Spindrift Two

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Pioneer Coupeville Christmas

In the Island County Times of 1912, a local historian gave this account of the Christmas of 1863 in Coupeville:

*A*bout the middle of December a number of Whidbey Islanders were gathered at John Robertson's store, and one of the party suggested a dance for Christmas night. Assent was unanimous, and a committee went to talk to Captain and Mrs. Fay who had the hotel down the street, to see if they could furnish a midnight meal for the dance. John Alexander was appointed to take up contributions for expenses, and Mrs. Fay was agreeable to the supper, for a percentage of the ticket sales.

Almost everyone on Whidbey Island put their names on the list for donations, so it was decided not to charge at the door, but to let anyone come who wished.

The dance hall was upstairs in a building that had belonged to the county, but had been moved and annexed to the Central Hotel. The hall was big enough for three sets of quadrilles and plenty large for the occasion.

Christmas in 1863 came on a dark, cloudy day and there was no moon, so everyone came early during Christmas Day and a jolly crowd it was who attended the dance. All the fashions of the past 20 years were worn at the dance, and a newly-married couple, Hugh Crockett and his bride were present, their first appearance since their marriage.

Captain Fay was Probate Judge of Island County, and had officiated at the wedding, and it was said he received a quarter of beef in payment. It was also said that he owed Hugh, and after the ceremony they called it square!

About 7:30 p.m., the dancers began to arrive at the hall, and the writer (a lad of 16 at the time) did not have a lady to escort, so was very observant of the rest of the guests. One couple in particular drew his interest. They were past middle age, and the man was very lively on his feet, and without a bit of surplus flesh. The lady was heavier, and much slower on the dance floor. The writer identified them as Mr. and Mrs. George Gillespie, early day Coupevillians, as of course all the rest of the dancers were.

The dance orchestra consisted of a guitarist and violin player. Ben Pettygrove of Port Townsend was the violinist, occasionally "spelled" by Will Hastie.
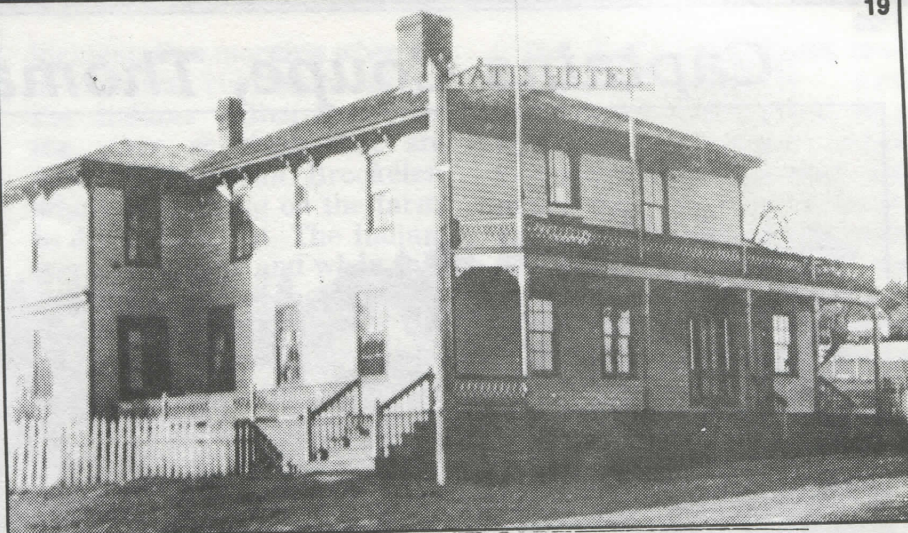
At midnight supper was announced. Captain Fay's was a large one-story building hewn of logs. The dining hall was large, with two tables running the length of the room. The excellent supper consisted of

Old State Hotel, scene of many Coupeville merriments.

roast chicken and mashed potatoes, and many cakes and pies.

After supper the men retired to have a smoke, then all went back to the dance hall. It was so dark that there was no thought of going home until daylight, consequently everyone danced to keep awake. When daylight came everyone left in their wagons and on horseback to

their various homes, well-pleased with the Christmas Dance.

