

FERRY HOUSE:
A Building History

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FERRY HOUSE

Significance

The Ferry House, built about 1860 on the west side of central Whidbey Island, Washington, remains one of the oldest extant structures on the island. Situated on the former Isaac Ebey Donation Land Claim and used variously as a mail station, tavern, inn, and residence, the Ferry House was the site of important activities that shaped the history of Whidbey Island and the state of Washington. The Ferry House, as well as its setting and outbuildings, is associated with the earliest generation of Euro-American settlers on Whidbey Island, most notably with Isaac Ebey's family. The Ferry House, owned by only two families in 140 years, has undergone remarkably few changes.

Building History

Ferry House, 1860-1916

During this fifty-six-year period, the Ferry House, built about 1860 on the 640-acre Isaac Ebey Donation Land Claim, was used as a stopping-place and tavern for people arriving at Ebey's Landing. Eventually developed into an inn and boarding house, the building also served as a residence for Ebey family members. Early in the Ferry House history, carpenters added a rear wing to the one and one-half story, rectangular main volume, thereby substantially increasing its capacity. At the same time, or relatively soon afterwards, builders erected a veranda across the main façade, and converted a gable-roof window above the veranda into a door. During these years, possibly the 1880s, a bay window was added on the south elevation of the rear wing. Through this period of changes and various uses, the Ferry House and its surrounding lands remained under the supervision of the Ebey family.

The Ferry House stands on the original donation land claim of Isaac Ebey, who arrived on Whidbey Island in 1850. Born near Columbus, Franklin County, Ohio, on January 21, 1818, he was the second child born to Jacob and Sarah Blue Ebey. Isaac Ebey became prominent in Adair County, Missouri, where he had moved with his parents in the mid-1830s. He married Rebecca Whitby Davis on October 3, 1843.¹ Their first son, Eason Benton Ebey, was born in Adair County in 1844, and their second son, Jacob Ellison Ebey, was born in Schuyler County, Missouri, in 1846. Leaving his wife and young sons in Missouri, Isaac Ebey came west in 1848, first to Oregon and then to the California gold mines.

Abandoning his mining endeavors after two years, Isaac Ebey sailed north to Puget Sound from San Francisco, California. After searching for suitable farmland, he selected a site on Whidbey Island and filed his claim on October 15, 1850. In 1851, Rebecca Ebey and their children traveled overland to join him in the complex of hewn-

¹ Susan Doyle and Fred Dykes, editors, *The 1854 Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott Ebey* (Independence, MO: Oregon-California Trails Association, 1997), 7. Isaac Ebey served as sheriff of Adair County from 1840 to 1844, was appointed circuit court clerk in 1845, and was admitted to the state bar in 1847.

log buildings known to the family as "The Cabins," located near the head of a ravine between the Ebey ship landing and higher ground at the edge of Ebey Prairie²

The Ebeys immersed themselves in work on the island. Isaac Ebey also saw extensive public service. Admitted to the Oregon Territorial bar in 1852, he was elected as Thurston County representative in the Oregon Legislative Assembly of 1852-1853, as customs collector for the Puget Sound district, and as revenues collector at the port of Olympia.³ Tragedy struck the family when Rebecca Ebey died of tuberculosis on September 29, 1853, four months after the birth of her third child.⁴ Isaac Ebey left the daily care of his young children to family members and continued his farming and public activities. In 1855-56 during Indian hostilities in the area, he also served as a captain of Company I, First Regiment, Washington Territorial Volunteers.

In 1855, Ebey ran against Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens for nomination as a delegate to Congress, losing the election. In January 1856, he married Emily Palmer Sponce and later that year, with Indian difficulties waning, he and his younger brother Winfield Scott Ebey (born December 21, 1831) contracted to supply meat and agricultural produce to the garrison at Fort Townsend.⁵ On August 11, 1857, Canadian Indians, seeking revenge for the murder of a chief, killed Isaac Ebey on the front porch of "The Cabins." Emily Ebey, the children, and guests escaped. Emily Ebey left Whidbey Island soon afterwards and filed suit to retain the dower portion of her husband's estate. Winfield Ebey acted as executor of his oldest brother's estate that included the land claim, crops, dwelling, outbuildings, and personal belongings.⁶

Eason and Ellison Ebey, ages thirteen and eleven, and their four-year old sister, Harriet, survived their father. The court appointed George Wesley Beam, husband of Almira Wright Beam, the boys' cousin, as their guardian. Jacob and Sarah Ebey cared for young Harriet. Winfield Ebey continued to oversee Isaac Ebey's estate on behalf of the minor children. The young boys joined George and Almira Beam in their home and, burdened with painful memories, the family abandoned "The Cabins" soon afterwards. Winfield Ebey wrote:

They are deserted for good, I suppose. We stript the walls of cloth and paper to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Indians. The old place looks lonesome and deserted. . . . The Cabins' once a place of resort are now an object of dread. . . . It will go to ruin and decay."⁷

Aching from the loss of his brother, Winfield Ebey looked after Isaac Ebey's children and spent time on his brother's land. On December 4, 1857, he wrote:

I have been sowing grass seeds most of the day. Blue Grass in the graveyard, a patch in the old garden. . . . Red Top in the old

² Jimmie Jean Cook, *A Particular Friend, Penn's Cove; A History of the Settlers, Claims and Buildings of Central Whidbey Island* (Coupeville, WA: Jimmie Jean Cook, 1972), 19. "The Cabins" lay east across a small ravine from the present site of the Ferry House.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19; Doyle and Dykes, *Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott*, 8.

