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Spindrift Two

Fall 1991

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Island's First Shipyard Was At Oak Harbor

Sea captains, boat builders and seamen generally were among the first settlers in Washington state's Islands, and Oak Harbor had its quota. In 1858 Captain George Morse, Captain Ed Barrington and others became interested in logging camps for the lumber that would build boats. A shipyard was laid out in Oak Harbor about where Flintstone Freeway is now located, lumber was ordered and a crew hired to build Oak Harbor's first and only schooner, the "Growler."

Captain Barrington is said to have named it so because the builders did so much growling. However, it was completed, and began carrying surplus farm produce to surrounding markets, to Victoria and other British Columbia points. A Captain Lloyd was in command.

One story is told of Captain Barrington taking a trip to Victoria with the promise of buying hats for the women of his family and other relatives. As there was a high custom rate for such commodities, Barrington distributed the hats among a dozen or so Indian women passengers who wore them with grace and without paying, but had them confiscated upon arrival in Washington Territory.

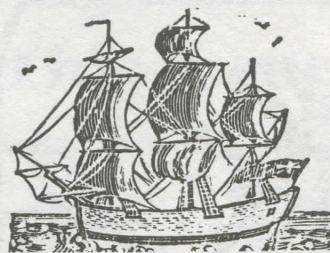
Captain Jonathan Adams also had a trading schooner which ran between Port Townsend and Island points, and

which carried the mail. About 1890 the Oregon Rain and navigation steamers *Haslo* and *Wasco* ran between Seattle and Bellingham, serving Island points.

In 1889, the year of Washington statehood, Joshua Green built the large steamer *State of Washington* and the sternwheeler *Fairhaven*. The Skagit flats were coming into prominence as the world's largest producer of oats and hay, seed and bulbs, and the boating business was booming.

Captain Barrington was in charge of the *State of Washington* and was reputed to be one of the best captains on Puget Sound. Bert Nunan, of the pioneer Oak Harbor Nunan family was purser, with Captain Green in command. It was said that Green was acquainted with every man, woman and child along the way, and each was welcomed as an old friend aboard the boat. The *State of Washington* was advanced for those pioneer days, and boasted a long family table in the dining cabin, a ladies cabin for music and social entertainment and a smoking room for the men.

Sam was the Chinese cook, regarded as the "boss of the galley and the crew, from Captain to cabin-boy. They all learned not to trifle with Sam. Captain Harry Barrington piloted the boat, and his brother Hill Barrington began his



career as a boatman as cabin-boy on the *State of Washington*. William Mitchell of Coupeville also worked to the top in boating under Captain Green.

The 1890s were years of growth and inspiration in the Northwest. Washington was finally a state, the population was increasing by leaps and bounds, the railroad had emerged, business was bustling, and opportunities were immense. During this time P. P. Custer, later a state representative from Island County at Olympia, had a contract to deliver the mail from Ebey's Landing to Coupeville, quite a cosmopolitan feat.

When the daily boat came in to Island ports, it was a momentous occasion. People would gather in the vicinity of landings when they heard the boat whistle, and when one of the young men was asked to take the bowline he felt highly honored. As late as the 1930s in Oak Harbor, when the *Atalanta* came in at 6 o'clock each evening with its load of freight, passengers and mail, local people would congregate at the little post office, to await the mail car rattling up the dock and the distribution of the mail.

The Lovejoy brothers, Howard and Ed of Coupeville organized the Island Transportation Company in 1912. Howard modeled and built the steamer *Whidbey*, a fast boat, but not so homelike as the old faithful *Fairhaven*, according to Howard T. Hill, local historian and writer.

The *Whidbey* ran one round trip a day from Seattle to Oak Harbor, tying up at the Oak Harbor dock overnight. Captain Arnold of San de Fuca was captain. The *Whidbey* burned at the

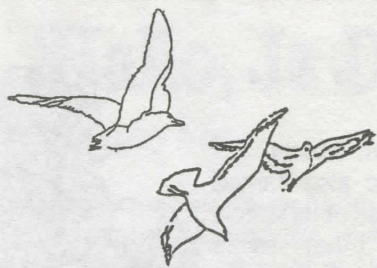
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end of the dock one night with the loss of two lives. She was cut loose and floated to Maylor's Point where what remained of her hull still lies.

