

STEILACOOM HISTORICAL



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

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JOHN B. CHAPMAN IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

by Barbara J. Cruchon

EDITOR'S NOTE: Barbara Cruchon, great, great granddaughter of John Butler Chapman, has researched the Chapman family. A member of the Association, she visited Steilacoom during the Apple Squeeze and offered to write an article for us.

John Butler Chapman was one of the first settlers to claim land and lay out streets in the town of Steilacoom. His town site, which he called Steilacoom City, lay to the west of present-day Union Avenue, that of Lafayette Balch was on the east, thus accounting for the street angles at that point in the modern town.

He was born December 26, 1797 in Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, the son of Thomas and Sarah (Eblin) Chapman. His hard-working, honest father grew up near York, Pennsylvania; his mother came of a Quaker family and was dismissed from member-

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Joan Curtis, Bette Bradley—Editors

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This being the final quarterly for 1985 and the end of my term as President, I want to express my thanks to all members for their support and for the privilege of serving in this capacity.

1985 has been a very good year for the museum as evidenced by the success of each of the annual events put on by the Association. It is certainly a credit to the many, many volunteers that devoted so much time and effort to these activities.

Volunteers are what sustain this organization. If you have never participated I urge you to do so. It is a rewarding experience.

Don Rehburg

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

A Country Christmas was the theme of this year's Annual Membership Dinner held December 7 at the Community Club. The guests were greeted by President Don Rehburg and Vice-President Tom McAvoy.

After a festive dinner, the members enjoyed a concert of Christmas music by tenor Neil Vosburgh. He was accompanied by Sarah Glick.

A brief business meeting was held to include the annual election of officers. Nominees were Tom McAvoy, President; Marianne Bull, Vice-President; and board members, Sherry Gimlett and Harold Roberts.

In charge of the dinner this year was Anna Zeigler. She was assisted by Lee Wilmeth. Nancy Montgomery was in charge of decorations. Assisting the chairman were the following committee heads: Rosa Kreger, Lenore Rogers, Judy Hopkins, Patty Forsyth,

Maxine Mathias, Jenny and Bob Hollister, Dawn Sage, Linda Wergeland, Alyce and Bob Wartenbe, Nancy Anderson, Janet Dures and Dave Langford.

SALMAGUNDI

- ★ Are you moving? Please remember to send a Change of Address card to the Steilacoom Historical Museum Assn., Box 16, Steilacoom, Wa 98388.
- ★ Christmas gifts from the Bair Drug and Hardware Co. include a fine selection of fresh ground coffees, selected teas and wonderful old-fashioned hard candies. Shop now because the store will be closed on December 23, 24, 25 and 26.
- ★ The thirteenth annual Apple Squeeze held on October 13 had no bad omens for the Association. It was the most profitable Squeeze to date with a gross of over \$8,000. Congratulations to chairmen Sherry Gimlett, Dave Hopkins, Harold Helyer and Tom McAvoy and their committees. A special feature this year was the Steilacoom Apple Squeeze sweatshirts designed and distributed by Sheila Elwell and Jenny Hollister. A few remain for sale at the Bair Store.
- ★ The Association will sponsor a Quilt Show on April 25, 26 and 27 in the Town Hall. A large selection of historical, antique and modern quilts will be exhibited. Members and friends of the Association who have quilts for display are invited to call Jenny Hollister at 588-9547. Hand quilted items are preferred, however, machine quilts will be considered. Quilted wall hangings may also be submitted.
- ★ The 1985 All About Fruit Show was held on November 2-3 at the Tacoma Dome. Association members Linda and Gerry Evanson, Nancy and Harold Hellyer, Lynn Scholes and Andy Gimlett assisted people as they pressed apples using the Hellyer's press. Other exhibits included wine and grape displays, ten best apples for Western Washington, grafting demonstrations and WSU Master Food Preservers.
- ★ Correction: According to Bob Karman, Green's Boathouse at Saltar's Point burned down in 1927, not in the 1930's as stated in the Summer issue of the *Quarterly* in "The Evolution of Saltar's Point." Bob recalls that his family had taken a trip to Michigan after school was out and coming home on the Union Pacific they had seen the smoldering ruins of the boathouse as the train rounded the corner before stopping at the station in Steilacoom.

