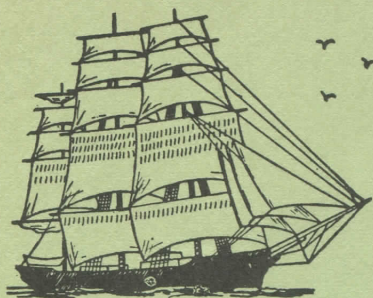


Wynne R. Wheeler

APRIL
WHIDBEY
Spindrift
1966



HISTORY—WHIDBEY DESTINATION OF "MERCER GIRL" . . .



Just as shiploads of English women went to Virginia to help settle the new colonies in the early days of our nation; and as shiploads of French women sailed for Montreal to take part in the pioneer life of Canada, so through the efforts of one man, Asa S. Mercer, came 53 women including 39 single women to Puget Sound to become teachers, dressmakers, housekeepers, and finally wives and mothers in this new land. Only one of them did not marry.

In 1834 the cotton mills of the South had shut down because of the war, and work in the New England states was scarce as a result. When Asa Mercer finally chartered a government transport, the Continental, the first of an adventurous band of young women — ten in all — agreed to come west when men made up the population and were not at all happy about it.

In 1864 the first party left New York Harbor for the four month and one week journey through the Panama Canal to San Francisco and then on to Puget Sound. From San Francisco they came by way of the lumber schooners whose crews were glad to have feminine company on the return trip.

One can imagine how the young settlements on Puget Sound welcomed the young women from the East. One can also imagine with what trepidation the young women disembarked in this wild wild west that was to become their homes; among savage Indians, woodsmen, hunters and disappointed gold-seekers and adventurers.

"Receptions" were given for Mercer's "girls" and the little log cabins of pioneers were packed with curious and admiring people. It was said the men stood outside the filled cabins, seeking a glimpse of the new additions to the population through the tiny windows.

All of them obtained schools to teach (the unmarried ones) and later still all of them married with the exception of one.

Flora Pearson Engle of Coupeville came with father, mother, sister and brother on one of Asa Mercer's ships. She taught music on Whidbey Island and married Will Engle, one of Whidbey Island's earliest pioneers. A fourth and fifth generation of Engles still live on Whidbey Island, grandchildren of Whidbey Island's "Mercer Girl."

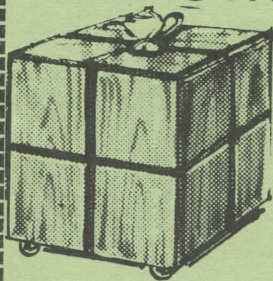
Flora Pearson Engle was said to have remarked upon her arrival on Whidbey Island that "it is so beautiful that I only have one step to take to get to Heaven."

Those who came to Puget Sound aboard Asa Mercer's ships numbered an even 100 — five childless couples, six couples each with one son, two couples with two or three children, three widows, one woman with three children coming to join her husband, 36 single women and 14 single men.

The rigors of shipboard, with scarce food and that of a poor quality, were soon forgotten with the rigors of everyday pioneer life to cope with. But Asa Mercer will always be remembered as the man who brought the "Mercer Girls" to Puget Sound.

∞

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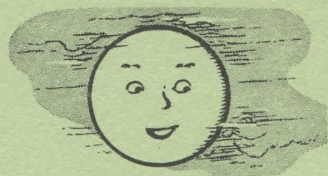
West Pioneer Way

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EARLY DAY INDIANS

In the early 1850's when the white men first came to Whidbey Island they found Indians whose sole costume consisted of a single blanket, preferably a red one. These had been obtained from the Hudson Bay Trading Co. Sometimes a hard wash-bowl type of hat made of reeds was worn, similar to the oriental type of hat.

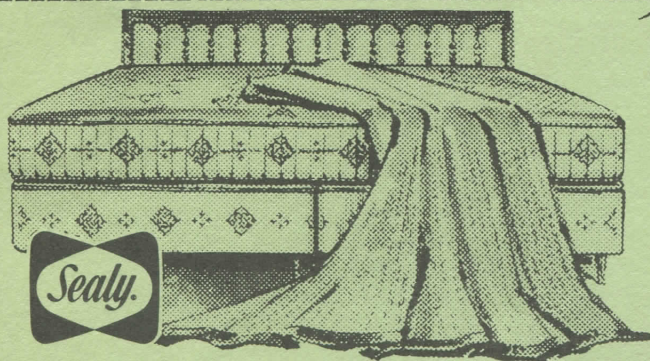
The Indians here were never a prolific race. They knew of herbs that prevented pregnancy or caused abortion, and their families were "planned." When a squaw was about to give birth, she waded out into the cold salt water and remained there until the "tenas man" or "tenas Klootchman" was born. Almost immediately the baby's head was placed between two bags of sand held in place by boards. When the head became a perfect slant back to the crown, the Indian was regarded as a member of the Flathead Tribe. Thus an adult Indian's head was unusually broad, and after the white men arrived, the Indians took to wearing the white man's hat, but the hat always appeared to be on sideways. Later when they adopted more fully the white man's customs, flattening the heads of babies was abandoned.



MOON MONTHS

Indians, like many primitive people, based their calendars on the moon. The month was usually from the time one new moon was seen until the next one came into view. Various lunar months are as follows: January, snow moon; February, hunger moon; March, awakening moon; April, grass moon; June, rose moon; September, harvest moon; October, falling leaf moon; December, long-night moon. Three names of our months are missing.

For Whidbey Island we can supply the following omitted moon-months: May, rhododendron moon; July, barbecue moon; August, vacation moon.



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Melvin Sez:



"It's April! When The Green returns To The Internal Revenue Service"

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