

# HISTORY NOOK



## Early Schooling on Orcas Island

### Part 4

#### **SCHOOL DISTRICT # 5, CONTINUED**

The last article in this series described the early days of School district # 5 in East Sound (as it was then known) and the building of the new school house in East Sound in 1904 to house the growing number of students in the East Sound school district.

The introduction of automotive travel in the early 1900s led to improved roadways on Orcas and made it easier for students to attend school with greater regularity. By 1918 there were 26 students in the combined 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade class taught by Francis Mullis in East Sound. A lesson plan from the 1916-1917 school year shows that the upper grade students studied Reading, History, Arithmetic, Geography, English, Grammar, Spelling, Writing, Music, and Language and received cooking instruction once a week.

Improved roads were not the only benefit of the dawning of the age of the automobile. The purchase of school buses in 1917 made it possible for students to attend schools that were further away from home.

Harold C. Wilson was the one of first school bus drivers. In an interview in 1945 he recalled his first bus, an open bed Buick truck "with seats running lengthwise and a canvas curtain to keep out the rain and snow." He said the roads were still very primitive and the new bus was not always reliable. One of his most important pieces of equipment was skid chains and at times he had to fall back on the old horse and buggy.

As consolidation proceeded, a bigger bus was needed. Harold Wilson said the next bus he drove, purchased in 1918, was a chain drive Kelly Truck that could hold more students. He said it was a "nightmare" and he spent as much time under the truck putting the chain on as he did driving the truck. His route that year was extended to include West Sound and

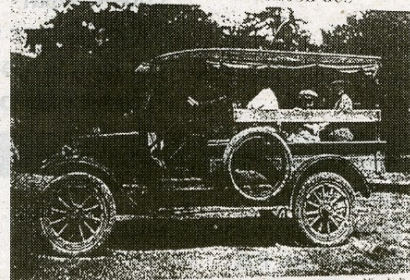
he discovered that it was faster for him to leave the bus in West Sound each evening and commute to and from the bus on his horse. The next year Wilson's route expanded again and the School District purchased a Dodge truck. Wilson said "Boy, was it wonderful!"

#### **Consolidated School District**

With better roads and school buses, the days of the one room school houses on Orcas were numbered. In 1919 or 1920, the first Consolidated School District, # 132, was formed when the schools in Crow Valley and Central were closed and elementary students joined the older students riding the bus into East Sound. Additional consolidations followed as schools in Deer Harbor, Doe Bay, West Sound, and Dolphin Bay closed.

In 1925, the district became District # 135 as the Rosario school closed its doors and consolidated. The district number was changed again, to # 136, in 1928 when the Orcas elementary and high school districts consolidated. The final consolidation occurred in 1937 when the Olga school closed and its students started attending the school in East Sound.

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