



Later Years

She spent her last years content with her family's gift to the community. She enjoyed an indoor cactus garden, played the organ, read her favorite poet, Pablo Neruda, and continued in environmental activism. Edna Breazeale participated with pride in the 1982 ground breaking ceremony for the interpretive center that bears the family name. She retained life-tenancy on the property and lived in the farmhouse until her death in 1987 at age 92. She lived to see children and families experiencing the land and the bay... just as she had intended.



Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Padilla Bay Reserve, part of NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System, was designated in 1980 and is managed by the Washington State Department of Ecology. The Reserve manages approximately 11,000 acres of the bay and nearly 200 upland acres.



photo by Amy Richards



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Padilla Bay

National Estuarine
Research Reserve

Edna Breazeale



"We all cherish the things that are in our past. Somehow or other, we knew some of this land should be kept so that other children could enjoy it.

As you look out at it, you realize why we had to save the bay."

*~Edna, Marcellus
& Fred Breazeale*

Edna Breazeale's Life and Work

Early Years

Edna Breazeale's family arrived on the shores of Padilla Bay in 1901. Young Edna and her brothers Fred and Marcellus learned to love the natural world growing up on the family farmstead. A 1912 graduate of Burlington High School, Miss Breazeale went on to live in Seattle where she attended the University of Washington. She graduated cum laude in 1917.



English Teacher With a Reputation

Miss Breazeale's 43 year career included 33 years teaching English and journalism at Seattle's Roosevelt High School. There, she gained a reputation as a respected teacher with high expectations for her students. Decades later, former students still recall her integrity, her close relationship to students, and her difficult tests. She was known for respectfully standing up to administrators without being intimidated, a skill that served her well in her later encounters with legislators and government officials.



During Miss Breazeale's Seattle years, Marcellus and Fred bought and cleared a "stump farm" just north of the village of Bay View. In 1949, Edna and her brothers built a new house on the farm. Building materials were scarce. Miss Edna would ask her friends in Seattle for nails, and return to the farm on week-ends with her luggage full of nails. "She wasn't afraid to roll her sleeves up and work," recounted her longtime friend Margaret Yeoman.



Upon retirement, Miss Breazeale returned to Bay View to live at the family farm with brothers Fred and Marcellus.

Community Organizer

In 1961, the Breazeales and area residents were confronted by a large development proposal for Padilla Bay. Plans were underway for a 9,000 acre industrial park, with dredged deep water port and filled industrial land. The Breazeales realized if the bay were to be saved, it would be up to the locals to do it. A local committee, headed by Miss Breazeale, circulated a petition showing opposition to the plans. Over 2,000 area citizens added their signatures, and the project was eventually abandoned.

*"Where many people spoke, she always acted."
—Terry Stevens, Reserve Director*

Miss Breazeale then began a movement for long-term protection of Padilla Bay. She spoke to civic groups and dike district commissioners about the unique natural assets of the area, and took a stand against commercial interests to develop the bay. Friends admired her courage and ability to take on an organized opposition and not budge. Always prepared with the facts, she presented her case with heart, soul and extraordinary intellect.



Edna Breazeale's untiring 23 years of work to protect the largest eelgrass meadow in Puget Sound paid off. In 1980, Padilla Bay became a National Estuarine Research Reserve, set aside for research and education. She and her brothers gifted their 64 acre farm for the interpretive center and research facility. In 1981, Edna Breazeale was honored by Governor John G. Spellman with an Environmental Excellence Award, recognizing over 20 years of monumental volunteer effort by Miss Breazeale and supporters who succeeded in preserving Padilla Bay.

"There are so few places anymore where children can go and just be free and learn about things. We felt there ought to be some place that wasn't just all people and houses." — Edna Breazeale