

Spindrift Two

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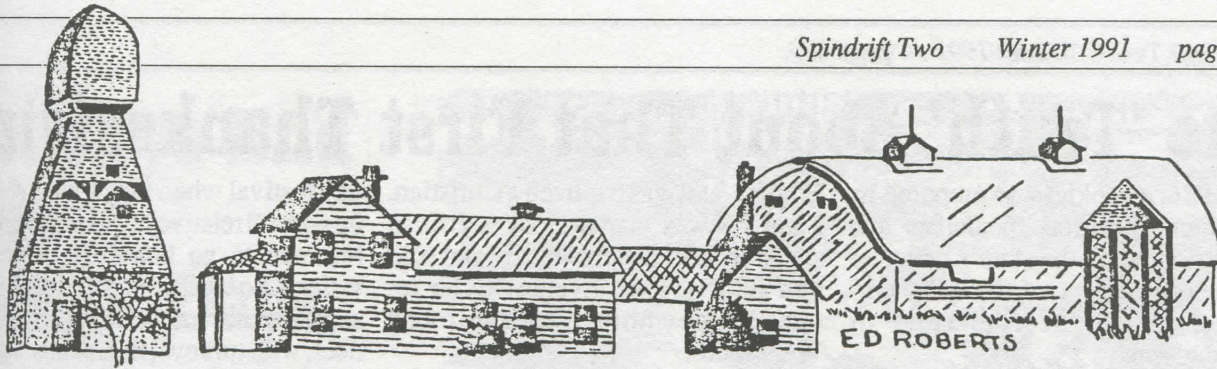
Winter 1991

A Merry Christmas



An interesting bit of history is this Fish Trap shack off West Beach. Little known, perhaps, because it involved a lot of fish but few people. In these 1905 photos, Pete and Antoine Muller of Crescent Harbor, with Chris Bos, "Cookie" and other unidentified workers rest in front of the fish shack, a combination of smokehouse, cookhouse and bunkhouse. Below are the young men in the boat they used to check the traps. Traces of pilings still remain on West Beach. Photos courtesy of the Douglass family.





Early Sea Captain Helped Build Area

Captain George W. Morse was born in 1830 in Brunswick, Maine, of New England stock, his grandfather having fought in the Revolutionary War. His father, Anthony Morse, was a shipbuilder and his son learned the trade.

At age 20 he shipped as a carpenter on a trip around the Horn to San Francisco, arriving there in 1850. This voyage took him to Australia, then to London and back home to Maine. On his voyage, California had been the place that appealed most to him, so his second voyage brought him to the West Coast in 1851. In the Eldorado country he dug enough gold to buy a good-sized pack train, which he later took to the Fraser River (Canada) area. Returning to winter on the Nooksack River in Washington he sold his pack train to the Boundary Commission.

Morse then went back to his old trade of ship building, helping to build the *General Harney* at Bellingham and the *Growler* at Oak Harbor. In 1861 he was appointed sub Indian agent under Samuel D. Howe, and was stationed at La Conner then at Tulalip. There he helped build the school buildings for the Indians, where the school was conducted by Father Chirouse, a pioneer Catholic missionary.

For several years he was owner and master of the schooner *Granger*, freighting to Puget Sound and British Columbia ports and making an occasional run to Alaska. In the meantime he had bought land in Oak Harbor in the Sumner donation claim that takes in what is now the entire center of the town of Oak Harbor.

Morse was serving as County Commissioner when Washington became a state and at the same time was elected to the first state legislature, serving four terms through 1912. His daughter Sadie Morse Davis told of accompanying her father to the inaugural ball at Olympia where she danced into the wee morning hours.

George Morse married Mary McCrohan O'Leary, whose husband Maurice had been drowned in a canoe accident leaving her with two boys. Captain Morse raised the boys and he and Mary had five children of their own.

In 1894 Morse built a two-story frame house on his farm property, and an item in the *Island County Times* referred to it as "the Morse mansion." The place was sold in 1910 to James A. Neil, who farmed it through 1930. The old house stood until about 1987 when it was torn down.

The water tower, built by James Neil in 1910, has been restored as a community landmark. The only other farm building left standing is the Roller Barn, also built by James Neil.



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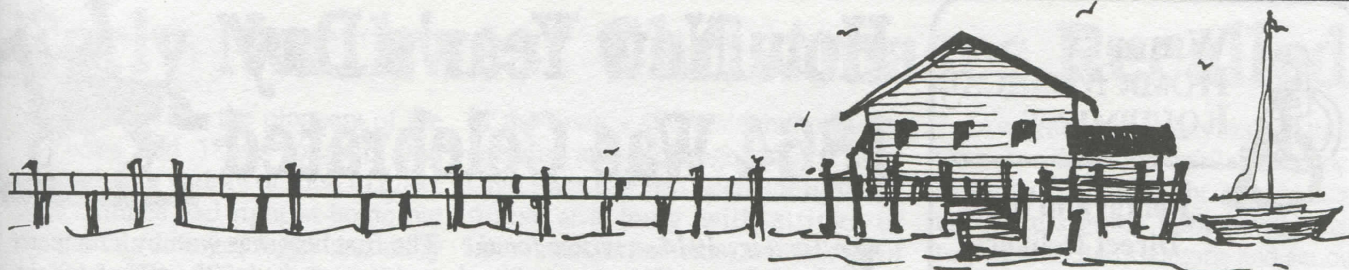
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And Then There Were Four . . .

