

NOW & THEN

Autumn 2020

www.SouthWhidbeyHistory.org

www.facebook.com/SouthWhidbeyHistory

The early history of the soon-to-be Whidbey Telephone Museum...

The little building that moved and moved

Our South Whidbey Historical Museum gained a new 'old' neighbor in June 2019 when the little wooden building with a lengthy history and a door on its corner moved next door as an upcoming Whidbey Telephone Museum.

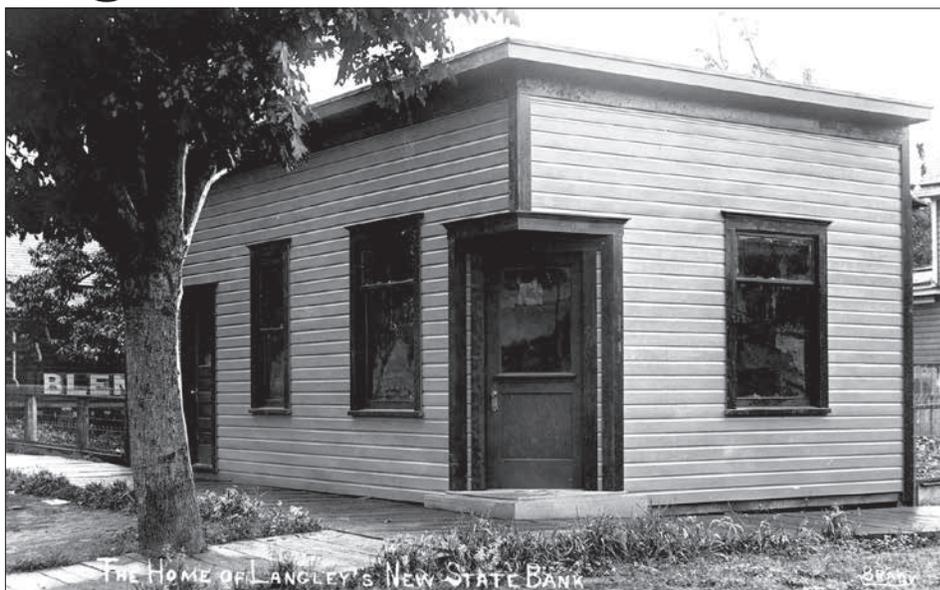
Langley town founder, Jacob Anthes, ran a line from his general store on First Street to his warehouse at the end of the wharf at the foot of Anthes Avenue in 1893. This was followed by lines to Bayview and Coupeville.

In 1908, the Whidby (sic) Telephone Company was incorporated with C. E. Feek as president, J. S Carron, vice president, Henry Bosshard, treasurer, and Hugh McLeod, secretary.

A switchboard was purchased and housed in a small building on Anthes Avenue next to Hugh McLeod's residence and law office for which he received \$8 a month rent. (Photo lower right.)

In 1915, the telephone office was apparently moved for a time to a building owned by J. H. Marshall. The next move was into the original Langley State Bank building. (Photo upper right.)

The Langley State Bank was founded in 1913 by a group of businessmen with James Curtis Langley, a nephew of town founder, Jacob Anthes, as president. They purchased a lot at the corner of First Street and Anthes Avenue from Fred Funk and constructed a small wooden bank building.



The Langley State Bank founded in 1913 and shown here in 1914 became the Whidby Telephone office in 1923.



The first telephone office was housed in the building on the upper left. Circa 1910.

Telephone Museum, continued

The bank struggled, and was in receivership by 1918. It was reorganized and a new, larger, bank building was constructed on the site in 1922.

Prior to construction, the original wooden bank building was moved next to the Funk Mercantile a short distance south along Anthes Avenue. It was purchased by the Whidbey Telephone Company in February, 1923 and became their first “Central Office.”

