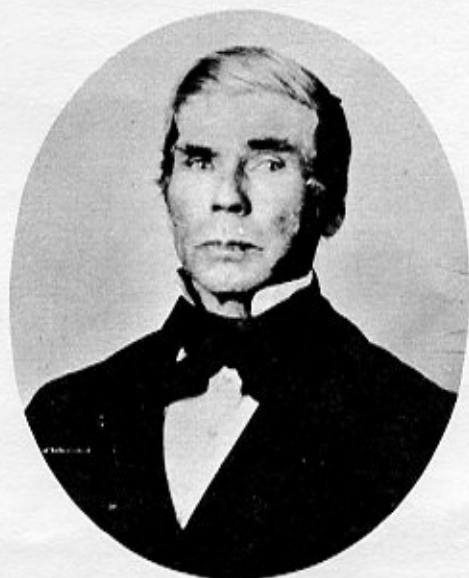


STEILACOOM HISTORICAL



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Volume 12, Number 4

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JUDGE THOMAS M. CHAMBERS FATHER OF WESTERN WASHINGTON INDUSTRY

By Linda Perez

Thomas McCutcheon Chambers was born in Utenards, Ireland on November 15, 1795. There he was educated and ordained a Presbyterian minister. In 1816 Chambers married Latitia Delzel, a cousin of Andrew Jackson. They traveled to America and Chambers became the overseer at Jackson's tobacco and cotton plantation. Chambers and his wife had eight children.

In 1845 Chambers formed an immigrant wagon train and traveled to the Oregon Territory, finally settling in the Willamette Valley. Two years later, they left Oregon and headed to Olympia where his sons set up land donation claims. In the fall of 1847, Chambers and his family arrived in Steilacoom, taking possession of the property surrounding Heath's Creek (also known as Steilacoom Creek) through a donation land claim. The donation land claim became effective on September 27, 1850, which entitled a married man over twenty-one years of age and his family to settle on 640 acres of land.

The Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly is issued quarterly as the official publication of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association authorized by the Board of Directors. Mail correspondence to the Editor, Box 16, Steilacoom Washington 98388.

Joan Curtis, Bette Bradley — Editors

Joan Curtis	President	Dave Hopkins	Vice President
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Lynn Daubenspect — Trustees

He could receive a patent upon proof of having lived on his land continuously for five years.

Heath's Creek was named for J. T. Heath who leased the land from the Puget Sound Agriculture Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson Bay Company, for fifty dollars a month. Heath had died about the same time Chambers had arrived in Steilacoom.

The trouble began when Chambers occupied Heath's land. The Hudson Bay Company had not had its last word on the rights of their land. Doctor Tolmie, a friend of Chambers, sent a letter to him warning of the dire consequences if he did not vacate the land. After no reply from Chambers, officials of the Company visited him on the creek and made their demands. Chambers replied by resting a rifle on his fence and made it quite clear he was going to stay. The Hudson Bay Company never bothered him again.

In 1848, Chambers was appointed Justice of the Peace and County Commissioner of Lewis County, an office he held until the division of the Oregon Territory into the Oregon and Washington Territories.

In 1850, Chambers began to build his business empire by opening the first three story grist mill near the mouth of now Chambers Creek. Machinery was shipped from San Francisco and a thriving industry had begun.

An advertisement that appeared in the *Steilacoom Express* on March 6, 1873 stated: "The grist mill of T. M. Chambers located about a half mile from Steilacoom, on one of the romantic nooks of this beautiful bay, is one of the most substantial and best filled out with all the latest improved machinery."

In 1852, Chambers built the first saw mill in Pierce County on Chambers Creek. Latitia, his wife of 36 years died at the age of 57. A few months later, Chambers married 18 year-old Agnetta Larson who had come with the Andrew Byrd family to Steilacoom. They had four children.

Besides Chambers' business ambitions, his political career also expanded. In 1854, when Pierce County was formed, he was appointed commissioner. Chambers became 'Judge Chambers' by his election as Probate Judge.

