THS honors
Charlotte Medlock

Charlotte Medlock is this year’s winner of the Tacoma Historical Society’s annual Murray Morgan Award. The award recognizes individuals who have significantly contributed to efforts to preserve and communicate local history.

The award was presented at the society’s annual meeting April 14.

Mrs. Medlock is a charter member of the society and has served many years on the board. She has played a major part in the society’s Tour of Historic Homes since the first one in 1993. She was editor of The City of Destiny Newsletter until 1997 and again in 2000 and 2001, and she has taken a leading role in the Tacoma Historical Writers group, which published Tacoma, Voices of the Past, volumes I and II.

Inside:

- Further adventures of the ‘gunnysack kids’ .......... 3
- A whirlwind construction job in 1917 got Camp Lewis ready in just 3 months .......... 4
- Tour of Homes did land-office business .......... 7

A young city’s growing skyline is evident in this circa 1911 photo taken from the first 11th Street Bridge, looking west up the 11th Street hill. The spire of the Puget Sound National Bank Building (originally the National Realty Building) is just left of the Perkins Building. The original 11th Street Bridge over City Waterway opened in 1894. Not long after this photo was taken, it was removed to make way for the current bridge, today an endangered structure itself (See Page 2). The old bridge was towed out into Commencement Bay and sunk, according to the late Henry Foss. The present bridge was dedicated in 1913. This photo was taken by Tacoma physician D.H. Bell and was among a collection of glass negatives donated to the Tacoma Historical Society by his son, Herbert Bell.

A view from the past
Charlotte Medlock receives the Murray Morgan Award from Dr. Ronald Magden, president, at the Tacoma Historical Society’s annual meeting April 14.

Continued on Page 2

Award
Continued from Page 1

The society began conferring its Murray Morgan Award in 1992. Previous recipients have included Caroline Denyer Gallacci and Ron Karabaich, Brian G. Kamens, Winnifred Olsen, Caroline Kellogg, Ottile Markholt, Gary Fuller Reese, Ronald Magden, Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, Robert Tschida, Murray Morgan himself, and the Tacoma-Pierce County Genealogical Society.

The award is named for the late Murray Cromwell Morgan (1916-2000), noted Tacoma author, journalist, and teacher.

The society has elected six new board members: William Johnston, James Hoard, Stacy Augustine, Gerald Eysaman, Ryan Mello and Robert Mack.

Re-elected as officers were Dr. Ronald Magden, president; Dr. Dale Wirsing, vice president; and Marie Hayden, treasurer.

Board takes stand in favor of saving 11th Street Bridge

The board of the Tacoma Historical Society went on record June 3 in opposition to the State Department of Transportation’s plans to close and remove the Murray Morgan Bridge over the Thea Foss Waterway.

The bridge linking downtown Tacoma with the Tideflats was dedicated in 1913. Its distinctive profile made it a Tacoma architectural icon and was part of The Tacoma News Tribune’s nameplate for many years. The bridge was named for celebrated Tacoma author Murray Morgan in 1997. It was previously called the 11th Street Bridge.

The Murray Morgan Bridge is on the Tacoma, state and federal historic registers.

Bob Tschida (759-2891) is circulating petitions to save the bridge.

This and that . . .

✔ We are trying to compile a complete record of Tacoma Historical Society programs since we were organized in 1990. We’re missing copies of the newsletter from 1992 to 1996. If you can help, leave a message on the society’s phone, 472-3738.

✔ Did you know… that this year is the 150th anniversary of Washington Territory?

✔ Some thank-you bouquets to people whose little-noticed efforts help keep the society going:
  • Wilma Peterson for handling our telephone message line, and Esther Keellean for recording our telephone message.
  • Babs Weston and Marlene Wirsing for copy reading City of Destiny Newsletter stories.
  • Tom Hudson for handling audio-system chores at our meetings.

✔ The Job Carr Cabin Museum, the “birthplace of Tacoma,” is looking for volunteer docents, tour leaders, etc. If you can help, phone (253) 627-5405.

✔ We need a volunteer to maintain the Tacoma Historical Society’s display at the Tacoma Public Library. Contact Polly Medlock, 752-7722.

