

Steve Dodson

2026 Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History

By Pat Johnson



Dodson, 2026. Photo credit: Pat Johnson.

Tuckerton resident and historian Steve Dodson has been chosen to receive the 2026 Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History. Dodson was nominated for the award by the triumvirate presidents of the Tuckerton Historical Society (THS): Kate Cortese, Connie Woolson and Cynthia Coritz because of his ongoing generosity in supporting the THS with his research and writings. Dodson gives the proceeds of his many books to the Society and Museum. Dodson also serves as the chronicler of Tuckerton History for THS.

Dodson edited 17 soft-bound books from articles he culled from various early newspapers such as the NJ Courier of Toms River and The Tuckerton Beacon—other books bring his opus to 20 or more.

When interviewed Dodson was self-effacing of his achievement, saying, “I loved doing it-- and the work is its own reward.”

“I’m a failed fiction writer,” said Dodson. “I was ambitious, I wanted to write novels and become famous... I studied and put a lot of effort into it and at the end of seven years I looked at my body of work and I hadn’t created one memorable character or coherent story. I wondered, ‘So, what else can I do?’ Well, I love history as much as I love literature-- telling historical stories is storytelling based on fact ...”

Dodson became interested in Tuckerton history when he became aware of a little-known local legend of the ‘Seven Foot Indians.’ In 1893 the twin Jillson Brothers, Arthur and Alfred, allegedly plowed up a cache of

bones on their farm close to the bay in Little Egg Harbor. Accounts in early newspapers vary from seventeen skeletons to thirty and some seemed to be seven-feet tall.

Dodson’s obsessive hunt for the truth of the story led to his first published piece, Tuckerton’s Race of Giant Men—An Historical Mystery. The article can be found on the THS website under Historical articles.

“I loved that I would call down to the Smithsonian and that Dr. David Hunt, the head of anthropology collections, would talk to me. I thought that was cool.”

“Then I kept going.”

His next project was publishing The Price Sisters Diaries—Florence and Eleanor Price, 1905 and 1915-1921 that also included Sarah Thomson’s Journal, 1809. Dodson was working in the Acme where he often chatted with local real estate agent Granville Price. “He knew I was interested in history and he kept saying he would show me his aunts’ diaries from the early 1900s. When he finally did, I thought, ‘This is a book.’”

By this time Dodson was mining local history contained in the Tuckerton Historical Society’s Giffordtown Schoolhouse Museum. The president at the time was Barbara Bolton and she and the members decided to publish Dodson’s edited version of The Price Sisters’ Diaries.

“It’s funny, you get emotionally involved when working with diaries—for a couple of years I put flowers on Eleanor’s grave on her birthday.”

His next project was co-publishing Leah Blackman's Old Times and Other Writings with THS. Blackman's first book History of Little Egg Harbor (1880) "was the heart and soul of the area's history," said Dodson, as it chronicled Tuckerton history and the genealogies of the first families.

Old Times and Other Writings are day-to-day accounts of life in pre-industrial South Jersey. "She took the time to write it all down – the houses, the schools, women's work and her attempts to get educated," said Dodson.

"I think she was a disagreeable person--she was unhappy with her lot in life. But this was at a time when you had to make everything yourself—Men work from sun to sun but women's work was never done." In spite of her workload, she found time to educate herself and became an absolute champion of our regional history.

"After Leah I was on a diary kick—I did Bella Haywood's from West Creek and Jenny Pharo's written in the 1930s but what I really wanted were male diaries and couldn't find anything. Then I found the diary of Paul Warren of Waretown. He was 15 years old and his father was a captain of a dredge in New York City and he talked about the 1888 snowstorm where the drifts were up to second story windows. That diary is part of a bigger book I edited

containing Charles Russell Horner's columns, The Old Timer, published in The Beacon. He wrote about being a baymen in the early 1930s up to the 1950s in Barnegat Bay and Little Egg Harbor."

The Beach Haven Library had diaries written in the 1800s by Captain Thomas Bond. "His diary was very succinct—he was crazy about waterfowl hunting," said Dodson. That diary is included in The History of Long Beach Island by Jesse Coole. When he could no longer find interesting diaries, Dodson advertised in the newspaper that he was looking for diaries and letters. Tom Applegate from Little Egg Harbor had a series of family letters.

"I particularly liked his grandmother's letters, she was funny—uneducated, bawdy and she would draw pictures too—the letters span before, during and after the Great Depression and were published as 'A Tuckerton Family During the Great Depression.'"

When he ran out of diaries and letters he started compiling news accounts that were in the public domain—starting with New Jersey Courier published in Toms River from 1852 to 1917.

"I love the early accounts, the earlier the better. The Beacon started in 1889 but The Beacon lost a few early decades when they converted them to microfilm."

The collection spans the years 1852 to 1987. Dodson's wife, Linda did the typing for most of them. "I would select the articles and cut them out and put them in order and then she would type them. Linda was an executive secretary and says she finds typing relaxing."

Dodson's friend, Joe Harness, got the newspaper books onto Amazon. All the books sold locally, the proceeds go to the Giffordtown Museum (headquarters of the Tuckerton Historical Society.)

For now, Dodson has shelved his editing and publishing interests and has picked up metal detecting as his latest compulsion. Perhaps you will see him as the weather warms on Long Beach Island, searching the sand for little treasures.

