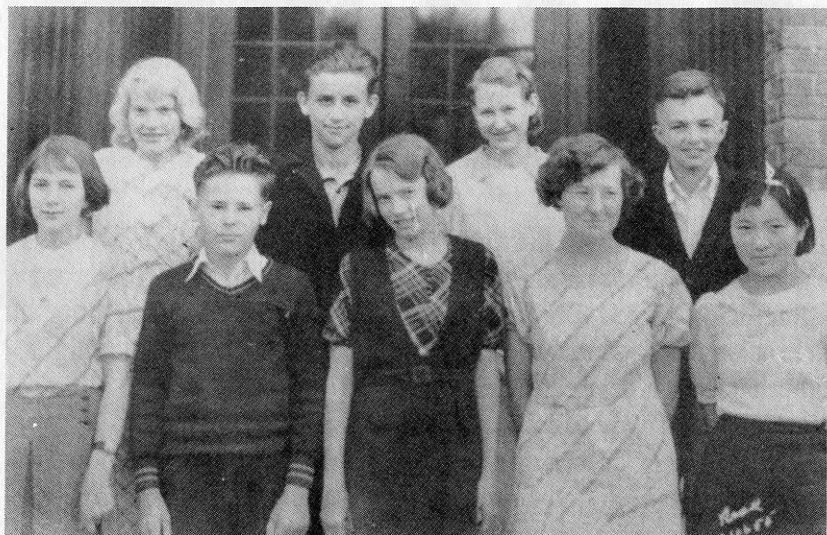


# STEILACOOM HISTORICAL MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Volume XXVII, Number 3

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*Steilacoom eighth grade classmates of 1934. Left to right, front row: Carol Ellsworth, William Russell, Ione Anderson, Florence Galbraith, Chisako Higuchi. Back row: Mildred Hilton, Robert Pearson, Ruth Evanger, Everett Burkhart.*

## A Japanese Family in Steilacoom—1920s & 1930s

**C**hisako Joyce Higuchi Hirabayaski has fond memories of her classmates and growing up in Steilacoom during the 1920s and 1930s. In *Reflections, Memoirs of Japanese American Women in Minnesota*, she wrote, "The students in our local school were made up of mostly immigrants. The families all started out on equal terms, more or less. The only difference was that the Higuchi children looked different. We were all in the same boat, just kids trying to live and play together."

In the mid 1920s Yuzaburo Higuchi moved his family to Steilacoom where he found work at the Steilacoom Sand and Gravel Company. It was owned by William Thompson, Sr., an immigrant from Wales. Living in a house above the Sound, it "was a time when our lives were happy and peaceful."

The mother, Katsumi, would take the three children, Suzy, Joyce, and Sam, to the beach for swimming lessons. "Mother would take walks and bring home scotch broom for part of her flower arrangement display. She made silk macrame purses for us and articles for the home. Not only did she take English lessons, but also tried to teach us Japanese."

Joyce learned to love flowers by visiting the nearby home of the Reverend Herbert West. There she helped Blanche West's mother tend the garden.

These happy times were to end by 1930 when Mr. Higuchi was injured in a work related accident, the Depression hit, and Thompson sold the gravel company. To earn a living "Dad leased the beach (from the new owner Pioneer Sand and Gravel Company) and called it Sunny Beach." He built four one-room cabins, a building to house 13 round-bottomed row boats and family sized picnic tables along the shore.

Joyce wrote, "Since renting the beach facilities to visitors did not bring in enough money to keep a family of five together, Mother found work as a clerk in a friend's grocery store in Tacoma. Now Dad was home taking care of the beach and us kids. My sister, at the age of around 13, also went to work as a clerk on Saturdays along with Mother.

My brother and I stayed at home. We helped Dad with his work on the beach, cleaning debris washed ashore from the tide of Puget Sound...."

A former classmate, the late Bill Russell, remembers that time and the Higuchis who were "one of the hardest working and most honorable" families. Others recall the delicious strawberries and produce the family grew.

At this time Principal Janet Tait was an important influence in Joyce's life. "She was very strong in history, English and mathematics....I've always said that I learned the most in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades under her tutelage. She was a taskmaster, but an excellent teacher."

*(Continued on page 4)*

## From the President's Desk



Some doors are closed, but SHMA remains as active as ever. The Orr Home fund-raising efforts are continuing. The Museum is closed temporarily due to Town Hall construction, but we are busy packing, clearing and storing artifacts before reopening in November.

A field trip for docents is being organized during their hiatus from museum duty, several educational programs are being considered for 1999, the upcoming Inquiring Mind lecture season is being scheduled, and it is not too early to begin planning for the Christmas Dinner and Annual Meeting to be held on December 5.

