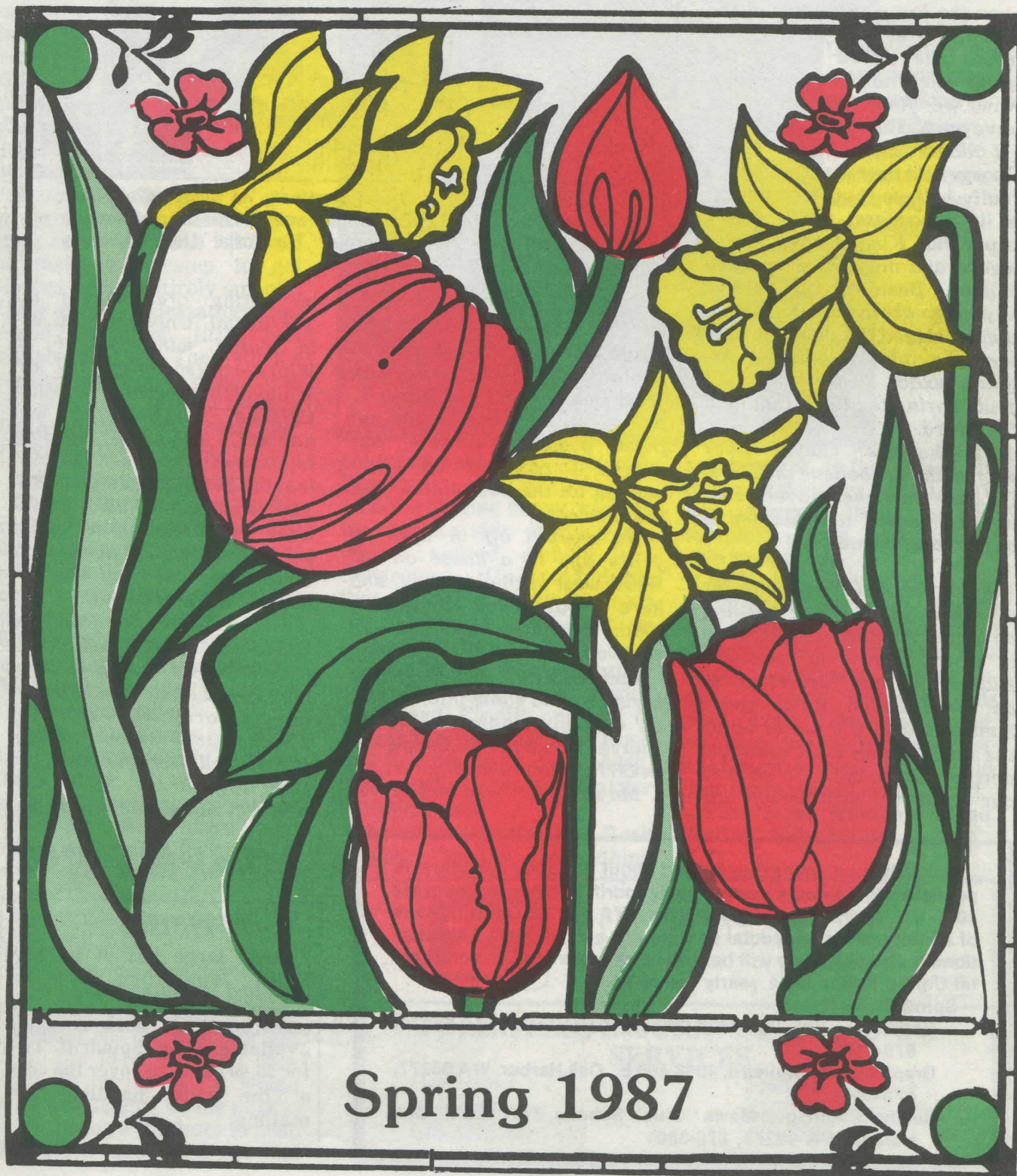


Spindrift Two

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Volume 10 Number 4

Whidbey Island's Own Magazine



6 Whidbey Island Settlers Remembered

From the pages of the *Island County Times* of April 1898, is a letter written to Crescent Harbor pioneer John Izett, from his old friend J. Thomas Turner who had visited Whidbey Island in 1852. Turner was chief clerk of the council in Olympia in Territorial days, and returned to Washington, D.C. to become a well-known lawyer.

Early in January 1852, in a large Indian canoe manned by four Indian bucks and as many squaws of the Skagits, I passed through Deception Pass and the first white settler I met was Captain Robert Fay whose log cabin near the shore was the first one I saw. (Somewhere between Deception Pass and Crescent Harbor).

On to Crescent Harbor, where I discovered James Busby and family, and (their) adjoining settler, genial, whole-souled William Wallace and family, who owned one entire section of 640 acres of rich prairie land, but, excepting his log cabin home, there were no improvements to be seen.

