

Harriet (Hattie) Elizabeth Godfrey Bair
Presented by Jane Bair Light

Before beginning her presentation Jane Bair Light, in the role of her grandmother Hattie E. Bair welcomed the guests to the Waverly.

Harriet Elizabeth Godfrey Bair, better known to Steilacoom residents as ‘Hattie’ or “Grandma,” was born in Hutchinson, Kansas on a farm on Sept. 29, 1860. She was next to the oldest of nine children. Her family moved to Salinas, and it was there that she met, and on June 28, 1887, married Warren LeFevre—always known as “W. L.”

W. L., a pharmacist, was one of 7 brothers. Although his practice was in Salinas, after he received a letter from his brother, Ed, he decided to relocate to the West. A cautious man, he advised his wife to “stay here. I’ll go and see if Ed is telling the truth. When I get settled, I’ll send for you.”

Hattie tried to talk him into letting her come along, but he was very determined that she stay and help her parents with her younger siblings.

“Don’t worry,” W. L. said, “it won’t be long, I promise you.”

Well, Hattie waited patiently for word from W. L. but as the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months, and still no word from W. L. she made up her mind to pack her satchel, put on her best hat and coat, and head West. When she stepped off the railroad in Steilacoom in early 1890, W. L. was standing nearby. W. L. turned to a friend and said, “If I didn’t know better, I’d think that was Hat’s hat getting off the train!” He was more than a little surprised to see his wife. “I guess this is just a good illustration of my independence,” she remarked.

W. L. and Hattie moved in with her mother-in-law, Mary Bair, in her house on Rainier Street. In 1895 the barn on Starling Street, behind the house, was converted into their first home in Steilacoom.

Their son, Godfrey LeFevre, was born August 3, 1890 in Tacoma. His sister, Eudocia, came two years later. Eudocia was known as “Dosh” or “Susan” while the only ones who called Godfrey “Godfrey” were his dad sister and Hattie—to everyone else he was “Cub.”

W. L.’s first pharmacy was in Tacoma. Soon, though, he realized that Steilacoom was **the** place to be, so in 1893 he moved his operation to Commercial Street, between Main and Balch. He built the current Bair Drug and Hardware store on Lafayette and Wilkes in 1895. He chose that location because the terminus for the Tacoma-Steilacoom Electric Railroad that came along Chamber’s Creek was at that corner. W. L. wired the store into the electricity from the railroad, and thus, the store was the first building in Steilacoom to have electric lights.

Hattie was really busy in those early years. Aside from raising those two children, she cooked at the Iron Springs Sanatorium—later a hotel, located on the corner of Starling and Pierce streets. Ed and W. L. bought it in 1903. It was famed for its iron springs: mineral baths, pure water, and on Sundays Hattie’s renowned 50 cent family-style chicken and biscuits dinner. It had 8 bathhouses, a saltwater swimming pool with water pumped up from the Sound (Godfrey’s job was to man the pump), plus billiard and card rooms. The Iron Springs Hotel was a highly desirable vacation destination for prominent Tacomans. Also, many of the residents were workers building the north/south railroad.

After the Iron Springs Hotel closed, Hattie opened a bakery in the building adjacent to the drug store. Butch Chelius’ meat market was between the two buildings. Pies and donuts were her specialty, but she also baked bread, made cakes and cookies and, of course, anything anyone wanted to order.

W. L. and Hattie were active in other organizations and endeavors, too. W. L. was a member of Steilacoom Masonic Lodge No. 2 and was Grand Master for many terms. Hattie was the first Worthy Matron for Acacia Chapter #39 Order of the Eastern Star, and held the office for a number of years. Social

activities were a large part of the Masons and Eastern Stars' activities so, of course, she often prepared fried chicken, made clam pie, sugar cookies, George Washington's cream pie, churned ice cream, and a host of other goodies. Hattie had the reputation of being an excellent cook. People say, "If you want something really good, ask Hattie to bring it."

Oberlin Church was a big part of Hattie's life. Her culinary skills found another outlet there since she cooked more food on more occasions for the church than she cared to remember. She was honored when the church women named a Circle in her honor, and (by 2008) it is still active.

After Godfrey graduated from high school, he headed to the Alaska goldfield, while Eudocia went on to Ellensburg Normal School after graduation and later returned to Steilacoom to teach.

After World War I started in 1914 it gave Steilacoom's businesses and housing a boost. Over W. L.'s objections Hattie bought and rented out "Blink Bonnie," a small, one-bedroom house on the southwest corner of Starling and Frederick streets.

