

TOKELAND HOTEL

A History by Ruth McCausland

The town of Tokeland in Washington State is situated along a low point of land on the north side of Willapa Bay a short distance inland from the Pacific Ocean. Its name came from long-ago resident Chief Toke of Chinook/Chehalis ancestry who lived the winter months in the vicinity of what is now Bay Center on the east side of the bay. As soon as the weather gave signs of spring, Chief Toke moved his family, immediate and extended, to the peaceful and plentiful wooded point across the water. There they made summer camp, lived off the land and sea until time to again take shelter from the unpredictable winter weather of the coastline.

The first intrusion into the life of the local natives came when ex-British Royal Navy Lieutenant of the Revolutionary War, John Meares, now an employee of East India Company and captain of the FELICE ADVANTURER, made the discovery on July 5, 1788, of a heretofore overlooked bay along the Pacific Ocean coast. His ship did not cross the bar but for several hours was anchored on the open water at its entrance. While there, the FELICE was visited by a native man and boy in a dugout canoe who came from inside the harbor. They would not board the ship and there was no verbal communication. After an exchange of trinkets for two otter skins, the Indians paddled back from whence they came. Before sailing, Captain Meares charted the body of water as "Shoalwater Bay" because of its shallow depth and sandy islands, presumably an uninviting place for sailing ships.

The land surrounding the bay remained unvisited for twenty-five years when British naturalist David Douglas came through. He later spread word about the abundance of giant trees he had seen and greatly admired. Because of the seeds he collected and sent back to England, these trees are now known as Douglas firs and can be found growing through much of the world. The next non-native visitors were members of the Wilkes Expedition who merely passed through in 1824 after leaving some local place names.

Harvesting of the giant trees began during the 1840s and brought a few loggers into the area. In 1850 Captain James Alden of the United States Survey Ship ACTIVE began to survey the Pacific coastline. Two years later he wrote to the head of the survey service, "We have made a reconnaissance of the entrance to Shoal-water Bay, and all the northern portion of it," continuing his report with a description of the terrain.

The biggest change to the sparsely-populated part of the country began when some of the unsuccessful prospectors who had rushed to California for gold in 1849 decided to head northward to new adventures. One of these men was Charles J.W. Russell, a former Virginian who somehow found his way north of the Columbia River to the shores of Shoalwater Bay in Oregon Territory. Russell saw the untouched trees but what really made him gasp was the amount of oysters laying the in the shallow

channels and sandy beaches of the bay. Russell inadvertently began the opening of the area when he set out to develop a market for oysters by bringing a small amount to San Francisco. His stories of an endless supply of the succulent bivalve inspired a Captain Fielsted to sail the first schooner from San Francisco into Shoalwater Bay. Once there, he loaded his ship with oysters and returned to California, confirming the fact that Charles Russell had not been exaggerating.

While in San Francisco, Russell met James G. Swan, one-time educator from Massachusetts. Russell invited Swan to visit him at his home in Oregon Territory. In 1852, accompanied by Russell, Swan came to Shoalwater Bay. He staked a claim along a creek emptying into the bay (Bone River) and built a small cabin in which he lived for three years. One year after Swan's arrival, the land north of the Columbia River was separated from Oregon Territory. For the next thirty-six years, until it became a state, it was called Washington Territory.

With ships and boats of all sizes moving in and out of the bay, accidents were bound to happen. Even when weather conditions lay quietly, fog often obscured the entrance to the bay. To alleviate the problem, government surveyors enlisted the help of Charley Ma-Tote, (believed to be the brother of Chief Toke). He recommended a site on Cape Shoalwater for a military reservation where a lighthouse would be placed. The Shoalwater Bay Light was erected and remained in operation until 1940 when it was lost during the erosion of the Cape.

It has been estimated that by the mid-1800s when all of southwest Washington Territory had been surveyed, mapped, and opened for settlement, about ninety percent of the natives of the Pacific Northwest had succumbed to epidemics of small pox and other diseases. Most of the rest were enslaved by the white man's alcohol. As there were so few Indians left, the leaders of the government in Washington, D.C. apparently had no qualms in taking control of what they considered to be unoccupied land. The Indians were paid to give up their camps and were granted various rights, but some resented being told they were to settle on a specific section of land reserved for them. In 1855, President Franklin Pierce requested Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens to relocate the remaining Indians onto reservations. The Indians of Shoalwater Bay, though peaceful in nature, refused to be grouped with Indians north and east of Grays Harbor. Instead, they chose a parcel of waterfront ground on the inland side of a cove formed by the curved end of Cape Shoalwater. There they created a village which became known as "Georgetown."

