

Greenbank was named after Delaware's

Greenbank, that narrow spot in the middle of Whidbey Island where the Greenbank loganberry farm was located, was named for the hometown of Calvin Phillips, Green Bank, Delaware. Phillips was an early day developer on Whidbey who was associated with the Penn Mutual Insurance Co. of Philadelphia. The Phillips family owned the Phillips Mill in Delaware, and employed many workmen.

Phillips told how, during the period following the Civil War, men came on crutches looking for work. He also recalled a story about the mill. Tools had been disappearing until one day when a traveling preacher came by, and space was allotted him in one of the buildings. The workmen all "got religion" and the tools quit disappearing. The Phillips family were Quakers.

The land on which Greenbank, Whidbey Island is located, and a large part of Oak Harbor is intimately connected with the early history of the Northwest.

When Congress passed the Act granting to the transcontinental railway every odd number section of land, a given number of miles north and south from the right of way, a wealthy banker in Philadelphia named Jay Cooke and some of his business cohorts advanced the money to cover the cost of a survey of a route from Lake Superior to Puget Sound!

Before these promoters were repaid, the railroad became involved in litigation, and to compensate them they were given 50,000 acres of land in this state, which the railroad

reserved in lieu of lands in the grant patented to settlers before the Act was passed. About 10,000 acres were located at Greenbank and Oak Harbor. After Phillips obtained the land from the railroad he proceeded to sell it to settlers.

The depression of the 1890s gave way to the Gold Rush of Alaska, and while homesteads were no longer available on Whidbey, there were great expanses of wooded land. In 1906, these Greenbank lands were advertised for sale to those unafraid of hard work.

One of the first settlers at Greenbank was Nels Christianson and his wife. He first worked at Greenbank Farm, then bought a 40-acre tract about a mile south where they built their cabin out of trees from their land. Christianson was a carpenter and helped other settlers build their homes. He later went into the shingle bolt business. He floated over 1,300 cords of shingle bolts to a shingle mill in Edmonds, and when the timber was gone, Christianson moved on to Alaska where he had previously worked, leaving his wife to care for the Greenbank acres!

Christianson's land at Greenbank had no water, as he discovered when he dug a well

128 feet deep with pick and shovel and found none. He then bought the 50 acres belonging to a neighbor, Snell, which contained several good springs.

A historical note indicates that the first "roads" in the area were just trails through the trees and brush, and when farm women visited each other they wore their best clothing, including the large decorated hats of the day. The hats made the trail passage difficult through the brush.

In 1879 the Alexander Rosenfield family lived on the west beach of the Greenbank area, the last homestead on Whidbey. Alexander was a ship's carpenter, and the family had come to Seattle from England a few years before the big Seattle fire. Greenbank was heavily timbered with huge trees and no trails. Travel was only by boat or by foot along the beach at low tide. Livestock was herded along the beach and two or three times a month Rosenfield would sail west to Port Townsend for supplies.

Nearest neighbors were the Robertsons to the north, the A. J. Demings at Bush Point and the Porters at Mutiny Bay. Deming was a colorful figure who had sailed the seven seas



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Green Bank

and had worked the gold fields of the west. Sometimes it was weeks before Mrs. Rosenfield saw a white woman. Many seamen who settled in the area had married Indian girls.

In the autumn, Indians came from Neah Bay, from Vancouver Island, and from nearby country, in big canoes to pitch camp at Greenbank beach.

They spent their time hunting, fishing, clamming and picking berries in the bogs surrounding Lake Hancock, then a freshwater lake before the Sound broke through and poured in. It was later called Hancock Lagoon.

The Greenbank area was a hunter's paradise, with numerous hunting parties coming by boat to anchor in deep water while their passengers took their gear to shore in rowboats.

The Rosenfields let the hunters make their headquarters at their home, along with their hunting dogs.

Phillips developed an experimental farm on a portion of his property, which he stocked with 100 head of Holsteins, second only in Washington to the famous Carnation herd. A landing dock was built, plus a hotel, store and post office at the landing. At that particular time, the U. S. Postal authorities objected to post office names of two words, so the little town of Green Bank became Greenbank!

Disaster, however struck the herd in the form of cattle tuberculosis, signalling the end of the dairy venture. Later the farm was sold to the Pommerelle Marine Co. of Seattle. It was planted with loganberries and in 1977 was regarded as the largest loganberry farm on the West Coast. *



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