Decorating For An Old-Fashioned Christmas The Tree

Basically, the tree should either be alive or, as in the case of the snow tree that will be explained shortly, very dead. Artificial trees (unless they are the fascinating novelties manufactured out of green feathers in the 19th century), aluminum trees and the like just cannot recapture the spirit and look of the trees of bygone years. Most any evergreen tree will look beautiful when decorated; and depending on the section of the country, there will be only certain types of trees available.

A fascinating and very beautiful turnabout of the live tree is the snow tree. It offers a great possibility of having an authentic, unusual Christmas tree in the old house today. The custom originated when thrifty persons kept their Christmas trees year after year. The first year, it was fresh and green; after it was taken down (and often trees were kept up in unheated parlors until spring), it was stored to dry out.

The following year, the tree was stripped of its needles and lined with cotton to look like new snow had descended on its bare branches. The tree was wrapped in paper each time it was stored away.

Lighting The Tree

Lighting is probably the most difficult phase to handle authentically. Before the first tree was electrically lighted in New York City in 1882 by Edward Johnson, an associate of Thomas Edison, the wax candle was the only means of lighting a Christmas tree in a darkened room.

This method was extremely dangerous and could only be used for short periods of time under watchful eyes, with buckets of water and wet mops nearby. The risk and trouble of lighted candles is just not worth the resulting authenticity. The tree should contain wax candles to add interest, however, even if they are not lighted.

The old carbon Christmas tree lamps are hard to find. However, they make wonderful collector's items and add interest to the tree. They should be lighted dimly with a low-voltage transformer so they do not burn out. They do produce great heat and should be used with metal reflectors.

Decorating The Tree

Many things were used to decorate the turn-of-the-century Christmas tree. Most common were:

Homemade food items: Strings of popcorn and gumdrops are easy to make and will hold together several seasons with the use of nylon thread. Cranberries are delightful but they dry up within a few days of being strung. Also popular were candy (often placed in miniature boxes or baskets), cookies (marzipan and springerle) and fruit. Also nuts, pinecones and gumballs.

A wide variety of glass beads and ornaments were popular, with ornaments coming in ball and figure shapes. Plastic ornaments and satin balls made today add a modern flavor that is to be avoided in recreating authentic Christmas decoration.

Each year it is possible to construct additional materials and enlarge a collection of Christmas decorations that adds beauty, warmth and authenticity to the Victorian house. And although one does have to follow basic rules, there are great opportunities to be creative and have the fun of collecting old and new materials to work with while making the home festive.

Old-House Journal

ACQUISITIONS

Household items, which once belonged to John Rigney, early Pierce County pioneer who came here with the first troops stationed at Fort Steilacoom, have been donated to the Museum. The items had been loaned to Fort Nisqually Museum in 1940 by one of Rigney's daughters, Rose Rigney O'Donnell of Steilacoom. The transfer was arranged by Patricia Rigney Rowley, a descendant of John. Included were a branding iron, two Indian baskets, sheep shears, buttermold, six-piece commode set, platform rocker and piano stool.

Other donations include a vintage Franklin stove given by Mike McMullin and a two-piece wedding dress from Lee Wilmeth. The cream wool dress was worn by Lee's grandmother when she was married on Christmas Day, 1890 to Hunter Grover Myers in Kansas.

FROM THE PAST

In 1863 there were 64 school children in School District No. 1, Steilacoom, ages 4-21 years. Bonney's *History of Pierce County*

John Chapman (Continued)

ship for "marrying out of unity." The family moved to Clarksburg, Harrison County, in present West Virginia, when John was about six years old. Here he spent his boyhood, working in his father's milling and bricklaying businesses, and learning to read and write at the local school. He was an adventurous youth who tried without success to enlist in the War of 1812-15, and later traveled on a keel-boat down the Mississippi and up the Red River into Texas. At age 20 he spent several years studying medicine in the offices of local practicing physicians, as was the custom of the time, and set up in practice for himself at Sistersville, on the Ohio River. Here, in 1819, he married Margaret McCoy, whose family had emigrated from Ireland around the turn of the century. They were eventually the parents of six sons and one daughter.

