

Whidbey Island's own magazine

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Spindrift Two

Spring 1978



25^c

The Robertson House Began as a Mill

The old Robertson House (later Rosenfield) on Coupeville's Front Street was originally a 18 by 18 foot building built in the early 1850's to be used as a mill. In 1882, the structure was set back 10 feet to make room for a wider Front Street.

In 1860, Capt. William Robertson brought his family to Whidbey Island from Baltimore. The Robertsons had two daughters, Mary and Leah, and three sons, John being the youngest. Capt. Robertson remodeled and built onto the mill, adding rooms and more windows, with a 14-inch beam construction. The filigree scrolls on the porch were added, typical decorations of that era.

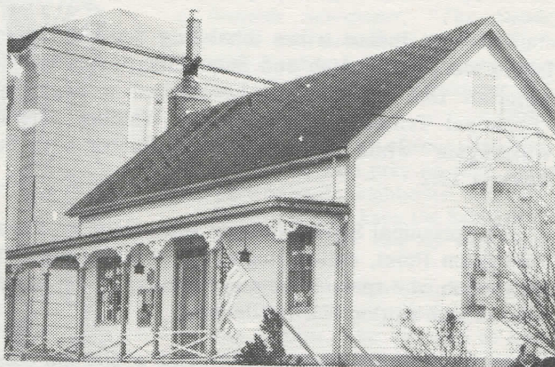
Being in the center of town it was an excellent place for a doctor to live and we find a number of doctors listed as residents. Among the pioneer names of those who lived there are Doctors Crosby, Walling, Wintermute, McKee, Fullinton, and Meecham; Judge Still, Attorney Craddock, a Mr. Weedon, and Sheriff Wangness.

Mrs. Sara Wanamaker came to Coupeville in 1902 with her family from New Brunswick. They bought the old Robertson house and it remained in the family for many years, becoming known locally as the Rosenfield house. Mrs. Rosenfield was one of the Wanamaker daughters.

Jane Rosenfield, matriarch of the pioneer Rosenfield family, was a very interesting woman. Coming here with her husband Alexander in 1889 from Wales to make a home in the wilds, she brought with her the rudiments of civilization.

Settling at Admiralty Bay, Jane spent the first two years without even seeing another white woman. Alexander had learned shipbuilding in his native Russia and he continued that trade here. He built sturdy boats that could weather the treacherous waters across Admiralty Bay to Port Townsend. He made many trips in open sailboats to trade farm products for groceries.

Mrs. Rosenfield was devoted to her children and made use of a noteworthy library she brought from England, teaching them so well that they entered the fourth grade when finally starting school.



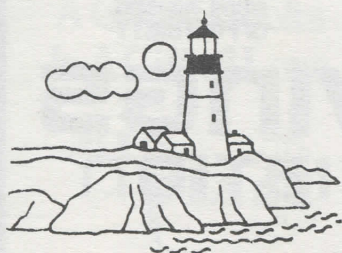
The Rosenfield, nee Robertson, house on Front Street now houses a restaurant, The Six Persimmons.



She loved and tended her flower garden, which was unusual for those early days. She had English thyme, laburnum trees and many flowers all raised from seeds she brought from her Welsh home. Her table was set with bone china and she cherished many beautiful pieces of furniture brought from Great Britain across Canada by train to West Minister.

The Rosenfields had five children of their own and also were guardians of five Kellogg children.

Through all the years until her death in 1914, Jane Rosenfield was beloved of all who knew her and by the many who found their way to her hospitable door.



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"Tschakolecy" was the name

The first Indian tribes inhabiting South Whidbey Island were Snohomish and Suquamish, according to historian Dee Hudson who researched a paper on "Principal Tribes and Villages on Whidbey Island, Washington" while stationed at Oak Harbor with the Navy in 1962.

The principal South Whidbey settlement was near Possession Point, called Negwa'sx. It was settled by Snohomish who spoke a language similar to the Skagit Indians who settled North Whidbey.

The Suquamish Indians lived on the western or outer shores of South Whidbey, and it was from this tribe that Chief Seattle came.

Four tribes, Snohomish, Suquamish on the southern part of the Island the Skagit in the center (Coupeville) and Swinomish on the north. (Oak Harbor). The Swinomish were canoe people, according to Hudson, but then all of the Island tribes were dependent upon canoes for their livelihood and transportation.

