



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

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Erastus Avenger Light **Pioneer Entrepreneur—1822-1899**

Erastus Avenger Light, commonly known as E.A., an adventurous and energetic pioneer, was a leading citizen of Steilacoom and Pierce County during the formative years of the Washington Territory. From the time he arrived on October 10, 1853, he actively participated in the growth of the settlement.

The arduous wagon train trip from Lima, Iowa, was the beginning of the adventure. E.A., his wife Caroline, sickly two year old son Henry, and two young men, Charles Hadley and John Reagon, left Lima on April 1, 1853, with the Longmire-Byles group. They covered the 2,243 miles in six months. The last and perhaps most challenging part of the journey was the ascent and descent of the Cascades via the Naches Pass. E.A.'s account of the early days in the *Tacoma Sunday Ledger* of June 19, 1893, described the trip.

We left the Natchez...River passing up to the summit of the Natchez Pass....The next morning we started down the western slope. After safely descending two steep slopes, we reached a third. To look down was enough to take the starch out of any living being...except a pioneer.

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Front page photo: Ira Delos, son of E.A. Light, born March 8, 1860; died March 20, 1935.

President's Letter

Salmon Bake - Make plans now for our annual Salmon Bake on July 26, either by volunteering to help, attending the bake, or both. Weatherwise, there hasn't been a bad day in the history of our Salmon Bakes. Sunnyside Beach is an ideal setting on Puget Sound, and this is an ideal opportunity for you, your friends, and your neighbors to support the Historical Association. I encourage all of you to enjoy a bit of Steilacoom tradition. **Don Rehburg** and **Bob Volkmer** are organizing all details to assure fast service and delicious food and, of course, beautiful weather again. Remember, July 26 from noon to 4:00 p.m.

New Board Member - I would like to take this opportunity to welcome **Clinton Cannon** as our new Board member. Clinton was voted to the Board at the May membership meeting. He has a strong commitment to historical preservation and will be a great asset to our discussions.

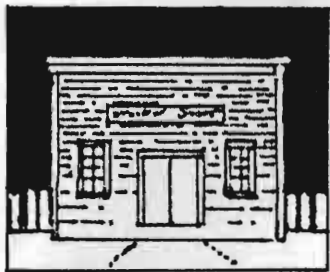
Long Range Planning - The Museum Board has already spent one Saturday (with a second meeting scheduled) developing long range plans. Part of the discussion focused on the deteriorating facilities at both the Orr Home and Bair Store. New roofs, windows, and painting are some of the major problems. These are also reasons why our fund raisers must be successful. We are setting priorities and developing a plan of action for the next several years. These are exciting and critical meetings to assure that the Museum Association moves forward in a thoughtful way, rather than with knee jerk reaction to current issues while losing sight of the big picture.

Life Members - One issue which was discussed at the spring membership meeting on May 28, 1992, (if you missed the meeting, you missed a fantastic array of delicious deserts) was the status of Life Family Members. Most of us paid \$50 for life membership more than 20 years ago. The cost of operating the museum and producing the *Quarterly* has long since used up the one time \$50 membership payment. The Board is discussing the possibility of annual dues to become a Sustaining Life Member. This new assessment would be voluntary and probably range between \$20 and \$25 each year. If you have any comments you would like to contribute on this or any other issue, please call me or any of the Board members.

I hope to see you at the Salmon Bake!

John Watson, President

Wagon Shop Update



The first phase of the Wagon Shop is completed. T D Construction officially turned the building over to the Association on May 11th. The next phase will include grading the area around the building, connecting the electricity from the Orr Home, installing appropriate lighting and finishing the interior with barn board.

During the summer the new cedar siding will darken and weather. In the fall the entire building will probably be finished with a weathering stain and preservative. When this is accomplished, it will be time to put the sign up, a sign similar to the one Nathaniel Orr made at the completion of the original wagon shop.

Nearly \$15,000 in contributions and fund raisers over the past year has helped to make this possible. Over 70 bricks have been purchased, and there are 36 names to be printed on the plaque. It is *not* too late to contribute. An additional \$6,000 will be needed, more if the barn board has to be purchased. Don't miss the opportunity to help preserve the past.

A Letter to the Editors

The following are excerpts from a letter we received from David C. Craig of Kotzebue, Alaska.

Greatly enjoyed "Steilacoom Prepares for War" in the Spring Quarterly. I grew up at that time (I was 10 years old when the "Japs" attacked Pearl Harbor), and it brings back memories of blackouts, Civil Defense folks, the aircraft observation tower on top of the hill, gas rationing, food rationing (the margarine came in a plastic bag with a red dye mixture that you squeezed into and through the white margarine—that was my job! Yuk—I still prefer real butter!), Victory gardens and collecting tin cans!

