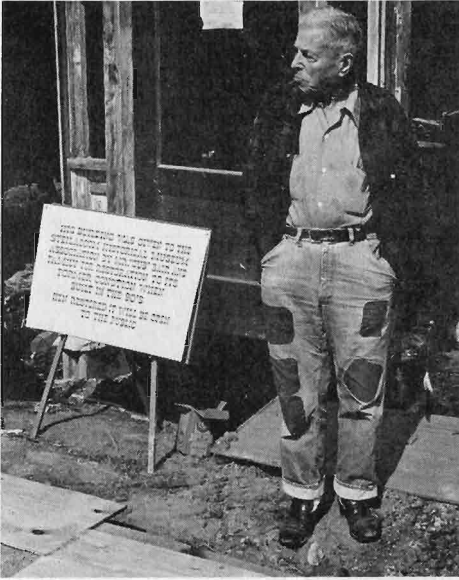


STEILACOOM HISTORICAL



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Volume 23, Number 1

Spring, 1994

Twenty Years Ago - The Bair Store Restoration 1973-1976

At a special board meeting on March 12, 1973, G. L. (Cub) Bair and his sister, Eudocia Leech, offered to give the Bair Drug and Hardware Store and adjacent property to the Association. In his eloquent style, President Lee Merrill wrote in the June *Quarterly*, "All of Steilacoom should have a prayer meeting. A thank you prayer of gratitude to "Cub" Bair and Mrs. Leech for their donation to the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association of the store and property they gave so generously in memory of their mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Bair. Certainly this preserves for all, as well as the generations to come, the historical flavor and noble beginnings of our Town. A sincere Thank You from us all."

(Continued on page 4)

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Front page photo: "Cub" Bair stands in front of the old Bair store during its restoration in 1975.

President's Letter

Greetings to the Membership:

On this, my first outing as your President, I bring you just one thought: MEMBERSHIPS.

Our prime support comes from our members, and I would like to make it my personal goal for 1994 to increase the membership to 1,100. Please know and let your friends know that we are very grateful for their support for the Museum Association, and that we do not require that they volunteer in any way unless they wish to. It is the yearly support that is important and that we seek. We also would appreciate our new members supporting our activities when they can. We like to think our events supply some good food, pleasant conversations and possibly some new friends.

For those who choose to become members and also wish to volunteer in areas of their interest, this is the life blood of our activities. No museum can exist without its volunteers. They keep things running in all phases, and we couldn't function without them.

For those of you who have volunteered in the past and to date have not gotten a call to help—this is your year. We guarantee that you will be called for something that you have indicated you want to become involved with.

For those members who so loyally send in their dues every year, and for those who have increased the amounts to either a friend or patron category, we are very grateful. Keep up the good work.

In closing, I ask you to remember us with your family and friends, neighbors and co-workers. If they are interested in history or particularly like this area—how many times have we heard, “Oh, I just love Steilacoom—we go there all the time and just ride around,” and have eaten at ER’s or the Bair or ridden the ferry to Anderson, etc....ask the question, as the experts say, and give us a call, and we will mail them an application at once. Or if you want to keep a supply at home, let us know and we will see that you get as many as you want. Many thanks for your consideration.

Arline Brightman

Docents Honored

Docents serving the Museum and the Orr Home were honored recently with an afternoon coffee and dessert at the Bair Store. Forty-five men and women are responsible for greeting visitors and interpreting Steilacoom’s history. Over 4,000 visitors came to see our property during the past year. A special thank you to all who have given of your time.

Welcome to the new docents: Billy Wolfe, Carol Wetherholt, Dale Welfringer, Marilyn Cullen, Bob Stevens, Peter Wolfers, Hilda Scott, Nancy Covert, and David Welch.

Docent Chairmen Marilyn Siemans and Nancy Anderson invite members to volunteer to serve. The time commitment is three hours a month. Docents at the Orr Home are scheduled to work usually three Sundays between April and October. Call the Museum, 584-4133, for more information.

Calendar of Events

Ice Cream Social, Orr Home Orchard	June 26
Salmon Bake.....	July 31
Town Wide Garage Sale.....	August 13
Annual Christmas Dinner & Membership Meeting.....	December 3

Enthusiasm ran high as Rita Happy wrote the following article for the *Quarterly*.

In Steilacoom it's the one place that defies description.

Undulating floors, overburdened shelves, vintage stock, 1906 soda fountain. Telling about them can't convey the character of a landmark like "Cub" Bair's store.

W. L. Bair built the store in 1895—first store building on Lafayette Street—and set up his pharmacy there. The pharmacist worked long hours, usually opening up at 7 a.m. and rarely closing before 9 to 10 p.m.

But then he ran one of the social centers in town. The retired or otherwise unoccupied settled themselves in the chairs around the pot-bellied stove to tell their tales of early Steilacoom.

When the fountain went in—about 1906—imagine the clientele who sipped their sodas and savored their sundaes! An addition at the back of the building made room for the post office and hardware stock transferred from the old Rogers Store.