Most immediately, Chairperson Brenda Leech is organizing volunteers for the annual Apple Squeeze on October 11. For future events, we are closely monitoring the technological development of a jug lid which changes color if *e. coli* is present. For this year, in the interest of safety, SHMA once again will be restricting pressing to the cleaned apples provided for sale. We are planning to double the amount available last year to meet the demand.

Family entertainment and a special exhibit of Jacob's sheep, a variety once plentiful on western prairies but now rare, will be featured. Pioneer craft booths, apple-related food booths and a few fun surprises will make this a day not to be missed.

*Marianne Bull*

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Editors : Joan Curtis, Jack Macdonald—Photographer: Jacqueline Dock  
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## **A Japanese Family in Steilacoom**

*(continued from page 2)*

After eighth grade graduation, Joyce had to catch the 7 a.m. bus to travel to Jason Lee Junior High School in Tacoma. There she was the only Japanese American student. Upon entering Stadium, she discovered that the Japanese American students spoke Japanese and she "felt excluded."

Since her sister Suzy was attending the University of Washington, it was decided that Joyce should also. During that first year she began studying the Japanese language, and she met her future husband, Martin Hirabayaki. While still at school, war was declared with Japan.

The Higuchi family found itself caught up in the relocation and internment of the 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast. Joyce wrote, "We had to get ready to sell what we could and move all of our belongings. Thank goodness, we knew the minister and his wife from the time we had moved to Steilacoom. We were able to store our furnishings in a barn on their property. The store which Mother ran and owned in Tacoma also had to be sold. Dad had to sell the rowboats and put things in order at the beach. Somehow, everything was accomplished."

The kindness of the Wests would continue as Blanche West wrote to a friend who was an English professor at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. Through that contact and the American Friends Service Committee, which assisted students to find colleges to attend, Joyce left her parents at Tule Lake Relocation Center in northern California to attend Earlham College.

In the meantime, Martin Hirabayaski had left the West Coast before the deadline for internment and was living in Montana. It was arranged that he would travel to Indiana where he and Joyce would be married.

Later Martin taught the Japanese language at the Navy Intelligence School at the University of Colorado and then at Harvard University. An assignment with the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey Team took him to Japan to research and survey the war damage.

Martin and Joyce were to serve over 30 years with the U.S. Foreign Service and State Department.

# Pioneer Family Cures in Steilacoom

## Were as Near as the Herb Garden

*by Barbara Carey*

To the pioneer housewife the words "useful plants" were especially true of herbs. Treasured herbs, carried carefully as seeds, roots, cuttings and tiny plants, were important to health and well-being in this new and unfamiliar territory.

Not limited to flavoring and seasoning, the family herb garden was the nearest source of remedies for common household complaints.

An upset stomach could be calmed by a cup of chamomile or peppermint tea. Perhaps the appetite needed stimulating with a cup of dandelion tea. The cranky or fretful child was soothed using dill or catnip, or a warm bath with lavender added. Catnip tea was used by adults as a remedy for headache, insomnia or in a poultice for sores or boils. The often harsh life brought on colds and lung complaints, treated using hyssop, anise or horehound. Decoctions of thyme, rosemary and feverfew cleansed wounds and abrasions. Sage, burned on the embers or boiled in water purified and disinfected the air.

Household pests were kept at bay by the wise pioneer gardener as well. Dried leaves of the catnip repelled mice. Pungent dried leaves of pennyroyal drove away fleas. Sprigs of lavender, rosemary, sage and southernwood tucked between the folds of linens and clothing kept out insects and moths, plus the fresh and pleasing fragrance the herbs imparted.

Leaves of lemon balm or crushed seeds of fennel made a good furniture polish, leaving a fresh, clean smell. A scouring pad for dull pots and knives came from the nearest stream bank and the abrasive horsetail plants found growing there.

The herb garden was a source of cosmetic items, too. Breath was sweetened by chewing fennel or anise seeds. Lotions of lemon balm and bergamot brightened the complexion. Calendula was the basis of an ointment to soothe skin rashes. The hair was rinsed with rosemary for brunette hair and chamomile for blondes to enhance the color and shine. And feverfew lotion even was said to bleach freckles.

Many of these same herbal approaches can work for you today. Give them a try.

