SIDNEY & PORT ORCHARD

By - Guy L. Wetzel

When Sidney Stevens came out to the Puget Sound country from
DeKalb, Illinois in 1885, and after sizing up the prospects of the
area for some time, finally purchased the Robert Campbell homestead
on Port Orchard Bay, he no doubt had visions of a great development
in this area. Records show that the Campbell property was acquired
by Mr. Stevens on October 10, 1885. After acquiring the property
Mr. Stevens returned home, and the following year his son, Frederick,
came west and the original homestead of Robert Campbell was platted
and the name of Sidney was designated as the name of the town which
Mr. Stevens was confident would develop.

Settlers in the community were few and far between when Mr.
Stevens acquired and platted his property, but an influx of residents
started moving into the area, probably attracted by the possibilities
offered. The Cline families - William, Alex, Moses, Thomas and Henry
together with A. H. Sroufe and family moved in from the Long Lake
District where they had homesteaded in 1883-84. Other families
came from various parts of the country, and within a couple of years
Sidney has assumed the appearance of a growing metropolis. Among
other earlier settlers in the community were the William Sutton
family, the Thomas H. Kendall family, W. L. Wheeler and several others
whose names are linked with early-day history. And it might be assumed
as proof of the advantages offered that in Port Orchard today are decen-
dents of many of the first families to settle here after the town was
originated. Among these are Emma Cline Saffer, Levi Cline, Mary
Kendall Corliss, Miss Chloe & J. W. Sutton, Sr., and probably the
one who should be most entitled to recognition as a decendent of a

pioneer, Mrs. Josephine Stevens Endsley, daughter of the founder of the town.

The original town of Sidney as platted by Mr. Stevens was an area bounded on the north by Port Orchard Bay, on the east by Sidney Street, on the south by Division Street and on the west by West Street. Other additions were platted within a few short months of the original establishment of the town by real estate promoters and others who visioned development, and when the town was incorporated in Sept. 1890, the boundaries of the Town of Sidney were fixed by Port Orchard Bay on the north, Mitchell Road on the east, South Street on the south and one block west of Short Street on the west. The boundaries have remained as originally described in the certificate of incorporation.

When Sidney Stevens first saw the picturesque setting of the city which he visioned, the entire surrounding area was timbered by virgin forests, and naturally the industrial activity was given over almost entirely to lumbering. The Port Madison Mill Company was operating a big logging operation at the head of the bay; the Port Blakeley Mill Company and the Port Gamble Mill Company also had extensive holdings in timber in the vicinity, and in addition to these large operators were many smaller operators, and all of them depending on ox teams and skid roads for transporting their logs to salt water.

Naturally, with the prosecution of these logging and lumbering operations, trading facilities were established in the embreyo communit Several stores were opened, each establishment carrying a little of every thing that it might anticipate what would be needed. And in the small stores could be purchased everything from food stuffs to loggers' clothing and supplies, and the early-day merchants reaped a fair harvest for their efforts. At one time among the business

establishments of the town were nine saloons, and while there might

have been some boisterous conduct among the loggers and others when

they came to town for a little recreation, and perhaps a few argu-

ments were settled with fists and billiard cues, yet there was no

crime, and the community was rated as a peaceful and happy place in

which to live.

Shortly after Sidney Stevens platted Sidney and started the

community on its way to development, the Navy Department began looking

around for a suitable site for a second naval establishment on the

Pacific Coast. An establishment already existed in Mare Island on

San Francisco Bay, and Puget Sound was considered the logical place

for a second major naval base. A commission from Congress came west

to investigate and recommend a suitable site, and at this point the

residents of Sidney actively entered the picture and accomplished a

notable service for their immediate locality and the Puget Sound

country. A. H. Sroufe had established the first newspaper in Kitsap

County at Sidney, and was in the forefront as a booster. He spent

weeks travelling over the Puget Sound area with the Navy Commission,

visiting every harbor and probable location on the Sound, but always

bringing them back to Port Orchard Bay where the greater advantages

of location were impressed upon the Commission. The efforts of Mr.

