

Island's first schools

In 1855, Whidbey Island's first school was built. It was the same year the courthouse at Penn's Cove was built. The school was a log house with an enormous rock fireplace built on Smith's Prairie and taught by Schoolmaster Lyle, who also made the log structure his home. The settlers were assessed \$2.50 per month for each child. Schoolmasters at that time received from \$25 to \$75 per month which was considered liberal wages.

In 1857 Winfield Ebey was elected School Superintendent, and four districts were organized.

In the fall of 1859, Oak Harbor School District was organized with 20 students. During the first years, school was generally held only during the summer months, as wintertime presented many

problems due to weather and lack of transportation.

The 1860's brought increasing numbers of settlers and in the year 1865 there were 129 pupils on Whidbey. There were four schoolhouses in 1867 and four teachers on the public payroll!

The teachers were John Sewell, Frank Miller, Ulrich Freund, one of Oak Harbor's first three settlers, and E. B. Ebey.

It was the custom up into the 1890s for two or three families to employ a teacher for children whose homes were distant from the schools. The teacher lived with one of the families.

The progress of the educational life of the Island was marked by the establishment of The Acad-

emy by the Congregationalists in 1886. The Puget Sound Academy as it was known, was a prep school that boasted of the ability to prepare students for any college in the U.S.!

The Academy, under the Rev. C. E. Newberry, was touted as "the only institution of higher learning north of Seattle." Newberry, a red bearded man with a booming voice, taught English, Latin, Greek, History, Psychology and Geometry to the sons and daughters of prominent families from all over Puget Sound at the boarding school.

On South Whidbey small community schools were established, and the first high school classes were held in the Kirk Lumber building at Langley. In 1915, new construction in Langley included both high and elementary classes. Oak Harbor's school on 700 Ave E. also included high school and elementary classes.


In 1916 Evelyn Spencer, then County Superintendent of Schools published the "Island Public School Journal," a 24 page, once-a-month newspaper for all the Island schools.

In the May 1917 issue, a story told of the hot lunches being prepared at San de Fuca and Mutiny Bay schools; the Coupeville school came in third in the state in debate; a garden club was formed by the Greenbank school; a cooking club by the Crescent Harbor school; and Oak Harbor High was installing a stage in the auditorium with labor by the manual training class.

Island County schools had come a long way from the log one-roofter built in the wilderness of Smith's Prairie!

Alice Kellogg Cahail of Anacortes was a historian to whom we owe much of the history of the Island area. Her father was Dr. Albert Kellogg, "The Canoe





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Doctor" who settled near what is today Fort Casey in the mid-1800s.

He built the first "hospital" on Whidbey, a log cabin structure to which he brought patients from all over Puget Sound. Many of his patients were loggers who had been injured in their work. Kellogg's wife oversaw the "hospital" and patients who improved were required to help other patients.

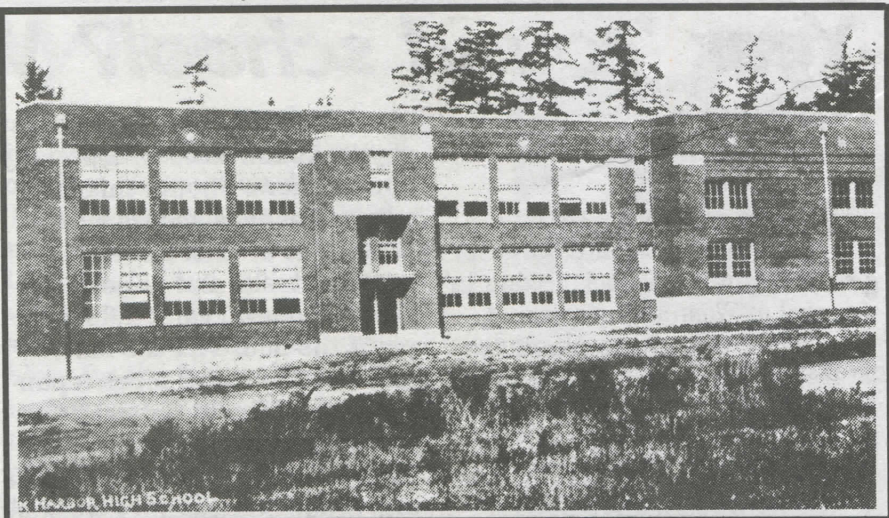
The years 1870 to 1890 brought settlers who cleared land and began farming. A "newcomer" wrote: "Much of this portion of Whidbey is the richest kind of prairie land and is now occupied by old sea captains who do not know too much about farming."

The change from sea captain to farmer must have been difficult, but the sea captains who came to Penn's Cove and surrounding areas such as Oak Harbor found that Whidbey was not just a place for making money but a delightful harbor in which to retire at the end of stormy years at sea.

Among the sea captain population were Captains Ed Barrington, James Henry Swift, Eli Hathaway, Robert Fay, George Bell, Thomas Coupe (for whom Coupeville is named), Samuel Libbey, H. B. Lovejoy, William Robertson and Richard Holbrook, George Morse and Captain Jonothan Adams. Many of the men serving aboard these ships also settled on the Island.

