



Early Schooling on Orcas Island

Part 6

OLGA SCHOOL DISTRICT #6

The parents of students in the Olga area had lost the vote on where to site the first school on Orcas in 1873, but they were unhappy with the decision as the new school was too far away for their children to easily attend. As a result, a year later, parents in the Olga area successfully petitioned the county to create a new district, District # 6, in Olga.

On March 7th 1874, parents in the Olga area met at the home of John Bowman to create their new district, electing John Gottlieb Viereck, Smith and John Gray, with John Bowman elected as the district clerk (principal). Two days later they sent a petition to San Juan County seeking the formation of a new school district in Olga (which included Obstruction Island). There were 13 children, ages 4 to 21, in the new district, according to the petition.

The school district was not able to support a school session that first summer, but the following year John Bowman was hired to teach a three-month session for a \$25 stipend. Classes were held in the building that had been built for the subscription school on the Doe Bay property of Peter Morress (originally Morressett), a French Canadian settler.

The school faced financial difficulties in the beginning that forced it to cancel the 1878 academic year. The following year Thomas McKenna was hired to teach a 2-month term for a \$20 fee. School district apportionments were not sufficient to fund a 3-month academic year until 1886. The school term grew to 4 months in 1895.

On March 13, 1880 the parents of school district # 6 voted to move the school house to a more central location on the Thomas Robertson property "situated about midway on the road between the mouth of Buck Bay and Doe Bay." By 1881, when the residents of Doe Bay created a separate school district for their children, there were 29 children residing within the boundaries of District #

6. That number had grown to 46 (ages 1 to 18) by 1888.

On September 13, 1898 the parents of District # 6 met to consider an offer of free lumber made by the Methodist Episcopal Church. The offer was accepted and the Olga school board decided to build the new school house on the corner of the Doak's property. However, there was a lot of public dissension as some felt the selection of the site was unfair and the school was never built.

Instead, in 1901 a simple one room school house was built using the donated lumber on property donated to the District by William Moore, the first homesteader in the Olga area. The school and its outbuildings were completed and painted in time for the 1901 academic year. It was designed to house 33 students, but 36 were enrolled that year; however, only 23 attended school regularly. Classes lasted for 5 months that year.

Students supplied all of their school-books and school supplies until 1918, when the district had enough cash on hand to purchase text books for all of the students. The students from Olga began attending the Eastsound School 1935 and the Olga school district #6 was formally consolidated in 1937. It was the last independent school district on the island to consolidate.

The original school house remained at 420 Pt. Lawrence Road and was incorporated into a residence. If you drive by today you will see a yellow house - only the portion with the narrowest roof is the original subscription school, but it has been extensively remodeled over the years. The Historical Museums' records do not indicate what happened to the second Olga school.

Much of the information for this article was supplied by Lois (Culver) Willis, who taught at the Olga school in 1895 for a 4-month term, and donated to the Historical Museums by her daughter Jane (Willis) Barfoot-Hodde.

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