



Spindrift Two

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Whidbey Island's Own Magazine



25^c

Early Days were Tough

In 1852-53 there was a scarcity of food supplies all over the northwest. Flour was \$40 a barrel if it could be obtained; salt pork was \$20 per barrel. Settlers brought cows with them so they had butter and milk. There was also plenty of salmon and venison. Farmers killed beef and shared it with their neighbors, otherwise as late as 1866 only pork was available besides venison and fish. Potatoes again saved the day for the early Whidbey Island settler.

When the white men first came, the Indians had a small potato which they grew for food. It had uncommon flavor, but did not bear as well as the white man's potato, so it was abandoned. What a find one day when someone finds a plant of the tasty Indian potato growing wild in some woods or field!

At an 1850s barn-raising all of the men working on it carried their lunches and only one had bread, that in the form of a biscuit! Will Engle, helping to build a road from Ebey's Landing to Coveland (site of San de Fuca) killed a blue crane, cleaned and cooked it over a campfire for his dinner. He had nothing else.

Clothing was made for service in those early days of settlement. Linsey-woolsey was a rough material used for dresses. Flora Engle told of seeing a woman and her four girls in the 1860s all dressed alike in calico which the mother had bought in Victoria and smuggled through customs by fastening it to her clothing under her hoop skirt.

It would have been a brave customs officer indeed who insisted upon searching for contraband under a lady's skirt!

Furniture was at a premium as it had to be shipped "around the Horn" by sailing vessel to San Francisco and transferred to another boat bound for Puget Sound. Most furniture in pioneer cabins was homemade. Household goods of all kinds were at a premium and a settler leaving the Island sold everything he had to other settlers.

An auction sale at Coveland the early days was the indirect cause of a tragedy which shook the Island settlements to their core. Four persons drowned when an overloaded canoe with furniture aboard capsized off Blowers Bluff.

SAVE ENERGY!

Two nutrition and energy specialists at the University of Illinois say that Americans are 2.3 billion pounds overweight! Nine hundred thousand cars could be fueled for a year on the gas that might be saved if Americans ended their gluttony and maintained their optimum weight.

Using data from the Public Health Service, the two calculated the national calorie savings that would result if the estimated 110 million overweight adults dieted for six months, a scale breaking 5.67 trillion calories! — Conservation News

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Swantown Settler Story Told

H. T. Hill, an old-time columnist for the Farm Bureau News, left this interesting story of Beach View Farm in the Swantown area in one of his newspaper columns.

John and Rachel Shaffer took up a homestead near West Beach in a heavy wooded tract. Spruce hemlock, alder, willow crabapple and ferns covered the land. Their first job was to build themselves a shelter, so they cut logs and



squared them for a log cabin. In between they cleared enough land so that a small garden could be started, and the one-room house and loft was completed with the help of neighbors, Jeff Maddox, William Gildow and the George Hathaway family. They had a five foot fireplace to give heat and serve as a place to cook until they could buy a cast iron cookstove. They had homemade beds, tables and chairs.

They next built a pole barn for the animals, and covered it with cedar shakes.


Rachel became an expert woodswoman, as their home was surrounded by trees from which they made everything.

Two acres of orchard was put in where there was a light growth of woods about a half mile from their home, and in between the stumps of trees, potatoes, oats and wheat were raised. John and Rachel worked side by side. The work was unending. As they cleared land and burned stumps, they dug them out, picked up rocks and then drained the land by ditching. Both worked together with shovels in ditching from morning to night.

While this was being accomplished, they had three children, Casey, Will and George.

Their hard work throughout the years produced one of the best farms on North Whidbey, and when it was put on the market a Captain Griffith of Seattle bought it. Griffith used it as a hobby, building new buildings and bringing it back to its former productive state. He named it Beach View. It was sold to Harry Fakkema. It grew from a \$1.25 an acre piece of land in the late 1800s to a \$50,000 piece of property by the mid 1940s.



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Oak Harbor Newspaper →

Coupeville had supported a newspaper for many years (since 1891) when Oak Harbor finally got around to investing in the media.

