ECHOES IN TIME

CLERKS OF KITSAP COUNTY

1880 Port Madison Court House

Seated at his desk in the courthouse in Port Orchard, Washington, Kitsap County Clerk Dave Peterson viewed pictures of his last two predecessors that hung on the office wall. A recurring question came to mind every time he saw those pictures: "*What happened to the Clerks who served before 1969? Surely every clerk has a story to tell.*" As a former history teacher for Central Kitsap High, this lingering question bothered him and eventually he was led to create a historical record of those former clerks. To his dismay, he found that only judges and county commissioners had any kind of historical documentation from the last 150 years.

Peterson, a typical administrator, had an office wired for sound complete with a desktop with two monitors, a touch screen notebook, a tablet and of course, a smartphone. "*Surely in the 21st century, with the power of the internet so close at hand, we could delve deeper into the past,*" he thought. So, he asked Alison Sonntag, his Chief Deputy and fellow nostalgia-buff, to search the Washington State archives and local microfilm sources to chronicle the missing clerks. Sonntag researched the old film and was ultimately successful in finding all the clerks dating back to 1889. Behind those names were many seemingly-forgotten lifetimes of noble public servants. Ironically, with all the fancy electronic devices within Peterson's reach, it was his 1937 Zenith "Tombstone" radio that best emulated those former clerk stories, their echoes in time waiting to be heard.

Port Madison to Sidney

Logging was the way of life in the 19th century with Kitsap County forged into five saw-mill towns: Port Gamble, Blakely, Sidney, Seabeck and Port Madison where the county seat was located on Bainbridge Island. Times were rugged and lifespans didn't generally reach the ages we enjoy today. Yet, the first Kitsap territorial clerk, Luke McRedmond, reached the ripe old age of 80! McRedmond began the first term in 1858, the same year the Iron Horse began operation with the Northwest Railroad.

