

# The Lopez Island Historical Society & Museum

P.O. Box 163 • Lopez Island, WA 98261 • [lopezmuseum@rockisland.com](mailto:lopezmuseum@rockisland.com) • [www.rockisland.com/~lopezmuseum](http://www.rockisland.com/~lopezmuseum)

Newsletter

Fall 2006

## Mother Brown and Her Family—Community Leaders, Boat Builders, Farmers

Charles Brown moved to Lopez Island in 1870. In tow were his wife, Conna (K-naugh), young daughters Ella (b. 1858), Maggie (b. 1863), Mariah (b. 1865), and Mary Jane (b. 1867). He homesteaded 167 acres adjacent to James Nelson's property and Charles Swift's near Port Stanley. Many fruit trees in the beautiful orchard he planted still stand and bear fruit, due south of the Port Stanley school.



Mother Brown with daughter Mary Jane

from port to port in Europe, the East Indies, around Cape Horn, and eventually to San Francisco. From there he was believed to have sailed to the Hawaiian Islands on an American vessel. He arrived in Victoria, British Columbia in 1853, where he left the ship. Soon he hired a couple of Indians to paddle him across the straits to Port Townsend in a canoe, for which he paid them \$40 (Rev. H.K. Hines, 1893.)

His first job was at the mill in Port Ludlow. There he built his first schooner, *Eclipse*, in 1855. In May of that

Born in Sweden on August 1, 1828, Charles (whose surname may have originally been Christianson) learned carpentry skills from his father, Erik, who was considered a master carpenter in his village. When Charles was fifteen, he left Sweden on a British merchant ship. He spent ten years traveling

year, there had been an eclipse visible in the area, likely the inspiration for the name. He continued building, sailing, and selling his ships through 1865, transporting mail, apples, potatoes, and such from Olympia to Victoria, according to customs records. The *Eclipse* was sold to Edward Barrington. Customs agent Isaac Ebey had the vessel seized for transporting whiskey to Indians (*A History of Whidbey's Island*, 1934). The *J.K. Thorndyke* was bought by William Winsor, who chauffeured James Swan aboard her to Neah Bay. Swan mentions his trip aboard the *J.K. Thorndyke* in his book, *Almost out of this World*. The *Surprise* was the largest of his ship, about 57'. She was sold in Victoria, and later used in the sealing trade. Charles built the *Restless* in 1858 at Port Ludlow as well. He carried flour aboard the *Restless* from Crosby's mill in Tumwater, to Yesler's store in Seattle. He homesteaded 157 acres on Mystery Bay on Marrowstone Island (1863), where he built his first home and planted many fruit trees. There he built the 32' schooner *Messenger*, and a 29' sloop, *Mystery*, named for the bay in which he built her. In 1870, Charles sold his property on Marrowstone Island to J.R. Williamson, for \$400 in gold coin.

In 1872, Charles and Conna were officially married in American Camp on San Juan Island. Her name became Mary Jane. She was born in the Prince Rupert area of British Columbia, known as Metlakatla. She was a Coast Tsimshian. It is still unclear how Charles met her. There were many marriages between white settlers and



Charles Brown

# Message from the Board

by Mike Ellis, President

Our big news is that the *Walnut Tree Invitational* was a very great success. The Lopez community contributed a splendid sum of money. Without question the most significant contribution to this success was made by the artists who created and donated the delightful selection of artworks and craft-pieces. Artists—we are deeply grateful for your participation. So, we thank the donors, buyers, sponsors and volunteers who created a good time while supporting both the Museum and our community of artists; an all-win result.

A very significant contribution to “*Walnut*” was made by Madeleine Linville. Madeleine created and implemented the design for the evening. She coordinated an army of volunteers to decorate the Center with flowers and historic artifacts, and persuaded the best island chefs to create and serve a stunning buffet. Further, Dick and Sharon Friel, veterans of more than 2,600 auctions, volunteered to manage the auction itself. These contributions are noteworthy for Madeleine, Dick and Sharon are not members of the LIHS Board. You three, we thank you.