Since that time the writer has attended many dances in that old hall, but none of them can come up to that one. It was the first dance he ever attended and the first time in his life he ever stayed up all night, therefore it made a lasting impression on his mind. ❄

Captains Coupe, Thomas and George
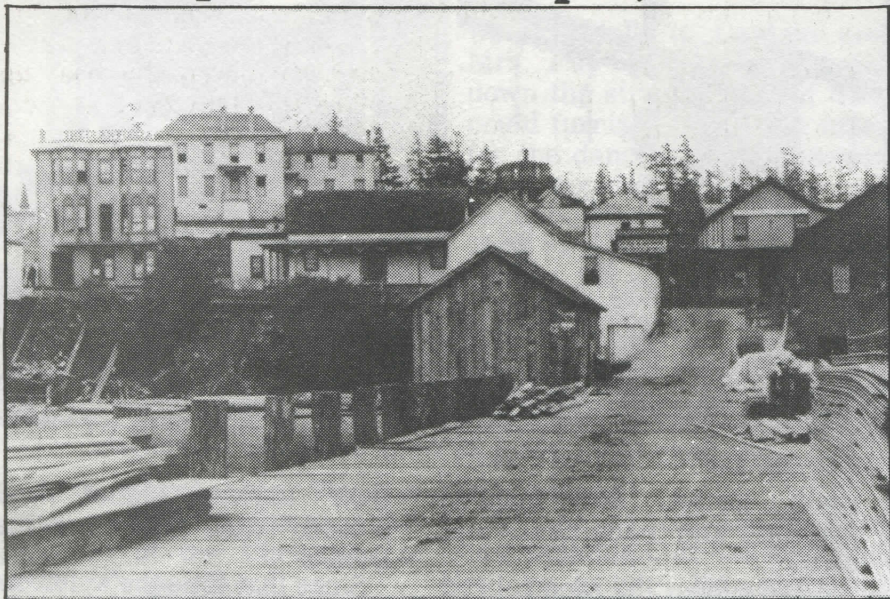
Coupeville from the dock in the days it was a bustling seaport town.

Captain Thomas Coupe, founder and namesake of Island County's county seat, was born on the Isle of Man in 1818. He married Maria White, a native of Bath, Maine, in 1840. The Captain sailed deep sea craft from New York and in 1852 sailed the schooner Rochester through the Straits of Magellan and on to San Francisco. There he bought an interest in the Bark *Success* and sailed her to Puget Sound for the pilings with which the wharves of San Francisco were being built.

In 1863, he settled with his family on Whidbey Island, telling his wife he would give up the sea if she would remain. In 1854 he built the second frame house on the Island. At Penn's Cove he not only got a cargo of piles, but also took up a claim of 320 acres on the northwest corner of which grew the town that would bear his name.

His wife and four children, Sarah E., William T., and George M. Coupe came around Cape Horn in 1853 in the Clipper Ship *Thomas Church* with Captain Martin at the helm. Coupe met his family at San Francisco and took them aboard the *Success* to their new home on Whidbey Island.

In 1854 he gave up command of the *Success* and accepted command of the topsail schooner, *Jefferson Davis*, the first United States revenue cruiser on Puget Sound.

Captain Thomas Coupe

Captain Coupe is remembered as the only captain who ever sailed a full-rigged ship through Deception Pass. One realizes the frustration of his wife when he did not give up the sea as he had promised, instead he went on to bigger and and bigger ships.
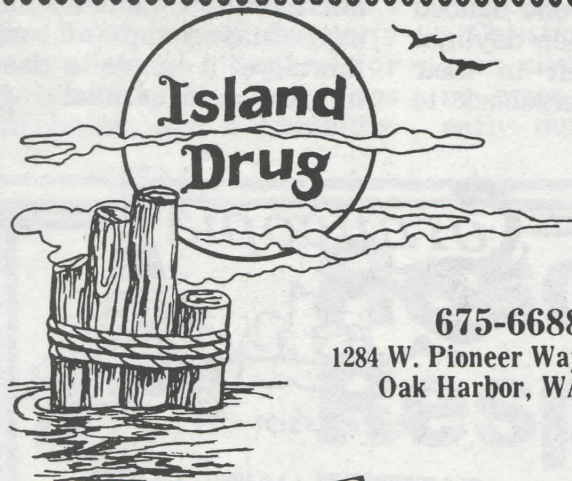
Coupe later operated a ferry route between Whidbey Island

and Port Townsend. He built three sloops, the *Mary Ellen,* the *Keturah* (named for his daughter), and the *Marie.* He never permitted anyone other than Captain Howard B. Lovejoy to pilot them. In the years 1855 and 1856 he made two trips to France carrying spars for the French government. His land claim, filed in 1852, became the present site of Coupeville.