Adjoining the Wallace claim was his brother-in-law, James H. Mounts, and passing through a dense fir forest about 80 rods west of James Mounts' donation claim, came upon the claim of his brother Milton L. Mounts. These Mounts brothers I should state in passing were known as the "nimrods of Whidbey Island." They were famous deer hunters in those pioneer days.

Passing, I came upon the log cabin of Mr. Hutchins, a nephew of the famous Dr. Hallowsay of patent medicine fame of London, England. Adjoining his claim was the donation holdings of Judah P. Church, who was murdered by an Indian who was subsequently hanged for the crime at Coveland; and Alfred Miller.

Then I visited the cabins of



This is Deception Pass and Whidbey Island as J. Thomas Turner saw it when it made his canoe trip around the Island in 1852.

Martin Taftson, C. W. Sumner and Ulrich Freund, situated in Oak Harbor. Upon a peninsula forming part of the harbor were the log cabins of the brothers Samuel and Thomas Maylor. I found too, on the sandspit of the harbor the log house of Ned (Ed) Barrington and his partner (Phillips) who were engaged in cutting piles and cross timbers for wharfage in San Francisco.

My next call was at the Ford claim, then on to John Condre, then a Mr. Basil whose claim having been abandoned was taken up by Captain Eli Hathaway. Then the log cabin of Mr. Bolte. He having given it up, the claim then became the property of S. D. Howe and G. W. L. Allen.

Allen and Howe severally claimed paramount right to the land by priority of settlement. Their differences, however, were amicably settled by Howe paying Allen \$500 to surrender the claim.

Adjoining Howes' donation claim came the claims of

Richard B. Holbrook, Widow Maddox, Isaac N. Power and Daniel Snow. Next the town of Coveland and donation claim of Richard H. Lansdale, and close by on a narrow neck of land was the storehouse of Captain Barstow, who was drowned, along with Mr. Conaha and Mr. Kingsbury.

Then the claim of Samuel Libbey of "Libbey's Prairie," and the claims of Captain Thomas P. Coupe, John Crockett, John Alexander, Col. Issac N. Ebey, Samuel Crockett, W. B. Engle, R. D. and N. D. Hill, claims of father Crockett and sons not mentioned above, then Dr. Kellogg, Captain W. Robertson, John Kineth and the Rev. J. S. Smith.

There were some other claims held by parties who soon tired of their holdings and abandoned their claims and went into other pursuits.

At Skagit Head R. C. Bailey owned a land claim, and with his claim my jottings of the

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View from an Indian Canoe in 1852 7

first pioneers of Whidbey Island closes.

In those early days of pioneer life on Puget Sound, the settlers, men and women, had a hard struggle to get along. Far from their base of supplies in San Francisco, provisions and clothing were very high, flour forty dollars a barrel and all other provisions in proportion, but we had the never failing wah-ta-poe (potato?), dried salmon, dried clams as well as those that were not dried and smoked. We had plenty of game, deer came into our front yards and gardens, ate our peavines and the bark from our apple trees, and the Indians kept us well supplied with fish, both shell and scale, and venison and game was so plentiful it palled upon our appetites.

... J. Thomas Turner,
April 1898



ACCENT ON STYLES



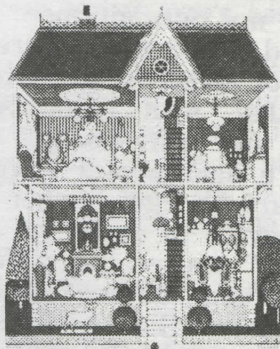
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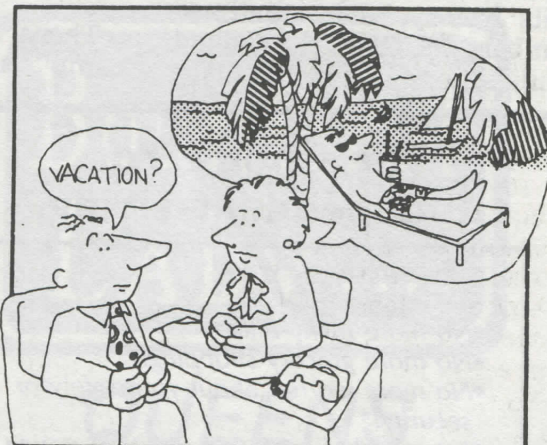
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The following article appeared in the Whidbey News-Times on June 28, 1979, headlined *Pioneer Granddaughter Recalls Days Gone By*.

By Dave Pinkham
Monroe's Landing is known by most Whidbey residents as that scenic bend in the road on the north side of Penn Cove where an extraordinary sandy beach curves around a little bay.

Some know it for its boat ramp or as the turn-off spot for Penn Cove Park, the residential development on the hill above. But Monroe's Landing, though not famous like Ebey's Landing, is also rich in history.

