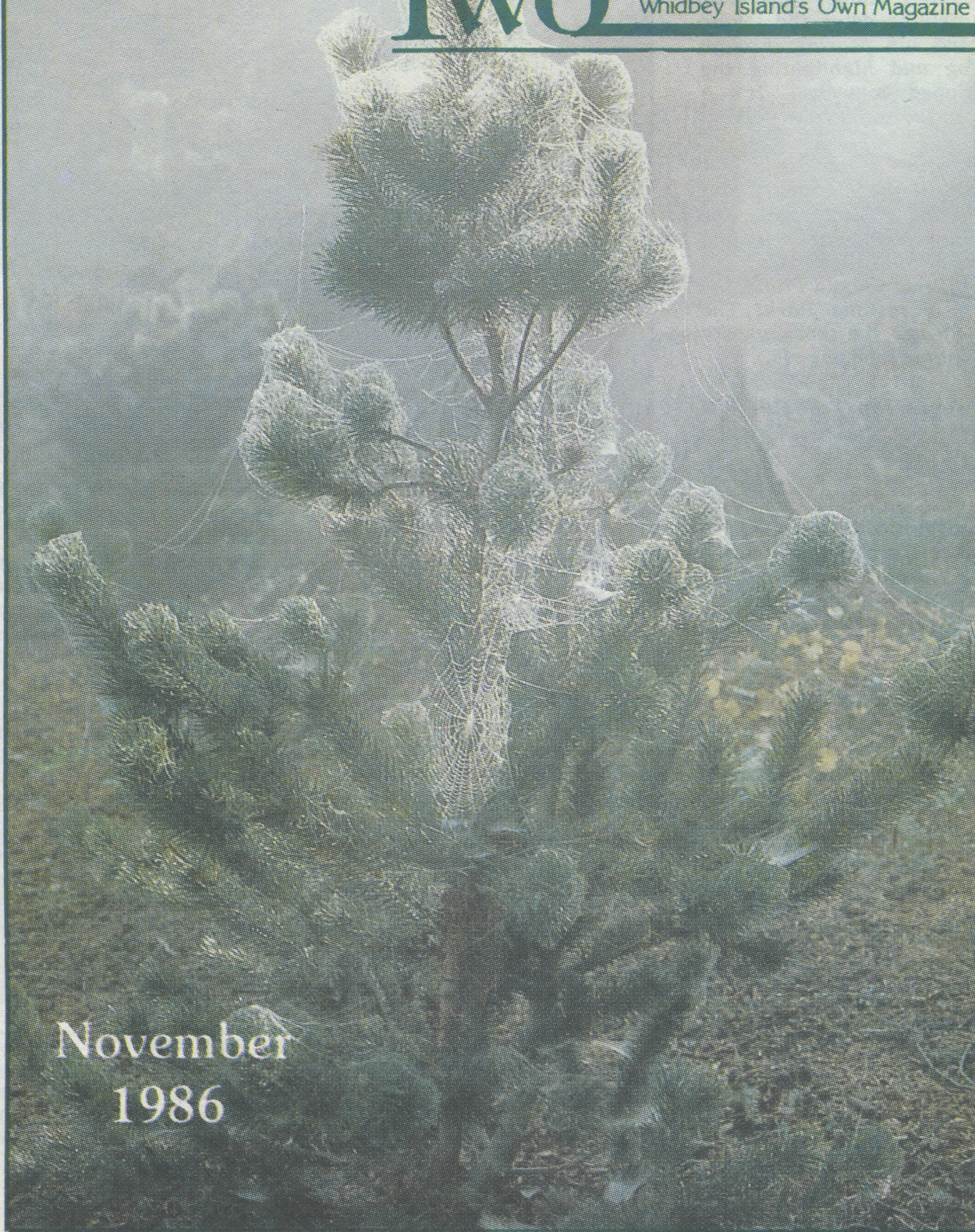


# Spindrift Two

50¢

Volume 10 Number 2

Whidbey Island's Own Magazine



November  
1986



The years between the discovery of Whidbey and the actual settlement of the island in 1851 contained an interesting bit of history.

