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Interviewed by Carol Neufeld

My first memory of Steilacoom, though none of our family was born here, was hearing that my great-grandparents came here in 1870. My grandfather was sent out by the government as a timber cruiser. They had standing forests then and the timber cruiser would come through and judge how much standing timber there was. All these big companies had timber cruisers. He was sent out to the Puget Sound region to Seattle and Olympia.

He and my grandmother opened the Clendenin general store in Steilacoom after he came out as a timber cruiser. He had travelled all over the state judging timber before that. He died very young while he had the store and my grandmother had to take over. They stocked pretty much everything, including, I believe, a barrel of liquor. I never heard my mother mention that, but a lot of stores had liquor.

In the 1870's the Catholic sisters came here and started a school for girls on the top of the hill. Then the prison over at Mc Neil had gotten started. The son of the manager of the prison gave my mother a blackboard. She took it to school and drew a picture on it, rather than writing her name, and she got her hand slapped. When she went home, she told her mother, who took her out of school and sent her to Annie Wright school and then St. Helen's Hall in Portland.

By this time we had trains coming to Tacoma. My grandmother would drive her by horse and buggy to the Tacoma train station where mother caught the train that went to Portland. When the train got to the Columbia river it would go on the boat and go across the river to Portland. She got all her education at St. Helens Hall. Well, not quite all. Mother came home in the summer time to paint. A German woman, who was her teacher, would teach her techniques so she could finish her paintings.

This painting of our house (the Keach Home) was painted by Darrel Smith. He could have been a cartoonist. He could take a piece of paper and start sketching while we were hanging over his shoulder watching. Actually until he put in the final lines, we really didn't know what he was drawing. When it was my birthday Clyde called on Darrel Smith and asked him to make a picture of the house. I saw him over there across the street sketching and pretty soon he brought the completed sketch over. I took it to Tacoma to have it framed and the man at that place said it was beautiful work. My cousin, Elizabeth Ayer, the first female to graduate from the U. of W. in Architecture, had an artist, Parker McAllister, from the Seattle Times come over

and he painted this other picture. It shows the bay and my mother's little house. This is the shadow of the chimney. You could just stand there at the window and see the shadow of the house. I bought this picture from him. Both of them are good pictures. Darrel did make one mistake, but I never told him about it. The french door with no knobs, he made into a window.

Philip Keach had this house built, I don't think there are any records of the builder of the house.

We came to Steilacoom with our mother to see my grandmother Clendenin, who evidently had a lot of property in Steilacoom scattered all over. She died in the 1890's when she was very young. So then my mother would come to Steilacoom once a month and collect rent. That is how my brother and I started to come here.

Then in 1911 we came here to live. The trains did not come to town until 1914. When we lived in Tacoma we were used to going to Point Defiance to go swimming. Here we were with this beach right in front of our house. This was wonderful. My mother continued to rent property for quite a long time.

Just before Clyde and I moved out to Steilacoom in 1937, everybody thought we were crazy. The first night we stayed here the furniture was all in the family room and there was no place to sit. We had a couple of beds and the kitchen was still in good shape, except the floor was uneven. The fire in the wood stove sloped terribly. I don't know who else had bought this house. A woman had been renting the house before we came, but it had been vacant for 8 years when we bought it. None of the windows had been broken, though. They were shuttered windows with small panes. One family had bought a toilet and some vandal had put a rock in the toilet bowl. This luckily didn't break it. Many of the windows are original. Clyde cut a tree down that hit one window and one or two panes were broken. Before we moved in the house was open and the kids could wander through. One problem was that when it rained, one corner of the living room turned black because of the water pouring on it. But the plaster did not fall off. The house was pretty well built.

On this picture of Steilacoom from about 1860 here is our house and this was my grandmothers house. This is Shingling Alley the path everyone used to walk up and down to get up the steep hills. My mother could go along Commercial Street and name all the old business locations. There were rooming houses, and this was a hotel. Many of the old buildings caught fire and had to be replaced. The Balch wharf was here and the other wharf was here. At low tide you can still see the pilings for both old piers.

My grandmother kept the store in Steilacoom after my grandfather died of pneumonia. In about 1880 she moved the business into Tacoma. How she as a young girl could continue with the business, I don't know. But while she was in Steilacoom she would take trips to Victoria in a large Indian canoe to buy goods for the store. She would lie on the floor of the canoe while the Indians chanted as they paddled the canoe. She would go to Victoria, to do her shopping and then come home. Here in Steilacoom there would be problems when Indians came and got drunk, but she never had that trouble and the Indians were always ready to bring her home.

Then in about 1884 she moved her business to Tacoma. This was when Tacoma was getting started up around 15th and Tacoma Avenue. There was not much of Tacoma down by the water. Her store was up in that area. She had an assistant who helped in the store. Eventually she sold the business.

