

## Island County's first school was at

**W**hidbey Island's first school was built in 1855. It was the same year the courthouse at Penn's Cove was built.

The school was a log house with an enormous rock fireplace, built on Smith's Prairie and taught by Schoolmaster Lyle, who also made the log structure his home.

The settlers were assessed \$2.50 per month for each child. Schoolmasters at that time received from \$25 to \$75 per month, which was considered liberal wages.

In 1857, Winfield Ebey was elected School Superintendent, and four districts were organized.

In the fall of 1859, Oak Harbor School District was organized with 20 students. During the first years, school was generally held only during the summer months, as wintertime presented many problems due to weather and lack of transportation.

The 1860s brought increasing numbers of settlers and in the year 1865 there were 129 pupils on Whidbey. There were four schoolhouses in 1867 and four teachers on the public payroll! The teachers were John Sewell, Frank Miller, Ulrich Freund, one of Oak

Harbor's first three settlers, and E. B. Ebey.

It was the custom up into the 1890s for two or three families to employ a teacher for children whose homes were distant from the schools. The teacher lived with one of the families.

**The progress** of the educational life of the Island was marked by the establishment of "The Academy" by the Congregationalists in 1886. The Puget Sound Academy as it was known, was a prep school that boasted of the ability to prepare students for any college in the U.S.!

The Academy, under the Rev. C. E. Newberry, was touted as "the only institution of higher learning north of Seattle." Newberry, a red bearded man with a booming voice, taught English, Latin, Greek, History, Psychology and Geometry to the sons and daughters of prominent families from all over Puget Sound at the boarding school.

On South Whidbey small community schools were established, and the first high school classes were held in the Kirk Lumber building at Langley. In 1915, new construction in Langley included both high and elementary classes. Oak

Harbor's school on Whidbey Avenue also included high school and elementary classes.

In 1916 Evelyn Spencer, then County Superintendent of Schools published the "Island Public School Journal," a 24 page, once-a-month newspaper for all the Island schools.

In the May 1917 issue, a story told of the hot lunches being prepared at San de Fuca and Mutiny Bay schools; the Coupeville school came in third in the state in debate; a garden club was formed by the Greenbank school; a cooking club by the Crescent Harbor school; and Oak Harbor High was installing a stage in the auditorium with labor by the manual training class.

Island County schools had come a long way from the log one-roomer built in the wilderness of Smith's Prairie!

**Alice Kellogg Cahail** of Anacortes was a historian to whom we owe much of the history of the Island area. Her father was Dr. Albert Kellogg, "The Canoe Doctor" who settled near what is today Fort Casey in the mid-1800s.

He built the first "hospital" on Whidbey, a log cabin structure to which he brought patients from all over Puget Sound. Many of his patients were loggers who had been injured in their work. Kellogg's wife oversaw the "hospital" and patients who improved were required to help other patients.

The years 1870 to 1890 brought settlers who cleared land and began farming. A "newcomer" wrote: "Much of this portion of Whidbey is the richest kind of prairie land ➤"



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## Smith's Prairie

and is now occupied by old sea captains who do not know too much about farming."

The change from sea captain to farmer must have been difficult, but the sea captains who came to Penn's Cove and surrounding areas such as Oak Harbor found that Whidbey was not just a place for making money but a delightful harbor in which to retire at the end of stormy years at sea.

Among the sea captain population were Captains Ed Barrington, James Henry Swift, Eli Hathaway, Robert Fay, George Bell, Thomas Coupe (for whom Coupeville is named), Samuel Libbey, H. B. Lovejoy, William Robertson and Richard Holbrook, George Morse and Captain Jonothan Adams. Many of the men serving aboard these ships also settled on the Island.

Schools were an item uppermost in the settlers' minds and a writer in a Seattle newspaper wrote: "Their common schools are well supported, paying their teachers \$25 to \$75 per month. But I am bound to state that the Superintendent is an old sea captain who doubtless has carried his vessel through many a storm but knows little about education in the common schools."

The sea captains, however, kept on whittling and commenting on education methods and one even wrote East asking for more teachers who would conduct themselves with dignity. He protested against school teachers who slid down straw stacks with their pupils at lunch hour and played kissing games with them in the evenings!



*This old photo is all that is left of Coupeville's first school at Smith's Prairie, where the red-headed Master John Lyle taught, ate and slept. In 1858, he was paid the handsome sum of \$112.00 for his services by the county treasurer . . . but the record doesn't state for how long that service was.*

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# How Silver Lake got its name

A brief "History of Silver Lake" was written in pencil on lined paper many years ago by Olga Langeland, whose family were pioneers of the Silver Lake-Strawberry Point area. When this was written, Olga was a pupil in the school she writes about. On the original her teacher made corrections in red ink.

