

Interview with Gus Reuble of Coupeville, WA

By Roger Sherman

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Roger-----What I'm mainly interested in; I'm writing a maritime history so what I'm interested in is the old boats, ah, anything to do with the Chinese, the smuggling, stuff like that.

Gus----You got me there.

Q-Roger---Well now lets start at the beginning, you're how old now?

A-Gus---91, next month on the 17th.

Q-Roger---Now, were you born here?

A-Gus---That's right, out in the lighthouse at Fort Casey.

Q-Roger---Was your dad the keeper at that time?

A-Gus---He kept the lighthouse, they gave him that for quarters. He was the blacksmith at that time. In those days there were no cars or trucks, everything was done with mules and horses and he kept the shoes on those animals. Maybe I ought to start back why I'm here, how come I got here. My dad was born and raised in Germany. My grandmother died and my grandfather remarried and he married, I guess, a woman to care for his kids and she was real cruel and mean to them and would not give them enough to eat. She had three kids, my oldest uncle, he was Carl and then my dad, Gustof and then my aunt Anna and so my oldest uncle, he saved enough money to come to America. He got a job right away working for a doctor, taking care---in those days his office went from house to house with a horse and buggy and he was on duty 24 hours a day, and my uncle's job was to get that horse ready, to take care of the horse, sometimes at midnight or any time during the night he would have to drive the doctor to where he had to go. He might put the horse in the barn and 15 minutes latter, another call and he would have to go. But anyhow, he saved his money and sent over to Germany and my dad came over. Well, my dad couldn't speak a word of English so he didn't know what to do. He joined the American Army. Just as soon as he joined the Army, he became an American citizen. Then he went to the Philippines. The Spanish-American war was on and of course he wasn't much good in the Army there so they had a Quartermaster Corps that took care of the horses and mules and one thing another, carting things around. When the war was over, he stayed over there and he learned the blacksmith trade, shoeing of mules and horses. While he was over there, learning the trade, he got word from Germany if he wanted to see his dad once more, to hurry up and get back home. So, he caught the first boat out of the Philippines to Germany. Of course, in those days, the boats were slow

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and there wasn't very many of them and it took him a month to get from the Philippines to Germany. Two days before he got there, they buried his dad. He never got to see him. Well, he felt bad about spending the money going over there and doing all that. I can understand that, but he knew my mother and knew my mothers folks that went to the same school. And he went over there one evening to visit with them and he said to my mother 'Regee (????spelling), would you like to go to America?' She said, 'I sure would.' No love affair or anything like that. They got married, came over to this country and they landed in Massachusetts and they tell me that's where I was conceived. Then he put his feelers out to get a job as a blacksmith. So he got the call here at Fort Casey. And of course they got here and they gave him quarters and moved them in the lighthouse. In those days----

Q-Roger---Was he a blacksmith for the fort then?

A-Gus---For the Fort, yeah.

Q-Roger---But he wasn't in the Army?

A-Gus---No, not then, he was civil service. Anyhow, he was there for, I don't know how long, but for some reason or other, he moved out. It was either too much for him to take care of the lighthouse and do the blacksmith work or what, and he moved but they gave him more quarters down by the sand spit. You know where that is, down there by where the ferry landing is? I don't know exactly where it was because I was too young at this time. Then they moved up there-----

Q-Roger---When would that have been when he was the lighthouse keeper? What would the date have been?

A-Gus---I was born in 1908.

Q-Roger---The present lighthouse was built around the turn of the century wasn't it? I can look it up.

A-Gus---It's not in this lighthouse, Roger, it's the old lighthouse. It was set down below. I delivered milk to that place with horse and wagon. Dad had a milk route out there. And I delivered milk to the old lighthouse. They tore it down and Sergeant Ernst out at Fort Casey, he retired and he moved out to Austin and he tore it down for the lumber. I can remember that real well.

Q-Roger---I can look it up and see when it was built. I know that grandpa LeSourd helped haul gravel for it when it was being built. A horse and team and wagon.

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A-Gus---Yeah, they got the gravel off the beach, probably. I've hauled gravel off the beach when dad's barn was built up here, with team and wagon. Anyhow, here we are, a lot of water under the bridge.

Q-Roger---Well, now you being one of the farmers here and most of the old farmers used to go over to the old co-op dock in Oak Harbor to pick up their feed and stuff. Did you do that for the dairy?