My mother lived in Tacoma with my grandmother. Mother married John Teevin, an alcoholic man who had an upholstery business in Tacoma. The marriage didn't last long because of the alcohol. Our house was located on South 9th and _____. I have little memory of him because I was very young when this happened.

Mother was taking care of the business of the rentals. When my brother and I came to Steilacoom when mother collected the rent, we would travel on the trolley along Chambers Creek. We would tie string to newspapers and float it out the windows hoping to catch fish. Soon other mothers would be digging string out for their kids. The conductor never said anything.

My grandmother planted maple trees in Steilacoom. These trees have grown so large now. I never worked in any of the stores my grandmother owned because she died when I was very young. My mother went to work then and she also continued to paint.

I remember taking trips to see my cousin on the farm near Olympia. My mother would take me down on the streetcar to the boats in Tacoma. It took four hours on the boat to arrive in Olympia. Then we would have lunch in town and drive by horse and buggy to the farm.

After I graduated from third grade we decided to live in Steilacoom. I recall being in the fifth grade at Pioneer School and being sent to the board to do long division. Steilacoom was more advanced than the schools in Tacoma and I hadn't had long division yet. Everyone was trying to help me but I was so embarrassed. Actually kids could drop out of school in those days and there were no set graduation requirements. There were about six of us that graduated in 1914 from Steilacoom and went to Stadium. I was the only one that finished at Stadium from that class.

I went to work at the Warren-Soule-Fairhurst Company a wholesale house on A street in Tacoma. I was in the bookkeeping department. My job was to keep track of the salesmen's sales. They travelled all over Washington and up into Canada. This was my job until I retired.

I retired when I got married to Clyde Vincent Davidson. When Clyde and I moved to Steilacoom it was 400-500 people. We thought it was wonderful here.

When my mother moved us here as children we thought it was wonderful too. We didn't think anything of having a saloon across the street. We played out in front of the house here and the kids didn't wander around. They played down at the corner where the Masonic Temple is now located. We finally got electric lights. There were oil lamps before that. A man had to go to each lamp and light it. Sometimes the kids could shake them and the light would go out. Then the man had to climb the ladder and relight the lamp. Friday nights were times we especially played at the corner. We also had surprise parties in Steilacoom. We would pick a house and then tell the kids who lived there not to go home. Then we would ask their mother if we could have the party there. We would make invitations to give out and bring sandwiches and fruit and cake to the party. The boys walked together to the party house and the girls went in a group. Because friends of my brother would gather at our house to walk to the party, I usually walked with the boys. I didn't mind that.

After the trains started coming to Steilacoom in 1914 we kids would go to see them. Two trains came around 8 o'clock in the evening that we would go to see. The girls went in one group and the boys in another. By the time we got home we were all mixed up, boy and girl together.

The mail came at about 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning. Mrs Mary Gimel was paid to go to Bair Store and pick up the mail to take to Western State Hospital. For years and years she drove this horse and buggy from the post office to Western State to deliver the mail. If there was no place to park the horse and buggy by the Bair, she would just sit and wait until the mail came. I don't think she got paid much for doing that, but it gave her something to do. The Steilacoom town mail came on the streetcar at 11 in the morning and 5 o'clock at night. The whole town turned out for that especially at 11 o'clock. Then the postmaster was appointed according to the party in power. One grocer was a Democrat and the other was a Republican, so the post office would change back and forth depending on which party was in power.

My oldest granddaughter came to Steilacoom during one of her vacations. She roamed around by herself on her bicycle. When she

went home she wrote a paper about Steilacoom. When she turned it in to her college instructor, he raved about it and wrote on it, "Where have you been?"

During the time Clyde and I lived in Steilacoom the mayor wanted to get the population up to 1,400 so he could get more money to run the town. I kept track of the babies being born to keep the count. Since we came in 1937 there have been quite a few buildings added to town.

The church bell that is hanging on the monument behind the Bair Store was used quite a bit in former times. My brother and I knew the bell would be rung on New Years, but it was hands off the rest of the time. Because it was also the fire alarm, nobody was supposed to touch it, but sometimes the kids rang it. One time the mayor threw the bell cord up out of the way, so kids wouldn't ring it. It was startling to wake up in the middle of the night to hear the bell calling the fire department.

It was also rung for church service. When I was doing a church history, I found that it was often the job of a family like the Deerings to ring it at 9:30 every Sunday. The Deering kids rang the bell and it went right through the whole family. I rang it for five years. Then there was no one left to ring it so I told Mrs. West, the ministers wife, that Milt, our son could do it. She said he wasn't old enough, I said he was. So we went with him the half block up the alley and he rang it. He was 14 at the time and should have been older, but he got the job. In the summer of 1950, he got a job with the forestry service and he was away. While he was away Clyde and I rang it. When he came back he rang it until he went to college. We kept fussing and finally got someone else to take the job. Now we haven't had it rung in a long time. Since they built a senior apartment next to the bell they haven't rung it in many years.