McRedmond, who was born in Ireland, followed the droves of immigrants sailing into the west coast in search of wealth and happiness. He first took root in San Francisco during the Gold Rush era and then sailed north towards Seattle in 1852. Versatility was McRedmond's main ingredient for success as he was a Sea Captain, a carpenter and, like most citizens of Kitsap, worked the lumber mills before eventually became a politician. Along with serving as the County Clerk he also held office as the Auditor, Assessor and as County Commissioner for four years.
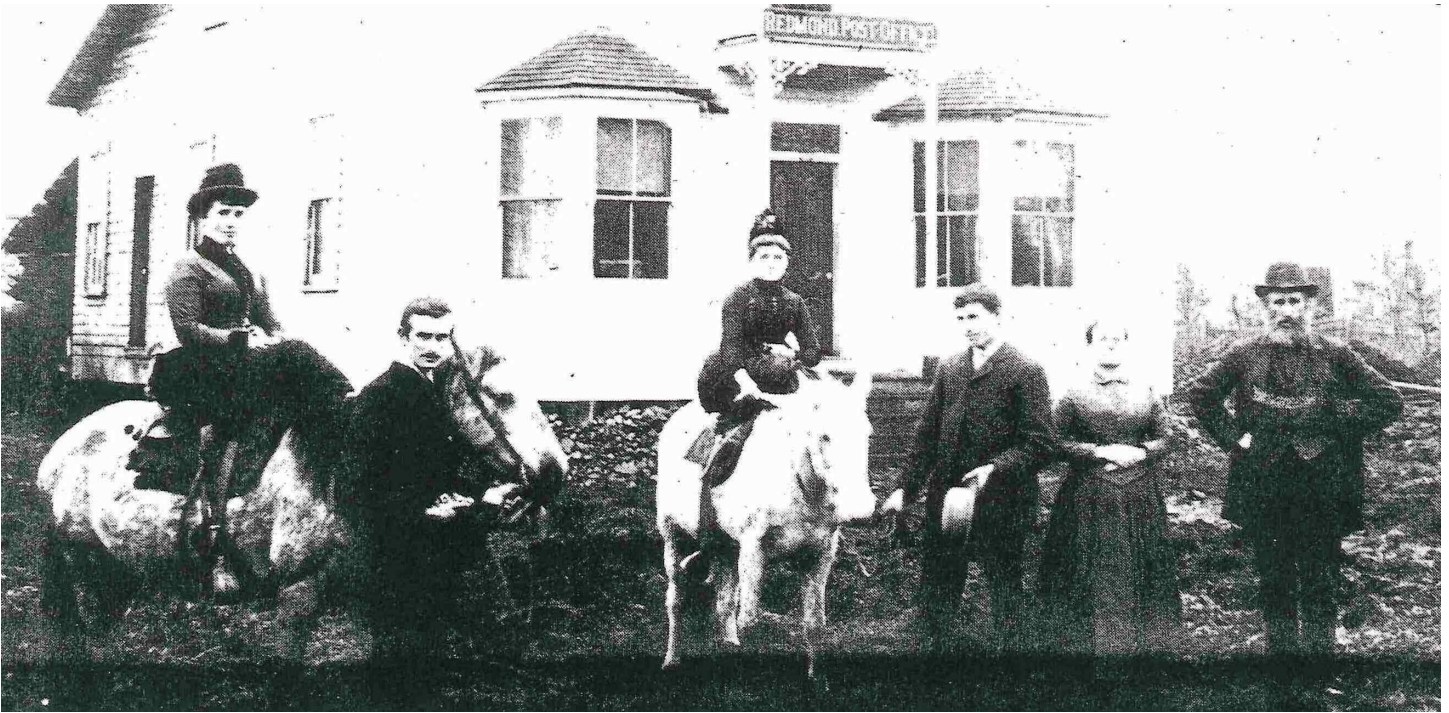
After turning 50, McRedmond uprooted and relocated to Seattle where he ran for King County Sheriff and was one of the initial discoverers of the Black Coal mines. He was also the first postmaster of Redmond, the city that still bears his name. Pushing paper as a Kitsap County Clerk may appear to be a boring position to most, but McRedmond and the next clerk, John Webster had character that stood out well beyond the average citizen of those times.

A year before Abe Lincoln became the President, Webster was appointed as the second territorial clerk. He was born in New York City and worked as a master blacksmith at the lumber mills in Port Madison. He was a prime example of how hard work eventually reaped huge benefits. Additionally, Webster was appointed to the Washington State Legislature and was the Auditor of the Kitsap County. Moving to Seattle was commonplace for men of ambition, so Webster left Bainbridge in 1861 and thereafter became one of the first appointed regents of the University of Washington.

After Washington joined the statehood in 1889, Joseph Comstock, the enumerator (keeper of vital statistics), couldn't help but notice that his son was a chip off the old block. Comstock suggested to his 25-year old son, Fred, that he should seek election as the state's first Kitsap County Clerk. The elder Comstock saw youth as an advantage for a position needing vigor and administrative structure for a newly formed office keeping records for the court. Fred Comstock turned out to be a natural leader and he was elected to

the clerk position. His Dad's instincts on his son's political potential were astute as he later was elected to two terms to the State House of Representatives in Olympia.

Newer technology had reached the west coast by 1890 with telegraph lines systematically being torn down and replaced with telephone service. Electricity had not yet reached Washington, but was edging closer with a 13-mile line in nearby Portland. During this exciting time of change, Thomas Ross was elected as the second Kitsap County Clerk. Ross was an overwhelming choice as he'd already served as the Clerk of the District Court during the territorial days before the statehood.

Shortly after being elected, Ross gathered up all the county records and boarded the steamer Ellis to move the Clerk's Office to the new county seat of Sidney (now Port Orchard) from Port Madison on Bainbridge Island. Ross was a highly motivated, self-made man who overcame a myriad of difficult obstacles with society, technology and economic changes at the turn of the new century. A few years later he was elected as the Kitsap County Treasurer and at the probable objection of his wife, Celia, had a safe installed at his home on Kitsap Street as the county did not have proper facilities to house a safe for its monies. Amusingly Ross must really have enjoyed his safe as he became the second president of the Kitsap Bank.