Captain George Coupe was born in New York City on May 30, 1849. His recollections of Puget Sound date back to the age of four. His boyhood on the Whidbey Island farm had one memorable happening when on August 11, 1857, Colonel Isaac N. Ebey was murdered by the Northern Indians who cut off his head and took it away. George was 8 years old and attended the Ebey funeral with his father. The Ebey and Coupe homes were only three miles apart.

He remembered another incident. One morning when his mother was cooking breakfast the Indians gathered around the stove so thick that she asked Major Van Brockelen, who was working on the farm, to drive them out. The Indians were indignant, and when they got outside one of them pointed a gun at the door. Van Brockelen grabbed him by his hair and hurled him over a 15 foot bank.

When the Indian died about 20 years later, his relatives claimed his death was the result of his "fall" over the bank.

When in 1868, Captain Thomas Coupe launched the steamer *Success,* (named after his earlier boat), George became a deckhand on her, thus beginning a long career as a steamboat man. The steamer *Success* plied between Port Townsend and Ebey's Landing and the fare was $1 each way. Puget Sound fares were high, $20 being the rate from Victoria to Olympia.

The first United States mail between Seattle and Bellingham was carried in a rowboat. Captain Jack Cosgrove oared the boat and made the trip once a week. Later he commanded the side-wheeler *Mary Woodruff,* the first steamer to make the inside passage run from Seattle to Bellingham. Captain Cosgrove was kind to the Coupe boy and never charged him for fares or meals.
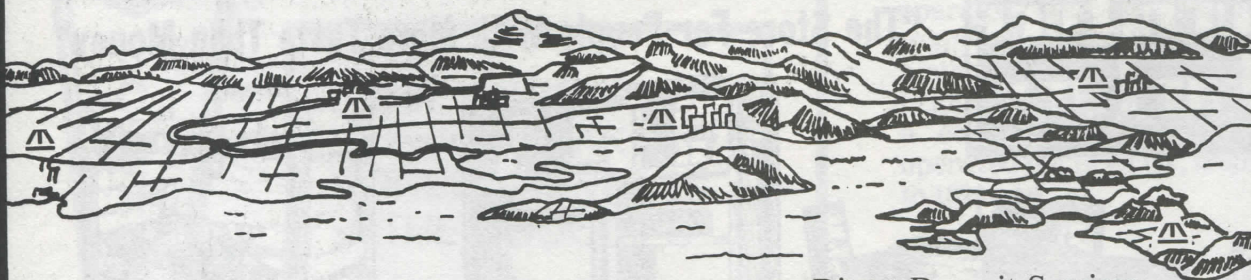
George Coupe worked on many boats around the Sound and when the Alaska Gold Rush came, he worked that run also. He was Purser of the steamship *Oregon,* and remembers that she earned $94,000 on her first voyage to Nome. The fares ranged from $75 to $125; freight was $40 a ton, $5 each for dogs, $1 a head for sheep and $30 a head for horses and cattle. George Coupe saw Seattle grow from a village to a big city. His last work was on the steamer *Tourist.* ❄

Birth of a County

When Whidbey Island observed its centennial birthday in 1953, the only "salute" to such a prestigious event was the Whidbey Island Cenntennial Supplement published by the Whidbey Press, covering the 100 years since the county was born.

Island was a county long before Washington became a state, mainly through the efforts of Colonel Isaac N. Ebey, representative to the Territorial Legislature from Thurston County. Created on January 6, 1853, the county at that time included what is now Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom and San Juan counties. County seat was at Coveland, the small settlement at the head of Penn's Cove.

