

## section c

## BACKGROUND

*Natural History*

**T**he face of Bainbridge Island has been shaped by two natural forces—ice and earthquakes—into the form that we now recognize. Some 80,000 years ago, ice sheets from British Columbia advanced into the Puget Sound lowlands reaching its maximum extent 14,500 to 14,000 years ago. Ice from the Puget lobe filled the Puget Sound area to a depth of 3,000 feet in some places. The ice began to retreat between 13,500 and 11,500 years BP (before present) leaving behind scars of ice sheets, deposits of sand and gravel and a thin layer of soil composed of glacial till.

Geologists have also discovered that a series of earthquakes struck the area between 16,000 and a few thousand years ago resulting in fault slip and uplifting of the island. The most dramatic of these forces was a major uplift of the marine shoreline of Bainbridge Island around 1,100 years ago when the land rose between 27 feet (9 meters) on the Seattle fault zone at Eagle Harbor and 15 feet (5 meters) at Blakely Harbor (2.5 km south of Eagle Harbor). Research on Bainbridge Island earthquakes continue as scientists learn more about strands of the Seattle fault.

The tides in Eagle Harbor are similar to those in Seattle and have a daily range of 11.3 feet between high and low tide. The sheltered waters of Eagle Harbor are protected from the winter storms that generally blow from the south and southwest. The marine life in Eagle Harbor is similar to that of all of Puget Sound. According to marine biologists, more than 220 species of fish are found in Puget Sound and the eastern portion of the Strait of Juan De Fuca. A small smelt fishery has been re-established on the recreated sandy beach just to the west of the former creosote plant.

The Puget Sound Marine and Lowland Forest ecosystems had an abundance of plants and wildlife before the settlement and rapid development of the area by Euro-Americans. As homes were constructed and the forest logged and cleared for farming, the ecosystem came under a great deal of stress. The maintenance of habitat areas is becoming a greater concern to the local governments. This area is located on a major flyway for migrating bird life and supports a large number of individual species of birds.

## *Cultural History*

### **The First People**

As the earth recovered from the Ice Age, a succession of plants and animals reoccupied the Puget Sound area. By 9,500 years BP, red cedar, fir, and spruce began regenerating and formed the basis for human occupation

by coastal dwelling Native Americans. The Suquamish People settled on the land west of Puget Sound, including Bainbridge Island, in villages and campsites. Bays with sheltered waters became favorite sites and include today's Port Madison, Blakely Harbor, Manzanita Bay, Rolling Bay, and Eagle Harbor. The Suquamish built Old Man House, one

of the largest structures (172 feet long by 72 feet wide) in the Northwest at the present town of Suquamish. They used cedar planks and post and beam construction for their winter quarters. Here the Suquamish lived by fishing; gathering shellfish, plants, and berries; and trading with the neighboring tribes, the Duwamish and S'Klallam.



The Suquamish People were the first residents of Bainbridge Island. For more than 5,000 years they fished, gathered shellfish, harvested berries, and plants, and used cedar trees for canoes, mats, clothing, and shelters.

Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society PB page #15

For generations, the Haida and other nations from the north raided the native people of Puget Sound until the late 19th century. The local Native Americans reciprocated and raided their northern neighbors creating continuous conflict.

In 1855 the Suquamish People were moved by the U.S. government to the newly created, 7,486-acre Port Madison Indian Reservation under the terms of the 1855 Point Elliott Treaty. As with many other Native American people, the

Suquamish struggled for survival until the 1990s. Today the tribal business activities are chartered under the Port Madison Enterprises, and the Tribe owns and operates the popular Suquamish Clearwater Casino and the Suquamish Bingo Hall.

### The First Explorers

**Royal Navy's Captain George Vancouver, 1792**—The first Europeans to visit the area were Captain George Vancouver aboard the HMS *Discovery* and Lt. Peter Puget commanding the HMS *Chatham* who arrived and anchored between Blake and Bainbridge Islands on May 19, 1792. Vancouver moved the *Discovery* to Blakely Harbor to find replacements for broken spars and later explored and named Rich Passage. He then proceeded to Port Orchard and Liberty Bay with the *Discovery*, but never found the narrow passage that made Bainbridge an island. He then set sail to explore further north on May 30, 1792, and the impact of his exploration was recorded by the naming of many natural features, such as Mount Rainier, Restoration Point, Hood's Canal, and Puget Sound.

