

HOUSE OF BLUE BOTTLES

History of landmark recounted by mother, daughter

By Dorothy Neil
Church Editor

Tall and square, with gingerbread trim and many bay windows, the "House of the Blue Bottles" was a landmark in Coupeville for many years.

Each window in front of the house, both upstairs and downstairs, held a line of cobalt blue bottles, hence its name. The late Gertie Parker (Mrs. Willard) had found a piece of cobalt blue while living in Eastern Washington, and began a collection. Her friends added to the collection until she had hundreds of bottles of different sizes and shapes, and when she and her husband came to Coupeville to live, the house on Main Street across from the Methodist church seemed to be the perfect one for a display.

Long before I knew Mrs. Parker, I was acquainted with the House of the Blue Bottles. The collection sparked for a time a collection of my own, but I never had the display space for them as did the big house in Coupeville.

Medicines and other necessary basics do not come in cobalt blue bottles and jars today. But many who lived through World War I days remember the Milk of Magnesia bottles, the Vicks Vaporub jars, cups, vases and countless other containers of cobalt blue. Big and little containers of blue glass are now extinct except in collections such as that of Gertie Parker's.

The era of the House of the Blue Bottles saw a different world from that of today. Even thirty years can make a significant change in a town. Coupeville had its own newspaper at that time, the *Island County Times*, a venerable publication that first saw ink in the early 1890s. In the 1950s the news content was only enough to fill the front page, and our job as "editor" was to accumulate enough of said news in one day's jaunt to Central Whidbey, with a stop at the courthouse, the high school, Harry Hurd's drugstore and the Seagull Restaurant on Front Street.

Looking back I see why I never

wrote a story about the Blue Bottle House. With all the news that was fit to print being jammed into a one-day stop and a one-page exposure, there wasn't time.

Today, with the year 1990 upon us, the Blue Bottle House has come into its own again. Over the years it has seen much change in the community. Its many fireplaces warmed the high-ceilinged rooms whose windows looked out upon Penn Cove and the steamboats that regularly plied the waters bringing passengers and freight to this island town.

It shared in the excitement that a projected railroad the length of Whidbey Island engendered. Penn Cove was the possible site of a canal through to the west side of Whidbey, and a city was envisioned at San de Fuca, reaching out both north and south, and Coupeville was the county seat where the action would take place.

In the late 1920s and through the '30s Coupeville found national fame in the annual Indian Water Festival which brought people from all parts of the country and exposure on national news broadcasts. And the House of the Blue Bottles made a comfortable home for Mrs. Parker, her daughter Inger Mathews and Inger's two children, Marcia and Eric.

According to Inger Mathews her parents came from Eastern Washington to buy the house "for a song" in the late 1930s. Real estate was cheap then and one didn't have to be an opera star to furnish the song.

Inger remembers living in the house, and "every spring all the windows had to be washed, and the bottles returned to their showplaces." The "days of spring cleaning" meant more in the House of the Blue Bottles than cleaning the carpets, washing the curtains and scrubbing the floors. When they moved into it, there was one bathroom and the house was only partly wired for electricity. It had been built by John and Jane Kineth, who retired from the big Smith Prairie farm to become "townspeople." A Seattle banker bought the place and

rented it out in the late '20s.