By 1822 John Chapman concluded to take up law, as an occupation more congenial to his disposition. After some months of study with a lawyer of Cabell County, Virginia, he passed his examinations before three prominent Virginia judges. Four years later, John and his growing family headed north into Indiana, where he settled at Crawfordsville in Montgomery County, and practiced both law and medicine.

His was a restless personality. During the next twenty years he traveled constantly, much involved in land speculation for town sites, canals, and finally, railroads, meanwhile maintaining a voluminous correspondence with important figures on the political scene, always on the lookout for an advantageous appointment. He loved politics, and often ran for office, though seldom achieving it. He had a Southerner's love of open hospitality and convivial company, entertaining his friends with true grace, and was partial to fine riding horses, once bemoaning the theft of "an elegant racker" which had cost him \$150. He was never at a loss for words, either spoken or written, though he often deplored the "countrified" language and habits learned in his youth. He saw to it that his children were well educated, sending the five oldest, including his daughter, to Asbury College at Greencastle, Indiana.

John B. Chapman has been described as an all-around eccentric, whose peculiar manner and hot temper often embroiled him in difficulties. Controversy was ever at his heels, and it was said he never backed away from a fight, whether verbal or physical. Yet he did here and there leave his small mark in American history, not the least of which are the results of his brief stay on the Pacific coast in the early 1850's.

He was by this date living in northern Indiana, where he was admitted to the bar of Carroll County in 1829. He had been Prosecuting Attorney, Eighth Judicial Circuit, Carroll County, 1832;

and served in the state legislature from Elkhart and Lagrange Counties 1834, as well as first postmaster, Turkey Creek P.O. near Leesburg, that same year. While in the legislature, he was instrumental in laying out and naming the county of Kosciusko and its county seat, Warsaw, to honor the great Polish general who served in the American Revolutionary Army. In the winter of 1833 Chapman visited President Andrew Jackson in the White House, and was a guest of Vice-President Martin Van Buren. The next year the President gave him an appointment as local Agent of Indian Reserves. He had voted for Jackson in every presidential election, and described himself as "an uncompromising Jackson man."

The news of the California gold strike fired his ambition to visit the Pacific coast and seek a location for a city. He planned to take out a coining machine and establish an exchange and deposit office on the Sacramento River, traveling in company with his son, John McCoy Chapman. The son went on ahead to St. Joseph, Missouri, where he was to wait with the ox-teams, but by the time Chapman closed up his business affairs in Indiana and arrived in St. Joseph, his son had gone on ahead. So he purchased a team and started out, but the load was too much; he buried the heavy coining machinery five miles east of Fort Laramie, and traveled the rest of the way alone on horseback across the continent to Sacramento. Here he found his son, though both had changed so much from the hardships of the journey that they did not recognize each other until the father spoke.

While his son John M. tried his luck in the gold mines, John B. embarked for Oregon late in January 1850. The ship encountered severe storms at the mouth of the Columbia and was forced to beat about for fifteen days before entering the river. He landed at Astoria, and, impatient at the delay, purchased a boat with some others of the ship's company, and rowed to Portland, where his younger brother, the lawyer William W. Chapman, had moved about this time. John traversed the Willamette valley on horseback, then crossed the Coast range to the Pacific, where he explored the bays and rivers, describing it as "a country of most romantic and singular character," where he sometimes camped for days with the Indians. Once, in the mountains, he was approached by a farmer who had heard he was a doctor and begged him to attend his wife who was about to die in childbed. Chapman, learning that the midwife had given up, took the case and soon delivered the woman of three healthy children.

Not finding any location that suited him south of the Columbia, John returned to Sacramento overland, taking only a servant boy and three pack horses through dangerous Indian country where they traveled at night and lay by during the day. The journey prov-

ed to be one of great peril and adventure; he tells of once seeing the camp of an emigrant company from the States surrounded and taken by Indians. His road along the mountains followed the emigrant route, which was strewn with horses and whole teams of oxen just as they fell in the snowstorms of the previous winter, as well as wagons, trunks, beds, every sort of equipment. He passed also many starving emigrants and shared his food with them, finally reaching Sacramento on July 4th of 1850.

