

## Fort Casey lighthouses, 'old' & 'new'

Although Fort Casey on Admiralty Head near the Keystone ferry landing of Whidbey Island did not become a named "fort" until 1899, the United States government was much interested in the site as early as the 1850s.

In 1857 a government report published the results of a marine survey of the area which recommended two lighthouses built on Admiralty Inlet, one at Point Wilson on the peninsula, and one on Admiralty Head, the jutting rocky promontory overlooking the inlet.

So in 1858 the land for the lighthouse was purchased from Dr. John Coe and Caroline P. Kellogg, and a frame house and

tower built near the present Keystone ferry dock.

Nearly 40 years passed, in which several families lived at the lighthouse site.

There was no denying that Admiralty Head was a strategic site at the entrance of Puget Sound. So when the U.S. decided in 1897 to fortify said entrance there were more surveys. The proper place for big guns to be installed was on or near the lighthouse site. Would the U.S. Lighthouse Service be willing to swap a bit of land for another? They would. So the old frame lighthouse and dwelling were razed, and a new lighthouse was built atop the bluff and a little to the north.



*Aerial view of the "new" Fort Casey Lighthouse, now a museum.*

The new one was built of brick from foundation to turret and covered with a concrete casing, unusual in design. To generations from 1900 on, Fort Casey and the big white lighthouse belonged to each other. The lighthouse directed ships entering Puget Sound and the fortifications of the fort were there to protect them.

A story of special interest to Whidbey Island is told. That Flora Pearson Engle, keeping the records of the lighthouse, changed the spelling of the name "Whidbey" to "Whidby" as it is still shown on old records. From the 1870s until the 1940s when the U.S. Navy arrived to build a base at Oak Harbor the spelling omitted the "e."

The Navy renamed the Island "Whidbey" to coincide with the charts of the area and name of its discoverer, First Mate Joseph Whidbey of Captain Vancouver's flagship, the Discovery!

Anything as serious as a fortification must not be tampered with, even if it is only a letter in a name.

So "Whidbey" it is.

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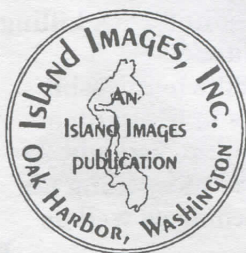




A community picnic at the "old light house" at Fort Casey in 1898 was just below where the present Fort Casey lighthouse is located. Pioneer family members included Charlie Gillespie on bike; Sibbie Fisher; "Auntie Chris" Barrington Power, the wife of the lighthouse tender; Mrs. E. J. Hancock, Ed Armstrong (with bike); Mrs. Nellie Dyer and baby Yorke; Mrs. John Armstrong and Miss Martha Power. The frame lighthouse was torn down when the new facility was built.

# De Ja Views

## Historical Pictorial of Whidbey Island



Companion book to "By Canoe & Sailing Ship They Came," containing hundreds of old photos of Whidbey Island from the files of Dorothy Neil. Makes great gift for only \$20 plus \$5 for handling and shipping. Write or call Island Images, Inc., 1536 SE 8th Ave., Oak Harbor, WA 98277, (360) 675-2844. Also available at local book stores. Photos are available in reprints.



## Group seeks return of beloved plane

The Seaplane Base, located between Maylor's Point and Crescent Harbor was originally built for the operation of PBY-5A Catalina amphibians, and is one of the few Naval bases to retain its original configuration.

Today, the Navy Exchange and Commissary are located on the PBY base of World War II, but memories are many for this unusual amphibian base.

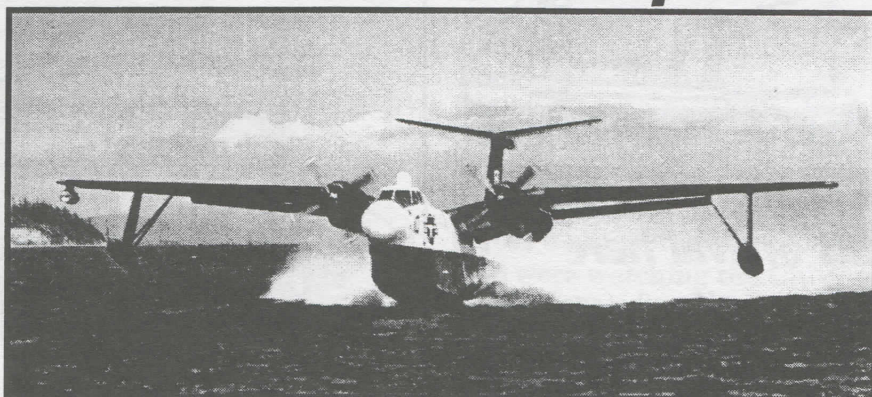
From 1942 to the end of WWII the Seaplane base was the training area for several squadrons serving in the Pacific and the Aleutian Islands.

The big noisy planes are well remembered by Oak Harbor residents of that time, as they flew training flights from the base, around Maylor's Point and Oak Harbor bay, to Crescent Harbor. A little tug, the "Lily" out of La Conner kept the driftwood out of the Crescent Harbor landing area to prevent wreckage of the big planes as they set down in the harbor.

