

# A Very Brief History of Lummi Island and the Islanders

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Originally calling this island "Skallaham," the Lummi Indians are thought to have had two longhouses near Village Point which they used when they came to harvest berries and clams, fish or hunt deer. Villages were not established here because the location was too open to attack from northern Indians. The island was charted for the first time in 1792, by Spanish explorers Galiano and Valdez as "Isla de Pacheco." Later it was known as McLaughlin's Island. The name it bears now was bestowed officially by the U.S. Geodetic Survey in 1853. It is thought that the name referred to "luminara", or great bonfires seen by the Spaniards as they arrived, a name the Lummi tribe later took as their own.

The first permanent settler was whaler and California goldminer Captain Christian Tuttle who arrived by canoe in 1871. His original land holdings, 320 acres, stretched from near Village Point south to Tuttle Lane. He and his wife Clara had seven children including the father of longtime Island residents Floyd, Marion and Echo (Griffiths).

Next Frederick Lane arrived in 1881. Lane Spit bears his name. With his Indian wife and twelve children, he tended the kerosene-burning navigation light off the tip of the Spit. Having such a large family it's not surprising that he helped establish a separate school district, No. 32, on the Island and was the first superintendent of the Lummi Island schools.

Frederick was also postmaster from 1887 to 1890. By 1893 he was carrying the mail in a small sailboat from Fairhaven to the Island, a sometimes hazardous journey. The post office was officially opened on July 24, 1882, as Beach, Washington, named after the first postmaster, Wade H. Beach. The name was changed to Lummi Island in 1946.

Melzer Granger came alone in March of 1888, followed in the fall of that year by his wife, Lucy, their six sons and one daughter. One son, C.R. "Chan" Granger built and, with his wife, operated Loganita Lodge, a popular resort for many years near Point Migley. Another son, Art, also married, had eleven children and remained on the Island, as did some of his children, Mac, Frank, Irene (McFarland) and Earl. The Grangers living on Lummi Island today are Art's descendants.

Frank Taft "discovered" Lummi Island about 1902 and convinced his wife, Ruby, with baby Maurine, and parents-in-law, Sallie and Leonidas "Lon" Blizard to come. Frank and Ruby, who were affectionately known by Islanders as "Pop" and "Mom", started taking in boarders. This enterprise became Taft's The Willows resort, run by all the family including the Taft daughters, Maurine and Dorothy, and their husbands Jack Melcher and Leo House, respectively, and their children Jackie and John Melcher, and Victoria and Greg House. Most of the original Taft property is now Isle Aire Subdivision.

Transportation to and from Lummi Island was first by canoes, rowboats and sailboats, then by cannery tenders or steamboats such as the Brick, a midget forty-foot wood-burning stern wheeler. The first car

ferry was a scow towed to Gooseberry Point by the steamer, Imp. According to Islander Cathy Scott (now deceased) who lived near our present post office, a flag waved from Gooseberry Point alerted the ferry crew, who often played cards on the porch of her cabin, that they should bring over the ferry.

By 1926, Lummi Shore Road from Bellingham was completed and a ferry, the Central owned by Whatcom County and large enough to hold six small Model-T Fords, was making scheduled runs between Lummi Island and Gooseberry Point. The slightly larger Chief Kwina replaced it in 1929. In 1962, the Whatcom Chief began service.

Logging and timber sales were the most common livelihoods on the Island in the early days. In 1896 a salmon cannery was built at Village Point by the Lummi Island Packing Company, which became the Carlisle Packing Company. From 1895 to 1910, a shingle mill operated on Lane Spit, then was rebuilt as a salmon cannery by Beach Packing Company, later known as Lummi Bay Packing Company. By 1906, at Smugglers Cove, Puget Sound Fertilizer Company was operating an odorous rendering plant, turning fish offal into fertilizer.

In 1908, the launch Sehome was providing daily mail service. By 1919, the Nooksack Packing Company also had a cannery on the Island at Sunrise Cove. Later Island livelihoods included chicken and dairy farming, growing cherries and raspberries for commercial canning, and operating summer resorts. One man unsuccessfully tried mining coal, another thought he had discovered platinum on the Island, an impossibility because of the type of rocks here.

By the 1960s, with an aging population, the Island was becoming a retirement community. Low school enrollments created serious concerns about keeping the school open. That has now changed and the Island has a lively growing population of all ages.

*Compiled by Beth Hudson from her research notes, with additional research by Nancy Simmerman. Thanks to Marion Tuttle, Irene Granger McFarland, Earl Granger, Jackie Melcher Gaines-Aschenbrenner, Kay Niedhamer, Clark Blake and the Lummi Island Newsletter for additional information and to Paul Davis for access to the Island archives.*

*Another source for genealogical & historical information is the Lummi Is. Cemetery's [burial listing](#).*

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