

The History of Raft Island

By

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THE HISTORY OF RAFT ISLAND

The first written record of Raft Island came in 1792 when English Navy Captain Peter Puget, on his exploration of the entire Sound south of present-day Seattle, wrote in his journal that he had landed on a small island off the mouth of Horsehead Bay. Puget wrote of how a large number of crows were on the island and "voiced objection" (Morgan 10) when his ship landed.

In the late 1830's, a U.S. Navy expedition under the command of Captain Charles Wilkes named the island Allshouse Island after Joseph Allshouse, a crew member of the *U.S.S. Vincennes*. Allshouse's good fortune was short-lived, however. On October 30, 1841, after the *Vincennes* had completed its expedition, a storm arose while the ship was in San Francisco

Bay. At 4:00 a.m. Allhouse was coming out of the hatchway to go on watch duty when a loose wooden spar pinned him to the hatch combing. It took five minutes before the spar could be removed and although it did not appear he was seriously injured at first, Allshouse died of internal injuries at 7:30 a.m. .

Despite the honor given to Allshouse by Wilkes, the name that came to be placed on maps was Raft Island. This name was given to the island because people thought it looked like a raft floating on the water right next to the mainland. (Another theory holds that the origin of the name comes from "rafts" of logs that were shipped to the mainland. However, Raft Island was given its name long before any logging took place.)

First Settlers

Raft Island was first settled in 1889 by the Stevens brothers. The entire island was claimed between the two brothers. One of the brothers, F. Stevens, held 27 acres on the western end of the island, while Jacob Stevens took care of the remaining 133 acres. Ownership of the island was recorded under Jacob Steven's name and was held by the brothers until 1900.

Around this time, Rosedale's first settlers (the settlers living on the mainland directly across from the island) began logging trees on the island. At first it was just the areas near the water that were clear-cut, but eventually the entire island was logged. By 1915 the island was split up into 14 different lots, each with a different owner. None of these 14 owners lived on or regularly visited the island. The only

recorded life on the island during this time were some farmers who, "By the early 1920's had come, cleared their land for apples and strawberries, and had already gone." (Para 3C).

Haunted House

These farmers left behind a small, A-frame house, which was located directly to the left of where the bridge is now. In the 1920s, children living in Rosedale thought this house was haunted. The children would walk across the beach at low tide and sneak around inside the old, empty house. As time went on and the house deteriorated, no one dared go up to the second floor, because a legend began to grow that skeletons were up there. The house was eventually torn down.

Bootleggers

During the prohibition era of the 1920s and 30s bootleggers used Raft Island as a hang out. A Mexican mining company purchased Raft Island trees for use as timbers to shore up their mines. When the company's boats returned to Puget Sound, bottles of illegal whiskey were hidden in their oil tanks. While the boats were tied up at Raft Island, the whiskey would be smuggled off to shore.

In 1928 George O. Noble, a wealthy mining engineer from Pasadena, California, bought the island. He used the island strictly as a recreational estate and visited rarely. Noble built a house and established a caretaker on the site that was later to be the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) camp, which was the forerunner of the All Saints Center. Noble also

brought electric power to the island by purchasing it from Peninsula Light Company. Building a house on the camp site and bringing power to the island were Noble's two major island accomplishments and by 1932 he had left the island for good. However, Noble officially owned the island until Jess Kuhns purchased it in 1942.

Kuhns' Restrictions

The price Kuhns paid for the Island in 1942 was \$30,000. When Kuhns purchased the island, he moved into the house Noble had built. Kuhns renamed the island Kuhn's Raft Island and in 1946 created his own restrictions for future residents to follow. The following is a summary of Kuhn's regulations:

- 1) No lot shall be used for commercial purposes.*

- 2) *No structure shall be erected nearer than ten feet from a property line.*
- 3) *No buildings or lots shall be sold to anyone not of the Caucasian race.*
(Note: This restriction was ruled discriminatory following passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and is no longer in force.)
- 4) *No animals, other than household pets or family saddle horses, shall be kept on any or said premises.*
- 5) *Proper sewage disposal shall be installed and maintained by the owners of each lot.*
- 6) *The center line of the roadways, as shown on the plat, shall be the property line, but the portion lying within such roadways shall always be subject to common use of owners and for the maintenance and installation of pipes, lines or other equipment so that the owners may be equipped with public utility.*
- 7) *These restrictions shall be binding to all parties having any interest therein, and all persons claiming through or under them, until January 1, 1960, at which time they will be extended for successive periods of ten years unless they are changed in writing by a majority of the lot owners.*
- 8) *These restrictions may be enforced by any person injured by the violation of these restrictions. Compliance may be enforced in*

any court of law or equity having jurisdiction, either by way of injunction, action for damages or other proper remedy. (Kuhns 1).