According to Harvey T. Hill, local businessman who later chronicled much of Oak Harbor history, it was the spring of 1911 when a tall gentleman in a long Prince Albert coat and black felt hat by the name of H. L. Bowmer, visited the town with an eye to starting a newspaper.

Bowmer was a newspaper man who had started a number of weeklies in the northwest. His newspapers were all strictly family affairs, with his wife helping set type (all hand set) in between keeping house and cooking for the family; Charlie Bowmer and wife Flo doing the editorial writing; Johnny Bowmer acting as press boy. H. L. himself did most of the outside work getting news and advertising.

*Old Farm
Bureau
News
building*



Photo taken of a watercolor by Phyllis McQueen Smith, former owner of the Whidbey News-Times. This delineation of Oak Harbor's first newspaper building now hangs in the Whidbey Press front office.

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John Rodgers, the local banker, Jerome Ely, real estate man and farmer who was destined to be the town's first mayor, and Hill raised \$500 for a loan to start the newspaper, and Rodgers donated a room free of rent in what was then a frame building on the site where the Pioneer Department Store now stands.

The Bowmer clan arrived in Oak Harbor with an old hand press, a few fonts of type, a bottle of printers ink, and a few reams of newsprint. The family moved into a big old house located where the seaplane gate is now, and began getting Oak Harbor's first newspaper together.

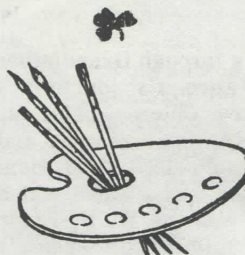
The first edition was five columns in width and contained eight pages, six of which were

"canned." Nearly all the stores advertised in it, and it recorded the latest local news. One feature was "The Courtship of Miles Standish" with illustrations by Howard Chandler Christie.

One had to be resourceful in 1911; one week the supply of newsprint failed to arrive, and Bowmer borrowed enough brown paper from the local butcher shop to print the News!

The Bowmer family fitted happily into the little community of less than 300 people. Charlie and Flo Bowmer were musically gifted, and sang to guitar accompaniment played by Charlie. Johnny was a leader in school sports, and the whole family took part in community and church events.

When the Rodgers building had to be torn down to make room for the new Farmers Cooperative, the Oak Harbor News had to move the newspaper plant to another building. (See picture)



In the 1910 Island County Times it was reported: "Oak Harbor has one known artist, Daisy Hill. The large painting of mountains and nature hanging in the H. T. Hill store is only one of many such scenes she has in her home as the result of the successful work of her brush."



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Whidbey Chinese Recorded in Old Farm Book

Lillian Huffstetler, whose forebears were Whidbey Island pioneers, writes an interesting item on the Chinese who lived on her grandfather's farm and in the surrounding area.

"Looking through Grandfather Ernest Hancock's journals I found many Chinese listed as land renters, starting in 1899 and going through 1920. The Hancocks owned Aloha Farm which originally was the W. B. Engle donation claim on Ebey's Prairie.

Most of the Chinese were here a relatively short time as listed in the books. They were Ah Hop, Lee Sing, Charley Sow, Tom Sing, Leo (Lu See) Gin Lin Tin, Mar Hee, Lee You, Tom Sow, Big Jim, Loo Gong, Old Jim, Ah Soot, Wah Lee and John Gong, and one Japanese, Tanaka, in 1918.

Of these all but two were hard working and honest. There is a notation by Gin Lin in 1900 "Skipped . . he owed \$81.60; and by Old Jim in 1912 "He didn't pay" he owed \$189.55!

Wah Lee lived near the road and that house still is there. Wah Lee's name was entered from 1903-1912. For part of that time he had a grandson living with him, a half Chinese half German boy named Laurence Young. When his grandfather went to work in the fields at dawn Laurence would take his lunch bucket and go sit on the porch steps of the Hancock home until the children were up and ready to go to school.

