



Homesteaders' Haven

Prior to the 1870s, Orcas Island hosted various tribal groups of the Northern Straits Salish. These residents were long and short-term tenants but the lack of tribal artifacts and human remains indicates that these were not permanent settlements. Visits from the Northern Straits Salish peoples became less frequent in the years after 1870.

Homesteaders were drawn to the Eagle Lake area of the island for many of the same reasons we are drawn to it today. They left behind the luxuries and conveniences of living that could be had on the mainland and built their lives here through hard work, commitment and the support of each other. We know a little bit about the first Eagle Lake area residents.

John Gottlieb Viereck immigrated to an area near Blaine in the 1840s. He owned a general store there and sailed his sloop through inland waterways trading with the Indians and early settlers in Canada and the San Juan Islands. In the early 1870s he became interested in land on the northeast end of Orcas Island. He brought his wife, Jennie Kahlan, a full blooded Tsimshian Indian and seven children to a log home he built on 175 acres of land. His patent parcel is described as being east of the current county road and three quarters of a mile north of the shoreline.

Heinrich Legbandt was a German member of the crew on a merchant ship bound for Fraser River. It is said that he jumped ship and made his way to Sehome or Bellingham as it's known today. He worked there for a while arriving on the east end of Orcas in 1872. He established his homestead on a 160 acre parcel next to Viereck's and in 1881 his brother arrived from Germany to join him. John Peter Legbandt settled the land adjacent to the northeast end of his brother's property. In 1883 his wife and daughter joined him on the island.

These are a few of the homesteaders who settled the Eagle Lake area. Some of their descendants remain on the island and have contributed to its growth and development for generations. It's their footprints that blazed the trail for Eagle Lake and led us to the land we enjoy today!