Ernest Noble, Sr. was named president of the Langley State Bank in 1924 and became a stockholder in the telephone company. He also served as company secretary from 1924 to his death in 1933. After his death, his son Ernest (“Ernie”) Nobel, Jr. ran the bank with his brother Ralph.

According to Frances (Anderson) Burk whose mother, Lois, worked as an operator in the 1920s and ‘30s, her mother “worked from 6 in the morning until 2:30 or 3:00 in the afternoon for \$85 a month.

The switchboard was by the big window in front. She’d roll up the window and yell over to Norm Clyde across the street, ‘Norman, your wife wants you to bring home a jar of mayonnaise.’”



Hugh McLeod's niece, Vera (“Jimmie”) McLeod was one of the telephone company's early operators. (Her later married name was Rothgeb.) Circa 1912.

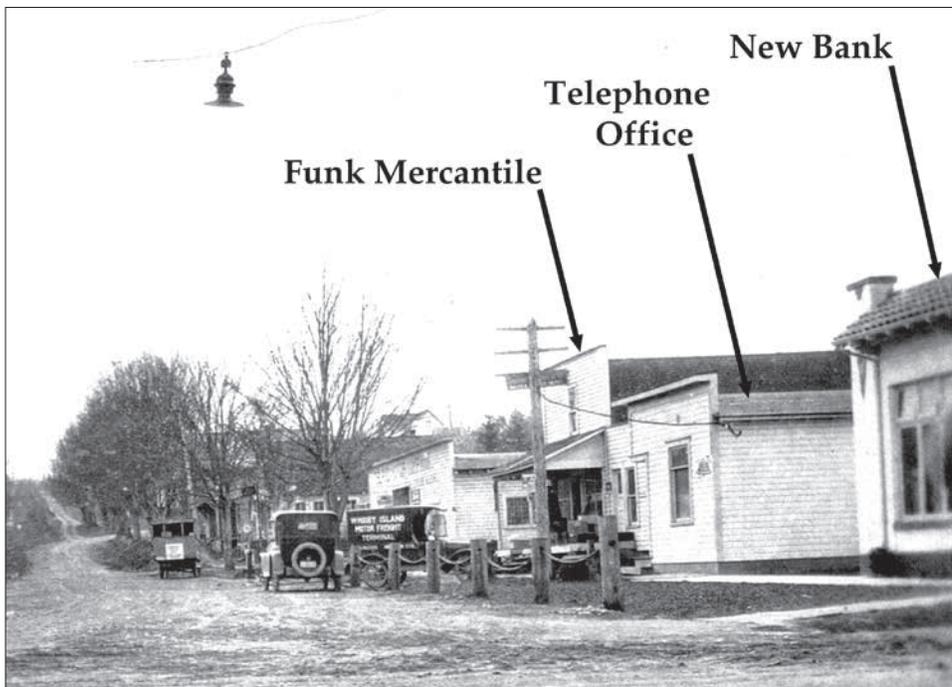
“The ringer was on a little desk with little plugs sticking up like long bullets. Then on the panel, were slots for out-going calls. If somebody called up she’d say ‘Operator’ and the caller would say, ‘I’d like to talk to number 234.’ The operator would plug that in and ring the proper number of rings.”

(Phones operated on party lines in those days. A party line was a local loop telephone circuit shared by multiple subscribers. People would listen

for their distinctive ‘ring’ if the call was for them. And if you picked up the phone to place a call and a voice was heard, then you had to wait until their call was complete before ringing the operator to get connected to where you wanted to call.)

Frances Burk continued: “The ringer was like a pencil sharpener. It had a little handle she would turn. She had a headphone so she could hear. She’d plug the little bullet-shaped device in there from the caller to the receiver – that’s all there was to it.”

If someone came in and wanted to make a phone call, there was a little



Circa 1926. Looking south on Anthes Avenue from First Street. The telephone office was situated where the Rob Schouten Sculpture Garden now exists.