Sroufe and others paid big dividends, and the accomplishment of these

local boosters is even more noteworthy, when it is taken into consid-

eration that they were opposed by the larger and more important centers

of - Seattle, Tacoma, Port Townsend, Bellingham or Whatcom as it was

then known, and other localities.

In passing, it might be interesting to note that even at that

early date the now famous Lake Washington Canal was a project, as

the Seattle boosters were pulling for Lake Washington as the Naval

Base, and recommended the canal as a means of ingress and egress.

While it was twenty-five years later that the Lake Washington Canal

was constructed, the vision was a live one in the early days and

shows the foresight, ingenuity and energy of the pioneer boosters of

the section.

The recommendations of the Congressional Commission in selecting

Port Orchard Bay as the site of the naval base were approved by

Congress and in due time an appropriation about large enough to erect

a five-room dwelling in these days, was made to acquire the site.

The development of the naval base is apparent without any lengthy

elucidation.

With the development of Sidney came several local industrial

plants, among them two steam sawmills, a steam shingle mill, and a

shingle-mill operated by water power on Black Jack Creek, and the

largest and most important of all a $50,000.00 pottery and terra cotta

plant, located at the foot of what is now known as Pottery Hill.

These plants operated six days a week and ten hours a day for many

months, and in fact until the "hard Times" of the '90's, when

business fell off and operations were curtailed for lack of market.

One of the steam sawmills was located on the bay at about the foot

of Grant Street, and was operated by J. Hester and Allison Ainsworth,

two of the early residents of the town. The other sawmill was located

on Bay Street where the Olympic Iron & Machine Works is located, and

was built and initiated by McLeod & McNaughton. The steam shingle

mill adjoined the McLeod and McNaughton saw mill. Much lumber used

in the construction of the first dry dock at the Navy Yard came from

Port Orchard, being sawed in the original McLeod & McNaughton mill,

which was then operated by W. M. Wheeler, who acquired the plant
shortly after its construction.

The pottery and the steam shingle mill were both destroyed by
fire; the two sawmills were dismanteled later in their existence,
and the dam at the water power mill on Black Jack caused so much
grief to the operators that this project was abandoned after a few
years. Lumbering continued at a limited rate even after the local
mills had suspended, but employment in the Navy Yard, which, by that
time had become more or less a factor in the local economy, attracted
many, and activity in the woods in this vicinity was curtailed for
many years, and until it was again undertaken on a large scale by
large logging interests.

When Sidney was incorporated and came under its own governing
body on September 15, 1890, the officials of the new city were faced
by some mighty serious problems. The community had no streets; the
town was divided in three sections by Pottery Creek and Black Jack
Creek, its main thoroughfare, Bay Street, was inundated by salt water
every time the tide came in. Probably the most serious difficulty
was the financial one, it being necessary to find some means to
accomplish at least some of the most vital improvements. Towns and
cities in those days were dependent entirely upon their own resources
for revenue. There was no money coming from the state or any other
source, and the first set of town officers set out on a task that
was a headache for many years to follow.

A license was placed on saloons, and small charges were made for
other privileges in the town. A poll tax was imposed to aid in
accomplishing much needed street work. The local improvement laws
were in their infancy, and apparently were not too efficient, but the

early-day officers started in with a will to make improvements, and
to try to create some semblence of progress.

Sidney Street and Bay Street claimed first attention, and some
apparently good judgment was shown in these improvements. With the
grading of Sidney Street, the dirt was used to make a fill sixteen
feet wide from Sidney Street east to connect with the bank along the
beach near the intersection of Harrison Street. From that point east
a wagon road was graded to a point near Rockwell Avenue, when the
contour of the bay again came into the picture, presenting further
difficulties. From Rockwell Avenue to Black Jack Creek existed a
salt water marsh. This obstacle was overcome by constructing a sort
of a "Toonerville Trolley" railroad, and with this equipment Rockwell
Avenue was cut down, and the sand graded from its limits was filled in
over the salt marsh to construct a roadway wide enough for a couple
of lumber wagons to pass. For many years after this operation,
Rockwell Avenue was known as the "Sand Cut", and every time a heavy
rain occurred, hundreds of tons of sand were washed down the cut
across Bay Street, evidences of which may be seen to this day where
the sand has filled in the beach at the foot of the Avenue. This
condition existed until Rockwell Avenue was finally black-topped and
gutters installed, which was not too many years ago.