Life was exciting with added hope and promise while nearing the 20th century. Automobiles were being manufactured by Oldsmobile, but by county ordnance those automobiles had to be driven at a walking pace across the newly constructed bridge that spanned the gully on Division Street leading to the new county courthouse. Sidney pioneers, Selton Wetzel and Tharal Lund had a hand in the construction of the then state-of-the-art courthouse. Little did they both know that one day their sons would serve as elected Kitsap County Clerks in the very building they had helped build.

Defying the Odds

It was a bone-chilling cruise for John Anderson as he crossed the Pacific with other Finnish immigrants on a mail steamship, the main mode for Ocean transportation in the 19th century.   In 1880, he, like 27 million others in a fifty-year era, came to the U.S. looking for a better life and eventually took up residence on Bainbridge Island. Leaving an established government to become a pioneer was a challenge for Anderson, who ended up working in one of the many timber mills that had sprung up to make ends meet.

Wanting to further his horizons from logging at 30 years of age, Anderson sought to become County Clerk and was elected in 1893. He must have had waves of memories of yesteryear quite often while sailing to Port Orchard on

the steamboat *Reliance* from Bainbridge Island. Traveling via the Mosquito Fleet was a practical way of commuting in that era as many roads were loose dirt and still being constructed. Anderson did double duty as postmaster of Brownsville and made daily trips through the woods with mail brought in from Seattle by the Steamer Delta. Holding multiple offices was common in their scarcely populated region. Anderson spent nearly his entire life in politics and was elected to the State House of Representatives an incredible nine times. Unlike Anderson who traveled by sea, American born James Clark began his journey in more perilous conditions while on foot.

Rev Clark with his wife Susannah and Grandson

Picture courtesy of the Eagle Harbor Church

It was a humid June day in Tennessee as 22-year-old Clark stood his ground in the battle of Hoover Gap while serving as a Private in H Company, 78th Division. By 1863 the Union was using the newly acquired seven-shot repeating rifles which gave them an advantage, but surely fear was the worst of all enemies to such a young man. Simply surviving was his goal during

their campaign against the Confederate Army, and fortune did smile upon Clark as they won the three-day battle. A month later he was discharged for disability, perhaps from wounds inflicted at Hoover Gap. Clark was fortunate as battlefield medicine could not be performed in sterile conditions and bacterial infections made it less likely to survive. Additionally his early exit from the Civil War kept him safe from the rampant airborne diseases such as smallpox, measles and tuberculosis.

Seeing his life flash before his eyes surely gave Clark added purpose as fate gave him an additional 44 years. He eventually travelled cross country from Mercer County Pennsylvania to Bainbridge Island…not a common thing to do in the late 1800's, but Clark was not a commoner by any stretch of the imagination. After crossing the plains he eventually became the Pastor of the Eagle Harbor Church in 1891. Four years later he was elected as County Clerk and re-elected two years later. In his later years he held a departmental position at Washington City. Truly a life of giving as he served the county, his country and his congregation

A view from the Sound

The first families that lived in Sidney were considered pioneers and were held in high esteem by the newer settlers to the area. Those founding families toiled day and night building homes and businesses along the rugged Puget Sound waterfront with the limited resources brought with them from abroad. Electricity was still a decade away when Thomas Wilson was elected clerk at the turn of the century.   Refining quality of life was priority and before taking office, Wilson served the community by performing much of the contract work in grading the streets of Sidney. This was especially a necessity for Bay Street as it was inundated by saltwater every time the tide came in. Wilson went on to manage the Cispus Logging Company and was a well-known lumberman for the next three decades.

Not everyone remained in Sidney after serving as the County Clerk. Edward Jones was elected clerk in 1903, but left office for a coveted position after one term to become the Deputy State Auditor in Olympia. He remained auditor for the next 18 years and passed on while in office. Sawmills weren't the only game in town, either, as the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard employed two former County Clerks, Charles Berry and William Newman who provided their families decent incomes during the first decade of the 1900's.