Schools were an item uppermost in the settlers' minds and a writer in a Seattle newspaper wrote: "Their common schools are well supported, paying their teachers \$25 to \$75 per month. But I am bound to state that the Superintendent is an old sea captain who doubtless has carried his vessel through many a storm but knows little about education in the common schools."

The sea captains, however, kept on whittling and commenting on education methods and one even



Oak Harbor's old new high school, built in 1935 by WPA labor, in its infancy. Part of Oak Harbor Elementary, it is now being renovated.

wrote East asking for more teachers who would conduct themselves with dignity. He protested against school teachers

who slid down straw stacks with their pupils at lunch hour and played kissing games with them in the evenings!

(S)

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Crescent Harbor chosen by first settlers

Crescent Harbor, so named for its lovely crescent-shaped beach, was settled by pioneers in the early 1850s, who were promised 640 acres of land under the Donation Claim Act. William Wallace was one of these settlers, having crossed the plains in 1845 with a party of immigrants to arrive at the Whitman Mission near Walla Walla just as winter set in. In the fall of 1846 the party went on to the west coast, narrowly escaping the massacre at the Whitman Mission.

Wallace met Col. Isaac N. Ebey at what is today Olympia, but at that early date was a small village named Smithfield, with only a few white men and many Indians.

The Wallace family was the only white family. Ebey had just located his claim on Whidbey Island and Wallace listened as Ebey told of the opportunities on this faraway Island in Puget

Sound. Wallace loaded his wife and small daughter Bessie, along with his few possessions into an Indian canoe and onto a small barge and set out for his "land of dreams."

Bessie Wallace later wrote of how she heard her parents tell of their visit at an Indian village on Elliott Bay (Seattle) and how kind and hospitable the Indian Chief was. Chief Seattle offered the little immigrant family all the land they wanted in the area of Elliott Bay if they would only stay! But Col. Ebey's glowing description of the Island to the north influenced Wallace to choose Whidbey. Col. Ebey had not as yet moved his family to Whidbey, and when the Wallace family arrived at Crescent Harbor, they were the first white family on all of North Whidbey.

Bessie Wallace, far from people, where church, schools and a social life were nonexistent, had a different view of this

new adventure and wrote that she always regretted that her father had refused the generous offers of Chief Seattle.

Bessie's sister, Polowna Wallace was the first white child born on Whidbey Island, on April 20, 1852, in the first frame house on Whidbey. While the Indian village on Elliott Bay was to grow more swiftly than Whidbey Island settlements, Wallace's decision to claim 640 acres bordering on a beautiful harbor made all the difference for the family.

There were only a few Indians in the Crescent Harbor area. The Skagits had a small settlement in Oak Harbor near the beach, and across the Cove in the Coupeville area was another sizeable village.

Wallace became a leader in those early days, welcoming other settlers to Crescent Harbor; Caleb Miller, who became Oak Harbor's first Postmaster;

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the Mounts brothers, James and Milton who each had 180 acres; Judge Chenoweth who in the 1850s found it took him two years to clear all the court cases on his docket; John Izett, boat builder; James Nesbit; James Buzby, who was given half the Wallace claim to bring his family to live on it; a settler by the name of Walker; George Washington Lafayette Allen, William Elmore, John Gould, Colonel Haller and many others in those promising days of the mid- century.

In 1853 Wallace brought W. B. Morse, a Methodist preacher to his home to preach to the Crescent Harbor community. In 1855 a schoolhouse was built on his property and church and other public gatherings were held there.

A Mr. Church came to Crescent Harbor and set up a small trading post near the beach. Church had a big brass watch and numerous glittering rings which he wore, perhaps to impress his contemporaries. The Indians were also impressed, and Church was murdered for his trinkets. This happening triggered the building of a blockhouse by Wallace for neighborhood protection, the only blockhouse north of the Coupeville and Ebey's Prairie areas.

"For protecting myself and family and my neighbors against the . . . Indians do hereby grant unto Caleb Miller, James Busby and F. A. Chenoweth in trust for the neighborhood a parcel of ground one half acre, the center of which is the center of the present blockhouse now standing near the residence of said Wallace to give and to hold said building and fixtures in trust for the use of the neighborhood for the period of five years. It is understood the 'neighborhood' is from Millers Point to George W.



A pioneer farm at Crescent Harbor. It's obvious that early settlers were much more interested in survival than in ecology . . . if indeed, they had ever heard of it!

Allen and Edward Barrington's (properties)" . . . signed and sealed Nov. 5, 1855 by William Wallace, witnessed by G. W. L. Allen and James H. Mounts.

The Crescent Harbor blockhouse was later used by settlers as a storehouse, and finally was torn down. Today much of Crescent Harbor is owned by the

Whidbey Naval Air Station, including the coastline between Maylor's (Forbes) Point and Miller's Point, a historic site cleared and planted in early days by settlers such as Wallace who chose an uninhabited Island north of Elliott Bay rather than acreage where the City of Seattle now stands. (S)



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