The City of Destiny Newsletter is published by the Tacoma Historical Society. We invite original articles on Tacoma history.

Editor……. Dr. Dale R. Wirsing
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When the ‘gunnysack kids’ needed movie money, they’d even load wood trucks

By Bob Tschida

One particular job we shied away from when we were young kids was loading wood trucks. Of course, when we got to the point of desperation to see a particular movie downtown and couldn’t come up with any money, we were up against the prospect of loading wood trucks.

Back in the late ’30s most of the independent wood truck drivers would congregate at two locations downtown. Market Street between South 17th and 19th on the east side of the street was a continuous line of wood trucks. Here motorists could creep along, sizing up particular loads. Or people on foot would check out the various species of wood and prices.

Nearly all the trucks had on their tailgates a sign indicating the price, such as $2.50, $3.00, $3.50; none was higher than $4.00. There were no new or late-model trucks, just older rigs, whose owners worked on the engines while awaiting customers. After all, in 1937, 1938, 1939 we were still in the Depression.

This was their only source of income — selling loads of wood. They got the wood from the mills, which were only too glad to get rid of the nubbins and cutoffs. Tacoma had many mills big and small. The city was after all the lumber capital of the world. Even though a great amount of waste lumber went into the burners, which burned day and night, still a great deal of wood was diverted to the wood lots around the city.

Usually the mills had their own large trucks, which were backed up under the large holding bunkers where most of the smaller waste wood was stored. The trucks would be under the chute and were loaded by gravity. The big trucks would dump their loads in Market Street, and we would load up the smaller trucks. Sometimes it would take three of us just to lift the heavy butt ends, which contained a lot of pitch (no wonder we had so many chimney fires in those days).

After we had most of the wood ready to go, drivers often wanted us to top off a load. That meant one of us would have to climb up on the load while two of us had to lift up bigger pieces to the one up in the truck.

A lesson learned the hard way

Some days we would go down to see if the wood truck drivers needed us to do any loading. When there weren’t any trucks to load we would hang around listening and talking to them.

One time a driver pulled out his snuff can and offered his fellow drivers a pinch. Then he asked us: “Do you boys want a pinch? Well, it will grow hair on your chest.” So yeah! We were all for that. He showed us how to take a pinch and put it in the sides of our mouths and chew it.

Good grief! We were poisoned, gagging, coughing, with tears rolling down our cheeks. We couldn’t keep it in a wad. We spat out what we could. While some of the drivers howled with laughter, we took off. We ran down Jefferson Avenue to a gas station by the bus turnaround. We grabbed the water hoses and tried to flush that foul matter out of our mouths.

We would gladly have taken castor oil, cod liver oil, anything to get rid of the residue and horrible taste. After that disaster no one ever had to lecture us about chewing snuff, snoopse, and tobacco. Once was enough for me forever!

Bob Tschida continues his story of growing up poor and adventuresome in Depression-era Tacoma. He and his friends were called the “gunnysack kids” because that’s what they carried on their quests for small change and items to eat or sell.

The other large staging area for wood trucks was below Jefferson Avenue at the sharp tip of South 17th up to the Pacific Transport and Storage building on Jefferson and Commerce. During winter both locations had fires going in steel drums so drivers could warm themselves.

The trucks they drove were usually one ton or one and a half. The fleet was made up of Fords, Chevys, Dodges, Whites, Diamond Ts, Internationals, Fageols, Macks, and a scattering of other makes.

Compared to the heavy nubbins, we actually enjoyed loading up planer ends. These lumber leftovers were nice and clean and very light and smooth. It did take a long time to load a truck with them because the pieces were small. They were trimmings off the ends of boards to make them the correct length. To load planer ends we usually had to go to the commercial wood lots on the City Fuel Co. grounds and on the northeast corner of Jefferson Avenue and South 21st.
A whirlwind construction effort turned Camp Lewis from prairie to military post in just 3 months

David Stone earned title of father of Fort Lewis

By Lt. Col. William A. Daugherty (ret.)

When Major David Lamme Stone came to the Northwest to build Camp Lewis in 1917, he began an acquaintance with the area that was to last throughout his life.

