

Spindrift Two

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It Was Too Much for One Holland Family

In 1901, shortly after his marriage, Klaas De Vries migrated to Oak Harbor. His interest in Whidbey had been kindled by publicity in the Holland, Mich. *Grondwet* and in Orange City's *Volksvriend*. Direct correspondence with Oak Harbor's pioneer settler Rekele Zylstra also convinced Klaas that Washington's climate and economic potential surpassed that of the Winnipeg area.

Rekele Zylstra and several other

settlers from Holland had already purchased land on Whidbey by 1895 and their first crops were better, they reported, than any they had seen in Iowa or Canada.

Wheat yields averaged 50 bushels per acre and oats 75. Garden vegetables of prize winning proportions were sent from the Island to some of the older Dutch settlements in the Midwest to demonstrate the fertility of Washington's soil. Thus the new colony on the

Pacific Ocean attracted much attention among Dutch people from New Jersey to South Dakota and Canada.

Klaas reported his experience during the subsequent years in considerable detail and his account of Oak Harbor is one of the most graphic available.

"At the outset I must say that my first impressions were not favorable when I saw the thick woods with large pine trees which had to be felled and removed before one could begin to plow. So I hesitated to begin, because I realized I would need a team of strong horses and dynamite. That called for some capital and that was just what I lacked.

"Still, I had come to the Island with the purpose of buying a small tract of land and settling there. Friends living there, mostly Groningers and Friesians, advised me to do so. They too were pioneers who had purchased wild, heavily wooded land, and it was plain to see they had worked hard. They had nice pieces of land under cultivation and the quality of the soil was exceptionally good. The potato and vegetable crops were enormous. I have never seen better soil than that in the valley west of Oak Harbor (Clover Valley). Some had harvested from 70 to 96 bushels of wheat per acre. Vegetables and fruit also brought an abundant harvest.

"I decided to set aside my objections and bought ten acres of land at \$18 per acre. I built a small house, bought a couple of cows and a few chickens and began to farm. Brother Jacob did the same and lived with Mother. So we were settled in the state of Washington on the Island, in a valley with a rich fertile soil but it was a real wilderness.

"I lived there two years with my young wife. We had a child when we arrived, our Gertrude. The following year our Peter was born, and the next year Winnie arrived. So we had a family of three children.

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"In those years my life was like that of the earlier pioneers in Michigan, working to clear the dense wood-land. But the soil was more fertile and I remember that my first crop was ten bags of peas and ten bags of onions from a small piece of ground. Selling them was not so easy. It was mostly trading and bartering. I seldom came in possession of a dollar bill. I could send my produce to the Seattle market by steamer but then one had to be satisfied with whatever the sales agent paid while waiting three or four weeks for the check."

Even going to church was difficult

"There was at that time a Christian Reformed Church. There were two small churches, one at Oak Harbor and one on the west coast. The second church had affiliated with the United Presbyterian church just before we came to the Island.

"That was a disappointment for us because we had been told that there was a Holland-speaking congregation available. We had had to seek food for our souls for so many years in unfamiliar denominations, and now we had another denomination with an English-speaking minister, the Rev. Best. But within two years we turned to the Christian Reformed church and the Rev. Gulker became our pastor."

Note: The Christian Reformed and First Reformed churches conducted



Families often walked from Clover Valley to this church on the Oak Harbor road, a matter of several miles. The church was located north of town as a halfway point.

at least one service a day in Dutch through the 1920s in Oak Harbor.

Highways

"The roads in those early years left much to be desired. To go to church on West Beach on Sunday we had to walk two miles (we had no horse and buggy). So brother Jacob and I decided to cut a path through the heavy woods so we would only have to walk one mile.

"We cut the path but it took more time than anticipated. The woods were dense and many trees which had blown down had to be moved. One long pine tree was four feet in diameter and lying in the middle of the woods. We

decided to cut a piece out of it so we could walk through.

"Later, when one of brother Jacob's cows was missing, we could not find it anywhere until we discovered it was stuck in that tree. It could neither move ahead or backwards, so we had to saw another piece out of the tree to rescue it.

"All I could make cutting cordwood was \$1.50 per day and we sold it to the steamers which burned wood instead of coal. So I agreed with my wife to sell my little property, not because we did not like the Island, but because I did not have the means to continue. I sold my property for cash, and we said goodbye to the Island."



