

INTERVIEW WITH BERNIE HINGSTON

April 20, 1997

This was another one that was done in my basement "Calista." The only problem was that I pushed the wrong button on the tape recorder so I have nothing on tape. This is all done from memory. Georgie Smith and Kay Foss were there.

On the colors of the steamers, Bernie said they were all white with black trim. He remembered some of them having sort of a beige color on the upper decks, like maybe on the bulwarks.

Georgie said that she would get Jeanett Henry's age for me. Bernie was born in 1917 and thought Jeanett was a couple of years older because they graduated at the same time, but Jeanett had been set back in school a couple of years. That would make her 1915, 82 years old.

He remembers the rum runner down at Ebey's Landing. He does not know where the liquor ended up but he remembers it being piled on the beach. Sheriff Gill Kennedy was guarding the booty and he told everyone that they could not take any while he was watching. Then he would turn around and talk about how beautiful the Olympic Peninsula or some other area was. A lot of locals got some pretty good bonded whiskey that day.

Bernie and Glenn Lynch and some of his other buddies used to walk West Beach. That was one of the favorite drop off spots for the rum runners. Sometimes they would bury their shipment on the beach for latter pickup. Bernie found lots of holes, about a dozen, but never any liquor they had missed.

There was one story where a guy in a big fancy car came down and they looked all over. Bernie and their buddies followed from a distance. They even went up into the woods. After they left, the kids looked everywhere but never found anything. Some of the local farmers including a Dick Van Rensum looked also. Later, a hunter shot a pigeon and it landed on a stash of 60 cases of bootleg whiskey. It was turned over to the sheriff.

He had another story about Elwell Libbey and his horses. The guys that picked up the liquor off the beaches used the horses and wagons of local farmers. One of them was Elwell Libbey. One night the federal agents came across them. Why they did nothing that night is not known, but somehow they got close enough to mark the horses with paint. The next day they looked through all of the local barns and found that Elwell's horses were marked. Elwell was arrested as an accomplice.

Bernie also told us that a lot of the liquor traffic went

BERNIE HINGSTON, INTERVIEW, Page 2, Cont.

across the San de Fuca dock. This made sense for a couple of reasons. San de fuca was a lot closer to West Beach than Coupeville or Oak Harbor and there was less population. Also, the Coast Guard did a pretty good job of patrolling Admiralty Inlet and Deception Pass. So if the rum runners could get the contraband booze across Whidbey Island, they could then take it into Puget Sound without much hassle. Bernie said it was all done at night and fast boats were used, not the regular steamers on the route.

Bernie was raised in San de Fuca. His dad ran the store. He went to school in Coupeville. His job all through high school was to meet the evening steamer from Seattle and get the mail. His father had the post office in the store. He would get the mail from the purser.

The steamers always loaded freight in the evening which irritated the passengers for Oak Harbor. Then in the morning they would come in close to San de Fuca but if there were no passengers, they did not land and continued on to Coupeville. They always left Oak Harbor at six in the morning.

Bernie told us what happened to the school bell in San de Fuca. He and some friends swiped it one night. This was quite a feat because the thing was heavy. They had to get boards and ropes and all sorts of good stuff. There was a druggist down town in Coupeville that none of the kids liked. They set this bell in the middle of his front door so that he would not be able to get into his shop the next day. His drug store was at the bottom of telephone hill. Today it is South Main street.

All of the conspirators gathered at nine the next morning to see the druggist open his shop/. The bell was not there and no one knew where it was. It wasn't until a few years ago that he learned it was stored in a barn down in Greenbank.