



## Early Schooling on Orcas Island

### Part 2

By: PEGI GROUNDWATER

Part 1 of this series discussed the early days of schools on Orcas Island when school districts were formed in the various settlements on the island because of the difficulty of traveling great distances. Most of these students walked to school, while a few rode their horses. After the construction of better roads on the island and the rapid adoption of automotive transportation enabled easier movement around the islands, a series of school district consolidations occurred.

#### **Public High School**

High schools came much later to the island. Concerned island parents realized that their children needed more advanced instruction than a single teacher in a one room school could provide. This occurred at a time of a national movement to create high schools for more advanced learning throughout the United States. As a result, the Union High School District, School District A, was formed between 1903 and 1905, drawing students from the East Sound and Crow Valley school districts.

In 1917, Robert Moran proposed that he build a private high school on his property that would serve the students of Olga, Doe Bay and Rosario. He said that students from East Sound could also attend if they wished. A student census showed 50 high school age students living on Orcas at that time. In that same year, East Sound High School District # 29 was formally created. The high school classes were held in the existing East Sound school building.

Robert Moran never built his school. Instead, high school students were taught in the existing district schools until 1928, when the Orcas Island Unified School District, District

# 137, covering both elementary and high school education, was formed to serve the entire island. Olga remained a separate school district until 1931 when it consolidated with the Unified School District.

#### **Whatcom School District # 14**

In the early 1870s, the San Juan Islands were still part of Whatcom County. In 1873, the Whatcom County Commissioners agreed with a group of concerned parents that a public school should be created on Orcas Island. In June of that year, citizens of the new district met and elected John Bowman, of Tennessee, as clerk. Mr. Bowman had been running a subscription school on the property of Peter Morress (originally Morressett), a French-Canadian settler. G. Shotter, John G. Viereck and Charles W. Shattuck were elected as directors of the new school. At that time a census taken for the new school district showed 28 children between the ages of 4 and 21.

One of the first decisions facing the new directors was where to locate the new public school. On July 26 of that year, the directors presented the public with two possible sites. The first was in a church in the town of East Sound (the town's name was combined into one word at a later date) at the head of Buck Bay (as the East Sound was then known) and the other option was the small school house that had been built on the Peter Morress property to house the subscription school. The vote was 8 to 6 in favor of the church. However, District # 14 never held any sessions, as the voters created San Juan County on November 17, 1873 and Whatcom District # 14 became San Juan County District # 5.

**Thank you to the History Nook Sponsor**



**Madrona Point Insurance**

Home | Auto | Commercial  
A Chele Enterprises Company

**Michele Wiley**  
licensed independent agent

365 North Beach Road, #106, Eastsound  
360-376-5707 office | 360-722-2802 direct

[www.cheleent.com](http://www.cheleent.com)