Little is known about J.F. Barrows who moved onto Toke's Point in 1854. James Swan wrote in his book, "The Northwest Coast" of an overnight stay in Barrow's cabin when on the way to the Chehalis River where the Treaty Conference of 1855 was held. Three years later, shortly before the next settler made his appearance, Barrows left his little home for reasons unknown.

George Brown, born in Pennsylvania, had also gone to California to try his luck in the goldfields. While in San Francisco, he met and married Mrs. Charlotte Norris,

mother of two young sons (the fate of Mr. Norris not known). The Browns moved from California to Portland where George worked as a butcher. Portland was not to be their permanent home, however, as George Brown had dreams of settling in the newly-opened land of Washington Territory.

In 1858 George Brown arrived by dugout canoe to the shores of Toke's Point and, without going further, found what he was seeking. He filed a claim, pitched a tent in which to live while building a house, and stayed over the winter. The following year, 1859, he went back to Portland, packed the family belongings, and moved his wife, Charlotte, three-year-old son Albert, and the two Norris stepsons Leonidas, age 11, and Darius, age 9, to the wooded spit near the camp used by the family of Chief Toke.

In the summer of 1862, the first official survey of Shoalwater Bay was completed by the crew on the Brig FAUNTLEROY, Captain Lawson commanding. Shortly after the ship left, Charlotte Brown was taken by dugout canoe across the bay to Bruceport and, on August 1st, gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. Nine days later, Charlotte brought "Lizzie" home to Toke's Point.

Almost four years were to pass when tragedy struck the Browns. In May 1866, ten-year-old Albert was drowned in Teal Duck Slough. His death was a devastating blow not only to the parents but to four-year-old Lizzie as well. It is not known if this was when Lizzie was sent to live with the Indians at nearby Georgetown, but she did spend considerable time there, learned their Chinook language and developed lifelong friendships with them.

To settle the northwest land disputes with the Indians, the United States government had sent Army detachments to negotiate with their tribal chiefs and to give protection to the settlers. At the same time, unresolved problems between the north and south in the eastern part of the United States were dividing the country. With the outbreak of the Civil War, all the servicemen in the territory were ordered to the battlefield resulting in the delay of the official placement of the Shoalwater Bay people. Not until the senseless slaughter (which took the life of Colonel Isaac Stevens, first Washington Territorial Governor) was finished in 1865 did the negotiations resume with the Indians.

On September 22, 1866, a declaration was signed by President Andrew Johnson reserving for the permanent home of the Shoalwaters less than one square mile of land surrounding the Indian Village of Georgetown. Because they had not signed the original treaty in 1855, the Shoalwaters were not considered "treaty" Indians and were denied some of the benefits given to those tribes that had signed.

Though there were about three miles between Georgetown and the Brown home, the children on the reservation were the playmates of Lizzie. There was no local school at the time (not until 1897) but she did attend classes held at the Rose Farm near Bay Center. Scholastic facilities were limited but the Brown always saw to it that Lizzie was as well-educated as possible.

The two Norris boys, Lizzie's half-brothers, lived on the Tokes Point farm until Darius moved into a house of his own which he shared with Christian Nedrow. Physically handicapped with a curvature of the spine, Nedrow was a jack-of-all-trades, adept at mechanics. Shortly before his twenty-first birthday, Darius turned his house and property over to the Browns and, with 52-year-old Nedrow, moved to California. The following year, hard-working, long-suffering Charlotte Norris Brown was dealt another tragic blow. Leonidas, her oldest son, was the victim of a fatal accident while hunting. Lizzie was now the only child living in the Toke Point home.

Since the development of the oyster trade, water traffic in and out of Shoalwater Bay continued to increase tremendously. Ships bringing supplies for the settlers returned to California loaded with the prized shellfish. Logging around the bay resulted in the establishment of lumber mills in South Bend which created more water traffic when transporting their finished product. Inevitably there were mishaps, usually due to unfavorable weather conditions. The lighthouse on the Cape helped guide the vessels into the harbor but the government decided the time had come to establish a Lifesaving Station to rescue unfortunate seagoers who were sometimes stranded at the entrance of the bay. After funds were approved for the building, workers were recruited through advertisements in Portland newspapers. One of the respondents was William Kindred who was hired as a carpenter.

