

# Eerkes Hill, now part of Seaplane Base

When we came to Oak Harbor in 1925, the town's main street, then called Barrington Avenue, extended from "downtown's" two blocks of stores on the east along the waterfront where about six homes faced the water. At the end of that was "Eerkes Hill" (today's Victory Homes), where stood a big square two-story house, the home of the Eerkes brothers, Herman and John.

John was married and had a family; his brother was a bachelor. Their father lived with their two younger sisters and brother just a stone's throw down the road.

Eerkes Hill was a windswept vista of pasture with trees here and there, a place where shooting stars and dogtooth violets bloomed in the springtime. The farm was a going concern as much as any farm was in those days just before the "Great Depression" of the 1930s.

The road continued from the Eerkes house on east to the narrow spit that connected Maylor's Point with the mainland. And from the spit northward along the beach was the "Big Spring" that had been there since primeval days, where the Indians used to stop for fresh water.

**Before the** Eerkes family came to Oak Harbor in the mid-1890s with the first wave of Dutch immigrants, a man by the name of A.W. Bash had taken land and built the big square farmhouse and buildings there in the 1880s. The Bash home was where the Navy gate to the Seaplane Base (now Skagit Valley College) is located.

Bash was an internationally

known figure. He was a collector of customs at Port Townsend and lived there as well as in Oak Harbor. After the Japanese-Chinese War, Bash decided to go to China to introduce American ideas about railroads. He was acquainted with Secretary of the Treasury John W. Foster, who was a good friend of Li Hung Chang, the Chinese statesman.

**Li Hung Chang** thought that the United States had only one statesman, and that was President Grant, who had been entertained by the Chinese in China. Li was impressed with Grant's whiskers, and A.W. Bash grew his whiskers in the same manner as did the president. That made them equally famous.

Bash and the great Chinese became fast friends, and when Bash was a guest in Li's home, his host had him sit in the seat occupied by Grant when he was a guest there!

Li was supportive of Bash's ambitions to build railroads in China, and Bash spent much time between Washington, D.C., and the East Coast and China. An article in the Seattle Times predicted that Bash, if he realized his ambitions, would soon become a millionaire!

**In the meantime,** Mrs. Bash, when not accompanying her husband in his journeys halfway around the world, lived at Oak Harbor. An article in the Island County Times of Sept. 20, 1895, read: "Mrs. Bash, who was with her husband in Seattle for a few days, returned to her home in Oak Harbor."

We often wondered what the

lady did with her time. There was little in Oak Harbor to keep her busy. Perhaps her Port Townsend home was a little livelier, with the ships coming and going in that frontier harbor town.

Oak Harbor had fewer than 100 people living inside its boundaries. L.P. Byrne maintained a hostelry and store just down the road toward the other part of town where Maylor's Store was the principal building. If the Bashes had children, they may have been grown, for no mention is made of them in available information.

**One happening** which dropped Bash's standing on Whidbey Island was his importation of Chinese pheasants which he turned loose to propagate and become "natives" of Whidbey. The farmers were angry, saying the birds would eat valuable grains and become a nuisance. But once loosed, the birds bred and became plentiful, and the farmers accepted the amount of grain they ate as negligible.

Fully occupied with railroad building, the Bashes sold the big square house in Oak Harbor to the Eerkes family and left, never to be heard from again.

When the Navy came to North Whidbey, the Eerkes Hill property and the Eerkes farm were the first to taken over by the government, and the Eerkes brothers and their family moved to Skagit County. The buildings, when nearing 60 years old, were torn down and where dogtooth violets grew housing sprouted, and where the house and farm buildings stood, the gate the Seaplane Base stood. ☆





*This photo was taken looking east toward Eerkes Hill and Maylor's Point, in the 1920s from the top of the water tower located about where the Oak Harbor Police Department is now. It is now where SE Pioneer Way, Skagit Valley College, Maylor's Point, and the Seaplane Base. Victory Homes takes up most of Eerkes Hill.*