During the auction a large number of people raised their paddles to support restoration of the *Sally J*,

an historic gill netter, as the center-piece of an exhibit that illustrates the great importance of the salmon harvest to early Lopez. *Sally J* first needs to be stabilized and Russ Levine, a well-known local shipwright, will survey the vessel and plan the supporting, strengthening, planking and cosmetic actions needed. Then the vessel will be moved to a more visible display area, and an interpretive display crafted. When complete, visitors will be able to see and understand how the *Sally J* worked as a fishing and a research vessel.

Your Board’s efforts have now turned to working on the 2007 and 2008 exhibits, The History Forum, and accelerating the work of cataloging and stabilizing the archives. And, of course, we will be thinking about the next year’s fund raising efforts needed to balance the budget.

There are vacancies on the Board of Trustees, if you’d be interested in joining the Board or volunteering contact the Museum (2049) or me (3256).

In a nutshell, your Museum is on a roll. Thanks go to everyone involved.

## Collection Update

Beginning with this newsletter, we will provide updates on our progress with the AAM/IMLS MAP grant, cataloging the photo & artifact collections, new acquisitions, and collection related projects for which we need volunteer help.

Christi Carter, our main cataloger who started with us last year, is leading the effort to refine our cataloging procedures. She has been working primarily on our photo collection, but will soon develop the process to enter data on the artifact collection.

Connie Kyser started with us this summer, and will focus first on organizing the archives, then will take on cataloging artifacts.

Linda Hudson is working on creating binders of photos for visitors to browse. We hope the combination of a computer database and a well-

organized visual record will help researchers find exactly what they seek.

Earlier this year, Edi Blomberg, Cathy Morgan and Judie Cole commenced archive organizing and documentation projects with our topic and family archives. (Cathy & Judie are Davis family descendants.)

Our Treasurer, Charles Givens, has taken on some very large photo scanning projects. Several Lopez Pioneer families (Brown, Hastin, Spencer, Landon/Mueller) have brought us their family photo albums and allowed us to scan the images. We are still working on the photo albums Mary Reece brought in—she is related to the Browns, Eatons, Andersons, Fagerholms, and several other families that arrived on Lopez well before 1900.

# LIHS News

by Mark Thompson-Klein, Museum Director

Where to start...?

Volunteers. The museum, and much of the Lopez community runs on the generosity and grace of volunteers. At the museum, volunteers work year-round and give us more than 2,000 hours completing myriad tasks, big and small. In fact, Lopez Island wouldn't have much of a museum without the dedication of volunteers. And, of course, we always welcome new volunteers—we have much work ahead.

A couple of years ago, we commenced a multi-year project to evaluate, stabilize, and catalog our collection. We have reported progress along the way, and now I can report some very significant news. We are one of only two museums in Washington to receive a Collections Management Assessment grant from the American Association of Museums (AAM) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This is a two-year program that begins with a guided self-assessment, then progresses to an evaluation and site visit from AAM's collections specialists. The specialists will make policy and procedural recommendations based on what they see. This is an extremely demanding process, but AAM's recommendations will 1) Result in a safer and more stable environment for our collections; 2) Help us plan

our next ten years; and 3) Put us in a position to apply for other federal grants.

Work is progressing on the *Sally J*. Russ Levine has assembled a temporary cradle to stabilize *Sally J*'s hull, allowing him to work on strengthening the boat's structure. Once the reinforcing is complete, fasteners set, and rust knocked back, the *Sally J* will be painted and moved on a permanent cradle to a more visible spot in front of the museum. We hope, sometime in the future, to build a cover over the *Sally J* to protect



*The Sally J in better times.*

her from the weather. Boat builders and fishing families love to get a close look at the *Sally J*—she's a beautiful boat, and an important part of Lopez Island's fishing history.

