

Beginning of Jimmie Jean Interview:

CHRIS: Let's just go back and give me a little bit of background on something that I actually don't know. How did you get to Coupeville?

JJ: My parents had moved to Coupeville in the 40's. My father's partner had been stationed at the Naval Air Station, so he talked my father into coming out and when I completed my courses at the University of Kansas, I joined my family. I came there in 1949. Knew nothing about it, cultural gap, you know. I came from a university where I was having a lot of fun and to Coupeville which was about 300 people, no library, no movie, no nothing, but it was a beautiful area. I enjoyed it.

CHRIS: So you came there after your tour of duty in London?

JJ: Oh, yes. I grew up in Kansas during the depression and had gone to Washington D.C. to work and of course the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, so I came back to Kansas, worked at Boeing for a little while. It was called the Boeing Airplane Company then, over at Wichita, and as soon as I was old enough, I had to be twenty-one, I joined the army and I was stationed in London and Paris during the war and came home, of course, when it was demobilized. Under the G.I. Bill of Rights went to the University, opportunity that most people didn't have at that time and after I graduated, came out to Coupeville.

CHRIS: And then became Coupeville's local historian?

JJ: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I was just interested. I just poked around. Never was I officially a historian of any kind. I enjoyed talking to the old timers, I enjoyed looking at the buildings, I photographed all the buildings. I just liked it. But nothing, nothing as far as being a historian was concerned. It wasn't until I started research later on that I sort of developed something of an expertise, if that's it, in history. I was never taught Washington history, so I didn't know anything about it really.

CHRIS: I would consider you Coupeville's local historian and when you wrote " Penn Cove, A Particular Friend", how did you come to do that? You must, at that time, have seen yourself somewhat as a historian.

JJ: You're familiar with the preservation program? The state, of course, had asked us to inventory our properties, and a young man name Ron Van Dyke had offered to act as the county liason with the state park

and then he was unable to go ahead. He didn't start the inventory. I offered to take over then and act as the county liason and we had a hundred properties to research. Since I worked in the county auditor's office, which is the recording office, I was familiar with the books and so I started researching the properties and so, I became a little knowledgeable about the history. I re-focused on it actually. I know the people who were there at that time, the sons and grandsons of the pioneers were very much aware of their sense of place, a sense of history and all of that. I hadn't really grasped that it was the second oldest settlement in the Puget Sound region, so I was discovering. I enjoy it. I love to dig around in books, so it was fun for me.

CHRIS: So it's from your digging around, the book was born?

JJ: No, no, actually, digging around was to verify the properties for registration or placement on the national register of historic places. When I finished that and had the application ready to go into the state, I had all of this material, so I approached the Historical Society to see if they were interested in having this printed up in a book. And they were willing to underwrite it, so that I zipped ahead with the book. It was all done so quickly, if I had had more time, I think I could have done a better job, but this all happened, the research, the book, everything within a year's time so, it wasn't done as well as I would have liked. But anyway, the application for the district went into the state and the book went into the printer and I thought I was finished at that point. It was fun, all the way through.

CHRIS: And was it finished at all?

JJ: No, not at all.

CHRIS: You said before that the people there had known their history, had been aware of it and you sort of got into it. Why do you think that is? Because I found that too, that the area-people are very knowledgeable about the history. They've saved it.

JJ: Well, so many were descendants of the pioneers and also, I think the farmers loved the land. I mean, they really appreciated the historic value of it as well as the fertility of Ebey's Prairie and Smith's Prairie and what they call Bald Hill over at San de Fuca. I also think it was such a close community. They had other ways...well, you know, being a member of a pioneer it was a little status and they were contented with it. It was

rather a depressed area economically. But they were very contented people and very proud of what they had. Marvelous group of people, I really enjoyed talking to the old timers. They were eager to share, too. I guess maybe they'd told their stories to everybody else but anyway, I was eager to find out about it.

CHRIS: One of the things that I find, cause you say they told you the stories, but now I find people that tell me the stories, often they tell me the stories that are in your book. Then, I think one of the things your book has done has given people the history.