My grandfather, Theodore Bernard Claussen, was 80 years old in 1941, but he acted as if he were a strong 45 year old and never really showed his age. He went to work at the Todd Shipyards in Tacoma—lied about his age—said he was in his early sixties! They really didn't catch up with him until near the end of the war.

During "The War" the Army had German P.O.W.'s at Fort Lewis, probably North Fort, because that is where I used to see them working on the roads, ditches, and culverts—under guard of M.P.'s. One time one of them slipped away from his work detail and came past my house in Steilacoom. I remember him. He was wearing the old blue fatigue uniform with white P.O.W. letters on the back of his shirt! Shortly after he walked by our house and went down to the railroad tracks, next to the beach, a bunch of M.P.'s and sheriff's deputies showed up with a tracking dog and found him below our house, on the railroad tracks—eating blackberries!

Gary Reese has a good idea about those lilacs. My grandparents, at Saltar's Point, had some really great lilacs in their side yard. Two huge lilac "bushes" (actually trees!) were planted along side each other, and they formed a huge bower with a tunnel underneath them. What a beautifully fragrant planting! They have been torn down now; when a house was put in next door to the old house. Too bad! Lilacs fit in with a "Victorian theme" for Steilacoom.

HELP PRESERVE THE WAGON SHOP

\$50 to \$149—purchase a brick
and have your name inscribed on it

\$150 to \$1,000—purchase a space
on the bronze placque inside the building

The Ham Rideout Trophy Race

At the Salmon Bake this year the Association will honor Ham Rideout for his long time support and organization of the boat races at the annual event at Sunnyside Beach.

The opening race is the seven mile course around Ketron Island. This has been designated the first annual Ham Rideout Trophy Race. A plaque in commemoration of Ham's service will be put up in the Bair store with the winner's name.

Ham was the originator of the races and started the first canoe race in 1980, setting up a course from the ferry dock to Sunnyside Beach. He later developed a mile race around buoys in front of the beach so the crowd at the Salmon Bake could see the contest. Eight years ago Ham and his son, Jay, started the race around Ketron Island. The race is open to all "human-powered craft" and includes canoes, kayaks and rowing shells. The races are open to all and provide a wonderful program for the Salmon Bake.

Boats are available, and the fee for the Ketron Island race is \$4.00, while entry into the other races is \$1.00. The final race of the day will be the Town Challenge sponsored by Steilacoom merchants.

After twelve years Ham is enthusiastic about turning over management of the races to the new joint sponsors, Rob Hignell of Tahoma Outdoor Pursuits and Dave Anderson of the American Rowing Club. For information call Dave at 588-2594.

Orr Home Flag

A thirty-one star flag is flying from the Orr Home. It is a reproduction of the flag flown from 1851 to 1858, from the time California was admitted until Minnesota became a state. It was during this time that a new political party was formed called the Republican Party with a young Illinois lawyer, Abraham Lincoln. Commodore Matthew C. Perry flew the thirty-one star flag from his expedition to Japan in 1853-54. If Nathaniel Orr flew a flag from his wagon shop, it would have been the thirty-one star flag.

E.A. Light residence on Lafayette Street across from the Masonic Hall. This spacious home was built by Light in 1853 and burned to the ground in 1900.

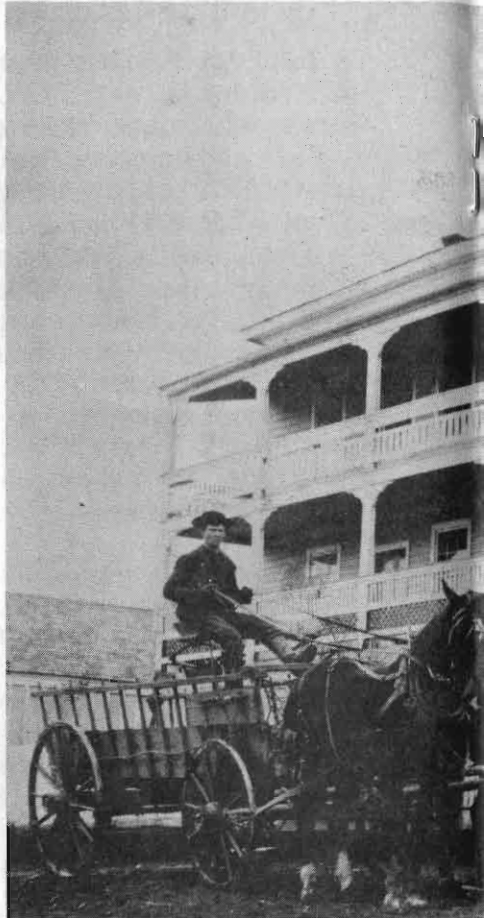
His recollections reveal a life that was as action packed as the westward trek. He was successful with business, politics, education and family.

