INTERVIEW OF EDNA DYER
by Carol Neufeld
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Steilacoom, WA

TURNING WAGON WHEELS tells of my life almost until I came out here. We came out here in 1929 to Steilacoom. We were met with the depression. I have an article on this that was printed. We were met with the depression and everything we had when we got here was wiped out. We didn't bring very much with us. We didn't have anything at all. We had some things sent (that) arrived later on. But we had no furniture or anything like that. So we rented a furnished house here in Steilacoom and lived in that for about a year. Then we moved to another place and we lived there for two years. Then we moved to this place and rented it for 8 1/2 years. Then we bought it. I've lived in this spot ever since. This is known as the Webster House. He was supposed to have built it (Wm. Webster), but as I told you before they have no records of that so we're not sure. We think it might have been built by Balch. Webster bought three houses around the Sound and we think this could have been one of them. Those records were burned but I was given the records of all the people who lived in the house and it doesn't say he built it, just lived in it. (Balch owned the lot). Then his widow, Mrs. Webster, married E.R. Rogers next door. He built the E.R. Rogers next door. First he lived in this house after he married Mrs. Webster, but not for long. He built the bigger house next door because they had so much company. He lost that house soon after it was built. They didn't move back here, though, because someone else owned the place by then. I have found the Mrs. Murbarger who married the Mr. Murbarger & lived here, and had the store. I tried to interview her but I couldn't because by then she lived in Oregon. We moved into this house in about 1933 for 8 1/2 years and rented. Then we moved out for 1 year because Miss Murray, the lady who owned it, thought she

wanted to live here. But it didn't prove successful. So we moved back and bought the house for $1,800.00. We paid $20.00 down and $20.00 a month. We paid it up completely in, I think, 1942 or 1943. Her brother was E.R. Anderson, who owned the real estate and insurance offices in town and he was quite provoked to think we paid it up and they didn't get to collect the final interest on it. Miss Murray was a very sweet person and she lived here. We told her she could keep living here because there was an apartment upstairs. She lived in that apartment on the weekends. She was a school teacher. She came out for the weekends for a few years and my children loved her. When we moved into the house it was in terrible, terrible condition. You couldn't believe it. So we went to work and fixed it all up. Miss Murray was so grateful for that. The walls had no studs and the walls were papered over with cloth, like ticking. The wall paper was papered over that. The wall paper in this room, the dining room, room off the dining room, was a kind of light orange with great tubs of oranges growing up on it. Then the upstairs wasn't finished off at all. But we put paneling in here, redid the kitchen and rewired. This wiring is in wooden boxes and wooden frames. Now they do it in metal. We have a great many of the lights redone all over the house over a period of years. We redid the kitchen when I started to work just before the war began.

I had a job when all my children were out of school except for the youngest. She had two years left in high school. We put four children through school during the Depression. We were so short of everything. We needed sheets so I went to work in town for the Helen Davis dress shop. I did alterations there for 35 cents an hour. I had to take the bus in the morning. Then after the War started, they wanted seamstresses at Fort Lewis so I started working there. I got rides there. I started at 35 cents again sewing chevrons (patches on uniforms), but I wasn't at that very long until they had me sewing other things. Then I went from there into fitting working on officers' uniforms. By the time I left over there I managed North Fort Lewis' Alteration and Cleaning shop before the Korean War.

Then when all the military were shipped out, they closed my shop down. Then I went back to sewing and fitting. I worked for about 8 1/2 more years until my youngest daughter was 32 and she became ill. I was getting $2.80 an hour when I quit working there, and those were good wages. The minimum now is $3.50.