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First Mayor of Oak Harbor was a Generous Man

The old house sits on the upper side of the short street of 200 Ave. West, just a block above West Pioneer Way. It is surrounded by a tangle of Garry Oaks and lilacs, a two story home over 100 years old, the home built by Jerome Ely, Oak Harbor's first Mayor.

Ely was born in 1844 in Susquehanna County, Penn. He enlisted in the Civil War and was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg. After a time being hospitalized, his wounds brought about his discharge, and in 1873 he came to the Puget Sound country, settling at Oak Harbor.

He bought much of the Sumner Donation Claim, which was located in what is now the center of Oak Harbor, stretching from the beach to 700 Ave. West. He built himself a small cabin on the property, and took an active part in forming the government of Island County.

He was Postmaster, a County Commissioner, Superintendent of Schools and Justice of the Peace. In 1890 he married Clarabelle McCaslin, and they enlarged the small house to build the house that still stands today (1991) on the property, and Vernon (Done) their youngest son, lives there.



Once the belle of the town's social set, the old Ely house now sits on 200th NW, mostly hidden by shrubs and trees. Few passers-by notice her now.

The front yard of the house sloped down to what was then Barrington Ave. (Pioneer Way) and Ely planted fruit trees on the lawn. A fence with a swinging gate bordered the front.

The Ely house became a center for community events such as weddings, and many a picnic was held on the front lawn. Ely himself was an ardent gardener, and kept a large garden until he was unable to care for it. His son Done has kept up the garden tradition, raising a fine garden each year, with

most of the yield from it given away.

Jerome Ely was a generous man. He donated land for the Ladies Aid Hall (a private residence across 40th from Help House) and for the Methodist Church. His big red barn still stands and is used as a pre-school in 1991 on 50th St. NW, moved from a site nearer the house. He built rental houses on his property at a time when housing was vitally needed in the community; Help House is one of them. Done later donated the house to the organization.

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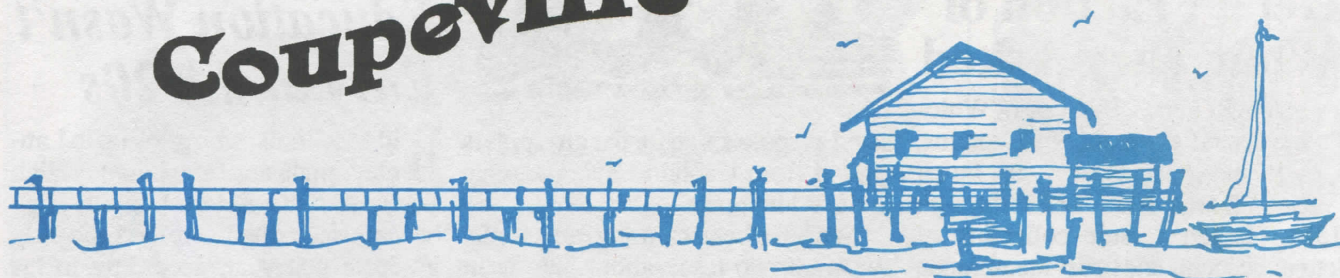
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Coupeville



Pioneers Celebrated Their Nation's Birthday

On the Fourth of July 1864, Hill Harmon's barn on Ebey's Prairie was the scene of an area dance which lasted all night and into the morning hours.

The barn dance capped the Fourth of July celebration which included a horse race on Smith's Prairie between a grey stallion belonging to George Gillespie and a brown one belonging to Thomas Perkins. The brown horse won, and the race was for 200 dollars in gold coin and was paid to Perkins.

The writer who chronicled the Fourth in 1914 noted that there was not a spring buggy or any other vehicle except two two-wheeled butcher delivery carts owned by Thomas Coupe and A. W. Arnold. Most of the traveling at that time was done on horseback or by foot.

Several couples from Oak Harbor rode horseback to a dance in Coupeville, danced all night and then rode home again in the morning. A dance in those days never closed until morning because the roads that existed were so bad. The dancers arrived, summer or winter, before dark, and left the next morning at daylight.

The dances were mostly lusty "hoe downs" according to the writer, interspersed with reels. Supper was included in the price of the dance, and either Mrs. Robertson or Mrs. Fay would serve a bountiful meal sometime after midnight so that the dancers could finish out the night.

