

# Historic mapping Coyle grow

**COYLE, THE REMOTE** community that developed on the tip of the Toandos Peninsula, was once the location of a seasonal village called *deWAVEwa'p* by the Twana tribe.

A winter village at the head of Dabob Bay to the east was called *to'he'wax*.

After the treaty of 1855, the majority of the Twana relocated to the Sikomish Reservation farther down Hood Canal.

"They continued to fish and gather at traditional sites over the years."

Marshall Blinn began to acquire land on the lower portion of the Toandos Peninsula in 1862.

He and partners had established a logging camp and sawmill at Seabeck, just across the Canal in 1856.

Most of Blinn's Toandos property was later deeded to the Washington Mill Co. and the Puget Mill Co.

Frank Norton is thought to have been one of the earliest white men to settle near the line that is the tip of the Peninsula (later called Fisherman's Harbor). He may have built his cabin by 1874.

Once other people began to settle near Fisherman's Harbor, a political precinct for the area was named for Norton.

Joseph Goodhue purchased land in 1880 and was joined by William Penman and John E. Wood in 1889. William J. Bailey, and Lyman Gilson received their land choices in 1891.

**New school district**

Peninsula School District No. 13 was established March 31, 1890. The growing community built a log schoolhouse near the head of Fisherman's Harbor.

J.W. Porter, James B. Wood and John E. Bergeson Sr. were named directors. Grant Edwards was hired to teach for a three-month period beginning December 1890.

In June 1891, Mrs. M.E. Smith was teaching the 15 registered pupils.

School Superintendent Robert visited the school for the first time.

"The house, considering its crudeness, is a substantial log without ceiling and is otherwise unfinished. It contains good homemade desks, tables, etc., and has an unabridged Webster's Dictionary, a few Bibles, and a very creditable 'pioneer' schoolhouse."

John Enis Bergeson received his land patent in March 1891 with wife, Alice, and son, John Jr.

John was active in the establishment of the local school district and operated a thriving store. Alice became well known as a trained nurse and midwife.

John was a "jack of all trades." He was fisherman, logger, merchant and farmer.

The family kept large gardens, orchards and farm animals.

When John died in 1900, Alice Bergeson married neighbor Bryan Cogger. Her son, John Bergeson Jr., went on to become a large landholder. His family still lives in the Coyle area today.

John Bradford Wood was also active on the school board. J.B. and Elizabeth Wood had a large family that they raised on their remote Hood Point farm.

He assisted in building the first wharf, petitioned for roads and was known as an outstanding beef stock-breeder.

**Community builds wharf**

The lower Toandos community pooled its skills and resources to build a wharf on the southwest tip of the harbor entrance.

According to historian Florence Wishear, the *Buckeye*, a freight and passenger boat, left Seabed at 7 a.m. three times a week.

Previous to the dock being built, rowboats transported passengers between shore and boat.

In January 1908, the community petitioned the county

## BACK WHEN

**Pam McCollum Clise**



to assist in creating a road from the wharf to the head of "Fish" Harbor.

A letter of support was written by W.W. Whitford where he stated: "As times are

very dull, we could get lots of help if it was done soon at low wages. Please give this your earnest consideration."

"PS. You can see by the petition that we would like a road as soon as possible as we expect a Post Office in a short time."

Just a month later the county engineer recommended that the one-mile road be established, for "this community is sadly in need of the road. The people are alert and progressive."

A post office was established at the head of the harbor in 1908 and George Coyle appointed the first postmaster. Needing a postal designation for the area, the community adopted his name.

The school grew to accommodate 22 students, and had more than 100 textbooks by 1909.

By this time, Henry Garrison and Brian Cogger operated a logging business. Gilson Lyman was postmaster. John Scott took over the general store and Whitford was doing carpentry work.

Renamed Eaton had come to Coyle in 1907. He and wife Margaret brought their two youngest sons with them, Harry and Clark.

Eaton and his sons had a towing business by 1911 while they continued to operate the family ranch. Eaton family descendants have had a lifelong connection with Coyle.

By 1911, Whitford was postmaster, school clerk and general merchant. Edward Donnelly, Lyman Gilson, M. Sholund, John Johnson and Eric Nickerson were all working as fishermen, and John Scott was now the local barber.

## Ferry to Peninsula

Ann Thomas' family purchased land near Camp Harmony near Dabob in 1920 and used it as a summer camp.

In order to get to the cabin, they caught the ferry to Bremerton, where a touring car, holding eight passengers, met them for the drive to Seabeck.

Once at Seabeck, Capt. Frank Rich was alerted that he had passengers to pick up. Rich met the Thomases at the Seabeck dock and took them up Dabob Bay.

Although Rich did not live in Coyle, he and his boat crew became an important part of daily life on the Peninsula.

Historian Florence Wishear gives us a vivid look at Rich:

"Frank Rich looked like one of the pirates in the story 'The Swiss Island.' After the *Buckeye* stopped its Seattle to Canal run, Frank Rich took over the transportation from Seabeck to the other side of the canal with his launch.