Henrietta Schumaker at the switchboard in 1928. (Courtesy of Kelly Krouse)



The Whidbey Telephone Company Office in 1958. (Courtesy Robert Noble)

room with a telephone, a telephone book and a wastebasket. There was a door into the business office. The billing was done in the bank.”

In 1929, a small bedroom was constructed at the back of the building for a night operator.

As early as 12 years old, David Henny had a passion for telephones and technology. At 23, he turned that passion into a career, when after searching the country for just the right-sized opportunity, he bought Whidbey Tele-



In 1963 the building was relocated across from the Island County Fairgrounds in what is now the Park & Ride lot next to the Fire Station. It had been a realty office and a barbershop. (Courtesy Ben Breedlove).

phone Company in 1953 from Ernie Noble.

He changed the name from “Whidby” to “Whidbey” Telephone Company in 1953. That was when the “e” was restored to the name of the Island in keeping with name of Captain George Vancouver’s sailing master in 1792, Joseph Whidbey, who noticed Deception Pass and determined that the land along which they were sailing was an island not a peninsula.

After the Telephone Company office moved to Bayview in 1963, Ernie Noble moved the vacant telephone building from Anthes Avenue to his property along the south side of Edgecliff Drive where it sat until 1969 when Dean Grisham spotted it as an ideal location for his real estate business.

Mr. Noble moved the structure to his property on Camano Avenue across from the Fairgrounds, painted it red to match the fairgrounds buildings, and

Grisham moved in.

Dean and his partner, John Stevenson, added an addition to the side of the building with an office for Dean and a small conference room.

In the 1990s, Dean Grisham retired from the real estate business and became a barber at the same location. The addition was then occupied by photographer, Michael Stadler.

When the Noble property was acquired for an Island Transit Park and Ride lot and new fire station in 2007, the building had to be either demolished or moved. The Whidbey Telecom Company began negotiations with the South Whidbey Historical Society and the City of Langley in an attempt to find a site to locate the building as a telephone museum.

The old bank/telephone office was designated a “building of historic significance” by the City, and on May 5, 2007, the building and its addition were separated and both moved by the Whidbey Telecom Co. to their property at Third Street and DeBruyn Avenue.

On June 1, 2019, 12 years after the move to Third and DeBruyn, the historic building was moved down Second Street to its present location on the Whidbey Telecom property next to the South Whidbey Historical Society’s Museum.

A small plaza and landscaping were added, and the transformation of the interior of the building into a museum continues.

According to Whidbey Telecom CEO, George Henny, the museum will focus on telecommunications within the societal and local history of the 1950s when his father bought the business.

–Written by Robert Waterman, SWHS Board Member

Look for more information about the Museum online and in the next newsletter. A ceremonial opening involving Mrs. Marion Henny, retired chairwoman of Whidbey Telecom, is being planned.

One matching grant met; a new one offered

Sometimes seeds are planted in young lives which continue to bear fruit years and even decades later. Such is the case with Derel Gabelein, a 32-year-old South Whidbey resident who operates his own wood slab cutting business for furniture making. (His Facebook page is at: <https://www.facebook.com/pnw.slabs.5>)

Back in 2002 when Derel was a South Whidbey Middle School eighth-grader in then-teacher (now Elementary School Principal) Susie Richard's English Communications class, he participated in a pilot program called "Youth in Philanthropy."

Students were tasked with raising an initial \$500 in order to receive a \$10,000 grant from The Glaser Foundation (plus weekly mentoring by the Foundation's president, Bill Carlstrom). They would then decide to make grants to local charities. The South Whidbey Historical Society was one of the recipients.

"That class had a big effect on me," Gabelein said. "I was able to attend a national conference and continued to mentor the next year's class as well. It stayed with me all this time."

It stuck so much so that Derel didn't hesitate to respond when he read a post on the Historical Society's Facebook page asking for matching funds to make up for lost parking lot fees when the Whidbey Fair was cancelled.