Imagine if you will, Berry or Newman standing at the crest of the hill at Division and Austin above the Puget Sound looking down at the shipyard. Could they have ever imagined that one hundred years later they would still be thought of, or that his courthouse would be leveled? Or that one day an administrative building would hinder that breathtaking view that they enjoyed that day?

Newman knew how to get his hands dirty, but was also was the secretary of the Port Orchard Athletic Club. As County Clerk he was responsible for keeping the records of the court, handling the jury process, and assisting the Kitsap County Superior Court Judges. It was not a responsibility generally handed out to the commoner in an era where William Taft drove his 1911 Stafford convertible down Pennsylvania Avenue.

1910 – Future Clerk, Reina Osburn and Clerk William Newman far right

As with many in the 1910's era, Newman, even though he was a fit man, he passed away at a somewhat early age a decade later while in his 40's. His lifespan mirrored Andrew Anderson, who served as clerk in 1915, and like his uncle, former clerk John Anderson, grew up on Bainbridge Island. Anderson was an avid HAM radio operator and spent many a night listening to those in other countries around the world. He took advantage of the best technology life could afford someone in those simpler times. Anderson died at age 45 in a Ballard Sanitarium from tuberculosis (TB), nearly ten years after the vaccine was first introduced. The airborne disease had a high mortality rate in the late 1920's, yet even today there are around 500 deaths in the U.S. each year. Anderson's probate record now rests in a dusty microfiche drawer in his own office. It seems unfair for someone's life to fade away on archival film, but like his beloved radio waves, his memories drift on.

A Street with Your Name

On a cold January night in 1950, Guy Wetzel, 66, stood before the Kiwanis Club at Mhyre's Café on Bay Street. The building, which today still stands, fully renovated from a fire, was alive that night with Wetzel reading from his own manuscript, a detailed history of Port Orchard to those lucky attendees. He spoke of 1912 when electricity and water were available for the first time and how Harrison Street was named after Benjamin Harrison who was the President when the city was incorporated. A kindly man who fascinated everyone he knew and took the finances of Port Orchard seriously. Wetzel never retired and devoted his entire life to public service.

Wetzel was the City Clerk for 16 years as well as serving a term as the County Clerk in his younger years. Three decades earlier, Wetzel married Florence Olsen, the County Treasurer and the first female elected official in Kitsap County. He and his daughter, Jimmie, shared precious times roaming the streets of Port Orchard nearly every night in his later years. This humble man could never have foretold that fifty years after his passing that one of those sleepy waterfront streets would actually bear his name.

He was not the only clerk to be so honored. Anderson Road SE is named after John Anderson and Ross Street pays tribute to Thomas Ross, Jr., the only clerk to serve for both the territory and the state. Additionally, Lund Avenue in Port Orchard is named after Arthur Lund, Wetzel's Deputy Clerk. Lund's family emigrated from Norway cruising into the New York harbor during the 1876 Centennial celebration. Eventually they became some of the original settlers of Sidney. Lund spent 40 years serving the community as the County Clerk and County Treasurer beginning in the 1920's.

Crossing Paths

The Roaring Twenties brought us the Jazz era which engulfed our nation as World War I faded into the past. Prohibition was in full swing. Summertime found families enjoying a typical Pacific Northwest pastime, gathering in the park under gazebos in case of probable rain. As luck would have it, the rain cleared on a sunny Monday morning in June of 1928 as all the officers of the court gathered in front of the Kitsap County courthouse for a historic picture.

Arthur Lund was all smiles while standing a couple of feet away from Reina Osburn, who was serving as Chief Deputy Clerk. Little did she know then that three years after this snapshot in time, she would become the next County Clerk. These two stalwarts provided stability during the Great Depression when strong leadership was especially needed.