These restrictions are still intact today, (except for number three as noted above). With the establishment of the Raft Island Improvement Association, additional "Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions" (CCR's) were adopted. These CCR's have since expired and Kuhns' original restrictions from 1946 are the only ones that the island goes by today.

Raft Island Auction

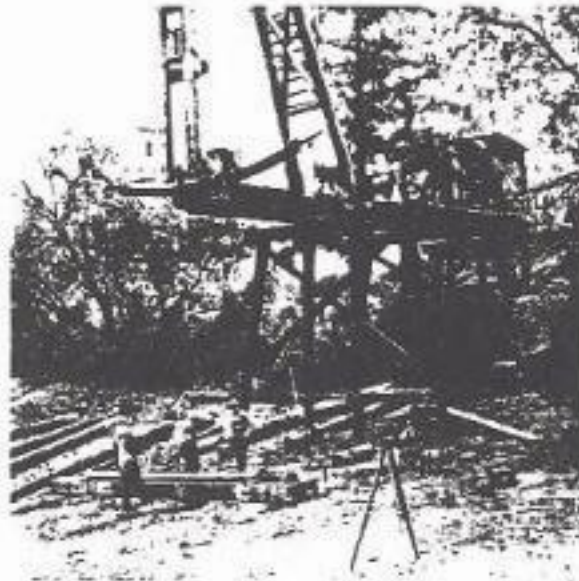
In the mid 1950's, Kuhns decided to hold an auction to try and sell the lots on the island. The auction was well publicized but not many people were interested. Norman and Eva Anderson bought one lot and the Catholic

Youth Organization bought the seventeen acre lot where Kuhns was living. The prices the lots were selling for were extremely low, so Kuhns decided to stop the auction and find one person to buy all of the remaining lots on the Island. All of the remaining lots on the island were purchased by a Tacoma man, Robert L. Healy, and a group of associates.

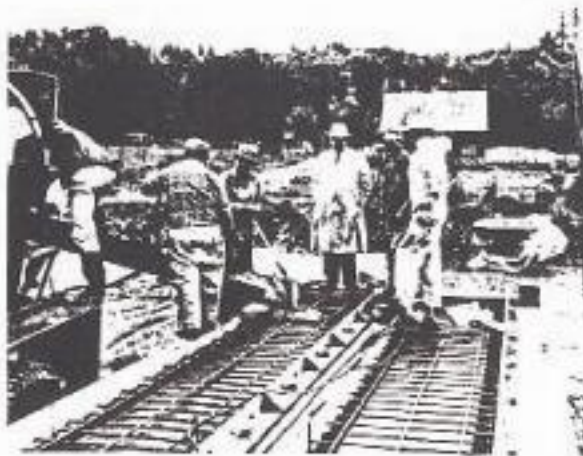
Bridge Construction

Healy applied for a bridge permit for in June of 1956, and was granted permission to build the bridge in September of 1956. On March 20, 1957, Healy sold the rights to the island and handed over the bridge rights to Archie L. Matthew, also of Tacoma.

Healy had gotten the ball rolling, but most of the bridge was constructed under the supervision of Matthew. Much of the bridge



Construction of the Raft Island Bridge
(Photographs Courtesy of Ed & Jean Springer)



ENJOY YEAR 'ROUND VACATION LIVING...

'RAFT ISLAND'

JUST 10 MINUTES FROM NARROWS BRIDGE!



It's wonderful to "get away from it all" on your annual vacation, isn't it? But wouldn't it be perfect if you could get away from it all throughout the year—every year? This dream can become a reality for you—RIGHT NOW! Raft Island, just a few minutes drive across the Narrows Bridge, is now being

developed and thousands of feet of waterfront property are now available for building sites. Plan now to build where you can relax on your own beach and let the tensions of a hectic working day dissipate while you enjoy the serenity of picturesque and beautiful Raft Island!