Once boats steamed into its dock. Once the orchard, now small, was large. Once there were many more acres of farmland surrounding it. Cars didn't speed by, people were more self-sufficient, and the modern conveniences of today were not to be had. Life was different.

With today's rapid influx of people to the island, newcomers are often unaware of its history, and sometimes members of the old Island families get "lost in the shuf-

Monroe's Landing Story Told by Pioneer Daughter

fle" of the population explosion.

Lillian Monroe Kennedy is a descendent of the Whidbey Pioneer James Crombie Monroe, who settled at Dugualla Bay in 1879 before moving to the place now called Monroe's Landing.

She remembers when farm and forest land extended over the area which today is Penn Cove Park, and when the orchard behind the farmhouse was expansive.

"There were 160 acres here and my grandfather once owned 320 acres up where Oak Harbor Airport is today, but he sold that," said Lillian. "At one time, they farmed both."

"We sold apples from the orchard and got lumber from Coupeville to make the apple boxes," she recalled. "We also sold cream, the creamery was at Crescent Harbor where they made butter."

"My father also sold hay, potatoes, wheat and oats. But a lot of the food we grew was just for family use."

There also was a "pole camp" at Monroe's Landing,

from which poles were shipped to Mexico to be used as mine props. The camp was owned by Jim Neil, Dorothy Neil's father-in-law.

It all began for the Monroes on Whidbey Island when Lillian's grandfather, James Monroe, left Boston and headed west to the "new country." In Boston he had owned a bakery.

With his sister-in-law, Sarah Morse Snow, wife of Captain Joseph Snow, James later bought the farm on Penn's Cove.

First Sarah came west to Whidbey to visit her brother, Captain George Morse. She took glowing accounts back East and in 1878 James made the trip west. He bought land at Dugualla Bay, and after a year returned to Boston and brought his family back to Whidbey Island.

"James Monroe was born on a farm, but hadn't farmed, so a lot of it was new to him," said Lillian. His wife Catherine, who he called Miss Kate, suffered through the rain of the first year, but eventually got used to

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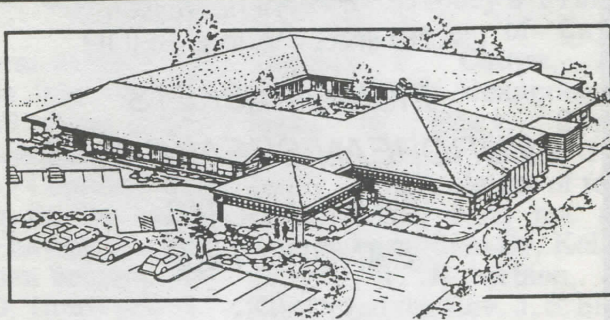
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the new life and recovered from her disappointment at leaving Boston.

Anthony William Monroe, James' son and Lillian's father, was 13 years old when his father brought him to Dugualla. In 1883, when he was 15, the family moved to Seattle for four years while he attended the University of Washington. When they returned to Whidbey, they bought the place at Monroe's Landing, part of the original Eli Hathaway donation land claim.

Anthony helped with the farm, and in 1897 married Mary Arnold of the San de Fuca Arnolds. Mary was the aunt of today's Chuck Arnold, San de Fuca farmer.

The Monroes lived in a log house at Penn Cove which they added on to. The older generation always lived there. The farmhouse, built in 1899, was for Anthony's family.

Lillian recalls that, though the old steamers did not make regular stops at Monroe's Landing wharf, they could make it in when the tide was high to load produce and bring supplies.

"One time in the morning my mother called to me that the Mosquito Fleet steamer 'Whidbey' was coming in to our dock and if I hurried I could catch it and get a ride to school in San de Fuca. So I hurried and got the ride. That was one time I didn't have to walk," she laughed. Lillian's uncle, Captain Henry Arnold, was skipper of the *Whidbey* at that time.

Since 1948, she has lived in the historic Monroe farmhouse, the white structure of New England "saltbox" style which graces Monroe's Landing, with her husband W. E. Ed Kennedy. It is the house in which she was born and reared, and it was brand new in 1899 when she said hello to the world there.

For Lillian as for passers-by the place has great romantic charm. It looks out over Penn



The old Monroe farmhouse still suns itself overlooking Penn's Cove and Monroe's Landing as it has since 1899.

Cove with one of the most impressive views anywhere. History still lives there. It is not difficult to conjure up pictures of the past and the farming, logging and fishing that went around it.

Going to grade school in the neighborhood is still a fond memory for Lillian, who attended the old San de Fuca schoolhouse, now a landmark in disrepair. She walked to and

from school, 2 miles each way.

Later she went to high school for two years in Oak Harbor and then switched to Coupeville for the final two years because it was accredited and Oak Harbor wasn't.