Officers of Kitsap County in 1928

Lund was first elected as County Clerk while there was a law in place stating that no one could hold the same county office for more than two consecutive terms. He found a way around the process by running for County Treasurer and was elected while Osburn served as County Clerk. Eight years later they switched offices and continued to crisscross paths until the mid-fifties when they both retired. Both were well respected by their peers and the public. Neither Lund nor Osburn, both Republicans, lost an election in those four decades, even during the FDR Democratic years.

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ARTHUR LUND
Port Orchard

Republican
Candidate For

County Clerk
KITSAP COUNTY

Primaries, September 12, 1922
General, November 11, 1922

Osburn's final eleven years as the clerk were after the two-term law was repealed. During World War II she worked side by side with all the clerks during a very high employee turnover rate. Osburn was the epitome of a public servant, with the emphasis on servant. She is quoted as saying: "If anyone asks for service, give them every bit of service you can, don't hold back!" She continued to work at the front counter until her last day in office. Lund and Osburn were friends to the end and both passed on at the age of 77 in the mid 1960's.

Horse and Buggy, Trains and Suburbans

Margaret Smith was happy playing with children her age at her neighbor's farm house ten miles outside of Ranton, New Mexico. But it certainly wasn't all fun and games in the early 1900's when outlaws gangs rode into town. It was commonplace to relocate the women and children while Ranton was being ransacked. But nothing bothered the always enthusiastic Smith who married young and loved to Mexican Hat Dance using the castanets.

Coal mining was the common way to make a living during the depression years and Smith did not see a bright future in Ranton, and she was determined to rise above her childhood surroundings. Inevitably the 20th century led to the Santa Fe Trail giving way to the Santa Fe Railway which she rode to California in 1922. Five years later her husband was laid off from the railroad, they used his two tickets for severance to move to his mother's house in Seattle. Ten years later they relocated to Port Orchard and Smith started working for the county. She steadily progressed from a switchboard operator to the County Auditor's Office, before being appointed as the Kitsap County Clerk in 1957.

Reina Osburn, a Republican, had retired that year and the county commissioners appointed Smith, a Democrat, to fill her position. They were not required to select along party lines until the law was repealed eight years later. Smith drove her 1955 Willys station wagon along Division Street each day, probably looking back to yesteryear and wishing her AM radio could pick up the southwestern music she had grown up listening to when automobiles were scarce. The post-war baby boom population explosion led to the need for inexpensive townhouse tract homes and Port Orchard expanded. Smith was determined to have her office grow in kind and more than doubled her employees after taking office. Never forgetting the poverty of her formative years, Smith kept an open mind and considered herself socially liberal, but fiscally conservative.

Smith moved the clerk's office from old school to the first days of modern technology, and consistently made decisions that helped with expansion.

Margaret Smith and Gov. Rosellini in 1965

She worked hand in hand with the Superior Court as their workload increased dramatically with the population boom. Politically savvy and known as a straight shooter, she served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions for both Kennedy and Johnson. Her reputation as honest and straightforward led to a long-time friendship with then-governor, Albert Rossellini, who shared Smith's vision of technology, as evidenced by his bringing the 1962 World's Fair to Seattle.

Shoeboxes to Computers

Some young men with political aspirations are born into families with law school as a prerequisite, but few, quite by accident, found their calling like Bob Freudenstein did. In the psychedelic era of the Strawberry Alarm Clock playing on the radio, Freudenstein found himself working as a shoes salesman in his late 20s. When Kitsap County Commissioner Bill Mahan called him about the vacant County Clerk position, the job of Clerk looked pretty good from his perspective.

Mahan, a former milkman, knew what it was like to start from meager beginnings and thought Freudenstein would be a perfect fit. Mahan encouraged Bob to apply for the position. The other commissioners agreed

with him and he was selected to fill the shoes of Margaret Smith. From the very beginning Freudenstein jumped in full throttle. His first day at work provided a shocking revelation, the clerk's office did not have a cash register and all its money was being kept in a shoe box, amusing considering his former occupation! He remedied that immediately by purchasing the best register available. This was just the tip of the iceberg for a tenure that would last a quarter of a century.