The Olympia newspaper "Columbian" of January 22, 1853, reported: "Three cheers for Colonel Ebey. Our talented and untiring representative in the House, Col. I. N. Ebey has been wide awake to the interests of his district during the present session of the Legislature and certainly deserves the warmest thanks of his constituents for the success that has attended his efforts in procuring the passage of acts for the creation of four new counties from the territory of Thurston and securing the recommendation of the Legislature to Congress asking for an appropriation of $20,000...for a military road from Fort Steilacoom to Walla Walla."

On February 1, 1853, Rebecca Ebey wrote in her journal: "Received two letters today from Mr. Ebey...he had had four counties organized and the county seats stationed. Coveland is the seat of Island County. The name is very applicable and I am glad that we have a county seat of our own."

The Columbian also said that Ebey had done more in the Legislature that any other member, adding "Col. Ebey has endeared himself to all parties of Northern Oregon." Ebey also secured what had been a long standing need, District Courts for Thurston at Olympia, for Pierce at Steilacoom, and for Island at Coveland.
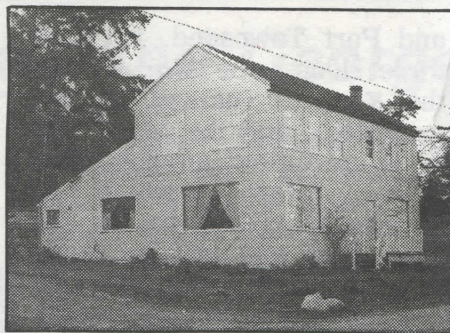
First Island Co. Courthouse at Coveland (San de Fuca)

Dr. Richard Lansdale

The Oregon Territorial Legislature specified that the election precincts would be in the home of Dr. R. H. Lansdale of Coveland. Dr. Lansdale is credited with the naming of both Oak Harbor and Crescent Harbor. He took up 320 acres at the head of the Cove, filing a donation claim in 1850.

Lansdale had come across the plains to San Francisco in 1849, then to Vancouver (Washington) where he was appointed postmaster, the first north of the Columbia River. He was also the first auditor of Clarke County. In 1854 he went to Olympia where he was appointed Indian Agent for a six year term. He was also associated with Governor Isaac Stevens in the organization of the Washington Territory.
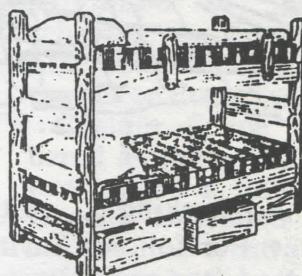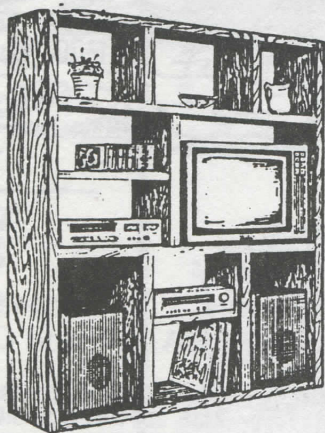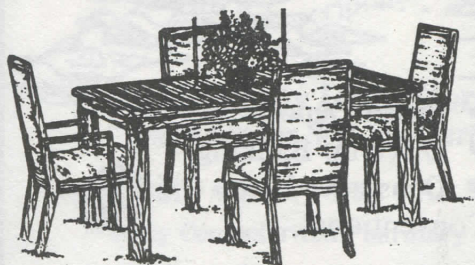
Christmas 1867, in Crescent Harbor

*A*ncutty Tillicum reminisced *many years ago about how he and his young friends observed Christmas in Crescent Harbor in the pioneer year of 1867.*

"The Christmas of 1867 was not allowed to go by without its good cheer being enjoyed by the young people. It was understood in November that there would be a dance Christmas night and as there were two gents to one lady on the Island, the writer thought it best to get in on the ground floor, so the next Sunday after it was given out that there would be a dance on Christmas night, he mounted his steed and was off for Crescent Harbor in search of a partner.

"Before he started he had the lady in mind that he was going to ask to be his partner and a short time after his arrival had his partner duly engaged. She thought him rather previous in being in such a hurry to engage his partner but he assured her he could not afford to let anyone get ahead of him.

"The 25th of December arrived in due time, and all went well. Will Hastie was the musician and John Van Wor-mer the floor manager. Three sets were danced until about three o'clock a.m. and all conceded having had a good time.

