

STEILACOOM HISTORICAL



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

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THE EVOLUTION OF SALTAR'S POINT

From the splash of the Indian paddle to the shriek of the Amtrak train whistle, Saltar's Point has witnessed many changes. This popular Steilacoom beach was first recognized on navigation charts as Gordon's Point, probably in 1848 when nearby Commorant Passage was named for the "HMS Commorant", a steam sloop which put into Fort Nisqually. An officer on board was George Thomas Gordon. Maritime maps to this day use the name.

When John Chapman filed his Donation Claim next to Lafayette Balch's in 1851 the "Point" was included. Land records indicate Chapman was continually selling and sometimes buying back his land in the 1850's and 1860's. The names are familiar ones—Keach, Gove, Wallace, Orr and Chambers. It was not until 1869 that John Saltar's name is recorded. In a brief period of time he had purchased the majority of the property along the beach and built a two-story house. Sometime after that the area became known locally as "Saltar's Point".

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

In the last issue of the *Quarterly* I mentioned the delegations of various responsibilities for operation of the museum and its many activities to individual members of the Board. This has been accomplished and the Board members are now in the process of developing written descriptions of their areas of interest.

These written instructions will serve as a guide for present members and will provide a comprehensive view of what goes on to new members of the Board as they are appointed.

Don't forget to mark Sunday, July 28, on your calendar. It will be our 15th Annual Salmon Bake, if memory serves me correct, and as usual we need all the help we can get.

Dave Hopkins is the Board member responsible for volunteers. His phone number is 582-5393 or call me at 582-4204. If you are unable to volunteer please turn out en-mass for the best salmon dinner in the Northwest.

Don Rehburg

LOOKING BACK . . .

When the first Washington territorial legislature met on February 27, 1854 the average age of the members was 28 years. It was composed of ten farmers, seven lawyers, four mechanics, two lumbermen, two merchants, one surveyor and one civil engineer. On the council were five Democrats out of nine and 11 democrats out of 18 in the in the house.

In May, 1885 the newly elected officials took their oaths including the second woman Treasurer, Rosetta Rigney. The first woman was Susan Fay, elected in May, 1884. *From Town Records.*

"The new prescription case of W.L. Bair, the druggist, is a work of art. He cut it out with an axe." January 30, 1891 *Steilacoom News*

(Continued from Page 1)

Captain John Saltar, born in 1814 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had a varied career. Serving first as a soldier in Illinois, he moved on to lumbering, then to trading on the Mississippi. He built a ship in Maine and spent many years on the sea. After coming around the Horn and almost losing his ship, he decided to come North from San Francisco and settled in Seilacoom after 1860.

As the years passed, property was sold and a few other structures were built. Captain Samuel Averill's name is recorded as buying property from Saltar in 1871 and 1874. In 1883 Arthur Burnell built a home facing First Street. It was later sold to the Misner family and now it is referred to as the "Claussen House". In 1953, over sixty years later, Myrtle Misner Claussen described the area when she moved there as a young girl. "Saltar's Point was vastly different in 1889, when my parents came from Illinois to locate in Steilacoom. A grassy turf, dotted with wild rose bushes, sloped gently to the beach — no trestles, no railroads, no shrieking trains. The beach then was covered with agates of many hues, also large fan-shaped shells with lovely pink edges. The water is very deep at Saltar's Point, and in the earlier days sailing ships had no trouble docking at Saltar's Point. In-shore a little way was a pond that came and receded with the tide. Here children bathed, or floated on rafts made from driftwood. There was even a good supply of this driftwood for huge bonfires at night. Time and tide made their inroad on the beach during the years.

"The Point used to be a favorite camping spot for Indians, on their way to visit other tribes, going as far as Bellingham and British Columbia. Long before they were in sight, we could hear their monotonous sing-song rhythm as they plied their paddles in big native canoes. Finding this a good camping spot and a cool spring near-by, their small shoddy tents were soon erected, fires made and much activity, which included hordes of youngsters and dogs. Those nights father made sure the chicken coop was tightly locked.

