



HISTORY NOOK

Early Schooling on Orcas Island

Part 3

SCHOOL DISTRICT # 5

Prior articles discussed the early days of subscription schooling on the island and the formation of a school district under Whatcom County before San Juan County was created. Following the formation of San Juan County in 1873, District # 5 was the first public school district created on Orcas. It served all of Orcas Island and many adjacent islands, including Waldron, Crane, Jones, Patos, and Socia.

Classes were first held in the township of East Sound (the name was later changed to Eastsound to distinguish the town from the body of water ne

xt to it) in an unpainted rough-hewn log church. An 1887 San Juan County School District report stated that the school had 34 students and the teacher was a Miss Ella Kepler, an "excellent teacher." The church was torn down in 1889.

The district, under the direction of James F. Tulloch, Dave Nichol, Sr. and Mrs. Ella King, acquired property to build a school house on August 14, 1888 and a simple unpainted 20'X30' one room log school house was built by local contractor F. C. King. Classes were held in a local public hall while the new school was being built.

Mrs. Grace Alberta was the new school's first teacher. The student population grew, so at some point the district divided the school house to form two classrooms. This permitted the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade to be taught in one classroom while 5th through 8th grade students did their lessons in a second room.

A student census taken in 1894 showed 88 eligible students (ages 5 to 21) within the district's boundaries. That year the school district employed 3 teachers and provided 9 months of instruction. The teacher's salaries were \$55 a month for the male teacher and \$45 a month for each of the two female teachers that year. The school board reported that Miss Flora Sutherland taught the September term



"and gives universal satisfaction as she teaches the little ones somewhat after the kindergarten style." The school building had been repainted and repaired that year and presented "a neat and comfortable appearance."

In 1898 District # 5 boundaries were redrawn to take in some of the students who had previously attended the Crow Valley School. As the student population of the District # 5 school continued to grow, its once spacious schoolhouse became too crowded. To handle the additional students, the school district built a new, larger two story schoolhouse in 1904. On Arbor Day the following year two students, David Nichol and John Harrison, planted a maple tree in front of the school. The tree still stands as a majestic reminder of early school days on Orcas.

After the new school was built, the newspaper reported that the old school house was sold to a Seattle real estate broker, W. W. Hainsworth, who moved it to North Beach Road and remodeled it to serve as a boarding house. The building still exists today. It is known as "Our House" and houses Mia's Café next to the Pioneer Museum.

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