

NORTHWEST HISTORY

by William Puget Race

My friends and family have convinced me that I should put in writing the history I know so well.

I was born in Coupeville, Whidbey Island in 1895, and in 1920 I married Helen Pratt from Oak Harbor, a town a few miles north on Penn's Cove, Whidbey Island. My father, Puget Race, was a pioneer druggist of this Island, located in Coupeville, and my wife's father, John Pratt, managed the Oak Harbor bank. After graduating from college, we settled in Seattle where I practiced dentistry for many years. Our three children -- Harriet, George and Helen -- visited their four grandparents often on Whidbey Island and came to love this beautiful place in northwest Washington State. This article is concerned primarily with the first white settlers who came here.

Both my mother's family and my father's family arrived to settle here in the West in the 1850's. My father's family, originally from England and Australia, lived in Port Gamble for 19 years before purchasing a ranch near Coupeville in 1876. My mother's father, Captain James Henry Swift, was an Arctic whaling captain from New Bedford, Massachusetts. He was from a family of ship owners there known as Swift and Perry Company. He sailed around the world 7 times, but the beauty of Penn's Cove stayed with him. He retired from the sea and, with his wife Emily, bought this log house where we still reside in Coupeville. This house, built in 1852, is the place where my mother, Hattie, and her brothers and sister were born. Captain Swift served in the Washington Territorial Legislature in 1869 and on the first Pilot's Commission in 1871.

Due to my parentage, and to contact during my youth with many of the original settlers of this region and continuous contact with their descendants, I developed a great interest in the history of this region. In 1948, Ida Alexander Sill and I founded and organized the Island County Historical Society. I was an original trustee, and my wife and I were voted Honorary Lifetime Members in appreciation for our work.

Our Swift Race family home, sometimes called "Fairhaven," is on a home-site of nearly two acres, extending along the waterfront adjacent to the City Park and on a hill looking over the town of Coupeville from the west. Here one has an unobstructed view of Front Street with its old buildings, docks, and a blockhouse. The view of Penn's Cove, Cres-

cent Harbor, Skagit Flats and Camano Island, with Mt. Baker and the Cascade Mountain Range in the background, is superb.

This was part of the donation claim of 640 acres selected by Mrs. Frances Alexander Fay. She came to Puget Sound in 1851, with her husband John Alexander and their sons John and William, on the schooner "Exact" in company with Seattle's first settlers. When Mr. Alexander died, Mrs. Alexander married Captain Fay, formerly of the brig "Orbit". They built a two-story frame house with a large bay window and a porch across the front. My grandparents purchased this house in which I was born in 1895; it burned in 1921.

A few years later my mother, assisted by her brother Dr. George Swift, a prominent Seattle physician, decided to move the Swift family log home from across Penn's Cove to this site. The logs were all marked in order to have them fit together properly on reassembly. They were taken, a few logs at a time, by horse and wagon around the Cove and reassembled on a stone foundation. The doors and windows were enlarged somewhat and the partitions and balcony bedroom eliminated in order to make use of the entire cabin as a living room. The logs for this large 18 x 38 living room were hand-hewn timbers, uniquely dovetailed and interlocked at the corners. The logs are caulked, as a ship would be, with oakum. There is a large stone fireplace at one end of the room. The massive hand-made doors have large wrought iron hinges and locks. The interior is sealed to the gable with rough, whipsawed fir boards showing the tell-tale circular saw markings. Large hewn beams cross the room overhead to tie in and support the side

walls. The rest of the house is sided and roofed with hand-split cedar shakes.

This log house portion was built originally by Jacob S. Smith on the north side of Penn's Cove. My grandfather, Captain James Henry Swift, came on his barkentine, the "Anadyr", to visit some of the sea captains who were beginning to settle. He fell in love with the area and tried to buy this log house and beautiful farm, but was unsuccessful. On sailing with a load of spars for England, he left word with his cousin Robert Hathaway, who remained on the Cove, to try and arrange for the purchase of it, as he wished to retire there. It is interesting to know that this cargo of spars, cleared by the U.S. Customs Office on December 4, 1855, was the first consignment of cargo to Europe from Puget Sound. After delivering his cargo of fine spars to Falmouth, England, he was called upon to return for a consignment of spars for the French Naval yard at Brest, France.

