

Clenda Teevin Davidson
By Susanne Davidson

The program about Clenda Davidson was presented by her daughter-in-law, Susanne Davidson.

On the second Saturday of December members of the town's historical association, Steilacoom Historical Museum Association, gather for the organization's annual dinner. Now in its third decade, the association pays silent tribute to its founders, one of whom was Clenda Davidson. Clenda was an inveterate "collector", and because of that habit of saving everything—including materials that once were deemed useless, countless contemporary historians and just plain "seekers of knowledge" are able to learn a lot about this small town that was established in 1851 (incorporated in 1854).

In her day, Clenda was known to as the "Unofficial Town Historian" (that meant that she didn't get paid). She made sure that all the mail addressed to a (at that time) non-existent Chamber of Commerce, mailed from all over the U.S., was answered.

She was the Church Historian, took track of all the Deaths in town, and saw that the flag was flown at half-mast on those occasions. She also was an avid headstone reader. The Masonic and Eastern Star organizations (of which she was a past Matron) turned over their research to her.

As a member of the Picture Committee for the Steilacoom Town Hall, she worked for several years, tracking down and seeking information so that the photos that were eventually displayed would be properly labeled. She served as Den Mother, and during WW II helped roll and sew bandages.

She was a church circle member who contributed and arranged flowers from her beautiful gardens—flowers that were given away to those who asked. She even took a turn at the Lookout Tower. Clenda gave talks at schools, youth organizations and women's clubs on every subject based on the historical background of her beloved Northwest.

Clenda was a Charter member of the Steilacoom Chapter of the Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington of which she was President from 1956-57. She was the State Board Chairman of the committee on Historic Sites and Markers, State Parks and Recreation Commission for Miss Elliot, Publicity Chairman and on the Education and Legislature Committee.

In 1937 Clenda and her husband, Clyde, purchased the historic 1858 Philip Keach Home. Clenda had remembered the house as a child and always wanted to live there, and so they purchased the two-story frame house not far from the Sound. For five years they tirelessly worked on the house that people thought they were crazy to buy. They dealt with holes in the roof, blackberries through the floorboards, and until the house was livable they slept in what is now the dining room.

At the time the house was built no one in town had formal addresses. The houses, instead, were given names. She was the one who named it "Rolling Hill" since it seemed to here that the lawn rolled down to Steilacoom Bay, which is the name given to the part of the Sound in front of their home. Milt, their son, says. "Once you've mowed the lawn you can understand how it got its name."

The team of "Clyde and Clenda" was known from one end of the county to the next. They lived in the lovely old house, Rolling Hill, that overlooks Puget Sound from Steilacoom Bay to the snow-capped Olympics.

When the couple were well into their 80s, they slept on the upstairs porch in sleeping bags. (just in the summer). She was tough as a nut, as active as a flea, and impossible to keep up with or to pin down. She was an out-of-doors camper, a woodland roamer and an end-of- the-road-seeker. She was always to be counted on if she took over a project for you.

In 1970 Clyde, along with some of his friends, began discussing how the Town should have a Museum. But where to put it was the question? They spoke to Mayor George Faulkner, and he suggested

that the newly formed association could use the basement of town hall in the room next to where the Boy Scouts held their meetings. They began planning, and the organizing went forward.

In the organization's early days, Clyde often would bring things from their home into the front door of the museum. Clenda, who wasn't eager to give up those antiques, would take them out the back door, saying she wasn't yet ready to give them up.

Eventually a compromise was reached. In appreciation for their efforts, the Town treated the Davidsons to a train trip to Canada.

Clenda died May 11, 1989, shortly before her 90th birthday.

Visitors to Town, who've had an opportunity to spend time at the Museum, (now relocated to its new site on Rainier Street) will come away with a keener appreciation for the history of this community on the shores of Puget Sound: A Place of Firsts.