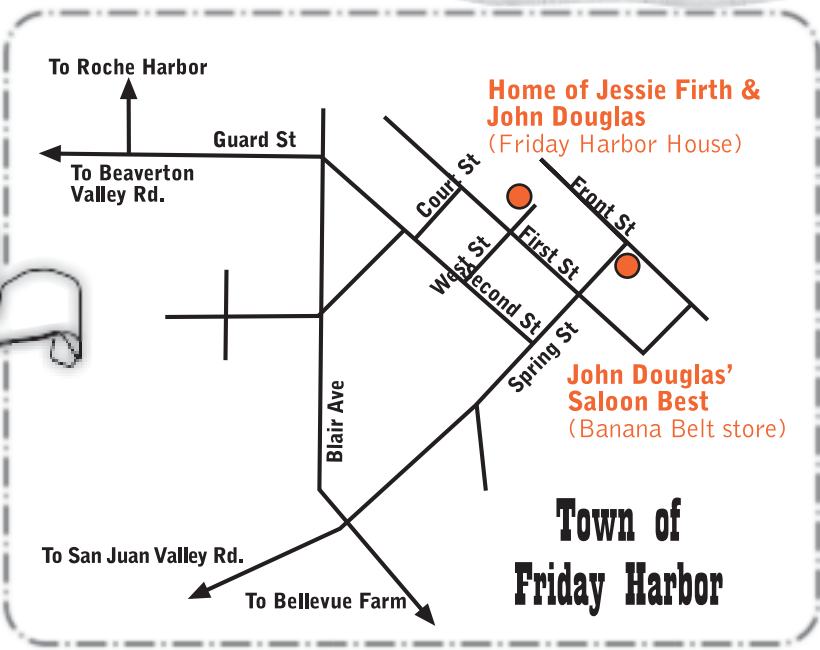
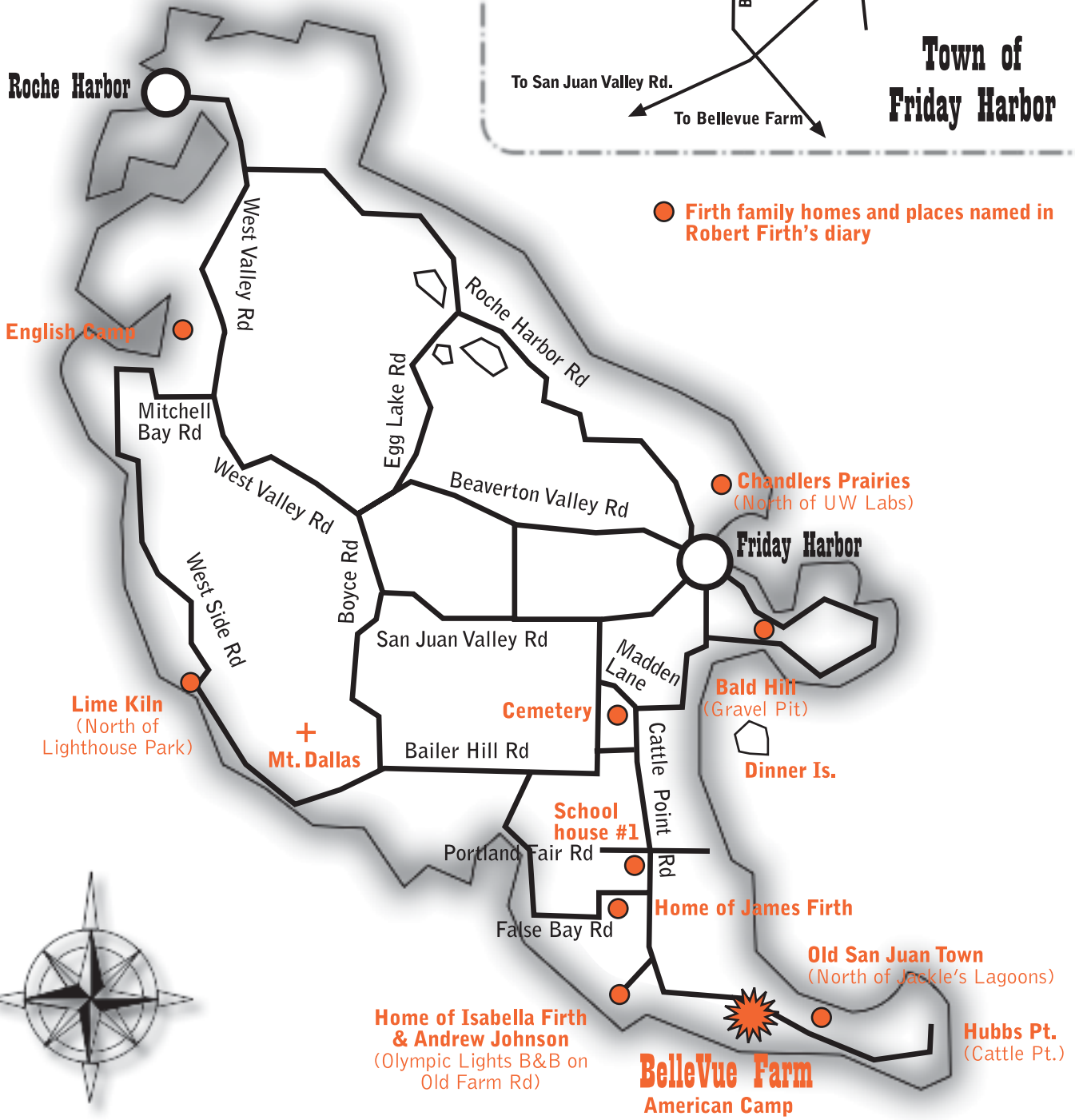


