

WAGON WHEEL

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Duvall Historical Society PO Box 385, Duvall, WA 98019 www.duvallhistoricalsociety.org

Tribute to Tove Burhen

By Mary Lampson

On May 21st, Duvall lost an amazing woman and I lost a long-time friend when Tove Burhen passed away at the age of 93.

I first met Tove in 1986 shortly after she married Ray Burhen and moved to Duvall. Ray was just beginning his fight to preserve the 1888 Dougherty House as a historic landmark and museum when Tove arrived. Her interest in history and genealogy led her naturally to join Ray as a leader in the Historical Society. When Ray's museum efforts were eventually successful, Tove plunged right in. She and a small group of women took on the job of cleaning, repairing, furnishing and decorating the interior.

Tove, at some time, filled all or almost all of the positions of leadership in the Duvall Historical Society, including several terms as President and a period of time as *Wagon Wheel* editor. We can thank Tove and Ray for the publication of all of our books, as well as starting the museum. Tove worked quietly, but persistently. When she saw a need, she found a way to fill it. When she was in her 80s, the Heritage Festival was short of volunteers, so Tove called on four of her children to come from as far away as Centralia to help us out. Of course, she and Ray were there as well.

She put her background as an English and drama teacher to work, writing skits about Duvall's early characters and history, then found appropriate venues for their performances. Sometimes, she even made the costumes. When she was in her mid-80s, she decided she wanted to direct one more play at the Senior Center. She had a cast of about 25, many of whom (including myself) had never been on stage before. It was an immense undertaking and she pulled it off brilliantly despite a prop collapsing and finding a substitution for a main actor who had a heart attack the night before the performance.

Tove and Ray loved to take road trips to visit other local history museums around the country, always looking for ideas that could be used in Duvall.



Tove Burhen with *finished* copy of *The Wagon Wheel*, 2009

She was an avid reader, especially of historical fiction, and an expert seamstress, sewing many of her own clothes, and took up quilting in her later years.

She and Ray were active in the government of Duvall as well, whether participating in the planning commission, attending council meetings, keeping an eye on our elected officials, and supporting their efforts to improve the town.

Tove gave generously of her time and talents. It's impossible to list her contributions to the betterment of our community—the Sno-Valley Senior Center, the Civic Club, Valley scholarship fund, and much more. Tove and Ray were both honored as first recipients of the "Duvall Citizens of the Year" award.

A kind, gentle, hard-working person, Tove loved people and they loved her. Whenever I wanted to persuade someone to do something, but wasn't sure I would be successful, I called on Tove. Nobody could turn her down. She will be sadly missed, but we are all so much better off because she has been here.

Remembering the Great Piano Drop of 1968

By Lisa Allen

From his vantage point in the chartered helicopter on the way to his small farm off Cherry Valley Road on that sunny late April day in 1968, Larry Van Over was astonished as he looked down at the unusual number of cars on the roads, most of which seemed to be heading in the same direction. “Gee, there are a lot of people out today,” he reportedly commented.

Continuing on, he soon realized a lot more people than he had anticipated had paid attention to the announcement on KRAB-FM that a piano was to be dropped from a helicopter onto his property east of Duvall. Plus, the mention that a rock band – Country Joe and the Fish – would be playing drew even more of the curious to the event.

Van Over, a KRAB producer and musician, with some assistance from others at KRAB (it was, after all, supposed to be a fundraiser for the station), planned out – sort of – the logistics of the thing. The pilot was to pick up the piano that had been placed close by, lift it, and then drop it on a woodpile. The hope was that it would make some sort of interesting sound as it hit the ground. Van Over had previously heard – on the same radio station – the sound of a piano being destroyed by sledge hammers. Disappointed at the result, he began to wonder what would happen if the instrument was dropped from a significant height. So he went looking for a piano.



The original piano harp gets loaded onto a truck headed for Duvall.

So he went looking for a piano, found one at a local charity for \$25, dropped it off at his farm and then chartered a helicopter from Boeing Field, thereby cementing the destruction of someone’s old living room upright into local lore for generations.