In 1839, a French-Canadian Roman Catholic priest by the name of Francis Norbert Blanchett arrived among settlers on the Cowlitz River to begin his missionary work. News of the "black gown" spread throughout the Indian population and among those who came to hear Father Blanchett was Chief Snetlum (later Snakelum) of the Whidbey Island Indians.

The pilgrims received instruction and learned various ceremonies and songs and returned home.

A year later, on May 26, 1840, a canoe of seven Indians from Whidbey Island went to the Mission which Father Blanchett held at Nisqually, and invited the priest to the island. He arrived two days later and was given a hearty welcome by the Skagits. They sang the

## Indians Build Gigantic Cross

Mass, showing they had remembered their instructions received a year earlier.

The home of the Chief was a house of logs, 20 by 30 feet long, and the interior was sealed with tapestry mats. On Sunday, May 30, some 400 Indians attended services there. An altar was prepared in a little room built of mats, with a rough plank serving as an altar table. Many sub-chiefs attended, along with Indians from other parts of the Island.

After the services, a great feast of smoked salmon and venison was prepared and the traditional Peace Pipe passed from hand to hand.

Suddenly the peace of that Sunday feast was shattered by a great shout as a group of

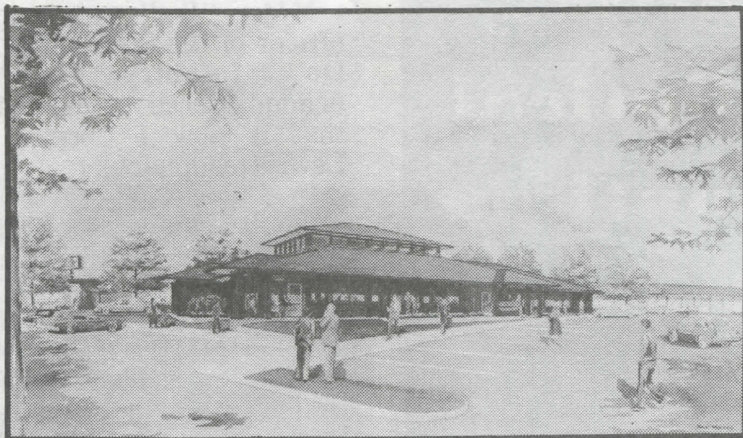


Indians arrived carrying a huge 24-foot cross built of cedar. It was placed in the ground at Blanchett's direction, and the priest prostrated himself before it, with all the assembly following suit.

When John Alexander took up his claim in Coupeville in 1851, the cross still stood upon his land. When Alexander died December 9, 1858, his body was placed in a hollowed cedar log and buried at the foot of the cross.

Years later, in 1902, the cedar casket was moved to Sunnyside Cemetery, and the remains of the cross was placed beside the door of the Alexander Blockhouse, where it still stands. The upright of this historic cross is only about 7 feet tall now, and the cross beam is part of a rail taken from the first fence built around the Alexander claim.

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# Edward Oliver

## Finds His



11

## 'Paradise, with Land Free'

In 1858 the Puget Sound steamer *Glencoe* brought a young man by the name of Edward Oliver to the head of Useless Bay, near Bayview. Rumors circulating in Ports of Entry Port Ludlow and Port Townsend, told of Whidbey Island as a paradise with land free for the taking, and Oliver decided to investigate.

After exploring South Whidbey, the slender, blond-moustached Oliver started a logging operation at Deer Lagoon, where trees grew to 15 feet in circumference, an untouched wilderness that

surrounded two small bays, north and northwest of what today is Sunlight Beach.