⁵ Lucile McDonald, "Violent Death Ended Isaac Ebey's Career," Isaac Ebey vertical file, Island County Historical Society, Coupeville, Washington; "Ebey's Prairie and Landing," *Seattle Times*, 5 March 1961.

⁶ Doyle and Dykes, editors, *Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott*, 12. Emily Ebey eventually won her suit in 1862, but died soon afterwards. Further research into Isaac Ebey's estate and its inventory may reveal additional information concerning improvements.

⁷ Winfield Ebey Diary, undated entry (1857); Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 21.

garden in the ravine by the Cabins and a patch near the little old pond above them.⁸

During the next two years, as water traffic to Ebey Landing increased, Winfield Ebey, in consultation with George Beam (Eason, and Ellison Ebey's guardian), initiated construction of a building that could be leased out as a tavern and travelers' accommodation. This business venture would generate income for Isaac Eason and Ellison Ebey and help support the extensive farm operations.

This rectangular dwelling built by Winfield Ebey and George Beam (much later known as the Ferry House) was completed around 1860, according to secondary sources.⁹ The precise date of construction and the builders' names are unknown. Island County records make clear, however, that the building was in full operation as a tavern early in 1861. Soon after construction of the approximately twenty-by-forty-two-foot structure, it served as a post office, functioning as such between March and December 1861. On February 24, 1861, while preparing for his young niece Harriet's burial, Winfield Ebey visited the Wentworths (or possibly Whitworths) who were tenants at that time of the Ebey's family house (the Ferry House).¹⁰

Island County records and visual inspection suggest that the Ebey-Ferry House included the rectangular, one-and one-half-story main volume measuring approximately twenty by forty-two feet, with two rooms flanking a central hall on both the first and second floors. Two interior brick chimneys rose through the ridge of the roof near the sidewalls of the house. The dwelling was set on a hewn-timber foundation and built of box construction with vertical plank walls (and no studs). Six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows flanked the central entrance. The structure's horizontal weatherboard siding was applied at construction or shortly afterwards. The building was finished with a plain frieze, boxed cornice, and corner boards.¹¹

Within a relatively short time, most likely by late 1864, carpenters added a large two-story rear wing and a two-story veranda across the main facade of the house. Two considerations suggest this possibility. First, Island County deed records, dated May 28, 1864, record a mortgage taken out on the Ebey-Ferry House property by Isaac Ebey's heirs (through their guardian, George W. Beam).¹² Closer examination of this mortgage instrument may determine if the agreement provided the funds for construction of the rear wing to the existing dwelling. Second, while examining the Ebey-Ferry House in March 1999, architectural historian Philip Dole suggested that, although corner detail indicated both building volumes could have been built at the same time, there was a strong possibility that the rear wing was added not long after the initial building construction.¹³

⁸ *Ibid.*, December 4, 1857, quoted in Theresa Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery* (Coupeville WA: Island County Cemetery District, 1999), 6.

⁹ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 73; Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 9. Close scrutiny of Winfield Ebey's diaries and letters and those of other early Ebey Prairie settlers and visitors may yield information about agricultural practices on the Ferry House land.

¹⁰ Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 9.

¹¹ Luxenberg, Castellano, and Lein, "Ferry House," Ebey's Landing Inventory, Pacific Northwest Regional Office, National Park Service, 1983. See also Huffman, Harbour, and Luxenberg, "Stabilization Priorities, Ferry House, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve," February 3, 1998. No photographs, if they exist at all, have been found that depict the Ferry House during its earliest years. These could resolve many questions. Research into the existence and locations of sawmills in the vicinity of Ebey's Landing might shed light on the availability of sawn lumber for flooring and siding.

¹² Island County Deeds, Mortgage Roll 3, p. 99.

¹³ Philip Dole, "Ferry House Assessment" (following visit made with National Park Service staff), September 18, 1999.

Further evidence of this early rear addition is suggested in the 1934 Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) "Historical Sketch," written in 1934. Describing the Ferry House as built by Isaac Ebey's family after his death, the writer states that, "the west porch and east wing were added later by George Campbell (related to the Isaac Ebey family), who operated a tavern and saloon on the premises."¹⁴ Although the source of this information is not given, it still may be fairly accurate; in 1933-34, the HABS recorder could have recorded this information from Ebey Prairie residents, then in their seventies, who had actually witnessed the building's new construction.¹⁵ Despite the uncertainty of its construction date, the Ebey-Ferry House addition substantially expanded the building's size and function. On the ground floor, dining, cooking, and sleeping spaces were gained, and the second floor now had six to eight small sleeping rooms to accommodate additional guests.

In 1934, the HABS recorders aptly described the Ebey-Ferry House as serving "for years as a favorite rendezvous of seamen whose vessels berthed at Oak Harbor, Penn's Cove and Port Townsend."¹⁶ Several early documents describe this residence as a hostelry between 1860 and 1865 and confirm the early use of the Ferry House name for the property. On April 11, 1861, officials granted the second liquor license in Island County to F. G. Wentworth to sell spirits at the Ferry House at Ebey's landing. In 1862 and 1863, James Clark held the license for the business at that site. In August 1864, the county auditor ordered the transfer of the liquor license. That month, with a bond of \$500 posted to Hill Harmon with George Beam and Thomas Coupe as sureties, Clark's license was transferred to Harmon and E. F. Bunker, "to retail liquor at the Ferry House."¹⁷ On December 26, 1864, a coroner's report further affirms the building's use as a boarding house at that time. The coroner stated that George Pearce had been found dead in *his room* "at the Ferry House." In May 1865, a petition asking for the appointment of viewers to locate a county road from the beach in Coupeville to the beach near the Ferry House was presented to the Island County commissioners.¹⁸

