

Ault Field once was totally Dutch

Ault Field, that broad expanse of fertile valley from Dugualla Bay on the east side of Whidbey, to the west beach where Whidbey Naval Air Station is located, was settled in the 1890s by pioneers of Dutch heritage.

According to an account by historian Jerome Ely, the Dutch immigrants began arriving in 1894 and continued to come in sizable numbers until 1912. These were the "early day" people from Holland; many had settled first in the Dakotas and Michigan, but were attracted west by promoters who offered fertile lands for sale.

Clover Valley was the name given the valley which was cleared by hand labor by people who built homes and raised their families to become good citizens in their adopted country.

In the early part of 1896, R. E. Werkman, who brought the first parties of Hollanders to Whidbey, wrote in the *Seattle Times* concerning the Dutch settlement at Oak Harbor.

There were about 200 estimated to have settled here at that time, most of them families. Many arrived with only a few dollars and a large family. Soon after their arrival they formed a Christian Reformed Church which met in Byrne's Hall on the waterfront. Plans were made to build.

Potatoes were the first crop raised that first year, and they found that the price of potatoes which had been as low as \$5 a ton, rose to \$10. Many of them planned to go into the dairy business, and all were reported doing well.

From the Island County Times Jan. 31, 1896: "Many of the newly arrived Hollanders have already begun making permanent improvements. The Island Mfg. Co. mill has been busy . . . getting out lumber and shingles for them. Lovejoy Bros. towed a raft of 11,000 feet of lumber to Oak Harbor via the Calista.

"The Holland colony now numbers about 100 souls in Oak Harbor; all have good old-fashioned families of six or more children which will help out the school fund of that district.

"They are the kind of settlers needed to make a prosperous community, industrious, patient and frugal, and if they are given the chance, will do their part toward making the wilderness blossom as the rose."

In the spring of 1896, another party of Hollanders arrived at Oak Harbor, accompanied B. H. TeRoller. They were the Rev. Brink and wife, a missionary of the Christian Reformed Church sent to look after the spiritual life of the colonists; Levy Sinnema and wife and three children; J. Fisher and P. Oostindie; all of Orange City, Iowa. The local newspaper duly recorded that the newcomers toured Ebey and Smith Prairies and visited Coupeville accompanied by, Messrs. Bos, Nienhuis, Hulst and others.

The first patriotic celebration on Whidbey Island by the Holland people who settled here was July 4, 1896. An account of the event which took place at West Beach below the Swantown Road, was



recorded in the *Island County Times* . . .

"About 100 persons were present at the picnic place which had been cleared in the woods at the edge of the beach. Seats had been made, as well as a platform, and swings 'for the girls.'"

"A patriotic program was put on mostly by the recently organized Singing School made up of young Hollanders. J. D. Helder brought an organ to the celebration for music. Dauwe Zylstra gave the principal address, followed by the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Many readings, some comical were recited; and hymns were sung.

"The 'Groningers' as they called themselves sang the Star Spangled Banner; Red, White and Blue; and Marching Through Georgia. Members from the 'east side' or Friesen also contributed to the program.

"A huge basket picnic was served, with lemonade, candy and peanuts, for free. Two balloons were released during the afternoon, which sailed away toward Coupeville."

The *Times* concluded with a quote from the celebration, "It is hoped we may meet again next year in increased numbers to celebrate the Independence of the country now our own, and ever more shall be. So be it." ❀

Oak Harbor – Utsalady Ferry

by Roger Sherman

Island County Historical
Society Newsletter

During the first part of the 1920s, the Deception Pass ferry, owned by Agaton and Berte Olson was doing quite well. They decided to expand and start a ferry route between Olson's Landing and Utsalady on Camano Island. They called it the Oak Harbor-Utsalady route. Olson's Landing is now known as Mariners Cove. The ferry slip was where the rock jetty now stands.

The ferry *Acorn*, named after Oak Harbor's Garry Oaks, was built at Seattle in 1924 and the ferry service started the same year. Agaton's brothers Trix, Art and Al were partners and were eventually bought out.

