

# Ebey's Landing



National Historical Reserve  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
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## Ferry House at Ebey's Landing

Perhaps no other building represents Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve as well as the Ferry House. Built in the early 1860s by the Ebey family, this public house first welcomed visitors to Whidbey Island at the front gate of Isaac Ebey's 1850 donation land claim—the first claim of an American settler on the island.

Superior farmland on a maritime highway made this one of the best claims on Puget Sound, and Isaac's 640-acre "Ebey Prairie" remains intact today - the heart of Ebey's Reserve.

Today the evocative Ferry House sits isolated in a field, far away from town and commerce. Yet it still continues to speak to the present... and hopefully will do so long into the future.



*The Ferry House at Ebey's Landing as it looks today. The fragile house and surrounding fields are not open to the public at this time.*

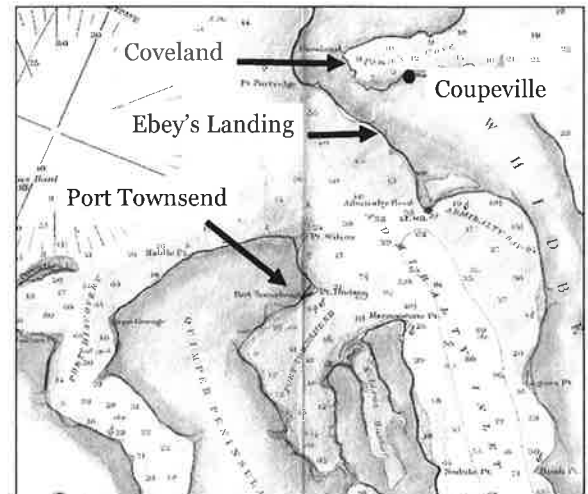
## The Maritime Gateway

When Isaac Neff Ebey picked the west side of Whidbey Island as the place to stake his donation land claim, he was not choosing a remote location off the beaten path. Just six miles across Admiralty Inlet was Port Townsend and one of the best natural harbors in the world.

Ebey chose this spot much as Dutch entrepreneurs had chosen Manhattan Island two and a half centuries earlier.

Its strategic location was well established by the original inhabitants. Archaeological evidence suggests the site had been a seasonal camp for visiting Native Americans for at least 10,000 years.

When Ebey was appointed Customs Collector for the Washington Territory in 1853, he successfully lobbied to have the Port-of-Entry for the United States moved north from Olympia to Port Townsend. It made a much easier commute to his farmstead at Ebey's Landing.



*US Coast Survey map of 1867, showing Port Townsend and Coveland on Penn Cove*



*Capt. Thomas Coupe*

## The First Ferries

The establishment in 1852 of Coveland as the Island County seat (shifting to Coupeville in 1881) brought government business to Penn Cove.

With the U.S. Port of Entry at Port Townsend, this meant lots of traffic across Admiralty Inlet, conducted on water. Ebey's Landing is still the low spot in the western bluffs, and was the original eastern terminus of the ferry route that operated from the island to

the peninsula. It saw lively traffic through the 1850s and 1860s.

Captain Thomas Coupe, namesake of Coupeville, obtained the charter for this very service in 1860, which he conducted until 1872 on his vessels *Success*, *Keturah* and *Mary Ellen*.

Others then ran the ferry to Ebey's Landing until trains and automobiles shifted transportation patterns to land.

## A Tragic Legacy

*"The "Cabins" are now deserted for good I suppose... The old place looks lonesome & deserted. The "Cabins" once a place of resort are now an object of dread. Their presiding genius can never light up their darkened walls. It will go to ruin & decay."*

—Winfield Scott Ebey  
August 15, 1857

Isaac Ebey was a leading political figure in the Northwest, often credited with the successful petition to Congress to establish the Washington Territory. But his hopeful life at what he called "the Cabins" came to a tragic halt on August 11, 1857 when he was the victim of a retribution killing at the hands of Northern Indians from southeast Alaska. Ebey was attacked in the middle of the night in his yard and his head taken as a trophy of war.

The repercussions in the community and the larger Washington Territory were enormous; for the family it was devastating. Ebey left two young sons, now orphaned, in the care of his extended family.

As the family abandoned "the Cabins," they undertook to build the Ferry House, purportedly using lumber salvaged from Isaac's home.

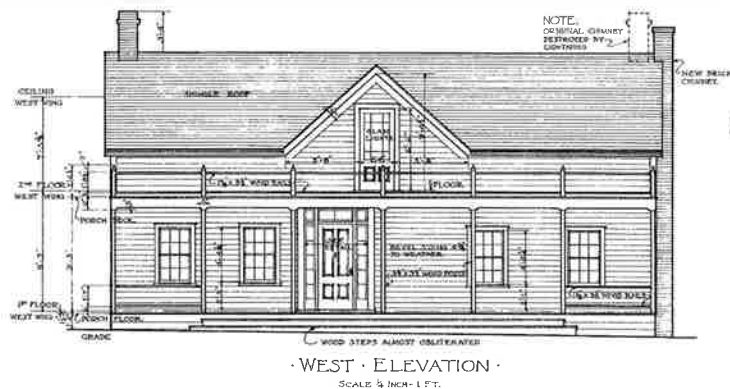
## The House

Shortly after Isaac Ebey's death in 1857, his brother Winfield Ebey and his cousin George Beam undertook construction of a wayside inn on Isaac's donation land claim as a means to support Isaac's surviving sons, Eason and Ellison.

With subtle Greek Revival architectural detailing and a hewn timber foundation, the Ferry House began in 1859 as a 1-1/2 story, plank-framed, 20' by 28' building with an interior chimney on its south end for heat. This is the structure that opened for business as a ferry traveler's stage service, tavern, and post office in 1860, acquiring the second liquor license issued by Island County in 1861.

At some point between 1860 and 1862, the original rectangular structure was extended on its north end to become a 20' by 42' structure comprised of two main rooms flanking a central hall; another interior chimney was added near its north end wall.

The House's east section was built sometime before 1865 - a large 1-1/2 story perpendicular ell at the rear of the building, with a large dining room below and six more sleeping chambers above - giving us the structure we see today.



Ferry House, west elevation  
Historic American Building Survey, c. 1930s

*"New Year's day. Came over from Port Townsend & we all adjourned to the Ferry House... We had quite a merry time of it Drinking wine Egg Nogg Smoking Cigars Eating SnapDragons &c."*

—Winfield Ebey, 1863

## The Ebey Inn



Ferry House, sometime prior to 1917

J. Ellison Ebey, Isaac's younger son, eventually took over the management of the hostelry in 1877 with his wife Mary.

Ellison made significant efforts to enhance the guest experience, adding a bay window and fireplace in the dining room, as well as refining the décor.

During his management, the Ferry House did business as "The Ebey Inn," until he became ill and was forced to retire in 1889, shortly before his death. This was the only period when the business was actually managed by a member of the Ebey family.

The Ferry House continued to be leased out as an inn, and later a boarding house until the family sold the property to Frank Pratt in 1917. The National Park Service acquired the house in 2000, and is committed to its preservation.



J. Ellison &  
Mary Ebey

