

## Brief History of Leque Island

By Dennis Conroy  
With Ole Eide

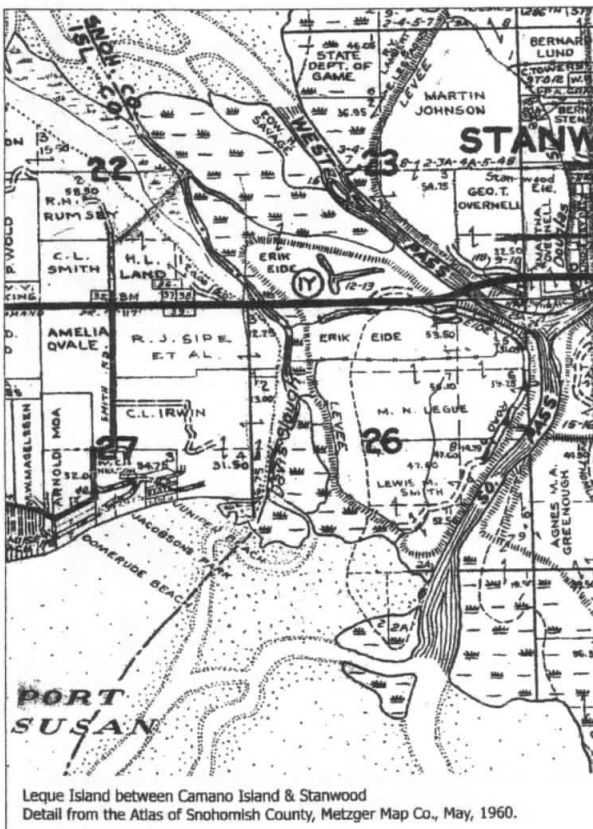
Going back in time! Ole Eide gave me an opportunity to visualize the past with a tour of the flat island west of the Mark Clark Bridge. We started on Eide Road that goes south just west of the bridge. The house where Ole grew up is the first one as you drive south. On the road near the next house there is a monument to the Leque Family.

Between the rise of the road and the Eide house is a stretch of water that is part of a slough that curved across the island connecting Davis Slough and West Pass. Indians paddled through the slough as a short cut across the island. When Nils Eide and Ole's father Ole Erickson Eide, farmed the north end of the island they diked along the length of the slough, which was called "canoe passage." Later Ole's brother, Erick, blocked each end of the slough so the dike could be removed. Beside the deep slough there was a large tree and in it were some Indian remains. The tree was eventually taken down.

The west end of the canoe passage opened into Davis Slough. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Davis was a much wider waterway that steamships used at high tide. On the north end of the island there were water channels, still visible, that opened into West Pass. These sloughs played a key role in providing a nurturing environment for young salmon and other fish to mature. When the approach road to the Mark Clark Bridge was built in 1946, Route 532 filled Canoe Passage in two places. One portion of the old passage is visible now north of the road, and two parts on the southern side.



Portion of Canoe Passage that once connected South Pass and Davis Slough. The Eide home is in background.  
[Photo: D. Conroy, 2004]



From 1856, when loggers and the mill came to Utsalady Bay, until the late 1860s Leque Island was a tidal area with about 400 acres of open tide marsh prairie and 100 acres cluttered with logs and debris. In the early 1870s Jerome N. Barry and his brother set up a camp at the south end from which they ran a logging operation. (Jerome was issued a land patent on November 1, 1873 for 164.9 acres.) Before 1872 a telegraph line was strung up on trees and poles across the south end going to the mill at Utsalady. There were no roads and all commerce was by water.

Nils Eide crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1853 and took a sailing ship north to the gold fields of California. Sometime in the early 1870s he headed north for the gold fields of Canada but when he came to Utsalady he decided to stay in the Centerville (now Stanwood) area. Nils Eide went to work on the Ovenell farm west of Centerville. In the fall of 1876 Nels P. Leque rented a farm north of Centerville. That same fall O. B. Iverson harvested 35 acres of grain on George Kyle's farm south of Centerville. O. B. met Nils at the Ovenell farm.

The three men got together and saw the possibility of diking and farming the island but didn't know who owned it. They sailed to Olympia where they found that the Barry brothers owned the south end. Iverson, Leque and Andy Danielson (who was the brother of Iverson's wife) bought the Barry property. Nils Eide claimed the north end from the federal govern-

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ment as a donation claim. (The title on 123.8 acres was transferred to Nelson Eide on November 25, 1879 under the 1820 Act).