The part of the Island once known as Marshall's Point, a name practically forgotten, was about 2½ miles south of the place later called Brann's Camp. A Mr. Marshall came to a wild, Indian-inhabited country many years ago and lived on the northeastern part of Whidbey Island on a point 8 miles east of the present town of Oak Harbor.

A man by the name of Brann came with a crew of men in 1887 to operate a logging camp. The camp was not far from the homes of two other pioneers by the names of Vosburg and Siegfried. Gradually the area began to be called Brann's Camp and the name Marshall's Point was forgotten.

In 1891 the camp closed, but as a schoolhouse had been built a short distance from the camp location, it was named the Brann's Camp School.

In 1903 the schoolhouse was moved about a mile south. As more families settled in the

area it became apparent that the name "Brann's Camp School" did not typify the community. There was no logging camp apparent to newcomers.

One of the neighbors was a correspondent for the Oak Harbor News, and sent his items in each week from "East Island." When he discontinued the correspondence East Island slowly drifted back to the old name of "Brann's Camp."

In the fall of 1915, the school children discussed the matter, trying to find a suitable name for their school. A small lake about three-quarters of a mile west of the school had been named the preceding summer by a schoolteacher "Silver Lake," as the lake appeared to her, and the children arrived at a consensus and asked their parents if they could name the school after the lake.

The parents agreed, and the post office and Oak Harbor News were informed of the name change from Brann's Camp to Silver Lake, which it has been ever since.

Olga Langeland Simonson noted in an interview that "we were a great book family" doing much reading of anything we could get to read. Her father cut out articles and stories from newspapers that were impor-



tant, and bound them by hand with cardboard and cloth. In the 1880s, both Grandfather Langeland and Olga's father made the family's books.

In 1911, the Langeland house put in modern plumbing with a bathtub, one of the few such improvements on Whidbey Island. "I remember how happy we were to be able to take baths when we wanted to," she said.

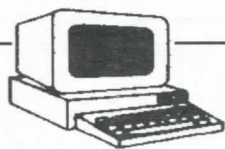
One of the early schools for the area was held at the Siegfried home. Mrs. Siegfried was a Langeland granddaughter. David Langeland attended this school, about a two-mile walk from home.

Olga went only a mile to her first school, and one of the teachers, a Miss Hart, stayed with the family the spring when Mrs. Langeland did all her weaving.

"Good teachers worked hard in those days with eight grades sometimes. You learned fast if you wanted to and could. We listened to the older children recite and knew what was expected of us in each grade," Olga said.

A heart-warming story she tells is that of Miss Hart who bought some material of beautiful colors to make a blouse. Olga finally got up enough courage to ask for a sliver of material for her doll, and the teacher gave her two "big pieces!"

Some 50 years later, Olga's eyes lighted up remembering how she made a coat, skirt and hat for her doll.



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*The Langeland family and the Langeland home north and east of Crescent Harbor. The area got the name of Strawberry Point, because the Langelands raised and shipped strawberries from there to Seattle.*



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# The mystery of Harry Evans

There are few people around who remember Harry Evans' disappearance. The story took place where Fort Casey now stands, on what was known as Admiralty Head.

The lighthouse stood on the brink overlooking the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and the keeper was Captain Joseph Edward Evans, who lived there with his wife Bessie and only child, Harry, aged 16 years.

Harry was an intelligent, capable boy who assisted his father with the care of the lighthouse, carrying the ten gallon cans of kerosene up the long flight of stairs to the light, trimming the huge wicks, wiping the lens and pulling curtains around them when the light was out during the day.

It was in October 1893, and the lighthouse keeper and his wife planned to go to Port Townsend to do some shopping and to see a dentist. For the first time, Mr. Evans decided to leave the care of the lighthouse with Harry . . . against Mrs. Evans' wishes.

It was an overnight trip, but Evans felt the boy would be able to handle the light for 24 hours.

For the boy, it was an adventure. He had received permission from his mother before she left to get her recipe book down and make some candy, a rare privilege in those days when stores were far between and sweets were very dear.

As the couple left to go to the boat landing where the small steamer called, Harry called, "goodbye Mama, have a good time." This was the last time the mother was to hear the voice of her child.



*This is the old lighthouse at Fort Casey where Harry Evans and his family lived when he went missing.*

That same afternoon about four o'clock, Norman Putnam, who had a field of potatoes near the lighthouse, drove his team over to load it for a trip to Coupeville the next morning.

Harry Evans came over and jumped up on the side of the wagon, chatting with Putnam and asking him to send two money orders for him on his next day's trip to "town."

