

Old school lived a short life

It was a "big year" for education in Oak Harbor. The little elementary school on Freund's Hill had outgrown its one room, and it was time for "onward and upward."

Oak Harbor was still unincorporated, and elementary schools dotted the countryside at Silver Lake, Cornet Bay, Swantown and Clover Valley, as well as Freund's Hill.

There was no high school but in Coupeville the Puget Sound Academy boarded students from the area.

The year 1902 looked the little village of Oak Harbor over, and took into account that there was no bank, no city water or sewer, but there was hope: the Dutch immigration had begun and farmers were locating at Swantown and Dugalla Bay and Clover Valley, with an eye to raising their families.

R. Zylstra went into business with a harness shop with a sideline of motorcycles and real estate; Maylor's Point and Eerkes Hill (where Victory Homes are now located) were pleasant farms owned by the Irish and Dutch families.

In the middle of Oak Harbor was the Ely farm which extended down to the main street, now Pioneer Way. Adjacent were the homes of Maylor brothers Joe and John, who built and owned the Maylor Store some 10-12 years before. Both places were fenced; the Ely property was an orchard, and the Maylor homes were landscaped.

Down the pike on East Pioneer, the L. P. Byrne complex sported hotel, dock, creamery, and blacksmith

shop, and daily a steamer brought mail, freight and passengers from Seattle and Everett.

Oak Harbor's First Citizen, "Indian Tom" and his wife lived in a little house built on the overhang of the beach about where the Flintstone Freeway (now Bayshore Drive) joins Pioneer Way. Old Tom delighted his white friends with a daily dip in the bay, winter and summer, no matter how cold the weather. Every afternoon one could hear him blowing water and swimming lustily in the salt chuck, a ritual that never varied.

That was the year the Oak Harbor Elementary School was born, where City Hall now stands on the hill overlooking the few homes and businesses of from 200 to 300 people. A two story wooden building, with basement and main floor that held two classrooms, the OHES pointed its steeple to the sky and its big iron bell tolled for the beginning of classes.

One room held the first four grades; the 6th to 8th grades occupied the other. There were no school buses, and children walked several miles each day.

The younger Neil boys as late as 1911 and 1912 walked from the ranch (Roller Barn) down a winding lane, across a stile and down the hill to school. The school yard extended north through brush thickets and pasture, with a pile of ice-age rocks as a favorite place to play. The rocks are still there, near the O.H. Police Station.

When the new grade and high school was built in 1918,



the old school continued to be used by the lower grades through the 1920s. But the town of Oak Harbor was growing, became incorporated, and needed a town hall. The old school then became the town hall and library, with the fire department lodged in the floorless basement.

With World War II and the advent of the Navy, and the general anxiety of the war years, an observation post was established in the town hall's attic, with volunteer "watchers" manning the post.

Then came the day when Oak Harbor needed a new town hall. The old school building was no longer needed and was sold to be moved to west Oak Harbor and became an Assembly of God church. Its bell tower was removed, the bell disposed of for scrap, and the 1950s were ushered in with a brand new city hall, library, fire and police department.

Old landmarks die hard, with a silent hurting as we see them disappear forever. And in the years to come, only a yellowed picture survives where the roots of communities took hold; where the struggles of pioneers seeking the best for their children took place; where history itself is told and retold in an area that holds little semblance to its origins.





Built in 1902, the Oak Harbor Elementary School sat on the hill overlooking town where City Hall is now. It replaced Freund's School, a one room cabin on the hill going west out of town on the road to Coupeville.

A Great Gift Anytime

A History of Whidbey's Island

as told in story and photo by
Dorothy Neil and Lee Brainard.

"By Canoe and Sailing Ship They Came"

Available in book stores, or send check for \$25.00, which includes tax,
postage and handling, to Spindrift Publishing Co., PO Box 1308,
Oak Harbor WA 98277

A publication of Spindrift Publishing Company, Inc.



Downtown Oak Harbor in the 1920s, complete with cisterns and pumphouses, looking southwest from the old water tower on the hill. The water tower, behind where the "cop shop" is today, was no longer needed after the city hooked onto the Skagit River water pipeline from Anacortes.



LAND TITLE COMPANY OF ISLAND COUNTY

AGENTS FOR:

PACIFIC NW TITLE
STEWART TITLE
TRANSNATION TITLE

Oak Harbor:

1080 NE 7th Ave. Suite #1
Oak Harbor, Washington 98277
(360) 675-2246 • 1 (800) 829-LAND
FAX (360) 675-0936

Freeland:

5570 S. Harbor Ave., P.O. Box 129
Freeland, Washington 98249
(360) 331-4838
FAX (360) 331-4837

Camano /Stanwood:

9123-271st NW #102, P.O. Box 1769
Stanwood, Washington 98292
(360) 629-9739
FAX (360) 629-2152

Steve Metcalfe
Manager

"We Want Your Business"

Some 'random recollections' of the

The following stories are some "random recollections of Coupeville" of the late Carl T. Engle, as told to Jim Power on the occasion of Whidbey Island's centennial celebration in 1948.