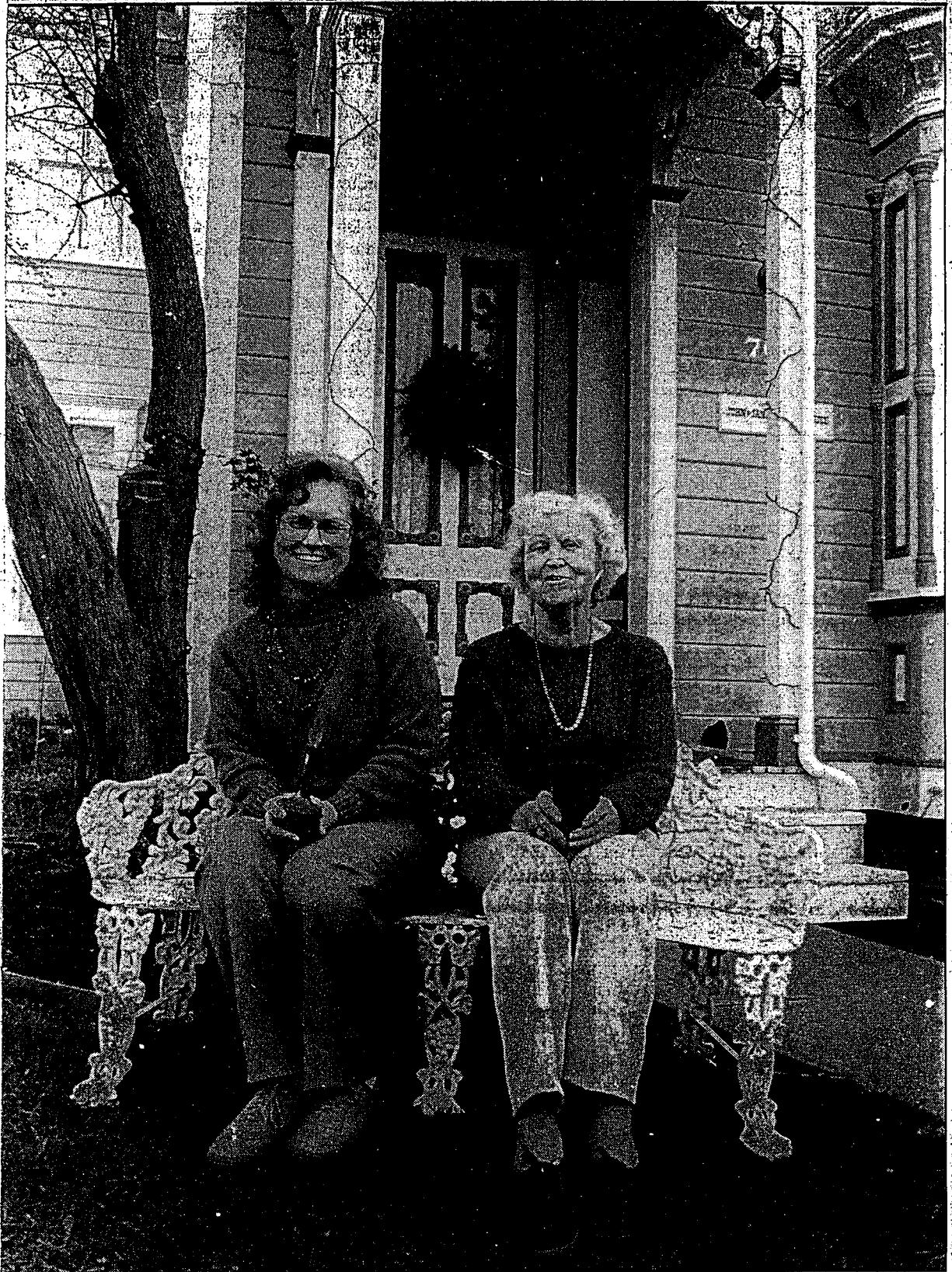
The building of the house on Main Street in Coupeville in 1897 was the culmination of a long life for John Kineth, who came with his parents in 1828 from Bavaria. They lived in Illinois until 1849 when John felt the call of "the West," arriving in Milwaukee, Ore., in that year. Jane Carter Kineth came across the plains with her parents when she was 13, settling at Portland. When John and Jane were married in 1851, their pioneer spirit was excited by what lay north and "beyond" Oregon, and from Olympia they came by open boat to Alki Point. A.A. Denny tried to induce the two to remain in what would be Seattle, offering them land in what would today be the heart of the city for a low price. But they had chosen a 640-acre claim on Whidbey Island.

They first lived in a tent, then in a log house and then a frame house. Thirty-six years later they built the handsome home in Coupeville for retirement.

Today the John and Jane Kineth House, the "House of the Blue Bottles" of the '40s and '50s, is the Inn at Penn Cove, where Jim and Barbara Cinney have done a major remodel and redecoration transformation.

It is hard to describe the new inn; entering the front door at the foot of the winding staircase, one is transported immediately to another world of a long-ago day. In the living room there is an 1898 pump organ, and the original fireplace of marbelized stone remains as it has for 102 years. The house has wide plank floors and 11-foot ceilings, and the three upstairs bedrooms are show-cases of yesterday.

Cinney said he was amazed at the construction of the house, the walls with diagonal bracing, all hand-sawn. Jim and Barbara looked over a number of possible businesses in the area, but kept "coming back" to the Kineth House. Now, with the Inn at Penn Cove properly introduced to the community at an open-house before Christmas, the Cinneys are looking forward to another



Marcia Zylstra, at left, poses with her mother Inger Matthews outside the 1887 Kineth House, now the Inn at Penn Cove. Marcia grew up in the Victorian house where her mother displayed her collection of blue glass in the front windows.

related project, the moving of the historical Gillespie House to the Inn site for restoration and conversion to the 1990s.

This year the Inn at Penn Cove will celebrate its 103rd birthday, a lovely lady with an interesting past, a walk into a world far removed

from the high-rise and shopping mall milieu of much of today, a reminder of a gentler time when life was slower and days were longer.