Putnam was somewhat surprised that the Evans' would leave Harry with the light overnight. His son and daughter were all for going over to spend the night with Harry, but Putnam decided against it.

He felt Harry would do a better job alone than he would with two others to assist him.

At 1:30 the next day the steamer rounded the point with Mr. and Mrs. Evans aboard and Evans pointed up to the lighthouse where the light was still

burning.

A premonition that something was terribly wrong spurred his feet up the hill when the boat docked. He flung open the door to call "Harry! Harry!"

Bureau drawers were in disorder, and Harry's clothes were gone. The wick in the light had burned all night. Evans extinguished it and covered the lens, and then went below to comfort the hysterical Mrs. Evans.

By late afternoon the grounds were full of men from Coupeville, San de Fuca and Oak Harbor, who came by horseback and in rigs.

The sheriff came, and it was discovered that the lighthouse boat was missing with several hundred dollars worth of government supplies; kerosene, paint, flour, sugar, potatoes and other things.

Also missing were two buffalo robes, supplied by the ➤



government to lighthouse keepers. A high powered rifle and shotgun were also gone, and it began to look as if the 16-year old Harry had been kidnapped or killed. Fear gripped everyone.

**Dr. W. L. White** of Coupeville came to minister to poor Mrs. Evans who had fainted and was in a state of severe shock. He stayed the entire night with his patient, assisted by Mrs. Putnam and Mrs. Kaehler and her two daughters, Delia and Louise.

The night of Oct. 10, 1893, will never be forgotten by the writer, who was the Putnam daughter.

A terrific-gale came up, the west wind blowing relentlessly through the Straits for four days. In the living room at Admiralty Head a brass lamp suspended on a long chain from the high ceiling swung all night long through the force of the storm. With the horror of kidnappers or murderers in everyone's thoughts, it was a weird night.

**The storm finally** abated after four days, and a lighthouse tender was sighted coming from Port Townsend, towing two white lighthouse boats. Mrs. Evans was highly excited and prayed "Oh God, please bring home my boy." But he wasn't with the people who disembarked.

Thomas Delaney, Chief of U.S. Customs and a slim girl, Millie Dennison, whose older brother Frank was keeper of the Smith Island light, had a story to tell to the searchers.

Four days earlier Harry Evans had come to Smith Island. The Evans and Dennison families were old friends, and Harry spent the day visiting with Mrs. Dennison, Millie,

Elinor and two boys, Joe and Charley. Frank was on the mainland at the time.

As night came on, the storm hit, and the young people, were playing cards. Harry seemed worried, (Millie said) and at last threw his cards down and said he would have to go to his boat to get his coat. Looking at Joe Dennison he asked, "are you coming with me."

Millie said her brother's face was ashen as he answered, "no, not in this wind. Let your coat go until morning," . . . but Harry left. The little group waited for him to return for an hour, and then Millie told them to get their coats and a lantern. They were going to look for the boy.

**The boat was gone**, and the youngsters called and walked all the way around the little island calling, but the howling gale and roar of breakers drowned their voices. They returned home and Millie said her brothers were so shaken at the disappearance of Harry that Mrs. Dennison questioned them closely.

Harry, they admitted, was running away from home and was headed for Alaska to "hunt bear." He had wanted Joe Dennison to go with him, but Joe's better judgment kept him at home on this stormy night.

Frank Dennison never did admit that he had visited with his friend on Whidbey Island the night before he appeared at Smith Island, but there was evidence that young Harry

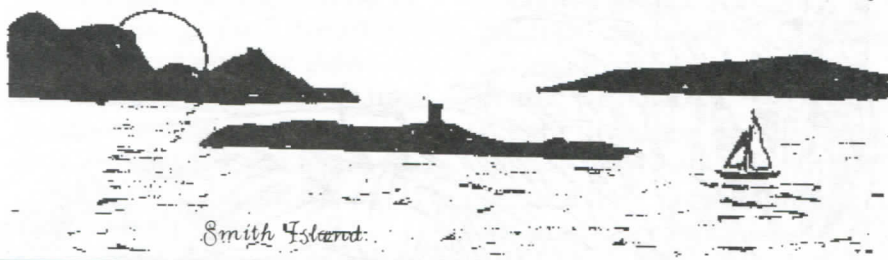
Evans had company after his parents left for Port Townsend. There were two places set on the supper table, with the remains of uneaten food. The plate of candy Harry had made had two knives stuck in it to pry loose the sticky mass.

Men who had taken part in the investigation said that the boy alone could not have carried all the supplies down the hill, loaded the boat and launched it. Launching the boat was a man's job even when empty.