The *Acorn* was 65 feet with a beam of 25 feet and was a single ender. There was only one propeller which meant the vehicles had to back off at Utsalady.

Olson's Landing was exposed to the winter winds which cause numerous problems for the little *Acorn*. An old wooden ship was put up on the beach and gave the ferry slip some protection.

Ivan (Augy) and Gilbert (Gib), Agaton and Berte's twin sons, started working on the *Acorn* when they were 12 years old. Their pay was a dollar a day. Berte's half brother Andy also worked with them. During the summer and on weekends, the entire crew consisted of Andy and one of the twins.

Agaton and Berte did everything they could to stop construction of the Deception Pass Bridge, but it wasn't enough. The bridge was completed in



Deception Pass Ferry in its hey day.

1935 and put both the Deception Pass run and the Oak Harbor-Utsalady runs out of business. The Deception Pass route was closed in 1935 and the Oak Harbor-Utsalady run stopped in 1936.

The year 1936 also saw Agaton and Berte divorce. Berte was a strong willed colorful person. After the route closures and the divorce, Berte formed the Olympic Navigation Company, took the *Acorn* and started another route on the Hood Canal.

It was called the Shine-Port Gamble run and was in about the same place as the present day Hood Canal bridge. She continued to expand her business and was known as the "Tugboat Annie of Hood Canal."

She could and did do all of the numerous jobs on her ferries, from skipper to deck hand to engineer to caulking scams. One of the most amazing things that she did was when she moved her family

from Dewey Beach on Fidalgo Island, to Hood Canal, she put all of their belongings into their house, loaded the house on a barge and took it with her.

Berte was only one of three women captains during that generation. Agaton had another ferry built, the *Tahoma*, and started the McNeil Island run in south sound.

In 1950, the *Acorn* was sold to the Island Navigation Company (Black Ball Lines) and in 1965 was sold to the Hat Island Development Company for operations between Everett and Hat (Gedney) Island. She was later taken north by a logging company.

Berte sold her company in 1950. In 1951, nearly all of the ferries and routes were purchased by the Washington State Transportation System.

Captain Berte Olson died in 1959 at the age of 77. Her twin sons, Augy and Gib were born at San de Fuca in 1917 and are living in Anacortes. ❀

Two tales of South Whidbey . . .

The following bits of Island history were written by Cora Cook some years ago. They appeared in our local newspaper, where we found them. The first is about Maxwellton on South Whidbey; the second is about Whidbey Island pioneers Mary & Thomas Johns.

Maxwelton is one of the communities on Whidbey island that has a mystery connected with its setting.

Captain George Vancouver sailed into the area we now call Useless Bay between July 2 and July 4, 1792. He and his men left the ship *Discovery* in small boats to explore. They found a large creek entering the east side of the bay.

Along the creek's bank was a bluff that stood 50-100 feet high. Up the creek they rowed in the shadow of the bluff on the left with a giant sandbar on the right.

About three-quarters of a mile up the creek they came to the

present mouth of that creek. A wide sandbar separated the main bay from an inner bay known as "the core." This inner bay filled as the high tide rolled over the sandbar then emptied as the tide receded.

When the men of Vancouver's party entered this inner bay behind the present location of Maxwellton, they assumed they were the first white men exploring the region. But they were amazed to see what appeared to be a wreck half submerged. Rowing over, they found to their astonishment that it was the remains of a ship.

Even then, in 1792, the wreck was so weather-beaten that the name of the ship pointed on the hull was indiscernible.

This shallow inner bay, bounded on the west by the wide sandbar, was almost a mile long in the north-south direction. On the inland side, two streams poured freshwater in. The larger of the two streams meandered away toward a small

lake near Midvale.

The lake, known today as Miller's lake, served as the spawning ground for the mighty hooknose silver salmon. Behind Maxwellton today we find a large marshland diked off from the sea. Indeed this cattail filled marsh is the core where Captain Vancouver's sailors found the old ship in 1792.

The remains of this old ship were rediscovered in 1859 by the first white settlers of Deer Lagoon, Thomas Johns and Edward Oliver. They also found wild oxen roaming in the trees.