JJ: It's a different group of people, for one thing. And, another thing is that I used the old biographical histories as much as I could. They were written in the 1890's and they perhaps weren't anymore accurate in a way than my book was, but they were at least based on interviews with the pioneers. They told them what they wanted printed up. These were actually subscribed to by the people who appear in the book and they were always immensely successful and all that sort of thing, which was true in most cases, but they were telling the stories that no one knew because so many of those people, like the Crockett's and the Ebey's were gone. Only the families that remained were actually aware of their own history and the other people had sort of gotten lost. So I think that's why people are re-discovering what happened to Glasgow out on the prairie, what happened to the Crockett's and then some of the people who...

JIMMIE JEAN INTERVIEW

CHRIS: Magic about Ebey's Prairie...Tell me what you see magic there. I agree, but I like to hear what other people see as magic there.

JJ: I see it as a sort of a holy place. It's just the very essence, I think, of the spirit of the pioneers of their remarkable ability to go into a strange land, a wild land really, and see the possibilities and opportunities. At the same time, do not destroy. They actually worked with... It was a natural prairie and they improved it as I said. It was a good improvement. It still shows you the Squarumont plain of Gunlevy. If you stand up in the cemetery looking down, you can see the boundaries, the Cook Road and Sherman Road or to the boundaries on the northwest side and follow right across to the angle road, you've come to the far point audit and the land use pattern is still the same. Everything about it is there to see now. It's just a fantastic piece of property. It should always be preserved. As just what it was like at the beginning of the territory. It was like 1850, I think. Ebey was a very clever man. He saw the best and he took it. We have to be thankful for that. I'm not sure that the Indians were that thankful, I believe he got along with them up to a certain point, but he gave a legacy to all of us. Not just the residents of the land, everybody passing through that district, looking across Ebey's Prairie must feel something about it. It certainly

restores a person's spirits, I think.

CHRIS: In your book you left it with that the spoilers are now on the land. Talk a little bit about that.

JJ: The spoilers, really as far as the prairie was concerned, was one of the owners who wanted to develop half of the Ebey plain, which would have been very visible to the rest of the farmers. Only it was an encroachment, it wasn't just a visual encroachment, as far as seeing the prairie, it also was a threat to the other farmers because it's pretty hard for city people if they move into an area like that to live next to a cow barn. There are certain problems with that. So the prairie would have eventually gone I think, into development which would have been wrong. That spoiled it. That was a spoiler thing. Also, Keystone Spit which is a marvelous wild area, actually a barrier between Admiralty Inlet and Crockett Lake is a very important part on the migration route of the birds. A wonderful place to go if you really want to get away from all of your problems and that also was being scheduled for development without a proper environmental impact statement, without any concern for the problems it might give the people in the county, and a suit was brought against the Dillingham Corporation which owned that and fortunately the Supreme Court upheld the decision that the county had not followed the proper planning, the proper guidelines and they found in favor of the group which was called SWIFT, or Save Whidbey Island For Tomorrow that had brought the suit. So that was stopped, development there was stopped. So things happened all along. I don't know that any suit would ever have stopped the development on Ebey's Prairie. It had to be the National Park Service coming in with the money to buy it that preserved that land. There were battles, there're always battles, there're always spoilers and there will be, but I'm hoping that cooperation between the National Park Service, the state parks and the local people will always prevail to keep it an unspoiled piece of land. And you have to give the farmers credit because they understand this heritage land. They understand that. I think they'll continue to farm and to keep it for the future and for their own children who'll be farming, too.

CHRIS: Did you expect when you got into the .....land that it would turn out with as much land preserved as it did?

JJ: Never, never. The best I could hope for was that development would be mitigated, be just as little intrusion as possible. Of course, any development was wrong, for my own personal belief, but I couldn't hope for that. Just hope that it would be done in the best possible way. I recognize the rights

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of the owners to do something with their land, I guess, if they want to, but, I could never see it and it's just fantastic when you think of Keystone, Fort Casey, Ebey's Prairie and Landing, Paragoes Bluff, Fort Ebey, Grassers Bluff, all of this being kept visually pure, I guess you can say. That's not the best word for it, but it still is there. People can see this settlement that was actually completed in 1853. They should know also that Ebey was settled there a year before Seattle was started, so it's the prime place in the Sound, the upper Puget Sound region.

