

The History Corner

Orcas Island Historical Museum in
Eastsound, Washington

Fire Hunting on Orcas Island*

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Mr. W.R.Griffin of Eastsound told the following story of Ed C. King and early deer hunting on Orcas Island...Late in the fall of 1897 Mr. King and his wife decided it would be a good night for fire hunting in the orchard. Mrs. King got the lantern in order while Mr. King loaded his old gun and gathered up all the extra shells he could find. Kneeling on the floor, Mr. King held still while Mrs. King placed pads on his head and under his chin, then brought the leather straps down each side of his face, under his chin, and cinched both tight. Mr. King could neither open his mouth nor talk while wearing the lantern, as it had to be fastened very firmly to his head.

Entering the orchard, Mr. King proceeded to blaze away with the gun, firing at every pair of eyes he could see in the lantern light. Fifteen shots later, he had expended all his ammunition but was unsure how many deer he had shot until the following morning, when his four boys were excited to find five dead deer in the orchard. Mr. King enjoyed a reputation as a good hunter, so was relieved that his“ Fire Hunt” had been so successful.

When they first began hunting with a lantern on Orcas Island, it proved quite an improvement over the old way of shining with a pitch jack. The pitch jack was a homemade affair, a heavy basket made of wire or thin iron bands fastened to a crooked pole, filled with pitch, lighted and the pole carried on the shoulder. This was not a successful method, being extremely dangerous in dry weather, as the falling pitch would set fire to the grass and orchards and woods.

*Excerpted from “Told by the Pioneers” Tales of Frontier Life as told by those who remember the days of the Territory and early statehood of Washington. WPA Project 5841, published 1938.

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