A-Gus---No---I got my feed from Hansen and Peterson. I was the first person, delivered the first load, they had the mill over there. They made the mash and one thing another, the feed for the cows and they had a truck and they put it in the barn for me. We had an overhead bin up there and they filled that up. They came over a couple of times a month. I was the first load he unloaded over here on Whidbey Island.

Q-Roger---Ok, so you never dealt with the old Washington Co-op then out on the dock?

A-Gus---No, never did.

Q-Roger---Now, in the, way back when, before the ferries and stuff, the only way you got on and off the island was the old steamers. Do you remember those boats at all?

A-Gus---I remember the old Thomas that came in from Fort Warden. See, they had three forts, Ford Warden, Fort Flagler and Fort Casey and they made that round everyday or every other day or whatever it was, they brought the groceries and food over for the soldiers out here at the Fort. And that was hauled from there to the commissary or to the quarters where the soldiers lived. That was all done with mules and a wagon. I remember that like yesterday. And they had about 30 mules out there. That means about 15 teams of mules. And they had six or eight horses out there and they pulled a wagon of, kind of a buggy affair, that the officers rode in. When the officers wives wanted to go to town like to Coupeville or anything like that, or go visit, they would just call the stables out there and they would send a driver and haul them wherever they wanted to go. Just hook the horses up.

Q-Roger---Did they use all mules?

A-Gus---Mules and horses.

Q-Roger---They did have horses there too?

A-Gus---Oh yeah. The horses were for what they called the glass wagon. It was an enclosed wagon.

Q-Roger---And that's the one that the officers used?

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A-Gus---The officers wives---yeah.

Q-Roger---Ok, now the Thomas, ah, I'll have to look that one up. Was it the Thomas or the Thompkins?

A-Gus---The Thomas as I remember it. There was a little boat, L35 I think the name of it was that came and made the run every once in awhile. It was just a small boat with a little cabin on it and I remember that. And I remember going across when I was a kid, rough and I got sea sick and I vomited all over the place. I can remember that. Those boats, I don't know how often, but they'd take us clear into Seattle to go shopping. Dad worked civil service and he'd get a pass. It didn't cost nothing, just have a pass to get on and take you to Seattle and do your shopping. It would wait there for a couple of three or four hours and come back again. I remember the mine layer but I forgot the name of it though.

Q-Roger---They had boats that would tow targets.

A-Gus---That's right. I can remember dad's shop---You know that long building before you make the turn to go up the hill on the left hand side with big doors in front. That was the blacksmith shop. Then there was the, ah, a carpenter shop and then in the other end there was a plumbers shop. There was three shops there in that one building. They were all divided, had their own key so they could get in and out. I could stand there, at the door of the blacksmith shop and see out on the water and I could see those boats dragging those targets around and I could see where they were shooting and how close they would come to them. You could see the splash in the water you know. I used to have a lot of fun when I was a kid.

Q-Roger---There's supposed to have been one of those boats that had the stack shot off.

A-Gus---I don't remember that.

Q-Roger---Do you remember any of the steamers on the other side. Did you ever take the Atalanta?

A-Gus---Atalanta, Calista. Oh there was two or three more. But I never took-----I think once I took that route with my dad or mother. I forgot which it was. Dad was always connected with the fort. And he always took the----And it didn't cost him anything going that way either, an army boat. I can remember hauling-----See I graduated in 28. And still there weren't to many trucks and one thing another around and I can remember hauling potatoes and I can remember hauling wood down to the dock. They put that wood----They hauled it someplace put it on the boat and the potatoes and things like that, hauled it down with the wagon. Unloaded it in there. I can remember that real well. I went to work for Jut Hancock. He was a fine man. I liked him. He----I worked the horses for him. He had an old tractor and did some of the tractor work. I did a lot of the plowing

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for him, harrowing and planting with the horses. He did the disking, mostly with the old tractor.

Q-Roger----How come your dad didn't make you help him? Your dad started the dairy here didn't he?

A-Gus----Yeah. I milked cows before I went to work and milked cows when I got home at night.

Q-Roger----You worked a long day then?

A-Gus----A long day.

Q-Roger----Ok, now tell me, when you have a team of horses out on the Coueville Wharf, how did you turn that thing around?

A-Gus----We'd go into the dock, inside the building and that wasn't easy. You had just about so much room to do it. You had to be able to control your horses and old Elmer Calhoun he was right there and if the horse didn't want to stop, he would grab it by the bit and hold them. He helped me get them turned around. Oh yeah.