The 1914 writer concluded, "Should the Island improve the next fifty years as it has done the past fifty, it will

indeed be a paradise, but by that time there will be none on the Island that took in the horse race on Smith Prairie

and the celebration at Hill Harmon's barn fifty years ago."
..."Ancutty Tillicum"



Whidby Island, Beloved By All

This poem was written by Coupevillian E. A. Hancock back in 1909. It may seem a bit schmaltzy for today's taste, but it tells us how much our pioneers thought of their favorite Island.

Beautiful Island of Whidby,
Spot that my heart calls home;
Blest with the bounty of nature,
Washed by the ocean's foam;
Fairer than dreams of Arcadia,
Dearer to me than gold;
Land where the red man hunted,
A paradise still as of old.
Wonderful prairies of amber,
Where the harvest of grain is spread;

Flowers that bring to the living,
The soul of the things that are dead.
Forests of cedar and fir trees
That pierce the far blue of the sky,
Drink of the nectar of Heaven
And the storms of the ages defy.
These and all of thy children
Have made themselves dear unto me,
And I would I could lay at thy altar
A heart that is worthy of thee.



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On the Water Under Front Street, Coupeville

Indians Didn't Get a Fraction of What They Asked

Captain Robert C. Fay, one of Whidbey Island's pioneer Sea Captains, was Indian Agent for the Puget Sound area from 1856 through 1861. He left a large collection of letters, accounts and treaty memoranda on Indian affairs of that period, and a census taken by him in 1858 shows 1,360 Indians in the widely scattered Skagit tribe. The following year Captain Fay entered into a series of talks with the Skagits, regarding their relocation on reservations.

In June of 1859 tribal chiefs of the Skagits gathered in the Lodge of Chief Squisqui at Long Point, south of Coupeville to decide on their demands regarding a reservation and to make a treaty. On the morning of June 14, Captain Fay went to Squisqui's lodge to talk and to distribute good-will presents. By noon of the next day some 500 Skagits had assembled in front of the old courthouse that still stands at the head of Penn Cove. Chief Squisqui



acted as spokesman for the group, as is quoted from Captain Fay's message to the white men:

"We have hearts among our people. We want two reservations. We want one contained between a line from Barrington's house in Oak Harbor across the Island to the Straits of Fuca, and a line from Mr. Howe's house across Penn Cove to Holmes Harbor taking the point of land east of that line.

"We also want a reservation on the Skagit River for our people who live there and who do not wish to come down to live near the white men. We have but one heart toward the Bostons and that is good. We are glad that the President has sent us such good talk as we hear from Colonel Simmons and Captain Fay and we are glad that you are putting our talk on paper so that the President can see it and know our hearts."

Getting a Decent Education Wasn't Easy in the 20s

Bill McGinnis, who grew up in Langley, graduated from Langley High School in 1920, the year Langley High became accredited. He was the only graduate that year, according to his memoirs which were printed in the South Whidbey Record in 1985.

The class of 1920 had 11 students to be graduated, but according to McGinnis, the community took sides when the school principal was accused by two girl students of improper advances and the war was on. All of the graduating class left school with the exception of McGinnis, who was determined to get his diploma so he could enter Washington State University.

The 1920s were those "hard times" prior to the Great Depression and McGinnis had a half year of studies to complete before he could graduate. The new principal assisted him in "keeping his trap lines open" and allowed him to be late a couple of mornings a week. Finally he asked Bart Lovejoy about a job on the steamer *Clatawa* as a deckhand, and got the job at \$110 per month. The school principal then arranged for him to work ahead on his school credits and finish up in February to be eligible for graduation in June.

"The graduation was held at the Friend's Church. I appeared in my sunbleached red hair and red sunburned face, in my absent brother's old box-tail suit with the pants rolled up one turn, and his white shirt. The members of the school board said the right words and I, the president of the first graduating class of Langley High School, valedictorian, salutatorian and possible historian, was handed a diploma, a large bouquet of narcissus and a 50 cent box of stationary.

"The diploma was handed me by board members Fred Funk and Andy McCreight."



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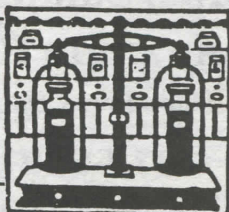
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