CHRIS: I want you to look back a little bit into Coupeville where you did so much work on the houses and talk a little bit about the sea captains and what kind of community grew up there.

JJ: What it started with—just three people actually. John Alexander who was not for some reason a sea captain and Captain Thomas Coup and Captain Howard Lovejoy. But they came, of course, as a result of the Lieutenant Wilkes expedition which charted Penn's Cove and this was part of the U.S. exploring expedition. And the whole purpose of that was to open the Pacific area to commercial exploitation. So the people who were watching those records and the logs were watching for opportunity and when they heard about the timber in Penn Cove, and the fact that Vancouver had said it was the most beautiful place that he had met in this whole area, they came. They came to get the timber and they came to stay. And even after they settled, Penn Cove as well as Coupeville, was totally rigged by these claims made by the sea captains. You get all these New England names of Lovejoy and Coup, of course, Barstow, Faye, Holbrook, oh, I can't think right now, but anyway, the sea captains were there and they continued in their trades. Some were in the China trade, some were in the coastal trade. They were taking the timbers down to San Francisco for piles in the docks and to Mexico for use in the mines and the trees off Barbados were so straight and fine that they were taken to France and England for spars and this may have been the first international trade coming out of Puget Sound, I don't know. But they settled down and it became known as the home of sea captains and they lived and died there, contented, I'm sure.

CHRIS: Tell me just a little bit about your house in Coupeville and some of the other Lovejoy houses and how he started building such fine houses.

JJ: My house was called a Zacher house. He was just a good builder. Of course, later he built boats as well, but he built most of the really fine houses in Coupeville plus the Methodist church. They all had an idea of what a proper house was, so

that's what they built, proper houses. He used standard plans and I've seen some of the buildings other places. I mean, just about the same thing. They could switch elements around in the house, you know, they chose a bay window or not, that sort of thing, but he used standard plans, and excellent lumber coming from the mill down at the end of the cove and he did just a proper job. I don't know exactly what the date is on the Zilcher house, but it was shortly after he bought the lot, I'm sure, which would be about 1893, just when Coupeville was platted finally. He also built what's called the Parker house next door for his mother, which is-gosh I don't know what that design is- It has a tower on one side. The towers became very popular in 1890's and he built the Kenneth house which is across from...The Methodist church is of course your gothic victorian and the members of the church have restored that original part of the church to the way it was originally. The sanctuary had been moved around, turned around, but they spent a year in there, painting and working and it's now facing-the congregation faces in the right direction. I don't know what to say about him, though. He was just an excellent craftsman. He had good taste. I'm sure he gave you a good value for the dollar and he, himself, liked the french style because he also built a house for his sister when she married, that has the mansard roof, too. The nice thing about the Zilcher house, though, I think, the windows above are curved if you've ever noticed, and usually they were boxed in. The other house, the Watson house I think it's called, has a boxed in dormer, but they're curved above the windows which were nice. We've discovered in the Historical Society that there are very few builders today or carpenters who can do some of those details. There's a detail along the roof and over the windows called a dental range, which you may be familiar with and we decided when we put the front on the little museum that we would use a dental range across the top, and if you ever take a look at it, the carpenter missed-he didn't get it just right. It's there, but it comes to an abrupt end before it should. So, it's very difficult for people who try to restore these houses to find someone who really knows how to do the work because some of those building techniques are just lost-at least on the west coast. Maybe on the east coast they're still there. ✓

CHRIS: So you saw a lot of changes in Coupeville in some forty years that you were there?

JJ: Oh, yes

CHRIS: Some good, some bad. What did you see?