His business career began with a job hauling potatoes for Lieutenant Slaughter of Fort Steilacoom. When this was completed, he was immediately employed as a carpenter for \$5 a day. Next he and John Lane, another member of the wagon train, settled briefly on Commencement Bay by the John Swan and Charles Riley fishery. Here they harvested trees, furnishing cargoes of timber, piles and cordwood for ships.

By 1855, Light, with Henry Wilson as partner, built up a business in the Lafayette Butcher Hotel. Unfortunately, this was stopped after a year because of the Indian War of 1855-56.

It became necessary for Light to travel to Lyette, Iowa, during 1856 to prepare his mill property for resale. After completing this task, he returned to Steilacoom by railroad and ship via New York, Panama, San Francisco and Olympia.

Next he entered into partnership with the brothers Andrew and Preston Byrd, building a grist mill at the head of Steilacoom Creek. During this time he lived nearby at Custer in a house he had built. When he sold his interest in the mill to the Byrd brothers, he returned to Steilacoom to begin a mercantile business.





On October 21, 1875, an ad in the *Puget Sound Express* read:
E.A. Light, Steilacoom, Washington Territory, head of Light's Wharf on Balch Street. Dealer in all kinds of Groceries and also all kinds of rough and dressed lumber, laths and pickets.

From about 1867 to 1874, Light formed a partnership with Issac Pincus and Adolph Packscher. During this time they owned the Webber Wharf, the Byrd Grist Mill, the Sherwood Sawmill property in North Bay, and the schooner *Clara Light* which was run between North Bay and San Francisco. According to W.P. Bonney, the partnership ended abruptly when Light sued Pincus and Packscher. After this incident Light settled for a year beginning June 24, 1874, in Lightville, Washington (near Allyn), where he established a post office.

Light's political career was long, varied and sometimes characterized by controversy. He writes:

I was appointed postmaster which position I held for 15 years, was a Notary Public for 30 years, and was commissioned as a United States Commissioner for 15 years.

He was also a member of the jail commission, a road supervisor, a county surveyor, a probate judge, a grand juror, and sheriff pro tem.

He was noted for his leadership in the controversy over Leschi, the Indian chief, who was accused of inciting murderous raids during the 1855-56 Indian War. The Steilacoom community was divided on this issue. Many considered Leschi innocent of the accusations and thwarted the sentence by arresting the sheriff and his deputy who was to carry out the execution. Light chaired the opposing group that formulated nine resolutions stating that justice would be served if Leschi were hanged. Light succeeded in this cause. He noted in his diary:

Leschi was hung where my mill stood. Thus ended the life of one of the inciters of the Indian War.

Light also championed education. He was one of several men who drafted a special law to incorporate the Steilacoom Library Association. After this law as passed by the legislature, February 3, 1858, he went to San Francisco where he purchased several hundred books for the library. He also served for many years as a library officer.

During 1867 and 1868 he was the Superintendent of Schools. On June 1, 1868, he reported:

305 persons in Pierce County of school age, outside of Muck Creek which had 62 of school age in 1867.

Joyce LaBelle, great-granddaughter of E.A. and Caroline Light, recalls: "His associates found him difficult, but he was wonderful to his family."

Because of his business success, E.A. was a good provider. He, with the help of Reagon and Hadley, two young men who lived with them, built a spacious family home in Steilacoom. Reportedly to be the largest on the Sound, it was located on three lots on Lafayette Street at the present site of the Drew Apartments across from the Masonic Hall. It was here that Caroline and E.A. raised their four surviving children: Henry, Harvey, Clara and Ira Delos.

Of the four children, Henry, the sickly two year old who came on the wagon train, lived in Steilacoom until his death at age eighty. Harvey Light and Clara Light Kubel moved to California. When E.A. went to live with his daughter, Clara, after the death of his wife, Caroline, Ira Delos carried out the family tradition in Steilacoom. He operated his father's mercantile business. Ira D.'s son, Ira Kenneth, was the Steilacoom road and utility director for many years. His son, Ira Kenneth, Jr., who retired in Steilacoom, has served on the Town Council.

When Erastus Avenger Light died in California on November 5, 1899, he left a legacy—descendants who continue to contribute to the growth of Steilacoom.

Carol Neufeld

From the Museum

500 Students Enjoy Steilacoom History

This spring over 500 students from schools in Steilacoom and the surrounding area visited the town and toured the properties of the Steilacoom Historical Association. Guided by members, the tours have differed according to the grade level and historic background of each group. Some of the younger children brought their own lunch for a picnic in Pioneer Park and later enjoyed an "old-fashioned" ice cream cone from the Bair Store as well as a visit to the Orr Home and Steilacoom Historical Museum. A more extensive trip includes a walking tour of historic Steilacoom which starts on Balch Street where Lafayette Balch first landed. Florine Fowler, Jane Light, and Jack Sage conduct this tour.