In fact, he rode his motorcycle down to meet a representative of the Historical Society to make a donation –



Thanks to donors who helped us make up parking fee funding from the COVID-19 cancelled Whidbey Island Fair.



In 2002 eighth-graders Kassie Weber and Derel Gabelein announced \$10,000 in grants to local nonprofits through the Youth in Philanthropy program. This September Derel matched our Whidbey Island Fair parking grant challenge.

matching the entire \$1,500 grant put up by Board members. (Thanks to additional donors, that grant has now been matched twice over.)

In a 2002 South Whidbey Record article, Susie Richards was quoted as saying that the class helped students meet real community needs and develop civic responsibility.

"The students gained an incredible sense of achievement and connection to their community," she said. "They

saw firsthand that through hard work and follow through, they can truly make a difference."

Those long-ago class members included Derel Gabelein, Kassie Weber, Marco Flores, Jeff Riggs, Stephanie Sanford, Topher Kline, Katie Murphy and John Moore.

Nancy Nordhoff makes a \$5,000 matching grant challenge

Now there is another opportunity to match a \$5,000 grant being made by local philanthropist Nancy Nordhoff to help the South Whidbey Historical Society continue our mission through these troubled times.

Ms. Nordhoff has long been a long supporter of the South Whidbey Historical Society, last year donating funds toward painting the exterior of the Museum.

Donations can be made online at www.SWHS.org or via a check mailed to SWHS / PO Box 612 / Langley, WA 98260.

We are most grateful for your financial support.

Learn about joining our Board...

Do you love local history?

Perhaps you are descended from one of the south end's early families and would like to continue a legacy of community building.

Or maybe you are new to South Whidbey and wish to learn about and get involved with your new community while working toward common goals.

The South Whidbey Historical Society invites you to learn more about serving on our Board.

Email our Board President, Bill Haroldson at SWHMuseum@gmail.com and mention a convenient time to call.

The Board meets once a month and practices social distancing and mask wearing during COVID regulations.



A message from our Board President:

Covid-19 has not slowed us down

The South Whidbey Historical Society is busy even though we cannot open the museum or make presentations concerning the past. Our mission is to record and tell the history of South Whidbey. We are committed to this task.

Many things go on as normal. We have been adding to our collection with photographs, documents, and artifacts.

These all must be recorded with accession records and a means to make them available to use. This process is carried out by archivists diligently going through the collection.

In this newsletter you can read about the history of the **old Whidbey Telephone Building** in Langley. It has had several moves around town and is now located next door to us.

An excerpted article written by Kate Poss explores the legend of a **mystery ship in the Maxwellton Valley**.

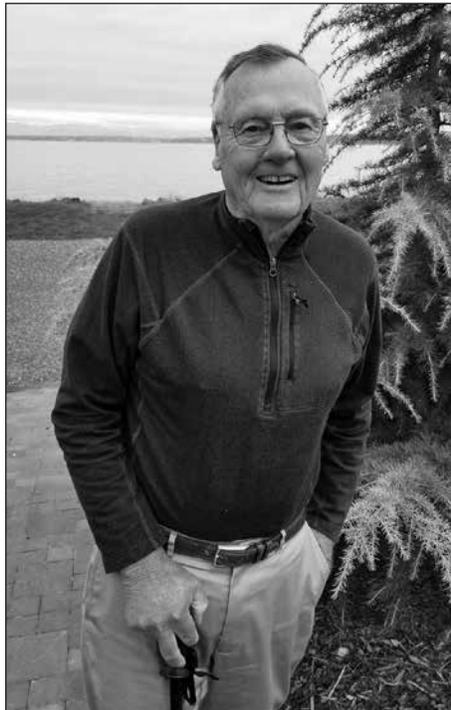
The article was originally featured in Kate's new online magazine, *This Is Whidbey*, which covers many topics about Whidbey Island. To view the whole article, log on to www.thisiswhidbey.com and look for the July issue.