"Now we will go up the grassy slope to the two large white frame houses belonging to Captain Saltar and his friend, Captain Averill. These homes stood side by side on the bank . . . They were picturesque houses, with wide verandas and long French doors, and of course, commanded a magnificent view of the water and the Olympic Mountains. Captain Saltar was an outstanding figure — tall and erect, with his wide felt hat and long white sideburns, flowing tie and courtly southern manners.

"Diagonally across the way stood the modest white English-type cottage (406 First) where my folks decided to locate. It was the only home along that western bank. Beyond was the virgin forest. The house was built by a young, cultured divinity student from Maine. He was the Rev. Burnell, preacher and teacher. He and his artist wife conducted a scholarly Academy in Steilacoom in the former Court

House building which later became our public school . . . First Street, in front of our house, was just a narrow country road which soon dwindled into a cowpath and led into Light's Swamp."

Captain Saltar died in 1898, having served his community well. He was clerk of the U.S. District Court for 16 years, as well as being Collector and Assessor of the United States Internal Revenue for Idaho and Washington Territories.

Around the turn of the century there was a structure where the present cook shed stands today. People would come to camp in the building, which also served as a boathouse. The natural beach, built up by the current, was an attractive place for camping, picnicking and boating. Nick Doering would drive his team of horses down to the shore to haul gravel for construction work.

A railroad survey map of 1906 shows the shoreline and the structures of that time. They included "dwellings, windmills, chicken houses and barns". The survey was needed before property could be purchased for railroad right-of-way. On June 6, 1910 Ordinance #85 was passed by the Town Council granting the Northern Pacific the right to construct the railroad through Steilacoom.

The *Tacoma Daily Ledger* reported the changes occurring in 1912, "Saltar's Point, a beauty spot of the Sound, will soon see decided changes in railroad right-of-way. The old Captain Saltar house, the Averill house and the Slayden house are to be taken away. Peter David's will be moved back; fruit and shade trees are being cut, but the beach outside the grade and its resorts will remain." "The music of the piledriver now breaks the quiet of Saltar's Point."

After the "music" of the piledriver, quiet disappeared with the rattle of the wheels and the whistle of the train. The gentle slope of the land had been replaced with a steep bank necessitating the need for a bridge to connect First Street to the beach. Residents continued to enjoy the beach.

A few years later Mamie and Charley Green built a boathouse near where the present marina is today. The structure housed the Green family on the upper story. The first floor accommodated boarders. A sign read "Mr. C.H. Green—Meals Served—Family Style Rooms". A picture has a sign reading "Soundview Inn".

A natural depression at the beach where water seeped through the gravel became the "duck pond" where Mamie kept the ducks which provided the main course for the family style dinners she served.

Green's boats were known as the finest on the Sound. They were clinker built and made to last. Naturally, they were painted green. The rental business was active as summer people and families of Steilacoom enjoyed a day at the beach.

Another attraction during the 1920's was the Deep Sea



Aquarium built by Ed Bair, brother of druggist W.L. Bair. Located near the base of the stairs it was a long rambling building. Lynn Scholes recalls, "The aquarium was a fascinating place with its pickled and live sea creatures gathered from the neighboring waters by Mr. Bair. Whale vertebrae adorned the front of the building which was shaped not unlike a Mississippi river steamboat. The paintings which covered the sides of the stranded ship were some of the most unusual ever seen until the advent of Salvador Dali. They were drawn by a patient at Western State Hospital. . . There was a seal, too. The seal was caged under the aquarium porch which extended slightly over the "duck pond". Twice a day, the seal enjoyed a swim as the tide rose and inundated his quarters."

Bair always the promoter, had brightly colored signs throughout the Western states advertising the Aquarium. Edna Dyer remembers seeing such a sign, probably in Wyoming as the Dyer family moved West to Steilacoom in 1929.

