

History Nook

Settlers and Settlements

by TOM WELCH
for the Orcas Island Historical Society

Following the arrival of the pioneer settlers in the 1850's and early 1860's, few whites settled on Orcas Island during the years of the Boundary Dispute with Great Britain. Paul Hubbs opened the first store on the island at Grindstone Harbor in 1865, while brothers John and Allen Robinson began farming in Crow Valley that same decade. Relatively few others came prior to the resolution of the Boundary Dispute in 1872. Following that momentous decision, the creation of San Juan County in 1873, and the first survey of island land in 1874, many more came to stay.

The establishment of island Post Offices, beginning with Orcas in 1873, and the provision of regular mail service to the island, were major fac-

tors in settlement growth. Post Offices helped create settlement centers, and mailboat transportation greatly improved travel between the island and the mainland. In those years island roads were, for the most part, non-existent. Prior to the early 1880s, walking was the principal means of land transportation on Orcas Island. James Geoghegan, recalling his arrival at Newhall in 1891, spoke of walking "through a sea of mud called a road" on his way to Eastsound.

Early settlers included John and Sarah Fry at East Sound (the name was changed to "Eastsound" in 1885). Reverend Sidney R.S. Grey and his wife Alma, Richard and Jane Willis near Obstruction Pass, Enoch May, James Tulloch, Michael Adams, John Oldham, James Clark, Thomas Dixon, Peter Leg-

bandt, Peter Morress, and Ephraim Langell. Langell's wife, Rosa, gave birth to Belle, the first white child born on Orcas Island, in 1871 at Port Langdon.

Freeman Lotte settled his family at Dolphin Bay after discovering that Crescent Beach wasn't a good place to raise sheep. Other early settlers included Setzer, Loos, Majo, McGuigan, Stowers, Waldrip, Bostian, and Kepler. Because travel between the scattered island communities remained difficult for many years, most islanders shopped for necessities by rowing to either Whatcom (now Bellingham), or Victoria, B.C. Those few that did shop at Eastsound in winter risked getting stuck there by bad storms, often remaining in uncomfortable situations for days waiting for the weather to improve before they could set out for their homes.

Thank you to the History Nook Sponsor

**Orcas Island
Eclipse Charters**

Opening April 6
for Wildlife Tours
Ask about our 1/2 off special
360 376-6566