

History Nook

The "Bill Buchan Story"

By: BILL BUCHAN

For the Orcas Island Historical Museum

In June 1946, just after the war, my parents Dean and Helen Buchan brought the family up to Gibson's North Beach Inn for a week's vacation. Practicality never being their strong suit, they bought their dream property at Obstruction Pass with the idea of starting a resort. We arrived in November 1946. The resort never got beyond four cabins, we ran a small farm, and Helen started a nursing station, at times being the only medical professional on the island, with Dr. Heath flying in from Friday Harbor as needed.

Recently I saw the bound 1946 Friday Harbor Journals on the Museum table and checked the Olga news section for a story on the Buchans' arrival. All I found was a story about "Bill Buchan's 10th birthday party" with John Willis and Virgil Carlson among the guests. Nothing much got past Auntie Frances Willis' eagle eye for news and God help you if she found out you had had visitors and didn't tell her in time for the paper. I rode in the Olga bus with the rest of the Olga/Doe Bay kids (no one came in cars then) to the old wooden Nellie S. Milton schoolhouse.

The Buchan business enterprise not really making it, Dean took a job as San Juan County Engineer. The old two-ferries a day schedule did not allow for inter-island job commuting, so we moved to Friday Harbor 1949-51. By the time we got back, the start of my freshman year, old school had given way to the new brick building. Except for the summer tourist influx (with GIRLS!) community life revolved around the school. There were basketball games and plays, and our beloved (though not by the Superintendent) science teacher and coach John Owen organized a scrap drive to raise money to pay for uniforms and equipment for our new six-man football team. The school also ran 16mm movies in the gym. The population of Orcas was around 750 (less than 3000 in the county) and the school tiny, 39 in the high school, only 9 of which were girls (hence the excitement of

summer). The County job not paying all that much, we moved to Burlington in 1953, but I spent summers here and often came back for school events. I picked strawberries for the Olga berry farmers, and worked two summers as Blakely Island was being developed. I had my own fast outboard, which was involved in several interesting stories that I won't go into here.

About the time I began my Air Force career in 1960; my parents were able to move back to their place at Obstruction Pass. We visited every few years, and I even parked my family here during my year in Viet Nam. But I saw the island changing as a series of snapshots, with each new building or development as a new, generally unappealing thing. I always said it would have been easier to take had I been here the whole time. The single most startling change to me is when I drive east along Crescent Beach at night, seeing all the house lights on Buck Mountain all the way to the Park where it used to be unbroken forest.

My association with the Museum began when I inquired of then OIHM President Margot Shaw why our little island in Eastsound had been called "Jap Island"; and had that had any bearing on the hut shown in Robert Moran's photo. I never got a definitive answer to this question (the 2010 Census maps still had it as Jap Island). But the upshot was that Margot invited me to be on the Board in the fall of 2008, and I've been there ever since.

On behalf of me, Maggie Vinson, our dedicated board members past, present and our volunteers we wish to thank Bill deeply for all that he has done for our community in the Lions and the museum. Please come wish our dear friend Bill "Fair winds and following seas" during Historical Days July 3-4. Thank you so very much, Bill! Clark McAbee, Director, OIHM



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