He established a home on a homestead on the west side of Deer Lagoon. His marriage to Melvina Sooy, whose mother was Indian and whose father was white, produced four children. Melvina died in 1886 and in 1887, Oliver married Gah-toh-litsa, whose English name was Jane Newberry.

Gah-loh-litsa was the widow of another early settler, William T. Johnson, who was discovered dead in the boat he rowed across Admiralty Inlet

with a load of fresh vegetables from his farm. There was no money on his person and his family believed he had been murdered for the sizable sum he was known to have been carrying when returning to Whidbey Island.

The pioneer life on Whidbey Island, as in the rest of Puget Sound country, was precipitous, and many dangers lurked, not only from the environment, but from unprincipled men who preyed on others. While Johnson had rowed back and forth from Whidbey to Port Townsend many times with his cargo of foodstuffs, braving winds and weather, his untimely demise probably came at the hands of his own people.

Johnson settled on Double Bluff before 1880 and his wife was related to one of the Snohomish tribal chiefs. The land upon which he settled apparently belonged to her, and their descendants still live on South Whidbey.



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## Hattie Swift Race, Whidbey pioneer

The following is the story of Hattie Swift Race as told by her granddaughter, Helen Race Brien, in "Incidents in the Life of a Pioneer Woman," published by The Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington some years ago.

**HATTIE SWIFT RACE**  
In 1872, Hattie Swift was born at Coveland, across Penn's Cove from Coupeville on Whidbey Island, where she spent her entire life.

Her birthplace, a beautiful log house, was later moved across the cove to Coupeville, and reconstructed. It was her home through the years of her marriage to Frances Puget Race, who was also of pioneer stock.

During her lifetime, Hattie was most generous in allowing people to visit the unusual house built of hand-hewn logs, with huge fireplaces, massive wrought iron bolts and hinges, filled with priceless antiques, books, historical documents and gifts from Indian friends.

Race owned the drug store at Coupeville and the family, there were two boys, Will and Henry, for a time lived above

the store. Hattie helped in the drug store because her husband was busy with a variety of interests: real estate, the telephone office, historical and Indian affairs. Thus Hattie learned a great deal about drugs and the chemistry of the human body.

The telephone office was in the drug store and Hattie and the boys helped run the switchboard so they were in a position to know every secret in town, but they did not gossip and were respected for that.

The store was centrally located in Coupeville, and Hattie was right in the center of much that went on. One time they heard shooting right outside the door, and they all ran to hide behind the store safe. It was just a small safe and after a lot of scrambling they had to line up one behind the other in a row.

During a lull in the shooting, Hattie managed to get to the switchboard to call the sheriff. The sheriff was a gentle man and always took a long time to arrive on a call, often missing the excitement entirely.

The shooting turned out to be the newspaper editor. He was



Telephone office at Coupeville.

developing a habit of getting drunk and riding his Appaloosa horse up and down the street, shooting and hollering. He went back to Montana after the townspeople suggested that it might be best if he left Coupeville.

Fairhaven, Hattie's home, was a social center and she was hostess to many important people, not least among them three Skagit Indian Chiefs who came to see her husband, an Honorary Skagit Chief himself.

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**Coupeville's Front Street early in the century.**

Hattie's children and grandchildren well remember the famous Coupeville Potlatch. They knew the Indians through Hattie and Puget, played with the Indian children, watched the weddings and gambling.

The Indians were great gamblers. They gambled at night, sitting in a big circle with their wives standing behind them, chanting for good luck. Helen Race Brien remembers falling asleep to that constant, gentle chant.

During potlatch, the squaws Mary and Kate would come to see Hattie and her sister, Maude Fullington, and exchange household hints. Hattie had an enormous garden and would advise them on substances to make their gardens grow and they in turn would share their age-old secrets about dyes and weaving.

Maude became so proficient in weaving that she was often invited by Mrs. Denny to lecture at the University of Washington.

One evidence of Hattie's medical skill was her care of her granddaughter after she dived into a mass of red jelly fish off the Coupeville dock. The stinging was terrible and she was rushed to her grandmother. Hattie put compresses over the girl's swollen body and calmed her down.

