

## The History Corner

Orcas Island Historical Museum in  
Eastsound, Washington

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### “Be Nice, or Leave”

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Early visitors to Orcas Island were often as impressed by the lack of saloons, and the related mischief usually pertaining to these establishments, as they were by the pastoral beauty of the island. Friday Harbor and San Juan Island had a deserved reputation for wild, drunken behavior frequently culminating in gunfire and violence, while Eastsound and Orcas Island enjoyed a genteel air remarkable for the times.

In 1883, when word got around that someone had purchased a lot and was engaged in clearing the land for construction of a saloon on the shores of Eastsound, the forces of temperance and righteousness were soon gathered in opposition. Confronted with religion, in the person of Elder Sidney Gray of the Episcopal Church, and temperance, in the person of Sarah Jane Fry, wife of the local Justice of the Peace, the erstwhile saloonkeeper soon got the idea that the future was not as bright as he had hoped. He returned the lot to Charles Shattuck, the seller, and decamped for more welcoming shores.

Flushed with victory, Elder Gray successfully convinced Charles Shattuck that the cleared lot, on which a foundation had been built for the saloon, was better-suited to a house of worship. Visitors to Eastsound today can see the fruit of his victory in the Episcopal Church, still standing on the land, and on the foundation, intended for Orcas Island’s first saloon. Orcas Islanders were as rugged and individualistic as any other early settlers in these parts, but shared values for farming, self-reliance, family life and religion all contributed to a loose-knit community with a common viewpoint.

Hard work, independent effort and being ‘neighborly’ was expected, appreciated and respected; rude, drunken behavior was unacceptable, and offenders were quickly acquainted with that fact. Until the latter portion of the late century, Orcas Island never did have licensed premises for the consumption of alcohol. Churches and community clubs, fraternal organizations, sports, dances and picnics on Mt. Constitution offered sufficient entertainment to counter the wilder attractions of Friday Harbor.

While not the official island slogan, by any means, a small sign which can be seen today on the wall of the Lower Tavern in Eastsound offers insight into the community values of Orcas Island: in large, clear letters it reads “Be Nice, Or Leave.”

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