The new station was placed on the sand dunes of Cape Shoalwater next to a channel which came from the cove on the inner side of the Cape. The station was finished and dedicated in 1878. Thirty-two acres next to the station was purchased by the station commander, Captain George Johnson, and his wife, Lucy Ann who later platted it into the town of North Cove. George Brown bought a piece of property on the Cape, north of the Lifesaving Station.

With Tokeland about four miles from the construction site, the carpenter from Oregon became acquainted with and then courted the daughter of the land owner at Toke's Point. On November 24, 1880, when Lizzie Brown was 18 years old, and William Kindred, 23 years old, they were married at a wedding ceremony held in the parlor of the Brown home. For a time they lived in Astoria, Oregon, the home of some of the large Kindred family. It was here, in 1881, that Lizzie Brown Kindred gave birth to a daughter named Maud Ethel.

Waterways were the highways in the early days of the country's growth. Along with settlers came their boats of various designs and sizes. Crossing land areas between bodies of water was done either by walking, by horseback, or horse-drawn wagon. The development of railroad lines eliminated the wagon trains and some of the stagecoaches although companies continued to provide transportation to points where the railroads did not reach.

Before the completion of the railway line between Portland and Seattle, several days had to be allowed to make the trip from Oregon to Olympia. First a traveler

boarded a steamboat in Portland which took him along the Columbia River to Astoria. Another boat crossed the river to Ilwaco. Prior to the opening of the Ilwaco Railway line on Long Beach Peninsula in 1889, the traveler boarded a stagecoach which was drawn by horse on the ocean beach (at low tide), crossed over to Nahcotta on the bay shore and caught a bay steamer to North Cove. Again, traveling on the beach by cart, he was taken to Chehalis Point (Westport) and connected with a sternwheeler to Montesano on the Chehalis River. The last 34 miles to Olympia were by stagecoach. This roundabout route made it necessary to find not only overnight stops along the way but also for meals to eat. People such as the Browns opened their homes to travelers for a small charge, prepared food for them, and unintentionally developed inns and hotels. Once a docking facility was installed on Toke's Point, the little bay steamboats stopped at Toke's Point bringing more visitors to the hospitable Brown home.

Over the years, Charlotte and George Brown had acquired about 740 acres of land on or near Toke's Point. They built up the soil in which to grow vegetables and fruit. They raised cattle for meat and dairy products. Chickens and turkeys also furnished meat as well as eggs. Seafood was plentiful—crabs, clams, oysters, salmon and sturgeon. Wild fowl and venison were in year-around supply. The ample supply of excellent food prepared by Charlotte Brown was often shared with travelers who had spent the night in their home.

The health of George Brown began to fail when he was in his fifties. Lizzie, Bill and Maud Kindred returned to Toke's Point to help in the operation of the Browns' large land holdings. In January, 1882, the Kindreds purchased a section of land from the Browns on which to build their own home. After George Brown died in 1883 at age 59 years, the Kindreds became full-time managers of the farm. Two years later, in 1885, they moved into their new house. It was here, in 1887, that a second daughter, Elizabeth (Bess) was born.

Washington Territory became a state in 1889. One year later, Northern Pacific Railroad brought its line to South Bend, a great advantage to vacationers or travelers who came in increasing numbers to the beaches of southwest Washington State. It was now possible to take one of the harbor steamers from South Bend to Toke's Point and North Cove doing away with the need for many of the stagecoach rides. Also in 1890, the United States Survey Ship GEDNEY sounded the harbor and found the channel deep enough for large ships. They officially changed the misleading name of Shoalwater Bay to Willapa Bay. Two years later Charlotte Norris Brown died leaving the entire property to Lizzie and William Kindred. They, in turn, began to plant sections of their land, then sold lots to private individuals on which to build their own cabins and house.

By 1894 Charles Fisher was appointed the first postmaster for the growing village called "Tokeland." In 1898 the home of Lizzie and Bill became Kindred Inn, the lobby of which housed the post office, William Kindred, Postmaster, with Lizzie taking on the operation for the next seventeen years.

A 2 and 3 story wing with bedrooms for guests was added onto the right end of the house in 1899. Its peaked roof line allowed some rooms on the third floor and were used by their hired help. Four years later the white building with green trim became the Kindred Hotel. A sitting room with a fireplace was called the "Indian Room." Over the years Lizzie had acquired a large collection of Indian baskets made not only from her local friends but also from grateful itinerant salesmen who stayed at the hotel when in Tokeland. The baskets hung on walls and from the ceiling as decorations. At least some of the collection was later given to the Burke Museum at the University of Washington.