Changes were to come to Saltar's Point in the 1930's. During this time the Aquarium was closed. Mr. Bair died and Eudocia Bair Leech inherited the property. According to land records she sold it in 1937 to the Town of Steilacoom. In 1938 other property on the beach was sold to the Town by the Scallan heirs. This established Saltar's Point as town property and future park. In 1938 the wooden and stone cook shed was built by the W.P.A. Rest rooms were added at a later time. The bridge over the tracks was replaced once. The need arose when a construction crane, neglecting to lower the boom, came through taking out the bridge.

After Green's boathouse burned in the 1930's, the family purchased land on the corner of First and Champion and built the "Green Lantern." The boarding house became a popular spot and Mamie, again, served Sunday dinners. Charley started building another boathouse. This time with only one floor. After he died it was sold several times.

In 1959 Chet Palmer bought the boathouse, expanding it to the present Steilacoom Marina. The purchase included the tidelands, the last such sale the State of Washington permitted in South Sound.

Today the ownership of Saltar's Point is a hodge podge of property lines. Burlington Northern, the Town of Steilacoom, private ownership and the tidelands of Washington State all mingle together.

Though the sound of the canoe paddle is gone, families still picnic, boats are rented, children alternate between freezing in the cold water and roasting on the hot pebbles and local residents breathe a sigh of relief when September comes and they can reclaim Saltar's Point again as their own.

SALMUGUNDI

- ★ The 15th Annual Salmon Bake is scheduled for Sunday, July 28 from noon to 4 p.m. Don Rehbarg and Tom McAvoy are looking forward to another successful day with delicious salmon. Volunteers are always needed. Please call 582-4204 or 582-5393 if you would like to serve, husk corn, make pies, take tickets or any of the many jobs available. Tickets will remain the same as last year, at \$6.50 for adults and \$3.00 for children under 12.
- ★ The Bair Drug & Hardware Store has extended its hours to 8 p.m. for the serving of dinner during the summer months. Members are encouraged to stop by and have an excellent meal at a reasonable price.
- ★ Jack Sage was recently appointed to fill the unexpired position vacated by Dave Langford's resignation from the Museum Board.
- ★ The *Steilacoom News* was printed in Steilacoom in the early 1890's. Very few copies exist. The Association would welcome any contributions of this newspaper if available. Though only published for a year or two it gives insight into the town of that period.
- ★ Recipes using apples as a main ingredient are being sought. Plans call for a cookbook to be sold at the Apple Squeeze—pies, cakes, muffins, beverages, snacks, etc. Please drop your recipes off at the Bair Store in the Museum box.

THE FIRST SALMON BAKE—1971

"Here come some more. Keep cooking. Will they ever stop?" said one weary worker as she wiped her brow and looked at the line of people who continued to come over the bridge to Saltar's Point. A simple get-together for the newly formed Steilacoom Museum Association had turned into a tremendous success—and an exhausting one at that. When the event had been planned in June, there had even been talk of finding tents since the early summer had been so cold and wet. With the temperature at 85° in the shade—was there any shade on that August 7th day in 1971 on Saltar's Point—all one waited for was the end of that line.

The Salmon Bake, a brain child of Herb Hunt and Clyde Davidson, was held on the hottest day of that summer. The wildest dreams conjured up 400 people coming, surely not more. But fate was to step in, in the form of the *Tacoma News Tribune*. When an article was not in the Wednesday issue as promised, Clyde got on the phone. The result was a front page article on Friday night, complete with three pictures on the newly opened Museum. With that, the wheels were set in motion for the first annual Salmon Bake.

Plans had begun early in June with Ruthann and Sam Lockwood and Joan and Boyd Curtis as chairmen. Meetings were held every two weeks. The basic menu is the one still used today, the only variation was that cupcakes were given to the children, feeling it might be difficult to get more than 70 pies. The price has changed—\$2.50 for adults, \$1.25 for children and a real bargain of a \$6.00 ticket for a whole family.