Raft Island offers a wide variety of recreational activities, too! The sheltered beaches offer warm water swimming... clams are numerous... fishing and boating conditions are ideal. A fine yacht basin will be completed shortly. Skin divers and water skiers will find the island a paradise. Play golf? There's a brand new course being built just five minutes from the island.



McDonnid, Realtors is doing everything possible in the development to make this the most livable island in the Northwest. The thickly wooded terrain is being cleared only where absolutely necessary in order that the rustic charm will be preserved. The brand-new, two-lane private bridge, over 750 feet long and State Highway approved, is of pre-stressed design. A community water system is being planned.



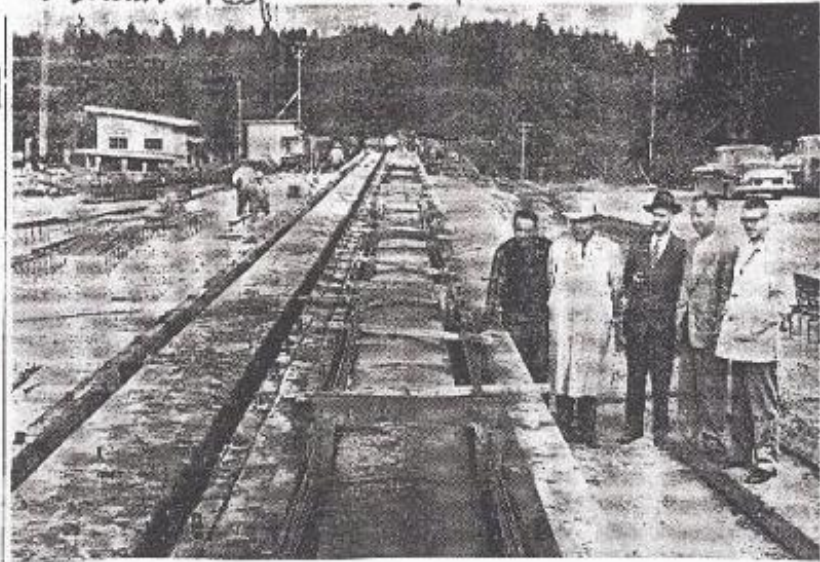
So if you like privacy—if you'd like to live in an atmosphere far removed from a daily humdrum existence, make the move to Raft Island!



W. Islands - Raf

News Article from
the Tacoma News Tribune
(October 13, 1957)

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Raft Island Bridge Plan

PENINSULA. (Special) — An easy access to one of Puget Sound's picturesque islands — with the Olympic Mountains as a backdrop — will become a reality by next spring, weather permitting.

The first major step in spanning the waterway with a bridge between Rosedale on the Peninsula mainland and Raft Island is well under way.

Both plans and cost of the construction of this No. 1 private enterprise (at the present time) in the Peninsula community have been undertaken by Archie Matthew of Tacoma. In May of this year Matthew completed negotiations for the purchase of a major portion of the island.

Concrete for the first 24 beams is expected to be poured tomorrow into forms constructed under the supervision of contractor Hugo Voore of the North American Pre-Stressed Concrete Co. of Vancouver, B. C.

It will require 322 of these pre-stressed concrete beams to complete the two-lane 660-foot deck which will be supported by cross-tied piling, he said. Approximately 400 yards of concrete will be poured. The bridge will be 21 feet wide.

Electric heat installed under the forms will speed up the drying process of the concrete, engineers explained.

Matthews plans to develop the island with roads and homesites to accommodate nearly 200 families on approximately 250 acres of view property with two miles of low sandy beaches.

Toll-free, the \$80,000 bridge will add another link to the expanding Peninsula community.



RAFT ISLAND BRIDGE—A bridge connecting Raft Island and the mainland near Rosedale will take another step toward reality next week when workmen begin pouring pre-stressed beams for the 660-foot long, 21-foot wide structure. Standing beside the completed forms with bridge builder and owner Archie Matthews, second from left, are Hugo Voore of Vancouver, B. C., contractor; attorney Rush Stouffer; Gig Harbor realtor Graham McDonald; and designer K. O. Jartun. Below, arrow shows route cars will take over the new bridge—that is, after the house has been moved out of the way.—News Tribune staff photo.