At the Orr Home, students are greeted by Patty Forsythe or Jackie Dock, both of whom have made replicas of pioneer dress to wear when they are docents.

At the Steilacoom Historical Museum the young people are shown the barber shop, forge, and trading post by Mike McMullin, Bill Smurro, Bob Johnson or Bob Weir. Also helping with the tours are Quest Heacox and Sandy Strother.

These programs are planned by Trish Laughlin, Association director. She wants to thank all the docents for helping the Association toward its goal of bringing our history alive to local students.

The Original Lady Washington

As a Washington State Centennial Project, a group from Grays Harbor built a replica of the *Lady Washington*. In remembrance of the days when Steilacoom was a port, the local Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring a Maritime Festival on Saturday, July 11. The *Lady Washington* will be anchored at the Steilacoom Dock and will be open for tours from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m., with tickets ranging from \$1.00 to \$3.00. The money will go to benefit the upkeep of the ship. Information about the ship is contained in the following article by John Hemphill, President of the Steilacoom Chamber of Commerce.

The *Lady Washington* was the first American vessel to arrive on the Pacific coast of North America. Its captain and crew sighted the coast of California just below the Oregon border on August 2, 1788, after a ten month voyage from Boston Harbor around Cape Horn. The captain was Robert Gray of Triverton, Rhode Island. Most readers will recognize Captain Gray as the famous discoverer of the Columbia River, but that important event occurred during his second voyage in 1792, while captain of the larger sailing ship *Columbia Rediviva*, a companion vessel of the *Lady Washington*.

Since official documents, such as ships papers and logs, have never been found, information about the *Lady Washington* has been gleaned from secondary sources leaving gaps in knowledge about the vessel. She was a sloop (a vessel of one mast) rigged with a large spread of canvas, a square topsail, course, and mainsail, and three headsails.

Very little is known about the *Lady Washington* prior to being prepared for sailing to the Pacific Northwest. Lost are the name of the builder and construction year and site, making the ship an "orphan of the sea." It is suspected that she was a privateer in the Revolutionary War, having deteriorated into unseaworthy condition by 1787 when she was purchased by Joseph Barrell and Company, along with the *Columbia Rediviva*, to thrust the United States into the lucrative trade with China for pelts of sea otter.

In 1789, loaded with a cargo of furs, the *Lady Washington* set sail for China, later returning to continue in the fur trade. In Canton the vessel was later converted to a brigantine (two Masts) at great expense.

Enroute to Canton with a cargo of furs at the end of 1794, the *Lady Washington* was anchored at Honolulu when salutes were exchanged with arriving British ships. Unfortunately, one of the British salute guns was loaded with grape which damaged the *Lady Washington*. A few months later, the *Lady Washington* was sold to John Howell, a businessman in Canton. With Canton as its home port, the *Lady Washington* was used in Far East trade until her demise on an unknown date and location, possibly the coast of China or the Strait of Malacca.

Reference:

Francis E. Cross and Charles M. Parkin, Jr. *Captain Gray in the Pacific Northwest, Captain Gray's Voyages of Discovery, 1787-1793.*

Museum Receives IMS Grant

The Steilacoom Historical Museum has received a \$6,400 IMS operating support grant which is equal to 10% of the museum's operating budget. The Institute of Museum Services awards grants to museums that have demonstrated excellence in all areas of museum operation. This year IMS awarded only two grants to historical museums in the state of Washington.

Salmagundi

- ★ The Steilacoom Salmon Bake was featured in the national magazine *Mobile Motorist* this spring, complete with a picture of Clyde Davidson serving clam nectar. The committee is looking forward to a most successful event.
- ★ Gary Reese has given away over 50 lilacs this spring. The entire town will visually benefit from Gary's gifts in the years to come.
- ★ Students from Charles Wright Academy worked in the Orr Orchard and at the Bair Store property in May. The annual event is a day set aside for students to participate in community service activities, both on and off campus.
- ★ Under the direction of Gary Reese the Variety Team #480 and 485 of the Boy Scouts has spent numerous hours working at the Orr Orchard. The benefits of their labors can clearly be seen. Recently four gooseberry bushes were planted, in addition to many lilac bushes. The garden committee meets on the second Thursday of every month from 9-12 noon. Volunteers are welcomed.

22nd Annual Salmon Bake

July 26—12 to 4 p.m.

Adults \$9 - Children \$4

Sunnyside Beach

Home made pies are back!



Canoe Races

New this year

1st Annual Ham Rideout

Trophy Race

Sign-up 12 noon; Race 1 p.m.

Also Town Challenge Race

Boats available



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