**Without Millie** Dennison's bravery and courage, the story would never have been known. The empty lighthouse boat was found floating bottom side up near San Juan Island, and a letter from Thomas Delaney to the Evans family officially closed the case. Hope had been abandoned by everyone but Mrs. Evans, who collapsed upon hearing Delaney's letter.

Upon her recovery the couple was sent to a lighthouse post on the Oregon coast, where later Evans passed away. After a few years of living in her girlhood home town in the east, Mrs. Evans returned to Whidbey Island and ended her days living alone in a cottage at Prairie Center, where she said she felt closer to both her son and husband.

*The Harry Evans story was written up in the Nov. 9, 1893 issue of the Coupeville "Sun," and is on file at the Whidbey News-Times.*





# What happened to Joseph Whidbey

by John Naish

Courtesy Harry Moore  
of Coupeville

**I**t is remarkable that Joseph Whidbey has for so long remained in obscurity despite the facts that he played a key role in the survey of the Northwest Coast of America in 1792-95, that he had a large island in the State of Washington named after him and that, on his return to England in 1795, he began a second career which culminated in one of the greatest engineering achievements of nineteenth century Britain, the Plymouth Breakwater.

Born in 1755, Whidbey's origins, education, and mode of entry into the Royal Navy are unknown. Although the date of his warrant as Master is known from Steel's List to be 1779, his certificate of qualification is missing from the Admiralty records.

In 1786 he was made Master of the *Europa*, then he became a shipmate with George Vancouver. A friendship developed which was cemented by professional collaboration in hydrographic surveying, notably of the complex approaches to Port Royal (Kingston), Jamaica.

The resulting charts, widely considered to be models of accuracy, were published in the name of Vancouver and Whidbey in 1792, and the approach channels were buoyed according to their data in 1791.

It was this collaboration which led to Whidbey's selection as sailing master of the *Discovery* in Vancouver's exploration of 1791-5. There is little doubt that Whidbey, older by three years than Vancouver, was a key member of that expedition and

the chief confidant of a commander whose tortured and difficult nature made him unpopular with many.

So much did Vancouver owe to Whidbey's staunch vigour and common sense and so highly did he think of him that, on the return of *Discovery* to the Thames in November 1795, he strongly recommended him for promotion to Master Attendant. This was Whidbey's ambition.

What emerges from various journals recording the voyage, particularly those parts where Vancouver used whole passages from Whidbey's log after he had returned from detached service, notably his independent survey of Grays Harbour in the *Daedalus* in 1792, is the picture of a thoroughly capable and pragmatic type of man.

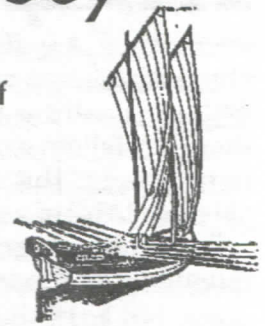
The only preserved letter Whidbey wrote to an unknown correspondent in London from California on Jan. 2, 1793 gives the same impression. What he had learned in the harsh Northwest about good anchorages and the protection of ships from storm and tide he was to put to good use in his future career.

**His career** began to blossom in 1799 when Lord St Vincent commissioned him to make a survey of Torbay with a view to rendering it a completely safe Fleet Anchorage.

The exigencies of the blockade of Brest and the vulnerability of the Channel Fleet lying either in Torbay or Plymouth Sound were weighing heavily on the percipient mind of St. Vincent.

St. Vincent had come to know Whidbey both through his Northwest coast reputation and

A replica of  
the ship's  
boat that  
Whidbey  
steered to  
his Island.



through his friendship with Sir Joseph Banks.

Banks had adopted a strongly anti-Vancouver stance in the aftermath of the voyage of 1791-5, which he had done so much to mastermind, and had come to believe not only that Whidbey deserved the main credit for the successes of that voyage but that Whidbey was an intelligent and capable man.

**Ship's Master** and engineer Joseph Whidbey retired at age 75 in 1830. It is recorded in the Roll of the Freemen of Plymouth for 1831 that he was living in a hotel in Taunton. He then bought St. James House in St. James Street, Taunton, where he lived the rest of his life.

He died on Oct. 9, 1833, and was buried in St. James churchyard opposite the house where he had spent his final years. His tomb is still there.

A portrait of Joseph Whidbey graced the exhibition celebrating the centenary of the City of Vancouver, B.C. in 1986. The original portrait hangs just outside the library of the Institution of Civil Engineers in Great George Street, Parliament Square, London.

This almost forgotten man had been a key figure in the great voyage of 1791-95 . . . almost forgotten perhaps by the world, but not by his namesake, Whidbey Island.