The Swinomish had villages in the San Juans as well as on North Whidbey and visited them regularly, trading and visiting.

The Oak Harbor area Skagits called their site "Klatoletsche," while the settlement in the Coupeville area was "Kalakut." The entire Island was named Tschakolecy. The Skagits were well advanced in their culture when the white man arrived.

As early as 1841, the Wilkes expedition reported that the Skagits had well-built lodges of timber planks at Penn's Cove.

When Joseph Whidbey landed in his small boat further north in Penn's Cove, he was greeted by friendly Indians who paddled their canoes out to meet the strangers. They brought fish and roots, and made the white men know that they meant well. The tribe kept a band of small woolly dogs which they sheared for their wool, much as they would sheep. They used the wool to make blankets and mats.

The Indians who met Whidbey had evidently never seen white men before, and were amazed at the pallor of their skin. Finally, after much sign language designed to convey the Indians' questions concerning this important item, Whidbey opened his waistcoat and bared his chest, to show them that he was INDEED white, that his face and hands were not painted!



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Telephones Are Old-Timers on Island

In the summer of 1899 a telephone line was run from Anacortes to Oak Harbor by the Sunset Telephone Co. and on August 21 the first long-distance telephone call was made by L. P. Byrne, who became the local manager for the company.

At that time the telephone system consisted of a long-distance line, two phones in town and a "suburban" line to J. M. Izett in Crescent Harbor!

Izett put up his own poles and paid the company \$2.50 per month rent. Many people laughed at him because they could not see how he would get his money's worth. One old timer remarked that within three years the farmers would be using the phone lines for clothes lines!

But by 1911 the system had grown to free switching all over the county and long distance connections with the entire Pacific Coast.

The Northwest Association built lines north and northwest of town in 1905. Soon they served Dugualla, Cornet and Clover Valley and was the largest of the Farmer Associations.

Seeing the time and money saved by telephoning, many Whidbey Islanders found the new system much quicker than



walking several miles to and from town. Farmer Associations sprang up all over North Whidbey, the first being the Crescent Harbor Association. By 1904 six lines connected all of Crescent Harbor.

The smallest line ran to Cackle Corner and was put in by D. N. Judson.

The Swantown line was known as No. 8, and the Oak Harbor line to San de Fuca No. 9. In 1908 the farmers of North Swantown decided to organize and became the West Beach Company, with line No. 18.

In Feb. 1905 a night operator

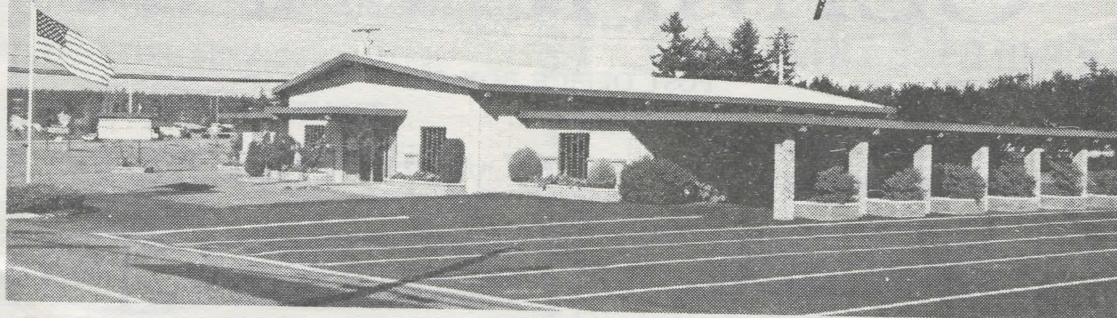
was put on duty, and North Whidbey enjoyed continuous service, something almost unknown in other rural places!

In Oak Harbor in the 1920's, the central switchboard was handled by a single operator in a small building on "telephone hill" just above the intersection of Midway and Pioneer Way. The night operator slept in the office, answering the few calls in between naps. Sundays were slow days on the board, and the operator brought her crocheting with her, or on nice days leaned out the window and visited with neighbors.

The "farmer lines" sometimes had from 15-18 subscribers on each and the telephone was the popular place to glean a little neighborhood gossip. The phone was rung manually when one wanted to talk to someone on the same line, a number of long and short rings. Thus the number "24F34" meant line 24, three long and four short!

"Central" knew just about everything that was going on in town, and everyone who was going on! The Coupeville and Oak Harbor operators became friends and in slow times on the switchboard, exchanged the news of their respective towns.

