STEILACOOM HISTORICAL

MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Volume 24, Number 2 Summer, 1995

Depression Kids—Summertime

By Jim Dyer

A small group of "locals" has been meeting monthly to talk about Pioneer School and town memories. Long friendships and attendance at the school sometime in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and early 50s is the bond. This article has been drawn from some of the notes of the meetings.

The day the Bair boys Bill and Barney appeared at school with "pig shaves" we knew vacation was almost here. With the last day's noon closing, they and their sisters Susie and Jane disappeared for the summer, as their mother loaded them into the car and in a few hours arrived at the family cabin on Hood Canal.

What an ideal summer they'd have, practically living on the beach! But none of those thoughts brought feelings of deprivation too long because of the pleasure of our own

(Continued on page 6)

The Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly is issued as the official publication of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association. Mail correspondence to the Editor, Box 88016, Steilacoom, WA 98388. Telephone: (206) 584-4133

Joan Curtis, Bette Bradley—Editors

Wolf Fletter..... President Wolf Fletter..... Treasurer
Jeanne Birney.....Secretary Arline Brightman.....Interim Director
Arline Brightman.....Past President
Trustees: Marilyn Cullen, Dave Hudson, Jane Light, Sandra Menter-Berry, H. L. Shellabarger, Sandy Strother, David Welch, Doug Wing

---

Front page photo: *Several McNeil guards and families picnics were held at Greens Beach. In 1933 this was the "super highdive" float. Jimmy Dyer, at right back, is with his three sisters Jean (Swanson), Betty (Andrews), Vir (Harrison).*

President's Letter

In the last *Quarterly* I outlined the SHMA mission and stated we still needed to decide just what we mean by preserving and maintaining cultural values, and more specifically for whom, and how will we know we have done so. It may seem obvious to us individually what cultural values ought to be, but what one person values often is looked down upon by another. Take the controversy over Initiative 164 as an example. And beyond the "values issue" is the notion of beneficiary. It's a complex matter deciding these sorts of things when you are dealing with a quasi-public entity such as our Association in a community such as ours. Some examples: Do we undertake the restoration of the Orr Home or the operation of our museum and the Bair store for the benefit of the SHMA membership, or for the residents of Steilacoom, or for the citizens of the state of Washington? Or, on which group of "customers" do we focus our educational programs? Where, as a public, non-profit entity, do we draw the line in using our buildings and lots to make money to support SHMA, and when, who, and how much do we, or should we, charge for using our facilities? How inclusive does SHMA wish to be in organizing our events?

While it is important for SHMA members to see that the board is working on such questions, it's more critical that you also understand some of the complexities and help shape the final product. In strong and viable organizations, members are willing to share in coming up with answers and solutions to these issues by giving input. You can do this by postcard or note giving us some of your views and suggestions over such "Mission" issues as values and "customers." That would be an important and invaluable contribution. Please mail these to me "Attn: SHMA Mission," P.O. Box 88086, Steilacoom, WA 98388. I'll make sure your input is forwarded to our planning team.

By now you have had a chance to read the new SHMA newsletter recently mailed. We need your reactions and suggestions for what to call it. We see sending it roughly once a quarter, but not in the same month as the *Quarterly*. We chose the newsletter as an additional means of communications for current events, and I want to thank Nancy Covert for getting it put together. The *Quarterly* will continue.

Another matter is our progress on hiring a director. We have developed a job description, placed advertisements, and are in full swing of finding a person who meets the qualifications. The candidate will have to be resourceful since the salary level will be greatly dependent on his or her ability to find funding. In effect, we are offering a very unique opportunity for an individual to gain professional recognition. We offer the opportunities presented by Steilacoom's many "firsts" in this state, by our unique holdings and assets, the cooperation of the town, the school district, and community as a whole. Combined, these all truly provide a very unique professional opportunity for the right person. We seek a very qualified person who wants the opportunity to make our visions reality. If you have interest, or know of one, or want to find out details, please contact Arline Brightman at the Museum.

We hope to see everyone at the parade on the Fourth of July and at the Salmon Bake on August 20 at the town's new Sunnyside Beach.

Wolf Fletter

Wagon Shop Update

The first phase of the brick walkway has been completed. Early in May, Ken Fellows, assisted by Gary Wilkes, laid 156 bricks in place. A professional bricklayer, Ken most recently has supervised the brickwork at the new Washington State Museum in Tacoma. We are indebted to his donation of time and expertise.