**Lt. Charles Wilkes USN, 1841**  
***The United States Exploring Expedition, 1838–1842***—Lt. Charles Wilkes, commanding the USS *Vincennes* and a small fleet, safely anchored in Port Madison Bay on the evening of May 9, 1841, after an adventurous voyage from the mouth of the Columbia River. While Wilkes was exploring the area he determined Bainbridge Island was an island, not a peninsula as Vancouver had thought. He named the island for Commodore William Bainbridge USN, a noted hero of War of 1812 and the Barbary Coast campaign. He also named Point Jefferson, Port Madison, Point Monroe, Blakely Rock, and Elliot Bay before sailing north to the San Juan Islands. He returned to Philadelphia in 1842.

**Hudson Bay Company Settlement in Puget Sound**—In 1824 John Work visited Port Madison Bay while scouting a new site for a Hudson Bay Company trading post. As a result of Work's exploration a new Hudson Bay trading post named Fort Nisqually was located on the Nisqually delta near Olympia. This location was closer to the overland

route from the trading posts at Astoria and Fort Vancouver. Over the next two decades, traders and missionaries paddled and sailed past by Bainbridge Island on their way to and from Fort Nisqually and the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

### Settlement of Bainbridge Island

#### *Early Sawmills on the Island, 1854*

**Port Madison Mill**—The first mill on Puget Sound was constructed in 1847 in Tumwater, followed by Henry Yesler's mill on the tide flats of Seattle. In the spring of 1854, George Meigs, who had purchased Isaac Parker's mill at Apple Tree Cove near present day Kingston, moved the mill to nearby Port Madison on the north end of Bainbridge Island and began operations. The first territorial census in 1857 showed that Port Madison had grown to 58 people, most likely related to Meig's mill. By 1892, Meigs underwent bankruptcy and the mill folded, leaving Port Madison vacant. The land was quickly subdivided and sold for summer residences.

**Port Blakely Mill**—After experimenting with other mill locations at Alki near

Seattle, Enetai on the Kitsap Peninsula near Manchester and Manette near Port Orchard, ship captain and San Francisco businessman William Renton finally settled on the southeast corner of Bainbridge Island at Blakely Harbor. Here Renton established Port Blakely Mill which eventually would be called “The Largest Mill in the World” and by the turn of the century was processing 500,000 board feet of lumber a day. Historian Andrew Price noted that the Port Blakely Mill shipped one fourth of all the timber shipped from Puget Sound in 1890. As with most mills of the time, fires periodically destroyed the mills, which were immediately rebuilt, and Port Blakely was no exception. After Captain Renton’s death in 1891, the mill passed into the hands of a nephew John A. Campbell. In 1903 Campbell and a partner sold their interest in the mill to a group of investors from San Francisco and the Midwest. During the night of April 22, 1907, the mill, again, was destroyed by fire and was rebuilt, but after a brief flurry during World War I, was closed in 1922 and dismantled in 1924.

#### ***Stores and Farms, 1861 to the Present***

William DeShaw built the first trading post on Bainbridge Island in 1861 near Agate Passage. An adventurer early in his career, DeShaw proved to be a hardworking and innovative businessman. He died in Seattle in 1900.

Other small stores sprang up around the shores of Bainbridge Island to support the increasing numbers of settlers who were not connected by roads. Seabold, on the northwestern tip of Bainbridge Island and near the mill at Port Madison, was the home of another early store, which was built around 1880. Shortly thereafter, another store was established at Manzanita Bay.

With the dawning of the Resort Era at the end of the 19th century, small hotels and subdivisions for summer homes sprang up near the established areas. These developments, in turn, spawned the development of small country schools to support the growing population. Today, most of the farms have disappeared, replaced with homes or grown over with thick stands of trees.

The economic center of Bainbridge Island has always been Winslow, situated on Eagle Harbor. First settled in 1878 the small village gradually grew to include a one-room school, church and by 1890, its own post office. In 1902 the Hall Brothers moved their successful shipyard from Blakely Harbor to Winslow and expanded their operation. The shipyard became a major employer during World War I. Barely surviving the Depression, World War II brought another boom to Winslow as the shipyard turned out many smaller ships. The yard closed in 1959 and was purchased by the State of Washington to service their ferry system. In 1990, the name Winslow was replaced by the City of Bainbridge Island by a vote of the residents.

