

**Presentation to Wooster Rotary  
J. Douglas Drushal  
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### **CLYDE WEBB-ROTARY PRESENTATION**

I am sure you are all familiar with the Webb family, prominent citizens in Stafford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. It turns out that some of those family members decided to cross the Atlantic and come to the British colonies in America, some as early as the 1650s. A few generations later, Moses Webb, a veteran of the War of 1812, decided to seek his fortune a little farther west and came to Wayne County, Ohio, in 1824. And so it was that there began what is now a nearly 200-year lineage of that Webb family in the Wooster area. The family farm in the early days was off of Valley Road, across what is now State Route 226 near Triway High School.

A few more generations went by and Clyde Webb Sr. was born in 1886, the sixth of nine children in that generation. Clyde Sr., in turn, had six children, the youngest being our own Clyde Webb Jr., born in 1924.

Now not only was Clyde born in 1924, but he was born on October 31, 1924, which means that today is his eighty-first birthday.

Clyde grew up on another farm near Jefferson and attended a two-room school close to the present location of the Oak Chapel Church. Clyde recalls many a day walking to school, being drug by his older sister. We have discovered reports from former teachers that it was necessary to whip Clyde a few times during his education. Clyde went on to Wooster High School and graduated in the class of 1942. He participated in football and swimming and played the clarinet in the band. Clyde had a fairly typical rural upbringing from that era including the

normal chores and play around the farm. Clyde has a rather unusual souvenir of this childhood in that he has to this day a .22 caliber bullet lodged near his spine from an accidental shooting when the neighborhood kids were shooting at rats in their chicken barn. After graduating from high school in 1942, Clyde went west to work on a ranch and ended up in Portland, Oregon. Before long, with World War II underway, Clyde decided to join the Navy, which required his mother's consent since he was not yet 18. Or maybe he just lied about his age, I don't know.... Clyde was trained as a submarine electrician and served in the Pacific theater for the duration of World War II. He left from San Francisco and was stationed at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu and Midway. He volunteered to be a mess cook in Midway, in order to get his own bunk and shower and not to have to stand in line. This aversion to standing in line, a trait which I have observed in other veterans, sometimes frustrated his wife after the War when he refused to go to a movie or attend other events which required standing in line.

He left from Midway on a submarine and saw heavy action, once bringing back into port at Saipan the most heavily damaged U. S. sub ever returned to port. Indeed, former colleagues in San Francisco held a moment of silence for this crew after receiving reports that Clyde's sub had been sunk and all on board lost. Clyde says he would have been lost, but for the tremendous skill and perseverance of the mechanics on board, repairing the broken lines and keeping the leaking boat functioning. They had to keep the boat underwater or face certain destruction by the Japanese destroyers on the surface that had attacked in the first place.

His submarine had descended to about 400 feet, over 100 feet lower than it was designed to withstand. And even on a good day, the air in a submarine of that era was so thin that cigarette lighters would hardly function and cigarettes would go out from lack of oxygen in the absence of a constant drag by the smoker. Clyde recalls being so close to Japanese-held islands

that he could see Japanese officers walking around their bases as he looked through the periscope. And without taking anything away from those who served in the D-Day invasion of Europe, Clyde points out that in the Pacific they had dozens of D-Days, one at the invasion of each enemy-held island.

Clyde often speaks to school groups about his War experiences, and says that the most frequent question he gets is, “What does a depth charge sound like?” The answer: “First you hear the ping of the detonator going off, then the whoosh of the explosion all around.”

Back in Wooster after the War, Clyde ran around with several boys who were the children of Dr. Alonzo Smith, a physician with his office in downtown Wooster (where most of the doctors then had their offices) and one of the founders of the Wooster Rotary Club. These boys had an attractive younger sister by the name of Dorothy who ended up marrying Clyde in June of 1946. The wedding was performed by Rotarian Racky Young at the Smith family home located on North Market Street where the Wooster Fire Station now sits. They had over five decades of a wonderful marriage until Dorothy’s death several years ago.

Clyde remembers Dr. Smith as the embodiment of the ideals of Rotary, always placing service to others above self. Dr. Smith treated Clyde’s father after he suffered a debilitating stroke at a fairly young age, going out of his way to help. And Dr. Smith’s tolerance of Clyde was notable. Dr. Smith’s son, Juney, was Clyde’s good buddy and a frequent wearer of wing-tip shoes. Once Clyde entered the Smith household and saw someone asleep on the couch, wing-tips sticking out from under the newspaper that covered the upper part of his body. Clyde grabbed the wing-tips and rolled the sleeping victim onto the floor, only to discover it was Dr. Smith and not Juney that he had just assaulted. Not the best way to treat your future father-in-law!!

Clyde parlayed his Navy electrician training into work as an electrician with Wayne Electric. He also operated a candy shop with Harold Picking, his brother-in-law, and husband of Clyde's sister, Alma. The candy shop was on Liberty Street, across from the old movie theater. (For those of you who wonder where the old movie theater was, see me after the meeting.) Making candy was a bit of a challenge in those days due to post-war shortages of sugar.