Down the beach from the Monroe house there was an Indian potlatch and longhouse when Lillian was growing up. Local Indians entertained



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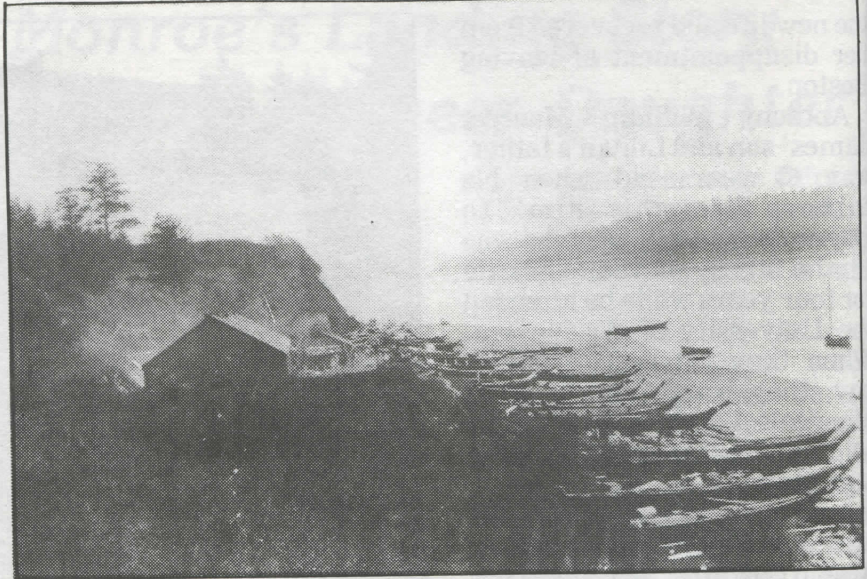
(Continued from previous page)

Indians from all over, recalls Lillian, and sometimes many canoes were parked on the potlatch beach. She said relations were always good between the Indians and the whites, for whom they often worked.

"One time when I was a young child, about 4 years old, I visited the potlatch house with my father and I clung tightly to his hand because I had never seen so many Indians at one place before. Dad knew some of their language since they worked for him on the farm. Billy Barlow was the 'chief' of that potlatch."

Because of Lillian's deep roots on the Island, she sometimes longs for the "good old days."

"I'm glad I grew up in that era, when there weren't so many people or so much strife," she said. 



Indian longhouse and canoes on Penn Cove west of Monroe's Landing during an Indian Potlatch, in the early 1900s.



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Clover Valley Became Site of One of Whidbey Island's First Businesses

In September of 1895, Charles and Annie Nienhuis, young Hollanders living in Michigan, headed West to become a historical part of Whidbey Island.

The 24-year-old Charlie purchased 60 acres of land in heavily timbered Clover Valley, site of today's runways for Whidbey Naval Air Station.

Earlier that year a devastating fire had swept Clover Valley, followed by a heavy windstorm. When Nienhuis moved to his property he said he found there was no need for sawing down trees and removing brush. His problem was in removing burned and fallen trees from his property. Before they started clearing they could walk across the valley on logs without once touching the ground. There were only two trees standing and they had to burn them down.

Nienhuis had seen the farm produce displays brought to Michigan by John Werkman to advertise Whidbey. It didn't take the newcomer long to learn how true the advertisement was. In about ten years Nienhuis was getting 265 sacks of oats, over 100 pounds to the sack, from 4½ acres of cleared land. The oats stood a good foot higher than his head.

Clover Valley was well named, for the clover grew so fine that the settlers got six crops a year. One quarter of an acre planted to clover and timothy fed six cows and a horse all year.

Although farming in the Clover Valley was a positive experience, Charlie Nienhuis was not really a farmer at heart. In Michigan he had worked in the north woods helping his father in a sawmill. One day in 1901, when he was digging potatoes, Bill Izett, a

Crescent Harbor farmer, stopped by and suggested that if he knew as much as Nienhuis did, he would start a sawmill.

The seed was planted, and the next year Nienhuis, along with Dan Schowalter, a mechanic, Henry Riksen and Nienhuis' dad, E. K. Nienhuis, bought a small mill and put it on the Riksen place in Clover Valley.

The Riksen house and barn still stands, occupied by a Navy family on Navy land overlooking Clover Valley.

New settlers were arriving on Whidbey Island daily, and lumber was in demand for homes and farm buildings. The first year, Nienhuis bought Schowalter out, and the next year Riksen dropped from the organization. With a portable mill, Nienhuis and his dad continued, and when the elder Nienhuis died, Charlie was on his own.

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In 1907 he sold the mill to Merryman Brown and went back to farming. He had always wanted to build a good barn and now was his opportunity. Teddy Roosevelt was in office and rates had gone up while the bottom dropped out of the lumber business, but Nienhuis was safe on the farm. He had begun drawing up plans for a barn when a neighbor suggested he build a "round roof" barn.