The island was partly filled with driftwood, both above and beneath the surface because it was tidal. The three owners cleared the logs and brush, diked it and began to farm the fertile soil. They called it Leque Island because Leque had the biggest ownership. A drainage ditch marked the boundary between the Eide and Leque property.

O. B. Iverson had learned surveying in the Civil War. In 1876 he was hired in Olympia as a surveyor, and sailed a sloop up Port Susan bay to survey the Stillaguamish River valley. The four men in the boat arrived late because of light winds and rowed after dark into Davis Slough. In 1920 Iverson wrote an amusing account of this event for the Stanwood paper. They didn't realize at the time that the mast of the sloop hit the telegraph wire, preventing the boat from moving. In the morning they discovered the problem and walked across the flats of the island to get to Centerville (as Stanwood was then called).

One of them fell in a narrow slough that broke off from Canoe Passage about 300 yards west of where the Eide house is now. That small slough went south from Canoe Passage bisecting the south part of the island and emptying into Port Susan bay. It has been filled in on the Eide property and part of the Leque property, but is still visible on part of the Leque property.

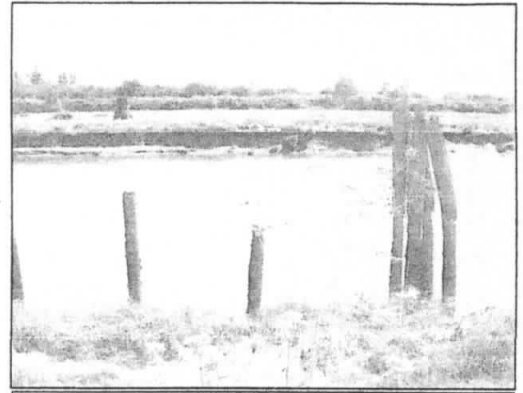
At first the settlers rowed to the mainland but eventually a cable ferry crossed West Pass just downstream from the current bridge and a road was built. In 1909 the iron swing bridge was built just north of the current bridge. There was also a bridge across Davis Slough built about 1912 with the counties sharing the costs.

On the west side of Davis Slough the dirt road jogged north and then doubled back to angle up Land's Hill. The Becker Shingle Mill was built at the turn of the century at the foot of the hill. Shingle bolts for the mill came from both land and water. A wooden chute was built on the hillside and bolts were slid down. Bolts were also floated into a millpond from Davis Slough and held there by a tide gate. The Becker mill burned in 1920. There is no evidence today of the mill, the road up the hill, or the millpond. In fact Davis Slough is now little more than a wide ditch big enough for a rowboat at high tide.

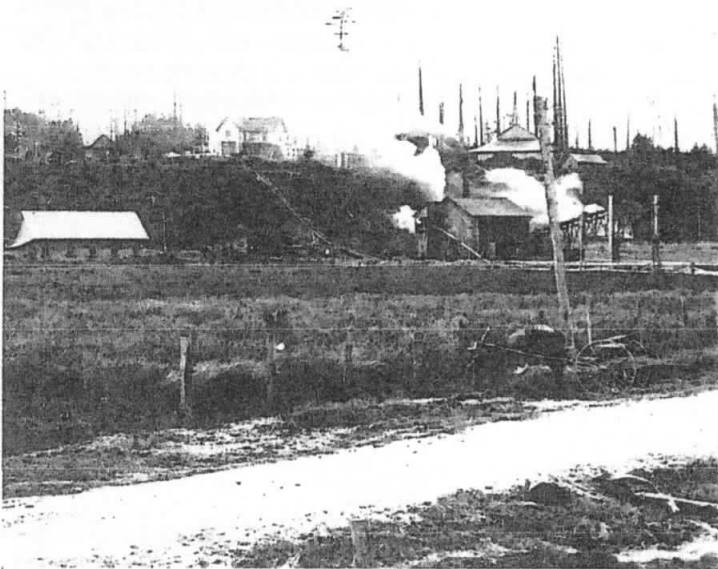
Leque Island, like the flats of Florence Island, Stanwood and the delta land to the north are filled with a deep muck. (Core boring near the Museum found a clamshell at 50 feet!). One day Ole's brother plowed into a buried tree on their land that was well preserved. How did it get there? There was major eruption of Glacier Peak 12,500 or more years ago that resulted in a massive wall of debris and mud flowing into the Stillaguamish River Valley. According to the USGS web page the outflow carried all the way to Puget Sound. Leque Island would have been created by that massive outflow. Glacier Peak erupted

again 5-6,000 years ago but the debris outflow at that time went into the Sauk-Siuattle-Skagit system.