In the meantime my children had married and my son, James, had been in the Navy. My two sons-in-law were overseas before they were married. My husband was transferred over to Columbia (near Benton City, WA, Richland). We were there for about four and one-half years. McNeil Island had a camp there for conscientious objectors who took care of the orchards. My husband, Mr. Dyer, was a custodian officer who had charge of the orchard project. While we were there the whole town of Richland was rebuilt. There had been only 3 or 4 houses and a couple businesses before we arrived. When we first went there we lived in a Quonset hut. Later on they moved in prefabs and we moved into one of them. They didn't have enough men to work in the orchards because of the war so they hired two women bus drivers to take pickers to the orchards. I was one of those women. I drove about 28 people on a long bus. I picked them up and took them to work. I went onto Hanford Reservation and sometimes we had to be searched when we came out. We started picking cherries, peaches, apricots and apples. One time they motioned me over so we could be searched, but I thought they were waving me on so I kept going. Then they drew a gun on us and everyone on the bus was shouting, "Stop, stop!" That is the only bad incident we had. It was an interesting experience. I enjoyed learning about all the fruit. I showed people how to set the ladders, pick the fruit without bruising it, and kept track of all the fruit they would pick. I also sold cherries for 3 cents a pound when they opened up the orchards for people to come and pick cherries. I weighed up all their containers when they went in. Then I weighed the fruit when they came out and subtracted the containers (this was a government job). They shipped the fruit picked by the objectors over to McNeil Island

Prison to be canned at the canneries. We were over there during the war from about 1942 to after 1946.

Then I came home and they called me from Ft. Lewis because they wanted me to go back to work. So I went back to work over there. My husband finished up at McNeil Island and retired. Then my youngest daughter became ill with Hodgkin's disease. So I quit work to take care of her. I drove in everyday early in the morning and stayed with her until her husband came in during the afternoon, unless she was in the hospital. She had 2 children and I took them all the time and took care of them. After she passed away, I took the children and raised them and put them in school in Steilacoom.

During the Depression, when I put my own children through school, we had no money. I had relatives in Texas who were quite rich. Every year they sent me a trunk of their used clothes, which were beautiful things. That's what I used to sew clothes from for my children when they were in school. My husband was put down to $87 a month at one time. We had to pay for some school supplies but not for transportation. They went to school in Steilacoom through eighth grade.

Our older daughter graduated from Lincoln when she was quite young. She got college scholarships but we couldn't send her because we couldn't afford it. We tried to figure out a way, but we just couldn't do it. So she went back to Clover Park, so we had four at once in the high school. She went back and took a lot of courses in business. Then she went to the business college in Tacoma and got a job from there. But there during the War (WWII) they were told they weren't patriotic unless they worked for the military so she (Virnadeen) became Colonel Long's secretary for a long time when the War was going on. She also learned how to repair office machines.

My oldest daughter is Virnadeen. Then came James and Jean, the twins, and Betty Joanne was the youngest. I have three living now. Of my daughters one lives in Seattle, another in

Kirkland. My son lives in California. James is the artist. He draws and paints pictures of the old homes in Steilacoom and has published a book with drawings and written descriptions of them. He sells these books. He has tee shirts and sweat shirts with the Ferry and the word Steilacoom across them. He displays pictures, stationary and his books at Ella Turner's Boutique shop in town. The shirts sold out.

During the Depression when we came here there were 750 people who lived here and there were wooden sidewalks. Everybody was out of work, but I think it drew people closer together. Everybody helped each other out. If you had a job and had money you were called on all the time. There were very few people who had cars, and children in the high school didn't drive cars so I spent so much time taking car loads of children to games and to their activities. My children were active in school so I took neighbors' children with them. My son and daughter were in the high school play. And Jean was the first girls' club president at Clover Park and my son, James, did the art for two year books. I was always running around someplace with children. When my daughter, Virnadeen, was in Stadium, she played in the orchestra. And she was in the operettas and musicals. James and Jean were in the drill teams and athletics. James and Jean were selected outstanding pupils the year they graduated. They got to go for a week to the U of W. I had a terrible time rounding up things for them to wear and take with them. I sewed and we borrowed and did a bit of everything to get them up there so they could go up to the University for a week. I had no worry with any of my children and their school years. I enjoyed them .

I started working when my youngest daughter was in 11th grade. She worked out at Lakewood Theatre as a head usher. Mr. Gamble, the manager, came to see me to ask if she could work there. He promised to see that she got home every night.