Upon his return in 1857 he again approached Jacob Smith, who was by then serving as the Representative from Island County in the Territorial Legislature. His daughter, Cordelia Jane Smith, had been born in the meantime and was the second white child born on Whidbey Island. When grown, she married Nathaniel Crosby III of Olympia. It was through this marriage that Cordelia Jane became the grandmother of our recently departed and dearly beloved Bing Crosby. Jacob Smith did sell his Penn's Cove claim to my grandfather, Captain James Henry Smith, for three thousand dollars in gold, and moved to Chambers Prairie near Olympia.

It is hard for many to understand why Whidbey Island was selected by so many of the early pioneers when it was somewhat distant from Olympia, Alki, Steilacoom and other Puget Sound settlements. Inasmuch as there were no roads in early days and all transportation was by water, passengers arriving at the Port of Entry at Port Townsend found it convenient to take a ship across to Ebey's Landing, then cross Whidbey Island a short distance to Penn's Cove and continue by boat down the well-protected Saratoga Passage to lower Puget Sound. Many settlers came this way, avoiding the rough waters and strong tides of Admiralty Inlet. Indians, whose ancestors had lived on this 60-mile-long Whidbey Island for centuries, were extremely peaceful, and canoes with paddlers were always available to the new settlers. Once seen, these fertile prairies ready for the plow and the beautiful scenery enhanced by mountain ranges to the east and the west beckoned settlers to stay on the Island. Shellfish, wild berries, native ruffed grouse and deer were plentiful, and fish were practically swarming in the waters, according to early settlers.

Whidbey Island had been very favorably described in 1792 by the English explorer Captain Vancouver. He named Penn's Cove in honor of a friend. He described this Cove as a beautiful English estate laid out on a much larger scale, with deer playing among the scattered trees and natural prairies. The Island was named for a member of the party who had sailed a small boat through the treacherous Deception Pass and around the Island to meet Captain Vancouver on the "Discovery." Joseph Whidbey thus proved that the land that Spanish explorers had

previously thought a part of the mainland was, in reality, an island. (As a young man repairing telephone lines over these whirlpools, I was convinced that these were treacherous waters.)

Members of Hudson Bay Company had noted Whidbey Island's agricultural potential and artesian wells in the 1830s. The first detailed accounts are from the records of the early French Canadian Catholic missionaries Augusta and Francois Blanchet. In 1839 they arrived at Plamondon's home on the Cowlitz River to begin their missionary work.

The news of the "Black Gowns" had spread rapidly throughout the Indian Tribes of Western "old Oregon". Delegations of Indians came to see and hear them. Among these was Chief Snaklum of Whidbey Island. The Chief and his party received instruction in the Christian religion, learning various ceremonies and songs which the Chief was to teach to his people on his return to the Island. It was at this time that Father Francois Blanchet devised his famous "Catholic ladder," a pictorial representation of religious and church history from the time of Adam to the present. A copy of this ladder was given to the Chief together with a "Square Rule" or shole stick.

A year later, on the 26th of Apr. 1840, a canoe, containing seven Indians, six men and one woman, came to the mission which Father Blanchet was then holding at Nisqually. They had been sent by Chief Snaklum, who was ill and unable to attend. The woman presented a skin sheath which contained the "Square Rule" which had been given to her husband, the Chief, on his first visit. Father Blan-

chet was invited to visit Whidbey and work among the Indians there. He accepted, and arrived by canoe two days later, on April 28, 1840.

He was given a hearty welcome by the Chief and treated with great reverence by the members of his tribe. Father Blanchet was surprised but pleased at the progress which had been made since his first meeting with the Skagit Indians on the Cowlitz River a year or so before. He called at the lodge of Chief Snaklum (or "Netlam", as he was sometimes called), and found that the Chief had only one wife, which was unusual for that time. Indians came from about fifteen lodges along the beach and touched his hand, which was their greeting, and made the sign of the cross. They sang hymns in Chinook, showing that they had received considerable instruction during the year. A Sunday service was held, with about four hundred Indians in attendance. The singing impressed Father Blanchet immensely. The meeting was followed by a dinner of venison and salmon, after which the peace-pipe was passed about between the different chiefs. Then a large group of braves arrived, dragging a huge wooden cross. After being planted upright in the ground, this twenty-four foot cross was blessed by the priest. By June, Father Blanchet had baptized 218 Indians on the Island, and the Mission was established. The records thereafter referred to it as "Whitby" Mission.

