



WHAT'S THE STORY ABOUT.....?

The History of the Chambers Creek Properties:

Almost all large-scale developments have a history, but few have the kind of colorful back-story of the Chambers Creek Properties. Long before this area was part of the Oregon Territory, then Washington Territory and finally with the State of Washington, the Chambers Creek Properties were making a significant contribution to local and national history.

Today, Pierce County's Chambers Creek Properties is comprised of over 930 acres located along the shores of southern Puget Sound, Chambers Bay and Chambers Creek. While Pierce County's permanent ownership of the Properties has been fairly recent (60+ years), the making of the Properties and its surrounding land uses began to take shape over 200 years ago and was influenced by not only the physical changes made, but by the people who lived and worked here. An abbreviated look at the key people and industries follows:

Steilacoom Indian Tribe (pre-settlement). Located along the north spit of Chambers Bay, an ancient fishing village of the Stelle'qub Tribe has been identified. The anglicized name of the tribe is Steilacoom. The Steilacoom Indian Tribe was a small group of Puget Salish speakers who lived along the east shore of Puget Sound across from Anderson, Fox, McNeil, and Ketron Islands. The Tribe has been closely linked by ethnographers to the Puyallup and Nisqually tribes.

These three tribes generally spoke the same language and had the same culture of hunting and gathering. Chambers Bay and Chambers Creek continue to be the usual and accustomed fishing grounds for the Puyallup and Nisqually Tribes. At this time, the Steilacoom People are not federally recognized as a tribe and as a result, do not have the same designated fishing rights in the Bay. However, Pierce County has historically acknowledged the Steilacoom People as a "tribe". The Steilacoom People were very active and supportive in the development of the Master Site Plan and have been continued to support Foundation efforts.

Hudson's Bay Company/Puget Sound Agricultural Company (1832 - 1846). The earliest European settlers to this region were members of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), a British trading company prevalent in North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. HBC's first establishment in the vicinity began in 1832 when the company constructed a storehouse at the mouth of Sequelitchew Creek (south of Steilacoom in DuPont). In 1833, HBC strengthened their presence by constructing more permanent structures on the hill above the storehouse. These buildings became a part of British Fort Nisqually.

To support the Fort and its residents, and to increase profits, HBC founded an operating subsidiary, the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC). HBC began to acquire surrounding property for farming, and then hired servants and local Indians to work the land. To increase output, HBC began heavily recruiting farmers from the Red River Valley in Manitoba, Canada. These farmers were known for their superior farming skills and it was hoped that they could turn the struggling PSAC program around. Unfortunately, commercial crop farming in this region proved to be indifferent and by 1844 the PSAC had virtually abandoned the entire area.

Fort Steilacoom (1849 - 1869). In 1846, America and Britain signed a treat establishing the U.S.-British boundary at the 49th parallel. Many employees of HBC and PSAC, suddenly forced to give up their holdings, felt that they had established themselves and did not want to move



from the area. Resentment between the locals, both American and British, began to grow. By 1849, an increasing number of Americans were moving into the area and settling on abandoned PSAC farms. As tension mounted, U.S. troops were dispatched to establish a post in the area. A well-established farm, previously owned by Joseph T. Heath, was selected to be converted to a military outpost for this region. For the next twenty years this "fort without walls" was known as Fort Steilacoom.

Thomas Chambers (1849 - 1876). Probably the best-known American settler of this area was Thomas Chambers. In 1849, Mr. Chambers staked a 640-acre claim at the mouth of Heath Creek, today known as Chambers Bay. There is speculation that Chambers, like many settlers to the area, inhabited an abandoned PSAC cabin. By 1850, the United States had still not compensated HBC or PSAC for their land holdings in the U.S. Since they had received no compensation yet still held the title to the land, PSAC refused to recognize claims on their land and tried to evict settlers on the grounds of trespassing. One newspaper story reported that an agent from PSAC had been repeatedly harassing Chambers and his family to get off their land. The final time the agent came to evict the Chambers family for trespassing, Mr. Chambers got out his shotgun and ran the man off. HBC and PSAC finally received payment for their lands in 1869.

With the construction of a gristmill in 1850 and a sawmill in 1852, Chambers set the precedent for industrial development along Chambers Creek. The gristmill was operational by 1852 and was being used by local citizens and the remaining PSAC officials. 1852 was also the first year of Thomas Chambers' foray into local politics when he was elected to serve as a County Commissioner for the newly formed Pierce County within the Washington Territory. Shortly after, he was elected Probate Judge. Always known as a "fair man", residents continued to call him Judge Chambers for the remainder of this life.

In 1857, Andrew Byrd constructed a second gristmill on the upper reaches of Chambers Creek just below Steilacoom Lake. To ensure adequate water flow, Mr. Byrd dammed the lake. Judge Chambers protested the water diversion. Subsequent investigation concluded that the other streams entering Chambers Creek provided adequate water flow for Chambers' existing mill. In 1860, local residents requested that Judge Chambers build a new mill. The new mill was a massive four-story structure located at the mouth of Chambers Bay close to where the dry storage marina now stands.