Dale Welfringer, in charge of fire tending, brought charcoal and wood around by water from the ferry dock. Herb Hunt contracted the nearby Lakewood Transit to supply service between Town Hall and Pioneer School to the beach. He, also, ordered corn and tomatoes. The same job he will do again this year. Ham Rideout was responsible for cooking the salmon while Don Rehburg, cooked the clams, nearly 3,000 of them, dug on McNeil Island. Clenda Davidson, hostess chairman, called members who wore long dresses and greeted people as they came down the stairs to the beach.

Other committee members included Marge Brock, serving; Carter Bass, clean up; Charlotte Bass, ordering food; Virginia Zumwalt, entertainment; and John Galloway, publicity. Dorie Hixson, R.N., was available in case of accidents and Lee Merrill took pictures and donated them to the Association. Extra outlets were put in at the cook shed by the Town Crew, and the marshall and fire chief gave suggestions.

Larry Wilkinson, set-up chairman, recalls hauling chairs, tables and other equipment over the bridge and down the stairs—and

then at the end of the day hauling it **up** the stairs and over the bridge. The tables and chairs were placed on the beach for the diners. Some were put in the cook shed as serving tables.

As people continued to swarm over the bridge and down to the beach supplies began to dwindle, calling for quick action and hurried phone calls. Sam and Boyd made a dash to Lakewood arriving at the fish market just before it closed, buying all the salmon available. Safeway was cleaned out of all corn, tomatoes, many loaves of bread and bags of charcoal. Nearby houses were scoured for sugar, pies, salt and coffee.

At the end of the day over 700 people had been served and 100 more turned away. The written evaluation read, "It was the feeling of the committee chairmen that it would be better in coming years to overplan. Extra food could be sold or returned. The main aim was to involve members of the historical association in a worthwhile activity. The response was most enthusiastic, very few people said no. Over \$900 was cleared which was unexpected, the aim being to involve people, not necessarily to make money."

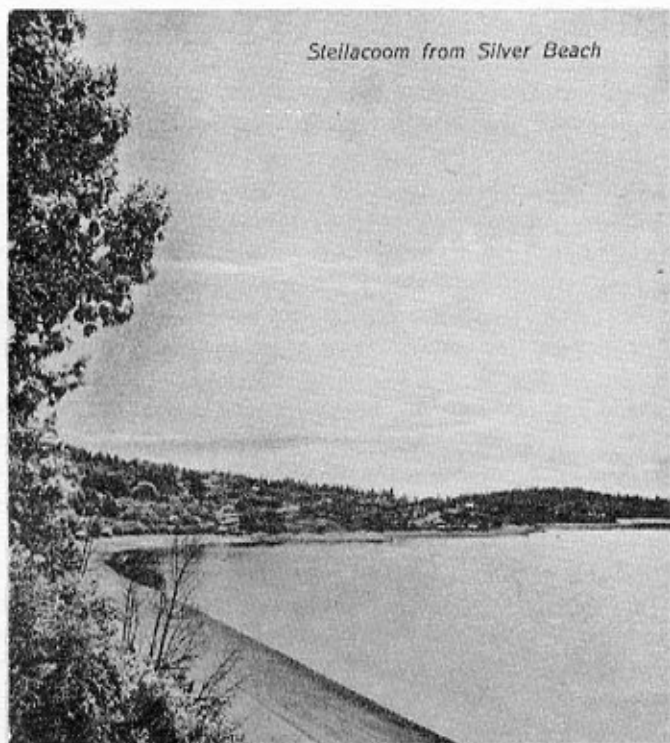
Upon the recommendation of the first committee, all supplies and equipment were brought in by boat the next year, eliminating the backbreaking chore of hauling it all over the bridge. The basic plans were refined and over 1000 people were served in 1972 with \$1,046.40 raised. A big decision was made immediately after the second Salmon Bake. The *Fall Quarterly* reads "Next year the Salmon Bake will move to Sunnyside Beach. The accessibility by truck to Sunnyside should facilitate the set-up and the numerous shade trees make the eating more comfortable. Also, the service should be much faster with the additional experience this year."