There was no doctor in town so it was to Hattie that people rushed for help. A week after this incident, a woman drowned after being enmeshed in red jelly fish.

Hattie had a profound influence on all who knew her. She worked with historical groups, including the Daughters of the Pioneers; was instrumental in the reconstruction of the three blockhouses on Whidbey Island; and was active in many organizations.

Hattie Swift Race died in June 1955, at the age of 83, in the home in which she was born.



## Oak Harbor Hobbies

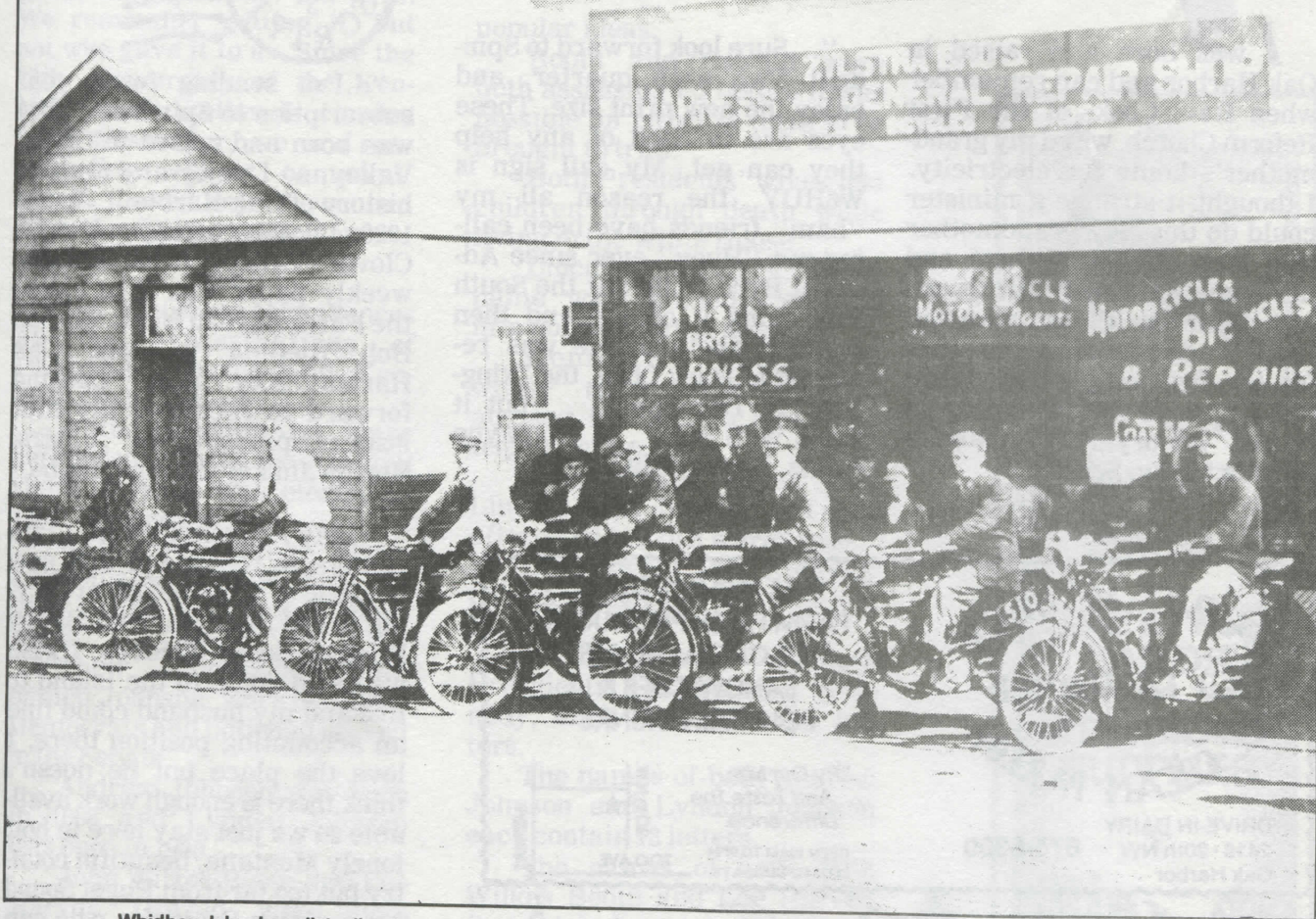
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Whidbey Island cyclists lined up for the start of a good day's ride in an early 1900's picture in front of a repair shop which advertised harness, bicycles and shoes. The motorcycles became popular following World War I.