In the past, not during my time, when anyone died they ran the bell. Townspeople could tell just by the tolling bell the age of the person who died. If it was just a few tolls it was a baby, and the older the person the more it would be rung.

I never did meet the woman who rang the Catholic church bell. I know her name was Grace. When the war was over, we rang the Oberlin Church bell for a few minutes. The Catholics rang their bell almost all day long to declare the war was over. I guess some of the women went crazy over ringing the bell that day.

On the day WWII was over, we were going to Hood Canal by way of Olympia. We went out to the park and stayed all night. When Clyde, Milt and I went downtown everybody was very happy. There were some soldiers going down the road holding up one guy who had too much to drink.

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In 1937, you could easily call Steilacoom a quiet town. The paper mill when it was opened in the 30's, brought in quite a few people from back east. Little by little employees would arrive at the factory and they would bring their families so that soon we didn't have a vacant house in Steilacoom. Even girls could work there when they first started up. This was before everybody had cars. To go to work they would catch the Steilacoom trolley which came down from Tacoma to Western State Hospital. After they got off at the hospital, they would walk down the steep hill to the paper mill. Going back home they would walk around by the beaches back to Western State Hospital gate to get the trolley. For five cents they could ride back to West Tacoma.

Many Steilacoom men rode the streetcar to work in Tacoma during the '20's and '30's. Quite a bunch would catch the 8 o'clock car in town to go to work and then would arrive home around 5 or 6 at night. I got rides to work in a car. There was always someone to do the driving. It only cost me about 25 cents a week. The man I drove with saved all his money so he could buy a new Ford.

Mrs. Bair was really an individual person. She was interested in many things and she was always buying something that her family would have to pay for. Her family was quite disgusted with her. She bought the E. R. Rogers house without telling her husband. He paid for it and they went to live there. During the war, she rented rooms to soldiers and their wives. I never heard malicious gossip from her. She would talk about when they came here in the 1890's and went right into the drugstore business, because Mr. Bair was a druggist. At one point they bought the Iron Springs Hotel, and she also had for a while, a restaurant next to the Bair Store. When the Bairs lived at E. R. Rogers (The Waverly), Mr. Bair would walk over to the restaurant in the morning. Mrs. Bair told me that their parrot would sit on his head or shoulders to be taken to the restaurant, where it spent the day. One morning he forgot the parrot and Mrs. Bair could hear the parrot calling, "Papa, Papa!" She told amusing stories like that.

I used to help at Oberlin Congregational Church. I remember I once arranged the singing for the Easter service. There were three girls in the third grade, Virginia Deering, Pearl Berger, and _____, who could all sing. I got them to sing an Easter song. They each wore a hat and carried a narcissus rose when they went up to sing. When they got to the front of the church they got stage fright and stood there fussing with their flowers. I can't sing and didn't know the song. I didn't know what to do, but I finally grabbed the flowers out of their hands and then they sang. Mr. West was the minister then.

One of the ministers was Mr. Bowron who came from eastern Canada. He was a nice person. He went to visit at the prison every Sunday. He

was careful not to intrude on people but he cared about them. He also participated in town affairs by doing things like working on the election board. He was opposed to liquor so they used grape juice for communion.

Though I love our house, I am willing to get rid of it and all my belongings, but I wouldn't want to lose the view of our sunsets and sunrises. When I first get out of bed in the morning there is the sun coming up from Chambers Creek. The sunsets are just gorgeous. I can't really see them in the winter time unless I go up the driveway. But I can see them now.

Do you see the tree in our yard that is almost bare of leaves? A neighbor woman said to me, "You know that tree is dying." I hadn't noticed, but I decided we would cut it down when it had died completely. Then I noticed so many birds lived there, so we haven't cut it down yet.

Seeing the tree reminds me that I have been told my grandmother was fast enough to catch humming birds in her hand. When they would stop and tip down to a flower she would grab them with both hands.

I recall being given a bank for savings. My great-aunt Mary would send me a dollar every once in a while to put in the bank. That started me on savings. When I was a tiny kid I had a bank account. We didn't have many places to spend money. We could walk three blocks away and spend three cents for candy.

I used to catch the Interurban on some weekends to go to Seattle to shop. It gave me a chance to get more of a selection and a better chance of finding my size which was very small. I had learned how to use the Interurban because I used to ride it with my mother to go to Auburn to visit my mother's aunts.

I have many historical things in the house, from photos to newspaper clippings, to childhood toys, books, etc. I haven't really done fall house cleaning since 1958, because there are too many things to move.