With the increased orders, phase two will include the additional bricks to incorporate a patio and seating with the present walkway. If you cannot find your family's name now, it will be part of phase two. Plans call for many extra bricks to be laid, which may be inscribed later. Call the Museum at 585-4133 for information on ordering a brick.

Through the efforts of Dave Hudson, electrical lines have been connected to the Wagon Shop and the storage shed. Marian Smith, electrician, donated a day's work to make this possible. He was assisted by Dave Hudson and Dave Hopkins with Alex Fletter and Mike Welch digging trenches. The hookup enabled lights to be used during the art exhibit and sale on June 25 in the Wagon Shop.

Salmugundi

★ Congratulations to the Orr Committee for a most successful art exhibit and sale, along with the ice cream social on June 25. This activity was most enjoyable, as it brings the members together to socialize. Be sure to put Thursday, July 20, on the calendar, when members only can come together in the Swanson garden for dessert and to hear the "Prohibition Jazz" musical group. See insert for more information.

★ After the art exhibit and ice cream social on June 25, John Thomas had a shave and haircut in the barbershop at the Museum. Pat, the barber, was the professional who did the

honors. John had won the raffle at the Bair celebration in May.

★ On May 6 the Bair family members gathered to join the Museum Association to celebrate the Centennial of the Bair store. Two weeks later the Bairs welcomed twin boys, Jackson and Jordan Leech, who are the great-great grandsons of W. L. Bair, the original proprietor of the drug store. The boys are the fifth generation of the family to live in Steilacoom.

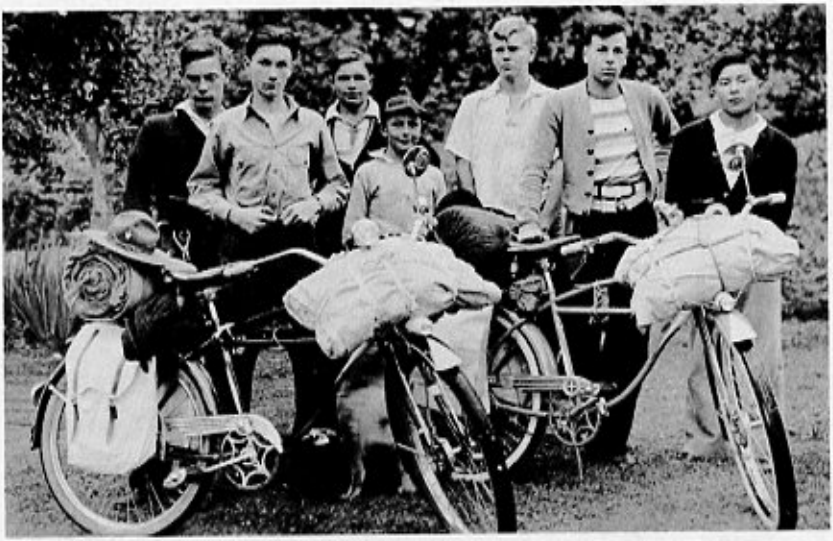
★ Fourteen docents were given a most complete tour at the Fort Lewis Military Museum recently. One of the Task Force's recommendations was working with other museums in the area. The tour served this purpose and gave the docents the opportunity to see a larger museum.

★ School tours have kept the docents on their toes the past two months. Nearly 400 students from the Steilacoom, University Place, and Bethel School Districts have seen Steilacoom's history.

★ Several new publications of historic interest are available for sale at the Museum and the Bair Store. These include *Erastus Light: Early Times in Pierce County; Tales and Reminiscences of Steilacoom and Pierce County* by Gary Reese; *Leschi, The Officers and the Citizens; Pioneering Reminiscences of Urban E. Hicks;* and *Joseph King Fenno Mansfield* with more to come. These have been made available to the Association through the generosity of Gary Reese and the Northwest Room of the Tacoma Public Library. Marilyn Cullen and David Welch cooperated to have the books printed and bound.

Calendar of Events

Desserts in Concert, Swanson Home ..... July 20
Town Wide Garage Sale ..... August 12
Twenty-fifth Annual Salmon Bake ..... August 20
Apple Squeeze ..... October 15



Steilacoom boys bike trip - 1939

summertime in Steilacoom. Ask any of us the reason, and the answer is the same—*swimming* or "living on the beach."