Q-Roger----Yeah, cause I have a little trouble envisioning how they could back up a four wheel wagon.

A-Gus----It wasn't easy. You got to know what you're doing. But I grew up with horses and broke horses and one thing another. I was a horse nut and I still love horses. My favorite animal is a good horse. You can't beat a good horse. Some of those horses are smarter than we are. That's not saying much either. Laughter----

Q-Roger----You're geared more to this side, to the west side of the island, than the other side then, so?

A-Gus----Yeah, I never went to Oak Harbor, that was too far away.

Q-Roger----It's funny, that being a farmer you didn't deal with the co-op.

A-Gus----No, never did.

Q-Roger----Of course, dad was in the poultry business so that's where he got all of his feed. He hauled it all from the co-op dock for years. Did you ever go to the water festival.?

A-Gus----Yeah, I went there once or twice.

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Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about it?

A-Gus----No except I had a good time. I remember that I used to love to watch those canoe races. The Indians would race one another out there in the bay out there. You could see those guys, how they worked, how they worked together, it was fun to watch them. They really knew their business some of those guys.

Q-Roger----Do you ever remember going off the Island before the Deception Pass bridge was built? Remember the Deception Pass ferry over there?

A-Gus----Yeah.

Q-Roger----Do you remember any details on that? I heard that it was a barge for awhile.

A-Gus----It was just a barge and had a little tug pushing on the side.

Q-Roger----The tug was tied to it then?

A-Gus----Yeah, and if you wanted to go across, there was a pole up there with a flag. It only hauled two or three cars, that's all they hauled and if you were just there by yourself they'd come across. I don't remember what they charged, it was very little charge for going across and coming back the boat and barge generally stayed on the other side, not on this side. Anyway, I can remember that real well. There was one or two guys running the whole show, I've forgotten how many, but it was interesting. You had these old cars, you had to be careful. You know, they were different than these new ones. It seemed like to me they steered different, they braked different, everything was different on them. You'd get on a tight place like that, it would make your hair stand up a little bit sometimes.

Q-Roger----I think then, later on, just before the bridge was built, I think that they had a regular boat. I think that they did away with that barge. Do you remember that? They had a boat called the Deception Pass.

A-Gus----I don't remember that.

Roger and Gus----We talked about the Oak Harbor-Utsalady ferry. Gus said he took it once or twice but couldn't remember any specifics. He thought it went in to Stanwood but wasn't sure. He couldn't remember where it landed on Whidbey but thought it was in the area of present day Mariners Cove. He said 'That's been so long ago, cobwebs are up there. I remember going across.'

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about the smuggling? Do you remember any stories about during prohibition when the Canadians were running liquor down here?

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A-Gus----I remember hearing them doing it, yeah. And they'd use that booze for the soldiers down here. I remember that part. I was too young, I wasn't interested in it, you know what I mean. I heard about it. I didn't see nothing when it was going on.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about the Chinese that used to live here?

A-Gus----Yeah, I can remember when I was a kid. We lived out on the reservation, you know, where you go out the other gate. There was a house up there and dad lived in that and he had a barn there and he milked cows there and he delivered milk out to Fort Casey at the time and to the right of that, Boyer's own it now, I think they still do, there's a shack in there, and a Chinaman lived in there and he was a nice old guy and came along the road one day and I pulled the wagon. I had a string around my neck and my sister was in the wagon. I was the horse. He grabbed a hold of that and said: 'Me take you home and make lisy.' I was so scart. He grinned and then he walked off. He was a nice old fella. They have those round nuts (leechy nuts?) and oh, were they good. Were they good. The Chinamen were good people. The Japs were pretty good too. They weren't that friendly, but they worked hard. We had Japs around here too. I can remember that.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about the fish traps?

A-Gus----The fish traps. Yeah---I remember there was a fish trap down here, you know where Lee's place is down there. There was one right out in there. And I went down there with a horse and buggy to get fish. I can remember going down there and they had little shacks where the fishermen stayed on the beach, on the land there, and they had what they called a dory and of course they rowed it and I went out to the trap with them. That water was deep out there, over my head. And you had to climb a ladder to get on top of the trap and I can remember them and in each corner they had a thing to reel the net up and they would scoop the fish out and put them into a barge or wherever they wanted them. They hauled them to Seattle mostly. Oodles and oodles of fish. I remember folks sent eggs and milk down there with me to give those guys that worked there and they would give me fish like that, great big fellas. Take three or four of them home. The fish were plentiful in those days. Anyhow, I enjoyed it. I think one of those fellas had a wife and some kids. What happened to those fish traps? Wilbur Sherman had a fish trap.