He spent some weeks at the "diggings" in Redding with his son and a nephew, then took ship again for Portland from San Francisco. This time, he says, "I determined to prosecute my favorite enterprise of making a full exploration north of the Columbia, to find the best harbor, and on it the most eligible site for a town." He organized a private exploration company, purchased a whale-boat, and explored the coast north of the river, as far as Grays Harbor and the Chehalis River. Taking a fancy to the point at the entrance to Grays Harbor as a possible town site, near present-day Westport, he apparently spent several chilly and lonesome winter months alone in a cabin there, subsisting perhaps on dried provender such as clams, fish and berries procured from the Indians.

He failed to attract any settlers, however, to his "City of Chelhalis," and gave up the project. By the spring of 1851 he settled down near Olympia, and returned to the practice of law. He was admitted to the bar at the Lewis County Courthouse located in the log home of John R. Jackson, on May 22, 1851, the first lawyer admitted to the bar in what is now the State of Washington. Jackson's cabin is still standing on the highway south of Chehalis, a state historical site.

In June John Chapman journeyed to Puget Sound, and "found an overwhelming prospect of everything I desired; the country delightful, the Sound the most beautiful sheet of water in the world, with the best and safest navigation. I determined at once to make a location; I marked out the section of land to which I was entitled, and laid out a town on the handsomest site in all Oregon Territory, naming it Steilacoom City."

He returned to Olympia, where he was appointed by the committee in charge of the festivities, to deliver the Fourth of July oration, the first on Puget Sound. The man-of-war *Falmouth* was in the harbor, and all her officers and men came up to the celebration. It was undoubtedly a jovial affair, and Chapman's speech, though unrecorded, met with resounding approval, particularly the part where he agitated for a separate territory north of the Columbia River. Interest was so great that a convention was called for August 29, 1851, at Edward Warbass's home at Cowlitz Landing, to consider appealing to Congress for a division of the territory. The name "Columbia" was proposed. The twenty-five delegates at that

convention appointed Michael T. Simmons, John B. Chapman and Francis S. Balch to prepare a memorial to Congress. According to Chapman, it was he who framed and wrote the memorial, which set forth "that the inhabitants north of the Columbia River receive no benefit nor convenience whatever from the territorial government of Oregon as now administered." The memorial also maintained "that it cost more for a citizen in northern Oregon Territory to travel to a clerk's offices or reach a district judge than it does for a man to travel from St. Louis, Mo., to Boston, Mass., and back, and takes much longer."

The Cowlitz Landing memorial was sent to Congress by General Joseph Lane, the Oregon delegate, and was referred to the House Committee on Territories on December 30, 1851. Before the settlers could learn that Congressional action was being taken, a second convention met at Monticello, south of present-day Kelso, November 25, 1852 to petition Congress again on the division. Less than two weeks later, however, Delegate Lane introduced his resolution before Congress requesting that the Committee on Territories report on the memorial referred to them the year before. The committee reported by a bill, H.R. 348, which was passed February 10, and signed by President Fillmore March 2, 1853, creating Washington Territory.

In the same month of July 1851 when John Chapman delivered his famous oration at Olympia, he was elected judge of the county court of Lewis County, and Lewis County Commissioner as well. That October he became embroiled in a controversy (largely led by himself) to relocate the county courthouse to Sidney Ford's new home on Ford's Prairie north of Centralia, rather than at Jackson's, which was too distant and difficult to reach for most of the jurors and other participants in court proceedings. Settlers at Steilacoom and Olympia were reluctant to travel the rough trails and dangerous river crossings during the wet winter months, and pressed for a court site nearer their homes. After a lengthy and acrimonious legal battle, the dispute was eventually settled to the satisfaction of Chapman and the others who lived in the northern part of Lewis County, and in May 1852, the Federal Court met at Ford's house. The most enduring result of the affair was the division of unwieldy Lewis County and creation of Thurston County from the northern portion, with Olympia as its county seat.