Most gathered at Greens Beach, actually Saltars Point. We called it Greens since Greens Boathouse was located where the Steilacoom Marina is today. The boathouse had a float where rowboats were stored and rented—the best boats around, slim, clinker built, and, of course, painted green.

Beach life at Greens, Sunnyside or Lake Louise was the key to our summers. Some found them a great place for practical jokes, some at the Sound were "gifted" agate spotters spending much time sifting through the flat rocks, and we all tried to hone our swimming skills.

There was always an argument between lake adherents and those who preferred the Sound. Some enjoyed the best of both, enjoying friends and times at Greens Beach, then going to Lake Louise for lessons and its warmth.

Two summers in the mid-thirties beach life held special interest, as the WPA provided two young men who came and organized a recreation program emphasizing water sports and swimming lessons. Another memory is the "quiet time" they

Ball game on Commercial Street - 1946

brought where we were introduced to great stories such as the never to be forgotten "The Greatest Game in the World." The town could not afford to keep its library open.

The sand that made Sunnyside Beach was the overflow of the Thompson Gravel Pit; the few pilings still remaining were part of the dock for loading gravel onto barges. The abandoned pit itself, now the Madrona development, was a popular play area. No problems were ever encountered. Our parents knew we were there, and that we would come home at a time usually determined by the arrival of a penitentiary "pen" boat or by the blast of the four p.m. whistle, sounds heard everywhere in town.

Other activities involved us. In 1934 the Veterans of Foreign Wars post sponsored the Steilacoom City Band for all ages, and in a couple of years the Drum and Bugle Corps for teens and older children.

Living in Steilacoom was somewhat provincial. Seldom did we see beyond its borders. Both the band and the bugle corps expanded our geographical horizon with parades in various cities and festivals like the Coupeville Indian canoe races and

the Rhododendron Festival at Port Townsend. The big competition was the annual VFW encampment in such exotic places as Walla Walla, Bellingham, Vancouver, and Hoquiam.

With musical groups blossoming, in 1935 the VFW and Steilacoom sponsored an annual summer musical festival held at Pioneer School athletic field. This drew competing bands and corps from many miles. The festival was well advertised and had many spectators from out of town. Troop 71 Boy Scouts also participated.

The Sunday School picnic was eagerly awaited when Nick Doering loaned a truck that carried us, packed in the back, to "Clee's Point" on the west side of Steilacoom Lake. Games, swimming, food, and being with friends were great attractions.

The two-week long Vacation Bible Schools at Oberlin were enthusiastically awaited. While Bible lessons joined the other spiritual values we gained at Oberlin, there were individuals and other things remembered. One was the activity time when we made checker sets with the checkers cut from a broom handle. That same broom handle could be cut into wheels for racing car bodies made from wood orange crates from Jake Smith's or Verbaum's stores, then assembled and painted.

Besides the wood crates, split cedar fence posts and slats that had long ago fallen provided the right material free of charge for those who liked to build. Tools were always available in some dad's garage.

A week at a "Y" and/or church camp, usually on the Peninsula, perhaps a weekend at the Boy Scout camp at Brown's Point are standout memories. Still unknown is how our parents scraped the money together for camp costs. Boy Scout and Campfire Girl activities were also part of our lives.

With no restriction on Steilacoom beach bonfires, one could always be built by whomever. And sometimes the bonfire site was moved up to the school yard or other place for one of the clam bakes that used to be held often.

How about the Fourth of July? Celebrations with fireworks usually were of the neighborhood variety. Fireworks were obtained at stands along South Tacoma Way between 84th Street and Steilacoom Boulevard. Being a member of the band

or corps could also occupy the day and evening with a performance in another city. And there were small gatherings at the beaches in the evening to shoot combined aerial fireworks.

Family excursions, one or two days, or even a week or more for seldom made long trips to see relatives, were special events. Unfortunately, they sometimes cut into activities we hated to miss. Paradise, Mt. Rainier with its hairpin curved road, the ocean beaches with miles of sand and razor clams, a visit to a battleship or cruiser in Tacoma's Commencement Bay, even a drive to Seattle and Pike Place Market were popular if your family had an auto or friends did.

Outings with other families could include going to Staircase at Lake Cushman or to the Kapowsin area for wild blackberries. Picking raspberries or strawberries in the Puyallup area might be followed by helping (maybe) our moms with canning.

Families, dependent to some extend on fishing for sustenance, would join a few other friends camping on an island beach, so fishing could be done when best. If fish weren't caught, it was pot-luck for dinner, but as a youngster it was fun and different, and with your family and friends.