Expanding his business once more, Judge Chambers opened a

(Continued page 5)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The end of the year is always a time for reflection—a time to assess the past before moving on to the future. The year of 1983 has been one of growth and productivity. The membership has increased which indicates historical preservation is not a passing fad, but a firm commitment. The fruits of our labors may be seen in the renovated Pioneer Room at the Museum completed under the direction of Curator Janda Volkmer, in the smiles and happy faces of the people who attended our Salmon Bake and Apple Squeeze and in our expanded bank account.

The Orr Home has a new coat of paint, as does the interior of the Bair Store, varieties of pioneer fruit trees have been planted as living memorials to those who are no longer with us, the Bair Store has new management, assessments of artifacts continue to supplement our collection, a Docent meeting program was established, lectures led by Murray Morgan and Mike Avey increased our knowledge of the Northwest and tours were conducted during the Oberlin Congregational Church's Centennial. All these and many more activities have kept us busy this year. Still to come are the annual dinner and the Nutcracker Ballet.

Two board members will be retiring, Bette Bradley and Jim Rudnick. Bette's shrewd questioning and Jim's ability to move the board meetings along will be missed. Secretary Judie Davis will be retiring after three years of service. Thank you, Judie, for your help and quick wit. Allan Forsyth completes five years, having served as vice president, president and past president. His contribution has been invaluable. These members have been hard workers in many of our projects.

The goals the Board has set for 1984 are realistic. An operational budget is being developed which will include funding for continued renovation of the Museum and contracting Curator Volkmer to design and supervise the work. The expertise of Treasurer Charles Buchanan is invaluable as he spends long hours developing that budget.

Plans for an oral interview workshop in the Spring are being formulated to encourage an increased awareness and skill in documenting the past. Thomas Carlyle expressed it precisely, "History is the essence of innumerable biographies." In this issue of the *Quarterly* is the first of a series titled "Living Treasures of Steilacoom".

Two new activities should be well received—a fashion show of historic clothing and a St. Patrick's Day celebration.

It has been an honor and a privilege to be president these past two years. I thank each of you for your help and support in this unique Town of Steilacoom as each of us brings our talents and skills to further its preservation.

Joan Curtis

CHRISTMAS DINNER—DECEMBER 10

The Steilacoom Historical Museum Association will hold the thirteenth annual Christmas dinner and meeting Saturday, December 10 at the Steilacoom Community Center. Wassail will be served at 6 p.m., followed by the dinner at 7. The menu includes: roast pork, apple and squash casserole, spinach salad, Italian green beans, rolls and the traditional flaming plum pudding with hard sauce.

The evening will cost \$8.50 per person and will be open to members only with reservations required. A short business meeting will include the annual election of officers.

The Steilacoom High School Choir under the direction of Rich Johnson will perform. Guests will have a preview of the Nutcracker as dancers from the Tacoma Performing Dance Company give a brief performance.

Nancy Montgomery is chairman of the dinner this year with Sheila Elwell acting as advisor. Marianne Bull is in charge of the decor which depicts an outdoor theme of stopping by the woods on a snowy day. Assisting the chairmen are the following committee heads: Patty Forsyth, Linda Work, Judie and Jon Davis, Aurora Toth, Lynn Scholes, Bob Davis, Margaret Wilkinson, Barbara Daubenspeck, Janine Davis, Donna Dorris, Anna Zeigler, Tom McAvoy and Marilyn and Wally Cullen.

CHRISTMAS AT OBERLIN CHURCH—1883

Oberlin Congregational Church, organized and incorporated in the spring of 1883, concluded its year with a Christmas program which was recorded in the *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, December 27, 1883.

"The Congregational church was filled with young and old on Christmas Eve to listen to music and speaking, and to witness the distribution of presents. After reading of the birth of Jesus in the 2nd chapter of St. Matthew, and prayer by the pastor, and much good singing by the choir, a Christmas Potpourri was rendered by members of the Sunday School. The play introduced the various characters of gleeful children anticipating Santa Claus, who finally appeared, preceded by a fairy, after the vain efforts of certain wise young men from college who sought to dispel the delusion of Santa Claus.

