Tacoma author was convinced she had Sacajawea story right

By Gary Emmons

With the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition fast approaching, controversies surrounding the famed Shoshone Indian woman, Sacajawea, who helped open and secure the West for the United States, are surfacing again.

Which wife of Frenchman fur trader Charbonneau died in her mid-20s at Fort Manuel, near the mouth of Big Horn in the Dakotas? Sacajawea or Otter Woman?

“My mother first entered into this fray back in the 1930s,” explained 82-year old Lakewood resident Allan “Bud” Emmons. He is the son of the late Della Gould Emmons, longtime Tacoma historian and noted author of many books and plays about the Pacific Northwest including “Nothing in Life is Free” and “Leschi of the Nisquallies.”

“I remember her talking about respected authors and researchers—Dr. Grace Raymond Hebert from the University of Wyoming and Eva Emery Dye of Oregon. Dr. Hebert unswervingly believed that Bird Woman (Sacajawea) lived to almost 100 years old and died on the Wind River.

Continued on page 2

Gallacci, Karabaich receive Murray Morgan Award

Caroline Denyer Gallacci, author of The City of Destiny and the South Sound, and Ron Karabaich, the book’s photo editor, have been awarded the Tacoma Historical Society’s Murray Morgan Award.

The annual award recognizes individuals who have significantly contributed to efforts to preserve and communicate local history. Dr. Ronald E. Magden, society president, presented the award at the society’s annual meeting April 8.

Subtitled “An Illustrated History of Tacoma and Pierce County,”

Continued on page 3

THS president Ronald Magden announces the recipients of this year’s Murray Morgan Award – Ron Karabaich, center, and Caroline Denyer Gallacci.
Reservation near Fort Washakie in central Wyoming. Ms. Dye and others left the door open for speculation. She thought the records and some vague references by Clark could lead one to conclude that Sacajawea died at the young age of 25 from a fever near the present town of Kenel, South Dakota,” he said.

Hollywood just had to add—love interest to Sacajawea tale

In any event, when Emmons’ first historical novel, “Sacajawea of the Shoshones,” appeared on the nation’s bookshelves in 1941, she sided with Dr. Hebert.

“Mother was convinced Sacajawea died in Wyoming at the ripe old age of 96,” Bud smiled. “It was Charbonneau’s other wife, Otter Woman, who died young from a fever in South Dakota. There were just too many compelling documents and firsthand accounts. One such account from an Episcopalian minister, who buried Sacajawea the day she died, April 9, 1884, cited her by name and listed her in the Wind River Reservation Church Register of Burial, No 1, line 114.”

But much like biblical Lazarus, Sacajawea’s specter continues to stir emotion and controversy. For example, there were some incorrect accounts made by Clark in his post-expedition days that have led many a historian on a wild goose chase.

Then there is another significant dimension that is often overlooked by historians: Sacajawea’s sensitivities as a loyal Shoshone. From all known accounts, Sacajawea apparently spent much of her later life in seclusion, ashamed at what she felt was betrayal of her fellow Native Americans. She saw what the opening of the West really meant: bloodshed, tears, and redistribution of land and wealth in favor of the white settlers. She blamed herself and her association with the expedition for this destruction of culture. Therefore, she kept silent about her ‘accomplishments’ with Lewis and Clark, further adding to her mystery.

“Then there was the issue about the correct spelling of her name and the issue of whether or not she really contributed significantly to the expedition,” he explained.

There was a big sigh of relief when Mrs. Emmons signed the contract with Paramount and they began filming on location in the Grand Tetons in northwestern Wyoming.

“When you stop and think about it, there is some irony in the fact the film (The Far Horizons) was made in the very state where the controversy existed over her burial. The Sacajawea issue was also well known by the film’s stars, Charlton Heston, Fred McMurray and Donna Reed (who played the role of Sacajawea).

And do you know why the film was titled The Far Horizons? Because no one could pronounce ‘Sacajawea’ on the set. Plus there was an ongoing argument over the correct spelling of the Indian

**About Della Gould Emmons**

A native of Glencoe, Minn., Mrs. Della Gould Emmons moved to Washington State in 1918 and to Tacoma in 1932. Undoubtedly best known for her novel Sacajawea of the Shoshones, which was made into the motion picture, The Far Horizons, she also authored and produced dozens of plays for schoolchildren and for radio broadcasts in the Puget Sound area.