The *Calista*, named for Calista Lovejoy, early pioneer of Coupeville, was Howard Lovejoy's finest piece of architecture, showing speed in all her lines. She was built for comfort as well. Captain Bert Lovejoy was pilot and purser was a seaman by the name of McGinnis.

Calista, with 59 passengers aboard headed for Seattle one morning in a thick fog. Off Sandy Point the steamship Hawaii Maru of a Japanese line ran into the *Calista*, which sank in 28 minutes. No persons were lost on either boat, but the "sinking of the *Calista*" was something Whidbey Islanders talked about for many years. Margaret McLeod, the Mayor of Langle was picked up hanging onto a coop of chickens, by a tug, the *F. T. Crosby*, and until the tug reached the city there was considerable apprehension concerning McLeod's safety.

Gradually, with the improvement in roads and highways, and the railroads, the boating era for this part of the Sound was over. By 1941 there were no regular passenger or freight boats on inland waters, only a tramp freighter here and there. In 1935 the Deception Pass Bridge was built, doing away with the need for both the Deception Pass and the Utsalady ferries.

Today a brand new series of Mosquito Fleet boats are plying the Sound, trying to bring back that leisurely mode of travel enjoyed by our forebears. Perhaps, with the gridlock on our freeways and the streets of Seattle, the idea might even succeed.



The ill-fated steamer "Whidbey" was cut loose from the Oak Harbor dock and floated over to the spit to burn itself out. The hulk remained beached for many years, until the arrival of the Navy. The wooded hill behind the boat is Maylor's Point.



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Heller Cabin Possibly Oldest Home

Possibly the oldest dwelling place on Whidbey north of San de Fuca is a log cabin made of hand-hewn timbers which stands on the Pine Valley Farm acres of Onno Heller. Pine Valley farm is near a marsh in Clover Valley, on Crosby Road and its first record shows a deed dated June 26, 1871 when it was owned by William Hastie, the pioneer for whom Hastie Lake was named.

Onno Heller's father Martinus Heller bought the place in January of 1907, and Onno recalled that even after a newer house was built, the big room in the log house was used for area wedding receptions and other events.

About 20 years ago Heller agreed to donate the building to the Island County Fair where it would be restored for display. Dewey Hoekstra, who was then president of the Fair Association, had been born in the log cabin. The project was never followed up, and the pioneer building is still in place at Clover Valley.

From the time it was owned by Hastie, the ownership changed to William James in 1876, who sold it to Jesse Jackson for \$1,400. Jackson's son, Elmer was born there and lived in Oak Harbor all his life. He married Katie Nunan Byrne and owned a butcher shop in Oak Harbor.

The cabin ownership went back to James, then returned again to Jackson in 1896. Hannah Crosby bought it in 1899 and sold it to Douwe Hoekstra. It was sold to W. J. Clapp, to Lambert Streutker and Jurgin Streutker, then to Martinus Heller.

The old hand-hewn log cabin, almost hidden from the road by an or-



The old Heller cabin still survives just off Crosby Road west of Heller Road. This photo was taken several years ago.

chard, is not used any more for wedding receptions, or for anything much.

Remembering, the cabin looks back to when there was only a trail

through the woods to what was Oak Harbor, where supplies could be purchased some decades before the Hollanders arrived to begin clearing land in Clover Valley.



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Bessie Wallace Tells of Life as Pioneer Wife

The first white woman to make her home in Skagit County, Bessie Wallace Cornelius Rudene, wrote of her life as the daughter of Crescent Harbor pioneers and the journey from Oregon to Whidbey Island.

"I was born in Oregon City on June 14, 1849. My mother had crossed the plains in 1845 and arrived at the Whitman Mission near Walla Walla just as the winter set in and the weary travelers gladly accepted the opportunity to rest and prepare for the remainder of the journey down the Columbia River to Oregon City in the spring.

"Father's party came in the fall of 1846, narrowly escaping being at the Whitman mission at the time of the massacre.