Black Jack bridge was also a major improvement in the early
days of the new town. The mouth of the Creek was about 200 feet
wide, and it was over this span that the original bridge was con-
structed. It was a timber structure, and due to the fact that a
shingle mill was in operation on the creek, it was necessary to con-
struct a span large enough to float booms of shingle belts up to the
mill at high tide, and to bring the product of the mill down the

stream on small barges. The original bridge served for many years,

and when it became necessary to replace the structure the shingle

mill had long since suspended operations, and construction was a

simpler problem. Wooden bridges served to connect the Mitchell Hill

portion of the town until about 1925 when the present concrete cul-

vert was installed as a part of the Gig Harbor Highway project.

From Sidney Street westward, road construction was strictly a

problem of plank roads on piles, and according to early-day records

of the town, numerous meetings and engineering conferences were held

in an effort to get the improvement down to a point where it was

hoped that the property could affort to pay the cost over a long term

of years. This project extended from Sidney Street around the bay to

the foot of Cline Street and thence west and over Pottery Creek at

the foot of Hull Street. These improvements were financed by issuing

what was called "City Script", and no doubt there is some of that

script floating around the country, as the property in many instances

failed to pay the assessed costs of the improvements, and property

values went to a low point during the "Hard Times" of the '90's

where even sale of the property would not meet the debts against it.

That the optimism of the founders of the town was shared in a

big way by outsiders is shown by the fact that several railroad

surveys were made in the late '80's and early '90's looking toward

railroad vacilities for the area. These surveys were all run from

north Pierce County peninsula, and apparently visioned a bridge across

the Tacoma Narrows, as Tacoma was then the terminal of the only cross-

country railroad. One railroad survey entered Sidney down the Black

Jack valley, and the plat of Annapolis designates "Depot Street",

where it was visioned the local terminal would be erected. Another

survey entered the town via Pottery Creek, and through this gulch is a platted thoroughfare called "Railroad" Avenue, and adjoining this Avenue is an addition to Sidney designated as "Railroad Addition". However, neither of these routes have even been utilized.

Among the first acts of the officials of the new town of Sidney following its incorporation, was the acquisition by the town of two lots on Black Jack creek as a site for a water works pumping station, and a power and light plant. A special appropriation of $800.00 was made for the purchase of these two lots, and if one could find the lots now the opinion might easily be reached that the pioneers were a trifle too optomistic over the future of their city, as most of the property in that locality has long been held by Kitsap County, as the owners apparently did not think it worth the few cents in taxes that was levied against it from year to year. However, plans were made for the construction of a water plant, using Black Jack Creek as a source of supply, and a contract was let for this project in 1893. Work on a wooden dam was started and much of the timber cribbing was constructed for the dam, but again "hard times" entered into the picture, and it was impossible to sell the bonds. The project was abandoned and the nucleus of the timber dam stood for many years over the creek, as mute evidence of good intentions and a good try. Franchises were granted a couple of different times for electric light and power, but none of these projects ever came to fruition. Sizing up the rates at which electric light is now available, it might not be out of line to include here that the maximum rate which could be charged under these early-day franchises was $1.00 per month for each 16-candle-power light.

When a water system was finally secured for the town, the source

of supply was Black Jack Creek, and the first units of the system were installed in 1911 and 1912. This source of supply served until about thirty years ago, when the system was converted over to artesian supply, and has been improved and enlarged until it is a source of pride to every resident of the town for its efficiency, adequacy and purity of its product.

In February, 1912, a franchise for electric light and power service was granted by the Council, and during the year the service was inaugurated. And so many years after the original Council of Sidney had endeavored to secure the luxury of water and electric service for its residents, these essentials finally became a reality.

The post office of Sidney was established in the late '80's and during the initial stages of establishing the Navy Yard and starting work on the station, all mail for the government institution came addressed to Port Orchard Naval Station, Sidney, Washington. Sidney had the only post office on the bay, and the mail was carried from the local post office to the station ship which served as Naval headquarter in a row boat. For some reason, it was believed by Mayor E. Garrison that the name Port Orchard carried a lot of potential benefits, as it was the official designation of the great Naval base, and efforts were started to have the name of the post office changed from Sidney to Port Orchard. These efforts prevailed, and on January 1, 1894 the name of the post office in the Town of Sidney was officially changed to Port Orchard.

