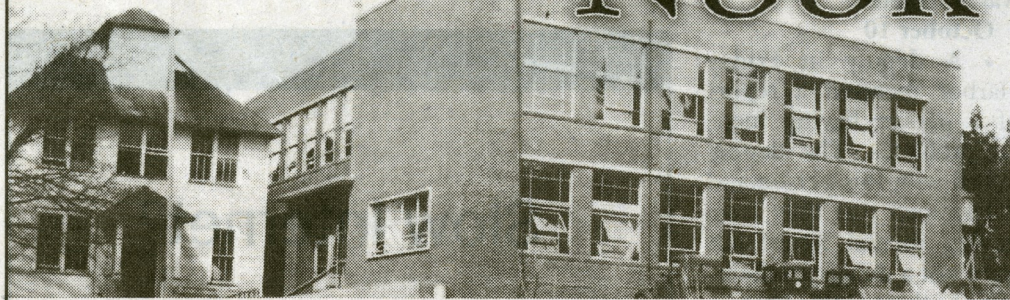


HISTORY NOOK



Early Schooling on Orcas Island

Part 5

CONSOLIDATED # 5, CONTINUED

The last article in this series described the consolidation and closures of the many one-room school houses on Orcas Island as the improvement of roads on the island and the purchase of school buses enabled students to travel longer distances to get to school. In a period of eleven years, between 1917 and 1928, all of the one-room schools on Orcas shuttered their doors and sent their students off to the two-story school building that had been built in Eastsound in 1904. The school house on Waldron Island has continued to operate as a separate school to this day, (with a few interruptions).

To house all of these new students, various additions, lean-tos, and outbuildings were added to the school over the years. But by 1946 the school was bulging at the seams. The building that had been constructed in 1904 to comfortably handle up to 50 elementary school students now housed 164 elementary and high school students and their teachers as well as the offices of the School District Superintendent.

The Orcas newspaper ran articles that year supporting a bond measure to build a larger new school. One article called the old school "a veritable Katzenjammer Castle" and deplored the thin walls that interfered with lessons and the crowded classrooms. It pointed out that the school had only one fire escape, a wooden platform that led over the boiler room – the most likely spot for a fire to break out! There was no space for lunchroom facilities, so the children ate outdoors in good weather and in their classrooms at lunch time. By 1946, many schools had started offering hot lunches to their students, but the old school could not, because it lacked space for a kitchen.

The bond was successful and on the evening of November 12, 1949 the new combined elementary and high school was dedicated. The dedication ceremony began with a perfor-



mance by the high school band, followed by the presentation of the new school's teaching staff and the members of the School Board. Mrs. Julia Jensen, the County Superintendent of Schools, spoke, as did Mrs. Pearl S. Wanamaker, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Mrs. Nellie S. Milton, the past Superintendent of the Orcas Schools, who had kicked off the successful bond campaign was introduced. Then everyone adjourned to tour the new school and to sample goodies made by the home economics students in the new school kitchen.

The next 50 years saw a few structures added to the school, but it didn't change greatly. However, by the early 1990s, the buildings were no longer meeting all of the needs of the combined elementary, middle and high schools students. A second successful bond campaign led to the construction of a new high school building behind the 1949 structure. The new building, designed to look like a collection of buildings or a village rather than a single monolithic structure, was dedicated in October 1993. It included shop buildings, band practice rooms and a gymnasium large enough to house a basketball court and bleachers.

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