"Shortly after my birth, my father William Wallace learned that any settler who would go to Whidbey Island might become owner of 640 acres of land, and he gathered together the few family possessions and set out through the wilderness for Puget Sound. When we arrived at Olympia (then Smithfield) we found we were the only white family in the village.

"On our way to Olympia, father met Colonel Ebey who had recently returned from a trip to Whidbey Island where he had located the claim now known as Ebey's Landing. So enthusiastic was the Colonel that Father's ambition for land was still further fired, and packing up again we started by the only means of transportation, scow and Indian canoe, for the 'land of dreams.'

"My parents often told of their visit at the Indian village on Elliott Bay (where Seattle is now located) how kind and hospitable the Indian chief was, generously offering all the land they would accept if they would only stay. But they were still under the spell of Col Ebey's enthusiasm and proceeded on their way to Crescent Harbor. Father located on what is now the John Gould place.

"We were the first white family, since Col. Ebey had not yet moved his family to the Island. In a short time however, others came so we were not long without white neighbors. It has always been a source of regret to me that my father refused the offers of Chief Seattle and persisted in going so far from the main settlements for the family was deprived of practically all the privileges of civilization, school, church and social.

"We had several Indian scares but were never molested nor in actual danger. I shall never forget our terror when the news of Col. Ebey's murder by the northern Indians reached us. Our information was so meager that we didn't know but what a general uprising and massacre would ensue, for the dread of the Northern Indians (Haidahs) were well founded. Even after all these years I never hear of the North Coast Indians without a shudder. Our home Indians were always friendly.

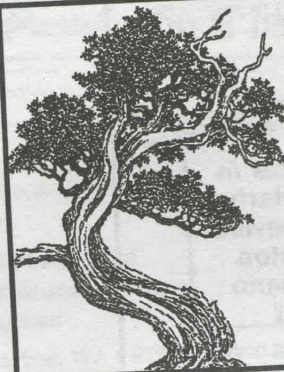
"In early womanhood I married a young pioneer, John A. Cornelius, and for a year lived at Oak Harbor. During that time Cornelius was investigating rumors regarding the possibilities of a low-lying flat off the northeast on the mainland and we finally decided to settle on a claim in the midst of that somewhat desolate area. Despite the ridicule of friends and neighbors in September 1867 he moved his young wife and baby (Wil-



liam John Cornelius) to that place that is still my home. I have no hesitancy in saying that I was the first white woman to make her home at what is now Skagit County.

"Cornelius secured the contract to complete a survey for the U.S. Government for a contractor who died on the job. He surveyed three tiers of townships starting in Snohomish county and north to the International boundary. He followed this work until hardship and exposure broke his health. But until his death he was an earnest worker and leader in the development of the land of his choice, the Swinomish flats.

"In the years following three more children were born, two boys and a girl. In 1882 I became the wife of John Oscar Rudene, who took up the development work where Cornelius left off. I have been happy in my life as a pioneer of Skagit County. It has meant hard work and privations but there have been compensations as I walked and worked at the side of those two good men and true."



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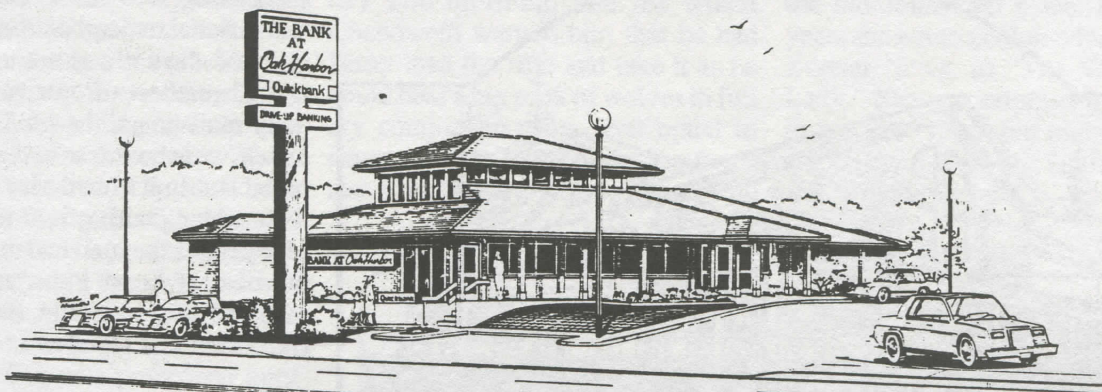
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Crescent Harbor Was One of the First