SAN JUAN ISLAND

Firth Family Historic Map



● Firth family homes and places named in Robert Firth's diary



Firth Family Historic Map

ANNOTATIONS TO MAP

Robert Firth's Diary was transcribed and annotated by Boyd C. Pratt, based on copy of the original manuscript in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia (E/B/F51), Victoria.

• **Bellevue Farm:** There were several fields established by the Hudson's Bay Company at Bellevue Farm: a little (approximately six acre) field to the west and downhill of the "Establishment"; a large field of some 40-60 acres across the ravine; an upper field to the east of the compound and a lower field below that. In general, the former two were planted in oats and carrots, while the latter two were planted in potatoes and turnips.

The racetrack was located on Home Prairie, the large expanse of open land to the south and west of American Camp and Firth's place. **The "Government garden"**, which was farmed by US troops at American camp, was located just to the north of Firth's place.

• **The "New Station"** was originally established by the Company in late September, 1854. Its precise whereabouts are unknown, although it was probably near Park Hill, just south of Friday Harbor.

• **Chandler's Prairie** was the open grassy north of Friday Harbor near the University of Washington Labs; also identified as "Sheep Hill" on later maps.

• **San Juan Town**, a collection of stores, bars, and brothels that grew up near the Company's former wharf on Griffin Bay.

• **"Hubb's Point"** was probably the current Cattle Point, near where the Hubbs had their farm.

• **Lime Kiln**, about midway on the west coast of the island, was the site of limestone mining and processing operations that was established by American soldiers and settlers in 1860.

• **Bald Hill**, located on the north end of Griffin Bay, is the site of a modern gravel mining operation that has reduced the hill to a pit.

• **Mount Dallas** is a high prominence on the west side of San Juan Island. The Company had a sheep station called "Mountain Station" during the 1850s.

• Although the island to which Firth took his sheep is not identified, it could have been **Dinner Island**, which the Township and Range surveyors said was being used for rams in 1874.

• **School House Number 1** was built at Portland Fair this year by volunteer labor.

BelleVue Farm was initially put under the charge of Robert Firth (1827 [1831?]–1903), a native of Scotland who was listed as a shepherd in the Company records. Firth was born in Kirkwall on Pomona, the largest of the Orkney Islands. When he was 19, he went to Edinburgh to become engaged in the Hudson's Bay Company. On May 12, 1851, he arrived in Victoria, where he farmed at Fern Hill. In 1857, he requested a leave of absence to return to Scotland to marry Jessie Grant (1830–1889), returning with her the next year. (They would eventually have nine children, two of whom were born in Victoria and the rest at Belle Vue Farm.) Firth arrived on San Juan Island on January 7, 1862 to assume management of the farm. In the spring of 1864, the Company leased the farm to him for three years, and subsequent leases ran up to the year 1873—coincident with the 1872 decision for the United States in regard to the possession of the Islands. Firth became an American citizen on February 5, 1878, and applied for and was awarded two land patents: a cash sale of 40 acres in 1880 and a homestead entry of 186.1 acres in 1884.ⁱ

Robert Firth kept diaries, and the years 1865 and 1866 are extant. Written in a nice hand with often unconventional spelling, the entries record his continuation of many of the farming practices of his predecessor. He mentions both the little and big fields, which he planted in oats, peas, and potatoes. Place names such as Sheep Station, New Station, Chandler's Prairie, and Bald Hill indicate that Firth was still using many of the original Belle Vue Farm pastures and stations. However, the introduction of a

growing number of new names of American settlers—Fleming, Hannah, Hubbs—as well as San Juan Town—the rough grouping of stores, bars, and brothels that serviced the soldiers of American Camp—indicates the future outcome in the settlement of San Juan Island.ⁱⁱ

After his wife Jessie died in 1889, Firth rented the farm to his son, Robert Jr., and lived in the American officer's quarters ('Pickett's House') with his youngest daughter, Mary Jane (Maimie). One of his grandchildren recollected that Belle Vue Farm at that time consisted of "a number of log houses in a hollow square with quite an orchard in the center".ⁱⁱⁱ Eventually, the buildings were used for storage of equipment as well as hay and other crops. In October 1927, Mary Jane and her husband Joe LaChapelle sold the farm to Robert McRae for \$13,000. The property included 160 acres along with all the livestock and farm equipment.

ⁱ Several of the Firth children married into local families; for instance, Robert Firth, Jr., married Lila Hannah, the daughter of an American farmer on the island (Firth Family file, San Juan Historical Museum, Friday Harbor).

ⁱⁱ "Diary of Robert Firth", PABC.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Inez Calhoun Shaffer", 1960 paper in Firth Family file, San Juan Historical Museum, Friday Harbor.