

The Lopez Island Historical Society & Museum

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Newsletter

Spring 2006

The period 1850–1900 was a wild and woolly time on Lopez Island. Samish and Lummi Indians had been a presence on the island for several thousand years, and they were about to be confronted with the first white homesteaders.

AFTER "HUTCH" Lopez Island 1850-1900

"Hutch" Arrives—With a Flair (and a Rifle)

Hiram E. Hutchinson ("Hutch") arrived on Lopez around 1850, landing in the midst of a battle between two native clans, the Coast Salish (whose descendants are the Lummi, Samish, Songhee and Saanich nations) and a raiding party of Haida (from the Queen Charlotte islands), who—according to their enemies, at least—regularly cruised in large cedar canoes among the San Juans to capture slaves. Hutch (age 19 or 20 at the time) employed his musket to turn the battle for the native Coast Salish, earning him their respect and a place to live.

Over the next 25 years, Hutch became Lopez Island's first postmaster, shopkeeper and unelected village mayor—an honorific title still alive in Lopez Village. Hutch may have come west to seek his fortune in the California gold rush, or he may have just wanted to find land to call his own. He soon married a Tlingit woman whom everyone called Mary. A son, Millard, was born in 1867. The family lived in peace until 1873, when Hutch's sister, Irene Weeks, came to Lopez with her husband Lyman and son Oscar, to help out at the store and (some say) shame her brother into ending his mixed-race union. Hutch may have left Lopez with his family for a time rather than fight his sister, but he and

Millard returned at some point. Hutch died around 1880–81, and is buried on San Juan Island. Millard played in the Lopez Cornet Band around 1890, and died in 1915. He is buried in the Union Cemetery on Lopez.

The Search for Eden Continues

Into the 1870s, the San Juan Islands were advertised in eastern and Midwestern papers as a kind of heaven on earth, a place abundant with natural beauty and land for homesteading and farming. The islands' allure also reached prospective settlers in California and Oregon:

"Homes for the homeless can be had on Government land of 160 acres...The productions of the soil are various and when properly cultivated, yield immense crops...Nimrods can hunt to their hearts' content and sit down every morning of the year to venison beef steak. The water surrounding the island is very productive...Ducks and geese are plentiful... The healthfulness of the climate cannot be surpassed... Thousands that are eking out their worthless lives in cities and towns, can find a happy home in this Lower Sound, either on the island or on the mainland, as there is still thousands of acres of good land awaiting the hardy tiller of the soil."—An 1876 letter to the West Shore, a Portland-based paper



Lopez Cornet Band--Millard Hutchinson in center on bass drum. Other players included George Cary, Joe Thornton, Charles Phelps, Charles Wood, Dick Sumner, Harry Cary, Sam Britt, Robert Hummel.

Message from the Board

by Mike Ellis, President

Despite the fact that the “Closed” sign has hung next to the entrance to your Museum all winter, there has been much activity inside. A dedicated group of volunteers together with our part-time Executive Director Mark Thompson-Klein have wrapped up 2005 and prepared for the 2006 season opening May 5.

First, one piece of good news is that we once again managed to close the 2005 year just under budget. This was achieved by parsimony, and the generosity of our members, sponsors and the Lopez community.

Once the 2005 *Maritime Lopez* exhibit was taken down there was room to make some big changes. The old kitchen was moved into a rearranged mechanical room, which allowed us to increase storage and research access to the document and photograph collection. New exhibit lighting is being installed, and the 2006 display, *After Hutch: 1850-1900* is being constructed.

LIHS News

It gets easier each year. Really. *After Hutch* is the third new exhibit we have produced—following last year's *Maritime Lopez*, and *Lopez Pioneer Amelia Davis* in 2004—and it has been a pleasure to work with our volunteers and Board to develop new content.