The following summer Chapman returned to the States, landing at San Francisco July 5, 1852 aboard the schooner *Mexican*, along with 2000 feet of piling he had contracted to deliver for the firm of Rogers & McCaw of Steilacoom. He arrived in New York City on August 15, "after one or two wrecks and a thousand hairbreadth escapes," proceeded at once to Washington, and called upon the

ed to be one of great peril and adventure; he tells of once seeing the camp of an emigrant company from the States surrounded and taken by Indians. His road along the mountains followed the emigrant route, which was strewn with horses and whole teams of oxen just as they fell in the snowstorms of the previous winter, as well as wagons, trunks, beds, every sort of equipment. He passed also many starving emigrants and shared his food with them, finally reaching Sacramento on July 4th of 1850.

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President, together with General Lane, to lay the matter of division of Oregon Territory before him. He began drawing up documents to be presented to Cabinet members, but was taken with a violent fever which necessitated his immediate return to his home in Indiana. He intended to return with his family to Oregon, but was discouraged when he did not receive the Territorial appointment he expected from General Lane. He disposed of his 312-acre donation claim at Steilacoom to his son John M. Chapman, who had settled there the year before.

By December 1852, he had participated in laying out the town of Pierceton in Kosciusko County, Indiana, and was operating a general store there. He continued in the following several years to apply for an appointment in Washington Territory, but was unsuccessful. He did, it seems, procure a contract dated January 18, 1853, through the Postmaster General to deliver the weekly mail to Steilacoom from Olympia at a weekly compensation not to exceed \$2.70. His son may have carried out the contract until December 1853, when another carrier was named.

From 1854 through 1859 he was much involved with the settlement of Kansas Territory, taking an active part in establishing towns, railroads and newspapers, happily meddling in local politics and controversies, and penning a profusion of long-winded letters and newspaper articles. He wrote and published in 1854 a 116-page "History of Kansas and Emigrant's Guide," of which the only known surviving copy is owned by the Kansas State Historical Society.

His wife Margaret died in 1855, back in Indiana.

He lost nearly all his fortune, much of it in land speculation, and it was probably late 1859 when he removed to Washington, D.C., together with his second wife Susan, and a small daughter. He eventually received a clerkship in the Treasury Department. Advancing age and deafness finally brought him to retirement in Warsaw, Indiana, where his sons Charles and William lived. Here he died October 20, 1877, at almost eighty years of age, retaining acute mental faculties and lively interest in politics until the end. He is buried at Leesburg, Indiana, beside his first wife and two of his sons.

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WHAT WAS HAPPENING CHRISTMAS DAY?

December 25, 1853

Washington became a territory in March 1853 but the Governor did not reach Olympia until November. Governor Isaac I. Stevens quickly issued a call for the first legislature to meet in February, 1854 and then he made a tour around the sound. He was a long way from his family when the Christmas season came but he was busy getting the new territory organized.

Social life was picking up in the capital city and the Olympia newspaper praised the group which had a party Christmas Day for the bachelors of the area. The dance was held at the Washington Hotel and was followed by a "sumptuous and tastefully arranged repast" and the thoughtful hosts were the hotel operators, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Ensign. A dance such as this had special meaning to the unmarried men in the far Northwest. An evening with select young ladies of the city was a delight for the lonely men looking for a proper wife. *Washington Pioneer*, December 26, 1853

December 25, 1856

Christmas on Puget Sound was far gayer than the previous years. The day was announced in Olympia with the firing of cannon and small arms. At midnight a salute was fired from the Prussian vessel lying in the harbor. And all during the morning, more cannons were fired. Guns replied in salute from the Tumwater Falls. Ladies and gentlemen, young and old, danced until midnight at the Washington Hotel. Members of the Territorial Legislature, who had not gone to their homes during the holiday, took an excursion on the Puget Sound and were wined and dined on the gayly decorated steamer. *Pioneer and Democrat*, December 26, 1856; January 2, 1857

December 25, 1858

The Puget Sound Herald reported that: "Officers at the garrison at Steilacoom, with their proverbial generous hospitality, threw open their quarters for the reception of visitors and the entire day was spent in feasting . . . and pleasure." The editor was also happy to report that a Dancing Academy was evidence of the new prosperity of Steilacoom. Although the editor did not dance himself, he "defended it as an institution." He concluded: "It (dancing) is manly, healthy and refining."

December 25, 1888

A masked ball in Seattle was the highlight of the 1888 Christmas social season for many Tacoma couples. Stories tell how many