"Two large trees were profusely loaded with gifts, which were pleasantly distributed while the audience was partaking of the nuts, candy and pop corn, left after filling cornucopias for all the children.

"The repainting of the church was declared a great improvement by all.

"The old year wishes to be remembered having given the most severe wind and rain storm of the season all day Monday and Christmas Eve, continuing with snow added, during Christmas Day."

(Thomas Chambers-Continued from page 2)

flour mill also on Chambers Creek. A news article that appeared in *The Puget Sound Courier* on Friday, September 21, 1855 described the new flouring mill as "a highly necessary and important work, not only to the people of Pierce County but to those living in every county north of us and one that the wants of the community imperatively demanded has just been completed and is now in successful operation."

In 1859, the neighboring farms asked Judge Chambers to enlarge his flour mill. A four story mill was built and machinery was obtained from California.

When the proposal for the establishment of a State University was formulated, settlers were asked for land donations. Judge Chambers donated 360 acres, half of his holdings. Western State Hospital now stands on that ground.

On December 28, 1876, Judge Thomas M. Chambers died of old age and general debility. He was buried in the Masonic Cemetery near Steilacoom. His obituary, which appeared in the *Daily Pacific Tribune* stated: "In every sense of the word, Judge Chambers was a pioneer, an old settler, and a useful citizen, and of his kind it would be well for the country were there more."

Today the three mills are gone. Only a memorial marker stands in its place. The hillsides that were once blanketed with tall fir trees are slowly being cut down. The banks of the creek are still laden with clam shells and the water teeming with fish. In the distance, a screech of an eagle can be heard competing with the whine of a nearby paper mill. Varieties of water fowl can be seen searching for their dinner or just sun bathing on the logs drifting to nowhere in particular.

Editor's Note: Linda Perez, a former anthropology student at Fort Steilacoom Community College, has researched the history of Chambers Creek for Professor Mike Avey.

DEBUT OF COSTUME COLLECTION

An Historic Costume Fashion Show is planned for Saturday, February 11 at the Steilacoom Community Center. This will be the first time the clothing of the Association will be displayed. Costumes from the 1860's through the 1930's will be modeled.

Highlights will include the 1868 dress Emma Orr wore on her wedding trip from Victoria to Steilacoom, the wedding frock coat and hat worn by Nathaniel Orr and a black 1930's cocktail dress especially made by Vouge for a magazine advertisement.

Invitations will be sent out in January for the style show—luncheon. Chairmen for the event are Jenny Hollister, Trish Laughlin, Bette Bradley and Joan Curtis. Members interested in working on the fashion show are encouraged to call Bette, 588-0164 or Joan, 584-8623.

ASSOCIATION SPONSORS NUTCRACKER BALLET

The delightful Christmas classic the **Nutcracker Ballet** with music by Peter Tschaikovsky will be presented by the Tacoma Performing Dance Company at the Steilacoom High School on Friday, December 16th at 8:00 p.m. The special one hour production especially designed for children of all ages is sponsored by the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association.

Tickets may be purchased at the Bair Drug & Hardware Store and the North Pacific Bank for \$1.50, children and \$4.00, adults. Seating is limited and members are advised to buy immediately.

NATIVE AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE MERRILL

Colorful photographs of native Americans in costume are currently on display in the Museum. They were taken by Lee Merrill at the annual Yakima Indian Encampment at White Swan in 1964 where "war dances nightly and Indian games" were featured. Indian artifacts from Ethel Scholes are on loan to complete the exhibit.

Merrill, one of the founders of the Association and president for two years, is highly respected in the field of photography. As a naval officer during World War II, Lee established the Photographic Laboratory Services at Barbers Point Naval Air Station, Oahu, Hawaii and later served as Photographic Officer for Admiral Gunther. He assisted the internationally known photographer, Edward Steichen, in the selection of "Two Hundred Best Naval War Photographs."

After World War II, Lee founded his own photographic business in Tacoma specializing in illustrative and commercial photography. An exhibit of his scenic photography is planned in the spring.

