

# History Nook

## Milton's retirement drew praise from community

by JAN KOLTUN  
*for the Orcas Island Historical Society*

**F**or this column, I am indebted to Virginia Jensen's research skills, to Tony Ghazel's interest in early Orcas Island School Boards, and to James Long's curiosity!

This is a follow-up to an earlier Sounder story about historic Orcas women. After it appeared, Jimmy Long emailed to ask why Nellie Milton retired. Although I was here in 1948 when that happened, after her sixteenth year as superintendent, I didn't know the answer. Seeing Tony on the ferry, I asked if there was any way to find out, as her records were burned.

Tony did the sensible thing and consulted Virginia Jensen, whose skills at finding stories in the Library's archives are legendary! Within a few days, she found the Or-

cas Islander story, stating that the school board was "surprised" at Mrs. Milton's resignation, had offered her a "substantial" salary increase and a two-year contract if she would remain, this according to the then-School Board President, Andy Johnson.

Her response to the offer was that, with the "new" school building getting underway, she wanted to allow a new administration to take over when that occurred. She expressed happiness during her tenure. That summer, she planned to complete the thesis for her doctor's degree, and was considering offers from other school districts as well.

The story that Virginia found also contained the information I'd heard for a long time: "In order for the school to have a band and gain an appreciation of music, she financed

all the instruments to be used."

We also know from stories in the Orcas Islander that in addition to serving as superintendent, she had taught in all classes and grades. The story about her retirement also noted something that all public boards would be overjoyed to hear:

"She came in as superintendent at a time when the country was in the depth of a panic and the school district was disorganized and almost bankrupt. By good management and a thorough understanding of local conditions, she reformed the district's finances and got it back on a cash basis. After a few years it was no longer necessary to vote special tax levies for operating expenses, and teachers' salaries were raised."

Days gone by.....

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## **Orcas Island Historical Museum**

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