Q-Roger----I don't remember the year, but I think it was 1934 when the state outlawed them. Wilbur had only owned it for a couple of years, or something, so he lost quite a bit of money on that thing, but I don't know just where his trap was.

A-Gus--It was over there on West Beach. I remember the trap real well.

Q-Roger----Well, on West Beach, where was it, say for instance, from that little park there at the end of Libbey Road? Was it to the north?

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A-Gus----No, no, you know where Ebey's Landing is? Well, you know where that lake is over there, Parago's Lake? It was on this side of Parago's Lake. That's where the trap was.

Q-Roger----They had another one at Ebey's Landing. I have a picture of that.

A-Gus----I think there was, I think there was two traps out there. I never was out in them, but I remember seeing them there.

Q-Roger----Can you think of any stories when you used to ride the boats out there at Fort Casey, other than getting sea sick?

A-Gus----I remember, I used to didn't want to go because I got sea sick every time, it seemed like. Yeah, I remember my dad took me on the boats to Seattle and took me to a doctor over there and they had my tonsils, adenoids taken out, I can remember that. And I can remember I was upstairs and I had to come down a flight of stairs and I started heaving and I heaved blood all over the place. Poor old dad, I don't know how he cleaned it up or what he did. I don't know what happened. I was sick as a dog coming home on that boat. I've been through the mill.

Gus and Roger----talked about farming for awhile.

Gus----You know, I worked for your grandpa for quite awhile. In those days we did a lot of work with the horses. I drove horses for him there. I plowed a lot of that land with the horses. He had a tractor. He ran the tractor and did this or did that. He did most of his disking with it or whatever he did and some plowing too, I think. But I've been over that ground. I worked for Freeman Boyer, I worked for Jut Hancock and I worked for John LeSourd. I got out of high school in 28 and I worked for a couple of years. And I learned the farming business from those three guys and I watched how they did and what they did and why they did it and they were all good men to work for. If I asked a question, they were patient and told me why and how this and that. That's how I got my education. And I respect those guys, all three of them. Jut Hancock liked to travel. And he'd say, all right, take care of things. I'd plow that field and when I'd get done, I'd do another field. I had to go over there and feed the horses and curry them and harness them and go out and plow. I walked across the fields. I didn't have a car at that time. I walked so much behind those horses, coming home, it felt good to run, different stride. Now that sound silly, but it's the truth. It felt good to run.

Q-Roger---You had to keep that plow going the right direction. Wasn't that real hard physical work?

A-Gus----No. You had your plow set and one horse walked in the furrow and he steered it for you. If you hit a rock or something like that, then it threw it off and you had to put it back in again and stop them. You had the lines around your back and you just pulled

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back and hollered whoa and they'd stop. Then you'd get the plow in shape and away you'd go again.

Q-Roger----Now this place here, did you buy this or did your dad start this farm?

A-Gus----My dad never had anything to do with it, no. I rented it from Ole Declispi???? And I farmed it with horses for three or four years and of course, I cleared most of that land. All that upper side up there. Your grandpa used to farm this when he lived on Smith Prairie up here. Anyhow, he worked with the horses all day too. I think he took them home every night. He hooked them onto a wagon and took them up the hill. Old John LeSourd was a good man. He was one of the best men---He's what I call a Christian. He used to, when I was married, come to our place and have dinner after church. When he got older, he says 'you know why I go to church?' I don't hear a word, but I go to church to show people who's side I'm on. I'll never forget that. He got pretty deaf.

Q-Roger----Well, did you build this house down below the road and the barn.

A-Gus----I built the barn and your dad came out and modeled his barn after mine. And the same fellow that built my barn built his, Ralph Strong and Warren Stockton.

Q-Roger----What kind of a tractor did you have, your first one?

A-Gus----The first one was a ford, a fordson. Every time I wanted to get it started, I had to get a mechanic to start it for me. I got rid of that and got into John Deeres.

Q-Roger----So when would you have gotten your first John Deere?

A-Gus----Oh boy, oh boy, I got married in 32, I imagine around 30, around there someplace, I don't know exactly.

This was not the end of the tape. Gus talked about what became of his place. Sort of sad. This tape is available to borrow if anyone wants to hear the "rest of the story."