Our children got to school from Steilacoom to Clover Park with buses. McNeil Island wanted us to move to McNeil Island. My husband said if you pay my four children's way to school--OKAY. We were never asked to move. Virnadeen started school to Stadium anad there were buses for that, and then they rode the city buses into town into Stadium. Then when James and Jean started we had voted to go in with Clover Park. That is when they started building Clover Park. Then they had school buses to Clover Park. But if children were in anything you had to make a trip out to pick them up because they had no bus to get home on. They didn't have the later buses in those days.

One amusing thing that happened at the school when we were voting on going in with Clover Park was that one of the ladies here in town got up and said she didn't want to send her children out there. She didn't know why we wanted to send children out in the wilderness. There was nothing out there then. There was nothing between here and Lakewood. It was all covered with scotch broom. There was nothing out to North Ft. Lewis at all.

During the war when they began building at Ft. Lewis, the boys that were stationed out there were mostly from California--Hollywood. They loved to come out here to the house on Sundays and set on the grass. I was crticized for letting them come out here because I had three young ladies. But my husband said, "I was in the army, and as long as they want to come here they're certainly welcome." The boys got to coming here to practice for a show they were going to put on at North Ft. Lewis. They wore their zoot suits and practiced. When they put on the show we got free tickets and special seats. One of the boys was going to be married. His girlfriend was the little Warner girl that was an actress in "Our Gang". They were married over here in Oberlin Church. The kids got the picture taken when she first came. They kept him someplace where he couldn't get out until they had things ready for the wedding. I have pictures of the wedding. Then they had the

reception at a barracks at North Fort Lewis. I don't think the church knew they had a famous wedding over there. The Warner girl was afraid to stay alone at night and lots of times we would wake up in the morning and she would be in bed with one of the girls upstairs when her husband was sent out on maneuvers. They were stationed here until her husband was transferred. Those boys were the ones who started the U.S.O.'s.

We didn't have any of this drinking in school or drugs or anything. We did when I raised my grandchildren. I went through that with them.

Virnadeen married Frances Harrison. She met him at the ice arena where she was working. They used to skate so much together. He was from Seattle but he had relatives living here but we didn't know it. My middle daughter, my twin Jean, married a boy from Ft. Lewis. She was only 18 or 19. She had one child. She was divorced and then worked at the bank at Ft. Lewis for 8 1/2 years. Then she met the man she is married to now, Herb Swanson. He is a wonderful man. My son, James, married a girl from Steilacoom, Patricia Willbanks. He lives in California and works at the Christian Conference Center. It is a big center that has 85,000 people come a year. It is in the San Bernadino Mountains. He lives in Forest Falls. It is a retreat center. The land was bought by Mrs. Meares years and years ago. It is very well known. It is where Billy Graham made up his mind to serve. My son edits the newspaper and does all the artwork. He develops the lessons and all the publications. He works in the priniting shop overseeing the publications.

One of the grandchildren who spent time here is Bob Holland. He lives with me now. He is my twin's (Jean) oldest boy. Then the ones I raised were Jodi Christine Andrews and Neal Andrews. Their father was a professional hockey player before he was married. He asked me to take the children when their mother died. For three years of the time I had them. I went

back to work at Fort Lewis. But I only worked parttime, from 9-4. I have been active in the PTA and in the church here. The Sunday after we came here, we went to that little church and have been going ever since. It's not a little church anymore, it's a big church. We built a new building. I started during the depression in the little church. Sometimes we had only a few people there. Mr. West preached there. I worked in the Sunday School and taught classes. Then I worked in PTA's and I worked at the school when my childre were there, so I was always a busy person.

I wrote poetry and belonged to the poetry club here in town and later to the Tacoma writers. I published quite a lot of poetry in different magazines--garden magazines, children's magazines, Good Housekeeping and in newspapers around, especially in Tacoma. I'm just sorting out my poetry now. When I took the children to raise them I couldn't write poetry because my poetry is a thing that is inspirational. Sometimes it comes to me during the night, and I can't get it off my mind so I get up and write it down. I couldn't do that when I had them. I haven't been publishing much for a long while (during Roosevelt's time). I took writing with a young man, Cy Happy, who came out from town. The government paid him like the WPA'S and CCC's. He taught classes in writing and theatre. I attended those. I had five sessions at Senior Citizens at Clover Park. I took in five semesters at different colleges. I'm not such a wonderful writer, I'm not a good speller, but I write and have someone edit it. I remember I was interested in writing when I was in high school. I said to this teacher I didn't think I could ever be a writer because I was such a poor speller. She said, "No, don't let that bother you. My brother, a well known writer named _____ Cooper, can't spell either, but he gets someone to go over it and correct it." Nowadays you don't have to worry because the computers do it. My daughter has a computer. I wrote "Turning Wagon Wheels" about my early life with All My Somedays. That was a club in Steilacoom and the writing was done on a grant also. This was all over the Northwest, 119 books were published from that. Mine was one