Nienhuis' 54x72 foot barn was designed by Otto Van Dyk (who also designed what is now the Roller Barn), and was the first round-roof barn on Whidbey Island.

In 1910 Nienhuis again went in with Schowalter on a portable mill. He later bought out his partner and from then on moved his mill around, following a dwindling timber supply. He moved the mill from Swantown, to Scenic Heights, and later to San de Fuca.

Nienhuis was a hard worker and used his money well. In 1896 he cut piling in Brand's Camp near Strawberry Point 10 hours a day for \$1.25 a day, then came home and cut piles. He walked both ways to work, which took up to four hours of the day, and milked cows morning and evening.

Nienhuis served on his district school board when the school year was only three months long. He was told if they levied a 5-mill tax they would get nine months of school. They got the millage and his district, No. 7, was the first on Whidbey with nine months of school.

In 1911, Nienhuis, along with Art Case, John Power and F. R.



Charlie and Annie Nienhuis built this comfortable house on the corner of 50th and 300 East in Oak Harbor, when they moved from the farm in the late 1920s.

Morgan, opened a creamery in Oak Harbor. They began with 50 cents, a bucket of butter color and salt. By the end of the first month they raised the price they paid for milk by 1 cent, by the end of the second month they raised it another cent; and by the end of the third month, when the company was \$450 ahead, they were paying 3 cents over Seattle prices for butterfat.

The butter color remained unused as there were so many Jersey cows on Whidbey Island they didn't need the extra color.

After serving on the creamery board for 17 years, Nienhuis turned his attention to a board position with the Cooperative Store branch.

In 1942, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Nienhuis celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with their five children, 16 grandchildren, and the entire community of Oak Harbor paying honor to two highly respected citizens.

In the late 1920s, the couple

left the farm behind and built a lovely big home that still stands on the corner of 300 Ave. East and 60th N.E. Later, because the new home was too large for comfort, they built a smaller home up the street on 400 East (across from the little Rock House), where they celebrated their 64th anniversary in 1956.

Charlie Nienhuis left his mark on North Whidbey as a developer of Clover Valley, as a lumberman, and as an activist in the pioneer community that came to be settled largely by Hollanders from the Mid-West and Canada, who came to make their homes and raise their children on an Island in Puget Sound. Most of the old homes and business buildings in Oak Harbor were products of the Nienhuis mill, a business sorely needed in those turn-of-the-century days.

Today six generations of Nienhuises have lived on Whidbey Island, all taking an active part in community and business affairs.

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Fires Changed the Face of Oak Harbor

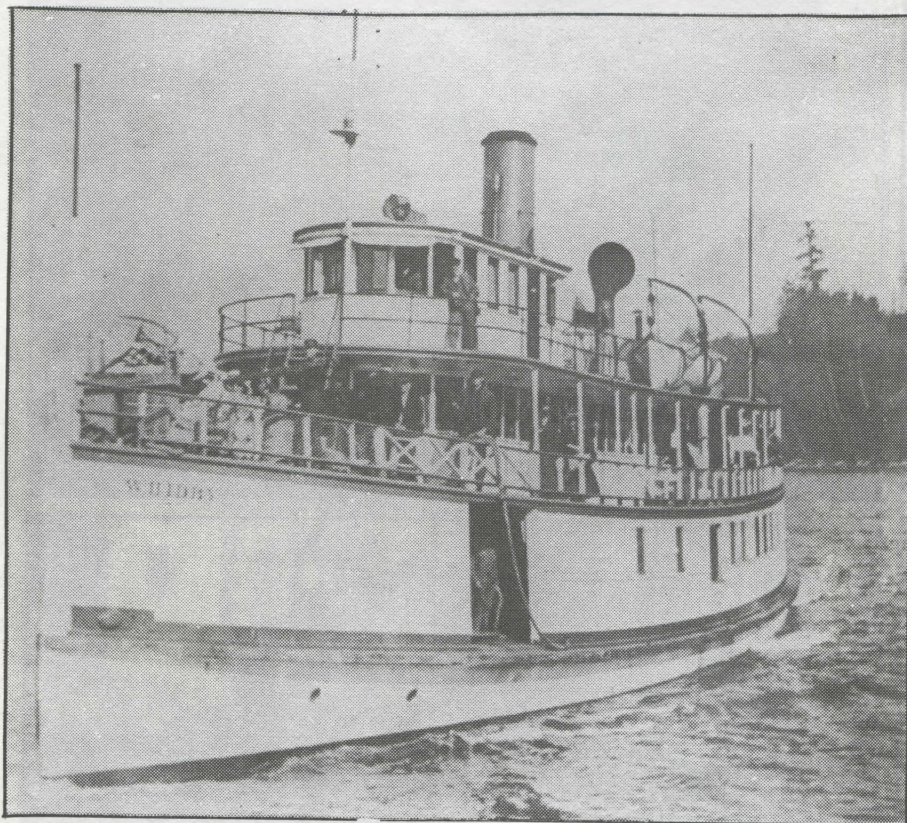
Oak Harbor, in its 130-some years of history, has experienced several disastrous fires, among them the burning of the steamer Whidbey, whose blackened hulk lay for years across the bay on Maylor's Point; the big fire of 1920 when most the town's businesses and many of its homes burned to the ground; the large three-story Odd Fellows Hall that burned on an icy night in the early 1950s when the water froze in fire hoses during an unusual cold spell; and the arson fire that burned the newly-built Methodist Church to the ground about 15 years ago.