The Society is providing 501(c)(3) nonprofit donation pass-through status for a major project begun by **Kyle Walker who is researching her great-grandparents' love story plus the Native American history of South Whidbey Island**.

Specifically, she is seeking information about the Brown family and their descendants at Sandy Point, formerly known as Brown's Point, and by its Lushootseed name of čəč̓lq̓s (ragged nose).

If you have family photographs, maps, newspapers, letters or documents that may contribute to this story, let us know.

Digitizing work on the old **Island County Fair Scrapbooks** continues thanks to the support of Board Mem-



Bill Haroldson, SWHS President

ber Charlie Pancerczewski and his wife, Gayle, a descendant of the pioneer Bainter, Catron and Wainio families.

These will be linked to our **website, currently undergoing a redesign to make it more cell phone friendly**.

When you become a member or renew your membership to SWHS, expect to receive more newsletters with untold stories about our island.

Our goal is to publish four more newsletters between now and next summer. If you or your business would like to sponsor one of these newsletters, contact us via email or phone.

On social media, follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/SouthWhidbeyHistory>

More than 3,000 people currently follow our South Whidbey Historical Society posts.

Should you have specific questions about local history, **visit our newly revised website at www.southwhidbeyhistory.org**.

Your Support Matters

We are always grateful for financial donations. And now, your donations will help us meet a **\$5k challenge operating grant provided by local philanthropist Nancy Nordhoff**.

Simply click on the donation page to donate safely via PayPal, or mail a check to SWHS / PO Box 612 / Langley, WA 98260.

Donating Local Historical Items

We love receiving items of local historical interest!

If you have items to donate, our curator would love to hear from you. We'll find a convenient and safe manner to pick them up or meet you.

We recently acquired several old Island newspapers, property deeds, maps and mammoth bones. Another recent donation was a **school bell thought to have come from the Mutiny Bay School** which was torn down in 1947. Let us know if you can provide information on the bell or Mutiny Bay School.

Join Our Legacy Circle

When you remember South Whidbey Historical Society in your will or estate plan, you help keep your community Historical Society and Museum serving our community.

Become Involved

Finally, we are seeking additional volunteers who may become Board members, and future docents for when our community opens up again — a time we all look forward to.

Email us at SWHMuseum@gmail.com or you can telephone the museum at (360) 221-2101. We likely won't be there but please leave us a message and we will return your telephone call or email.

Maxwelton's mystery ship revisited

This article is excerpted from an on-line article written by Kate Poss, editor of This Is Whidbey. For the full version, please visit the website www.thisiswhidbey.com and look for the July 27 issue.

A sunken ship. A box of bones that goes missing. Oral history shared by island Native Americans about a ship with a broken mast. Murder of a crew. Tall tales?

John Williamson lives in the Maxwelton Valley and believes there is truth about a sunken ship in the marshes, dating back to the 1850's. His wife Rebecca's grandfather, Herbert Fish, was a history professor at Central Washington University in Ellensburg (aka CWU), who learned of the myth of the sunken ship through conversation with Snohomish Indian Chief William Shelton.

I talked with John last week and he kindled interest in a mystery that has yet to be solved.

"Rebecca's grandfather was head of the history department at Ellensburg. He came here in around 1905 to gather information. He had knowledge of pre-European cultures. There is a brief that speaks to the first sailing ship that came into Useless Bay with a broken mast. Men came ashore with their animals. They went into Maxwelton Valley to gather a tree, removing its limbs preparing to take it out. A group of Indians attacked the shore party. They killed some of the crew. The main ship sailed away, leaving the smaller ship in the valley. It silted over and filled up with mud. The Burleys later moved to that location in the Maxwelton Valley.