On June 1st of 1841 Captain Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition sailed into Penn's Cove, which was at that time in Oregon Territory. The Territory was under the "Joint Occupancy Agreement" with Great

Britain, and the reports of the Wilkes party were to have bearing on the final American boundary of the region. He landed on the site where the Alexander Blockhouse now stands and described the Skagit Indians as living in plank lodges similar to those on the Columbia River. The Chief showed Wilkes a treasure chest, including a map of America, church illustrations, and sketches of heavenly bodies. Wilkes noted these Indians had a great deal of reverence and affection for their religious teachings.

The Indians at that time were building a log church near Father Blanchet's Cross. This Cross stood for sixty years on what later became Mr. Alexander's donation claim. Mr. Abraham Alexander, son of the original settler and first white male born on Whidbey Island, saved a portion of the Cross, and it can be seen in a glass case beside the Alexander Blockhouse in Coupeville.

My first job, at the age of seven, was to cultivate the potatoes planted where the Cross stood. From our living room one can look down on the Alexander Blockhouse and the site where the Cross stood. Looking out over Penn's Cove, one can see where Captain Vancouver anchored his "Discovery" while

his crew went ashore to inspect the region. It was just below our family home, where the dock now stands, that Captain Vancouver and Captain Wilkes made their landings. The first white settler here was Thomas Glasgow in 1848, but he was run off by the Indians. The first Whidbey Island donation claim was registered to Colonel Isaac N. Ebey in 1850.

Inasmuch as the term "donation claim" is

often mentioned in connection with the early settling of the Island, it should be explained that it makes reference to land taken up under the old Oregon Territorial Land Act. This is sometimes called the Oregon Donation Land Law, and was passed by Congress on September 27, 1850. Under the Act a citizen could "stake out" 320 acres, or 640 if he had a wife. This land was free if the claim was filed properly at the United States Land Office and the person filing lived on the claim for several years to "prove up" or improve the land. At the end of this time he was given a "Patent of Title", which was a large, impressive legal document signed by the President of the United States. Originally, Oregon donation claims had to be filed between 1850 and 1853, but this was extended to December 1, 1855. This Act was to benefit veterans of the Mexican War and other wars, but its main purpose was to bring more American settlers into this new country which had been monopolized by England's Hudson Bay Company since 1825.

The California Gold Rush in 1849 brought many single men to the West. There was only one Land Office west of the Rocky Mountains where they had to file their claims, and that was in Oregon City. Due to the long trip necessitated by the distance involved, a great deal of claim-jumping took place. Arguments arose as to filing dates versus actual staking. If one had a fast horse he could sometimes file someone else's claim at the Land Office. Oregon City to this day has the original plat of the City of San Francisco, and will not give it up. It is displayed under glass at the Courthouse in Oregon City.

58 claims were filed in what later became Washington Territory in 1851; in 1852, 117 claims were filed, and 40 of these were on Penn's Cove, Whidbey Island. A Land Office was established at Olympia when Washington became separate from Oregon Territory in 1853.

The Homestead Act was quite different from the Donation Law. Under the Homestead Act, one could not take more than 160 acres, and must live on the land for four years and show proof of improvement. However, after fourteen months of residency one could obtain the title by paying \$1.25 per acre.

Colonel Isaac N. Ebey took up the first donation claim on Whidbey Island in October of 1850. It stretched along the west side of Whidbey, and had a view of Port Townsend and the Straits of Juan de Fuca in the distance. He came up the west coast from San Francisco on the brig "Orbit" with the Simmons party, headed for Tumwater. On the voyage he was reading a book called "Tuva Morata, Life of Olympia." He suggested the name Olympia to replace Smithfield, and it later became the capital city of Washington State.