After Eudocia's marriage to Lt. Wm. I. Leech in 1918, they moved in. The joy of Hattie's life—her first grandchild—Jackson Warren Leech, was born in 1919. She admits that she spoiled him rotten. Eudocia, meanwhile, had gone to work in the post office, located in the back of the Bair Store, so Hattie watched Jack. Whatever he wanted—he got and more besides. Grandparents will understand.

When Godfrey married Mary Drew in 1920, they, eventually along with their four children, moved into Blink Bonnie. Eudocia and Bill moved in with W. L. and Hattie on Starling Street.

When the North/South Railroad came through Steilacoom in 1914, the tourists stopped coming, and businesses, including Hattie's, bakery closed. With time on her hands Hattie turned her attention to Real Estate and nurturing other children.

In 1928—again over W. L.'s objections, she bought the Waverly—built in 1891 by E. R. Roger—and turned it into a boarding/rooming house. For many residents the Waverly has been their first home in Steilacoom, especially during WW II when Ft. Lewis expanded. The Waverly also was home to many servicemen. A lot of McNeil Island employees also lived there for short periods of time. Hattie took great joy in fixing chicken and biscuits, fried potatoes and onions, steaks, cookies, donuts, etc. That's why she always wore a floured apron on!

Again, over W. L.'s objections, a 12-year-old boy named Bert Steng came to live with them. His mother wasn't able to care for him. He helped out at the store until he graduated from high school and moved on. He became a second son to the Bairs.

During these Depression Years many men—called "Bums"—would drop by the Waverly and stay for a day, a week or a month. The "Bums" were men down on their luck, without jobs, bumming a ride on the railroad from town to town—just looking for a handout. They would willingly do odd jobs: chop and stack wood, sweep, clean—whatever—in exchange for food and a place to sleep. There was a wood shed and storage shed next to the Waverly, and the "bums" would stay there. Never once did the Bairs have a bad experience with any of the "Bums."

Hattie's beloved W. L. died in 1930. The family carried on—Bill and Eudocia ran the store and post office—Bert helped out and as each of the grandchildren grew, they took their turns helping. Godfrey was in Alaska mining for gold.

In the 30's Steilacoom had a Drum and Bugle Corps, sponsored by the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). Hattie was instrumental in forming the VFW Auxiliary, so, of course, she became involved with Drum and Bugle Corps. They were a talented and smart-looking group in their uniforms of Scottish kilts and spats. Hattie went along on their bus "Bonnie" to competitions in Aberdeen, Walla Walla, etc. All the members called her "Grandma." She'd help anyway she could (the parents would probably rather she'd stay home). The band won several competitions, and Hattie was very proud.

The young people in Town knew they were always welcome at the Waverly. Hattie set up a ping-pong table in the front parlor and they would come and play. Granddaughter Jane and young Kenny Light really were good. And, of course, there was always food.

In 1939 a terrible fire in Steilacoom destroyed the entire block-long building along Lafayette, between the store and the Oberlin Church. Luckily the Bair store didn't go up in flames, too. It was shortly after that that the three buildings attached to the store were dismantled.

World War II started Sunday, Dec. 7 1941. Hattie was at church and on her way home she noticed a solemn gathering in the store. They told her what had happened. Her three grandsons went off to war, and she worried a lot about them. Godfrey didn't go back to Alaska. Instead, he went to work in the shipyards as his war effort. Steilacoom's War Coordinator was Barney Drew—Mary's Brother. He appointed Hattie, at Age 81, as Chairman of the Red Cross War Fund. Five weeks after that appointment, Hattie reported that they had exceeded their goal of \$400—not bad for a town of less than 1,000.

To keep her mind off the war and give her something to do, Hattie bought the Colonial—Dr. Taylor's Mansion, across Lafayette Street from the drugstore. Its apartments were occupied with Army families that she took under her wing.

Hattie's youngest grandchild, Jane, graduated from the 8th grade during the War. Hattie hosted a party at the Waverly for the entire class—all 13 of them. They came for an evening of games and food. Unfortunately the party had just begun when the air raid siren went off, and all the youngsters scattered to their wartime stations. Jane was a bicycle messenger, stationed at the Leech's garage, with an air raid warden. Her job was to carry any messages between air raid wardens. Of course, there was a blackout, so it was pitch black. Even though it didn't last very long, it put a damper on the party.

Hattie's last days were spent at the Waverly, listening to the radio and napping. She died on January 29, 1948, at the age of 88 and was buried at the Old Masonic Cemetery in Lakewood.