O. B. Iverson was elected to the legislature in Olympia in 1878 and eventually sold the farm on Leque Island to Leque, who passed it on to Lewis H. Smith. The Leque and Eide families continued to farm the land for many years. Ole Erickson Eide, Ole's father, leased the 105 acre farm for three years and in 1904



This photograph looks east from Eide Road across South Pass where the Leque grain warehouse and dock were located. In the early days each farm had a small dock and usually a warehouse where grain could be stored waiting for the steamer to stop and take on the crop. There was a warehouse on the bank near the Leque farm, the location marked today by pilings.  
[Photo: D. Conroy, 2004]



This is a photograph of the Becker Mill at the foot of Land's Hill just north of State Route 532 onto Camano Island. The dirt road still leads to where the mill once was. Photographer: John Wagness.

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Erick Eide ran the Eide farm. Martin Leque took over the Leque farm from his father.

Washington State now owns all of Leque Island. The southern part was purchased first. Now the entire island is a Wildlife Recreation Area and the Washington State Fish and Wildlife Department operate it. It is an important area on the flyway for migrating birds. In the fall it is stocked with pheasants and is a popular hunting area.



Thanks to those who organized and participated in the first revitalized Harvest Jubilee! ~ Carol Ronken, Dave Eldridge, Vivian Henderson, Quentin Mitchell, Dennis Conroy, Gail and Conrad Ryer, South End String Band, Stilly River Band, Just Plain Folk, Tim Miller Jazz, Jon Stevens, TOGF, Lily Mahoney, Billie Eichorn, Klesick Family Farm Organic Produce, Cathy Roy, Warm Beach Greenwood Garden Club, Pat Farmer, Jeanie Thomas, Auverne Dieffenbach, Snohomish County Conservation District, Mary Taylor of Rosebar Ornamental Garden Art, Herb & Fran Kuhnly

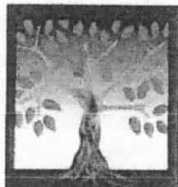


## Road Names & Street Signs

Have you noticed the new street signs around Stanwood? Thanks to **Dave Eldridge**, the **Stanwood Camano Area Foundation**, and the **City of Stan-**

**wood** for adding decorative street signs below the numbered street signs to preserve a sense of the historic, and more interesting street names of Stanwood.

Along that same line, the League of Snohomish County Heritage Organization has a program for researching and documenting **Road Names of Snohomish County**. The colorful and unique names of roads and street corners that help define our communities are disappearing as the County switches to a numbering system. The League is attempting to record the histories associated with named roads, streets, and corners of Snohomish County. To help work on this project, contact Bert Estes at 360-653-6367 for assistance with maps and history materials— see [www.snocoheritage.org](http://www.snocoheritage.org).



## Historic Preservation

Thanks to **Annabelle Birkestol** for donating her subscription of **Preservation Magazine** to the Historical Society. We keep it in the library for members interested in other historic preservation projects. The December 2003 Issue has an article on the effects of Wal-Mart and the history of the town of Chestertown Maryland. If you've never looked at it, take a look— it features many interesting places to visit or know about around the country.

## Island County Historic Marker Commit- tee Brochure

The Island County Historic Marker Committee has produced a new brochure using funds from the Island County Hotel Motel Taxes. It features some of the historic places on Whidbey and Camano Islands with a map to current and future markers. Places featured on Camano are :

- Camano Lutheran Church
- Utsalady Point County Park (with carved sign made by Gene Remington and Carl Strever & placed by the Stanwood Area Historical Society)
- English Boom (interpretive sign in process at parking lot above the shoreline)
- Utsalady Ladies Aid.

There are other sites of course and we hope to include them as soon as funds can be procured for creating the markers. The committee is seeking more volunteers from Camano Island to attend meetings and participate in planning for placement of more markers. To volunteer, contact Karen Prasse, 360-629-6110.

**ISLAND  
COUNTY** Historical  
Marker  
Project  
c/o  
South Whidbey Historical Society  
P. O. Box 612 Langley, WA 98260

## Stanwood Area Historical Society Elected Officers & Board Members

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