# Tartans & Tweeds

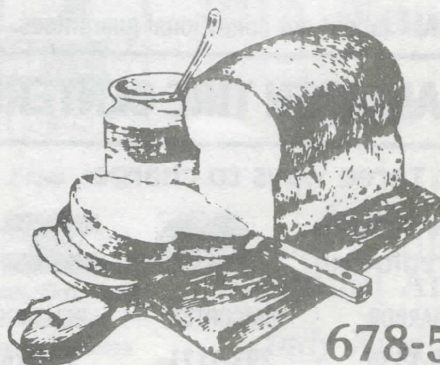
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On Sunday, September 21, Whidbey Island Naval Air Station celebrated its 44th birthday. Newcomers and Navy people may not believe this, but Whidbey Island was chosen in the first place because of its good weather.

According to an official report, Whidbey Island became the site of a Naval Air Station and a "training base for both land and seaplane pilots, navigators, gunners, bombardiers, and ground forces" because of a "meteorological history showing that sunshine prevails during 75 percent of the daylight hours," making it a sort of "sunshine oasis in the fog belt of Puget Sound."

It was considered an odd fact that right in the heart of the Puget Sound area of Western Washington, generally known for its fog and rainfall, there is a belt with "precipitation so light as to approximate desert conditions, and with more than average sunshine." The report went on to say that "only 17 inches annual rainfall is the average for Whidbey Island."

Whidbey Island lived up to its dry billing, at least at first. Rainfall at NAS Whidbey was 10.11 inches in 1943 and 8.15 inches in 1944. Rainfall in 1979 was 17.87 inches, 2 inches below normal, according to a later report.

This so-called "banana belt" extends from southwest to northeast, from the Olympic Peninsula to the vicinity of Vancouver, B.C.

In siting the air station, advantage was also taken of the natural terrain, and the installations designed for each specific function of the station "appear to be just another part of the normal surface development of the surrounding territory." Approximately 6,000 acres were purchased for the development of this naval reservation.

Early in 1941, the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics and the

