

Grahn Kove: A Water Trail History

From cedar canoe to Mosquito Fleet

Photo Credit: The Grahn Family



The Chickaree pulled out for annual maintenance.

Early in the history of Kitsap County, advertisements distributed in Seattle highlighted the beauty of the Brownsville area, making it a popular destination for weekend trips. Gilberton, in particular, saw a shift from logging in the late nineteenth century to a tourist destination and summer cottage location for those interested in "sandy beaches". With the advent of the Mosquito Fleet ferry system, travel between towns, both within Kitsap County and across the water, allowed for more and more people to vacation and live here. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were seventy docks around the county, built to accommodate twelve steamboats serving the small communities around western Puget Sound. One family, the Grahns, who owned and operated ferries out of Gilberton, has made this area their home since 1884.

Born in Sweden and after a brief time in Minnesota, four brothers from the Grahn family settled in Gilberton prior to its platting in 1909. While three of the brothers later moved to Seattle, Carl Grahn remained and settled on forty acres around 1898, naming his parcel, Grahn Kove. According to his son, Erwin, around 1898 visitors came to the property by steamboat. A float was placed in the water and people would get off the boat and then wait for a row boat to pick them up and take them to shore.

Other visitors to Grahn Kove included Northwest tribes from Vancouver Island who camped on the spit at the mouth of the creek each summer, where they dug clams. A spring located along the shoreline just north of Grahn Kove and used by these visitors was known as Chief's Water.

Transportation around the county became easier once a ferry run was established linking Brownsville with Bremerton. This run and the boat, Tazalina, were purchased by Carl's sons Earl and Cullie in 1917. A year later they replaced the Tazalina with the larger ferry, Chickaree. This 75 foot ferry transported workers to the naval shipyard, students to the high school in Bremerton, and milk and produce to town.

The Chickaree made several stops along the Brownsville to Bremerton route, one of which was Grahn Kove in Gilberton. Members of Our Saviors Lutheran Church were frequent passengers on The Chickaree. Families from this Bremerton

church would take the ferry to Grahn Kove after church on Sunday afternoons and picnic in the field of the Grahn family property. The Chickaree also was known to transport baseball fans and players to the various fields of Kitsap County and dancers to Foster's Pavilion on Bainbridge Island. In a time of poor roads, the Grahn's ferry allowed for speedy travel throughout the county. The Chickaree ran until 1942 when it was damaged in a collision.



Credit: Google Earth

Today, brothers Karl (80) and Peter (75) Grahn (grandsons of the first Carl to settle at Grahn Kove), along with their late sister's three children: Tom, Marylee, and Jerry, are working with Great Peninsula Conservancy to fulfill their vision of permanently protecting Grahn Kove. We can think of no better way to conserve its beauty and history than to create a water accessible campsite at Grahn Kove as part of the Cascadia Marine Trail. If we are successful, kayakers and small boaters will once again be able to enjoy a Sunday afternoon picnic in the apple orchard at Grahn Kove.

Siv Carlson
GPC Intern



Peter Grahn; Sandra Staples-Bortner, GPC Executive Director; Phil Best, GPC Board Member; and Kitsap County Commissioner Josh Brown view Illahee Road washout and flooding impact to creek.

Photo Credit: Elaine Thomas

What's in Your Watershed?



Gilberton Creek and Estuary Restoration Project

TOGETHER WE CAN:

- Take out the asphalt and debris
- Remove invasive weeds
- Replant streambanks
- Restore the health and function of the stream and estuary
- Attract shorebirds, ducks and fish to the cove once again
- Create a water-trail campsite for kayaks

THE STORY OF GILBERTON CREEK

On December 3, 2007 disastrous flooding pushed a house-sized section of Illahee Road into Gilberton Creek burying the lower reaches under loads of mud, rocks, and asphalt.

At the stream's mouth, a protective cove important for endangered Puget Sound Chinook and other salmon, is now filled with gravel. Shellfish beds along the spit are smothered and the beach is littered with logs.

Today, a large fish-friendly passage replaces the problem culvert but the debris remains.

Great Peninsula Conservancy owns four acres of land along Gilberton Creek to help protect this special landscape.

Great Peninsula conservancy is working with our neighbors, the Kitsap Conservation District, Kitsap County, and WA Department of Fish and Wildlife to find a way to restore the stream and estuary.

The Conservancy is interested in acquiring five acres at the mouth of Gilberton Creek, to protect the estuary and create a future water accessible campsite as part of the Cascadia Marine Trail.

FOR MORE
INFORMATION ON THIS
OR OTHER STREAM
AND ESTUARY
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