He returned in the late 1930s to command Fort Lewis and came back at the end of his 42-year Army career. After becoming involved in the life and politics of the local community, the circle came around to full completion upon his death in 1959 when he was buried among the towering trees in the Fort Lewis cemetery — on the post that he built.

David Stone was born in Mississippi, August 1, 1876, in Stoneville, a town established by his family. Because his parents died when he was young, he was raised in nearby Greenville by an aunt and uncle. When he was 18, he entered West Point and, because of the deteriorating relations with Spain, was graduated a few months early in April, 1898, the day after the declaration of war. He was commissioned in the 22nd Infantry Regiment and fought in both Cuba and the Philippines. His four years on Luzon and Mindanao against different native groups were formative ones, for he particularly grew to admire the Moros for their integrity and fighting spirit, qualities that he found in himself. Wounds from a Moro weapon received while charging a fort of the Sultan of Cato, for which he ultimately received the Purple Heart and the Silver Star, resulted in his evacuation to the States.

After the Spanish American War, he alternated between regimental duty and construction assignments, with the latter assuming increasing importance. As a captain, in 1909, he was detailed to the Quartermaster Department and charged with the responsibility of building the “New Post” at Fort Sill. The project, which took two years to complete, established him as a man of strong will and high principle. During the preparation phase, he was told to award a contract to a specific person, instructions he ignored since the individual was not the lowest bidder.

Politics then intervened, with a complaint gravitating to the War Department. An ensuing investigation concluded that Captain Stone by failing to award the designated contract had not built the post according to specifications and owed the War Department three million dollars. None of this made any sense to Stone, since he figured he had saved money on the project, not wasted it. In a daring and rather sardonic response, he replied with an offer to buy the New Post for the same amount and lease it back to the Army, noting that local bankers would consider his proposal as an attractive investment opportunity. He heard no more of it, and years later said, “Had it been $3,000, I’d have worried.”

As World War I approached, a group of Tacoma citizens, thinking of the lightly forested plain south of American Lake, showed it to Army representatives who liked what they saw as a potential post for the West Coast. Then the group persuaded the county commissioners to call a special election on January 6, 1917, for a bond issue to buy the land. After fervent appeals to patriotism, the vote passed by 86 percent. A trip to Washington, D.C., by a few determined Tacomans speeded the process. When Secretary of War Newton Baker accepted the 70,000 acres as a gift from the people of Pierce County, it was the first donation of its kind in the history of the country.

Army surveyors soon set to work in the American

Continued on Page 5
Lake area. Amidst an air of expectancy, a brand-new major of infantry arrived, a small man, somewhat graying, outgoing in a soft-spoken, Southern way. David Stone, an authentic hero of the previous war, had recently completed a very impressive succession of large, permanent construction projects in Hawaii. Now he was to be the “Constructing Quartermaster,” coming to build a military city.

Quickly he decided the site for the project, orienting its parade ground to feature a splendid view of Mount Tacoma, as he was urged to call it. He pitched his tent near the lake, let contracts, and the dirt began to fly. Over 8,000 workers were bending to the task. Men with shovels dug ditches, averaging over a mile a day. The Northern Pacific laid new tracks to bring in materials: of lumber alone, it delivered 1,300 rail cars to on-site sawmills. There it was precut and numbered for 1,863 buildings of standard design to be assembled by less skilled workers. It was a marvel of efficiency and cooperation.

During the construction, Stone again showed his key concern for obtaining the best buy for the dollar. He refused to award a contract for watering troughs to a Georgia lumber company. Instead, he had the troughs made locally of the abundant Douglas fir. Again the War Department conducted an investigation and informed him that he had violated the specifications of the plan. And again David Stone refused to admit any wrongdoing. Eventually the matter was dropped, but Stone’s actions were later vindicated by a congressional subcommittee that investigated war expenditures. It concluded that Camp Lewis was “the only construction carried on during the war that came through with a clean record, according to evidence submitted.”

Close to where Major Stone pitched his tent was the residence of Chester Thorne, Tacoma banker, civic leader, prime mover in making the bond issue a reality. Stone’s custom was to spend the summer evenings at Thornewood, the two men discussing events of the day. On Sundays, Stone would tour the project on horseback, checking the progress of the extensive construction, with Thorne’s young daughter, Anita, a regular member of the party. Many years later, after Stone had been widowed and his children grown, the two would marry, completing his allegiance to Washington state.