Management of the Ferry House entered a new phase in 1865. Winfield Ebey, who had overseen business matters for his nephews since their father's death in 1856, died of tuberculosis on February 21, 1865. On July 26, 1865, Eason Ebey, having reached the age of twenty-one, was appointed guardian of his nineteen-year old brother, Ellison.¹⁹ The two young men took increasing personal responsibility for managing their property and apparently lived for a time at the Ferry House.²⁰ Eason Ebey's report to the Island County probate judge on June 4, 1867, concerning the guardianship of his brother, reveals extensive information about the use of the Ferry House and surrounding lands:

[In 1865] all the land suitable for cultivation was leased to the following parties -SW1/4 section to Hill Harmon; NW1/4 to Hill Harmon (H. W. Harmon) and (Reuben) Doyle; NE1/4 to (James)

¹⁴ Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), "Historical Sketch," Ebey [Ferry] House, Ebey's Landing, Whidbey Island, Island County, Washington, Project No. 39-W-13, June 1934. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

¹⁵ Further research might establish identity of George Campbell, his possible relationship to the Ebey family, and his potential role in work at the Ferry House.

¹⁶ HABS, "Historical Sketch," Ebey [Ferry] House.

¹⁷ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73; Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 22.

¹⁹ George Wesley Beam, guardian of Isaac Ebey's sons since August, 1857, died on May 10, 1866 of tuberculosis.

²⁰ The 1934 HABS "Historical Sketch" for the Ebey [Ferry] House states that Mrs. Flora Pearson Engle, who came to Whidbey Island in 1866, recalled that Eason Ebey was living in the Ferry House that year.

Harvic and Vidittoc. The remaining quarter section being used as pasture. For the use of the above named quarter sections the parties were to pay in a certain amount of improvements as set forth in the signed leases now in my hand. I cannot say that any of the parties except Harvic fulfilled the agreements with the departed dead [Winfield Ebey] but I will say that Hill Harmon damaged the quarter section which he farmed to the amount of one thousand dollars besides not fulfilling his obligation which can be safely counted at \$500 more.

The Ferry House was leased to R. L. Doyle on June 14, 1865 for the term of one year—the rent to be \$200, which in part has been paid in board for my ward and part is still due. After the expiration of Harvic's lease, my ward and myself farmed the field that he had rented, but made nothing more than our living and feed for the horses.

The amount of personal property now on hand belonging equally between us, is as follows—14 head of horses and colts and mares, 25 hogs, 19 sheep, 19 lambs, 3 cows, 3 calves, 1 steer.²¹

On November 11, 1867, Eason and Ellison Ebey drew up an agreement that, although may not have been officially recorded at the time, separated management and use of their father's donation land claim:

Being the heirs of I. N. and R. W. Ebey, Dcd, that E. B. Ebey should own all land lying on the northwest of the center line if the road not be in the center and that J. E. Ebey should possess the southeast half parcel. We also agree to divide equally all rails on said claim equally among us.²²

Eason Ebey, who had married Annie Louise Judson on February 19, 1867 at Ebey's Landing, had constructed a house of his own. "I have built with my own hands a good house on the East half of the land, [his property]; also a common building in the west half, also a large shed for hay or grain on the east half."²³

Ebey, who named his new home Willowwood, served as superintendent of schools for Island County from 1869 to 1874. He continued to oversee both his own and his aunt Mary Ebey Wright Bozarth's property nearby (the Jacob and Sarah Ebey property). Ellison Ebey attended the University of Washington between 1871 and 1874. Within a few years, he married Mary Irving Van Wormer.²⁴ Around 1880, Mary Ebey gave birth to a son, Harold Ebey. Another son, Edward, was born around 1886.

Ellison and Mary Ebey occupied the Ferry House from the late 1870s to 1889.²⁵ They took in guests at the Ferry House, known as "Ebey's Inn" during the 1880s when many vessels sailed into Ebey's Landing. In 1885, the *Sun* reported that the steamer

²¹ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 73-74.

²² *Ibid.*, 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ Letter from Eason Ebey to Mary Bozarth, February 9, 1873; George Albert Kellogg, *A History of Whidbey Island* (Oak Harbor, WA: G. B. Astel, 1934), 89; Dorothy Neil and Lee Brainard, *By Canoe and Sailing Ship They Came: A History of Whidbey Island* (Oak Harbor, WA: Spindrift Publishing Co., 1989), 104.

²⁵ Kellogg, *History of Whidbey Island*, 118; HABS, "Historical Sketch," Ebey [Ferry] House, 1934, quoted Flora Pearson Engle as stating that Ellison Ebey was living at the Ferry House in 1880. Also see Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 17.

Enterprise left Ebey's Landing at 1:00 p.m. every day except Sunday."²⁶ In June 1887, Eason Ebey, who had moved away from Willowood and Whidbey Island, visited his brother at the inn. After a moonlight-washed walk from Coupeville, he waited at the front door of the inn. "I hesitated some moments before ringing the bell as all was so still around the place and, except for the thundering surf . . . quietness reigned supreme."²⁷

John LeSourd, who came to central Whidbey Island in 1885 at the age of ten years, recalled Ellison and Mary Ebey at Ebey's Inn.