of them. We had a teacher for that, though, so we didn't criticize each other's work. I like to belong to a group that will criticize your work, but you don't have to accept it unless you want to. Each person got 30 books when the works were published. But they told me they liked my book. I wasn't to say anything to anyone else in the group which made me feel strange. But they published 200 more copies of my book to put in schools. They printed more than 200 so they let me buy 90 more books for little or nothing. These books are in all the libraries around. It is in Steilacoom and Tenzler and Tacoma Library. It is in the All My Somedays collection.

At first when it was in the library here you could hardly get it because somebody had it all the time. That flattered me. I could still sell the book now if I had more copies because people are always calling me up and wanting to know if they can buy my book. I don't have anymore. Besides I just wrote it for my children, not for the public. We still have the All My Somedays group with Cy Happy on Mondays. He doesn't get paid for it now. He just does it because he likes it. We are such a close group because we have known each other so long that everybody lets their hair down and it's a good therapy.

Some new ones come. Ruth Barnett, who used to run the dock down here, joined. She is doing a book on the dock. Some of the original people are Mr. and Mrs. Lang from University Place, Lola Miral, Jack Sage, James Scampster, Mrs. Wrilfinger. She was born and raised here in Steilacoom. She might be a good person to interview. Mrs. Redell no longer comes to the group.

I have two granddaughters who write all the time--Theresa Balland. She lives in California now and writes a paper for businessmen. Then there is Patricia Kramer. She is Virnadeen's daughter and lives in Oregon. She wrote a book on how to select baby gear for children. They previewed different brands and explained which were good for purchase. It took them about three years to gather the material. They

are changing some of it now. They are in the second publication now. Patricia is my oldest granddaughter. All of my children are very artistic.

My daughters -- My daughter Jean has done weddings and Virnadeen does all kinds of art work for people. Jean does crafts. My son is the artist, though the others are quite good too. I have a sister who is a good artist. She lives in Missouri where she is quite well known for her art work. Her name is Hela Goodell. She does oil paintings. My daughter Virnadeen writes books that are in the library. They haven't been published, though. When her mother-in-law, Mrs. Harrison, died, she left a diary of all her life here in the Northwest. She edited that and has it in the library in Seattle. Mrs. Harrison was raised as a pioneer in Puyallup. Then she lived in Alaska and she also taught school by Black Diamond.

Virnadeen has worked with geneology. She has information in a book on my family, the Lights, from way back. My family was from Missouri but now that we have done research, we think we are far cousins to the Lights from Steilacoom. I found the family history of Ken Light in some of the papers that I get for my family history. We're quite sure that we had a mutual grandfather way back from Philadelphia. He had three sons who all spread out. We know where two of them went, but we don't know where one went. We feel that one was Ira Light's ancestor (Ira and E.A. Light came to Steilacoom in the 1850's). We have found cousins all over that we write to now that we didn't know. It is like a puzzle you get involved in.

Q: Have you had anyone else in the family who wrote besides you?
A: No, not in my family, I don't think. I don't know of any. My daughter Virnadeen writes also. She has done some books that are in the library but not published. She has done books like when her mother-in-law died she left her her diary of all her life in the Northwest. She did that up and has it in the library in Seattle. Her mother-in-law was Mrs. Harrison. She

was raised a pioneer in Puyallup and she lived all around Washington and in Alaska. She also taught around Black Diamond. My daughter looked up all these places and did the diary. She selected the interesting days from the diary. Mrs. Hanson taught at different schools around the country. Virnadeen has worked in our family genealogy. She has information on the Lights clear back. She has written a book on the interesting things from their lives. These Lights came from Missouri. We think we are related to the Ken Lights from Steilacoom. We think we are far cousins to the Lights here. We're not positive, but we're quite positive .