Later he left for China with his grandfather, but Wah Lee died enroute home and the young boy was sent to relatives in the interior of China. They were very primitive and superstitious and they took away his bicycle and

threw it up on the road "to scare away demons." I don't know what happened to him but it certainly must have been traumatic for him, a child born and raised in America to be suddenly thrust among strangers in a land foreign to him, although I assume he must have known the language. I hope he was able to return to the U.S. when he got older.

Johnny Gong was listed from 1905 through 1920 and was the one closest to the Hancock family. He also lived on Aloha Farm near Wah Lee, but across a pond from there, beyond the farm buildings. When my mother was small Johnny Gong brought her gifts whenever he went to Seattle, and we still have some of them, lovely little embroidered silk scarves. When he went back to China with his savings he bought a young wife who later took all his money and ran away. He died penniless.



Ah Soot lived on the John LeSourd farm on the road to Ebey's Landing. Unlike all the rest of the Chinese on Whidbey who felt it was of utmost importance to return to China so they could be buried there, he always wanted to stay here and be buried "near Mr. LeSourd." He was sick for a long time before he died, and each evening John LeSourd would walk down to see if he needed anything.

When he died he was buried in the LeSourd plot in Sunnyside Cemetery in Coupeville and some 50 years later John LeSourd was buried near by just as "Soot"

wished it. He was lucky to have such a fine employer who treated him with such kindness at a time when most were treated as "non-persons," (to quote Jimmie Jean Cook's "A Particular Friend").

Jimmie's book also mentioned about Leo Gay hanging himself on Jan. 31, 1909.

My mother remembered the incident even though she was not yet 5 years old at the time. I believe he lived near the Ed Jenne (Chester Maxim) house just where Engle Rd. takes the jog. The reason that he hanged himself they heard was because he had gotten drunk and was in jail on Chinese New Year and that was such a disgrace he took his life.

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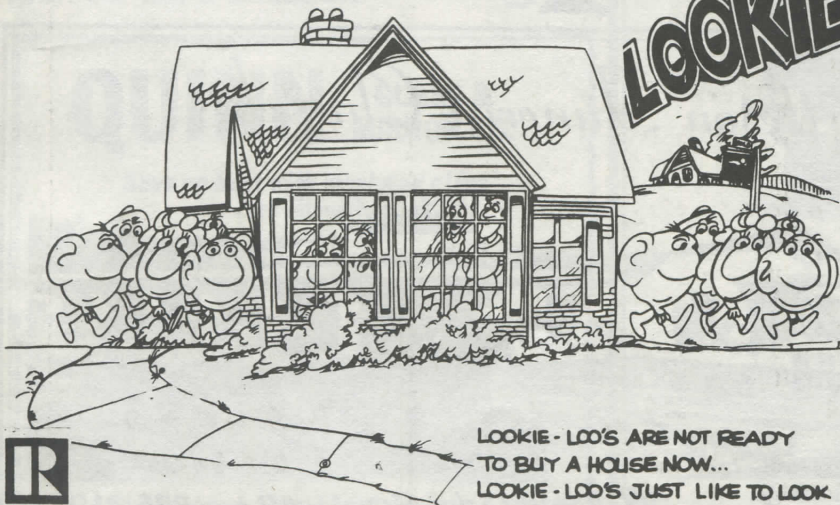
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Barrington Ave. (Pioneer Way) circa 1920

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From a Frame House Coupeville Grew Through the 1800s

The following edited recollections of the Coupeville area were written by Carl T. Engle and printed in the "Souvenir Edition" commemorating Whidbey Island's centennial, 1848-1948 or "One Hundred Years of Progress on Whidbey Island!"

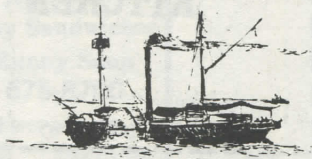
Living on Whidbey Island in the early days was pioneering in a very real sense. Much of what we took for granted then seems like an unbearable hardship today. There were no roads, the country was wild and the Indians a constant threat, mail service was erratic, and provisions scarce.

It was said that at San de Fuca the settlers ate salmon and potatoes; at Coupeville they ate venison and no potatoes. It was not uncommon for a family or settlement to be without flour for months at a time.