[Ellison Ebey] lived down here at Ebey's Landing house when we came here. . . . The mail came in down here at Ebey's Landing every day about noon. . . . Mr. Ebey . . . ran this stage and hauled passengers over to Coupeville. . . . Ebey and his wife . . . operated the old hotel. Passengers would come in on this boat from Port Townsend at noon and they would go up to the buildings . . . and maybe have their dinner before the stage would take them over to Coupeville. That was Mr. Ebey's business, running the stage service and hotel. . . . That was the old Ebey Inn.²⁸

In the later 1880s and 1893, three Ebey family members died. In 1889, Ellison and Mary Ebey's three-year-old son, Edward, died and was buried in the family graveyard. Ellison Ebey himself soon became ill. In June 1890, the probate court of Island County established his guardianship. He died July 10, 1890 at Lynden, Washington, at the home of his brother, leaving his wife and young son.²⁹ Eason Ebey died three years later on July 13, 1893 at Lynden, Washington, at the age of forty-nine years.³⁰

In 1889, widowed Mary Van Wormer Ebey leased the Ferry House tract to P. P. Custer, who remained on the property until 1891. Custer's son, Harris, recalled his father carried the mail and passengers from Coupeville to Ebey's Landing. These travelers ate their noon meal at the Ferry House before boarding the mail boat for Port Townsend. Passengers from Port Townsend were given their noon meal and transported with the mail to Coupeville.³¹

On December 6, 1891, Mary Ebey leased the property to Atherton Herrett, an action that ended permanent Ebey family occupancy of the land. "Ebey's Landing farm, a 58-acre tract with dwelling house, barn, and other buildings for one year for \$375 with the stipulation that if the mail between Ebey's Landing and Coupeville should be discontinued at any time before December 12, 1892, the rent would be reduced to \$325."³² Mention of the postal service in this Ebey-Herrett deed infers that the Herretts offered similar services at Ebey's Landing as had Ellison and Mary Ebey and, later, P. P. Custer. Atherton Herrett apparently managed the property between 1891 and 1898. Between 1898 and 1915, Atherton Herrett's brother and sister-in-law, Gilbert and

²⁶ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 74; Luxenberg, Castellano, and Lein, "Ferry House," Ebey's Landing Inventory, Pacific Northwest Regional Office, National Park Service, 1983.

²⁷ Letter from Eason Ebey to his wife, Annie, June 7, 1887, quoted in Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 15.

²⁸ Roger Sherman, *The Sinking of the Calista*, 11.

²⁹ Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery*, 20; Island County Probate Court, Roll 14, p. 94; Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 22.

³⁰ Cook, *A Particular*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³² *Ibid.*, 74.

Evaline (sp?) Herrett ran a boarding house on the property.³³ Ada Herrett LeSourd recalled living in the Ferry House with her family during the 1890s, according to Ada Herrett's step-grandson, Roger Sherman.³⁴

Photograph No. 1, taken around 1910, depicts the Ferry House during the period of the Herretts' occupancy. The caption accompanying this image reads "The House at Ebey's landing place. The Herrett family lived in it from the fall Oct. 1898 to the fall of 1915."³⁵ Photographs Nos. 2 and 3 are taken at about the same time. For nearly twenty-five years (1891 to 1915), Atherton Herrett and Gilbert and Eveline Herrett were associated with the Ferry House and its management.

Additional study may determine if, during their tenancy, the Herrett's operation shifted from active use of the facility as a mail stop and inn to that of a boarding house. In the early twentieth century, steamers were apparently re-routed to other locations, such as Fort Henry and Coupeville. Water traffic to Ebey's Landing consequently declined and use of the Ferry House as an active busy inn ended during those years.

The dates of modifications to the Ferry House after construction of the rear wing about 1865 are unknown at the present time. These changes include the construction of the three-sided bay window off the dining room on the south elevation of the rear wing and possibly of the dining room fireplace. The construction date of the shed-roofed addition and porch on the east (and rear) elevation is also unknown. A photograph (No. 1) of the Ferry House's west and south elevations, taken around 1910, clearly shows that both the bay window and the shed addition existed at that time. The photograph also depicts sawn board fencing surrounding the dooryard.

Ferry House Landscape, Setting, and Outbuildings, 1860-1916

A thorough study of land ownership of the entire 641-acre Isaac Ebey Donation Land Claim has not yet been conducted. It appears, however, that the land was treated as one parcel between 1851 (the year Isaac Ebey secured his claim) and 1867, when, by personal agreement, Eason and Ellison Ebey divided their father's original holdings into two parcels. From 1867 until 1917, the Ebey brothers' informal division of the property appears to have remained in force. In 1917, Ellison Ebey's son, Harold Ebey, sold his portion, which included the Ferry House.³⁶

From the earliest Euro-American settlement on central Whidbey Island, Isaac Ebey raised crops that sustained his family as well as his stock. These included wheat, barley, oats, and potatoes. Vegetable gardens and fruit trees provided additional sustenance.³⁷ Environmental historian Richard White notes that large portions of the

³³ Roger Sherman, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 30, 2000. Sherman has access to photographs contained in a family album, located in the home of his mother, Dorothy LeSourd Sherman.

³⁴ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 74; telephone conversation with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 21, 2000. Sherman stated that his step-grandmother, Ada Herrett, lived in the Ferry House in the early 1900s and took in boarders.

³⁵ Roger Sherman, December 28, 2000. Photograph and caption from a scrapbook in the possession of Dorothy LeSourd Sherman, Roger Sherman's mother.

³⁶ Island County Deeds, Patent, USA to Isaac N. and Rebecca Ebey, Roll 5, p. 156, September 10, 1880.