Chief Leschi (1850 - 1858). When the HBC and PSAC were present in the region there had been little or no conflict between Europeans and local Indians. It was a policy of the company that all traders would be safe. To ensure the traders' safety, HBC went out of their way to establish good relations with local tribes. With the signing of the 1846 Treaty, HBC moved out of the area and relations between the new settlers and the Indians began to deteriorate.

By 1850, the American government began to establish Indian reservations in the Washington Territory. As local tribes were being forced onto the reservations, outbreaks of unrest began to erupt. When the American Indian War began in 1855, Chief Leschi was viewed as one of five leading generals in this war. Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens feared Leschi's leadership abilities and issued a warrant for his arrest. Chief Leschi evaded capture, made his way to his mother's people on the Yakima Indian Reservation, and continued to lead his people in their war against the Americans.



In 1857, Chief Leschi was arrested for the ambush of five army messengers, two of whom were killed. Chief Leschi was taken to Fort Steilacoom to await trial. Leschi's lawyers argued that all acts between the years 1855 through 1857 were acts of war and therefore could not be considered murder. The United States government claimed that there was no war, as defined by the law of the Territory at that time, making Chief Leschi guilty of murder. An attempt to appeal the decision was made by local citizens who claimed that they had proof that Chief Leschi did not commit the murders. Unfortunately, the Governor conceded to pressure from more influential constituents and ordered Leschi's execution to take place.

In an attempt to stay the execution, local officials had the County Sheriff arrested on a charge of selling liquor to local Indians. The charges were unfounded, and on February 19, 1858, Chief Leschi was executed by hanging at a spot near the upper reaches of Chambers Creek. The execution was not carried out on the federal grounds of Fort Steilacoom which would have been the traditional location. There is some speculation in newspaper reports which indicate that the place was moved because many of the troops stationed at Fort Steilacoom were married to local Indian women.

Railroads (1889 -today). By the time of statehood in 1889, local residents were anxious for an overland route to Tacoma. A direct road route was not constructed, however, in 1892 the Tacoma- Steilacoom Railroad was completed connecting the two towns. The railroad consisted of two tracks each running down opposite sides of Chambers Creek Canyon terminating on the north and south spits of the Bay. The line proposed to run down the north side of the canyon was never constructed. It is believed that the rail bed was graded without tracks and then proposed as a way for the landowner (Thomas Chambers) to acquire more land on the north side on the canyon. Chambers Creek Road West, as it descends into the canyon to the Bay follows the old railroad grade.

In 1914, the Northern Pacific Railroad began construction of the shoreline tracks along of Puget Sound. These rail lines are still in use today. The old station in the Town of Steilacoom is located next to the Anderson/Ketron/McNeil Island Ferry Terminal. In 1916, no longer able to compete with the Northern Pacific Railroad line, the Tacoma-Steilacoom Railroad was dismantled.

Commerce and Industry (1900 - 2000). In the early 1900's the Chambers Creek area was proposed to be developed into a major industrial center. In 1910, Henry Hewitt, president of the Pacific Match Company, announced plans to construct a manufacturing plant 500 feet from the mouth of Chambers Bay. Grading of the site had begun and the foundations for a dam were being installed at the time of the announcement. Plans included a blacksmith shop, kilns, storage facilities, and docks to accommodate the large ships expected. Sites were also selected for the development of a paper mill and sawmill near the match factory.

The Tacoma Daily Ledger stated that "when the plant gets under operation, the company plans on building a number of houses for its operatives and establishing an industrial center of no mean proportion". The match factory was never built. However, in 1919 construction began on the West Tacoma Paper Mill at the site of the proposed match company. Construction techniques of the era called for hydraulic pumps to sluice away the hillside to create additional room for the paper mill, a very destructive practice not allowed today. This mill manufactured book paper made from purchased pulp. Boise Cascade Corporation bought the West Tacoma Mill in 1969 and continued the mill's enlargement, including the recycled ink paper mill. Beginning in October 1994, the mill was rapidly exchanged three times. The final mill



operators/owners were Abitibi Consolidated, Inc. This historic West Tacoma Mill ceased operations and began to be dismantled for redevelopment in the early 2000s.

In 1928, the Tacoma Alder Lumber Company was constructed on the south spit of Chambers Bay. At the beginning of the Great Depression the following year, the mill was leased to Phillip Gilbert who ran the company until 1936. In 1936, the mill lease was taken over by two men, Westbrook and Revelle, who renamed it the Chambers Creek Lumber Company. This mill operated until it burned to the ground in 1954. The mill was rebuilt as the Tacoma Narrows Lumber Company and was in operation until it was dismantled in 1978. Today, the Chambers Bay Marina is located on the old mill site. The remaining portions of the property have been acquired through donation and purchase by the Pierce County Wastewater Utility.

