

Freeland was not exactly free land

Much of the information about Freeland in the following was taken from Charles Pierce Le Warne's book "Utopias on Puget Sound," published by the University of Washington Press.

The town we Islanders know as Freeland, sitting on the shore of Holmes Harbor about three-fourths of the way down the Island from Deception Pass, was an offshoot of the Brotherhood of Cooperative Commonwealth's Socialist colony "Equality" in Skagit Valley near Bow.

As the "parent" colony, Equality was expected to help found other groups with the intent of taking over the state for the Socialists. However, human nature being what it is, there was some dissatisfaction with the scheme.

Several dissidents wished to leave Equality in their own way, but without giving up their dreams of a Socialist Utopia. So in 1900 and 1901, they left Skagit Valley and joined together to form a less formally organized experiment on Whidbey Island.

Assisting this move was James P. Gleason, an Irish-born entrepreneur from Seattle; Freeland was partially a real estate promotion. As an officer of the soon-to-go-bankrupt Fidelity Trust Company, Gleason had acquired land along Holmes Harbor, and wanted to dispose of it to the disenchanting Equality families.

He chose as his agent a man with an imposing name and a long white beard . . . George Washington Daniels. The Free Land Association was incorpo-

rated in Island County on Jan. 12, 1900, authorized to trade and engage in merchandising, manufacturing, printing and farming, and anything else that might come up. Other trustees were Henry L. Stevens and Henry A. White.

According to the newspaper *Whidby Islander*, Freeland was not officially a Socialist colony, but "simply a settlement of Socialists cooperating on semi-capitalistic principles."

In 1900, the original townsite was platted by Daniels into 5-acre tracts with wide streets. Two years later he platted a second addition, and in 1904, a Tacoma development company added a third.

A full membership in the association cost \$50. Nonresidents could buy stock in the association's store fund for \$10 a share and receive rebates on purchases. Interest was 8 percent, and stock could only be sold or transferred to the corporation or to other members.

Many of the first members had come from the Equality Colony. Along with Daniels, the S. S. Longs and the William Gearharts, others were Mrs. and Mrs. Oliver P. Darr and A. K. Hanson.

A member could purchase land with a 20 percent cash down payment and pay the balance with dividends from the store or other association industries. The founders considered the land to be free; hence the name Free Land.

Although the store was the "Mercantile Department" of a "Cooperative Company," its advertising suggested a typical

rural general store. As an example:

"Rare Bargains. For eye-openers on prices, read this: Late Style Boy's overcoats, large enough for a small man; regular retail price \$6; our price \$3.50. These coats are good cloth and are excellent bargains."

Since Freeland was located at the head of a long bay which was subject to extremely low tides, it was difficult to get transportation by sea. The Corporation badly needed a boat for transportation, shipping and fishing.

There were no roads, few trails, and sporadic boat service to the mainland.

The problem was resolved by the arrival of John H. Prather, Daniels' son-in-law. He came to Freeland and leased a 28-foot passenger boat which he named the *Freeland*.

He operated alone until he acquired a second and then other larger boats. With his brother, Enoch P. Prather, he built up a service between south Whidbey and Everett, and by 1910 was a leading businessman of the area.

Although the Whidby Islander is remembered as a Freeland newspaper, it started publishing in Langley in 1900. Langley had fewer people, but it was an established community. It was in Langley for a year, then moved to Freeland. The first Freeland issue was the Nov. 1, 1901 edition.

It was not an official Socialist paper, although it leaned that way but was really the

voice of its publishers, DeForest and Ethel Brooke Sanford.

After having trouble with the postal service . . . their 2nd class mail status was cancelled . . . the paper stopped publishing in April 1903, and the Sanfords moved to California.