## 'Good Weather' Cited As Basis For Base Choice



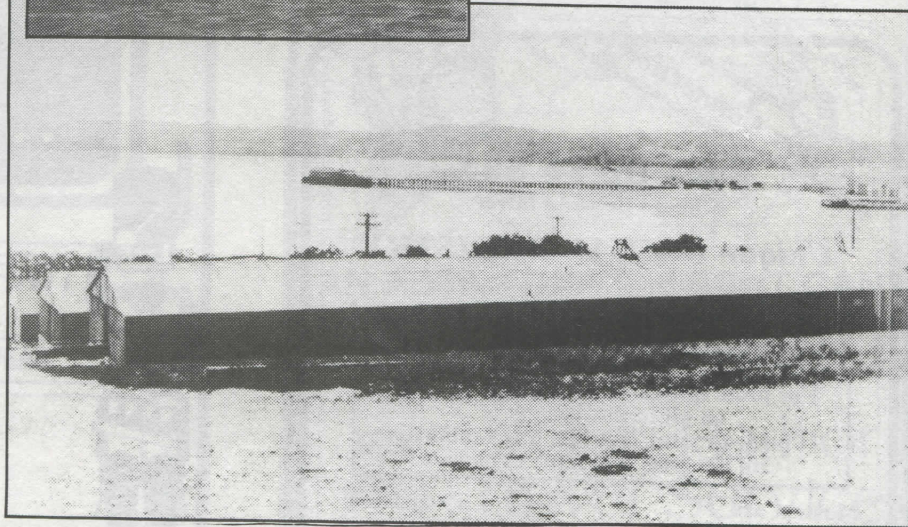
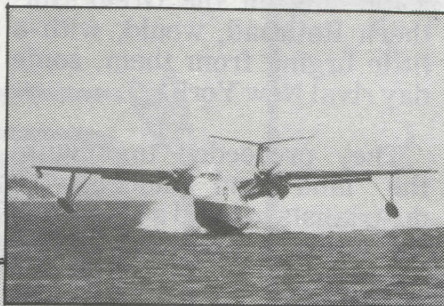
Construction at the Seaplane Base, view looking southwest. Sept. 2, 1944

Chief of Naval Operations requested the Commandant of the Thirteenth Naval District at Seattle, to recommend a "location for a re-arming base for patrol planes" operating in the "defense of Puget Sound, should such defense be

necessary."

Of the various localities having the required qualifications, Lake Ozette, Indian Island, Keystone Harbor, Penn Cove, Oak Harbor, and Crescent Harbor were chosen for closer consideration.

One by one the others were eliminated because of mountainous terrain, bluff shore fronts, inaccessibility, absence of sufficient beaches, lee shores, and kindred other reasons.



Remodeling four contractor's barracks to house 160 officers. Photo taken Sept. 2, 1944, looking southwest on the seaplane base.



# Happy 44th Birthday NAS

23



Early 40s runway at Ault Field.

It was, therefore, recommended by Captain Ralph Wood, NAS Seattle commanding officer, that the area on Saratoga Passage including the shores of Crescent Harbor and both the east and west shores of Forbes Point be named as a suitable site for the seaplane re-arming base.

The acquisition of all Crescent Harbor was recommended to be used for large scale re-arming operations, a shoreline of two to three miles being available.

Captain Wood also recommended an area four miles north of Oak Harbor as a site

for a landing field. Clover Valley was believed to be the best natural site for a landing field in the entire Puget Sound area, being level, well drained, and accessible from any approach.

Surveyors arrived August 14, 1941, and began laying out the present bases. The 142 Indian skeletons found on Forbes Point, five of which are said to have spent the night with the Marines, were transported to the Indian Reservation at La Conner, and reburied with all proper Indian ceremony.

First plans for the seaplane base did not provide for a mess hall, the powers that be deciding that since Whidbey Island was but a short distance on the other side of Lake Washington, the men could be messed at NAS Seattle.

After it was pointed out that a round trip of 130 miles would be required for each of the three meals, the Seaplane Base got its mess hall.



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## Christmas 1896: They Whooped It up at Byrne's Hall

In 1896 Christmas was observed at Oak Harbor when all of North Whidbey came to Byrne's Hall on the waterfront. (About at the corner of East Pioneer Way and Flintstone) The town at that time included a number of stores and other businesses on what is East Pioneer Way today. L.P. Byrne had built a hotel and a dock and warehouse, and the Oak Harbor Creamery and a blacksmith shop was located on the bay side of the street.

Byrne's Hall was above his warehouse on the dock, and was used by the community for celebrations, for church and for the first high school in Oak Harbor. Dances and programs made the building ring with music, and Christmas 1896 was a milestone.

Hollanders had come from the Dakotas, Iowa and Michigan to settle on Whidbey, where there was little chance of flooding. They had investigated the Skagit Flats, which in November of that year had endured disastrous flooding from the Skagit River, and opted for the Island. In 1896 there were 32 Dutch families on



Oak Harbor's main street as it looked about the time everyone gathered for the Christmas party.

