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Revisiting Coupeville's Haller House

By Lynn Hyde, Historic Whidbey

Just one year ago, Historic Whidbey was a passel of fresh-faced preservationists, filing our Articles of Incorporation with the State of Washington as a new nonprofit organization. We were heady on the wonderful support we had received from the Washington Trust for our inaugural cause – the purchase and restoration of Coupeville's 1866 Haller House. It had just been named to the Most Endangered Properties list for 2013, and the Trust was acting as our fiscal sponsor as we began our pursuit of funds for acquisition of the house. It has been a serpentine ride chasing victory, but every day we gain momentum. The house's builder, Colonel Granville Haller, was a speculator par excellence; we are hoping the Colonel's luck is with us.

In the last twelve months we have received our IRS letter of determination as a 501(c)3, tax-exempt nonprofit organization, and we have recently signed a lease with the owners of the Haller House with an Option to Purchase in June of 2015. This enables them to keep the house off the real estate market at a time when some hope of a rebounding market exists. Meanwhile, we focus our attentions on raising the funds for purchase.

Our happiest milestone passed is the completion of the essential Historic Structures Report, thanks to the good

people at Artifacts Consulting, Inc. in Tacoma. Aided in the field by our skilled Historic Whidbey volunteers, Artifacts produced a top-notch document. This is an invaluable tool in attracting support and can be found on our website: historicwhidbey.org.

Though purchase of the house and property is our most pressing priority, we are also developing our future vision for the site. As a significant architectural artifact within Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, the Haller House will always be a part of a broader historical community; more dwellings of Washington's Territorial Era (1850-1875) survive in Coupeville than anywhere else in our state. This founding period of our history is little known by the public, but is perhaps the most fascinating.

Of the Reserve's 29 homes and businesses of the period, it is the Haller House that best encapsulates all the major themes of the Territorial Era. As an active participant in the forces of westward expansion, Colonel Haller makes the perfect tour guide to demonstrate that the 19th century Washington Territory was not just an isolated backwater, disconnected from the United States in the east; it was an anchor strand of a social web centered thousands of miles away.

This is the deeper narrative of Ebey's Reserve, and we intend to join our

voice to those of the Reserve's other partners in sharing this story. Thus, we see great promise in the future establishment of a historic house museum in the Haller House, one that focuses frankly on the difficult theme of Manifest Destiny – the complex and often troubling juggernaut of American expansion into the Pacific Northwest.

To support this museum, we will establish a commercial/retail space in the back ell of the house on Main Street. This shell of an earlier structure (c. 1859) was joined to the Hallers' new house in 1866, but unlike the "new" house, it has been so far degraded that we need not fear compromising its historic integrity with modernization. An appropriately themed social enterprise will support the educational mission, while generating the revenue necessary to maintain the museum and grounds. Best of all, with its prime location at Front & Main Streets along the waterfront, it can attract more visitors to the downtown corridor, increasing heritage tourism to the community that depends on it, with a complementary rather than a competing venue.

It is a plan that is a win for the Haller House, a win for Coupeville, and a win for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. Please visit our website or like us on Facebook for more information!



Captain Granville Haller at his home in Coupeville.



Portraits of Captain Granville and Henrietta Haller painted in 1849 around the time of their wedding, shortly after his return to York, Pennsylvania, from the Mexican-American War. Photographed by Jeri Goldstein.