

# Whidbey SPINDRIFT

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*Mobile Whitehead  
Pearl Hayes*

"WHIDBEY WAGONS" A FRIENDLY GROUP OF TRAILERISTS  
PICTURED AT OAK HARBOR'S BEACH PARK FOR A CAREFREE  
WEEKEND DURING A SUMMER CELEBRATION.

WHIDBEY SPINDRIFT  
THE ONLY MAGAZINE THAT REALLY CARES  
ABOUT ISLANDERS



## HISTORY MARKED BY EARLY DAY TRAGEDY IN 1863

Oak Harbor's first families were largely Irish, not Dutch. The Dutch migration came later.

In 1858 Francis McCrohan brought his big family of five boys and four girls to Oak Harbor from Australia. The boys were Ned, Tom, Francis, Michael and David; the girls Margaret, Mary, Elizabeth and Christina.

Margaret married Raphael Brunn; Elizabeth, Tom Nunan; Mary, Maurice O'Leary and later, Capt. George Morse and Christina, Ed Barrington.

Descendants of the O'Leary, Morse, Barrington, Nunan and McCrohan families are still numerous on Whidbey.

The hard existence of our early settlers was often marked by tragedy, and in 1863 the little community of Oak Harbor suffered the loss of four of its members in one catastrophe.

It began when an auction sale of household goods was held at Penn's Cove (Coveland). Household articles such as furniture and cooking utensils, were much needed by the pioneer mother, and Mrs. McCrohan, her son David, and son-in-law Maurice O'Leary, with Ulrich Freund, one of our first three settlers, hired an Indian with a good canoe to take them to the Penn Cove auction.

Mrs. McCrohan bought a number of articles, among them several pieces of furniture. Freund objected to riding home, saying the canoe was badly overloaded. He had bought only a small wall mirror at the auction, and decided to walk home through the woods, with his purchase.

The overloaded canoe rounded Blower's Bluff (Scenic Heights) when a sudden squall arose, capsizing the canoe.

The Indian was reputed to be an excellent swimmer, the most powerful of his tribe, but he did not save himself or any of his party.

The next day, when a searching party set out, they found them all drowned, on the beach. They told how the Indian was found, crouched on hands and knees on the tidelands as though attempting to crawl to safety.

The little settlement was stunned. Mary McCrohan O'Leary was bereft of mother, brother and husband, and left with two small boys to raise.

Ulrich Freund, whose intuition saved his life, did not hear of the tragedy until the next day, to realize how closely he had come to sharing the fate of the four.

The victims of the tragedy were buried, the first in a small cemetery northwest of Oak Harbor, where since many members of the McCrohan, Barrington, Morse, O'Leary and Nunan families were laid to rest.

As the families still gather each year at the little cemetery park for a reunion, the story is remembered how Mrs. McCrohan, walking with a daughter near this site only shortly before the tragedy, stopped beneath a small tree and said, "I want to be buried here".

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In 1853, Walter Crockett, whose claim was located near Fort Casey wrote to a friend in Virginia, "... I would be glad if you would enclose a quantity of apple seeds...if I can get seeds I can raise my own stocks and get slips from my neighbors.... I can raise a fine orchard".

Crockett also complained of the Fenen, or common fern, and mentioned the Camas, favorite food of the Indians, which, he said had a bulb like an onion.

The Camas grows wild on Whidbey, having a sheaf of bright blue lily-like flowers in May.