"Leon Burley was ten when he crossed the West with his family. His family was part of a group of families which put in a tide gate to reclaim the

Maxwelton Valley for farmland. About 30 years ago, I went over and talked to him. He stopped and leaned on his pitchfork and pointed right over to the property along the valley floor, where he said it was located. Mentioned his family would hit something with their plows from time to time. Mr. Burley told me they removed chains and a cleat from a boat below that never rotted, due to its being in low-oxygen mud. People were killed there was what he had heard. He remembers his father talking about it.

"Across from the (Maxwelton) fire department is the old schoolhouse. There was a box in the attic full of hu-



Professor Herbert Fish and Chief Snakelum and his wife at Penn Cove. The crack in the photo is from a glass negative. Circa 1905

man bones rumored to be possibly from that event. When Mr. Burley passed away, 15, 20 years now, the family had to clear the property out and sold it. One of the Burley family remembered the bones and told my wife. At some point the bones were moved out. We don't know where they went when the schoolhouse was sold. Bottom line, there is written documentation by Professor Fish, who was writing a book with Chief William Shelton. They were writing it together. It was called *The Totem Maker*. Professor Fish died before the book was finished."

The written documentation Williamson refers to is in the form of letters Professor Fish wrote back and forth with Shelton, aka Wha-cah-dub, Whea-kadim, who was born on July 4, 1868, at

Sandy Point, Whidbey Island. Shelton shared the story of the ship's attack with Professor Fish, whose letters were donated to CWU's history department, which donated them to the City of Ellensburg Library. A copy of these letters is also available at the South Whidbey Historical Society...

Williamson contacted the South Whidbey Historical Society a couple of years ago and spoke with its president, Bill Haroldson, perking Bill's interest in the supposed sunken ship....

"Let me ramble," Bill says, while we're seated in the parlor of the museum on July 20. "Cora Cook, probably wrote more than anyone. Cora Cook used to write for the *Spindrift*, a promotional thing. Her lineage goes back to Paul Cunningham, her father, who used to ride as a substitute for Wild Bill Cody. He ended up here in 1905, where Sebo's Do-It Center is now. He became acquainted with William Shelton, (the last hereditary Snohomish chief). Cora Cook's allusion to Vancouver's ship discovering the wreck is wrong. I've gone through Vancouver's logs.

Maybe it's a Spanish galleon. Some early settlers say they discovered the boat in 1859. Cora mused that Indians or pirates might have sunk the ship. She liked to embellish her stories."

In a copy of *The Spindrift*, Cook writes: *Behind Maxwelton today we find a large marshland diked off from the sea. Indeed this cat-tails filled marsh is the core where Captain Vancouver's sailors found the old hull. The remains of this old ship were rediscovered in 1859 by the first white settlers of Deer Lagoon, Thomas Johns and Edward Oliver. They also found wild oxen roaming among the trees. Is it possible the oxen were aboard the ill-fated ship? Had the ship landed to find timber for a new mast?*

Continued next page

South Whidbey Historical Society Membership Form

**Keep our remarkable local history alive for future generations.
Become a member or renew your annual membership.**

Please fill in the information below and mail it along with a check to:
South Whidbey Historical Society / PO Box 612 / Langley WA 98260.

You may also join or renew online at our website at: www.southwhidbeyhistory.org



Name _____

Address _____ City, State, & Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Enclosed are my annual membership dues:

- Individual (\$20) Household (\$30)
 Business (\$50) Lifetime (\$300 or more)

My Donation: (SWHS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit)

- Enclosed is a donation of \$ _____
 Count this toward the matching challenge grant
 Please send me information on how to join the SWHS Legacy Circle.

Help us share South Whidbey history.

**Please make a donation to the
South Whidbey Historical Society and
remember us in your estate planning
so that we may continue sharing our
local history. Thank you.**

“Perhaps the ship’s captain and crew were killed by local Indians. It is even remotely possible the ship contained a pirate crew which fell to quarreling over booty. In the sands of Sunlight Beach on the Double Bluff side my father found two skeletons. One had a broken arm, another a fractured jaw. Could they have been part of the crew, victims of some unknown tragedy?” ...