Colonel Ebey was Deputy Collector of Customs until 1853, when he succeeded Simon Moses as Collector. He then had the Customs House changed from Olympia to Port Townsend. He spent part of each year near Coupeville on Whidbey Island, and the rest of the time at the port of entry for all ships at Port Townsend. In 1854 he sent for his family to come to Whidbey Island. His father, Jacob Ebey, veteran of the Black Hawk War of 1812, took up a claim on one side, and his son-in-

law John Davis took up a claim on the west side of Ebey's prairie.

Colonel Ebey was, in 1853, the only representative from Thurston County to the Oregon Territorial Legislature. This county included all of the territory from Chehalis to the 49th parallel and between the Cascade Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. He was later instrumental in forming four new counties from Thurston County. They were Pierce, Jefferson, King and Island. Coupeville (or Coveland, as it was called) was then made the Island County seat of government. Island County included all territory north of Lake Washington to the 49th parallel boundary with Canada, and between the Cascade mountains and the center line of Admiralty Inlet. This was later divided into Whatcom, San Juan, Skagit and Snohomish counties. Island County at the present time includes Whidbey and Camano Islands.

In 1857, Colonel Ebey was beheaded at his home by northern Indians from Canada in retaliation for the killing of several of their members at the so-called "Battle of Port Gamble." The U.S. steamer "Massachusetts" had fired on them there. This brutal killing of such a fine man was one of the great tragedies of the early days.

Near Colonel Ebey's donation claim was the claim of Sam Crockett. He came west with the Simmons party to Tumwater, and assisted Mr. Simmons in establishing his first mill there in 1846. After staking his claim where Whidbey's Fort Casey now stands, he sent east for his parents and brothers, and they took claims adjoining his. The Crockett family made a

large raft, and they poled and sailed from Olympia to Penn's Cove, which was considered a difficult undertaking. They built a large stockade near their Whidbey Island homes, with blockhouses at the four corners. One of these was displayed at the Alaska Yukon Exposition and is now at the Point Defiance Park in Tacoma. My mother, Hattie Swift Race, was very instrumental in preserving the other three blockhouses, which still stand on Alexander's claim, Walter Crockett's claim and John Davis's claim.

My good friend, Herman Wanamaker, and his dear wife Margaret, bought the Samuel Crockett claim and lived there many years. Herman was related through his mother to the pioneer Calhoun family. Other donation claims nearby belonged to Davis, Engle, Hill, Terry, Kellogg and Crockett.

Directly across to the east side of Whidbey Island is Saratoga Passage. Near Captain Coupe's claim was Kineth's and Smith's. In 1876 my father's parents bought the Doyle claim which faced Camano Island across Saratoga Passage. The Race family consisted of Henry and Frances, and their sons Melbourne, Tasman, Austral, Puget, William and Ronald. I have wonderful memories of the Race Ranch and the Lagoon. One time I counted twenty-eight deer feeding in a grain field. Sometimes I would spear sole fish at night in the Lagoon as they came up toward my carbide lantern. I often went hunting with my uncles. Most of the time we hunted pheasant, ducks and grouse.

Before the Deception Pass Bridge was built at the north end of Whidbey Island, all supplies were brought to and from this Island

by boat. My uncles would load farm crops on a huge raft they had made from cedar logs covered with planking. They towed it to deep water and hoisted a flag. The steam boat would pull off her regular course, pick up the cargo and take it to Seattle. The raft was used most of the time as a dock for small boats.

My Grandmother Race was widowed in 1884, but continued to run the farm and to educate her growing boys. The kindness of the steamboat captains certainly made it easier for her. Whenever she traveled she was delivered close to her doorstep instead of seven miles away at the Coupeville dock. The captains brought their stern-wheelers right up to the beach and let her off. Her oldest son, my uncle Melbourne, was owner and captain of the steamboat "Clara Brown", which brought the first food and relief to Seattle after the big fire of 1889. I often went along with my uncle as he towed logs to the Bellingham and Anacortes mills or delivered merchandise up the tributaries of the Swinomish Slough to Blanchard and Edison and other small towns. It was quite a sight to see the "Clara Brown" paddling on the tide-flooded channels of La Conner. Sometimes we could come right up to a house and barn to load grain, quickly before the tide went out and left us high and dry. The memories of my uncles and events connected with the Race Ranch are indelibly imprinted in my mind. That Ranch is now the site of an extensive housing development.