Freudenstein quickly realized he needed to be the first County Clerk who did not work full time at the front counter. He used his time wisely with his common sense skill set and implemented much needed newer technology. On the bright side of the spectrum, the Beatles were still together in 1969; on the lesser side, the clerks were still transcribing court minutes into large ledger books. It took the office ten more years to transition to a statewide computer case management system. Implementing that dramatic change was not an easy undertaking, but Freudenstein and his staff persevered and then some.

The number of Clerk's Office employees grew from 9 to 33 to handle the five additional Judges added during his 28-year tenure. He envisioned a paperless court more than twenty years before it would finally come to pass. Someone is not re-elected seven times without being politically savvy and Bob had the pleasure of meeting John Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey, Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson and Bill Clinton. Bob served his country in the Air Force for two years, the second Clerk to do such, along with James Clark during the Civil War. He passed on in 2022 as the oldest living Clerk, for now, at 83 years old.

Could lightning strike twice at 30 years of age? The commissioners sure thought so and appointed Dean Logan to the retiring Freudenstein's clerk position. Logan, like his predecessor was 30, but he only served one full term as clerk so he could serve in the Secretary of State's office. As the nation

neared the turn-of-the-century Y2K scare, Logan was busy transitioning the office to digital storage of all incoming and outgoing documentation., he had to find more record storage space in a small courthouse which would not expand until 2006 when the new administrative building was erected. Logan went on to become the Registrar, Recorder and County Clerk for the County of Los Angeles, California.

Every Kitsap County Clerk has left their position without losing in an election. Many were appointed. Dave Peterson was the fourth consecutive County Clerk chosen by the Commissioners. Peterson was 58 years old when he was appointed, the very age Freudenstein was upon retirement. Peterson won re-election four more times and dealt with massive county cutbacks during the recession, starting December of 2007. During the county cutbacks the clerk's office lost five full-time positions, but never had to hand anyone a pink slip.

At the beginning of this decade, Peterson's idea of hiring staff to save money went against the grain of traditional thinking. He created a Public Defender's Office and brought lawyers onto the county payroll rather than contracting the

work out to private attorneys, saving the county close to a quarter million dollars each year. That office spawned a Superior Court Judge with Bill Houser in 2013 and Tina Robinson, who was elected County Prosecuting Attorney in 2014 and became a Superior Court Judge in 2020.

Peterson spearheaded many money-making services that helped make the Clerk's Office more self-sufficient. He offered passport application and photo service to the public without need for an appointment. These passport services generated over a million dollars in revenue for the county in the first ten years. Additionally, the Clerk's Office took over collecting legal financial obligation collections from the Department of Corrections, increasing monies collected by over 50%. These monies were returned to the state and county and victims of crime.

Peterson worked hand in hand with the Superior Court to replace paper court files with all electronic files accessible by all judges while on the bench or in chambers. Working smarter, not harder, time and monies were saved for the office and public after the office implemented electronic access by subscription to the clerk's court records for attorneys and the news media. Peterson, like his two predecessors, was administratively adept, a vital commodity during the technology evolution.

Clerk's Sonntag and Peterson with Gov. Inslee in 2015

Back to the Basics

Reina Osburn was elected for her third term the year our next clerk, Alison Sonntag was born. Coincidentally, they both grew up in Tacoma, in neighboring Pierce County. Osburn, who started working in the clerk's office in her early 20's, was in the public eye on a daily basis more than any clerk - that is, until Alison Sonntag! She considered being a public servant the highest possible honor, and believed that if she had good colleagues in place, the office would literally run itself. Additionally, she considered filing as one of the most important jobs in the office and was never hesitant to point out, "One hundred years from now, the only thing that will matter is whether or not the record can be found."