Boys (girls too) are natural scavengers for food, and Steilacoom was our domain. It had many old orchards, even then no longer maintained, where pockets were filled with fruit in season—cherries, apples, and pears. Such great delights!

If you were one of those classmates who especially enjoyed the dock, there were places, hidden from the public, where one could sit for hours with a line and sinker, hook and some cheese trying for perch. If fishing was slow, climbing through and over the box cars at the station was available.

Another enjoyable afternoon found us rowing to the far side of Ketron, where the gentle current would take you along over sea cucumbers, moon snails, sand dollars, starfish (now sea stars) and urchins visible on the sandy bottom. If you were fortunate, a small octopus might be seen, even caught.

The new tennis courts were built in the early thirties. Tennis was the second summer love for many. The tennis courts were also the site of exciting hockey games using roller skates, a knot from a board, and anything that resembled a stick.

Jim Dyer ready for soapbox derby.

Saltars Point not only had Greens Beach, but also Capt. Ed Bair's Deep Sea Aquarium and Museum. Both the Captain and his assistant, Mrs. Egan, could be the target of practical jokes. The sound side of the Aquarium had a row of changing rooms where rented bathing suits could be donned. This also was attractive to boys bent on mischief. The Captain always admonished us not to call the tide pond the "duck pond."

The thirties that allowed us the freedom that was ours and our close friendships ended. In the second half of the World War II decade, what was left was disappearing. As some returned from service, while others now had grown into adulthood, there were Saturday night bonfires at Greens Beach. Gathering in the long twilight, beside swimming and talking, we ate hot dogs and marshmallows, poked at the bonfire, enjoyed it all and wondered when those times would end. At one of the last bonfires, Don Van Wert offered the hulks of some of those old green clinker boats for firewood. As each boat burned away with the blue flames of layers of copper paint, another would be placed on top until they were gone. A grand fire helping end a grand era.

Pioneer School History Group: Nancy Tollefson Anderson, Janet Tollefson Bailey, Marge Hatcher Brock, Milt & Sue Davidson, Pat Wiltbank Dyer, Jim Dyer, Bernice Scholes Keifer, Ken Light, Jane Bair Light, Kathryn McCutcheon, Shirley Barclay Roe, Christy Sundvall, Jean Dyer Swanson, Dale Welfringer, Jack Wiltbank.

The First Bake - 1971

The Steilacoom Salmon Bake celebrates its 25th anniversary this summer with a change in date, but not in menu. Prolonged beach reconstruction has necessitated that the Bake be held on Sunday, August 20, a week after the official reopening of the beach.

The first Bake was held at Saltar's Point on August 7, 1971, on the hottest day of the summer, with no shade. Supplies and equipment were either hauled over the bridge or barged in by boat from the Steilacoom dock. Ham Rideout was responsible for cooking the salmon while Don Rehburg cooked the clams, nearly 3,000 of them, dug on McNeil Island.

Excellent publicity brought out the crowds, double what had been anticipated, and sent workers to Lakewood for more salmon, tomatoes, corn, bread, and charcoal. At the end of the day over 700 people had been served, with many being turned away, and $900 had been added to the new Association's treasury.

The get-together to involve the membership in a worthwhile activity had become a "first annual." The next year everything was barged into Saltar's Point, eliminating the backbreaking chore of hauling it over the bridge. A profit of $1,046.40 was recognized. In 1973 the decision was made to move the Salmon Bake to Sunnyside Beach where "accessibility by truck would facilitate the set-up, and the numerous trees make the eating more comfortable." It proved to be a good move.

The price for a good salmon dinner in 1971 was $2.50, adults, $1.25, children; in 1995 it will be $7.95 and $3.50. Considering the inflation over the years, it is still a good price! As the Association celebrates its 25th anniversary of the Salmon Bake, it wishes to thank all the pie bakers, corn huskers, salmon cookers, and all the hard workers who have made it such a success. A very special thanks to Don Rehburg who has labored over the past 25 Bakes with great expertise and patience. Come and join in the celebration on Sunday, August 20!

25th Annual Salmon Bake

August 20th, 12-4 p.m.

Sunnyside Beach

Adults $7.95; Children $3.50

First Salmon Bake - 1971

Steilacoom Historical
Museum Association
P.O. Box 88016
Steilacoom, WA 98388

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Tacoma, WA
Permit No. 272

Address Correction Requested