That decision was a wise one and the Salmon Bakes have continued successfully to this day at Sunnyside Beach where the "best salmon dinner in the Northwest" is served.

**SAVE THIS DATE—SUNDAY, JULY 28
SALMON BAKE**

- ★ The Steilacoom Historical Museum Association invites everyone who is interested in Steilacoom to join with it in the important work of preserving and interpreting local history. 1985 membership dues are now being accepted. Your check should be made payable to the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association, P.O. Box 16, Steilacoom. A special museum box is in the Bair Store to save on postage. Family memberships are \$7.50, an Individual Life Membership, \$30 and Family Life Membership is \$50.

Steilacoom from Silver Beach



SUNNYSIDE SALTWATER PARK A Stretch Of Manmade Beach

Editor Note: Our thanks to Al Elwell, Charlie Buchanan, Chet Palmer and Larry Wilkinson for their assistance in researching information on Saltar's Point and Sunnyside Beach.

In the early 1900's, when Saltar's Point Beach was a popular town picnic area, Sunnyside Beach didn't exist as a park. The hillside above it was known as Box Canyon and was the site of a commercial gravel operation. Over a period of years, however, the use of the beach area gradually changed from private to public use.

From 1890 to 1930 William Thompson, a Steilacoom resident who lived at Cedar and Lafayette, ran a sand and gravel operation off the beach. A wooden sluiceway conveyed the gravel from the pit, down the hill, and over the tracks of the Tacoma and Steilacoom Railway, ending at a loading platform. There the gravel was transported a few hundred yards to the Thompson Dock and loaded on barges. The pilings of the old dock are still visible today.

During the years of the operation of the Thompson pit, the runoff of excess sand and gravel dumped approximately 300,000 cubic yards of excess sand onto the beach—such a sandy texture

was unusual to Puget Sound. Thompson may have assumed that he was filling in an area that he could later use. However, the land that was built up by accretion between the inner and outer harbor lines belonged, by law, to the state. This buildup later resulted in the creation of Sunnyside Beach.

At the time Thompson ceased operations at the pit, the town limits were halfway between the present day sewer plant and Chambers Creek. The north end of the beach belonged to the county, and a group of summer shacks located there were rental property. The wild parties of the tenants were so disturbing to the people in Steilacoom that the town finally applied to the county to annex the north end of the beach. Thus, our present town boundary.

The area along the shore, known as Silver Beach, changed very little until the early 60's. The state, at that time, required the town to build a sewer treatment plant. An investigation into possible sites led to the realization that the state owned the built-up beach area and the town lost no time in taking steps to obtain the property. State Senator John T. McCutcheon, a Steilacoom resident, applied to the legislature in Olympia to have the property deeded to the town for municipal purposes—emphasizing the building of the state-designated sewer plant. Agreement was finally reached and the town was required to pay \$5,000, to give the Northern Pacific Railroad an easement on the north end of the property and to provide the state with a survey of the land, as it was not on the map.

The town then had sufficient area for both a sewer treatment plant and a stretch of manmade beach. In November 1966, after the building of the plant, the Town Council acted to obtain funds to develop a community park on the property now known as Sunnyside Beach. In 1967 a seawall was built to prevent erosion and additional sand was brought in to develop the area. Today the three acres of waterfront, with 1400 feet of saltwater shoreline, is the most popular recreational facility located in Steilacoom.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Association Board Meeting at Bair Store	July 11
Annual Salmon Bake	July 28
Steilacoom Flea Market, Street Fair	August 10
Apple Squeeze	October 13

"Lamplighter's bill submitted to the Town Council in June, 1891 totaled \$11.50 for 23 evenings" *From Town Records*

PERKINS PARK
In Honor Of "Dr. Mary"

by Carol Neufeld

Perkins Park on Union and Martin Streets in Steilacoom stands as a memorial to the life of Dr. Mary Fletcher Perkins. The property was donated by her son, Melville, in 1972. A brick and stone marker bearing her portrait recalls the contribution of this remarkable woman.