In three months, the construction of Camp Lewis was over, accompanied by good feelings. So well did the work force feel about the fairness and competency of Stone’s management, that each man chipped in 25 cents to pay for what is still the emblem of the post, its blockhouse design of stone and wood for a Main Gate. There also was a ceremony of sorts staged by the representatives of these same workers. A spokesman told how well they thought the work had gone and, at some length, what a fine boss the Constructing Quartermaster was. To cap the occasion, they presented him with an impressive gold watch, a gift from all the workers. In accepting it, Stone revealed his own unassuming attitude toward them, saying, “I have found you all as you have found me, and I hope some time when the war is over that I can come back and live...”
among you.”

It was 19 years, however, before Stone returned to Fort Lewis. In some of his more notable assignments, he had served with the 3rd Division in France, had been the American member of a three person Commission that governed the demilitarized German Rhineland after the Armistice, and had been executive officer for the Assistant Secretary of War. In 1936, when recommended for a second star, he was ordered to Fort Lewis, now a permanent post and home of his wartime unit. He had expected it to be his final posting, but another construction assignment was in the offing. In 1937 General Stone was sent to command and improve the defenses of the Panama Canal Department.

After three years in Panama, General Stone retired and returned to his adopted community, becoming a part of it. During World War II, he took on Civil Defense duties, ran for the state Senate—almost beating the incumbent—and served on the county board of commissioners. In his later years, his health declined, and after a period of long hospitalization, he died on December 28, 1959. His grave at the Fort Lewis cemetery marks the final resting place of a soldier of character and distinction.

Col. Daugherty was a member of the Tacoma Historical Society board until his recent resignation for health reasons. This article and accompanying photographs appeared in the Banner, the publication of the Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum, in 1994 and are reprinted with the permission of the Fort Lewis Military Museum.

The Tacoma Historical Writers has available the very popular Tacoma: Voices of the Past Volume I (reprint) and Volume II — $20.00 each, $3.00 shipping and handling. For copies, call (253) 752-7722 or write 1812 Skyline Drive, Tacoma, WA 98406.
Wages of Wood
Continued from Page 3

Most householders would order their wood early in the spring and split and stack it to cure or dry all spring and summer and early fall. It was usually November when folks would start their furnaces, living-room heaters, and fireplaces for the winter months. But kitchen wood stoves were in use the year around.

Planer ends were good for starting a fire. So was kindling cut from older wood, which split easily. We kids were used to working with it because we were the ones who most often had to carry it in for the stoves and basement furnaces. We also helped to split and stack wood. It was just part of growing up. Slivers came with the territory.

So, what were the wages of wood? For one load we earned 50 cents for all three of us, or about 17 cents apiece.

After resting awhile we would amble down to Pay Less Drug Store on Broadway, next to the Pythian Temple. We had to keep 30 cents so all three of us could get into the movie theater for a dime apiece. That left us with 20 cents, but usually we had some pennies so for 27 cents we were able to buy nine candy bars for 3 cents apiece at Pay Less.

Then it was on to the theater. With each of us fortified with three large candy bars, we would enjoy two features and a much-needed rest.
TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Regular meetings

July 14, 2003 – Monday, 6:30 pm
Meet at Job Carr Cabin Museum for a Walking Tour of Old Town. The museum will be open for us, as will the historic Old St. Peter’s Church.

August 11, 2003 – Monday, 6:00 pm
Meet at Fort Nisqually in Point Defiance for a potluck picnic, followed by a guided tour of the newly restored Chief Factor’s House. Note: There is a charge of $3.50 per person for the tour.

Sept. 8, 2003 – Monday, 7 pm
Main Auditorium, Tacoma Public Library
Babe Lehrer: Reflections on a Remarkable Tacoma Life

Oct. 13, 2003 – Monday, 7 pm
Main Auditorium, Tacoma Public Library
Gary Emmons remembers his grandmother, Tacoma novelist Della Gould Emmons