Apparently Sidney residents were not the only ones who believed that the name Port Orchard carried some magic power, as the town which had sprung up at the west end of the Navy Yard, and which housed the headquarters of the contractors of the dry dock, and the scores of

imported workmen engaged in building the dry dock, was platted and
incorporated under the name of "Port Orchard". However, Sidney had
beat them to the punch in having its post office designated as Port
Orchard, and when the post office was established at the new town,
it was given the official title of "Charleston" in honor of the first
unit of the modern Navy to visit the bay. So, on the south side of
the bay was the town of Sidney and the post office "Port Orchard"
and on the other side of the bay adjoining the Navy Yard on the west,
was the town Port Orchard and the post office of Charleston. This
confused situation continued until 1903, with the State Legislature
took a hand in the mess, and by legislative act changed the name of
the Town of Sidney to the Town of Port Orchard, and changed the name
of the Town of Port Orchard to the Town of Charleston. And in the
meantime the Navy Department had changed the official designation of
the naval establishment from the Port Orchard Naval Station to the
"Puget Sound Naval Station", so just who was winner in the confused
battle of names is difficult to determine.

In naming streets in the new town, those men who platted the
original town and the various additions, chose names which served to
perpetuate the memory of the founders. Sidney Street was named for
Sidney Stevens, who platted the original town. Frederick Street gets
its name from his son who came here the year after his father acquired
the property and remained until the platting was completed and the
plat filed. Division Street was so named, as it formed the dividing
line between the original town and the additions to the south. DeKalb
Street was named for the town which Sidney Stevens was proud to call
his home - De Kalb, Illinois, Garrison and Kendall Streets were
named for early-day mayors. Rockwell Avenue was so called to honor

the first mayor of Sidney. Taylor, Sweaney and Smith Streets also honor first residents and land owners. Harrison Street honored Benjamin Harrison, who was President of the U. S. when the town was platted and incorporated. Seattle, Tacoma, Portland and Spokane Streets paid homage to neighboring cities, which many of the first settlers honestly believed were destined to a second-fiddle role when Sidney should get out of its swaddling clothes. Sroufe, Melcher, Cline and Hull Streets perpetuate the names of early residents. Austin Street was named for a branch of the Stevens family.

Mitchell Road on the east boundary of the town probably perpetuates the name of the oldest old-timer, being named for James Mitchell, who settled at Mitchell Point long before Sidney was envisioned, and who was one of the early-day logging operators.

While transportation was not too adequate when Sidney was first platted, it rapidly developed to a point where there was good service. The little steamers Helen, Grace, Mountaineer and A. R. Robinson were early in the field, carrying passengers and freight from Seattle via Sidney and to points on Port Washington Bay. Other steamers entered the field as the community grew, and the steamers General Canby Chehalis and others entered the transportation picture in the early days. Among the first of the steamers to serve Sidney was the Lief Erickson, a small vessel operated by Capt. John Nibbe, who also ran a grocery store in Sidney. The loss of this steamer by fire on Christ Eve, 1888, brought tragedy to the new town as several citizens were drowned when the boat burned off South Beach on its trip from Seattle to Sidney. Aboard in addition to the passengers was a quantity of goods for Christmas celebration in Sidney, and due to slow communicati it was many hours after the tragedy before residents of Sidney heard

of the loss of the steamer and several of its passengers. Trans-
portation facilities improved with the growth of the community, larger
and faster steamers being placed on the run as business warranted,
and it probably reached its peak of efficiency and convenience during
the '90's when there were a dozen trips to Seattle daily. Everyone
knows what the facilities are at present.

In addition to services to Seattle, Tacoma entered the picture
as contender for local business. A small steamer named the Estella
made one round trip each day between Sidney and Tacoma, the boat
going by way of Port Madison on each trip and consuming many hours
between terminals. Port Madison was the county seat of Kitsap County
at that time, and it was apparently believed that this service would
serve a double purpose. The Estella was replaced by a new boat called
the Blue Star, but the service petered out after a few months for lack
of patronage.