Ann Linnea read Captain Vancouver’s logs and found no evidence his crew found a sunken ship. However, she does not deny the possibility that there could be something buried in the marsh. In *Journey through Maxwelton Watershed*, she writes about the marsh and farm field owned by Leon Burley,

a 20-acre farm bounded by Maxwelton and Quade creeks. A Salish tribe once lived on the south end of Whidbey.

Vancouver’s logs from his 1792 exploration in the Discovery do not mention shipwrecks, she writes.

“The legend of the Maxwelton Shipwreck has several elements of historical truth. Yet because of the lack of recorded information, many ‘facts’ can never be checked—the age, size, name and exact location of the shipwreck—and so it must remain part of the unverified lore of Maxwelton.”

Thinking the site might be viewed by radar to determine if a shipwreck lies beneath the marsh, Bill Haroldson

contacted Scott Williams, Cultural Resources Program Manager with the Washington State Dept. of Transportation Environmental Services office.

“One thing with myths, there is some basis for truth,” he said.

“If they hit the chain and cleat with a plow, plows went only 6 or 8 inches then. Seems if a ship were buried, it would be deeper. They could have hit a chain and cleat from something else. Maybe someone was exploring, or found a ship’s chain and cleat they were doing something else with.

“Having said that, there are examples where they get silted over, not usually

Continued on page 8

South Whidbey Historical Society
PO Box 612
Langley WA 98260



Mystery ship, continued

something you'd hit with a a plow, I wouldn't say it is impossible, it could be something. Pirates are a favorite theory.

“One thing we see over and over, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, is farmers when they're plowing, they'll hit Indian burials... We've been researching an old shipwreck in Oregon from 1693. We learned from Native American oral history that Europeans were on the Northwest coast that are not written in the history books. I've heard about slave raiders who were here before Vancouver. Indians' oral history tells they were taking slaves and raiding,” he said.

Scott adds that ground penetrating radar may not work if the marsh is in saltwater because salt acts as a sort of lead shield which prevents detection. He thought use of a magnetometer might work.

Back at the museum, Bill pulled out an 1872 map showing a now-disappeared sand spit that once extended from Maxwelton Beach to Useless Bay.

He says the entry through the sand spit then would have been too shallow for a large ship, but perhaps a smaller one did go through. Perhaps one named *Blue Wing* (overtaken by northern Indians in 1859)...

“I took photos of the area. Next question is you need money. We don't

have it at our little museum. I did find that UW has equipment which could be attached to a drone. Scott said if the land was radared, they could take a core sample and analyze the wood,” he said.

Estimated costs of a drone-mounted magnetometer could run up to \$30,000 Bill guessed....

John Williamson said he would move forward if the artifacts were on his property, but permission would have to be granted from its current owners...

He thought from reading Professor Fish's letters, the ship may have had Spanish origins.

“That isn't my assumption, it comes from Professor Fish's letters, that Spanish played with the animals on the beach,” John said. “Something

he heard from William Shelton that the crew was Spanish, not English, pre-dating Vancouver's discoveries. I remember talking to Mr. Burley, who witnessed pulling up pieces of ship's equipment while plowing.”

Editor's note: We will continue to update this story as new information surfaces.

INSIDE:

Historic Building	1-3
Matching Grant	4
President's Letter	5
Mystery Ship	6,7,8
Membership/Donations	7

www.SouthWhidbeyHistory.org

Thanks to *Whidbey Telecom* for sponsoring this newsletter issue

Thanks to Whidbey Telecom for underwriting the printing of this newsletter issue.

Look for details about the new Whidbey Telephone Museum in the next newsletter.

Would you like to sponsor a future issue of *Now and Then*? Contact Board President Bill Haroldson via email at SWHMuseum@gmail.com or by calling (360) 221-2101.