Crescent Harbor, that broad pocket of farmlands and forest bordering a curving shoreline to the east of Oak Harbor has a startling history to contribute to Whidbey Island's past. At Crescent Harbor, Whidbey's last elk was shot; the first murder committed; the first water piped into a house; a pioneer blockhouse was built in the 1850s to protect settlers; and it was the scene of one of the first Fourth of July celebrations held on the Island, with both settlers and Indians taking part.

Henrietta Frostad (nee Izett) was born in Crescent Harbor to early day settler John Izett and his wife Nancy who was the sister of two other settlers, the "Mounts brothers." Her vivid accounts of growing up in Crescent Harbor, of attending the Academy at Coupeville, and her memories of the tales her father and mother told of pioneering are a valuable part of the history of North Whidbey.

Henrietta Izett had a good memory and remembered such early pioneers as Captain Ed Barrington and Jerome Ely and their families. She referred to

Ely as "Uncle Jerry." She told a humorous story of Norwegian Taftson, one of the three men who arrived first in Oak Harbor.

"Taftson once said to my father, 'I don't see why Ulrich (Freund) can't say "blue-jay" . . . he always says "plue-chay!"'

Henrietta's father John Izett was a boat builder, and when Captain Barrington decided to build a boat in Oak Harbor, Izett was chosen for the job. Izett's dream for many years had been to be a boat builder, but on a hazardous trip by boat from San Francisco in 1857 nearly all of the savings he had accumulated by working at Utsalady went overboard with his belongings to lighten the ship when the old "*Constitution*" nearly foundered. So the "*Growler*" was not only his first attempt to build a ship on Whidbey, but his last.

Barrington, who was in the logging and freighting business, and who furnished the Utsalady mill with hotel meat along with hay and feed for the animals, found the *Growler* a good money-maker and after a few years on

the Sound, sold her to a trader in Alaska for a good sum. She was later lured ashore and wrecked by the Northern Indians.

John and Nancy Izett lived in Crescent Harbor, then a densely wooded valley, after their marriage, staying with the Chenoweths until their first son was born. Then they moved with little George to their cozy log cabin home. There was a tiny kitchen with a painted floor and a varnished cupboard, a Buck's four-lid patented cookstove, the stove Henrietta learned to cook on. In the sitting room was a sofa, a rocker and four dainty cane chairs, a drop-leaf mahogany dining table, a homemade desk and a little sewing chair. There was an ingrain carpet both in the sitting room and bedroom, and in the bedroom there was also a spool bed and highboy.

Izett worked at Milltown at Utsalady as a ship's carpenter while clearing land for his homestead. He found after he built his first few buildings that the land he had pre-empted was on an unsurveyed school section, and for years he fought for his title, finally succeeding.

Henrietta remembered that in her girlhood days it was not unusual for winter weather to drop to zero, and the daily mail boats, the *Idaho* or *Fairhaven*, wore boards over their bows to protect the hull from the ice formed by river water pouring into the Sound. Many times the mail had to be put off the boat at Long Point and hauled overland to Coupeville, then to Oak Harbor.

There was a spring of cold clear water in Crescent Harbor, near the western side, and John Izett made wooden pipes, bored by hand with a spliced ship auger, white fir poles bored from one end, then the other. Izett and his sons were pleased that they had only spoiled two lengths of "pipe" by missing center. Henrietta



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Settlements on Whidbey

was only seven at the time of the pipe-boring.