Among those on the road that day, journeying to the event, were then-ninth grader Andy Weiss, who had heard about it on the radio and hitched a ride along Woodinville-Duvall Road to get there, and Eunice Kosters along with her husband Ken, who had just returned from active duty in South Korea.

“I was a weekend hippie,” said Weiss, who recalled his memories of the exciting but brief event during a taped discussion of the “Great Piano Drop” on March 17 at Jack Straw Cultural Center in the University District. The discussion, which took place just shy of the 51st anniversary (April 28), was aimed at further documenting the event with the help of some first-person stories. Other than Seattle historian Paul Dorpat, then-editor of the *Helix* (the hippie newspaper), Andy and Eunice were the only ones who actually attended the memorable “Drop” who could be rounded up for the occasion. Van Over passed away a couple of years ago.

“I wanted to hear Country Joe and the Fish,” Weiss explained. “It cost a dollar to get in and for an extra dollar you could get a hit of LSD (not an actual part of the event but separate, Dorpat insisted). It was great music and great weather.”



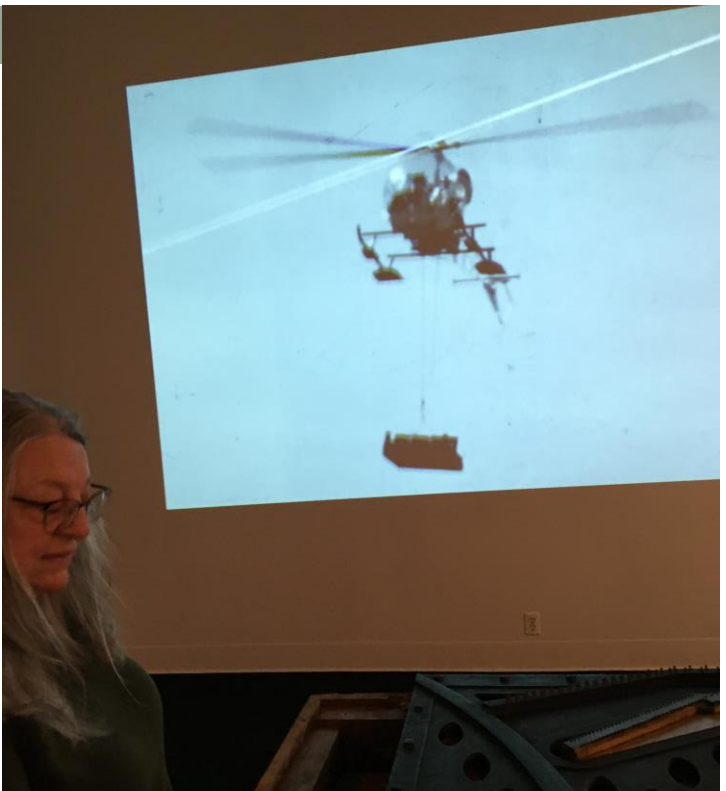
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Eunice remembered that she thought it would be fun to go up and take a look. "I had never seen so many people in Duvall. We didn't pay to get in and didn't see anyone else pay either. But later a lot of them decided to move out here and became important parts of the community."

The attendance was eventually estimated to be about 3,000 people. The population of Duvall at that time was 400 or so.

As the drop was being planned, one thing the organizers didn't expect was the number of people who showed up (they were thinking maybe 300). Dorpat, who was picked to be master of ceremonies, said he asked the band to come and play there. "The band played once before the drop and a couple of times afterward," he said. "I was asked to emcee because I was editor of the *Helix* and had some authority. I was also gregarious and loved the attention."

Dorpat was also charged with keeping visitors away from the woodpile where the piano was supposed to land. "I was worried about injury," he said. "My role was to say on the mike: 'Please stay back from the woodpile!'"



At Jack Straw Cultural Center in Seattle, Elizabeth Hill surveys the piano's harp while original home movie coverage of the 1968 Great Piano Drop plays in the background. (Photo by Lisa Allen)

Sure enough, he had plenty to worry about, since overhead things weren't going so great. The copter pilot was struggling to keep control of the aircraft as the dangling piano, about 100-150 above the ground, began to sway. The pilot was also concerned about the massive crowd below. But Larry insisted they would all get out of the way. "Trust me man, it will be like the Red Sea all over again," he shouted over the engine noise. The pilot then hit the harness release button but nothing happened. He then hit the emergency cable release and the piano fell free.