³⁷ Richard White, "The Garden and Wilderness, the Unexpected Consequences of Island Farming," *Island Independent*, 14 April 1994; Winfield Ebey Diary, December 4, 1857, quoted in Theresa Trebon, *Sunnyside Cemetery* (Coupeville WA: Island County Cemetery District, 1999), 6. Winfield Ebey mentions scattering grass seed in the old garden. The 1934 HABS drawings of the Ebey [Ferry] House mark the location of a Bellefleur apple tree north of the dwelling.

land on the island probably remained undeveloped and that areas of wild grasses would have been reserved as pasture and used to cut for hay.³⁸

Following Ellison Ebey's death in July 1890, the leased Ebey property probably was used to grow similar crops. The deed of lease between Mary Ebey and Atherton Herrett in December 1891 provided for planting timothy on a portion of the Ferry House property.³⁹ Photographs Nos. 5 a, b, and c., and Photograph No. 6, panoramic overviews of Ebey Prairie taken about 1910, depict the fields and fencing patterns. Crop types may be recognizable to the trained eye. Harold Ebey, Ellison Ebey's son, oversaw the management of the property during the Herrett's tenure in the Ferry House. In 1915, Ebey, then residing in California, described the land as "having about 32 [acres] under cultivation." Two years later, he wrote, "Mr. Shreck has the place under crop this year."⁴⁰

Outbuildings associated with the property's earliest development are not known but assumed to be no longer standing. The earliest photographs of the Ferry House and its outbuildings date from the very late 1800s and early 1900s. Photograph No. 1 clearly shows the existence, at that time, of a wood-frame, gable-roofed barn north of the Ferry House and a wood-frame, gable-roofed shed at the rear of the house. Similarly, Photograph No. 4 shows the entire Ferry House ensemble. While construction of this roughly fifty-by-fifty-foot barn and the shed by the Ebey family is not known, it is likely that such substantial buildings would have been erected by the properties' owners rather than by lessees. Mary Ebey's lease to Atherton Herrett, dated December 6, 1891, noted the existence of a "dwelling house, barn and other buildings."⁴¹ It is commonly believed by Ebey Prairie residents that the timbers used in the frame of the barn were retrieved from the nearby beach, a common practice in the early days of farming on the island, according to Dale Sherman, longtime Ebey Prairie resident.⁴²

The National Park Service Inventory of the Ferry House property (1983) noted the existence of an outhouse. No construction date has been established for this small wood-frame, gable-roofed structure. The location of the outhouse(s) probably changed over the decades, but may have always stood to the rear of the house and not far from the sloping ravine leading down to the beach.

Ferry House, 1917-1939

Harold Ebey, the son of Ellison and Mary Ebey, spent his earliest years at Ebey's Landing. Only about ten years old at the time of his father's death in 1890, he and his mother, apparently moved away from the Ferry House and visited the family property only on occasion.⁴³ As early as the summer of 1915, Harold Ebey expressed interest in selling the property he referred to as "the Landing." That year, he offered for sale "fifty-

³⁸ White, "Garden and Wilderness."

³⁹ For additional information concerning the area's agricultural practices, see Richard White's *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County Washington* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1980).

⁴⁰ Letters dated July 16, 1915 and June 7, 1917, Robert Pratt Estate Collection, Island County Historical Society.

⁴¹ Photographs of the barn and shed intact may reveal further information concerning their dates of construction. If the Ebey family built them, one or both of these outbuildings predated 1890. Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 74.

⁴² Dale Sherman, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 19, 2000.

⁴³ "Who's Who on Shore and Sea," *Shipping Register*, 10 December 1927, 17.

eight acres, about thirty-two under cultivation."⁴⁴ In June 1917, when Ebey found an interested buyer, he hesitated giving up his family's home and land. On Nov. 10, 1917, however, he and his wife, Frances, sold the Ferry House and acreage to Frank J. Pratt, Jr., and his wife, Madelene (Lena) Kohne Pratt.⁴⁵ With this sale, Harold Ebey, then a prominent figure in the international shipping business and a resident of San Francisco, ended more than six decades of Ferry House property ownership by the Ebey family.⁴⁶

Frank Pratt was born at Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts January 8, 1863. He graduated from Amherst College in 1886, was admitted to the bar, and practiced law in Greenfield, Massachusetts, and New York City. In 1897, Pratt left New England to enter law practice in Seattle. On August 9, 1901, Frank Pratt and his wife, Helen T. Pratt, purchased five and one-half acres of land on Whidbey Island. The land, owned by Howard A. and Mary L. Hartzell, constituted part of the former Isaac Ebey Donation Land Claim No. 38.⁴⁷ The Pratts' apparently spent at least part of the year on central Whidbey Island. In March 1912, the local newspaper wrote:

Mr. and Mrs. F. J. Pratt arrived on the steamer *Calista* Tuesday evening and . . . will spend the summer here at their home on the west of Ebey's Prairie. They have brought a handsome 38-horse power Cadillac auto with them.⁴⁸

Frank Pratt became single during the next two years.⁴⁹ His second marriage, to Madelene (Lena) Kohne of Coupeville, took place on December 8, 1914. Lena Pratt, born May 12, 1884 in Coupeville, had attended local schools. Prior to her marriage, she had served as Island County superintendent of schools.⁵⁰ The location of the Pratts' first home on the island is not known. In the 1920s, the couple constructed a residence overlooking Ebey's Prairie, several hundred yards away from the Jacob and Sarah Ebey House.⁵¹

Frank Pratt's ownership of the Ferry House and land extended from 1917 to his death on December 27, 1939. During that time, the Ferry House changed from an inn to the private residence of tenants, some of who farmed the land around the house.