The Tokeland Oyster Company was organized in 1905 with Lizzie, part-owner, as Secretary. The company officers met in the lobby of the Hotel though the station itself was located near the Nemah River across the bay from Long Beach Peninsula. Toke Point Oyster Company existed for a few years. Their station was located at Hawk's Point about three miles east of Tokeland on the northern shore of the bay.

From 1906 on, Willapa Transportation Company's popular steamers, SHAMROCK and RELIABLE, brought passengers and freight from South Bend to the dock in Tokeland. Guests of the hotel were met by William Kindred and taken by carriage to Kindred's Tokeland Hotel.

When the Tokeland Hotel could no longer handle the number of guests arriving in Tokeland, some to stay for the entire summer, John and Laura May Norby bought property on the edge of the water. In 1907 they opened the unique Rustic Hotel, a three-story structure designed as a beached river boat. It had a dining room and saloon on the main floor with staterooms on the second and third floors. From 1915 to 1919, its lobby was the home of the Tokeland Post Office. Also during this period of time the Venice Inn was opened on the Point.

In 1909 daughter Bess was married to Edward Miller of Tacoma. The Tokeland Hotel registry listed thirty guests who came to the wedding. With her new husband, Bess moved to Tacoma where she lived for the rest of her life except for the occasional visits to Tokeland. There were no children of this marriage.

A group of Portland businessmen were impressed with the popularity of Tokeland and in 1910 developed plans for a "Coney Island" resort. The plans never materialized but they did plant the seeds for future expansion in the mind of Maude (who had by now added an "e" to the end of her name). The same year a matching wing was built on the other end of the Hotel. This gave space for a large kitchen and storage facilities. The dining room was later enlarged to take in the unused area between the two wings next to the lobby.

As needed, several buildings were added to the surrounding grounds. Though the beef cattle roamed free, the cows were milked in a large red barn by John West, an employee of the Kindreds. Another small building served as a milk house used for separating the cream. An occupied chicken house insured a steady supply of eggs, but

the turkeys had the run of the farm. The old Brown home was used as a tool shed until it was demolished. Horses were taken care of in stables by Mickey McGuire who had the concession to rent them out to guests. On nice days, riders were seen on the trails through the woods or along the beach.

World War I had little impact on the town's people. A few gun emplacements were installed on the hills overlooking the ocean but were never needed. Local residents gathered sphagnum moss and shipped the bags to hospitals to be used as bandage material.

In 1930 Lizzie and William Kindred celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary filling the hotel with family and friends. Within a year, not long after her 69th birthday, Lizzie Brown Kindred died. She was laid to rest in the Oakridge Mausoleum in Tacoma. Maude and her father were left to run the hotel.

For a number of years, Cape Shoalwater had been slowly eroding taking away the protection it gave to Toke's Point. Storms of the 20s and 30s did considerable damage to the entire area. As if the encroaching sea was not enough of a problem, the world was trying to cope with a catastrophic state of depression, the result of the Crash of 1929. Money became scarce, even for necessities, with little or nothing left over for recreation. The Tokeland Hotel suffered from lack of customers as did all other businesses. Maude, with the help of Ralph Harrington, attempted to revive interest in the hotel by building a nine-hole golf course on the pasture land. The cows were moved to a fenced-in area near the hotel. Room was made for a little graveyard edged with a white picket fence to hold the tombstones of Charlotte's sons. An abandoned pool hall was moved with the help of several men and two horses to the entrance to the golf course. The building was remodeled into an attractive clubhouse. The course was open at the most for about four years and was abandoned after high tides flooded the grounds. The Willapa Rod and Gun Club building near the hotel was a gathering place for hunters. Its entrance was a veranda opening to a large hall. The second floor was used for sleeping. Fire destroyed the lodge sometime during the 1930s.

In spite of the efforts of Maude Kindred, the number of guests continued to drop. Severe storms continued to batter the coast with disastrous results. Two streets of homes on Toke's Point were washed out in the 30s, as were the Rustic Inn and Venice Inn. Tokeland Hotel and other structures further inland were saved by the wall of riprap placed along the side of the road. Maude, who had an apartment upstairs in the hotel building, moved into a small house nearby, one of several cottages on the property available to guests who preferred them to a room in the hotel.

The 1930s were particularly hard on the Kindred family. Lizzie's daughter Bess Miller in Tacoma, and Maude, in 1939, all died, leaving William Kindred alone at the hotel. The long-time housekeeper, Effie Reinkins, remained to care for him. William Kindred died in 1943 at age 86 and was entombed in Tacoma with his family. As there were no grandchildren, he left the hotel and property to Mrs. Reinkins.