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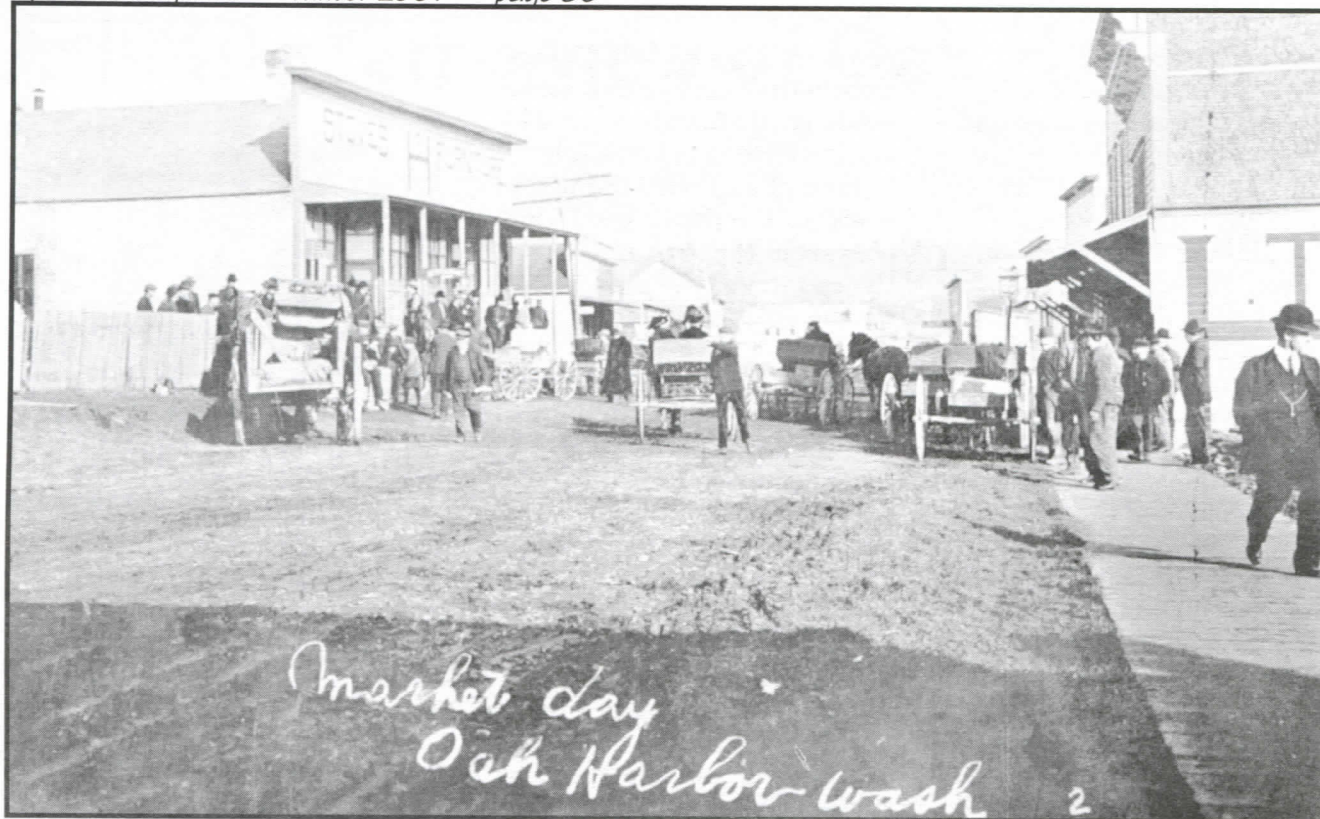
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*Above: Market Day in a growing Oak Harbor about 1915. Figure at right is Johnny (J.T.) Rogers, local banker.  
Below: A snowy night on Pioneer Way in the 1950s featuring newly installed street light. Photo taken looking west from about where Old Town Mall is now.*