Young Godfrey and Eudocia Bair became their father's helpers and their own best customers. Their first jobs in the pharmacy kept them behind the candy counter—a task which brought few complaints. A penny bought a lot of candy at that counter in those days....

The youngsters went to school in Tacoma (Eudocia entered Stadium with its first class in 1906), they married, and Cub tried other tasks in Alaska and Tacoma. But that corner store was too much a way of life.

When their father died, Cub ran the store for his mother. Eudocia's husband, William Leech, had already joined the crew. He clerked in the store with his wife and had already obtained the job as postmaster.

Mrs. Bair died in 1948, and Cub became proprietor of the store with its porcelain-knobbed display cases and its "whatever you need, we've probably got it" stock.

The store has been closed for a couple of years. At 83, Cub decided he needed some extra days for fishing. Eudocia, who is two years younger than her brother, agreed that it was time to retire the store.

They made a decision a couple of months ago. They agreed to donate the corner building with a few selected historic items to the museum.

"We hate to see it deteriorate," Eudocia said. "We would love to see it restored."

The restoration process began in 1974 as Herb Hunt debated whether to tear the store down completely and rebuild it or to restore and shore up the existing structure. In the meantime, a committee was evaluating and going over the extensive accumulation of 80 years. Among the "finds" was the old mortar and pestle sign which used to hang on the store front, the first flush toilet in Steilacoom, complete with the old overhead wooden box, first electric lights, the original front doors stacked against one of the out buildings, a box of wooden carpentry planes, well preserved because of the can of linseed oil which spilled upon it, and thousands of items with no historic value.

As a fund raiser, an old-fashioned "Close Out Sale" was held on August 3, 1974. Tables were lined up next to the store on Wilkes Street. Others completely filled the tennis court area. A dedicated, dusty crew had spent weeks before going over the stock, cleaning it of dust and grime, pricing and putting it into categories. Those who worked so diligently were Bob Anderson, Lyle Dunkin, George Parker, Walt Swanson, Ruthann and Sam Lockwood, Fred Rosevear, Bonnie Stucker, Bob Johnson, Margaret and Larry Wilkinson, Melveia Parker, and Bordon Winsley.

People lined up at the tennis court as early as 8:30 to find bargains. By the end of the day, over 1,700 people had come and gone. According to Chairman Lou Dunkin, \$6,331.01 was taken in. The variety of items had been so large that one customer questioned that it all could have come from the store. He was assured that it had. Cast iron fry pans, paints, nuts, bolts, copper wiring, glass, spelling tablets, Pyrex dishes, heaters, erasers, and sprinklers were just a few of the items which were sold. Items were priced to sell, and they did. At the end of the day, the remainder was wholesaled to a dealer. Items of historic interest and value were stored by Don Rehburg so the restoration could begin.

Bob Anderson and Lyle Dunkin were designated the working chairmen of the project. The outbuildings were

removed, with the exception of one to be used for temporary storage. The store was gutted to the stud walls. The December, 1974, *Quarterly* read, "The clean-up and pick-up phase of the Bair Store restoration is well underway, with thanks to the many volunteer laborers. More volunteers are always needed—men, women, and teen-agers. You need not have a special skill—just be willing to pitch in and help!"

Responding to the call for volunteers, the Air Force Civil Engineer Reserve Unit 939 came with its expertise and equipment to raise the building so concrete footings could be poured. The unit built stud walls before lowering the building.

Progress continued, according to the Summer, 1975, *Quarterly*:

The Bair Store is straight. Straight as the day it was built. That leveling process was a painful one judging from the creaks and groans the old building emitted when the walls left the ground. Since that day in April, the cribbing has been taken away, a cement foundation has been poured around the exterior, new studding has been built and fill has been put down in preparation for the pouring of a cement slab.

After the slab is poured, the roof will be shingled and the outside painted. The old store will begin to look like new—just as it did in the 1890's. Fred Schwab is busy restoring the original doors....An old picture in the Town Hall is helping to give authenticity to the restoration.

Three men, Lynn Scholes, Lyle Dunkin, and Bob Anderson, with assistance from Bob Volkmer, have put in more hours than one can count to make what seemed a dream last summer a reality this year. There have been many who said that it couldn't be done.

By fall the building was painted, the windows and doors on so work could continue inside during the winter months. The work included installing a sprinkler system, duct work fabricated for the heating system, wooden flooring put down, and the ceiling put up.

In the spring of 1976, the rest rooms and post office area were largely completed. The soda fountain was back in place, though not yet operational. According to the *Quarterly*, "A handsome back bar has been installed, and some counters,

cabinets and shelves returned to their former places. Everyone who visits the building, including "Cub" Bair, the donor, seems well pleased.

During the months of July and August, 1977, the store was run with volunteers working on a rotating basis—serving sodas, root beer floats, and ice cream cones. The dedicated crew were: Anne Daubenspeck, Alma Irvin, Linda Evanson, Barbara Welfringer, Nancy Olson, Joan Curtis, Nancy Anderson, Barbara Petrie, and Anna Zeigler.