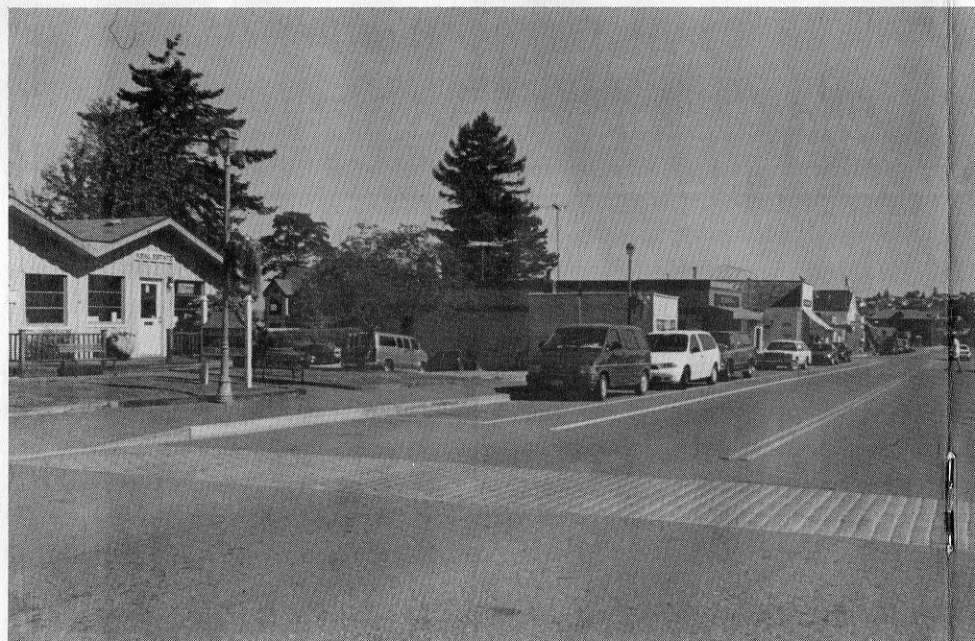


# Time Was . . .

## Lafayette Street circa 1923

**People** (left to right): Six boys in center unidentified; Hattie Bair in black dress with grandson Jack Leech in straw hat; W.L. Bair in front of Bair Store with son-in-law W.I. Leech, postmaster; others unidentified.

**Buildings:** Pool hall, now site of Steilacoom Grocery; corner of the O'Donnell house, now a vacant lot; home of Walter Hatcher, presently known as the Parsonage; (across the street) former Oberlin Church; Jake Smith's storage building; Fred Chelius Butcher Shop; Jake Smith's store; Mary Gimel's Barber Shop; Hattie Bair's Bakery; Bair storage building; and Bair Drug & Hardware.





## Lafayette Street Today

Current photo of Lafayette Street taken from the other end of the block just short of the Parsonage, which still stands. Everything except the Bair Drug & Hardware on the north side of the street was destroyed by fire in September 1939. The fire started in the freezer compressor of the butcher shop. Long-time resident Jim Lester was playing poker in the adjacent restaurant when the billowing smoke broke up the game. The Bair Store was spared because there was space between it and the next building, and the Bair Store had metal sheeting on its west side.

## McNeil Is "One L" of an Island

*Here Is the Story of the "Two L" Man for Whom It Was Named*



*Captain William Henry McNeill*

**M**cNeil is the name of the island just across from the Steilacoom ferry dock. It was named for Captain William Henry McNeill. No one has figured out what happened to the second "L" in the spelling, but it has become so fixed in tradition that it is too late to change it now.

The island was named 157 years ago by U.S. Navy Commander Charles Wilkes during his expedition on Puget Sound in 1841. Though he was an American, Captain McNeill worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. His ship, the *Beaver*, played an important part in the development of small communities around the Sound.

The 101-foot *Beaver* was built on the Thames in England in 1835 and was the first steamship on Puget Sound. The ship was rigged with sails for its 163-day trip around Cape Horn and north through the Pacific.

*The McNeil Century* reports: "About two years after the *Beaver's* arrival in Puget Sound, Captain Home, who had brought it from the Thames, was drowned; his replacement



was William Henry McNeill. McNeill, a New Englander born in 1800, had taken naturally to a seafaring life, and in 1830 sailed to the West Coast in command of a brig, the *Llama*. Later it was bought by the Hudson's Bay Company and McNeill was retained as its commander. Some years afterwards, when the *Beaver* had lost its captain, McNeill...was transferred to become the best remembered of the *Beaver's* many captains [it was wrecked in 1888]. He commanded the *Beaver* from 1837 to 1843."

When Commander Wilkes arrived at the Hudson's Bay outpost Fort Nisqually in 1841, he received a cordial welcome from Mr. Anderson, who was in charge of the fort, and Captain McNeill, who was waiting for new boilers for his sidewheel steamship. Wilkes was so pleased by the warm welcome from the two British representatives that he named two nearby islands McNeill and Anderson.