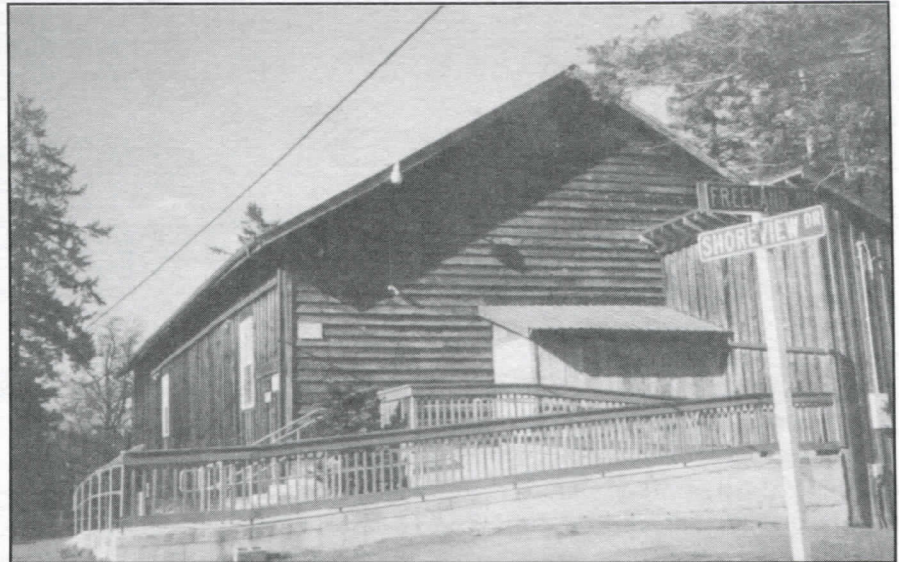
Because of its isolation, Freeland had problems with mail delivery. This appeared in the February 1903 *Whidby Islander*: "The Freeland post office is on the move these days. On the morning of the 17th, Mr. Davison (the postmaster) boxed it up and moved it up to G. W. Daniels' residence. That was just as unsatisfactory to the patrons as it was to Daniels. Ten days of that proved enough so on the morning of the 27th, he packed it up again and took it home with him.

"Many patrons are having their mail changed to Austin and Newell, It has been remarked that the postmaster should have a little steam wheelbarrow to put the office on so he might blow the whistle occasionally so the people could keep track of it."

A year later, the post office was discontinued.

As early as 1902, Freeland struggled to obtain a school, despite strong opposition from neighboring towns. Freeland children had to walk three miles across the Island to Useless Bay, but that building became crowded and the Freelanders were forced out in February 1903.

It was many years before Freeland obtained its own school. In the interim, local residents helped construct a building at Mutiny Bay to



This is the Freeland Hall as it looks today. Overlooking a wooded area with trees and picnic facilities . . . according to the sign . . . it is still for rent for groups to use.

serve the south end of the island.

Roads were another problem. A single road went across the Island which allowed mail deliveries in 1902, and a trail wound east to Langley.

Freelanders complained bitterly to the county. "The roads around Freeland are getting no better fast. We would be just about as well off if the old Roman walls were around us, with gates locked and keys lost.

"The road to Bush Point has an almost impassible (sic) mud hole; the road to Useless Bay has a very bad place in the dike which it crosses; the road to Mutiny Bay has been fenced so that there is no chance for a team to get near the store. How long, O Lord, how long must we put up with this?"

Except for minor improvements, county officials left the basic problems unsolved.

The earliest and most enduring club on the Island seems to have been Freeland's First Thursday Club, organized by the women in May 1902.

The group demonstrated an interest in the role of women, and discussed such topics as women's rights and the life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

It remained a prominent organization, its success capped about 1950 with the organization of a men's auxiliary!

In 1914, with money raised by teas, lunches and bake sales, a large community hall was built on what is now the intersection of Freeland Ave., and Shoreview Drive. It was maintained over the years by the First Tuesday women and still is available for events. ♪





Classic Cars on Coupeville's Front Street, about the time of World War One.

Dorothy Neil's books make great gifts!

Copies of local historian Dorothy Neil's uniquely Island books make great gifts for family and friends. The latest are "The Irish Book" (the Irish were here first) and the Summer edition of "Savoring the Seasons on Puget Sound," a "Cookbook for Readers." Her picture book, "De Ja Views, Historical Pictorial of Whidbey Island," which contains hundreds of old photos dating from the 1860s to 1980, is a companion piece to "By Canoe And Sailing Ship They Came," a comprehensive history of the area. "Canoe" is only \$25 including tax and mailing, or \$21.95 if not mailed.