SUCCESSFUL APPLE SQUEEZE

Good weather, a bountiful crop of apples, excellent publicity and a well-organized committee resulted in a successful and profitable Apple Squeeze. Twenty-one presses were kept busy the entire day. Over 70 gallons of apple butter were sold-some dispensed on bread, the rest processed in jars. By 4 p.m. all the carmeled apples, donuts, pie and ice cream had been consumed. All that was left was over 100 gallons of cider which have been frozen for future use.

A \$4,000 profit exceeds all past records for the Squeeze. Congratulations to Judy and Dave Hopkins, Janet Duris and Dave Lanford, chairmen and their committee heads: Harold Hellyer, Lynn Scholes, Lyle Dunkin, Jack Watson, John Bulgar, Larry Wilkinson, Allan Forsyth, Mike Murphy, Beau Beauchamp, Lynn Daubenspeck, Wayne Kohler, Tom Maliska, Nancy Montgomery, Judie Davis, Linda Evanson, Marianne and Tim Bull, Janine Davis, Margaret Wilkinson, Patty Forsyth, Karen Knudsen, Susan Hedrick and Benno Bonkowski.

DOCENTS TO BE HONORED AT ANNUAL DINNER

Marian Young and the docents who have served the Museum for ten years or more will be honored at the Annual Dinner on December 10. The Steilacoom Museum owes much of its success to the willingness of many docents who have given of their time and energy through the years to keep the Museum open for the thousands of visitors who have passed through. Under the faithful leadership of Marian Young the list of members willing to serve two or three times a year has varied. The Association wishes to thank the following for their dedication:

10 Years

Charles and Katherine Buchanan
Frances Hentze
Alberta DeChant
Bernice Jensen
Dorothea Karman

12 Years

Chester and Edna Burg
Kathryn Bryan
Edna Dyer
Harold Hellyer
Lane Lester
Myrtle Wickens
Sara Lint
Margaret Merrill
Kathryn McCutcheon
Marjorie Scholes
Frances Swanson

13 Years

Clyde and Clenda Davidson
Patty Forsyth
Louise Norberg
Leona Wood

14 Years

Joan Curtis
Lou Dunkin
Clyda Gibson
Bonnie Stucker
Adelta Schwab
Esther Spreen

A special tribute goes to Marian Young who has managed the formidable task of contacting members and arranging for docents to be on duty since the Museum opened its doors in 1970.

PUGET SOUND EXPRESS—October 29, 1874

Site for Sawmill.

NOW IS THE CHANCE OFFERED capitalists who desire to invest in a steam saw mill or Dry-dock to purchase the most suitable site for such purpose to be found on the Northwest Coast. The undersigned is now enabled to give warranty title to the excellent mill-site at the mouth of Chamber's Creek, and will consider all bids for purchase of the same either verbally or by letter. The bountiful and constant supply of fresh water in the Creek renders it the more valuable as a site for a sawmill. Steamers can easily tow booms of logs up in the Creek and the logs may be in the Creek for years without becoming wormy. For the establishing of a dry-dock on the Northern waters, there is nowhere a more suitable location than on this Creek. Address: T. M. Chambers, Steilacoom, W.T.

EARLY HOLIDAYS REMEMBERED

By Cy Happy

This holiday season in Lakewood seems far removed from pioneer times, but glimpses of early celebration survive in diaries and journals.

Fort Nisqually, about one mile west of the present town of Du Pont, was the Hudson's Bay Company post. A journal was kept of "Occurances at Nisqually House" in which Dr. William Tolmie wrote as follows:

"Wednesday Dec. 25, 1833. This being Christmas day I gave the men a liberal Regale of eatables and drinkables, to make up in some measure for the bad living they have had all year here, and they enjoyed the feast as might be expected men would do who lived solely on soup since they came here. Weather still very cold.

"Thursday 26th. The men allowed to rest from their labors today as they are rather fagged after yesterday's indulgence. A hurricane or whirlwind passed and broke down the largest trees in its way like straws."