We are lucky to have an extensive collection of top quality photos of Lopez Island's early settlers. Some of the best images came from John Burt, a professional photographer in the early twentieth century (and the local Watkins man.) In the process of cataloging the collection we are finding extraordinary photos of early island landscapes, farms, fishing scenes, and most important—the adventurers who came to Lopez and found a way to have a good life here.

You have probably noticed our new announcement board inside the Lopez Village Market. (Many thanks to Bill Carpenter and Aaron Dye for their generous support.) We will use that space to show off photos we discover in our archives, and also to let you know about new exhibits, special programs, and public events at the Port Stanley School.

We are on the look-out for energetic volunteers. Our "To-do" list is truly impressive, and we welcome volunteers of all ages, abilities and skills. I keep a very diverse project list at hand, so there will be something for you to do any time you have an hour or so to give us a hand. Please call or drop in if you would like more information about volunteering at the museum.

We are working hard to raise funds to improve the entryway and paths to the Exhibit Shed, and at the same time create parking places to start the process of making the Museum universally accessible.

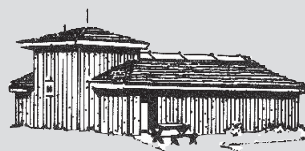
Really significant progress has been made on cataloging and stabilizing the collections. Lopezians have been generous with their family photos, documents and artifacts. Great progress has been made under the leadership of Christi Carter cataloging and stabilizing the photos using a procedure developed the preceding year by Ginger Lowell. At last count, Christi assisted by Linda Hudson and Laura Deach had entered into the computer full descriptions of more than 1,000 photos—only a few thousand more to go!

In a nutshell we are making progress on all fronts. However, there are vacancies for a couple of Board members and of course we need volunteers to help. If you would like to join a winning team call Mark now at 468-2049. As that famous recruiting poster said, “We need you!”

by Mark Thompson-Klein, Museum Director

And speaking of volunteers—I would like to thank our exceptionally active and generous Trustees. In addition to meeting monthly to conduct the Society's business, individual Trustees have painted walls, hosted fund raising sales, printed scores of photos, written pages of exhibit copy, organized and trained docents, presented educational programs, designed and built exhibits, installed exhibit lighting, recruited program & exhibit sponsors, addressed & stamped envelopes, and moved heavy things from one place to another place—all in just the past three months!

We hope you will visit the museum this summer to see *After Hutch*. We are also happy to help you discover things you may not know about your land or your Lopez ancestors. We'll be open noon to four, Wednesday–Sunday from May 6 through September.



The Lopez Island
Historical
Society
& Museum

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The James Cousins Homestead *by Kip Robinson Greenthal*

Driving down Cousins Road for the first time in 1958, I remember the wide open fields surrounding the Cousins farmhouse, the knolls of cedar and fir, and the deep slanted roof of the old grey-shingled barn. At twelve years old, I was mesmerized by the vast expanse of land and the sense of Lopez history. Pierre Franklin had placed a small “farm for sale” sign on the southwest corner of the property, and that sign (which we still have today) attracted my parents, Dwight and Anne Robinson. Though Pierre had promised Willie Cousins, who



still lived in the farmhouse, that he would not sell the farm during his lifetime, he wanted to find a buyer, for he had grown discouraged with farming and wanted to try his hand at gill-netting.

Two years later Willie died, and in 1960 my parents bought the farm. Fourteen years old, I remember the feeling of disbelief that they would take on the responsibility of one of the oldest farms on Lopez. My father, a professor at the University of Washington, had one hammer in his tool collection. Yet when he walked beneath the large cedars in the upper fields of the property, saying, “This is my cathedral,” I learned quickly the farm was not a practicality; it was a passion for unspoiled land, where trees could age and moss could grow like thick white hair on the rocks where few people walked; where silence could live in the night’s owl calls.