To look back over the 100 year history of Whidbey Island and especially that part which centers around Coupeville, is to recall scenes of tragedy and humor, hardships and blessings, continual progress and change.

We who have spent our lives on the island have seen the big and little events happen or heard of them from our fathers and mothers. They are not dull pages from history to us, but personal memories. So, too, shall this short history of Coupeville and the surrounding area be a series of personal recollections aimed at giving life and breath to yellowing pages of records.

Living on Whidbey Island in the early days was pioneering in a very real sense. Much of what we took for granted then seems like almost unbearable hardship today. There were no roads, the country was wild and the Indians a constant threat, mail service was erratic, and provi-

sions were often scarce.

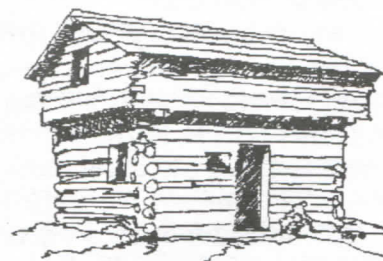
It was said in those days that at Coveland (San de Fuca) they ate salmon and potatoes, at Coupeville venison and no potatoes. It was not uncommon for a family or settlement to be without flour for months at a time.

The history of Coupeville as a town properly begins in 1854 when Captain Thomas Coupe built the first frame house there. He had previously filed a claim on the site on Nov. 20, 1852, after his first voyage to that area.

My father, William B. Engle, came with Capt. Coupe on that first trip. He staked out his claim on Ebey's Prairie and built a frame house in 1853. His trip to pick up bricks for the chimney made the first wagon tracks across the future townsite.

Previously, supplies had been put ashore at Davis' Landing, some distance to the north.

My father's claim adjoined that of Col. Isaac N. Ebey who filed in 1850 and is generally regarded as the first permanent white settler on the island and one of its most honored pioneers.



The murder of Colonel Ebey by a group of Haidah Indians on Aug. 11, 1857, is one of the most tragic episodes in the island's history.

Colonel Ebey and his family were then living in what they affectionately called "The Cabins," not far from Ebey's Landing. There had been considerable trouble with the Haidahs for several months which occasionally flared into open warfare.

On the afternoon of the murder, a group of Indians had come to the Ebey house but had left without causing undue alarm. At the time, United States Marshall George W. Corliss and his wife were visiting the Ebeyes before returning to Olympia.

Several hours after the family and their friends retired, the Indians attacked. Mrs. Corliss jumped from a window and ran to my father's place and then to the home of Colonel Ebey's parents to give the alarm.

All the group staying at "The Cabins" escaped except Colonel Ebey. He went outside at the first sound from the Indians and was shot down and beheaded without warning.

The news of his death shocked not only people of the island but those on the mainland as well. John Crockett made the coffin for Colonel Ebey, and my father dug the grave. The murderers were never caught. ➤

Gift Shoppe



Belle Trésors

Beautiful Treasures for You & Your Home

Seasonal Decor, Rustic Lodge Furniture • Home Accessories
Baby Gift Corner • Beanie Babies • Snow Babies
Collectibles • Beautiful Gift Items

720-1 SE Pioneer Way Oak Harbor 679-2955 Open 7 days a week

early days on Whidbey's Island

Not all the events were tragic, however, and one does not dwell on them too much when looking back. We made the most of our amusement, and much of it was in the spirit of horseplay.

On one occasion, a group got together to shivaree (charivari) a pair of newlyweds. When the couple refused to open the door, they forced a window and pushed a pig through. This brought the door open in short order.

Pigs at one time were so numerous on the island as to be a nuisance. They sprang from domestic ones that had escaped and gone wild, multiplying rapidly.

As boys, we used to sit in trees at night at the edge of gardens and shoot them to prevent them from destroying the produce. Many of the settlers built traps to catch them. The last ones were killed or trapped around 1885 or 1886.

Coupeville's growth through the years was fairly steady if not spectacular. New businesses and stores were located in the town from time to time.

The town experienced two booms in its time, but unlike some of the hopeful metropolises started during the same times, it managed to survive.

The first boom came about 1890 when the whole area had a building hysteria. A rash of new townsites sprang up all over the island, but most of these died a-borning. The second boom came in 1902 at the time Fort Casey was built.

