

The Women of Steilacoom

Steilacoom “has charm”—the words, coined by the community’s first woman realtor—echo into the 21st century, and serve as inspiration for a program “Women of Steilacoom” that focused on the contributions not only of that woman, but also of other women who made a significant difference in the life of the state’s oldest incorporated community.

As Washington State’s oldest incorporated community (1854) Steilacoom has long been celebrated as a *Place of Firsts*. While its many “Firsts” have served as the reason behind many of its community festivities, one aspect of its identity—the contributions of its women—has rarely been formally acknowledged.

The Washington Women’s Suffrage Centennial that begins in 2009, sparked plans to showcase the efforts of a group of 20th century Steilacoom women who made significant contributions to their community

For purposes of the Women’s History Month program (which included lectures and displays) “The Women of Steilacoom” focused on half a dozen key personalities including a realtor, a businesswoman, a physician, a museum founder, an educator, as well as the town’s first woman council member and its first woman mayor. The fact that the 2008 presenters were personally acquainted with each of these women added to the presentations.

As Washington State’s former First Lady Jean Gardner noted in 1997 during the launch of plans for the State’s Centennial Celebration, the accomplishments of Washington’s women have all too often been glossed over. Steilacoom’s recent commemoration of women’s achievements has helped to change that misconception.