Finally, more thanks. Our fund raising event this summer, the *Walnut Tree Invitational*, was great fun and a great success.

Lopez artists produced

an impressive body of work for us to auction, and Madeleine Linville led an inspired group of decorators and chefs to set the scene for auctioneers Dick & Sharon Friel. As always, Lopezians gave generously—buyers hoisted their paddles high and often, and delivered our most successful fund raiser to date.

We are grateful for your support.

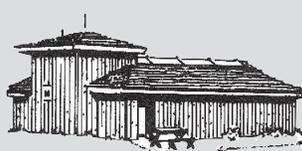


*Winter in Lopez Village*

*Other photos available.*

You may order Historic Lopez notecards by calling the museum.

Prices are \$7.50 for a 4-pack;  
\$18.50 for a 10-pack.



The Lopez Island  
Historical  
Society  
& Museum

#### LIHS Board Members

President:	Mike Ellis
Treasurer:	Charles Givens
Secretary:	Bill Evans
Trustees:	Gary Alexander
	Gale McCallum
	Greg Ewert
	Don Linville
	Raiti Waerness
Director:	Mark Thompson-Klein
Collections Staff:	Christi Carter
	Connie Kyser

(360) 468-2049 • [lopezmuseum@rockisland.com](mailto:lopezmuseum@rockisland.com)

continued from page 1

Metlakatla women in the San Juans. Northern Indians came all the way down to this area on hunting and gathering trips, as well as raiding attacks, and taking slaves. One story has her family leaving her behind on one such trip. It was believed that she was caught stealing food at the construction site of a lighthouse. Supposedly, the lighthouse keeper was a friend of Charles' and he (Charles) took her in. Mary, or Mother Brown, as locals later called her, became a sort of liaison between the natives and settlers on the island. She learned Chinook Jargon and English.

Charles' family grew during their years on Lopez. Ten children Ella, Maggie, Maria (pronounced "Mariah"), Mary Jane, Sarah, Catherine (Kitty), Emily, Henry, Willie, and Nettie, all spent their childhood on the island. An eleventh baby was said to have been washed out of Mary Brown's arms while on board one of the boats near Cattle Point, and drowned. We have found no record of it. Charles' daughter Mary recalled her father churning butter to sell in Victoria, so that he could buy shoes for

his children. He sailed his small boat from Swift's Bay to conduct business. Charles continued farming until his health failed, and Mary Eaton and her husband managed his farm. Charles died in 1908—Mary in 1920.



**First year in new Mud Bay school house c. 1910.**  
*Standing: George Chadwick, Nina Eaton, Alma Norman, Cora Scribner (teacher), Margaret Range, Florence Eaton, Jennie Fagerholm, Jennie Schruder, Merle Range. Seated: Henry Carlson, Richard Pusey, Johnny Wren, Walter Anderson, Albert Fagerholm*

Ella married Charles Anderson; Maggie was married to LeMaister, Mitchell, and Bauer; Maria married John Hackwell, later Ben Korman; Mary Jane married Erwin Eaton; Kitty married Andrews, she and Sarah each eventually moved to Alaska; Emily married Johnson Williams, who was a teacher in the Indian Schools in Taholah, and Neah Bay; Willie became a steam ship engineer, and lived on Vashon Island for a time. Nettie and Henry each died unexpectedly in their twenties, and

are buried with their parents. Charles and Mary Brown, daughters Ella, Maggie (Marguerite), Maria, Mary Jane, are all buried in the Lopez Union Cemetery, along with many of their families.

*This article was written by Mother Brown's great-great-granddaughter, Mary Jane Reece.*

---

## 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 +

Sponsor \$100 +    Benefactor \$1,000 +

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*The Lopez Island Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.*

**Lopez Island Historical Society • P.O. Box 163, Lopez Island, WA 98261**