Is it possible the oxen were aboard the ill-fated ship? Had the ship landed to find timber for a new mast?

In the sands of Sunlight Beach on the Double Bluff side my father once found two skeletons. One had a broken arm, another a fractured jaw.

Could they have been victims of some unknown tragedy?

Thomas and Mary Johns

Sometime before 1878, Thomas Johns, one of the first white men to settle along the shores of Deer Lagoon, was smitten by the charm of a pretty little waitress in Port Townsend.

Mary Jane Coffett had dark, blue eyes and dark brown hair, the kind that always stayed right where she combed it, giving her a neat prim look.

She had been born in Red Oak, Iowa, on March 20, 1852, and when her father died her mother decided to take her and her brother out west to see her other two brothers, one living at Friday Harbor and the other on Lopez in the San Juans.

After arriving in the islands, Mary decided to go to the ➤

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a mystery and a tragedy

by Cora Cook



"metropolis" of Port Townsend where she found work as a waitress.

Thomas met Mary there. They fell in love and were married April 12, 1878 at her brother's home on Lopez where her mother now also lived. He was 37 years old and she 26.

Thomas took his bride to his little bachelor house near Deer Lagoon which she, in no time made to look like a real home. She found her new life a difficult one as all pioneer women did. Most of the neighboring women were Indian girls married to white men and she longed for the companionship of a white woman.

In the rich and fertile ground she grew vegetables which she cooked on a little stove. From a well she carried water which was used to wash her and her husband's clothes by hand, Thomas fished and dug clams and hunted deer for their table.

In the evening they would watch from their cabin door as the sun sank behind the Olympic Mountains, bathing the countryside in shadows of lavender and rose. In the spring they watched as ducks and geese came from the south by the hundreds to the lagoon to raise their young. In the fall, they watched them fly away in giant "V's", back to the warmth of the sunny south.

On February 4, 1879, their first child, a girl, was born. They named her Florence. Because the nearest doctor was at Port Townsend, an Indian woman came and stayed until the baby was born.

Twin brothers were born

September 27, 1880, and were named Richard William and James Jasper. Florence called them Willie and Jimmie which was how they were known by all the neighbors. Jimmie, always taller and stronger of the two had dark hair. Willie's was light brown.

One day when the twins were over a year old, the family decided to visit a neighbor by the name of Torgeson who lived on Lone Lake, just south of where the Deer Lagoon Grange stands today. Thomas carried the twins in a sack along on his back. Florence walked. Walking is a privilege of being older than the boys, her mother comforted her when the young girl couldn't understand why they, but not she, were carried.

The three children attended the first school formed in the district which encompassed the entire south end of the island below Coupeville. The school was first organized at the Lyons' Ranch which later became known as Maxwelton. It was later moved to Bayview.

Thomas became one of the first directors in newly-formed District 8 and continued in the position for many years. He was also the first postmaster, parceling out mail to the neighbors from his home where it arrived from Port Townsend by small boat.

The years passed. One day the twins, now 19 years old, decided to go to the logging camp situated just north of Maxwelton. They had gone there many times before and went by a small boat of theirs that they had sailed and rowed along the shores of the island to

visit friends.

They had no trouble reaching the camp and spent the day visiting with the men. A storm had come up in the evening, however, making the bay very rough. Though the loggers advised them to spend the night at the camp, the boys were sure they could make the trip and so left.

Their father waited three days for them to return and then began walking down the beach in search. Just south of Sunlight Beach he found Jimmie, lying dead amongst the driftwood. Further south he found Willie, also dead.

Footprints on the sand indicated that the two boys, both good swimmers, had reached the beach alive after the boat had capsized midway between Maxwelton and Sunlight Beach. Tracks showed that both had started up the shoreline toward home.

Thomas figured that the smaller Willie had tired first and had been carried for about two miles by his brother. Then, feeling that both could not make it that way, Jimmie had left him to go for help. He too was overcome by exhaustion, however, and fell where his father found him.

The crying of the gulls and the lapping waves along the beach, never before sounded so lonely, Thomas said of the sad walk home to tell his wife and daughter of their loss.