"The lady who was my partner in 1867 is still living in Whatcom County. That was the last Christmas the writer saw on the Island until in 1900, and the next time after that was in 1913."

Crossing the Skagit, 1876

In the early days of Mount Vernon's settlement a huge log jam occurred in the Skagit River, extending for about four miles. From the village of Mount Vernon to what is now West Mount Vernon crossing for a time was easy. One just walked the logs. It was finally cleared under the leadership of pioneer Dennis Storrs, but it took three years to do the job.

Ed English, logger, cut logs all winter. Then a freshet came and washed away all the logs and the jam. English claimed the logs and got $3,000 for them from the Port Gamble mill.

When the log jam was gone, a ferry was needed. The first was a scow, propelled across the river by large poles and oars, then later an overhead cable helped put the river current to use in making the crossing. Gilbert LeBarge was the first operator and kept at it for many years. According to history books, the county bridge was completed in 1893 at a cost of $29,000. The ferry operated for 14 years, from 1879 to 1893.

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Snow Clogs Pacific Northwest,

The story of the Big Snow of 1916 has been written a number of times about Whidbey Island and how it affected the Islanders, but Whidbey was only a small part of the 36-inch snow that blanketed the Pacific Northwest in early February 1916.

Said the Puget Sound Mail of La Conner: "On Feb. 7 it took a Standard Oil tank wagon with four big horses, en route to La Conner, seven hours to make the 10-mile trip. The horses were in a lather and all in when they arrived. It took Peck's mail stage with a light load three hours to make the trip from La Conner to Mount Vernon; six hours for the round trip. J.H. Hulbert Jr., and Gust Johnson had cow barns collapse, but there were no cows in them at the time. O.W. Lee had a hay barn collapse and Jimmy Sullivan's Granary collapsed on the Samish River."

The P.S.Mail of Feb. 3, said that just previous to the snow there had been a cold snap and old timers like County Commissioner E.A. Sission, Dr. J.S. Church and Archie Siegfried who had all lived in Skagit for 40 years maintained it beat all records for continuous cold weather. However, Editor Carter went through the old files and found that on Feb. 2, 1893, the Mail had an editorial about the record cold snap where the temperature was down to 13 degrees below zero and Swinomish Slough was frozen over.

The 1916 storm started on Feb. 1 when the worst weather in recorded history closed in on the Cascades. The Great Northern Railway had to stop all trains attempting to cross the mountains. The only run east was from Everett to Skykomish, and Skykomish was under three feet of snow. Further into the mountains, the snow depth was 12 feet.

Even the interurbans between Everett, Snohomish and Seattle were running late. The Snohomish River froze. On Feb. 2, conditions worsened. The coast line of the Great Northern from Everett to Seattle became blocked and the weight of the snow, which got up to four feet, caused roofs and sometimes entire buildings to collapse. Schools were closed as were most businesses. Street cars came to a stop. In Snoqualmie Pass snow reached depths of 25 feet, with an additional five feet being added each 24 hours.
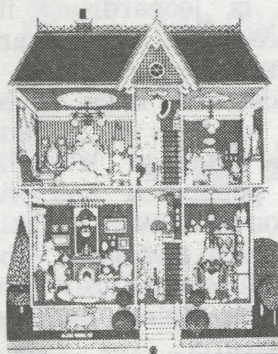
1916