"As the piano began to fall, there was a slight separation in the crowd, not too much," Dorpat remembered. "I wondered 'What's to be done – sacrificing a life or two? – but that didn't happen.'" Smiling softly, he recalled the moment. "I felt I was overseeing a sea of potential victims. Then there was suddenly the sound of shattered wood – I was completely ecstatic (that no one was hurt).

"It hit a muddy area between the woodpile and where the people were standing. The crowd surged forward and picked up the pieces. The



sound was just a big plop (later he referred to it as the Great Piano Flop).

“The crowd grabbed all the pieces, except the harp, which was too heavy,” Dorpat continued. “The harp was later seen being lifted into a VW bus by two hippies. I wrote an article in *Helix* about it and used the analogy of the Maenads dismantling the god of music – Orpheus.”

As odd as it might seem, the event turned out to be somewhat of a cultural phenomenon. It was a prelude to the 1968 Sky River Rock and Lighter than Air festival, which was the first outdoor rock-jazz festival staged in the country (on a strawberry farm south of Sultan) and not on a rented stage. Two more took place later in the same area.

The location of the piano’s harp was unknown until 2010, when Paul got a call from a widow of a man who had kept it in storage, and offered it to him. Paul retrieved it and eventually put it on display at the Jack Straw Cultural Center, where people could also watch home movies of the “Drop” and read about the history of it as well.

The harp’s long and storied journey is not yet over, however. Shortly after the March 17 discussion ended, Paul agreed to donate it to the Duvall Foundation for the Arts (DFA) at the request of board member Elizabeth Hill. It was moved the following Thursday and is now in storage in Duvall. Plans are to permanently display it at the new Duvall Cultural and Performing Arts Center (formerly the yellow barn) to be built on the south edge of town. According to Hill, fundraising for the new center continues. This summer, construction will continue for the outdoor area, which is expected to be ready for use in the summer of 2020. In January of 2020, the property for the center will be transferred to the DFA. Fundraising for the building is expected to take three to four years. Once funds are raised it will take 18-24 months to construct. The new center is expected to open five to six years from now.

Duvall has continued to keep the memory of the original event alive by staging a couple of full-size re-enactments (minus the helicopter), plus one on a much smaller scale. The idea of actually repeating it was sparked a few years ago when Andy Weiss discussed his experience at a Rotary meeting. Some members thought it would be fun to do it again, so in 2011, as a Rotary fundraiser, a piano

(which was decorated by citizens) was dropped from a construction crane in the Safeway parking lot, attracting some 2,000 onlookers. The next “drop” was part of a summer event at McCormick Park in August of 2013. Then in 2017, a miniature piano was dropped from a drone during one of the SummerStage concerts at McCormick Park. A group of young children playing in the vicinity retrieved the 3-foot high replica from the grass and brought it back to the drone operator, no doubt puzzled as to why on earth someone would want to drop a toy piano from a drone.



Andy Weiss, Eunice Koters, KRAB archivist/historian Chuck Reinsch and Paul Dorpat discuss the 1968 event at Jack Straw Cultural Center March 17. (Photo by Lisa Allen)

Upcoming Events

Cherry Valley Elementary Reunion will take place at Taylor's Landing on Saturday, July 13th at noon.

The Tolt Museum will host an open house on Saturday, July 20th.

A jug band will perform at the Dougherty Farmstead on Sunday, July 28th 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM.

The Conestoga Wagon Pioneers Program will take place at the Duvall Library on Tuesday, September 17th starting at 7:00 PM.

The Twilight Novelty Cemetery Tour will take place at the Novelty Cemetery at Saturday, September 28th starting at 6:00 PM.

The Korean War Vets Readers' Theater will perform on Tuesday, November 5th at the Visitors Centers starting at 7:30 PM.