Ever since the inception of the community, the people have had
a capacity for securing what ever they went after, if the project
was considered valuable and the results compensatory. The first
instance of this tenacity and determination was the establishment of
the Navy Yard. The second came a couple of years later when Sidney
decided it wanted to be the County Seat. The county seat was estab-
lished at Port Madison when the county was first established, but when
Sidney began to take on bright prospects for development, the county
seat was attractive game. Petitions were circulated, an election
called and at the general election of 1892, the returns showed that
the people of the county had voted to move the seat of the county
government from Port Madison to Sidney. There is probably as much
truth to the rumor circulated at the time of the election, that Port
. . . . the sailors on the many ships in that port

and at Port Blakeley, as there was to the counter rumor that Sidney
had voted everybody they could find between here and Henderson Bay
way down in Pierce County. And then again, maybe both rumors were
true. Who knows at this late date?

As an inducement to the voters of the county to move the county
seat to Sidney, residents of the town donated the land and built a
fine new court house and deeded it to Kitsap County for a court house.
That was a big undertaking in those days of scarce cash, but the
building was erected, a fine two story affair with a fire-proof vault,
ample office space and a large court room. In the rear of the building
were two rows of Chick Sales edifices, one for ladies and one for men,
and also a larger cistern equipped with a pump for fire protection.
That the early residents built well is evidenced by the fact that
the original building served as a court house until 1930, when a new
fire proof structure was erected around it, and this has now been
added to by additions constructed during the past year. So since
January, 1893, when scores of the hardy residents of Sidney chartered
the steamer W. J. Ellis and went to Port Madison and moved the county
records to the new debt free court house in Sidney, the county seat
has been maintained on the tract of land donated by patriotic resident
of Sidney, and for nearly forty years of that time in a building which
was donated by that same group of citizens debt free to Kitsap County.

Another permanent example of the local spirit of determination
is the Washington Veterans Home located to the east of the town.
When the Legislature in 1908 appropriated money for a new home for
Veterans and their wives, the community immediately decided that this
institution would be a big asset to this locality. So again the peopl
of the town dug down into their cash reserves, bought the property on

which the Veterans Home is now located, and presented it to the State
of Washington for the Washington Veterans Home. No doubt this gesture
on the part of the citizens played an important part in the decision
to locate the home here, as scores of sites were being boosted by all
sections of the state. To show the acument of the local boosters for
the Veterans Home, the local citizens also arranged an excursion for
the annual G.A.R. Encapment being held that year to inspect the site
and its many attractions. Hundreds of veterans of the Civil War and
their wives, with a sprinkling of Spanish War veterans visited the
site where a big picnic had been provided, and which wound up with a
free dance in the evening. Perhaps the enthusiastic veterans might
have helped to decide the location, but anyway it was all through the
efforts and the cash put out by local citizens.

Like all new communities without fire protection, Sidney suffered
its share of fire losses. The first major blaze destroyed the original
Sidney Hotel and a couple of residences located on Prospect Street.
This fire occurred in 1892. In 1894 practically the entire business
district was destroyed when fire wiped out all the buildings on both
sides of Bay Street between Sidney and Frederick Street. The one
survival of the conflagration was the building which now houses Hanks
Real Estate office. Destroyed in this fire were such old-time business
houses as W. F. Howe's Hardware store; Robinson's Grocery; Baker's
Grocery; Hunt's Hotel; Henry Cline's General Store and Post Office;
Barber's restaurant and hotel; Corbett's Drug Store; the Sidney Broad
Axe plant; and many others not now recalled. Probably none of these
names mean anything to recent arrivals except that of Howe's Hardware,
as W. F. Howe was the father of E. S. Howe, present owner of Howe's
Hardware and Howe Motor Company.

Rebuilding after the disastrous blaze was slow, as it was during the tight money area, and only those buildings necessary to carry on the business were immediately rebuilt.

Schools of the community followed the pattern of progress found in nearly every frontier location. Starting in the one-room log school house, new construction kept pace with the growth of the community and advancement in educational methods, until the present some of perfection in construction and methods was reached.