I had another uncle, Captain Ed Swift, who owned several steamboats. In 1889 he had established a passenger and mail route from Seattle to Snohomish. He liked to tell of

putting the Swalwell family ashore at Port Gardner (now Everett) in 1890. They were put ashore with all their belongings, including a piano. There was no shelter for them; only one house in sight, and that was occupied by Mr. Smith.

Uncle Ed Swift had many exciting experiences he told me about. He took a small stern-wheeler named the "Caswell" to Alaska, and operated for a time on the Stikine River. He also assisted Robert Peary, the arctic explorer, in outfitting the "Roosevelt" for his successful expedition and discovery of the North Pole. The proud ship "Roosevelt" later sank in the Panama Canal. Ed made frequent trips to visit us. He and my father, Puget Race, were both honorary chiefs of the Skagit Indian tribe. They often spoke in the Indian Chinook language, which annoyed their wives.

Whidbey Island, and particularly the area around Penn's Cove which had been settled by so many sea captains, produced many sons who took to the sea as a means of livelihood. Captain Howard Bentley Lovejoy settled here in 1862. His brother Edward owned a saw-mill, and he owned the ship yard in east Coupeville. They built many fine steamships together. Among these were "Albion," "Camano," "Whidbey," "Calista" and the schooner "Lovejoy." His oldest son Howard became a marine designer and builder, and his son Ben was a noted sea captain on Puget Sound. Howard's three sons, Bartlett, Edward and Stanley, all became captains and Puget Sound pilots.

The Barrington family also contributed prominent captains to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska waters. They descended from Captain

Edward Barrington, who came to the Sound in 1855 and established a store at Oak Harbor. He also owned and operated the schooner "Eclipse" between Oak Harbor, Coupeville, and Olympia. His son Harry was master of many fine boats on Puget Sound, while his other two sons, Sidney and Hill, were pioneer captains on the Yukon and other Alaska rivers. There were many native sons from Whidbey who took to the sea.

Every time I drive on the road around Penn's Cove I think of the kindness Captain Horace Holbrook extended to my children during their summer vacations. His father's donation claim was at the head of the cove. Later it was platted for a boom town called San de Fuca. Captain Horace's mother was formerly Mrs. Sylvester of Olympia, and a wonderful story teller. She came to Whidbey on Captain Henry Swift's bark, the "Anadyr."

This road I mention is a delightful scenic drive. Madrona trees and greenery line the road, with frequent open vistas showing the placid waters of the cove. Even this road is historically important, as it is part of the original road established by the first Board of Commissioners of the then huge Island County. Samuel Howe, John Alexander and Walter Crockett had been appointed to the Board by the Legislative Assembly of Oregon on January 6, 1853. The meeting was held at the Alexander cabin in Coupeville (at that time called Coveland). Later that year Washington became a territory separate from Oregon.

Whidbey's first trading post was built in 1853 by Captain Barstow on his donation

claim at the head of Penn's Cove. Captain Whidbey's Inn stands there now, and is still a lovely place for travelers to stay. Nearby is beautiful Kennedy's Lagoon. Friend Wilson, brother of my grandmother Swift, built a grist mill here in 1878. It was unusual in that it had a reversible wheel, operating on the in-coming tide as well as the out-going tide. Dr. Williston of Port Townsend later removed the mill to Friday Harbor on San Juan Island, and the mill stones can be seen at Olalla.

The 1852 donation claim of Dr. Lansdale was next to Kennedy Lagoon. His cabin was designated as the seat of government for Island County, and was also headquarters for organizing the first Methodist church for this area. He was an extremely competent physician and explorer of Snoqualmie Pass, as well as diplomat in assisting Governor Stevens with Indian treaties. He sold his claim to Henry Roeder and moved to Oregon State. (Henry Roeder and William Pattle later founded the town of Bellingham.)