Besides the above, Dorothy's other books, including three other "recipes and reminiscences" volumes of "Savoring the Seasons on Puget's Sound," Spring, Autumn & Winter editions; "The Daisy Woods & Other Island Verse," and the "Dutch Book, A Celebration of 100 years of Dutch on Whidbey Island," are also available.

"Daisy Woods" (\$10), the four recipe books, Summer, Autumn, Winter & Spring (\$10.95 each), and "Canoe" (\$21.95) may be purchased by mail from Spindrift Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1308, Oak Harbor, WA 98277, or call 360-675-3801 for information. "De Ja Views" (\$20), "The Dutch Book" (\$10) and "The Irish Book" are available from Island Images, Inc., 651 SE Bayshore Dr. C102, Oak Harbor, WA 98277, 360-675-2844. All of Dorothy Neil's wonderful books are on sale at local stores.

Early Island roads

by Carl Engle

Whidbey Island roads followed the lines of least resistance in the early days, going around a big stump if it was in the way, and dodging the worst hills as there was no way of making cuts and fills except by horse power.

Powder was not in general use, and while the Island had the name of having about the best roads of any place on the Sound (except in some of the cities), they did not begin to compare with today's roads.

The road running south from Prairie Center was not graded until about 1893, and it was almost impassable in the winter, especially after a big snow.

In 1898, the county let a contract to cut a 4-foot trail from Smith's Prairie to Linn's Corner and it was a trail not much more than usable by a man on horseback.

The trail, however, showed that a road might be possible between these two points, so in 1900 a wagon road was contracted for.

It was a wagon road, but hardly a buggy road, although Enoch Wood and George Mitchell made it to Langley in a Model-T Ford in two days, the first car over what is now the highway.

About 1916, the road was graded and became fairly passable to a car.

While the central and northern parts of the Island were settled, the south end was slow to develop, being almost all heavily timbered.

Loggers and a few white men with Indian wives were the only people around, and up into the eighties there was

only one white family living permanently south of Smith's Prairie.

The boom of the 1890s and the indomitable spirit of Jacob Anthes (known as the Father of Langley), founded a general store in Langley, and the people of that vicinity were able to stay on their land, financed as woodcutters by Anthes.

Cordwood was needed for the steamers plying the Sound, and large contracts for brush to be used in Everett for fills on the waterfront were also obtained.

With the growth of Everett and Seattle, the summer home business began to grow. Langley was a center for the production of strawberries and poultry raising.

Before a road was built between North and South Whidbey, travelers went by boat or followed a beach trail between Greenbank and Coupeville.

There was little or no machinery for road maintenance after the roads were built with labor donated by the men of the community. A road tax was worked out by the landowners at \$4 a day for man and a team, and after a road had been graded by using a team and slip scrapers, the remainder of the work was done in the early summer when the crops had been planted and it was not yet time for haying to begin. This labor consisted of hauling granite either from the beach at Ebey's Landing or from pits closer to where the gravel was needed. Where possible, the beach gravel was used as it

was found to make a better road than the pit gravel.

Traveling before and after the roads were begun was kept at a minimum, and at first it was either a ride on horseback or in a big wagon.

One of the first conveyances for personal travel was owned by Captain Thomas Coupe, afterward (owned) by my grandfather in which as a young boy I had many rides. It was a two-wheeled affair with one seat and a small open body and was called the "Blue Jay."

Some time in the late 1870s, John Engle and John Mason built a double-seated top buggy for Robert Hill. This, I think, was the first covered buggy on the Island and was all hand made.

When Hill moved to Port Townsend my father bought the buggy and afterward sold it to Isaac Jennings, and the last I knew it was still in existence.

In the very early eighties, there were one or two single-seated open buggies, but from then on the use of buggies, especially those with tops, increased rapidly and with the increase of buggies there came a demand for better roads.

The above is taken from an original manuscript written by the late Carl Engle of Coupeville, whose father, William Engle, was one of the first settlers on Ebey's Prairie, and the first on the scene following the slaying of Colonel Isaac Ebey by Northern Indians. Carl Engle died in 1957 shortly after this was written.

