David Denny and his "Sweetbriar Bride," Seattle's First Couple to Wed

Contributed by Midori Okazaki, Puget Sound Regional Archives in Bellevue

The first couple married in Seattle were pioneers David Denny and Louisa Boren. John Denny, David's father, led a party of settlers from Indiana to Portland in the spring of 1851. From there, nineteen-year-old David traveled to Seattle in September and was joined by his brother, Arthur, and Arthur's family two months later.   The only unmarried woman in the party was Louisa Boren, daughter of John Denny's second wife, Sarah. Before heading west, Louisa taught school. By time the settlers reached Seattle, Louisa and her step-brother David were, as they say, an item. (Accounts differ as to whether they were sweethearts before the journey or not.) They were married on January 23, 1853, at the home of Arthur Denny in a ceremony performed by DS "Doc" Maynard.

The newlyweds staked their claim to land in what became the Lower Queen Anne area of Seattle and built a cabin on what is now Denny Way. There Louisa planted sweetbriar seeds she had carried with her from Illinois, earning her the title "Sweetbriar Bride." In addition to expanding his business and real estate interests, David became active in public life, supporting women's suffrage and opposing the expulsion of Chinese immigrants. He was at one time one of Seattle's wealthiest citizens, but was forced into bankruptcy during the Panic of 1893. David died in 1903 and Louisa in 1916. They are buried in what is now Evergreen Washelli Cemetery, on land that they owned and lost in bankruptcy.

The original marriage certificate for David Denny and Louisa Boren no longer exists, but their marriage is documented by an entry in the Record of Marriage Certificates, a register of marriages. The marriage was recorded by King County Clerk, Henry Yesler, who failed to note the bride's last name. The original record is held by the King County Archives, but was recently uploaded to the Digital Archives and is now readily accessible.