There were other fires, of course, one that comes to mind is the Playhouse in 1973, and then there was the great dock fire that lit up the sky for miles one October night in 1966.

C. B. Hunt told about the Whidbey's burning around 1908.

He had come to Oak Harbor on business, and he had a friend who had been living on the beach. This friend offered him hospitality, which Hunt accepted.

The two campers had a close-up view of the burning boat. The fire started while Whidbey was tied up at the dock. When the fire got out of control, they cut it loose and the blazing boat drifted toward the marsh area formed between Maylor's Point and the "crooked spit," directly across the bay from the town, where it burned itself out.



Steamer "Whidbey" in its hey-day, a popular passenger and freight boat that linked the Island with Seattle and Everett.

The charred hulk lay on the beach undisturbed except for children playing for many years until the Navy built the bulkhead from the spit to the Point and filled in the area.

Fire in those days, was especially terrifying as water was scarce and there was no organized fire department. Such was the case when, one hot summer afternoon, a spark from the forge of Gil Kennedy's blacksmith shop ignited a fire that burned out half the town.

At the cry "Fire!" everyone in the little town raced to the

scene, and a bucket brigade from the old creamery and from Alfred Maylor's house was formed. The pitiful water supply proved inadequate from the start, and before the fire burned itself out, the Byrne Hotel and Byrne Store, on opposite sides of the street (Pioneer Way and Midway) were gone along with the blacksmith's shop, "Dad" Smith's house, the old cooperative creamery, and "Cap" Sill's garage which had formerly housed Oak Harbor's first high school classes.