⁴⁴ Letter dated July 16, 1915. Robert Pratt Estate Collection, Island County Historical Society.

⁴⁵ Island County Deeds, Vol. 34 p. 498.

⁴⁶ *Shipping Register*, 10 December 1927 and miscellaneous clippings from the *San Francisco Call* and other newspapers, Ferry House vertical file, Island County Historical Society.

⁴⁷ Island County Deeds, 9: 222. Frank Pratt apparently began his forty-year residency on the island at this time. *Island County Times*, 4 January 1940. Frank Pratt's obituary states that he had resided on Whidbey Island for "some forty years."

⁴⁸ Cook, *A Particular Friend*, 122, *Island County Times*, 22 March 1912.

⁴⁹ It is not known whether the Pratts were divorced or if Helen Pratt died. Roger Sherman, on December 28, 2000, recalled that his mother's family provided board for Frank Pratt, possibly during the period before he lived permanently on Whidbey Island and before he and Lena Pratt were married in December 1914.

⁵⁰ *Whidbey News Times*, 16 December 1965

⁵¹ A precise construction date for the structure has not been established. Island County Deed Records, transaction #23903, March 25, 1922. A. H. Kohne, Lena Pratt's father, sold the couple land in the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Township 31 North, Range 1 East. The fact that Frank Pratt later deeded this land at a consideration of "natural love and affection and 1\$" to be his wife's "sole and separate" property, suggests that it may have been their home site. Charles Arnold, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 20, 2000. Arnold, Whidbey Island resident who knew the Pratts, recalled that they built their home "in the early 1920s." Island County Deed Records, Volume 43, p. 474. The deed between Frank Pratt, Jr., and Ivor Powell in 1928 contains wording that exempts the "new house" on the property from use by the tenant. Roger Sherman, telephone conversation with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 21, 2000. Mr. Sherman stated that the Pratts' first home burned down after Frank Pratt's death in 1939. The dwelling now standing on that site dates after 1940.

Freeman Boyer, Jr., longtime resident of central Whidbey Island, recalled that his uncle, Jasper Boyer, may have occupied the Ferry House in the late 1910s.⁵² By the early 1920s and for a period extending into the late 1930s, the Powell family occupied the Ferry House. Robert Strong, longtime Whidbey Island resident, recalled visiting his grandmother, Elizabeth Powell, in the house in the early 1920s when she and her two sons, Ivor and William Powell, occupied the ground floor of the "old hotel." The Powells used the outhouse during their residence in the house; there was no inside bathroom. The family used the shed at the rear of the Ferry House for storing wood and, possibly, for protecting their automobile. Ivor Powell farmed the land.⁵³

Frank Pratt held a deep interest in the history of the Ferry House property (as well as other historic Ebey Prairie properties). He provided basic maintenance for the residence. One of his first major repair tasks occurred shortly after his purchase of the property.

On July 18, 1918, lightning struck the south elevation of the house, destroying an interior brick chimney, ripping much of the siding off the end wall, and breaking two windows.⁵⁴ The local *Island County Times* reported that no one was injured by the lightning strike. Frank Pratt replaced the damaged siding, repaired the windows, and erected an exterior brick chimney to replace the damaged interior chimney. The precise date of this reconstruction is unknown, but it is unlikely that the damaged structure remained long in disrepair, since it may have been rented as a resident.⁵⁵ The reconstruction of the former interior chimney as an exterior chimney following the lightning strike altered the structure's appearance. Photograph No. 7 shows the south elevation of the Ferry House with repair work underway. The 1934 HABS photograph (Photograph No. 8) shows the replacement chimney and unpainted newer siding.

The Ferry House experienced another notable physical change during Frank Pratt's ownership—the loss of the two-story porch across the main facade. Robert Strong remembered that a porch extended across the main facade in the 1920s and 1930s. A HABS photograph taken around 1934 (Photograph No. 8) shows the porch still in place. (Although no porch existed on the south elevation of the Ferry House, Strong recalls that a porch did extend across the rear of the building at that time.) Strong recalled that the front veranda was torn down or collapsed in 1937, four years after the HABS team had drawn plans of the house with this porch. Since the structure continued to be used intermittently as a residence, it is likely that the door opening from the second-floor was changed to a window after the demise of the porch.

It also appears that portions of the dwelling were re-sided during the years of Frank Pratt's ownership.⁵⁶ The Ferry House, painted white during the Herrett occupancy, has apparently not been repainted in the last eighty or ninety years. The 1934 HABS drawings depict the Ferry House as it appeared during the Powell family's tenancy. Since the Powells lived primarily on the ground floor of the structure, the upper level may have retained its appearance from earlier decades.⁵⁷

⁵² Freeman Boyer, Jr., telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 22, 2000.

⁵³ Robert Strong, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 21, 2000.

⁵⁴ *Island County Times*, 19 July 1918, clipping in Cultural Resources Division, Columbia-Cascade System Support Office, National Park Service, Seattle, Washington.

⁵⁵ Philip Dole, September 18, 1999. Professor Dole's physical assessment of both exterior chimneys places their construction date in the early 20th century.

⁵⁶ Rob Harbour, Gretchen Luxenberg, and Laurin Huffman, "Stabilization Priorities, Ferry House, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve," February 3, 1998.

⁵⁷ HABS Drawings, Ebey [Ferry] House, 1934.

