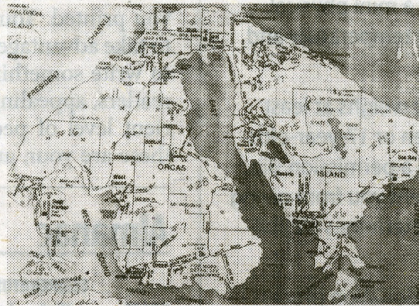




Early Schooling on Orcas Island

By: PEGI GROUNDWATER



The children of the earliest European settlers on Orcas did not have schools to attend, so they were taught at home. However, it wasn't long before island parents started hiring traveling teachers to come to their home and teach lessons to the neighborhood kids for a few months each year. The parents of each student paid a subscription to cover the teacher's salary, so they were called subscription schools. Records show that one of these early subscription schools was held in the home of Peter Morris, east of Olga.

The first school on the island was created in the early 1860s at the head of Buck Bay (as the East Sound was then known) in the village of East Sound (as it was then called). Classes were first held in a hewn log church which was torn down in 1889. A few years later a one-room log school house was built, but it is no longer standing.

In 1873, the year San Juan County was formed, the East Sound School District was created as District # 5 of the San Juan County School District. Because most children walked to school with a walk of 1 to 2 miles being considered an easy walk, school districts started being formed wherever there was a concentration of children. By 1894 there were 88 school age children in the East Sound district and Waldron Island had established its own school district,

which is still operating.

Following the receipt of petitions from families in the affected area, the County approved the creation of District # 6 in Olga in 1874, while school district # 7 was formed for the Orcas Landing area (including West Sound and Deer Harbor) in 1881, followed by one for Crow Valley in 1888. These early schools were simple affairs where a teacher would give lessons for 2 to 5 months of the year in a one room schoolhouse.

School age children on other parts of the island had to wait a bit longer for schools to come to their area. In 1891 school district # 15 came to the Cascade-Newhall area (Rosario) and district # 16 was formed in the Deer Harbor area (including Crane and Jones islands). School district # 14 was established in Doe Bay in 1893 and West Sound children got their school district # 23 in 1895. The area around the Tulloch homestead became school district # 27 in 1898 and Dolphin Road families celebrated their new school district # 28 in 1903.

A wave of consolidations followed this proliferation of schools. By 1913, the Tulloch area school district had disappeared and the East Sound school district had absorbed parts of several other districts, while other parts of the district had been spun off into a new school district called the Central school district which ran from Beach Haven Rd in the North to Nordstrom Lane in the South. Further consolidations occurred in 1918 and by 1931 the only remaining independent school district, the Olga school district, consolidated with the Orcas Island School District.

The length of the school year varied from year to year, depending on the availability of teachers AND the availability of funds. Records show that the East Sound school did not operate in 1895, 1902 or 1908.

Part two of this column will run on Aug. 17.

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