The newly restored Bair Drug and Hardware Store and adjacent park were formally dedicated by Association president Lynn Scholes on August 20 as Steilacoom celebrated the country's 200th anniversary with a Bicentennial Street Fair. Eudocia Bair Leech and G. L. (Cub) Bair, the donors, and members of their families were special guests.

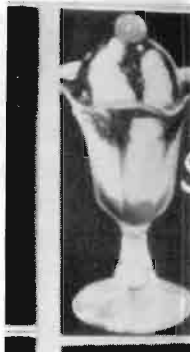
Recognizing that the Association did not have the expertise or manpower to run the store, the decision was made to lease the store out. The goal in the restoration was to have a viable store which could be used and enjoyed as a living museum and one that could bring in revenue. In the past seventeen years, there have been seven leasees who have brought their individual styles to the store. As the most recent, Rosa Kreger is beginning her fifth year as a highly successful operator.



Wagon Shop Memorial Walkway

It's not too late. Orders for the bricks for the Wagon Shop Memorial Walkway will be accepted until May 1. Nearly 150 bricks have been purchased commemorating pioneer families, present residents, birth of a child, grandchildren, prominent citizens, a birthday or graduation, and memorials for family members. Give the gift of a brick by mailing \$50-\$149 to SHMA, Box 88016, Steilacoom, WA 98388. A sample brick may be seen at the Bair Store.







Salmagundi

- ★ The Association Board met on March 26 at Wolf Fletter's home to discuss a long range plan. Setting priorities and establishing goals and objectives to gear the organization toward the year 2004 were considered. See the Treasurer's Report for more information.
- ★ Tree pruner Alan Forsyth has done it again! That high ladder expert has pruned the fruit trees in the Orr Orchard. Thank you, Alan, for your hard work, including hauling away the cut branches.
- ★ Dave Hudson put in over 60 hours during the month of February. He built a new storage area in the basement of the Town Hall for the artifacts which were returned from storage. Carpentry work for a new exhibit area and work on the plans for the restoration of the Orr Home were also time consuming. The dedication of Association members is greatly appreciated.
- ★ The Association will participate in "Alternative Education Program" through Tacoma Community College. The program, geared toward disadvantaged youth, will teach an appreciation of the area's history and includes a tour of Steilacoom.
- ★ Spring exhibits at the Museum will include a display of household irons spanning nearly 100 years, from 1860-1940. A number of the irons are very rare, including one heated by charcoal, one of the first electric irons, an iron heated by gasoline, and many children's irons. The second exhibit will have a nautical theme, recognizing Steilacoom's importance as an early-day sea port. Sailing ship models, charts and other marine memorabilia, some from Steve Brightman's collection, make for a must see during the summer months.
- ★ The Museum is open Tuesdays through Sunday, 1-4 p.m. until fall. The Orr Home will open on April 10 for the season. Hours will be 1-4 p.m. on Sundays. Members are admitted free of charge.

Steilacoom Dines Out

Fine dining was the popular pastime two evenings last month as Steilacoom Dined Out. The cuisine was varied enough to tempt every palate: Italian, Southwestern, East Indian, Tuscan, Norwegian, and Southern. Everyone who attended had an enjoyable time. It was a nostalgic evening for David Salzer as he and his wife dined at the house where he had grown up—the home now owned by Pat and Hank Brown.

Bertha Orr wrote from Virginia, "Thank you for opening the front door at Orrmont (the Orr home) when 'Steilacoom Dines Out.' I think that is one lovely idea!!! Glenn told me about the home being the usual gathering place in Steilacoom for entertainment. Said a Tacoma band used to come out to play since our old piano was one of only a few there at that early stage of Steilacoom development. How Glenn had to take the band's piano player's place once." Bertha said that she "would be there in spirit only, with Nathaniel and Emma, just to make the Orr Family a bit more complete" and sent a check "for a Quiet Evening at Home."

The Orr Committee wishes to thank the following hosts and hostesses for their pioneer spirit and generosity for making this event so successful: Sue and Bob LaFraugh; Hank and Pat Brown; Jon and Judie Davis with Maria and Wolf Fletter; Jenny and Bob Hollister with Chef Vik Wiklund; Pat and Bill Smurro; Susan Small, Bernice Kiefer, Ken and Jane Light; and Sandy and Ed Strother with Joan and Boyd Curtis.

At a recap meeting of the Orr Committee, the recommendation was made to have "Steilacoom Dines Out" every other year—with the possibility of informal dinners or activities the other years in the summer, "Steilacoom Dines Outside." This would open up the possibilities to a barbecue, a car rally, entertaining on a boat, a garden party, or even a scavenger hunt.

Dedication - June 26



Wagon Shop Memorial Walkway

Enjoy an old-fashioned Sunday afternoon at the Ice Cream Social in the Orr Orchard following the dedication ceremony.



Steilacoom Historical
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