As the Chief Deputy Clerk, in 2015, Sonntag was a key player in the Guardianship Facilitator bill which allowed counties to offer Courthouse Facilitator services for guardianship cases. Before that time the county facilitator program had been limited to family law cases only. Additionally, she and Peterson testified before the legislature in support of the bill, assisted in the writing of the bill, and in finding a sponsor.

The Commissioners appointed her the Kitsap County Clerk on August 16, 2017. Her "by-your-side" leadership, boundless energy, ever-present enthusiasm, and strong work ethic made the commissioners appointment of Sonntag an easy and unanimous decision. Sonntag's focus was always on the job-at-hand. As an example, in a fiscally saving move, she delayed hiring a Chief Deputy to fill her former position until after she implemented Odyssey, the newest Superior Court Operations and information system.

No one could have predicted the impact of COVID 19 in March of 2020, yet Sonntag never closed the clerk's office and continued to serve the citizens and courts of Kitsap. Many offices shut down during this time for months and even years, but her staff moved ahead smartly. Sonntag adapted to new technology and ever changing times, always with a touch of nostalgia!

From the Basement to the Top floor

Bremerton native, David Lewis has remained locally, and grew up listening to the Detroit Motown sounds of the Jackson 5 and Stevie Wonder. His mother, Harriette, worked at the Kitsap County Treasurer's Office, so Lewis grew accustomed to hanging out in the courthouse. In 1984, at the age of 19, a summertime "Extra Help" job as a file runner from the basement to the front counter seemed like a step-up from his recent position as a busboy at Sea Galley. He applied and soon found himself face to face with then-clerk Bob Freudenstein, who would become an invaluable mentor to the talented teen.

David Lewis and Bob Freudenstein the day David was sworn in as Clerk

During his interview the county clerk in his typical friendly fashion, said, "You can call me Bob" David's reply was a respectful "No thank you, I'd prefer Mr. Fruedenstein, if you don't mind" His mother taught him well! Lewis has much in common with the man who hired him full time for the front counter a few years later. They both shared the ability to have everyone they meet feel comfortable, like speaking with a good friend. Fruedenstein was awarded the Liberty Bell for public service by the Bar Association in 1978, and Lewis followed his mentor's footsteps, receiving the same honor in 2022.

Lewis' background as a DJ helped hone his natural public speaking skills. He is a gifted musician as well, winning the Kitsap County talent show both times he performed. For over four decades, he has served his community, first, as a docket clerk and eventually settling into the Domestic Violence Specialist desk, using his even-keeled temperament to full advantage. He very quickly became a front counter fixture as another Mr. Courthouse, again, following the path of his mentor.

Outgoing County Clerk Alison Sonntag recommended Lewis as her replacement. During the commissioners' interview, Lewis was asked which Clerk he had the most in common with. He responded that Bob

Freudenstein taught him to manage with a people-first style in the office, allowing his hard-working staff to work with him as well as for him. The clerk's office future is in good hands now and it looks quite promising for him to win office as "Lew in 22!" Lewis could never have imagined, way back in 1984 while riding the elevator on a file run from the basement, that he would one day be destined to reach and remain on the top floor, just like Mr. Freudenstein.

Chasing History

Today all of the former clerk pictures hang on the lobby walls in the clerk's Office, including Luke McRedmond and John Webster, the very first two territorial clerks from1859 and 1860. Interestingly, each of the men posed for their pictures wearing a suit and tie. What good fortune considering official pictures were never taken for the office. Yet their images are still being viewed by Kitsap County residents a century later. It took more than six years to find each of these clerks. Intensive internet searches, genealogy societies,

Fred W. Comstock
1889 – 1890

Thomas Ross, Jr.