Frank Pratt's appreciation of the history of the Ebey family and the Ferry House was expressed in other ways. In 1928, Frank Pratt placed a monument commemorating the location of the original Isaac Ebey home known as "The Cabins." (Pratt's father-in-law Anthony Kohne had assisted island resident W. B. Engle in removing the structure's remnants sometime prior to 1907.⁵⁸) On December 4, 1929, the Pratts put the Ferry House property and other acreage into a trust for the benefit of their fifteen-year-old son Robert, which they administered.⁵⁹

On December 27, 1939, Frank Pratt, Jr., died by his own hand in his home on Whidbey Island. His widow Lena Pratt and son Robert, a student at the University of Washington at the time, survived him. Following Frank Pratt's death, Robert Y. Pratt of Seattle, Washington, assumed the responsibility of managing several hundred acres of land owned by the Pratts, including the Ferry House property.

Landscape, Setting, and Outbuildings, 1917-1939

In addition to the outhouse and the woodshed, outbuildings that existed during the Powells' occupancy included a granary, measuring approximately ten by twenty feet, located north of the house, according to Robert Strong. He recalled that a barn stood about 75 feet from the granary and about 150 feet north of the Ferry House. The barn's shed-roofed lean-to section along the side was used for storing the tractor and other farm machinery. During the 1930s, the barn housed five or six milk cows. The barn's haymow was used to store loose hay.⁶⁰ Charles Arnold, eighty-five years old and a long-time resident of Whidbey Island, remembered that the Powells occupied the Ferry House during the 1920s and 1930s. Arnold recalled that the Powells kept horses in the large, gable-roofed barn and used it to store hay and grain.

In 1928, when Ivor Powell farmed the land around the house, the fields were planted in wheat, oats, barley, and hay. On October 1, 1928, Frank Pratt, Jr., and Ivor Powell signed a five-year lease agreement, according to Island County deed records.

The farm known as Ebey Landing Farm . . . *with the exception of the woodland and the new house thereon.* . . . Lessee shall have free use of buildings without rent and also free use of one acre of ground adjoining said farm buildings for a home garden...Yearly rent shall be one-quarter of all crops and produce raised on such farm.⁶¹

Freeman Boyer, Jr., reported that farmers typically rotated crops and tried to change their crop selection in response to market demands and prices. Common crops grown at the Ferry House property during the Powell's tenancy included grains, barley, wheat, alfalfa hay, and squash for the winter market, as well as seeds for cabbage and other vegetables.⁶²

⁵⁸ Frank Pratt to Edmond Meany, April 4, 1928, cited in Theresa Trebon, interview with Robert Pratt, 97.39.3, 14.

⁵⁹ *Island County Deeds*, Volume 45, p. 440.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* The HABS photograph, taken c. 1934 during the Powell's occupancy of the property, shows what looks like cabbage growing in front of the house.

⁶¹ *Island County Deeds*, Volume 43, p. 474, "except such quarter share rent shall not be paid on such portion as shall reasonably be fed to stock and poultry on the farm for the joint profit of owner and tenant. This exception of share rent shall not apply to horse feed and feed of any other animals used as draught animals to operate the farm, but this latter shall be at sole charge of the tenant lessee. The yearly rent shall also include one quarter of all animal and dairy products and all other products raised on said farm."

⁶² Freeman Boyer, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 22, 2000.

The Ferry House, Outbuildings, and Setting, 1940-1998

Lena Pratt lived in the family home until her death on December 9, 1965.⁶³ During the twenty-five years between her husband's death and her own, she continued to oversee the Ferry House property. The land continued to be farmed, but the dwelling's occupancy appears to have ended. Robert Strong recalls that the Ferry House remained unoccupied after the Powells left in the late 1930s.

Robert Pratt recalled that during World War II, a detachment of soldiers lived in the Ferry House. An observation post with two gun mounts stood near the ravine. The area, Pratt remembered, was restricted during the war and one had to have a special permit to work the surrounding lands.⁶⁴

Albert Heath, a professional artist, came to Whidbey Island following World War II, and lived in the Ferry House from approximately 1947 to 1954. Heath occupied three rooms: the dining room with the bay window, the room behind it, which he used as a bedroom, and the kitchen at the rear of the house. During these years, the Ferry House had no plumbing; water was carried from the well near the back porch. A woodstove in the kitchen and a fireplace in the dining room provided the only heat. Like others before him, Albert Heath used the outhouse, located about twenty feet away from the back porch near the draw that sloped down to the beach. The rear porch had a wall on the ocean side to protect it from southerly winds.⁶⁵

Heath recalled that the barn had vertical planks as siding and a cedar shake roof. It was used for storing hay. Heath used the shed behind the house for storing wood and for parking his car.⁶⁶ During the late 1940s and 1950s, the Ferry House property was used to grow Hubbard squash for Seattle markets. During the years of Heath's residence in the Ferry House, grain was not grown near the dwelling, but was raised on higher ground on Ebey Prairie. No grazing occurred near the Ferry House during these years.⁶⁷ Dale Sherman, who has lived and worked near the Ferry House throughout his life, reported that the Ferry House has remained unoccupied except for occasional visitors since the late 1950s.⁶⁸

Following Lena Pratt's death in 1965, Robert Pratt assumed responsibility for the family's holdings on central Whidbey Island. Pratt, a graduate of the University of Washington and a lifelong scholar with an avid interest in natural science, retained his primary residence in Seattle with his wife, Helen, but spent considerable time on his Whidbey Island property. Pratt attempted to preserve the property as he remembered it throughout his youth.⁶⁹

In 1978, Congress established the 17,000-acre Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve on Whidbey Island. Over ninety percent of the property within the reserve, including more than 650 acres owned by Robert Pratt, was privately owned.⁷⁰

⁶³ *Whidbey News-Times*, 16 December 1965.