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Fort Casey . . .

Fort Casey State Park had its beginnings in 1858 when the U.S. Government purchased land for a light on Admiralty Head from Dr. John Coe and Caroline Kellogg. A marine survey recommended two lights, one on Point Wilson, the other on Admiralty Head, and on this side the Straits a wooden structure with a tower was built in 1861 somewhere near where the Keystone dock is located.

A lighthouse keeper by the name of Flora Pearson Engle, keeping records of the lighthouse, changed the spelling of the name Whidbey to 'Whidby,' still shown on old records. It remained "Whidby" for some 75 years until the U.S. Navy located at Oak Harbor to build another "fort" and changed the name to the original spelling to coincide with the name of the Island's

discoverer, First Mate Joseph Whidbey of Captain Vancouver's flagship, the Discovery!

In 1897 the old lighthouse was demolished when its position, midway between Emplacement No. 1 and the bluff interfered with fortification plans. A temporary light was installed, and the present lighthouse structure was built at the turn of the century and first used in 1902.

Admiralty Head had been specifically recommended for fortification by Major General H.W. Halleck on August 9, 1866, but 30 years elapsed before action was taken. The post was first occupied by troops on Sept. 8, 1899.

The Fort was named in honor of Brigadier General Thomas Lincoln Casey, last Chief of Army Engineers.

It was a modern coastal defense fortification, representing the ultimate in perfection developed through 6,000 years of military science. But like other fixed positions, within the period of 25 years it became a nothingness in value for defense!

Fort Casey was one of the three fortifications guarding Puget Sound, the others were Fort Worden and Flagler. In January of 1898 the Salt Lake Tribune reported "Two immense guns arrived here by rail each weighing 70,000 pounds and with ten-inch muzzles." A dispatch from Watertown, Mass. soon announced ten carloads of material for mounting the huge guns on disappearing carriages were being shipped for Puget Sound defense. By April 15 of that year the carriages for the four 12-inch rifles for Casey (then still Admiralty Head) arrived at Seattle.

Workers building the fort got \$1.65 per hour for a ten-hour day.

Fort Casey and the sudden increase in county population brought business to Coupeville and led to its incorporation in 1910, the first Whidbey town to do so.

Bledsoe T-V



**1495 Midway, Pay-Less Center
Oak Harbor 675-5676**

The
Crystal Bell
A Gift Shop

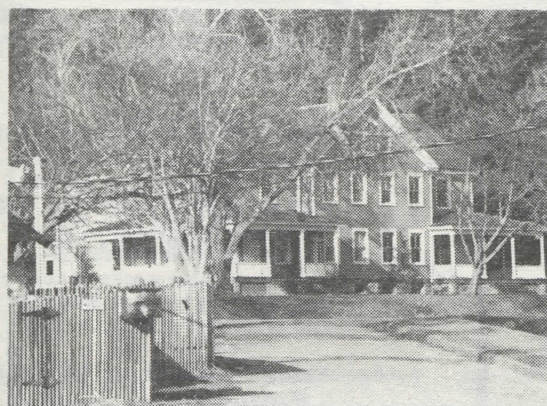
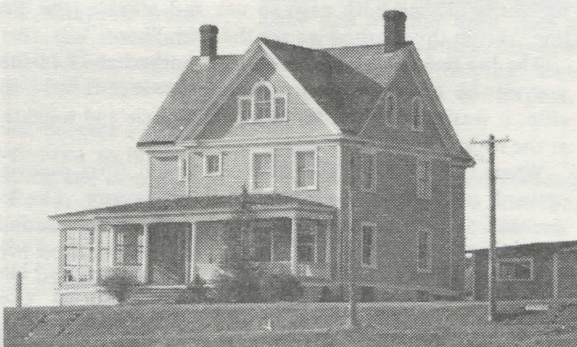
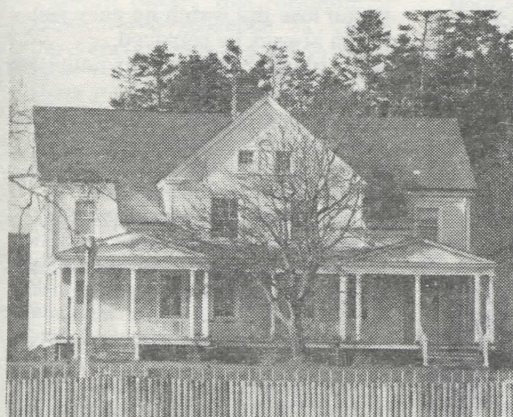


Downtown Oak Harbor

1133 W. Pioneer Way


675-8485

A State Park With a History



Three beautifully solid and well built houses still stand in Officers' Row at Fort Casey. Above is the Colonel's House, a single family residence. Top left is the duplex used as married officers' quarters, and below it is the large building used as bachelor officers' quarters. Those were the days when officers lived graciously and RHIP (rank had its privileges)!