JJ: Oh, for twenty years I saw no change. That was pleasant. ✓

That was the time that I really enjoyed Coupeville and photographed it. For one thing, all of the buildings were painted white or maybe a buff color paint and it gave a unity and cohesiveness to the town. And the roof was always shingled, because these people knew how a house was supposed to be. So that taking a picture down through Coupeville, you had this unity throughout all the dark roofs and the white houses, creating a very pleasant pattern. Well now I don't blame people for using newer paints and colors and all that sort of, or using composition roofing that might be red or pink or whatever, but there's a certain cohesiveness lost when this happens and it would be nice if they would go back to perhaps a darker roof color, and maybe not white, but, you know, something. So, once again these buildings would be certainly units, rather than each individual building. Some buildings have been placed in very poor places because they do impact historic structures and in some places the open space, we called it Kruger's Field, that's the space between Main Street and Broadway, I think perhaps the building there down in the valley of this field could have been better, to make the buildings a little lower and sort of fit into the hillside. Most of them are really rather obtrusive. But those are things that have happened and perhaps building in the future, as it fills, will be more compatible with the land. Little things, they're just little things that I miss and the changes I saw. Front Street fortunately, is really not suffered too much. The first building in mariner's corridor, whatever it was, was purchased by a Texan who completely covered the building to make it look like little Abileen or something like that, so that's destroyed and the old city hall was destroyed by a mayor who thought it an eyesore. But, other than that, it's really pretty well saved as it was. I think you can still get the flavor of a waterfront town. I don't know, I guess there's still some awfully nice things about Coupeville and these things could be corrected if people really wanted to make it look more like a New Eng

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town, because that's basically that's what the architecture is, the salt boxes that you find. Captain Coup's house is a salt box, the old granary there on Front street is salt box, Griffith's house, again, plus these little square houses with the high gables. It's a very pleasant town. It still is pleasant. Just be careful about what they do in the future, I hope.

CHRIS: We've talked about the changes in things. What do you see for the future of the area?

JJ: I guess I have to come back to the word "stewardship". That's really what it's all about. I think people owe an obligation to the future. If they have something of value, they should preserve it for the future. It's not just for your use or



my use here and now, but for children and generations to come. I think they should be very careful about the authentic buildings they have and preserve them in a sensible way. No one ever wants it to be just a tourist attraction. It has to be a meaningful community for the people that live there now and the people who'll will live there in the future and for all the people that will pass through it because I'm sure there will be people from the east coast and other countries that will like to see a rather unspoiled, pioneer community. So that's what I'd see. Whether it happens is up to the people that are there now, I guess. And perhaps for the people to come. There's some things that are just worth more than money. I guess at one time we were always talking about the people there who were buying property who knew the price of everything and the value of nothing and it still applies. They must respect what they have. I hope they do.

CHRIS: Anything else that you'd want to add?

JJ: No, I just wanted to...you made this pleasant. I thought I was going to have to sit here and give you the history, history, history and I thought, "Oh God! I don't remember all those things, you know." But you made it very pleasant. You made it enjoyable, I must say.

CHRIS: Well, I enjoyed it and you got on a lot of things that I wanted to get on, to cover. You gave me very nice things on Coupeville because we didn't have enough on Coupeville and we can do some very nice visuals on Coupeville. Also you get very nice visuals on there's Grasser's Hill, there's Keystone. There all

JJ: This is a model of the four masted schooner which was the work horse of Penn Cove. These were the vessels that came in to load up the timber and take it out to the markets. The sight of these was very common when the sea captains were still there loading and taking the timber...and the sailors, incidentally, were very good at marketing the timber. They knew how to rig block and tackle and drop the logs out into the water, which very simple there to move the logs from the land and drop it in the bay and float it then to the ship. This model is made by a gentleman named Pingston, Bill Pingston Jr., and I think he did a very good job. It's based on an actual schooner that's still beached down in California, called the Forrester.

CHRIS: Lovejoy didn't, the one that built the houses, he didn't go to sea, did he? He built ships and built houses, but he didn't go to sea, did he?

JJ: Lovejoy? I'm not sure if...no they given these records but

at that time, there was just nothing. He sent me all this material so I had all this on Ebey's plus the material they had over at the University of Washington....