In 1833 Fort Nisqually consisted of the factor's house, the store and a building for the men. Men with Indian wives built separate dwellings. These wives are seldom mentioned in the journal, but the men were urged to marry and settle down.

In 1844 Hudson's Bay Company's subsidiary, Puget Sound Agricultural Company leased to Joseph Thomas Heath, a square mile of farmland, the area now included in Western State Hospital and Fort Steilacoom Park. Heath, an educated, homesick English gentleman, farmed successfully there until he died in 1849. His journal, available at Tenzler Library reference desk, gives a remarkable picture of pioneer life on our prairies.

The following are excerpts:

"Wednesday, January 1st, 1845. Rose at 6, Rode to the Fort and dined with Doctor Tolmie; paid a visit to the Indians at the Beach to witness a gambling scene, would have made a fine study for an artist, wished myself a dabbler in colours. Returned home about seven with Klapat who had taken too freely of the Jolly God and had much difficulty in keeping his seat on his horse, entertained me greatly, being the only Indian I had ever seen in that state, sometimes singing the Pater Noster and all the English words he could make use of, most anxious to see his wives, of whom he is blessed with two; one too many, I think. Thought of Millend and all near and dear to me, and how they were engaged. A dull day, not like merry England's New Year Day, fine and cold.

"Friday, December 25, 1846. Served out beef, flour, molasses and tobacco to all my people for their Christmas dinner."

Heath's farm became Fort Steilacoom, In August 1849 the U.S.

Army leased it from Puget Sound Agricultural Company for \$50 a month and moved into Heath's buildings. The fort was rebuilt in 1858 under direction of Lt. August Kautz. Four of those building remain today.

Kautz Journal

Kautz kept a journal ("Nothing Worthy of Note Transpired Today") available at Tacoma Public Library. He wrote of the 1858 holiday season:

"31st. Spent this day in town (Steilacoom) until the Santa Cruz came down from Olympia when Capt. Fauntleroy and Mr. Wyman went up to the garrison and took dinner with us. After dinner we all went to town and participated in a grand New Year's Ball given for the benefit of the Steilacoom Library Association. There was a very large attendance, nearly all the people in the county were present. The party passed off pleasantly and with the exception of a little row with Mr Frank Balch who refused to pay and was put out, nothing disturbed the enjoyment of the evening."

Whether 1830's, 1840's, 1850's or 1980's, the holiday season is much the same. Visiting friends, feasting, dancing, resting from labors, worshipping, longing for loved ones far away are as much of the season then as now.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December Board Meeting.....	December 8
Association Annual Christmas Dinner and Meeting...	December 10
Nutcracker Ballet.....	December 16
Annual Membership Drive.....	January
Historic Clothing Fashion Show.....	February 11

SALMAGUNDI

- ★ The Museum will be closed from December 15 to the first of March for renovation. The Orr Home is annually closed from the day after Apple Squeeze until April. Tours may be arranged by calling Joan Curtis, 584-8623.
- ★ Our thanks to Andy Gimlett and Drew Gonzalez who have mowed the lawn at the Orr Home this year and to Allan Forsyth for his maintainance of the grounds. Lynn Scholes has been plumbing so there will be water to the bathroom when it is wallpapered and completed this winter.
- ★ A tea to honor the docents of the Museum and the Orr Home was held October 29 at the Town Hall. Recitations of pioneer letters were narrated by Janda Volkmer and Bill Houts and a musical program was presented by David Miller, Sean Parker, Bill Houts and Jeanne Leyden. The interesting afternoon was planned by Curator Janda Volkmer.

LIVING TREASURES OF STEILACOOM

"There are treasures in Steilacoom. It is a place of historical firsts, and in this beautiful town on the Sound are many early buildings. The 1857 Nathaniel Orr House, 1858 Philip Keach house and the 1895 Bair Drug Store are only a few of them. But, perhaps most valuable of all are the people and their memories of Steilacoom's history. They are the living treasures." —Carol Neufeld

PHILIP KEACH AND CLYDE DAVIDSON VALUABLE CITIZENS

By Carol Neufeld

"We have lived in our old house now for nearly forty-six years and we have enjoyed every year," says Clyde Davidson.