"On leaving Seabeck with passengers and supplies, Mr. Rich, wearing his old slouch hat, would begin to mother the piece of machinery giving it a drop of oil here and a drop of oil there until they finally reached their destination and passengers were rowed to shore."



A view of a frozen Fisherman's Harbor at the tip of the Toandos Peninsula in the 1950s.

In 1920, plans were submitted for the first section of the Dabob-Coyle Road for the Puget Mill Co. It was constructed in stages until, in 1922, past resident Lee Morgan recalls, the first car traveled the new gravel road. It was full of stumps and gullies, and had been put in by hand labor and horses.

Young Clark Eaton met his future wife, Lolo-Man, a teacher, when he was sent to meet the boat with the new teacher on board.

They were married in 1925.

Like most of their neighbors, Clark kept a large garden to feed the family while Lolo-Man canned all that she could get to store for the family cupboards.

The Eaton children spent their free time hiking and swimming. For many years Clark and his brother, Harry, had a fishing boat and usually led to fish the Alaska waters each May, returning each September.

In the early 1930s and 1940s, it was subsistence living in Coyle and many earned part of their living by running "long lines" to catch dogfish, a species of shark.

The fish were delivered to the rendering plant in Brinson where the fish livers were processed for oil to produce vitamin A.

Besides commercial fishermen, Bill Thomas Jr. and some of the other kids run the "long lines" and received 25 cents a pound catching fish off Harry Eaton's dock.

Bill's grandfather was catching dogfish back in the 1920s.

**Coyle in the '40s**

When Paul and Dortha Checkhard purchased waterfront property near Coyle in 1940, they brought three small cabins from Bangor and barged them to the property to use while logging the land.

Once finished, they decided to use the land as a vacation spot. Their vacations were filled with fishing, clamming, oyster gathering and campfires in their lovely wilderness area.

About 1943, Fred and Pearl Slack moved to Coyle. The area still had no electricity, indoor plumbing or phones when the Slacks arrived.

Fred drove the school bus to Quilcaine, where the Coyle children were educated when the local school closed in 1947.

Pearl delivered mail between Coyle and Dabob on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The roads that they traveled were still no more than single-lane gravel in rough condition.

The old school was being used for various holiday parties, anniversaries, dances, church services, a polling place and other special events.

By 1947, Jerry Yamashita purchased tidal property on Dabob Bay and began an oyster business, which became the Western Oyster Co.

Jerry and Dick Steele became founding fathers of the North Pacific Oyster Growers Association and officially named the Japanese oyster the "Pacific" oyster.

In the 1940s and '50s, the population had declined.

There were still fishermen, who went to Alaska each season. A few single men leased or owned land on which they picked huckleberry brush to sell in Quilcaine. There were still a few farms.

Mildred Morgan drove the school bus for a period of time. Lee Morgan maintained the old Coyle Road, spreading gravel to fill the ruts periodically, back when an average of only eight round-trips per day were driven between Coyle and Dabob.

The community continued to grow and decline throughout the years.

When Floyd and Mandy Strickland moved to Coyle in 1956, kerosene lamps still lighted the houses. Son Jim Strickland used to row riding his horse for hours without seeing another soul.

## Old school bell

Lee Morgan eventually purchased the old school bell from the Quilcaine School District for \$1.

John Bergeson recycled the lumber from the school, and moved the old teacher's cottage.

The bell tower itself was hauled to the Strickland property at the head of the harbor in 1962.

It served the Strickland grandchildren as a playhouse until it finally fell apart with age.

Phone service was established about 1962.

The population of Coyle continued to dwindle, and by 1969 the two Morgan boys, Neil and Ken, were the only students south of Dabob Road.

Irene and Clifford Daly purchased property at Coyle in 1978 where they hunted game, mushrooms, and picked berries.

There was a small, strong community where people watched out for each other.

People assembled in each other's houses to get together in the 1970s, and used a clubhouse at the defunct old South Trail Camp.

## Community center built

It was a polling place as well as being used for local gatherings before the Community Center was built in 1992.

Since the Coyle Community Center was built, it has been easier for people to gather as a community again.

It was last New Year's Eve that Lee Morgan and his family brought the old school bell back to Coyle, returning it to the community of its origin.

Since then, several past

and present residents have filled in the years of Coyle's history that have been temporarily "lost."

Interviews with a number of people have been compiled for the Coyle community and the Jefferson County Historical Society.

A full copy of Coyle stories and documentation may be obtained from the historical society.

By understanding its past, the community is better equipped to work toward its future. The Coyle community is strong and thriving once again.

**Pam McCollum Clise** is a historian who lives in Port Townsend. Her Jefferson County history column, *Back When*, appears on the final Thursday of each month in 3rdAge.

She can be reached at news@peninsuladailynews.com (subject line: Pam Clise). Her next column will be published April 27.