⁶⁴ Robert Pratt, interview with Theresa Trebon, 1999.

⁶⁵ Albert Heath, telephone communication with Gail Evans Hatch, December 23, 2000.

⁶⁶ Heath does not recall the existence of a granary on the property during his occupancy.

⁶⁷ Heath, December 23, 2000.

⁶⁸ Dale Sherman, telephone communication with Gail Evans-Hatch, December 19, 2000.

⁶⁹ Robert Y. Pratt, "Biographical Information," Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, University of Washington.

⁷⁰ Patrick Connolly, "Protection for Ebey's Prairie," undated (2000), newspaper clipping, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, National Park Service.

The reserve was created "to preserve and protect rural community, which provides an unbroken historic record from . . . nineteenth-century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time."⁷¹

Between 1940 and 1998, during the period when Lena and Robert Pratt were responsible for the property, the Ferry House appears to have experienced few changes. The outbuildings fared less well. The National Park Service inventory of 1983 noted that the barn and shed were still standing. By 1995, the barn had collapsed. Dale Sherman recalled that the barn was blown down in a storm and later removed.⁷² The shed behind the Ferry House collapsed in 2000. Please see Photograph Nos. 9 and 10.

Ferry House, 1998-Present

In 1998, the movie *Snow Falling on Cedars* was filmed at the Ferry House. Film crews erected the present small front porch, repaired the front of the house, installed a different front door, and painted and wallpapered interior rooms. Local sources stated that after filming was completed, funds paid by the film company to use the site were to be applied toward a constructing a new foundation and roof.⁷³

Robert Pratt died March 7, 1999, in Seattle, Washington. His death raised fears that the Ferry House property might be lost to development. Pratt had to sell or develop the land throughout his lifetime. Under the provisions of his will, approximately 147 acres were donated to the Nature Conservancy, including 102 acres of beach and bluff property, Perego's Lake, the Jacob Ebey House and Blockhouse, the Ferry House and forty-five acres of adjoining farmland. The Conservancy described plans to donate the Ferry House to the National Park Service and to sell a conservation easement on the farmland to it. The Nature Conservancy had also taken options on 380 acres of additional land on the reserve.⁷⁴

The Ferry House, the shed, and outhouse remain on the property. Acknowledging the significance of the dwelling, Professor Philip Dole, during a tour of the property in March 2000 noted the importance of the outbuildings:

Of extraordinary importance are the existing outbuildings. I found these unusual in their detail and their range of spaces. Outbuildings rarely survive. For most of its four phases this house would have been helplessly deformed, paralyzed without its outbuildings. A rural house of this kind is one, complete, with its outbuildings.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, National Park Service," brochure, undated.

⁷² Dale Sherman, December 19, 2000.

⁷³ *Whidbey News-Times*, 3 April 1998; *The Herald*, 5 April 1998.

⁷⁴ Connolly, "Protection for Ebey's Prairie," Undated newspaper clipping.

⁷⁵ Philip Dole to Gretchen Luxenberg, March 14, 2000, Columbia-Cascade System Support Office, National Park Service.

Ferry House Summary Chronology

- 1851 Isaac Ebey secured Donation Land Claim #38 on central Whidbey Island.
- 1851-
1857 Isaac Ebey built and developed "The Cabins" to the east and across the ravine from the present Ferry House.
- 1857 Isaac Ebey killed at "The Cabins."
- c.1860 Ferry House constructed; used as a tavern.
- c.1864 Rear wing of Ferry House added; building continued in use as an inn.
- 1867 Eason and Ellison Ebey divided Donation Land Claim #38 by agreement
Eason Ebey built separate dwelling on his portion of land.
- 1880-
1889 Eason Ebey moved away from Whidbey Island; Ellison and Mary Ebey
ran Ebey's Inn at the landing.
- 1889-
1917 Mary Ebey and son Harold Ebey leased property from 1889 to about
1915; land farmed and house used as inn, boardinghouse and mail
stop.(Custer, Herretts); 1917 land cultivated by "Mr. Shreck."
Remnants of "The Cabins" torn down by 1907.
- 1917 Property purchased by Frank Pratt, Jr., and Lena Pratt.
- 1917-
1939 Property owned by Frank Pratt, Jr.
Dwelling and fields leased out during these years for agricultural purposes.
(Boyer, Powells)
- 1918 Lightning strike damaged house; Frank Pratt, Jr., replaced an interior chimney
on south elevation with an exterior chimney, replaced broken windows and
damaged siding.
- 1928 Frank Pratt, Jr., placed marker indicating location of "The Cabins."
- 1939 Frank Pratt, Jr., died; his widow Lena Pratt and son, Robert Pratt managed the
Ferry House property. (Property left in trust for Robert Pratt by his father).
- 1940-
1945 World War II. Military personnel used Ferry House for lodging.
- 1947-
1954 Albert Heath, an artist, lived in the Ferry House. Ferry House land leased to
farmers.

Ferry House
A Building History, January 2001

- 1955-
1960s Ferry House probably unoccupied, except for short-term visitors.
- 1965 Lena Pratt died.
- 1966-
1999 Robert Pratt managed the Ferry House property.
House occupied only occasionally by weekend visitors.
- 1995 Ferry Barn had collapsed by this time.
- 1998 *Snow Falling on Cedars* filming done on property; alterations/repairs made to Ferry House for film.
- 1999 Robert Pratt died.
- 1999-
2000 Nature Conservancy/National Park Service acquire Ferry House property.
- 2000 Ferry House rear shed had collapsed by this time.

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