#### ***Mosquito Fleet, Ferries and Transportation***

The Native Americans used Puget Sound as their superhighway. Using the wind and the tide, they moved from bay to bay, point to point, beaching their wooden canoes to wait for favorable conditions. Steam power arrived when the small Hudson’s Bay paddle wheeler



*Beaver* arrived in the 1830s to serve Fort Nisqually. She continued service until 1888 when she ran aground near Vancouver, BC. The early American settlers, who built homes along the Sound, constructed community docks that served the hundreds of small steamers that plied the Sound, bringing passengers, supplies, and freight. The steamers, which were the best and fastest means of transportation, were so numerous that they were referred to as the “Mosquito Fleet” as they swarmed around the Sound and Elliott and

Commencement Bays. During this period there were 60 landings along the Sound, with 27 of them on Bainbridge Island.

The first scheduled ferry service on the Sound was on the *City of Seattle*, which began service in 1888 and ferried passengers between Seattle and Duwamish Head. With the arrival of the automobile, road construction began in earnest and more ferries were constructed to meet the growing need. The Puget Sound Navigation Company, organized in 1898, became the leader of

these privately-owned ferries and carried the flag of the famed Black Ball Line. By 1948 Captain Alexander Peabody, President and

The Grand Trunk Pacific Pier (left) and the Coleman Dock (right) were the hub of Seattle’s “Mosquito Fleet.” From the 1880s to about 1930, the small steam vessels of the Mosquito Fleet served large and small ports around Puget Sound. After a series of fires and mishaps, both piers were razed in 1964 for the Washington State Ferries Terminal.

Photo courtesy Museum of History and Industry,  
#6011-27

General Manager of the Black Ball Line, notified the State of Washington that he was shutting down the ferry system, stranding thousands of passengers. Shut downs continued, causing disruptions in service, and on December 30, 1949, the State announced that it was acquiring the equipment and operations of the Puget Sound Navigation Company for \$4.9 million. On June 1, 1951, Washington State Ferries began operation of the ferry system under the aegis of the Washington State Department of Transportation.

In 1940 the State authorized the construction of a bridge across Agate Passage to connect Bainbridge Island with the Kitsap Peninsula, but because of World War II the actual construction was delayed until 1948 and not completed until October 1950. Now the island had two means of access, by ferry from Seattle and by road (SR 305) from Poulsbo, Bremerton, and Tacoma.

### *Asian Settlement—Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese beginning in 1857*

Emphasizing the inclusive nature of the immigrants, author Jack Swanson noted in his book *Picture Bainbridge, A Pictorial*



*History of Bainbridge Island*, published by the Bainbridge Island Historical Society, “We are a melting pot. Swedes. Chinese. Norwegians. Croatians. Japanese. Filipinos. Native Americans. Finns, Irish, Scots, Brits, Germans, French, Spaniards, Portuguese.” The first immigrants tended to settle in groups, the Norwegians on the island’s north end, the Chinese at the mill at Port Madison, and the Japanese at the Port Blakely Mill.

#### ***Port Blakely Mill and Nihonmachis, 1883–1925***

By 1883 as many as 20 Japanese immigrants were working at the Port Blakely Mill and living in a small village constructed on company land set aside for their use. The tiny settlement was called “Japan-town” by the white settlers and *Nagaya* by the Japanese workers. The first village was shortly followed by another called *Yama*. These *Nihonmachis* or “Japan-towns” furnished the residents with lodging, services, and recreational opportunities similar to what they had in Japan. Andrew Price, writing in his history Port Blakely described the structures of the *Nihonmachis* as: “simple, small, usually unpainted and weathered looking, and almost on

top of each other.” The early bachelor residents soon were replaced with families which in turn gave a greater sense of community to the *Nihonmachis* that reached a population of more than 200 in the early 1900s. The Port Blakely Mill closed in 1922 and what was left of *Nagaya* and *Yama* burned in 1925.

