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# YOUTH HERITAGE PROJECT: INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION



## Rescuing a Whidbey Island Treasure

By Lynn Hyde, Board Member, Historic Whidbey



*The Haller House, pictured with its "for sale" sign.*

A British friend of mine roared with laughter when I told him I had moved to Coupeville, Washington. "Is it covered with chicken coops?" he jested. I reflexively defended my new home by saying it was full of sporty little cars. But the truth is that Coupeville is most generously spangled with many of the earliest surviving homes on the west coast – 18 dwellings that predate 1870 at last count. Many more nineteenth century Victorians help make Coupeville and the larger 24-square-mile Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, one of the largest National Historic Districts in the country.

The Historic District was established in 1973, so one would expect that all Coupeville's architectural and historic treasures would be well-known. But when the 1866 home of Colonel Granville Haller went on the market in November of 2012, one was hard-pressed to find a local who had ever heard of it or knew where it was. It sits at the corner of Front and Main Streets, very nearly the epicenter of the town's history tourism. Yet, a

hardy crop of volunteer trees, shrubs, and "little-shop-of-horrors" ivy have obscured it from view so completely, that the house has been hidden in plain sight for decades.

Just as obscure is the house's builder, Granville Haller. Haller was a prominent military figure during the 1850s when Washington Territory had

conflicts with both Indians and Englishmen. After the Civil War, Haller returned to Whidbey Island with his family, where he became an important figure in the commercial growth of young Coupeville. Despite his relative anonymity, his personal history is tightly interwoven with our state's Territorial history.

Haller bought this northwest corner of Thomas Coupe's original land claim along with its earlier 1859 house built by merchant Raphael Brunn. He apparently moved the Brunn house and joined it to the rear of his new one as an ell. In its day, it was the grandest house around – a two-story colonial with 10' ceilings, two central fireplaces, a distinctive corbelled chimney, wood grain painting, and trendy bay windows in the east parlor.

With a waterfront bluff location and views of Penn Cove and Mount Baker, the Haller House might have sold quickly. But it has some issues – most noteworthy is the fact that due to an unusual ownership history, it has never been modernized. It has only rudimentary do-it-yourself wiring threaded in and out of the plaster, and no more plumbing than a toilet



*View of the Coupeville Wharf and Penn Cove from Front Street near the Haller House.*

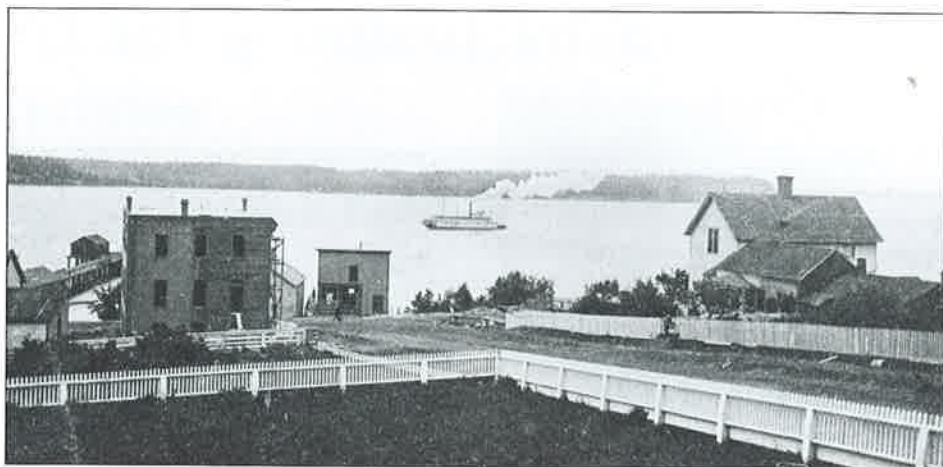
and a kitchen sink. There is no central heating. Layers of original wallpaper rest under layers of paint. In short, the house is nearly unchanged since it was built 147 years ago – a preservation-geek's dream house.

To modernize the Haller House to meet modern codes would require the destruction of much of its historic integrity – and the loss of an invaluable educational resource. In a town like Coupeville, it was inevitable that some alarmed preservationists would rally to the cause of its preservation and restoration. Comprised of historians, public educators and historical architects, our committed group recently incorporated as Historic Whidbey and is in the process of obtaining nonprofit status. Our ultimate goal is to fulfill the house's promise as a historic house museum, most likely with a supporting for-profit enterprise.

To raise awareness, one of our first actions was to nominate the house for the Washington Trust's Most Endangered Properties list for 2013, which was granted in May. We also worked with the house's sympathetic owners to remove it from the market so a serious campaign could be launched to purchase it. A temporary deal was struck, and Historic Whidbey is now preparing to enter a lease-to-own agreement, which will provide the owners with relief from heavy ownership costs, while providing our fledgling non-profit time to raise the funds to purchase it outright.

Central to our successful campaign launch is the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, who has generously offered us fiscal sponsorship while we await our IRS nonprofit designation and while we build credibility in the community. With the support of the Trust – our "fairy godmother" – we felt confident the time had come to go public with our cause.

On September 21, Historic Whidbey held our campaign launch in Coupeville with guided Haller House tours that attracted approximately 200 people. There was also a free



*Historic photo of Front Street while the Haller House was operating as the Campbell Hotel, with a vessel in Penn Cove in the background, c. 1891.*

public lecture titled "Tribes, Treaties & Pigs: Homeland Security in the 1850s." Mike Vouri, chief historian at San Juan Island National Historical Park gave a fascinating overview of the U.S. Army in Washington Territory in the 1850s. Vouri's teaser gave

Coupeville a hint of the untold stories that can be chronicled through a rich interpretive program at a newly-restored Haller House Museum.

With a great cause and a supportive community, Historic Whidbey looks forward to the challenges ahead!

# CALL FOR 2014 MOST ENDANGERED NOMINATIONS

Every year, many historic properties across the state are threatened by demolition or neglect. Collectively, these properties contribute to the quality of life we enjoy and shape the daily experiences of living in Washington State. To help protect these valuable places, the Washington Trust solicits nominations from the general public for inclusion on our annual Most Endangered Historic Properties List. As part of our mission, the Trust selects a group from these nominations upon which we spend the next year focusing our attention and resources.

The Haller House in Coupeville was featured this year as one of our 2013 Most Endangered properties. To see the entire list, please visit our website:

[preservewa.org/current-list.aspx](http://preservewa.org/current-list.aspx)

We rely on the support of our membership to help us know where preservation efforts are most crucially needed. If there is an endangered historic resource in your neighborhood, please consider nominating it to our 2014 Most Endangered Properties List, to be announced at our annual Preservation and Main Street Conference in May 2014. For instructions on the submission process, please visit:

[preservewa.org/nomination-process.aspx](http://preservewa.org/nomination-process.aspx)

If you would like to submit a property to our Most Endangered Properties list for next year, applications will be due:

## MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2014