The next day the weather turned colder and the snowing stopped, but there wasn't enough equipment to haul the snow from the streets. If there had been there was no place to dump it, said Mayor D. D. Merrill. Feb. 4 was a bad day in Everett.
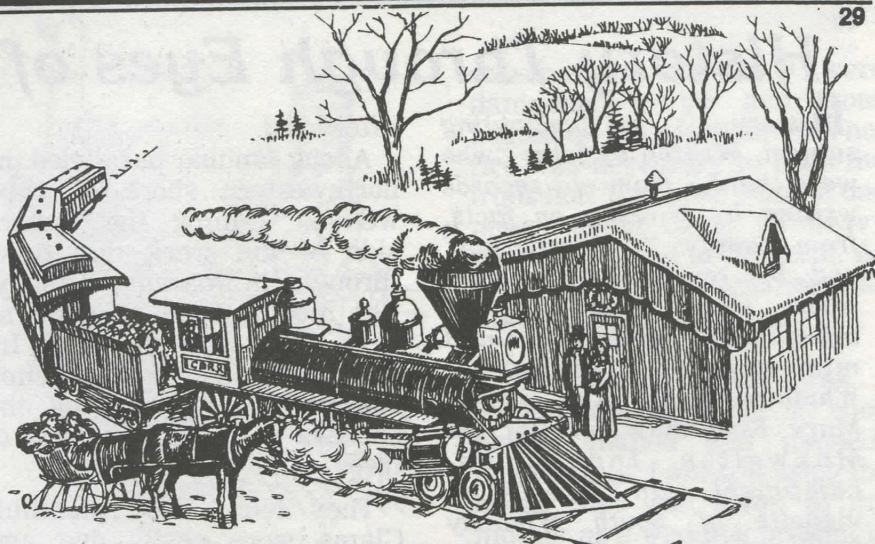
The city was a center of fishing and most of the craft were kept on the river. Ice started breaking up and coming down the river, taking out logs, and between the ice and the logs many small craft were sunk: fishing boats, pleasure boats, barges and houseboats. Then a boom of logs formed a dam at the Everett Avenue Bridge, holding up the ice, and more boats were crushed.

Barns throughout Snohomish and Skagit Counties began collapsing. In Skagit, 30 head of cattle were killed in one barn. The Skagit River froze over at Mount Vernon.

Snow removal in Everett began Feb. 5. Then the Chinook winds arrived the following day, Sunday. The snow melted rapidly but this caused slides of snow and mud, roads and railway tracks were blocked, and telephone lines went down. In the lowland floods added to the chaos.

As a grand finale, Mother Nature sent a huge slide down the mountain near Scenic on Feb. 10, wiping out a bridge of the Great Northern which was 350 feet long and 64 feet high. This halted railway traffic between the two halves of Washington state for some time.

The February "big snow" came just as winter was supposedly over and the first signs of spring were already showing. Which just goes to show, you never know whither winter weather. ❄

From Whidbey's Past

In the Dec. 20. 1919, issue of Oak Harbor News:

"The old Reformed Church parsonage is being wrecked by its purchaser, Mr. Ralph Zylstra, prior to the erection of a new, commodious and up-to-date manse on the same site. A large amount of voluntary labor has been promised immediately after the holidays, when a start will be made. . . Last week the Consistory appointed a strong and hustling building committee comprised of Messrs. H. Riksen, Chas. Nienhuis and Barney Nienhuis."

"On Sunday, while sitting in her front room, Mrs. Reikele Zylstra, Sr., was startled by the crash of a bullet through her front window. . . . Someone hunting on the bay opposite the house probably fired the shot."

December 30, 1937:

Mr. and Mrs. John H. Kineth, faithful pioneers of Whidby Island, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversay at the I.O.O.F. Hall in Coupeville. . .Dorothy Andersen and Lee Auvil married, as did Isabelle Jackson and Otto Van Dyk. . .Seventy-five enjoyed the Christmas tree party at Juan de Fuca Grange. . . .Henry Case was elected president of North Whidby Sportsman's Club. . . .Signs of growth: PSP&L installed 73 new meters in 1937. . . .Lindbloom Co. moved into its huge new building, build completely with Whidby Island labor and materials. The warehouse-type building was located on Pioneer Way, across the street from the movie house.

"Over at Stanwood they are having trouble with the city water superintendent, who is charged with having as a "side line" a whiskey still a few miles north of town. A former town Marshal has pleaded guilty to being an accomplice with the accused. Liquor sold from the still brought $25 a gallon, according to testimony."

DRAMATIC GROWTH

The town of Oak Harbor had an increase of 817 in population from 1940 to 1950, and an increase of 3,566 from 1940 to 1960. In 1961 the number of military personnel on duty at the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station was about 4,500, with 750 civilian workers.

In 1939 the Farm Bureau News was selling want ads at 1 cent per word with a minimum of 25 cents per ad. Green alder sold for $4 per cord, green fir for $4.25 delivered.

GREENBANK HOTEL - 1908