#### ***Life on the Farm: Strawberries, Greenhouses and Commerce***

The first-generation Japanese used the term, *Issei*, to describe themselves. Their American-born children, the second generation, were called *Nisei*. Beginning in 1908 Shinichi Moritani became the first *Issei* to raise strawberries on Bainbridge Island. The soil and weather were ideal for strawberry farming and the low cost of the plants meant the capital needed to start was minimal. The labor intensive raising of strawberries meant that entire families were engaged in clearing the land, planting, weeding, cutting, and harvesting of the berry crop. By 1941 Japanese American farmers on Bainbridge Island planted more than 500 acres of strawberries and controlled 80 percent of the agricultural industry. Washington’s Alien Land Act of 1921 prevented the *Issei* from owning land,



Port Blakely Mill set aside land for Japanese immigrants who worked in the mill. *Nagaya*, seen here, was the first of two small Japanese communities on Bainbridge Island and included a two-story hotel.

Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society PB page #190



Strawberries were introduced to the island in 1908 and by the mid-1920s were world famous. Otohiko Koura (right) and his family were successful farmers. During the strawberry season more than 200 local residents were employed in the local cannery.

Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society PB page #129



Once the *Nihonmachi*s were destroyed in 1925, many Japanese Americans became farmers, quickly adapting to community life and starting families. As the families grew, washing and drying diapers was a daily chore.

Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration

and many families acquired title to the land through their Nisei children. Bainbridge Island strawberries became famous nationally and were judged to be the “best in the country.” During World War II, with the Japanese American families interned, the strawberry industry collapsed, but revived during the 1950s. Shortly thereafter many of the farms were replaced with housing developments.

Beginning in 1909 the Okomoto family constructed the island’s first greenhouse. Soon other families built their greenhouses in which they grew vegetables and flowers. The most famous of the greenhouses was Bainbridge Gardens located on the west side of the Island. As the Japanese American families became more financially secure, they expanded into more commercial ventures. They formed their own growers’ association and cannery and sold their produce through a network of Japanese American grocers. The Nakata family opened Eagle Harbor Market, and other families opened gas stations and grocery stores. In a joint venture with the Loverich family, the Nakatas opened the landmark Town and Country

Supermarket on Winslow Way in 1957. The Haruis reopened Bainbridge Gardens at Island Center in 1989, continuing a family tradition.

### *Society and Culture: School, Church and Recreation*

To quote from Connie Walker’s “Multiple Property Nomination” (2001) for the National Park Service, “The island’s Nikkei community had been transformed in the period between



In 1910, shortly after emigrating from Japan, brothers Zenhichi Harui and Zenmatsu Seko established a produce stand and nursery and developed sunken gardens near Fletcher Bay. In 1989 Harui’s son Junkoh began restoration of the family’s 20-acre Bainbridge Gardens, which had fallen into ruins during World War II. “In its heyday, before World War II, Bainbridge Gardens was a destination for local island residents and tourists.” —National Register nomination.

Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration



1925 and 1942. What was once a centralized *Nihonmachi* in Port Blakely had evolved into a geographically scattered community, unified by cultural traditions and common labor practices, and intermingled with their Caucasian neighbors.” While retaining cultural traditions, the Japanese American community sent their children to public schools where they developed

close ties with their fellow Caucasian students. Many Nisei converted from the Buddhist faith to the Christian faith and participated in integrated sports and recreation programs. Walker observes, “Truly, the island was a remarkably tolerant and understanding place . . . (where the) Bainbridge Island Nikkei were insulated from (racial prejudice).”



The Nakata family opened Eagle Harbor Market in 1939, quickly turning it into “one of the island’s finest groceries,” according to the *Bainbridge Review*. John Nakata, seen here, expanded the business to include produce and dry goods.

Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration



By February 1942 the *Bainbridge Review* noted, “. . . 84 Nisei students in the Bainbridge Island public schools—who counted among their number 13 seniors just shy of graduation, 7 students who had helped produce the high school’s winter play, 12 members of the honor roll, half the members of the baseball team, and the captain of the basketball team—found themselves leaving classmates, teammates, and more than a few life-long friends.” A year later, there were no Japanese American students in the Bainbridge Island school system.

Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration



Taken during the late 1920s or early 1930s, two young girls pose in their traditional kimonos at the annual Japanese American picnic. Issei parents worked hard to provide their Nisei children with an understanding and appreciation of their Japanese heritage.

Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society PB page #191



## **World War II**

President Franklin Roosevelt, acknowledging the coming conflict, began to put the nation on a war footing in 1940 with the mobilization of the National Guard, the development of Lend Lease programs, and active antisubmarine efforts in the North Atlantic. The formal relationship between the governments of the United States and Imperial Japan had begun to deteriorate with the Japanese invasion of China, culminating in a complete rupture with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The day following Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan, followed by Germany's declaration of war against the United States on December 11, 1941.