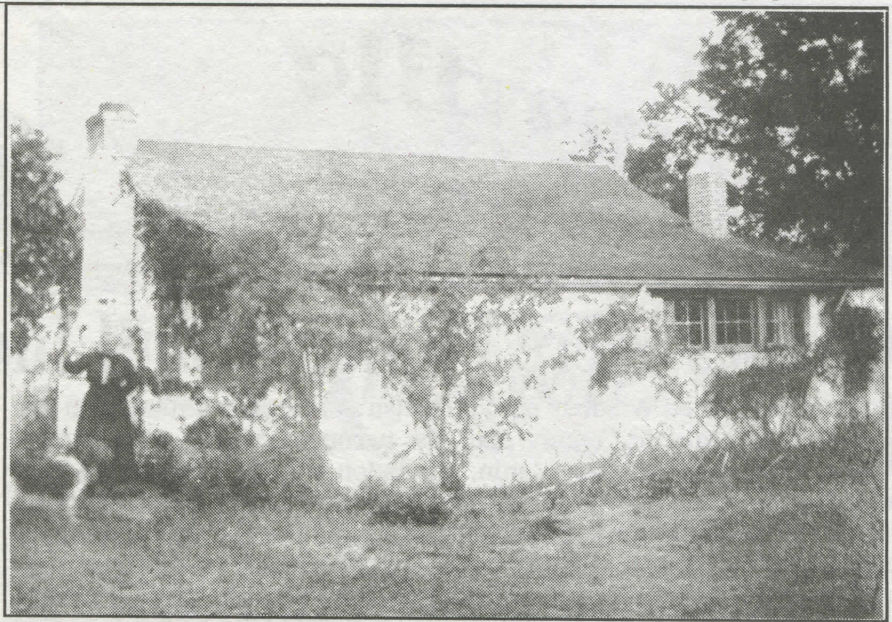
In 1857 Izett and Lawrence Grennan rode horseback to Oregon to buy machinery for a big mill to be built at Utsalady by Grennan and Cranney, then took a boat to San Francisco. Izett planned to take a course in drafting, and to buy a stock of goods to open a store at Coveland. In his plans also was a small shipyard, and within a short time they loaded their stuff on the old *Constitution*, as Henrietta put it, "with lightened wallets and happy hearts set out for home."

On the way north a fierce storm overtook the *Constitution* which was heavily loaded and with a large passenger list, and the steamer began to founder. As they turned back they found the pumps inadequate to lower the water in the hold, and Izett volunteered to make wooden pumps. All the men aboard worked day and night to keep the ship afloat until they docked again at San Francisco.

During the storm everything that could be moved by hand had gone overboard and only a box of white kid gloves to be part of his wedding finery was left. The wedding was to take place as soon as he returned to Whidbey. The gloves themselves had been used to save the hands of the "pumping passengers." Grennan's machinery was too heavy to move and was saved, as was Izett's furniture which was loaded in back of the machinery.

The wedding was postponed until July 4, 1858 and Izett went to work for Grennan and Cranney to make enough money to improve his land and to build the log cabin.

Packs of great grey timber wolves roamed North Whidbey in the 1850s and one pack pursued the Island doctor as he made his way by horseback



Pioneers lived as comfortably as they could. This is the original Izett cabin in Crescent Harbor, where Henrietta Izett Frostad was born. John Izett piped water from a spring to the house, thus providing the first house with running water on the Island. Henrietta's mother Nancy (Mrs. John) is shown here.

through Crescent Harbor. One sprang onto the horse's rump and fell to earth, pulling the end of the horse's tail off, but the horse took the doctor to safety. Such were the hazards of life in the early days in Crescent Harbor.

Izett, who rowed from Crescent Harbor across Saratoga Passage to work at Utsalady, started on his journey one morning, and his friend Chenoweth warned him that he had better load the rifle and take it as he could hear a big pack of wolves in full cry coming his way. Izett opted to instead of arm himself with a fence stake, and met the wolves in a narrow

trail. While he was fighting for his life, Chenoweth ran to his help, and the Indians on the beach turned their guns on the wolves putting them to flight.

Henrietta Izett grew up and married John Frostad, and they maintained a farm in Crescent Harbor on the old John Izett place. For many years she wrote a column for the Farm Bureau News, as "The Wheelchair Lady." She was crippled by arthritis in her later years, but maintained an active interest in her family history and Whidbey Island.



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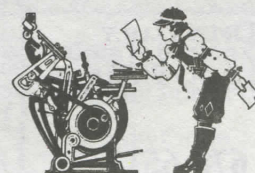
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