Herbert Nelson and his family had moved to Tokeland in 1929. He began to fish for crabs and gather oysters. By 1935 the Nelson Crab and Oyster Company had a market in the Portland area. By now it was possible to can crab safely so they dropped the oyster business and became Neslon Crab, Inc. After the Kindred will was probated and the property turned over to Mrs. Reinkins, she sold it to the Nelsons. It was thought the hotel could be used as a boarding house for cannery employees but that was not feasible. By 1949 it was a guest house for friends of the Nelsons who came to hunt ducks and geese.

Ray Nelson asked David and Emily Hawthorne to host the visitors on weekends when David was not tending the books at the cannery, he and Emily prepared the rooms and furnished meals. In 1950 the Nelsons convinced the Hawthornes to purchase the hotel and immediate grounds. Once again with new owners, the building was opened as a hotel and restaurant.

Emily Hawthorne had grown up in the Detroit area where her parents managed a resort. Renny Tesoriere, her father, had been a captain in the South African Army during World War I. While stationed in England, he met his future wife. After the war was over, they moved to Canada, near Detroit, where their daughter Emily was born. David Hawthorne, a native of Olympia was stationed at the Great Lakes Naval Station during World War II and, while there, met Emily Tesoriere. They were married and after that war was over, moved back to Washington State. David accepted a position as bookkeeper for Nelson Crab Company and moved to Tokeland.

After they purchased the Tokeland Hotel, the Hawthornes convinced Emily's parents to move to Tokeland too. Emily and Renny Tesoriere purchased the old clubhouse and remodeled it into a tavern. It was a landmark known as Capt's Tavern for many years. The Tesorieres celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in 1985 at the hotel. Renny dies in 1969 and his wife (also named Emily) kept the tavern open for two more years.

Emily and David Hawthorne had five children who, during their growing years, all worked in the hotel. They were reaching adulthood when, in 1971, the Hawthornes sold the hotel and tavern to the Swanson and McDonald families. Three years later, Betty and Al Smith bought the hotel but the tavern remained with the Swanson family.

For much of the time when the Browns and Kindreds were operating the hotel, no useable highway was open to Tokeland from the north. The narrow dirt road was improved upon over the years as the area became more populated, but boats were still the only means to reach Tokeland from the east side of the bay. That is, unless one motored from Raymond north to Aberdeen, west to the coast, then south to Tokeland. Finally in 1962 the long-awaited highway along the north shore of Willapa Bay was opened, connecting Tokeland to Raymond and Highway 101. Residents of South Bend and Raymond could now drive to the coast in a half-hour and enjoy a day at the ocean beaches.

In 1978, the Tokeland Hotel Preservation and Restoration Society was formed by persons who wished to save the hotel from total disrepair. Spearheaded by the late Evelyn and Nat Hawes, volunteers cleaned, rebuilt the aged fireplace (for the third time) and began other maintenance projects. The group applied for and received the honor of placing the hotel on the National Register of Historic Places. The Smiths kept the hotel in operation until it was purchased by Roslyn and Conrad Detering. That venture was not a success and the hotel closed one year later. Involved in lawsuits, the building remained vacant until ownership reverted back to the Smiths.

During this time, some of the antiques and two guest books disappeared, a sad loss as the registers disclosed much of the hotel's history. Though the building had deteriorated from disuse, it was taken over in 1989 by Katherine and Scott White of Seattle. The interior required months of cleaning and repair work. A new roof was a priority as was improved wiring. New bathrooms were installed on each floor. Every bedroom was painted and papered in the turn-of-the-century motif. The Tokeland Hotel with a new lease on life was opened for business on Mother's Day, 1990.

Around the same time, the tavern building was purchased by Carol Quint of California who remodeled the interior into a restaurant and art center. A large deck was added to the back of the building, facing the old golf course where guests could sit at tables and partake of good food. The restaurant was open during the summer months only and was not self-supporting. It has changed hands again and is now a private residence. Efforts have been made to rebuild the golf course.

Some of the land formerly owned by the Kindreds has been platted and sold for residences, mainly on the bay side of the highway leading to Toke's Point. The Tokeland Hotel has once again become a popular bed and breakfast inn, open all year. The restaurant serves meals daily. During the summer months, the hotel receives guests not only from all over the country, but also world travelers. In the winter months, the patrons are largely southwest Washington residents. Accommodations are much more comfortable than they were one hundred years ago. Because of the antiques and memorabilia added by the Whites, the flavor of turn-of-the-century life can still be felt.