Churches also entered the picture early. The Christian Church was organized in 1888 and the first edifice was erected on the site of the present house of worship. The Methodist Church was established in 1890, and for many years these two houses of worship represented the religious institutions in the community. Now the community is served by more than a dozen denominations of religious faith, all in their own houses of worship. Religious growth kept pace, or perhaps advanced faster, than industrial and commercial progress.

Interspread with events which marked the progress of the community are many instances outstanding in patriotic and social observances. A Fourth of July celebration would bring people on chartered steamers from all parts of the county as far away as Port Gamble. Inter-community baseball games would see teams from every settlement vieing for supremacy in the national game. These exchanges of game always meant water excursions which were attractive to the greatest part of the population. But probably the biggest event of a patriotic nature was when Sidney welcomed the Navy.

In the spring of 1892, the Navy Department designated the old Nipsic as station ship at the new naval base. The Nipsic was a Civil War relic which has sustained severe damage in a typhoon in the Samoan

Islands and was considered unseaworthy. As a result, when she entered Port Orchard Bay she was escorted by the gun-boat Mohican, another wooden war ship.

Sometime, in the early days of the settlement, a cannon had been secured and had been mounted on "Fort Hill" where Prospect Street makes it right-angle turn. This cannon had been secured from the old Steamer Polyfofsky, a gunboat which came to the United States with the purchase of Alaska from Russia. The "Polly" was serving as a tow boat for one of the sawmill companies, and in some way Sidney procured this old cannon. As the Mohican and the Nipsic felt their way up the bay on that proud day in 1892, the old Russian cannon on Fort Hill boomed forth a national salute of twenty-one guns. The gun was manned by Captain Nibbe, a Navy veteran of the Civil War. It was a laborious job firing those twenty-one shots from the old muzzl loading cannon, but time and patience were the main stock in trade of the pioneers, and it was finally accomplished. There was no answering salute from the ships and some disappointment was apparent among some of the residents. However, officers from the ships called on the Mayor and invited the citizens of the community to visit the vessels while the Mohican remained in port, which was for about two weeks. Every courtesy was shown the visitors and Sidney was in reality introduced to the Navy. But, the big thrill came when the Mohican weighed anchor for her return to Mare Island Navy Yard. As she started down the bay an answering salute of twenty-one guns boomed forth, and Sidney was really part of the Navy.

So, there you have it. A disconnected, incomplete legend of some of the things which played a part in Port Orchard's existence. The old-timers gave you the Navy Yard, the County Seat, the Washington

Veteran's Home and a background of energy and foresight. Apparently

the atomic bomb has sort of put skids under the Navy Yard and it is

necessary to look beyond for some other means of continued prosperity.

And I think I found a mighty good suggestion in a recent issue of the

Salvation Army "War Cry". This magazine was commenting on the cen-

tennial of the discovery of gold in California, and stated that it

wasn't the discovery of gold that made California prosperous, but

it was the discovery at about the same time that California soil would

raise practically everything under the sun. The article pointed out

that the agricultural and horticultural products of California had

always been worth many millions more than any income from gold, oil

or any other source. If we stop to think about it, that statement is

true of any state. Agriculture is and always has been the backbone

of any state or country. Washington's products of the soil make the

income from all other sources like chicken feed. The annual income

from lumber, plywood and other various sources is lost when compared

to the income from grain, fruit, seed, bulbs and other products of

the soil.

And while perhaps the surrounding area is not the most extensive

farming country in the state, the fertile valleys surely produce some

wonderful crops, and the sunny slopes give us some of the finest

berries in the world, and poultry and dairying are and will continue

to be big factors. It would be a safe bet that the annual income from

the farms in this vicinity is a lot bigger than all the industrial

incomes combined. But, because we don't see a few score of workers

going and coming from these establishments, we lose sight of their

value.

Our future as well as that of every other community lies in the

products of the soil, and the greater development in this line, the greater will be our prosperity.

(Signed)   Guy L. Wetzel.

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Copied from the original manuscript as written by Guy L. Wetzel. Read before the Port Orchard Kiwanas Club - in January, 1950