I found their family history in things I was doing here. I worked quite a little bit in geneology too. I found their history in some of the papers I get. They didn't even know about it, so I took it down to Janie Light and gave it to them. Since then I'be gotten more that is mixed in with our family history. We're quite sure that our mutual grandfather --back, back, back-- came from Philadelphia. He had three sons and these all spread out. We're pretty sure where two of them went. We feel one of them could have been Ira Light's relative. We have found cousins all over that we didn't know, who we write to now. We have a lady from Mearland we keep in touch with. She was out to see us.

Ira Light , the father of E.A. Light, was the first one to come to Steilacoom. He came from Illinois and through that way.

We are also very interested in the people on my mother's side. My grandmother was half Cherokee Indian. Back--back in one of the Indian Wars. Her mother was the only one the Indians didn't kill. They took her back into the tribe and she was raised there. She married into the tribe. Then her daughter married a Frenchman. That's all we can seem to find. My gandmother's family was named Williams (my mother's mother). We have her records but we don't have her family's records. She was separated from all her family during the Civil War. She never found any of them again until after she was

married. Then she found her twin brother. They got together again.

We found the maps of my grandfather Hunt's grants when he got out of the Army. The maps showed the land he owned and everything. We just pulled out a drawer and there it was.

My father was a Light, William Light. My mother's name was Rosie Brewer Light. My father's mother was Pamela Hunt. It was her husband's grant maps we found from when they had been in the Revolutionary War. We found these in the library in Seattle.

We also take a paper called the Search Light. The last paper we have they are printing the names of the volunteers who served in the Civil War. My grandfather was supposed to have served in the Civil War. But he was a minister. He drove a supply wagon. He buried all the dead. He was a Light. We never have been able to find any records of them in that War. That was William Light. We know our grandmother had an interview on her 100th birthday and said he had driven this wagon and had buried the dead on both sides. But whether he really joined the Army or was one of the volunteers, we don't know. We have looked and looked. But no one has been able to trace him down. Unless things were mixed up and he was on the Confederate side instead of the Union. They all came from Kentucky and settled in Missouri. We have that information and their marraige licenses. We wrote back to Paluska County. We even got where they paid their taxes. They had to pay taxes on everything -- their horses, and on one or two servants they owned.

I can't drive around anymore to get this information. But my daughter is taking it over and now her daughter is taking it over (Virnadeen and Tracy Bollinger, her daughter).

We have a sister in Missouri interested. One of her daughters lives in Kentucky. She has found a lot just by visiting around

cemeteries and places like that. She has even found information on the Brewer side which is the Indian side (in the cemeteries).

There is a cousin who wants to adopt an Indian boy. But they have to prove that they are Indian, so they are trying their best to trace it back.

FAMILY NAMES

Edna Light Dyer
Virnadeen (Vir) Dyer Harrison
James Carmon Dyer III
Jean Dyer Swanson
James Carmon Dyer IV (or IX)

VIRNADEEN'S CHILDREN'S NAMES (Harrison)

Patty Ann Cramer} Wrote "Baby Gear Guide" c. 1985
Consumer guide to
Taree Bollinger } 35 products

Pat wrote short stories. Working on novel on Webster house.
Taree writes a business paper

Mike Harrison - painting talent
James Harrison

JAME'S CHILDREN'S NAMES

Merilee Hudson
Tommy Dyer (& Maggie of Forest Falls, CA)- on ship Logos which was sunk on Beagle Channel between Argentina & Chile Jan. 4, 1988. All 141 men, women, and children were saved.

EDNA DYER'S CHILDREN

JEAN'S CHILDREN (Swanson)

Bob Holland
Susan Swanson
Katherine _____
Amy Lazardo

Susan works as art director of Labels West, Inc. Smuggled Bibles into communist countries.

BETTY'S (15) CHILDREN

Neil Andrews
Jodi Christine Andrews