

Ebey's Landing



National Historical Reserve
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Jacob & Sarah Ebey House

"I found Father & Mother moved to their new house on the hill or "Sunny Side" as I sometimes call it. I went up and am now spending my first night at the new place. The house is as yet somewhat uncomfortable but will soon be rendered habitable. And Mother says she feels like she was at Home Again. That is sufficient to make any place agreeable."

—Winfield Scott Ebey
February 27, 1856



The Jacob Ebey House on the Ebey's Prairie Ridge Trail

Who were the Ebeys?

When Whidbey Island's first permanent Euro-American settler, Isaac Neff Ebey arrived in 1850, his first order of business was to bring his family out to join him. They did so in two waves—his wife Rebecca and sons Eason and Ellison hit the Oregon Trail with her brothers in 1851.

Isaac's parents Jacob and Sarah Ebey set out three years later with their grown children Mary, Winfield and Elizabeth Ruth.



Jacob Ebey

At the time, Jacob was 61 and Sarah 58 - more than twice the age of the average traveler on the Oregon Trail. But these were hardy people and the Ebeys were no novices at emigration.

Jacob was born in Pennsylvania and Sarah in Virginia, and they had raised their thirteen children in Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri before heading out for the Pacific coast. They left nine of their children behind in cemeteries of the Midwest.

A veteran of the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk War (where he served in the same battalion as Abraham Lincoln), Jacob proved a fearless seeker to the end, surviving Sarah and all but two of his children. He died in 1862 and is buried in Sunnyside Cemetery with the rest of his family.

Why Whidbey Island?

The Ebey family of Adair County, Missouri made the great migration along with the neighboring Crockett family. Jacob Ebey and Walter Crockett brought their families west after their sons had crossed the Oregon Trail in the late 1840s.

Both Isaac Neff Ebey and Samuel Black Crockett had explored the gold fields of California and the prairies of Oregon's Willamette Valley, but it was the superior farmland of Whidbey Island they chose for their new homes. The Oregon Donation Land Law of 1850 made it possible for them to claim 320 acres of land for free, with a promise to work it for four years. Their wives could claim an additional 320 acres as well.

Eventually, nearly thirty Ebeys and Crocketts would make the arduous move to Puget Sound between 1851 and 1854, most of them settling on Ebey and Crockett Prairies.



Isaac N. Ebey

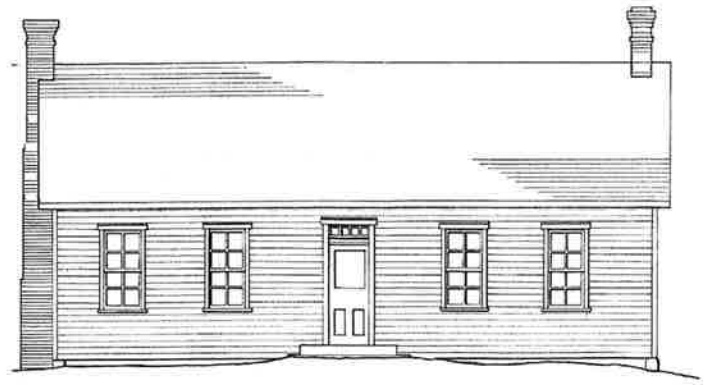
"I scarcely know how I shall write or what I shall write. When I think of home, of father, and mother, sisters and brother, wife, children, and friends, my heart sinks within me; I can scarce find words to clothe my ideas, it seems so like writing to the dead... The great desire of my heart is, and has been, to get my own and father's family to this country... which is almost a Paradise of Nature... If you all were here, I think I could live and die here content."

— Isaac Neff Ebey to his brother Winfield, April 25, 1851

The House

Eight family members called the 18' x 40' house "home." Jacob Ebey claimed 320 acres of land on the western ridge overlooking his son Isaac's square-mile claim on the prairie. Here the farming family would raise wheat, oats and potatoes while maintaining chickens, pigs, oxen, horses and a small herd of dairy cows. By 1860, the profitable farm was valued at \$8,000.

Constructed in the fall and winter of 1856, the 1-1/2 story, "hall and parlor" type house was built with 12"x 1" fir planks nailed to a hewn-timber foundation. These thin, uninsulated vertical plank walls were first papered, then covered with cloth to try to block the prairie's fierce winds.



*Jacob Ebey House, southeast elevation,
National Park Service*

A Troubled Era



The log blockhouse next to the house is a symbol of conflict and violence between settlers and Native Americans.

Throughout 1855 Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens conducted a whirlwind tour of the Washington Territory, creating treaties with native peoples for their land. The treaties, conducted with more efficiency than diplomacy, left a bitter wake amongst Washington's tribes that led to violence.

On Puget Sound this threat was compounded by frequent raids by Indians from today's Alaska and British Columbia.

About 5 o'clock this morning every living Soul about the house were aroused by the cry of "Indians" "Indians" "The Yard is full of Indians" from father___ In a very Short space of time I had got my Pants & Boots on & seizing a Rifle was going at the top of my Speed for the Beach. As I got to the top of the hill I saw two canoes pushing off. I immediately raised my gun and attempted to fire when I found by the 'Click' of the lock that the rifle was not loaded. I never was so vexed in my life. I was in fair view but could not Shoot."

—Winfield Scott Ebey
January 19, 1856

A January 1856 raid by Northern Indians at Ebey's Landing may have motivated the Ebey's to build at least one blockhouse adjacent to their new home at the time of its construction. Community Memory holds that the Ebey House was once surrounded by a 12-foot palisade, anchored by four blockhouses. No evidence of this has been found.

The Ebey blockhouse is one of four blockhouses to survive in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. As many as eleven were built during the troubled decade of the 1850's.

The Pratt Years

The last Ebey family member to live in the house was Mary Ebey Bozarth—Jacob and Sarah's eldest child. Her departure in 1872 marked the end of regular stable occupancy in the house, and in 1929 the property was sold to Frank and Lena Pratt.

Thanks to the Pratts' appreciation for history and Ebey's Landing, the house, blockhouse and land received the care and stewardship that held them in safety through most of the twentieth century. Their son Robert Pratt, a devoted conservationist and preservationist picked up the torch, and upon his death in 1999, ownership of this treasured place was transferred to The Nature Conservancy.

That organization then transferred the structures and parts of the acreage to the National Park Service—for the perpetual enjoyment and benefit of the American People.



Jacob & Sarah Ebey House, and Blockhouse, ca 1900s.