In addition to Sacajawea, she wrote Nothing in Life is Free in 1953, which was recognized as the official book commemorating the Washington Territorial Centennial. She also authored Leschi of the Nisquallies and a public school textbook Northwest History in Action. Long an avid student of Pacific Northwest history, she served on the board of curators of the Washington State Historical Society from 1950 until 1975. She died in 1983 at the age of 92.

**Historic Homes of Tacoma Tour**

Very successful tour retaining $5000 for our future Tacoma Museum.

To all those who attended please consider joining our society to help us toward our goal.

$25 Individual  $35 Family  $75 Corporation

Continued on page 4
Eight Stately Sisters

Eight Queen Anne-style row houses stand in proud array in the 700 block of South J Street. The houses all date to 1889, the year Washington achieved statehood and a boom period in Tacoma history. Most of them were built for a recorded cost of $2,600. Together, they comprise the South J Street National Historic District. Third from the left is the Savage House, which was part of the 2002 Tour of Historic Homes. The owner is Thomas R. Stenger.

Author, photo editor of Tacoma history honored

Continued from Page One

the book was published in 2001 and was such a success that as of this writing, the society has only a few copies remaining.

Subtitled “An Illustrated History of Tacoma and Pierce County,” the book was published in 2001 and was such a success that as of this writing, the society has only a few copies remaining.

Gallacci is currently an instructor at Tacoma Community College and the University of Washington in Seattle. She has spent many years as a historic preservation consultant. Gallacci is a former president of the society and is the author of a forthcoming narrative titled Planning the City of Destiny: An Urban History of Tacoma to 1930.

Karabaich, a Tacoma native, is a professional photographer who has been in business locally for the last quarter century. He is known for his panoramic photography and historical photo collection. He is currently a member of the society’s Board of Trustees.

The society’s Murray Morgan Award honors the late Tacoma historian, teacher and author. Previous recipients have included Brian G. Kamens, Winnifred Olsen, Caroline Kellogg, Ottilie Markholt, Gary Fuller Reese, Ronald Magden, Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, Robert Tschida, and the Tacoma-Pierce County Genealogical Society.

Also at the annual meeting, Ken Brownlee and Thomas R. Hudson were elected to three-year terms on the society’s Board of Trustees.
guide: Sacajawea or Sacagawea or Sakakawea. But Mother believed that the spelling was Sacajawea based on Clark’s entries in his journal where it is spelled with a “j” and the fact that he frequently refers to Sacajawea as “Janey” in his written journals, which also supports the “j” theory,” he said.

“And as to the questions surrounding Sacajawea’s contribution to the expedition, there is just no doubt that Lewis and Clark would not have made it to the Pacific had it not been for her energy, connections with other Indian tribes and getting the party their horses for the long trek westward.”

The movie opened in Seattle at the Cinerama Theatre in 1954 with much fanfare.

“After the movie debuted across the nation, my mother was much in demand for speeches in schools and at clubs in the Tacoma and Seattle area. She really made a splash. You can still see The Far Horizons on the Movie Classics cable channel once in a while. The moviemakers tried to make too much out of the possible love affair between Sacajawea and Clark. But that’s Hollywood,” he said.

And as the 200th anniversary of this epic American trek is about to be celebrated, will the controversy about Sacajawea ever end?

“Oh, probably not!” Emmons exclaimed. Every time a historian comes up with a new find, I’m sure the spelling of her name, her age at death and burial place will make headlines somewhere. But my mother was a diligent researcher who went to the original sources and descendants more than 70 years ago.

“I’m convinced she buried Sacajawea in the right place. I’m also convinced that Sacajawea went to her grave deeply concerned for her native brothers and sisters and for what she thought may have been an unfortunate and irreversible exploitation of Native Americans as the West became part of the United States.”

Author Gary Emmons was a reporter and photographer for The News Tribune prior to his 27-year career as an Air Force officer. Col. Emmons is a graduate of the University of Puget Sound. He returned to his native Tacoma in 1994.

This and that

We’re delighted to read that the new North Slope Historic District Park at North Eighth and K streets is dedicated to the late Valerie Sivinski, who in her all too brief career was an ardent advocate for historic preservation. Valerie was 49 when she was killed in an accident in downtown Tacoma Oct. 17, 2000. She was the City of Tacoma historic preservation officer before opening her own firm. A monument in the park honors her memory, and News Tribune columnist Peter Callaghan expects that the spot will become known as “Val’s Park.”