The establishment of the Puget Sound Academy in the late 1880s made Coupeville an

educational center for the northern Sound area. Students came to it from all over the surrounding area and even from as far away as Oregon.

There were two of us in the graduating class of 1894: Spurgeon H. Calhoun and myself.

There were several factors that contributed to Coupeville's permanence. One of these was the productivity of the prairies which made the town a shipping point for apples, potatoes, wheat, oats, wool and lumber.

Being the county seat also contributed to stability as did the presence of a bank in the town.

Coupeville was never much of a manufacturing center due to shipping problems, but some industries started, and some of them did thrive for a time.

A sawmill built by Luther Clark and operated by the Lovejoy brothers survived for many years. These same brothers also built four steamboats at Coupeville. One of these went to the Yukon and operated there. The other three plied the Sound for many years.

A potato dryer was built here during the Alaska gold rush and operated successfully for several

years. Attempts were made to establish a cannery, but this venture never made a go of it.

Three different tries were made to get a railroad on the island. The first was by Jay Cook, the New York financier. If Cook had not gone bankrupt, the island might have had rail service.

Another was proposed about 1890 but failed. The last proposal was made in 1910 when promoters came in and sold stock. After collecting several thousand dollars from investors, the promoters vanished leaving island people bereft of both the railroad and the money they had invested.

Today (1948), Coupeville has forgotten the delusions of grandeur that occasionally swept over it in earlier days. It remains the county seat, a pleasant home for its people, and the trading area for the rich prairies stretching out behind the town.

Good roads link it with other parts of the island, and the bridge at Deception Pass to the north and regular ferry service to the south give easy access to the mainland.

To many of us, however, it still remains a place beloved in memory and rich in history. 🌲



The Oak Tree

Yarns, Needlepoint
and Crosstitch
Instructions

720 SE Pioneer Way

Downtown Oak Harbor

web: www.oakxstitch.com

email: oaktree@whidbey.net

675-6931

Ed Barrington was city's first businessman

Ed Barrington's name appears prominently in the early development of Oak Harbor in the 1850s. The town's first "businessman," he later married Christina McCrohan, youngest of the large McCrohan family.

A big, red bearded sea captain, he became known as the "Father of Captains," as four of his five sons followed in his steps. Capt. Hill Barrington and Capt. Harry Barrington lived in Oak Harbor and San de Fuca and Capt. Sid Barrington lived in Seattle. All three piloted boats in Alaska and on the Sound.

In the early part of the 1850s, Barrington, an enterprising man, loaded a bark with piles for San Francisco. It is said that C. W. Sumner sold the pilings there and kept the money, leaving Barrington as poor or poorer than when he started.

Discouraged, Barrington packed up and left Whidbey, but got only as far as Olympia where he was offered the schooner "Eclipse" at a bargain. In partnership with Charles Phillips, he returned to Oak Harbor to again try his luck in the new land.

He sent word up the river that he would pay the Indians one dollar a barrel for all the potatoes they would bring him, and soon the big Indian canoes came down the river loaded with fine potatoes.


It was said that the method of exchange was very simple, the captain and one Indian stood on deck and every time a barrel was dumped in the hold the captain dropped a silver



Looking east from Maylor's Store on Pioneer Way in the 1890s. The main street was originally named after Captain Edward Barrington, Oak Harbor's first businessman.

dollar into the Indian's hand. When he got \$20 in silver dollars he dropped them all into the captain's hand in exchange for a \$20 gold piece.

In one trip loaded down with potatoes, Barrington was said to have cleared enough to pay for the schooner.

The firm of Barrington and Phillips established the first store at Oak Harbor. They dealt in all kinds of home and garden produce and meats, and also had the first delivery service on the Sound, for they delivered goods wherever it was needed, by water. 

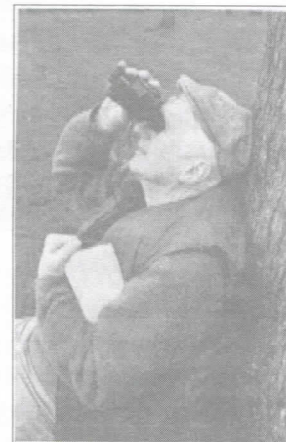
Looking for the Best Value in Retirement & Assisted Living? Look No Further than Harbor Tower Village.

Now that fall is here and the leaves are changing from green to gold, it's time to consider all the comfort and convenience you'll find year-round at

 **Harbor Tower Village**

A VILLAGE CONCEPTS RETIREMENT & ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY

100 E. Whidbey Avenue, Oak Harbor, WA 98277
www.jetcity.com/~foxridge/village



675-2569