The history of Coupeville as a town begins in 1854 when Captain Thomas Coupe built the first frame house there. He had previously filed a claim on the site on November 20, 1852 after his arrival there.

My father, William B. Engle who came with him on the first trip staked out his claim on Ebey's Prairie and built a frame house there in 1853. Engle's trip to pick up bricks for the chimney made the first wagon tracks across the future townsite of Coupeville!



Before that supplies had been put ashore at Davis' Landing some distance to the North. Engle's claim adjoined that of Col. Isaac N. Ebey who filed in 1850 and is generally regarded as the first permanent white settler on the Island and one of its most honored pioneers.

(Ed. note: Thomas Glasgow came to the Ebey Prairie area in 1848, brought some animals, put up a shelter and planted a garden. He was frightened away by hostile Indians that same year.)

The murder of Col. Ebey by the Haidah Indians on August 12, 1857 is one of the most tragic episodes in the Island's history. He and his family were then living in what they called "the cabins" not far from Ebey's Landing.

On the afternoon of the murder a group of Indians had come to the Ebey house earlier but had left without causing alarm. At the time the U.S. Marshall George W. Corliss and his wife were visiting the Ebeys from Olympia. When the Indians attacked Mrs. Corliss ran to my father's home and then to Col. Ebey's parents' home to give the alarm. Col. Ebey was the only casualty.



John Crockett made the coffin for the Colonel, and my father dug the grave. The murderers were never caught, but the Colonel's head was recovered later and buried with him.

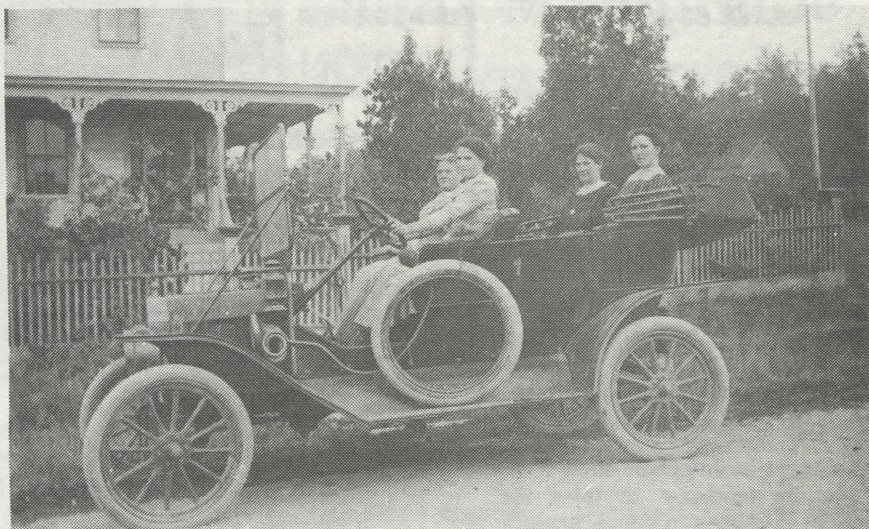
One of the nuisances on Whidbey Island in my boyhood were wild pigs which sprang from domestic ones escaped and gone wild. They multiplied rapidly, and were destroyers of gardens. The last ones were killed or trapped about 1886.



Coupeville's growth was steady but not spectacular. The Puget Sound Academy in the late 1880s made Coupeville an educational center for the northern Puget Sound area. There were two of us in the graduating class of 1894, myself and Spurgeon H. Calhoun.

Coupeville experienced two booms in its time, the first about 1890 when the whole area had a building hysteria; the second in 1902 at the time Fort Casey was established.

The productivity of the prairies made the town a shipping point, and as County Seat Coupeville had some stability. The presence of a bank also helped.



Pioneer women in Coupeville welcomed the Model-T Ford as a horse-and-buggy alternative. Pictured is May Zylstra, at the wheel; her mother Mrs. McCaslin beside her, and Lydia Libbey and another lady in back. The picture was taken in front of the old Eaton home where the Whidbey Island Bank is now located on Main Street.

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