Gravel Mines (1889 - 2002). Located north of Chambers Bay was the largest open pit gravel mine ever operated within the State of Washington. In continuous operation for over a century, the gravel mine holds some of the oldest mining permits in the state. Large scale mining on the site first began in the early 1890's when the federal government selected Pacific Bridge Company to construct Fort Warden, Fort Flagler and Fort Casey; strategic military locations on Puget Sound. One of the company's employees, David Williams, is noted to have discovered the Steilacoom deposit, though HBC records indicate that they were aware of the large gravel source near their trading post. After the completion of the forts in 1905, Pacific Bridge Company sold its interest to Martin Sand & Gravel.

Two other small mines in the northern portion of the site, opened between 1905 and 1907 under the ownership of Seattle Sand & Gravel Company and Independent Asphalt Paving Company. In 1910 the three mines combined into Pioneer Sand & Gravel Company. David Williams became the Vice President and General Manager of this new company. In the same year another company, Glacier Sand & Gravel began operation of a new mine on the south end of the site. In 1986, both mines were purchased by LoneStar Northwest. According to *Rock Products* magazine in 1992, LoneStar Northwest's Steilacoom Pit was the country's largest sand and gravel operation, producing more than 3.5 million tons of material. At the end of 1992, LoneStar Northwest sold the property to the Pierce County Wastewater Utility and began to shift its operation to its new gravel mine located 7 miles south in the City of DuPont.

Maintenance Facility (1950 - today). Located just east of the former LoneStar Grave Mine entrance at the intersection of 64th St. and Grandview Drive was Pierce County's Chambers Creek Road Maintenance Facility. Initially purchased in the 1950's as a County gravel mine and road shop, the shop became a maintenance facility for the Wastewater Utility as well. The Utility eventually purchased this site from the County's Road Fund. A small portion on the east end of the site was leased for three decades and eventually sold to the University Place School District for use as a bus barn facility. This area was the first large project developed under the Master Site Plan, with the Wastewater Utility's construction of the County's Environmental Services Building and Playfields and the Foundation's Chambers Creek Labyrinth.

Chambers Creek Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) (1982 - today). Pierce County's Chambers Creek Regional WWTP is located on the shores of Chambers Creek and Puget Sound, just north of the Town of Steilacoom in the City of University Place. In operation since 1984, the original 44-acre site was incrementally developed to a capacity of approximately 24 million gallons per day (mgd). Recently completed construction activities have increased the available operating treatment capacity to upwards of 48 mgd. The Wastewater Utility presently serves customers within unincorporated Pierce County (Inc., South Hill, Frederickson, Graham,



etc) and the cities of Tacoma, DuPont, Lakewood and University Place and the Town of Steilacoom from this WWTP. The Chambers Creek Regional WWTP has received numerous awards for exemplary treatment practices and is considered one of the best treatment plants in the nation by the EPA.

The County's adopted Unified Sewer Plan recognizes that expansion of the plant is expected to continue indefinitely at this location to handle ongoing growth and development, and to meet existing and anticipated water quality standards. To accommodate the ongoing expansion demand, Pierce County began actively pursuing the acquisition of additional land from LoneStar Northwest. In 1992, the Pierce County Wastewater Utility purchased all 610 acres of Lonestar's property with a 10-year lease back provision allowing LoneStar to continue to mine while closing the site. The gravel mining areas were contiguous to the north, south and west of the original WWTP and allow for the continued expansion and operation of the WWTP.

In accordance with the Master Site Plan, the WWTP expansion is anticipated to eventually directly occupy approximately 200 areas of the 930 Chambers Creek Properties. However, very notable provisions of the Master Site Plan, the environmental documents, the state-approved mine reclamation plans (DNR), and the state-approved WWTP operating permits require that all of the Properties are required to be developed in accordance with the Plan, and are necessary to buffer and further support the continued operation of the WWTP (e.g., advance treatment and reclaimed water, etc). These were all very conscious decisions made by Pierce County to ensure the long-term security and operational viability of its billion-dollar assets and the Utility's customers. This is also the public purpose established as required in 1992 to support the 610 acres purchase.

Chambers Creek Canyon (1986 - today). In 1986, Pierce County Parks and Recreation Services began acquiring portions of the canyon in order to preserve the area from future development and to create a greenbelt within the urban area. The single largest acquisition was completed in 1996. Coupled with some mining land acquired by the Wastewater Utility, the County's current acreage is just over 200 acres. Most of the property acquisitions were funded through state and federal grants, numerous private land donations and local conservation futures allocations, ensuring that the canyon would be developed as a passive recreation park as noted in the Master Site Plan. The City of University Place and City of Lakewood have properties which adjoin the County ownership, and are working together with the Foundation to fully develop the Canyon Trail system as called for in the Plan.