Clyde then got into sales of appliances for Bendix Apex and then later for Bennett Geiser, founder of the Bennett's Appliance Stores still in business today. Seeing a good future in the appliance business in the post-World War II housing boom, Clyde and his brother Howard decided to go out on their own and open an appliance store, first located by the Ohio Hotel on Liberty Street, then moving to Buckeye Street, between North and Larwill Streets, in a location which is now part of the Methodist Church parking lot right behind my office. Out of this location, the Webb brothers also sold and repaired lawnmowers in addition to the appliance business. They quickly saw a future in a new device called a "television" and got into television sales, first black and white and eventually color sets. (For those of you who wonder what a black and white television was, see me after the meeting.) They expanded their business to include kitchen remodeling. They outgrew their Buckeye Street location and moved to a location at the corner of Liberty and Bever Streets, presently the new home of Larry's Music Center.

In this new location, the business expanded to do air conditioning and refrigeration repair work. Clyde decided he preferred this part of the business and in 1968 Howard stayed with the appliance business and Clyde bought Atlas Heating and changed its name to Webb-Atlas. That business was then located at the Winkler Drive address where Webb-Atlas is still in business today. Clyde grew the company and prospered through long hours and hard work. He truly enjoyed this line of work and especially the challenges of large projects. He did the complete

HVAC system for the Rubbermaid headquarters when that was built. (For those of you who wonder what Rubbermaid was, see me after the meeting.) He enjoyed the challenge of small projects, too, like nursing along the steam heat boiler in the basement of my house on more than one occasion. Webb-Atlas is still owned by the family and is headed today by Rotarian Denny Webb. The company also employs son, Cliff, and son-in-law, Frank Gengo. While now retired, Denny reports that Clyde does still come in from time to time ... usually to pick up his rent check.

Clyde became a member of this Club in 1955. Secretary Tim provided me with a copy of his membership proposal, signed by Clyde's Elm Drive neighbor, Bill Lytle. I haven't checked this, but Clyde might be the only one of our senior members who are being honored whose Rotary sponsor is still alive and a member of this Club. I do need to report one problem, however, Tim and Bill. The Membership Proposal asks for the prospect's age, and the age "35" is filled in the blank. Now if born in October 1924, in August of 1955 Clyde would have been only 30. So, Bill, apparently, just like the Navy, he lied to you about his age!!

Clyde and Dorothy had six children, Denny being the oldest and also including Rotarian Doug Webb. Doug went into dentistry, deciding that working four days a week was better than midnight calls from people whose furnaces and air conditioning were not functioning properly. Denny and Doug remember many happy family times during their youth, including a trip in 1963 with all six children and two parents covering 6,000 miles in their family station wagon pulling a camper trailer that slept six, leaving two in the car every night. Denny and Doug also have many fond memories of family times at a cottage purchased by Clyde in 1952 at Charles Mill Lake. They had a bit of a family compound there as Harold and Alma Picking had an adjacent cottage (now owned by Rotarian Dave Taylor) and a third cottage was owned by friend Dick Wertenberger, father of Gary Wertenberger, who is the present owner of the State Store in Wooster. Dick Wertenberger gave Clyde his nickname of "Skeeter", after a second baseman for the Washington Senators by the name of Skeeter Webb. Denny and Doug remember Charles Mill as a wonderful family place where the kids were turned loose and told to be back for dinner. It was a place of children and cousins and card games and campfires and much family happiness.

In addition to work and family, Clyde has had a lifetime of service to the community. While never a Boy Scout himself, Clyde became quite an active supporter of Scouting, in addition to service with organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, which he served as Board Chair for three years, and United Way, where he served as President and formed a friendship with Rotarian Ed Arn while Ed was the Executive Director of United Way. In his retirement, urged on by wife Dorothy and son Doug, Clyde spearheaded the renovation of the former Wooster High School building into the present Cornerstone Elementary, leading to Clyde's selection as a Daily Record Citizen of the Year in 1996. Clyde was so instrumental in this project that some people proposed naming the school in honor of him and the then School Board President who was also instrumental in this effort, but wiser heads prevailed and decided that the Bonnie and Clyde Elementary School might not sound quite right.

Clyde was instrumental in the founding of the Wooster High School Alumni and Friends Organization. Clyde was also inducted into the Wooster Area Chamber of Commerce's Wall of Fame in 1999.

Clyde also was extremely active in the Reed Warehouse renovation for STEPS and Every Woman's House, and also their Beacon House project. Clyde's work on these efforts was far from a figurehead, preferring instead to roll up his sleeves and get the work done himself. Doug remembers many Saturday mornings when he was awakened by a call from his Dad telling him to get over and start helping him working on these projects. Clyde also was able to engage various contractors with whom he had worked over the years to assist on these projects, informing them after they showed up that "you need to do this as your donation to the community". Clyde does not remember this project as work at all, just fun.

He also would work with many of the men doing community service who often helped on these projects. During the course of his conversations with them, after chatting about why they were there, Clyde would bluntly respond: “Why did you do that?”

Whether with contractors, community members or others, this was Clyde Webb. Denny and Doug remember Rotarian Mike Steiner telling them that he always appreciated working with Clyde because you always knew where you stood with him.

Clyde, we are glad that your ancestors found their way to Wayne County. We are better off because they did so, and we are privileged to recognize your contributions to our community.

Please join me in saluting one of our outstanding senior members of Wooster Rotary, Clyde Webb.