One of Dr. Mary's first memorable medical acts, in Steilacoom, was to administer assistance to a Santa Claus who accidentally burned his beard and hands at a Christmas gathering.

Ida Blood, Mary's daughter, recalls that: "The custom of the town was to have a Christmas party for the whole community in the Masonic Hall. Everyone took presents for their children for Santa to distribute. They (our parents) took us kids. Santa came in and began to dole out presents. Some children received big dolls and all we three little kids got was oranges." (Our parents did not know about the gift custom.) "Then the old fellow (Santa) reached across the candles on the tree and his beard caught on fire. We three children thought that served him right. The payoff was that Mother had to render first aid to Santa Claus."

Dr. Mary and her family moved to Steilacoom in 1902. She arrived in March with her husband, Dr. Luther M. Perkins (L.M.); her three children Melville, Julian (Jim) and Ida; her sister Althea (Babe); and her father.

They came from Missouri where Mary and L.M. had worked. Mary graduated from the school of nursing at a St. Louis hospital and was a nursing supervisor there. She later received an MD from the medical school at the University of Michigan. L.M. taught anatomy and surgery at Washington Medical School in St. Louis. Their first year in Steilacoom, L.M. served as a physician on the ship *Grenoble* which traveled from Tacoma to the Orient.

During that period, Mary, who was waiting to take the Washington State Medical exams, began practicing unofficially under the direction of a Tacoma physician. He recommended Mary to his Steilacoom patients who had emergencies and signed the prescriptions she had filled at the Bair Drug. In March 1903, Mary received her Washington license.

When L.M. returned, the Perkins opened joint offices in Tacoma. After about two years, the family moved into Tacoma except for the summers. Then they lived in the former Downey house in Steilacoom. The Perkins kids referred to the house as "the palace" and enjoyed the orchard and the saltwater.

From the time she arrived from St. Louis until her death, Dr. Mary was known as a compassionate, helpful physician. She was on call 24 hours a day attending the sick in Tacoma, Steilacoom and Anderson Island. In fact, special boats were run to take her to patients. She usually delivered babies at home; but, when a case had complications, she would take her patient to the Steilacoom home of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Agnes Fletcher, a registered nurse.

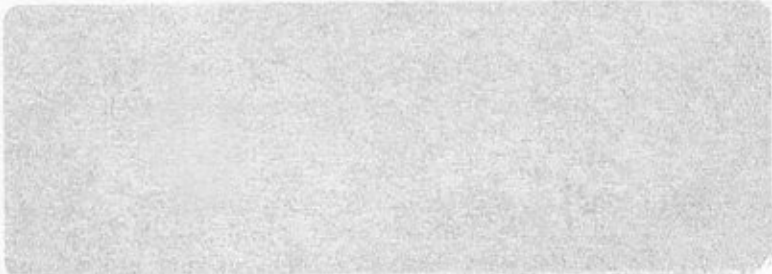
After her husband died in 1911, Dr. Mary took complete responsibility for her teenage family and practice. She shouldered the job well. In 1914 she was the physician for the Tacoma Public Schools, and in 1918 she became the first female doctor at Western State Hospital and remained on the staff for twenty years. Dr. Mary's caring personality extended beyond her medical practice to her family. Her daughter, Ida Blood, remembers that she frequently gave them little bits of philosophy such as: "Don't be selfish", "Society doesn't have room for fools" and "Don't behave that way or you will ruin my practice".

Dr. Mary moved back to Steilacoom in 1938 and died three years later at the age of 82. According to Marci Whitney, author of *Notable Women*, friends' memories of Dr. Mary recalled enlightening personal details. "She was noted for her square biscuits and apple dumplings... a fashionable black ribbon around her neck... Kentucky accent... interest in children... frankness... a youthful appearance even in old age... and a dignified manner."

**Front Page Photo: Captain John Saltar's House at Saltar's Point—
Circa 1895**

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