



Surfacing History

This member has always loved the water, and now he's working to make sure its stories are told.

By Stacy Booth

Like many native Western Washingtonians, Dick Blumenthal grew up in and around the water. Besides spending the summers swimming at his grandparents' house on Lake Washington, he also learned to skipper his first boat—a homemade eight-foot dinghy. After mastering the rowboat, Dick says his dad purchased a three-horsepower motor. That motor, he says, still runs: “We use it for sockeye fishing on Lake Washington.” In all, Dick has been boating more than 50 years, and has come a long way from that eight-foot dinghy. In the interim, he’s compiled five books, two in print, of Pacific Northwest maritime history, taken numerous trips on his own boat, *Les Frères*, and is helping his two grandchildren learn to love the water.

According to Dick, history was not a favorite subject in school. He only became interested about eight years ago to the point that he wanted to start researching. After collecting journals of the earliest explorers of inland Washington waters and reading numerous history books, Dick says he found the books did not always match up with the firsthand accounts of explorers. “I finally came to the conclusion that the original material could be useful for someone who is interested in history, because it’s from the horse’s mouth,” he says.

His first collection of journals, “The Early Exploration of Inland Washington Waters: Journals and Logs from Six Expeditions, 1786-1792,” was published in 2004. It includes transcriptions of journals

and logs of the initial explorers to the region, including Manuel Quimper, Alcala Galiano and Cayetano Valdéz and George Vancouver. For this book and his second, “With Vancouver in Inland Washington Waters,” Dick says he just transcribed a lot of firsthand accounts that previously had not been available. “I find them pretty fascinating,” he says. The second book was published in 2007 and picks up with the journals of Vancouver’s men during their 1792 voyage. Both books explain how things were named, including mounts Baker and Rainier, Puget Sound and Hood Canal by Vancouver and Spanish names such as Port Angeles, Padilla Bay and Sucia Island.

Dick has three more books ready for publication, including one with the journals of Charles Wilkes and his men. Dick started his research in 1999, finding journals in places like the National Archives in Washington D.C., the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, and even the British National Archives in Kew, outside of London. Dick says he found many by sheer luck.

For him, getting the books published wasn’t about making money or seeing his name in print. “It’s more about making it accessible to somebody who might be interested in the same stuff,” Dick says. And now, when he’s on one of his annual crab trips with friends or boating with family, Dick can usually answer questions about the areas he is in. “I find that my experience changes significantly just being able to relate stories if someone is interested,” he says.

Even a short trip from Lake Union, where his boat is moored, to the Ballard Locks provides ample opportunity for tidbits of history and interesting stories about the boats in the water. Dick says he enjoys any time he can get on the boat. During his 30-year career with Pacific Northwest Bell (now Qwest) being on his boat was the one thing that would reliably make him relax. Dick still enjoys spending as much time as possible on *Les Frères*, though with his wife, Cathie, still working, they only manage a couple of trips a year. He says he tries to spend at least a total of one month on the boat yearly, but with annual ski trips and time visiting their daughter in Washington, D.C., it can be hard. “Sometimes it’s only two or three weeks, sometimes a month—but it’s never enough.”

Dick truly enjoys Western Washington waters, and has a list of favorite spots. He explains winter and summer boating are going to be different, simply because when the weather is better it’s easier to spend extended time on the boat. Among his favorite summer destinations in American waters are Roche Harbor, Jones Island and Matia Island, all of which are part of the San Juan Islands. Staying closer to home in the winter, Dick enjoys Poulsbo, Bremerton and Port Orchard. All





Dick says his boat, Les Frères, is the one thing that reliably helped him relax during his career with Pacific Northwest Bell.

BELOW Dick enjoys spending time with his grandchildren, Connor, 4, and Tyler, 2.



three of these destinations have a variety of indoor activities, good for rainy, colder winter days. He says his all-time favorite boating destination, however, is Sucia. It has four major bays for boats to moor and plenty of gravel beaches. At low tide, numerous tide pools provide opportunities to lay down on the warm rocks and observe life usually hidden under water.

Dick and his family, including his two grandsons, ages 4 and 2, are planning a vacation on the boat this summer. While they don't know their destination yet, Dick is excited. It will be the first time the grandkids spent more than a day or two aboard. The boys are pretty comfortable with the water, however. Dick spends two days a week with them in the Club's pool. Both are learning to float, swim and

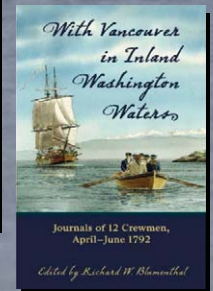
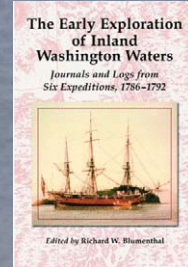
enjoy water. "The outdoor pool is an absolute kick now with the kids," Dick says. "My older grandson can touch the bottom, so this summer should be really fun having him in there ... The younger one is not quite there yet, but he enjoys playing on the steps."

In addition to the pool, Dick uses the Club's studios three days a week, and he and his wife enjoy dining in both Splash and Polaris. Dick currently isn't working on another book; instead, he's trying to find a Northwest publisher interested in printing the three books he has finished. He also says there are a number of projects to finish, including some home remodeling, converting old home movies to DVDs and helping neighbors with projects. "I've not found retirement life to be eating bonbons and watching TV all day," he says. Instead, Dick stays busy with family, friends and as much time as possible relaxing on Western Washington's waters.



Following is a sample of one of Dick's favorite passages from a yet-to-be-published book.

As you journey north in Saratoga Passage, at the north end of Camano Island, you pass the small town of Utsalady ... The origin of the name of the town is interesting. After the stork visited the home of an early Scottish settler, one of his neighbors queried, "what is it?" He responded: "Uts-a-laddy!" This story has charm; however, a more reliable source insists the name was a corruption of the Indian name Atsula'di, meaning "pointing corner."



Dick's first two published books are available through him directly or at Amazon.com.