"Rolling Hill", the delightful home of Clyde and Clenda Davidson is located on Commercial Street in Steilacoom. The stately, early American, two story, white and green shuttered house faces Puget Sound. From the french door windows, the Davidsons' view the Sound, the Islands, and the Olympics.

"This home was placed on the National Register and is recognized as one of the oldest original homes in Steilacoom. It was built in 1858 and is known as the Keach House," continues Clyde.

Philip Keach, the first owner of the house was an active member of the community in the 1850's and 60's.

Clyde Davidson, the present owner of the home also has been a prominent citizen since he moved to Steilacoom in 1937.

There are many similarities in the lives of these two men, the first and present occupants of the house.

Philip Keach and Clyde Davidson each purchased "Rolling Hill" for his family. Philip had the house built for his bride-to-be, Antoinette Martin. They moved into the home after their wedding on March 21, 1858. Clyde purchased the house for his wife, Clenda. They occupied the house in 1937.

"Our friends thought we were crazy for buying that old house. I almost agreed with them before we got it fit to live in," recalls Clyde. "But it took me nearly two years to get the house anywhere livable. The front porch was so far gone that we had to put boards across so we could walk in. There was a big hole in the kitchen . . . and we had to have a new roof, for it leaked."

Both Steilacoom citizens were merchants. In November of 1854, the firm of Philip Keach and Company was dissolved with the partners W. C. Richmond and H. C. Perkins retiring, leaving Keach as the sole owner. Keach sold the store in about 1870 when he moved away. Clyde was in a similar partnership with his brother Bill Davidson, who owned the Steilacoom Grocery. Then in 1948, Clyde purchased his brother's half of the store, thus becoming the sole owner. He sold

the business in 1959 when he retired in Steilacoom.

Each man was active in political affairs.

Philip Keach was one of the organizers of the Steilacoom Library Association. The first issue of the *Puget Sound Herald*, March 12, 1858, announced that a meeting would be held at the Philip Keach Store for perfecting the Library Association. At the second meeting, in the Methodist Church, Mr. Keach was elected as the first librarian.

Clyde Davidson was one of the organizers of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association.

"I contacted Herb Hunt, a friend of mine from Steilacoom," Clyde remembers. "I asked if he would help me establish a historical museum in Steilacoom. He agreed and we went to work."

Clyde was elected in 1970 as the first president of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association.

Philip Keach was elected in 1858 as treasurer of Pierce County (Steilacoom was the county seat until 1880). He also served in 1862 as an incorporator of the Puget Sound and Columbia River Railroad Company. Then in 1867 he was named as a board member to supervise the construction of a territorial jail in Pierce County.

Clyde Davidson was elected in 1959 as a member of the Steilacoom City Council.

"I learned a lot in the next ten years. I was head of the building and parks department," says Clyde. "When I took over the improvement of Sunnyside beach, it was nothing but a group of shacks. Now it is one of the best waterfront parks in the area."

Both men showed an interest in the cultivation of fruit trees. Keach had an extensive orchard of twenty acres with 500 trees. Davidson has preserved many of the fruit trees in the yard at "Rolling Hill".

Clyde says of his retirement: "I have found happiness by just working around the place, and enjoying the beauty of the flowers and yard. . . . I have worked mainly with roses and Mom's cut flowers. She loves flowers and knows just how to use them. We also have several fruit trees that supply us with fruit. That is enough to keep me busy . . . pruning and spraying."

Thus, Davidson continues today the contributions to the business community, the fine traditions of public service, and the preservation of the orchards, following in the footsteps of an earlier illustrious citizen, Philip Keach. They are among Steilacoom's valued citizen treasures.

U.S. CENSUS FIGURES FOR STEILACOOM

1870	314	1900	284	1930	722
1880	250	1910	430	1940	832
1890	270	1920	564	1950	1233



1890

Front Page Photo: Judge Thomas Chambers, courtesy of the Oregon State Historical Society.

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