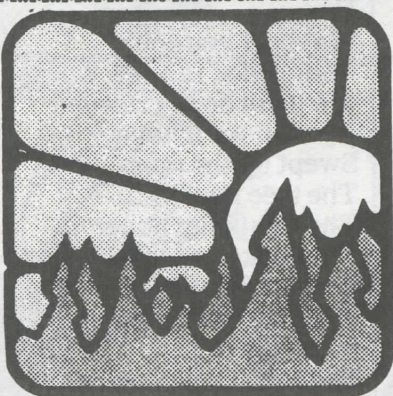
North Whidbey, totalling 213 newcomers.

So it was that on Christmas Eve, Swantown, Dugualla Bay, Silver Lake, Crescent Harbor and Oak Harbor people came together to observe Christmas. There were 300 present, according to Jerome Ely, historian of that day, and the hall was decorated with three Christmas trees, each glowing with real lighted candles. There were gifts for all.

The program was opened with Sunday School youngsters singing a song of welcome and

followed by prayer by the Rev. Schoonmaker. From then on, the children recited and sang Christmas songs, but the hit of the evening were two hymns sung by the Heller brothers and sisters and Miss Capaan, all of Swantown.

They were encored and encored, and the evening ended at 6 p.m. with everyone wending their ways home by horse and buggy along unlit, rutted roads, regardless of the weather, but knowing that they had just celebrated the best Christmas ever.



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# South Whidbey Island in 1880s Saw Growth

The 1880s on Whidbey Island saw a concerted growth in population, schools, businesses, government and opportunities, both on North and South Whidbey.

The 50-mile long Island was settled separately, with Penn's Cove, Coupeville and Oak Harbor on the north end forging ahead as communities while South Whidbey was still depending on four logging camps for existence.

The general settlement of South Whidbey by those who would become permanent inhabitants, and whose descendants would form the communities of today, began in the 1880s.

When Washington became a state in 1889, a great number of people from all parts of the world, especially from the Scandinavian countries, had begun to arrive to establish farms and homes. The census of 1900 showed 100 families living on South Whidbey with a total of nearly 500 persons.

In 1850 a 26-year-old Virginian by the name of Robert Bailey arrived to trade with the Indians at the village

of Digwash on the southernmost tip of Whidbey. Bailey liked the look of the place and took up residence on the beautiful bay that for many years bore his name.

On September 1, 1852, Bailey filed his claim for 82½ acres, thus becoming the first recorded white land owner on South Whidbey.

He took as his wife an Indian woman from the village and established a home and trading post. He increased his holdings to 350 acres from the bay to the eastern side of Possession Point, and in 1859 he had become Indian Agent to the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skykomish and Stillaguamish tribes.

His home was designated a polling place for Island County by the County Commissioners, encompassing an area extending from Scatchet Head to Holmes Harbor.

## Growth

Being a pioneer on South Whidbey in those days meant isolation from one's own people and from many of the conveniences of civilization. The Bailey children grew up with Indian playmates, as they had no permanent white neighbors. His son Henry married an Indian girl and they had two sons and a daughter. When in 1888 William Jewett took out homestead rights next to the Bailey claim, he married 16-year-old Laura Bailey.

Bailey's Bay has been renamed Cultus Bay, but Bailey Road connecting Scatchett Head with Maxwellton; and Jewett Road, from Bailey Road to Glendale Road, honor two of the earliest white settlers in that part of the Island.

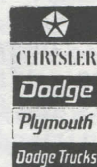


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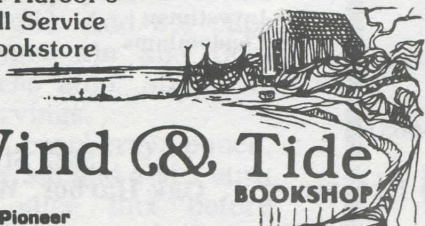
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