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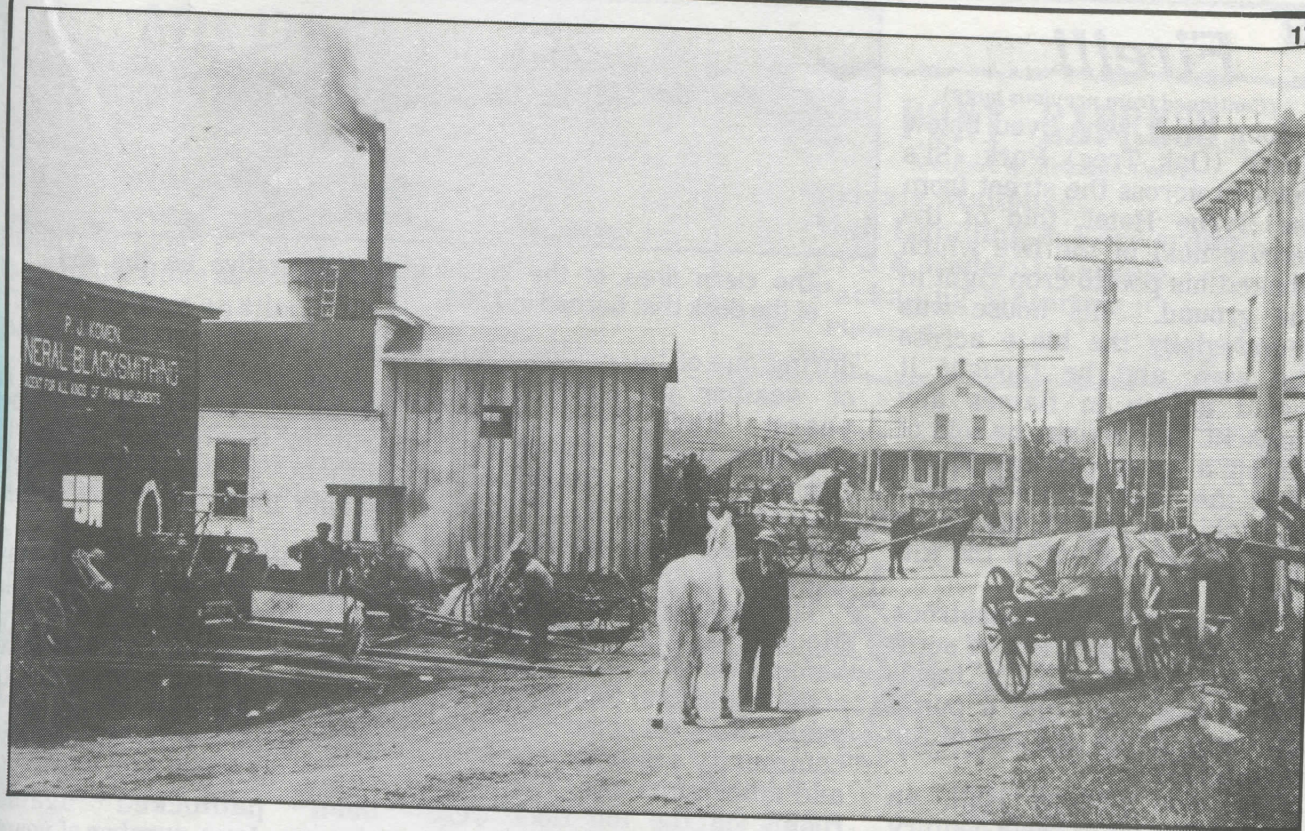
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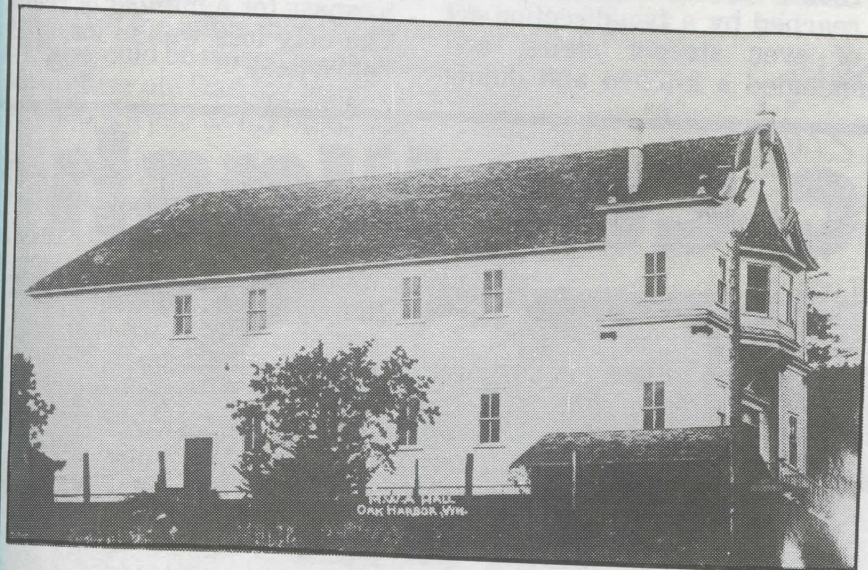
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(Above) Oak Harbor's business district before it burned on July 9, 1920. The fire started in the blacksmith shop and before it burned itself out, despite a hastily organized "bucket brigade," the creamery, McCrohan Hotel and Byrne's store and hotel, burned to the ground along with the Byrne warehouse and several homes.

(Left) The Odd Fellows Hall, which burned unimpeded on a cold night in the 1950s because the hoses were frozen, was the community center for many years, built originally as the Modern Woodmen's Hall.

(Below) Graveyard of the Whidby on Maylor's Point where the blazing boat drifted after being cut loose from the dock. It was a favorite play place for kids until the Navy came.



Fire!!!

(Continued from previous page)

John Draft, who lived below Smith (Oak Tree) Park (Si's Corner) across the street from the Byrne Hotel, told of the terrific heat of the fire which "baked his potato crop right in the ground." His house was scorched by the blaze across the way, and he thought it would go up in flames any moment. In his fear, he told of pulling a heavy cast-iron range from the house all by himself, and told how later it took four men to put it back in the kitchen.

Soon after this disastrous fire, a fire department of sorts was organized, with a hand-drawn hose cart and a pump stationed on the bay side of the main street.

The Odd Fellows Hall, an outstanding bit of early century architecture, burned to the ground in the 1950s in a spectacular fire which occurred




The clean lines of the Washington Cooperative on the end of the dock that burned in 1966.

during one of the coldest spells of weather recorded in late years. The large frame structure was destroyed while firemen battled frozen hose lines and near zero temperatures in the middle of the night.

The hall had been built by Modern Woodmen of America before World War I, had steep steps to the first floor which for years had housed all the community's dances, smokers, and entertainments. The lodge rooms on the top floor were reached by a two-direction set of even steeper stairs, and included a kitchen and dining

room.

Loss of the big hall was a distinct catastrophe to the growing community, leaving it without a big enough community gathering place to this day.

The dock fire, on a Saturday night in October 1966, while spectacular and disastrous as far as losing an old landmark, was probably the least loss to the town of the four "big fires." The dock warehouse was empty, and the dock itself had been padlocked against trespass for a number of years. The only loss was in losing an "old friend." 