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construction and assembly was done right across the water from the island, on what is know today as the Raft Island entrance. The concrete blocks still sitting along the gravel at the Island entrance were used as supports during the assembly of the bridge. As legend has it, during the construction of the bridge, some workers decided to take a bull dozer across the beach during low tide in order to get some work done on the other side. The workers didn't get very far before the bull dozer began to sink, and try as they might, they were unable to stop it. The bull dozer kept sinking little by little, and is thought to still be buried beneath the mud today. The construction of the bridge was completed on August 1, 1958.

The opening of the bridge marked the end of the island's isolation. For example, Eva Anderson, who had a cottage on the Island

before the development began, stated that many deer used to roam free on the island, but the development as well as the people bringing their dogs to the Island, caused the deer to be chased away.

McDonald & Parish Buy the Island

On March 20, 1959, exactly two years after purchasing the Island, Matthews sold the island to Graham and Blodwyn McDonald and Merrill and Alta Parish for \$348,000. McDonald owned a real estate company on the Gig Harbor side of the Narrows bridge, so as soon as they bought the property, they began to think of ways to develop the island. They brought over several dump trucks and bull dozers and began the development of the roads as well as the water system. Parish eventually took the responsibility of supplying water to the Island

residents. The Raft Island Water Company was subsequently owned by island residents Walt Powlowski and Mary Morrison. Its current owners are Chuck and Carol Snyder.

CYO Ship Sinks

The CYO camp had an army landing craft, which Kuhns, a highly ranked army officer had helped them obtain. The camp used this craft to get kids from the mainland to the camp and vice versa. After the construction of the bridge the camp continued using the landing craft because they chose not to pay their bridge dues, and in turn were denied the right to use the bridge. Besides using the craft strictly to get to the mainland, the camp would occasionally take the campers out on the craft for a sort of field trip. One day, several years after the completion of the bridge, the landing

craft was full of kids and camp counselors when it sank near Cutts Island. The counselors were able to quickly rope together the kids and no one was harmed. Later, the counselors were highly praised and received awards for their heroism and bravery. The sunken landing craft remains there today, and is a popular attraction for scuba divers.

RIIA Founded

In December, 1960, McDonald and Parish, along with their wives, founded The Raft Island Improvement Association. The purpose of the of the Improvement Association is to "foster and promote recreational and cultural activities among residents of Raft Island, Pierce County; to provide for the improvement and beautification of said Raft Island; to own and operate for the use and benefit of the residents

of said Raft Island, a playground, recreational areas, and private beaches, and to maintain the private, dedicated roads of Raft Island, access roads, and bridge" (McDonald 1). Membership to the Improvement Association was, and still is limited to people who own a "possessory interest in any parcel of land located in the plat of Raft Island. The certificate of membership stays with the land, not with the individual. Membership can be suspended by failure of an individual to pay assessments or an unauthorized transfer of membership" (McDonald 1). The original annual assessments were around \$25.00.

Each member of the association has the right to vote at all Improvement Association board meetings. The meetings are run by the elected officials (President, Vice-president, Treasurer, Secretary) and the six elected

trustees. Elections are held annually for the officials and trustees. No president is allowed to serve more than two consecutive years in office and the two trustees are elected annually for three year terms.

The Board of Trustees has the power to hire a General Manager for "transaction of the business of the corporation" (Island members 2). The job that the General Manager is required to do is:

- 1) *Incur and authorize such incidental expenses as may be necessary in the direction and operations of the affairs of the R.I.I.A.*
- 2) *Within the approved budget, employ such personnel for and on behalf of the R.I.I.A. as in his/her judgment are required.*
- 3) *Present monthly to the Board of Trustees a detailed report of all business transactions, correspondence, and expenditures conducted on behalf of the R.I.I.A."*

The Raft Island Improvement Association has succeeded in its goals of bettering the

island. Over the years, it has established a park with a tennis court and basketball hoops for residents to use, kept up and remodeled both beaches, and made necessary repairs to the bridge and roads. The Improvement Association has dealt with all matters concerning the good of the island and its residents over the years, and in doing so established itself as the backbone of Raft Island.

From the Stevens brothers to the Raft Island Improvement Association, and from the haunted house to the North Beach, Raft Island has a unique history. Noble, Kuhns, Matthew, McDonald, and Parish along with everyone else who has ever lived on the island, have been a part of Raft Island's history, and it is this history which has shaped the island's independent character.

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