Years later, former crewmen and pilots began putting notes and log books to gather to tell the story of the Catalina, stories handed down to grandchildren of veterans, some of whom now hope to carry the history to future generation.

In Oak Harbor, PBY veterans are meeting to form a PBY Memorial which will hopefully include a plane, historical notes and pictures of the WWII era and location of a suitable site on the Seaplane Base. A fully restored Catalina plane would be the focus of the memorial.

Some years ago, North Whidbey's Chamber of Com-



*A PBY sits down in Crescent Harbor. . . . US Navy Photo.*

merce and other interested groups attempted to obtain a PBY to place on display near the Seaplane Base, and located one in California for the (then) princely sum of \$20,000. The local group had no money, and \$20,000 was out of the question.

The current group of veteran PBY crewmen and pilots is holding monthly meetings to plan and discuss the memorial. For more information write Win Stites, 6088 21st Ave. Yakima WA 98902. Stites is chairman of the PBY Memorial endeavor.

**It was some years ago** on North Whidbey. The Navy was working overtime putting up homes on Eerkes' Hill, which would be called Victory Homes, for the enlisted personnel that would be flooding in. The Navy was still buying farms in and around Clover Valley and in Crescent Harbor. The Seaplane Base was a widened approach to Maylor's Point, where the big rumbling seaplanes lifted off for Alaska and jaunts around the sound. Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Chuck and Juanita Thomas arrived to open a gas station, a

store and a group of cabins on the intersection of Goldie Road and what was then the highway, with a view of cows grazing on clover at the runway's edge.

Some years ago we received a letter from Juanita in Indianola after talking to both her and Chuck on the phone. She included a rundown of the Thomas activities 50 years ago, which she wrote for her children to enjoy. Folks who were here in those hectic first years of Whidbey Naval Air Station may remember; newcomers to bustling Oak Harbor of 1941 may be interested to know about the little village that grew and grew!

The Thomas business location was a reviewing stand for traffic to Ault field and Deception Pass. Farmhouses, barns and cabins—even chicken houses—were being moved to new locations to be made into apartments.

The Age of Developers had not yet arrived. The cabins were in great demand. Hunters and fishermen rented them at first, then when sailors' wives began to arrive, the wood stoves were changed to oil so the women could cook. They didn't know much about wood stoves.

Whidbey Island was a great



duty station for sailors who couldn't believe their eyes when they saw the 40-pound salmon caught at Deception Pass and displayed at the store. There were deer, pheasant, quail and rabbits a-plenty.

A riding academy moved across the road from the little store, and the Thomases watched the goings-on of sailors who didn't know how to ride, and those who did. As the Seaplane Base evolved in town, the USO took over with memorable Tom Moore at the helm. It was a busy time. Farms were fast disappearing.

The Thomas store was in direct line with the Ault Field runway, and often a sailor would rush in and yell that a plane just missed their roof by inches!

The sailors used their phone to call home. The phone was a box affair on the wall and one cranked to get the operator. They were on a 2-party line and the ring was one long and four short. Juanita said she no sooner got one batch of sailors educated in using it when a new bunch would move in, and some days she expected to see it cranked right off the wall!

The sailors waited for rides across the road and they put on all kinds of sympathy acts, expressing fatigue or saying they were freezing.

One boy just out from New York turned to his buddy and asked, "Where the heck does this bus go?"

"What the heck do you care as long as it gets you out of here!"

**Chuck Thomas** was also a musician and arrived in Oak Harbor at the time of its metamorphosis from a country village to a Navy town, when

there was plenty to do in this growing period. There was no kindergarten in an age when kindergartens were a part of every self-respecting school district!

A district could request a kindergarten, then pay for the teacher, the housing and curriculum for a whole year before the state took over! It was a big order, but The Band was the answer. There was a piano, accordion, saxophone, clarinet and drums and what more for a country dance?

There were few places to go for entertainment, and our country dances not only became famous, they helped to pay for Oak Harbor's first kindergarten!

Jack Wood, school superintendent; Grace Wood, Chuck Thomas, Dean Davis and a Neil at the piano beat out the ABCs of elementary education! With the help now and then of Tommy Clark and George Astel. Chuck was a happy-go-lucky type that made everything fun

**The Thomases** moved out of their gas-station quarters to a

house with acreage "down the road." One day a Navy chief asked to buy two acres from them to move in a farmhouse he had bought from the Navy. Shortly after the transaction the couple took off a day to go to the mainland. When they returned, there was a large 10-room farmhouse and barn sitting next door!

The town was rapidly changing from a quiet farming center of 375 people to a Navy town in the middle of a war!

Juanita Thomas' memories of those days are just a small bit of the frantic history of times when the Navy was building its Whidbey Island base. When meat and sugar and butter were being rationed, when Whidbey Islanders who had lived through the depression years went to work for Civil Service, and when planes became a part of everyday life.

**It was the biggest** change in Whidbey since the first sea captains sailed into Penn Cove and changed the everyday lives of the Indians!

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