The "Old Court House" (which still stands today) was built on this claim in 1855 by Thomas Cranney, who operated a store on the ground floor. The Third District Court met here twice a year on the first Mondays of April and October. The District included Pierce, King, Island, Whatcom, Jefferson and Clallam counties. The Sheriff's budget was one dollar a day per prisoner at that time. Once they got around to the trial, justice was quick in those days. An Indian was convicted here of killing Judah Church near Oak Harbor. The Sheriff, Hugh Crockett, took him immediately across the street and hanged him on the "hanging tree" of Penn's Cove.

In the first census of the Washington Territory, taken late in 1853, Island County was shown to have 195 inhabitants with 80 voters, and King County (including Seattle) had 170 inhabitants with 11 voters. Island County was a stable agricultural settlement with no transient people.

Samuel D. Howe was very prominent in Washington Territory politics. His 1852 donation claim was across Penn's Cove from Coupeville and next to the original Swift farm, which my grandfather purchased from Jacob Smith. It is now a housing development called "Surf and Sands".

Samuel Howe married Captain Swift's oldest daughter. He had stories to tell of Oregon Indian Wars, and after that of his voyage on the sloop "Georgiana" to seek gold in the Queen Charlotte Islands near Alaska. He and his men were taken prisoner by the fearsome Haida Indians, and all their belongings and clothing were taken from them. It was amazing that he and his men survived.

Near Howe's claim is Hastie Lake. The Dutch settlers of the town of Oak Harbor used to ice skate on that lake in the best Holland tradition. Nearby is the homesite of the pioneer Monroe family. Lillian Monroe Kennedy still resides here. A few miles further north is the town of Oak Harbor. This pioneer dairy community was located in beautiful Clover Valley. A naval air base is there now.

The finest Guernsey cows were introduced here in 1922. My father-in-law, John Pratt, was a gentleman farmer and banker. He put numbers in a hat for the farmers to fairly

draw their cows. His own number was the last one, but his cow turned out to be one of the first in record milk production. Mr. Pratt was called upon every year until he was into his eighties to judge local livestock exhibitions.

The railroads were built on the mainland, and this changed the population centers. Most of the towns on the one hundred or more islands of Puget Sound have remained small.

Coupeville received a great deal of publicity through the International Indian Canoe Races, which were held annually for sixteen years. Starting in 1925, Indians came from Puget Sound, the Olympic Peninsula, Canada, and Yakima to participate in the feats of skill and endurance at the "Water Festival". The eleven-man dugout canoe races held prominent coverage in the Seattle newspapers. Excursion boats brought people from all around the Sound to watch three days of events. There were dances, weddings, some gambling, and clam bakes. The Coupeville dock would be crowded with sightseers watching the Indians prepare their meals at their campsites along the beach as they had done for centuries. This has been a favorite locale for archaeological diggings. Eight or ten beautifully hand-carved and polished canoes would be on display for all to admire.

The canoe races were held in front of our Swift-Race family home. Friends and visitors from afar used to gather on the porches and lawns of our house to watch and cheer as the paddles flew. Indians were peculiar in that they would usually head for shore rather than be last in the 3-mile race.

The town of Coupeville is much the same now as it was in early days. Many of the old buildings and houses have been restored and are now gift shops and restaurants. Most of the new business section is now several miles back from the waterfront. The older buildings, supported from the beach on pilings or piers, have an appearance much like that of a New England coast town.

Six generations of Swifts and Races have enjoyed this peaceful area. I hope the history will be preserved and the heritage appreciated for many more generations.

*Emily Wilson was 3rd wife of Capt J H Swift
daug. Maud Furlington was Hattie Race's
younger sister. She was born 1875
in Coupeville and ^{at 15} went to live
with an Aunt in New England.
English work & weaving were
maud's greatest interest. She
married Mr. Furlington a veterinary
doctor and eventually they had
a boy Birney and a girl Mary.
They came west by Railroad in 1912.
Birney went to sea - later was a
Columbia River Pilot - Had 2 daughters
Mary never married. She was an
art teacher at Roosevelt High - Seattle.
She moved to Coupeville in 1965 in
retirement. She & her mother had the
Cannon house built in 1905 from hand-*

Maudie & Rethel had a brother
Dr. George Swift - founder of 1929
Carr's Hosp. in Seattle. He
paid for his sister Thomas to
be buried so they were neighbors
all the rest of their lives in
Comprville.

Helen Race Brown