

Langley Looks to the Sea

'All traffic was by steamboat. All these steamers were wood burners and the call for cord wood was immense. (From) 1891 to 1893 our wood sales averaged fully 35 cords of wood a day.'

—Langley founder Jacob Anthes

First, the Canoes

The Salish came first, arriving by canoe and colonizing the land as the glaciers retreated 10,000 years ago. They set up fish camps along the south Whidbey shoreline, living in seasonal villages a few miles across the water at Camano Head and several miles north at Cama Beach. The Indians fished, hunted, gathered shellfish and berries, built plank houses and traveled among permanent and seasonal villages on both islands and the nearby mainland.

Tall Ships and Steamers

Then in the 1800s tall ships brought Whidbey Island's first homesteaders and loggers. Among them was south Whidbey settler Jacob Anthes, who picked the site of Langley to serve the steamships' demand for wood.

By the early 1900s Langley and its wharf were fueling steamers, sidewheelers and sternwheelers that carried passengers, freight and farm produce throughout the region. With the stunning view from this bluff, it is no surprise that Anthes intended to build his permanent home a few hundred feet from here, where the library and city hall stand today.

His plans changed when he lost his job as postmaster and moved to Everett, but the town remained and thrived.

Saratoga Passage

All five of Island County's population centers today are situated on this passage – Oak Harbor, Coupeville, Freeland, Langley and Clinton. Saratoga Passage connects three large river systems, the Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish, with their major salmon runs. It provides a sheltered corridor for recreational boaters between the population centers to the south and the San Juan Islands to the north.



A century ago the steamer Fairhaven visited Langley every day on its Puget Sound route. Langley's wharf was built in a U-shape so horses could pull wagons of cargo onto it without having to back up and turn around. Photo courtesy Bill Hunziker.



Steamer Atlanta approaches Langley Wharf in this photo taken some years later, after one side of the U-shaped wharf had deteriorated. Photo courtesy Island County Historical Society.

