

*Welcome to “History on the Fly” a podcast series offered by the Washington State Historical Society. This episode is titled: “Old Man House,” by Maria Pascualy, Curator for the Washington State Historical Society. This episode is one of four gallery talks describing the Hall of History gallery at the Washington State History Museum, in Tacoma, Washington.*

My name is Maria Pascualy, and I curated the permanent exhibit at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma, Washington. This year U will be talking about four different objects now on display in the Hall of Washington History.

Treasures don't always look like treasures. One of the most significant objects on display at the Washington State History Museum is a plain gray cedar plank. The plank, actually the butt end of a house timber to be precise, has no carvings and no decoration. But I always point it out to friends because it's what's left of Chief Seattle's home.

Chief Seattle grew up at Old Man House.

This hand adzed old growth cedar home was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century and was located on Agate Pass near the present day town of Suquamish. Old Man House measured between 600 to 1000 feet in length. Indians and outsiders described it as the longest plank house ever built on Puget Sound. Plank houses usually housed three to five families in the winter. However, this house was used for inter tribal gatherings and could keep 600 guests warm within its walls.

But the United States Government didn't like plank houses. They were physical manifestations of Indian tribalism, of ideas about communal ownership of property and of the land. Plank houses were un-American. In order to promote the idea of private property, or so they said, Old Man House was burnt down after Chief Seattle died. The Indian Agent said it was done to encourage the Suquamish to settle on individual plots of land and farm and make a better life for themselves.

Chapin D. Foster the director of the Society in the 1940s acquired the plank for the museum. In the Society's newsletter he describes going to the house site which now belonged to the Parks department. It took three men 4 ½ hours of strenuous digging to salvage the board. Fifty years later the plank sits in our gallery waiting to tell its story.

Thank you for listening. There are four more stories in this series about some of the artifacts in our galleries.