According to all reports, McNeill was a decisive and resolutely honest man. He later commanded other boats for the Hudson's Bay Company as well as holding shore posts.

If we can accept the personal notes in Commander Wilkes' newsy diary, "Captain McNeill's marriage was typical of the adjustments made by many men to the frontier shortage of women. Mr. Anderson and Captain M'niel both reside in the Fort [Nisqually] with their families, both are married to half-breeds, and have several fine children."

McNeill retired in 1861 and built a home on Vancouver Island. He lived there with his large family until his death in 1875, the same year the U.S. government opened its new prison on the island that bore his name.

Among other points of distinction in his long and active life, McNeill was associated with the first discovery of the North Pacific coal fields, the discovery of gold on the Fraser River and with the founding of the British Columbia capital, Victoria.

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**Sources:** *The McNeil Century* [newspaper].

Paul W. Keve, *The Life and Times of an Island Prison* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall).

W.P. Bonney, *History of Pierce County* (Chicago: Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1927).

Lester Price, editor, *McNeil—History of a Federal Prison*.

**Photo:** Provincial Archives, Victoria, British Columbia

# The August Kautz Journal

by Gary Fuller Reese

[Here Mr. Reese provides the third in a series of articles on how the records of our very historical area were found, developed and are being preserved for future generations.]

A major break came in our search through historical literature when excerpts from the journals of Lt. August V. Kautz were found published in the *Washington Historian* magazine. They included heavily edited accounts of his experiences at Fort Steilacoom in 1853 when he served at the post as a young Army officer.

It was found that the Kautz diary, beginning in 1957, was deposited in the National Archives, and preparations were made to have the Northwest portions of it microfilmed.

The Kautz account of the 1857 climb of Mount Rainier and his experiences soldiering in the U.S. Southwest after the Civil War had already been published, so it was possible to see many names of persons, places and things in a printed form that could be compared with some of his unclear handwriting.

The life and times of the little world around Steilacoom and the Fort was the focus of the diary where he often recorded the words "...nothing worthy of note transpired today," and then caught up on the local military and civilian gossip, the outside news heard from travelers and letters arriving on the steamers and overland.

He wrote about his Indian wife and family, the weaknesses and imperfections of some of his fellow officers, castigated himself for becoming unworthy to be a Son of Temperance, complained about the Army way of doing things, poked fun at the more pompous Territorial officials, and described his trips to other forts and posts and to Olympia and to Victoria to find materials for the rebuilding of the Fort.

When completed, the journal consisted of 451 pages of double spaced typescript with notes and an index.

The literature search continued as the journals, diaries, reminiscences and autobiographical accounts of other officers were searched for information about their time at the Fort.

## Salmagundi

- ☆ Congratulations to Karen and John Williamson and Doris Rehburg for the most profitable Salmon Bake ever: \$4,062.04 net. Nearly 1,000 dinners were served. Thanks to the volunteers who participated.
- ☆ Congratulations, also, to Lenore Rogers and Barbara Studebaker and their workers for a most successful garage sale on August 22. Over \$1,300 was taken in.
- ☆ Apologies to Milt and Sue Davidson. We neglected to give them credit for the use of their photos of the Steilacoom Dock in the summer issue.
- ☆ The popular "Steilacoom Dines Out" is being planned for 1999. Members who would like to serve as hosts are invited to call Marianne Bull at 584-9410 for further information.
- ☆ On sale at the Museum and Bair Store is *Nothing But Scratch*, recipes and kitchen stories spanning nearly 100 years. These were written by the Steilacoom Pioneer School Memories Group.
- ☆ From the Museum: Two significant donations have been received recently—an 1892 oil painting of Steilacoom and Ketron Island with Mount Rainier in the background by artist von Keith was given by Michael Schroeder of Cupertino, California. Jack Leech has donated several boxes of papers and records of Steilacoom, as well as historical photos and glass negatives, assumed to have been taken by his great-uncle John Bair at the turn of the century.
- ☆ Thanks to Arline Brightman for her work on the library collection.
- ☆ As work continues on the Town Hall, the contents of the storage area and the interior room at the Museum were moved to a secure storage area. Thank you to all who assisted in this tedious task.
- ☆ Finally, "Toys of Bygone Years." We hope to do a piece in the winter edition of the *Quarterly* on the simple toys common in earlier decades. Please drop us a line or give us a call about toys you remember. Write us at 1208 Eleanor Court, Steilacoom, or call us: Joan 584-8623 or Jack 588-2839.



**STEILACOOM**  
**APPLE**  
**SQUEEZE**  
10 A.M. to 4 P.M.

**OCT. 11<sup>th</sup>**



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