John D. Anderson
1893 – 1895

J. B. Clark
1895 – 1900

Thomas Wilson
1900 – 1903

Edward F. Scott
1903 – 1906

Charles Berry
1907 – 1910

William C. Newman
1911 – 1914

Andrew M. Anderson
1915 – 1918

Guy L. Wetzel
1919 – 1922

Arthur Lund
1923 – 1935

Reina M. Osburn
1931 – 1936

Arthur Lund
1939 – 1948

Reina M. Osburn
1947–1967

Margaret Smith
1958 – 1969

Robert Freudenstein
1969 – 1997

Dean C. Logan
1998 – 2001

David W. Peterson
2001 – 2016

Allison Sonntag
2017 – 2021

David Lewis
2021 – Present

Courthouse on Division Street
1891

Courthouse on Division Street
1893

museums, the state archives, newspaper microfiche, obituaries, public libraries, and especially historical societies contributed to their discovery.

Tracing family trees can be a daunting task, but we were lucky enough to find and speak with the nephew and daughter of Guy Wetzel, the son of Margaret Smith, and the grand-daughters of Arthur Lund and Reina Osburn. Each of them were more than happy to share stories and, of course, quite surprised random strangers would hold interest so many years after their relatives had passed on.

One of the last pieces of the picture puzzle, and the most difficult person to locate was Edward Jones; yes, Jones, the fourth most popular surname in the United States. Additionally, Jones was clerk in the first years of the 1900s and his family had moved from the state. It seemed a nearly impossible task, but eventually an obituary of his grandson was found after a random search through gravesites. Listed on that obituary was Jones' great granddaughter who lived in a small Illinois town. She called our office in response to a letter we drafted and was completely shocked we'd found her, the one person who retained the 125-year-old family picture in an old box in the closet.

Surely after the Jones discovery we felt fate was on our side with only one clerk left to find, J.B. Clark. We had jokingly called Clark our D.B. Cooper because all we had was his initials with no first name. Of course, again, Clark, along with Clerks Anderson, Jones and Wilson are generally known to be among the 15 most popular surnames! Yet luck did prevail as a week after finding Jones we found a short three-line obituary for Rev James B. Clark while searching the Seattle Times archives.

Thankfully within his brief synopsis was the fact that he was our lost clerk, as it mentioned his county position, but the best part was it listed the church he had presided over on Bainbridge Island. Smiles turned upside down after searching every nook and cranny of the church to no avail. But…shockingly, a few months later our improbable six-year journey came to an end when the daughter of a former church member came across the original 1891 picture of Rev Clark from the church's 1982 Centennial program.

Following Footsteps

The current courthouse has been standing since 1932, with the Clerk's Office still located in the same room. Back in the 1930 and 40s, Reina Osburn sat at her desk just behind the front counter. The faces have changed since then, but the footsteps through time remain consistent—a chosen path of public service. A lonely file room in the courthouse basement remains a musty reminder of the generations who have passed us by. A whisper of yesteryear bounces from those walls telling us to never forget those who spent their lives giving to the community.

These lives' meant something to history and are far reaching. For instance, while walking on Comstock Street in Seattle, how many would realize that it was named after the first Kitsap County Clerk? Fred Comstock served for a little more than a year as the clerk. Ten years later, he represented Seattle in the State House of Representatives. Sidney Avenue is a main road in Port Orchard, but how many of its daily travelers know that the city of Port

Reina Osburn, far right, middle

Orchard was once named Sidney? One would tend to think the Sidney Museum and Arts Association can answer that one!

County Clerk Dave Peterson understood that legacies should never go unacknowledged, and built the framework to hold the clerk photographs himself. Peterson signed and dated a piece of wood, a time capsule of sorts that will surely put a smile on the face of whomever is eventually tearing down the courthouse.

The plan to build a new courthouse is to begin formulation soon, but what will be left behind? Memories fade, but one thing is for certain, the Clerk's Office will never forget its roots. Peterson retired in 2017 and as he hit the light switch for the very last time on his way out of the Clerk's Office, he knew that one hundred years from now that he and all the other former County Clerks would never be forgotten — at least in Kitsap County. A new building will stand on the same land someday, but the echoes in time will live on forever.

Guy Wetzel in 1957

The back cover picture is the continuation of the Kitsap County Courthouse front picture from 1891. The Administrative building is now at this location.

Picture courtesy of the Kitsap Historical Society.