Over 130 years ago the early settlers on Whidbey Island faced an expected Indian uprising by building blockhouses, sturdy forts made of logs with apertures for guns. From the writings of Flora Pearson Engle, who came to Whidbey Island as a young girl with her parents and sisters aboard one of the Mercer expedition ships, there were 11 blockhouses located on five donation claims in the Coupeville area. The "John Crockett Fort" was possibly the first one built, in 1855, on the northwest corner of what was the Carl Engle farm, where the Engles still live and farm.

A later use for this blockhouse was as an "apple house" as early as 1866, bearing testimony that the Indians on the Island were not for long considered much of a threat to the white settlers.

A blockhouse in Crescent Harbor was also built, and for many years later was used as a fruit and vegetable cellar.

A blockhouse from the Walter Crockett donation claim was built soon after the John Crockett Fort, and stand today near the Fort Casey gate on property given by Mrs. Armstrong. It has been restored and a fence placed around it. Another was loaned to the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition. Following the exposition it was moved to Tacoma to the Point Defiance Park where it may be seen today.

Jacob Ebey, father of Isaac N. Ebey, Whidbey Island pioneer and statesman who was beheaded by northern Indians in 1857, came to join his son and family in 1854. He and his wife each took donation claims at Ebey's

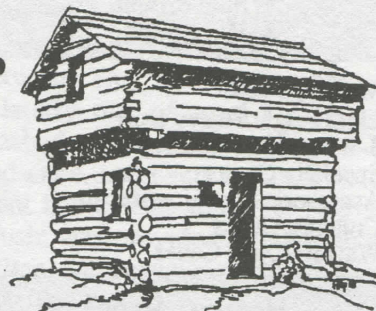
Landing west of Coupeville and up on the hill where Sunnyside Cemetery is located today. Jacob Ebey built a house in 1855, and after the death of Isaac he surrounded his home with a 12-foot high stockade with a blockhouse at each corner, similar to the Army forts of the Old West.

When the Indian scare of the early 1850s was over, Ebey used the stockade blockhouses as household and farm buildings. One was a smokehouse, one a root cellar for fruit and vegetables during the winter months, and one was used as a dairy.

The Davis Blockhouse, which has also been rebuilt, stands at the edge of Sunnyside Cemetery. It featured a fireplace and as we remember it a number of years before it was restored, the original fireplace was of sticks and plastered with clay. A very hot fire would have been disastrous.

The Davis blockhouse was built by pioneer James Davis, brother to Rebecca Ebey, wife of Colonel Isaac Ebey. Another blockhouse was also built by the Cook family in the 1870s on the Davis claim.

The Alexander Blockhouse, built in



1855 and moved east to its present site some years later, is probably the best known of the Coupeville blockhouses. A portion erected by Indians for Father Blanchet, a Catholic Missionary, in 1840 is preserved in a glass case, in front of the Alexander Blockhouse. The cross arm is a portion of a rail fence built by John Alexander himself on his donation claim which took in part of the present town of Coupeville.

At the time the Alexander blockhouse was built there were about 1,200 Indians living in and around Coupeville, all friendly to the white man. The Indians called the place *P-satly* or *Psatlee* which meant snake basket.

Only four of the original pioneer blockhouses remain: near Fort Casey (Crockett); in downtown Coupeville (Alexander); in Sunnyside Cemetery (Davis); and higher on the hill on private property, the Ebey Blockhouse.



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How New Year's Day 1864 Was Celebrated



In January 1914, a writer for the *Island County Times* who signed his columns by his Indian name, Ancutty Tillicum, but who was a member of a Coupeville pioneer family, wrote this account of a New Year's celebration in 1865.

In the 60's New Year's Day was not as a general thing kept as was Christmas. There seemed to be no great interest taken in considering it a holiday. The first New Year's Day this writer remembers in Washington Territory was Jan. 1, 1864. On that day nothing different than the ordinary was done, everyone was too busy with their own affairs to attempt to do anything in the way of celebrating.

But on Jan. 1, 1865, there was "something doing." A horse race had been gotten up between James Harwick, owner of a black stallion named "Jim," and Robert Adams, owner of a bay named "Trumpeter." The race was for \$200 and was to be one-half mile and repeat, the horse winning two heats to get the money. The black horse was ridden by Wm. Hawkins and the bay by John Gillespie. After more or less jockeying about the judges, and the allowance of 20 feet in favor of Jim, they started in the first heat.

The track was in a field near Ebey's Landing just south of the lane or road from the landing towards Coupeville.

The first heat was won by Trumpeter and was greeted with yells of delight, and the betting was increased. One man by the name of Bill Ludington offering to bet \$50 on Trumpeter. The bet was quickly taken up by Wm. Lock.

The second heat started about 10 minutes after the close of the first one, and when about 200 yards from the starting point, Trumpeter "flew the track" and John had considerable trouble getting him back again. This he did two or three times during the heat which caused him to come in second best. The race then stood "hoss and hoss" and the betting on the last heat was stronger than ever.

At that time there was a bar in the hotel at the landing and by the time the second heat was over a number of the crowd were "feeling their oats," but all were good natured. There was no rowdiness or quarreling going on.

Capt. Coupe offered to bet the drinks for the crowd that Jim would win the third heat and the race. He was taken up by Dr. Kellogg and of course everybody was interested in that heat. After the third heat started Trumpeter again "flew the track" and continued doing so to the end, consequently losing the race and sticking "Doc" for the drinks all around. If there was anybody on the grounds who did not get a drink it was their own fault.



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