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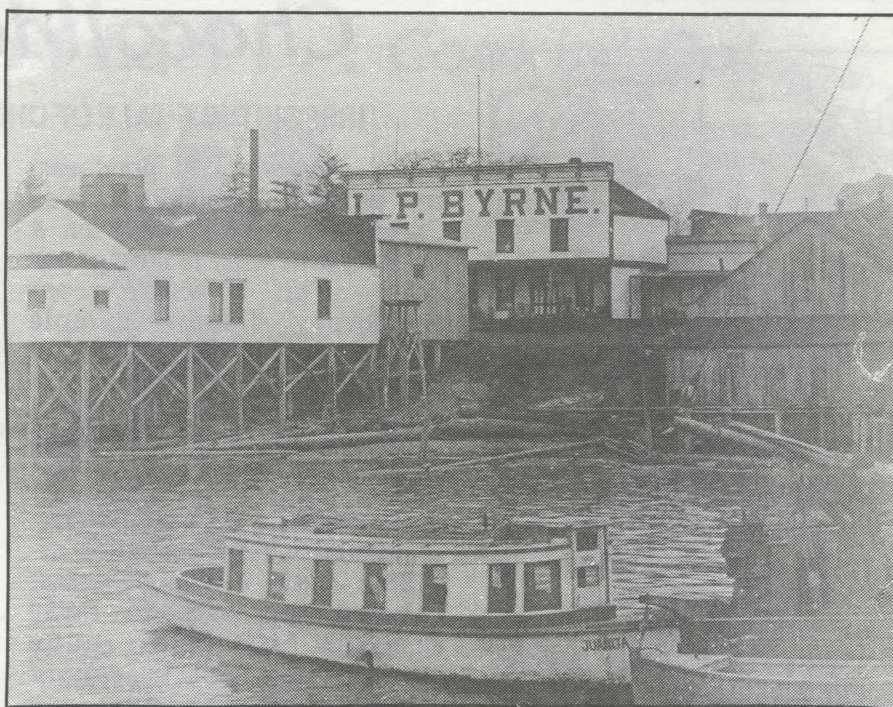
By Dorothy O'Neil

Spring is a good time to set the record straight. Oak Harbor was NOT settled "in the beginning" by the Dutch! It was the Irish, b'gorra, who came as pioneers in the 1850s to leave their mark on Whidbey Island, to pioneer in trading posts, farming, and to take part in the various phases of government in the new country.

The Maylors came first, two brothers who took what is still called Maylor's Point for their homes. For nearly 100 years they farmed it and when the Navy took over in 1940, two Maylor brothers still farmed there: Randolph (Haley) and Ted. Their children and grandchildren live in Oak Harbor.

For over 85 years the Maylor Store (now Radio Shack) served Oak Harbor. In its latter years mostly hardware, it originally was a pioneer "country store," carrying everything from farm implements to groceries.

Captains Ed Barrington, George Morse and Jonathan Adams were seafaring men who settled here to raise large families and who contributed greatly to government leadership in pioneer days. Barrington and Morse both married into the McCrohan family, a strong Irish clan who came from Ireland to Whidbey via Australia.



The town that burned in 1920 . . . L. P. Byrne came from Ireland to help build the town of Oak Harbor. He married Katie Nunan; their grandson Paul Allen still lives in Oak Harbor.

Arriving with the McCrohans was the David O'Leary family, with three little boys. O'Leary was drowned in a canoe accident a few years after arrival here, and his widow, Mary McCrohan O'Leary married Captain Morse. Morse and O'Leary family descendants still live in Oak Harbor, keeping an eye on the old Pioneer Cemetery (off 80th N.W.) where many of the early Irish are buried.

The Nunan family came with two boys, and altogether they added 10 native Islanders to the rolls. Nunan carried the U.S. Mail from Coupeville to Oak Harbor by horseback when there was only a trail through

the woods between the two towns.

Margaret McCrohan married Raphael Brunn, and Christine McCrohan married Captain Barrington. Their Barrington boys became famed in Alaska in Yukon days as steamboat men.

Barrington and a partner, Phillips, established an early trading post at Oak Harbor. The captain hired Indians to raise potatoes for sale in San Francisco, built a ship here, the *Growler*, and acted as judge and jury among the Indians, with whom his large stature and loud voice was law.

Another Irish businessman, in the late 1880s and 1890s, was L. P. Byrne, who did his best to put Oak Harbor on the map as a town. He owned a plush hotel-resort, a wharf, a livery stable, and a 2-story warehouse where the first Oak Harbor High School held classes in an upper room. Byrne married Katie Nunan and built one of the finest homes in the area, still standing just above Oak Tree Park on Midway Blvd.

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