



The old courthouse at San de Fuca, which was then Coveland. It was the first courthouse in Island County, built in 1855 when Island, Skagit, Whatcom, San Juan and Snohomish counties were all one county, the only one north of Seattle. Everyone traveled by boat in those days so being an island wasn't a problem. The historic building is now a private residence.

The first road on Whidbey connected Coveland with Ebey's Landing

Before there was a Madrona Way from San de Fuca to Coupeville, the only road connecting the San de Fuca (then called Coveland) site with Ebey's Landing, and possibly the first road on Whidbey Island, ran between Ebey's Landing or just above, and a spot near Good Beach at the head of Penn Cove.

Flora Engle of Coupeville wrote in the *Island County Times* in 1928 that there was a trail existing from the Cook farm on Cemetery Hill past the Davis Spring with a never failing supply of ice cold water, to the Ed Smith home over-

looking the Cove. Engle had walked this trail in 1926.

A post office was established at Coveland in the early 1850s, even before a sawmill was put in operation at Utsaladdy.

The post office was abandoned in favor of the Coupeville office, but reestablished later in the late 1890s when San de Fuca became a "boom town."

Grennan and Cranney, pioneer storekeepers at Coveland, kept a store there when the first flour mill opened, owned by James Buzby, the Crescent Harbor pioneer who owned the farm later owned by

Herb Dykers.

There were rooms over the mill, presumably bachelor quarters. A grist mill was later installed nearby, owned by Friend Wilson, an uncle of Mrs. F. P. Race.

Coveland was the first Island county seat which embraced the present counties of Island, Snohomish, Skagit, San Juan, and Whatcom counties. Court was held for the third Judicial District in 1852 in a little log cabin.

In 1855 the "old county courthouse" was built, which still stands at the head of Penn's Cove.

Coupeville in the '20s

It was the 1920s and the Great Depression was heating up for a long run to World War II. Our family had just moved to Whidbey Island and found there were no houses available for a family of six in Coupeville, so it was back to Oak Harbor to claim the only one available here!

Coupeville, ten miles south on Whidbey, along a narrow country road had been recommended to Mother by a friend as being "the place where the culture is". . . and Mother, anxious to provide all the culture she could for her brood of four, took her friend at her word.

After all, Coupeville was the site of the (Puget Sound) Academy, the "only seat of higher learning north of the University of Washington."

It was also the County Seat and the home of the Court House, and one could tell that the town's founders came from New England by the tall and beautiful homes erected in the settlement on Penn's Cove.

It was a great disappointment when the little Star touring car



Coupeville was truly a one horse town in the early years of the century.

turned around and headed back toward Oak Harbor.

Mother and Dad found a welcome in Oak Harbor where "newcomers" were few and far between. The family established itself through church, school and community and to this day a series of outrageous (but still acceptable) incidents are told and retold.

One particular happening took place when Mother and Dad went to Coupeville on business, and Dad parked his car on Front Street. Mother

waited while Dad attended to business. The day was warm, and the street was a dirt path where pavement was yet unheard of.

As Mother sat in the car contemplating the stillness and inactivity of the little town, a big cat walked slowly out into the middle of the thoroughfare, dug a hole in the dust, and sat down. He then rose, covered his contribution and walked slowly back to the sidewalk.

Nothing else stirred . . . until Dad returned and found Mother in hysterics!

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Ely was first mayor

Jerome Ely, Oak Harbor's first elected Mayor, came to Oak Harbor in 1873 following a stay in hospital after the Civil War. He took up a homestead in the center of today's Oak Harbor, on land that had originally been claimed by Charles Summers, one of Oak Harbor's first three settlers.

There were only a few people living in Oak Harbor at that time. Ely came to the Island looking for a new life in a new land. He built a small cabin in the middle of the tract in a grove of Garry oak, many of which are still standing.

In the early 1890s a family named McCaslin came to town, McCaslin representing an eastern nursery, and a number of his fruit trees are still in existence on the old Ely homeplace, continuing to bear fruit. The McCaslin family had several daughters, and Clarabelle became Mrs. Jerome Ely. She was the hostess for the small social life that took place in those early days. The house that Ely built for his family was destroyed in the late 1990s after 100 years of occupancy.

Many an early day wedding and reception were held at the Ely home, a perfect place for the three Ely children, Jerry, Syrena and Vernon, to grow up. A fence and gate opened upon today's "Old Town" Pioneer Way and a large barn and water tower were built farther up the hill. The barn still stands, being moved farther north and becoming the USO for a long time, and which today houses the Montessori School.

When Jerome died in 1923, Clarabelle sold the property which today includes City Beach, to



The old Ely house sitting above the town deteriorated badly, and was burned several years ago as a fire department training.

Vernon "Done" Ely, the youngest son. "Done" (rhymes with bone) continued to live in the old house the rest of his life. Some years ago, he gave the "Help House" location (which was a family rental), to the city as a gift.

Done, the youngest son, recalled taking his shotgun and climbing the hill in back of the Ely home, to hunt birds in the thick woods. He went to school in the tall wooden schoolhouse built in 1902 where the "new" City Hall now sits. He graduated from high school here and was an outstanding baseball player in the days when baseball between the Whidbey Island communities was followed with much intense interest by the entire population.



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