A tip of the THS hat to the Lakewood Historical Society, which is getting up a head of steam. It was organized three years ago and has grown to nearly 90 members. Membership information is available from Margaret Gunter, 582-1950.

The Board of Trustees of Tacoma Historical Society ordinarily meets at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the society’s office, 3712 S. Cedar St. The next meeting is August 6. Members are invited to attend and to bring their ideas and comments.

HELP WANTED:

• Someone to maintain the Tacoma Historical Society’s display at the Tacoma Public Library. Contact Polly Medlock, 752-7722.

• Last year the society was the recipient of Everett Sweet’s collection of photos of Mount Rainier – more than 800 images in all. A volunteer is needed to help catalog the collection. If you can help, call Ron Magden, 759-5196.

• It’s not too early to start thinking about the 2003 Tour of Homes. We can use your help in identifying homes and planning and organizing the tour. Contact Esther Keelean, 572-7477.
The ideas of one man made a difference for thousands of Tacoma-Pierce County college students

During 1962, architect Lyle Norman Swedberg, born August 3, 1920, designed Tacoma Community College. His purpose was to keep the buildings on the campus at modest heights so that students were not overpowered by their surroundings. Swedberg believed huge buildings like Suzallo Library at the University of Washington made students feel insignificant.

He also wanted to create a campus without a single stair step. Physically disabled students would have total access to every room on the campus. Lyle Swedberg fought for his plans against criticism from the school administration and board of directors, the state superintendent’s office, and the college faculty. On October 10, 2001, Swedberg passed away without recognition from the community or the college that he had given so much.

Peace to his memory.
— Ronald Magden

SURFING FOR HISTORY

The Internet is often a great way to find about local history and events commemorating it. Here we review a few sites of interest to Tacoma history buffs.

“Bridges to Destiny” is a site developed by Dwayne E. Howe. It gives you two choices when you open it – photos of bridges from Tacoma’s past or photos of contemporary bridges. You can spend a lot of time entertaining yourself here:

www.cni-media.com/bridges-to-destiny/BT-Dhist000.html

And when you’re tired of bridges, try “Our Mountain’s Name is Tacoma.” This is another effort by Dwayne E. Howe, and we owe him a vote of thanks. It’s a compilation of vintage articles dealing with the real name of that towering volcano southeast of Commencement Bay.

www.cni-media.com/MtTacoma/index.html

Puzzled about the origin of a local name? Chances are that it’s in the Tacoma Public Library’s database:

www.tpl.lib.wa.us/v2/NWROOM WaNames.htm

For an idea of the potential of a local-history web site with lots of bells and whistles, take a look at www.historylink.org/welcome.htm

ANNUAL REPORT
Tacoma Historical Society
January 1, 2001 – December 31, 2001

Tacoma Historical Society Operating Account
Bank Balance January 1, 2001................................................................. $ 2,701.65
Income – 2001 ............................................................................................. 8,916.60
11,618.25
Expenses – 2001 ........................................................................................ 10,171.91
Bank Balance December 31, 2001........................................................... $  1,446.34

Historic Tour of Tacoma Account
Income – 2001 .......................................................................................... $15,313.00
Expenses – 2001 ...................................................................................... 7,728.98
Transfer to THS CD Museum Fund ......................................................... 7,500.00
Ending Balance December 31, 2001 ..................................................... $  1,293.93

Tacoma Historical Society Museum Fund................................................. $56,783.06
(Includes $3018.93 earned interest for 2001)
TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Regular meetings

July 8th, 2002, Monday–6:30 PM
Meet at Ninth and Broadway at 6:30 pm!
Brian Kamens, librarian and local history expert,
will repeat his popular
Walking Tour of Downtown Tacoma’s Historic Sites
The itinerary includes the Elks Temple, Old City Hall, Fireman’s Park, etc.

September 16th, 2002, Monday–7:00 PM
Auditorium of Tacoma Public Library
Robert Mack on
“The Chinese Expulsion from Tacoma”

October 14th, 2002, Monday–7:00 PM
Auditorium of Tacoma Public Library
Doug McArthur on
“Favorite Moments in Tacoma Sports”