Japanese submarines were active off the west coast of North America during the first three months of the war. Nine U.S. ships were sunk, 12 were attacked, and a coastal oil refinery in California was shelled. Ships damaged at Pearl Harbor returning to the United States for repair reported a Japanese battle fleet heading for the West Coast. On New Year's Eve, three sites in the Hawaiian Islands where

shelled by submarines. In June 1942 Oregon and Vancouver Island were shelled. During the first year of the war, 147 sightings of Japanese submarines were reported from the mouth of the Columbia River to southeastern Alaska.

In January through March 1942, Japanese forces occupied the East Indies and annihilated the combined fleets of the Dutch, British, Australians, and Americans in a series of engagements in and around the Java Sea. Guam, an American outpost in the Mariana Islands, was captured on December 10, and Imperial Marines occupied Wake Island on December 20. With American resources stretched thin, the Royal Canadian Air Force flew anti-submarine patrols from the mouth of the Columbia River to southeastern Alaska during 1942. All of these actions contributed to the general war hysteria, racism, and fear that was rampant along the west coast of the United States during the early months of the war.

***Military Importance of Bainbridge Island***  
Fort Ward on the southeastern corner of Bainbridge Island had a strategic military role in guarding Puget Sound and the



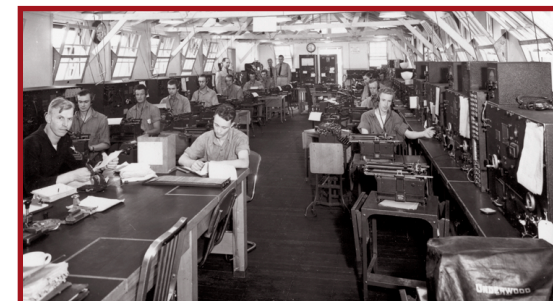
Puget Sound Naval Shipyard was designated a navy yard in 1901 and for more than 100 years has provided service to the Fleet. The hammerhead crane (dominating the skyline) was completed in 1933 and provided the heavy lift capability needed to construct and repair larger ships. During World War II, the shipyard's major effort was directed toward repairing war-damaged ships.

*Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society*



The Fort Ward radio intercept facility (center of photograph), designated Station S, intercepted the Japanese diplomatic message instructing the Japanese ambassador to terminate peace negotiations with the United States government on December 7, 1941.

*Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society, Louis Nadeau Collection*



U.S. Navy radio operators at Station S monitored Japanese diplomatic and naval radio traffic from mid-1941 to the end of World War II and Soviet traffic during the early years of the Cold War until the mid-1950s. The top secret facilities masqueraded as a radio school to conceal its real purpose.

*Photo courtesy Bainbridge Island Historical Society, Louis Nadeau Collection*

approaches to Bremerton Naval Shipyard going back to 1890. Built as part of the Endicott System of coastal defense forts, Fort Ward complemented the other forts constructed at the entrance to Admiralty Inlet further to the north. By 1903 the fort bristled with three 8-inch guns, two 5-inch guns and seven 3-inch guns with a minefield in Rich Passage. Many of the guns were removed in the 1920s, and the fort was decommissioned in 1928. In early 1941 the U.S. Navy constructed a radio intercept station at Fort Ward identified as Station S. Station S was the radio station that intercepted

the December 7 message ordering the Japanese ambassador to break off peace talks with the United States. The Navy expanded the acreage of the fort for security reasons by acquiring three adjacent farms in the spring of 1941. This action made the three farmers the first Bainbridge Islanders to be removed from their homes for security reasons. Communications antennas were constructed at Fort Ward and two transmission towers at Battle Point, five miles north of the Fort. All during World War II and into the early Cold War, Station S monitored Japanese and Soviet electronic communications.

During the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, submarine nets were placed in Rich Passage at Fort Ward, stretching from Middle Point to Manchester and across Agate Passage, to protect the Naval Shipyard in Bremerton. Barrage balloons and anti-aircraft guns dotted the island, protecting the shipyard in Winslow. The Winslow yard expanded from 100 workers in 1940 to 2,300 workers in 1943. The yard turned out 17 steel minesweepers, 12 harbor tugs and other small vessels, as well as repairing ships during the war years. In combination with other facilities in