The James Cousins homestead is one of the oldest remaining farms on Lopez. The Cousins came to Lopez in 1883 and farmed 160 acres, producing fruit, grain and cattle. The farm changed hands only twice before my parents bought it in 1960. Originally from the east, they knew how quickly historic places can disappear. The Iowa styled farmhouse surrounded by split rail cedar fences, the turn of the century orchard, and the large barn cast a spell on them. When most people in the northwest at that time were building modern homes overlooking the water, my parents were peeling off seven layers of wallpaper to reveal the original wood paneling of the walls in a rather dark, small-roomed farmhouse.

Though we were the farm’s new inhabitants, the Cousins family (James, Ella and Willie) left their mark on the land. My sister Grosvie, along with Pierre Franklin’s daughters Marie

and Valerie, found hidden under rocks old bottles stuffed with messages: “Today is June 23, 1943. The wind comes from the southwest, chilly, with a fair sky. High temperatures 67 to 70 degrees. Signed, Willie Cousins.” Once my father, while leaning against an old fence post, spotted Willie’s name etched in one of the split cedar fence rails east of the shed. If you look at pictures taken of the farm in the early 1900s, and look at the farm today, everything seems the same, the line of buildings beneath the hill slope, the grid of fences patterning the land.

Because the pastureland was endemic to the farm, my mother worked hard to sustain its agriculture. Over the years, she leased fields for grazing to Sally Bill, MR Buffum, Dwight Lewis and Bret Fowler. She even let Ted Richey bring his ponies to forage there.

I always knew many Lopez residents appreciated the Cousins farm due to the preservation of its original character, even though it remained relatively isolated from community involvement on account of my parents’ request for privacy. After my parents died, the farm began to present challenges for me personally in knowing how to manage its farmland and maintain the historic dwellings. I knew, after we replaced the barn roof and received thank you letters, and re-fenced the west field and got letters expressing environmental concerns, that this place belonged in spirit to many others besides our immediate family.

When I was asked if the Cousins farm could be included in a historic tour sponsored by the Lopez Historical Society



and the Lopez Community Center, a door opened in my mind. I realized the Cousins farm could come into its own historic light and be appreciated by the Lopez community. I realized that the farm could help broadcast

the significance of our local history. Its value suddenly transcended private ownership and became a bridge towards being an educational resource that could increase awareness and appreciation for our northwest culture.

I am hoping, with time, to find partners to help preserve this unique property. Though sometimes this feels like a daunting task, I keep telling myself that if you can imagine something, you can make it happen. Looking back, I’ve known since I was twelve years old that the spirit of this land and buildings belongs in the same spirit to all who value it.

Walnut Tree Invitational

Save the date! On July 22, you will have the opportunity to eat fabulous food, drink fine wine, and support both the Lopez Island Historical Society and Lopez artists.

The *Walnut Tree Invitational* is inspired by the magnificent walnut tree in the snapshot—one of Lopez Island's landmark trees. The canopy spreads more than 70 feet, and in summer when the tree is in full leaf, the filtered light has an almost unreal soft quality. In winter, you can see the tree's massive structure—open and perfectly balanced.

Here's how the *Walnut Tree Invitational* will work. We have



invited Lopez painters, sculptors, quilters, photographers, potters, writers, and musicians to produce an original work in their specialty that interprets the walnut tree. We will auction their work at the big celebration July 22. We are

trying to make this event rewarding for the artists as well—they will receive a percentage of each sale, and we will host shows in spring and early summer for contributing artists to show and sell their other work.

Please call Mark TK at the museum (2049) if you have questions or suggestions, or if you would like to volunteer to be part of this exciting event.

Walnut Tree Invitational sponsors: Lopez Pharmacy, Island House Realtors, Jamie & Lauren Stephens, Islanders Insurance, Hayward Design & Construction, Lopez Village Market, Karen Rousseau, Steve & Michele Heller, Doug James Floorcoverings, Spencers Landing Marina, Raiti Waerness

Please support the Lopez Island Historical Society
to help collect, preserve, interpret, and share local history.

Memberships and donations are fully tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

- Individual \$15 - \$99 Family \$25 - \$99 Business \$50 +
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