

# 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 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 brood of thirteen children in Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri before heading out for the Pacific coast. Sadly, 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 his wife 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 a neighboring Crockett family. Jacob Ebey and Walter Crockett brought their families west after their sons had blazed 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.

Calling for their families to join them, the sons lured parents and siblings and in all, nearly thirty Ebeys and Crocketts made the arduous move to Puget Sound between 1851 and 1854, most of them settling on Ebey and Crockett Prairies.



*Isaac N. Ebey*

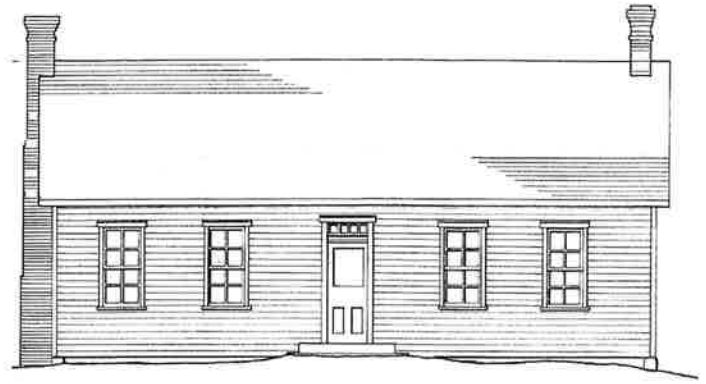
*"I scarcely know how I shall write or what I shall write. When I think of home, of father, and mother, sisters and brother, wife, children, and friends, my heart sinks within me; I can scarce find words to clothe my ideas, it seems so like writing to the dead... The great desire of my heart is, and 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 would call this 18' x 40' house "home." Jacob Ebey claimed 320 acres of land up 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, Jacob's profitable farm was valued at \$8,000.

Constructed in the fall and winter of 1856, this 1-1/2 story, "hall and parlor" type house was built of 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



Built for defense, the hewn log blockhouse next to the Jacob and Sarah Ebey house is a reminder of conflict between settlers and the Native Americans who were being displaced from their traditional lands.

The Ebey's house was completed in the winter of 1856, one year after Territorial Governor Issac Stevens toured the Washington Territory, creating treaties with native peoples for their land. The treaties were conducted with more efficiency than diplomacy and some tribes reacted with violence.

*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

On Puget Sound, conflict with local tribes was compounded by frequent raids by Indians from today's Alaska and British Columbia. Such a raid at Ebey's Landing in January 1856 may have provided the motivation for the Ebey's blockhouse.

This was not the only blockhouse built in the Reserve. Evidence suggests that there may have been as many as eleven built during the 1850s. The blockhouse standing at the Jacob and Sarah Ebey house is one of only four that remain in the Reserve today.

## 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. Her heirs sold Jacob Ebey's land claim in 1929 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 Ebey House, ca 1900s with surviving blockhouse*