"The most unusual shop in town"

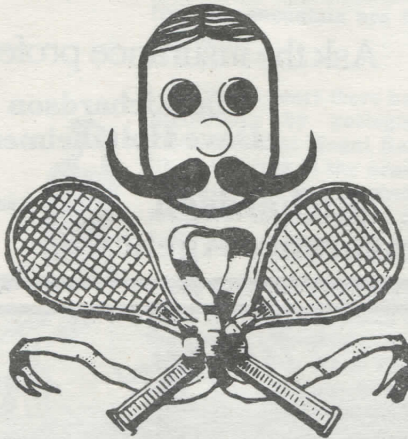


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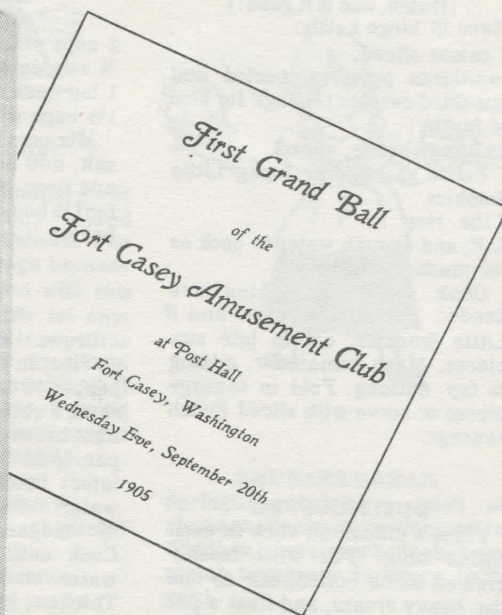
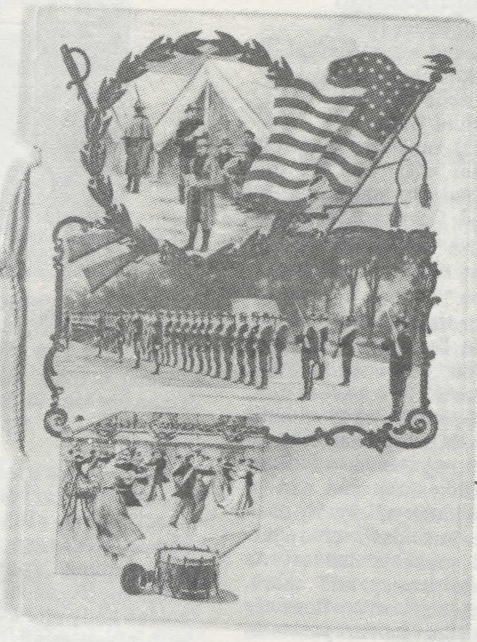
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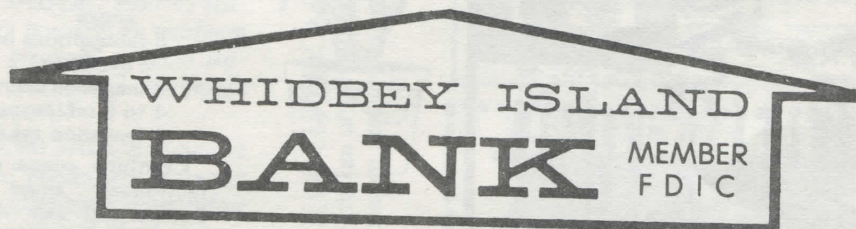
Fort Casey's 1905 Ball was a Gala



Soldiers far from home on an Island in Puget Sound called Whidbey made their own amusements. The first Grand Ball of the Fort Casey Amusement Club was held at Post Hall, on Wednesday eve, Sept. 20, 1905, as this program reveals. Dances included a Grand March, waltz, two-step, lancers, three-step, quadrille, minuet and Germania two-step, with places for four extras.

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