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Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Sustainable Agriculture and a Family History

by Claude Romig

Sun Gold Farm lies near the small Dutch community of Verboort, where four generations of the same family have farmed and cared for the land. The farm sits on approximately 140 acres, built up over the decades through judicious land purchases and maintained through good farming and ranching practices. Charlie and Vicki Hertel are the current owners of the farm.

Family History

Vicki traces her family history back to the 1880s when the VanDykes, her dad's side of the family, settled in the area. The andeheys, on her mother's side, emigrated from Vreeland, The Netherlands, in 1853. They originally settled near DePere, Wisconsin and later moved to Nebraska. Then, as Vicki relates, "...there was a huge blizzard in the winter of 1887-88 that almost killed great grandpa, but did [kill] all of his livestock. They promptly packed up that spring and headed for Oregon, settling in Baker City for a short time. The weather there reminded them too much of Nebraska, so they came out to Verboort because of the rave reviews from earlier settlers." This was in 1903.

Charlie, Vicki and Chris Hertel up to their ears in corn!

The original VanDyke settlers, Theodore VanDyke and Mary Bernards, had seven living children (four others had died within a year of birth). "Most people don't know this," Vicki exclaims, "But my Grandma Margarite Joosten Van Dyke started the Verboort sausage feed over 70 years ago. The parish priest at the time wanted a parish event to raise operating money. Grandma suggested a sausage and kraut dinner using her recipes. My dad shot the first pig for that first sausage, and the rest is history. Today the little parish feeds over 7,000 people in one day (the first Saturday in November) with all volunteer help, thanks to Grandma!"

The first land purchased by the Van Dykes was located west of Verboort on Hwy 47 (Henry Black Donation Land Claim). Theodore continued to purchase land in the Verboort area and deeded it to his children. "My grandfather Walter VanDyke," Vicki recalls, "Owned a farm south of Verboort off Martin Road, and this is where my dad, Clarence Jeff was born and raised. (My uncle Ralph Van Dyke lives there today.)" Vicki's dad purchased 40 acres on Osterman Road north of Verboort in 1940 and added another 57 acres connecting on the north in 1943. That is where the farm is situated today.

As an interesting aside, the original old, drafty, leaky house that was originally on the farm was replaced in 1962 with a tri-level. Vicki remembers that they moved into the new house one week before the Columbus Day storm. "We were lucky! The old barn that is still standing on our farm was built in the late 1800s and was moved from the south end of the farm to its

present location in the early 1940s. It was built without nails and is mostly pegged and made from hand-hewn lumber. We had a new roof put on it several years ago, and the roofer claimed it was one of the squarest old barns he had ever worked on. They knew how to build them back then!"

Community Supported Agriculture

Among the many interesting things about Sun Gold Farm is that the owners have put together a Community Supported Agriculture program. This type of program is a combined effort between a farm and a community of supporters where each season the harvest shareholders provide the money (and sometimes other resources) needed for the farm to operate by purchasing a share of the season's harvest. Operating costs include seeds, labor, and growing supplies. By making this commitment, a harvest shareholder assumes with the farmer the risks and the rewards of growing the food they will eat. In turn, the farm distributes to the shareholders their share of the harvest.

The CSA model is an economically viable way for small-scale farmers to produce a small amount of a wide variety of high quality vegetables in an earth-friendly way. CSAs foster responsible relationships between the grower, the consumer, the food, and the land on which the food is grown. Last year Sun Gold had 200 shareholders; they also have hundreds of loyal customers at farmers markets in Beaverton, Portland, Tillamook, and Astoria.

The farm is not certified Organic (Vicki says the cost to certify is prohibitive) but it does employ sustainable farming practices such as crop rotations and weed control by rototillers and hoes, not with pesticides. "Each year since we started vegetable production," Vicki says, "We have tried to use less and less chemicals. We have not used pesticides for several years now. We use crop rotations to renew the ground. Our main rotation is a clover and/or bean crop every three years to replenish the nitrogen in the soil naturally. We also add lime every three to five years to sweeten the soil. This is not only very important for happy plants, but it makes the fruit taste sweeter. Weed control is done by several rototillers and hoes! Insects are not too big of a problem most years. Our customers would rather see a bug bite than eat that same vegetable that has been sprayed with a chemical."

Dairy Farming

Sun Gold Farm was not always part of a CSA. In fact, for many years Sun Gold was primarily a dairy farm, until the Department of Environmental Quality got itself involved. As Vicki Hertel remembers, "All of our ancestors were dairy farmers in the area, as were many other farmers. At one time, we had the perfect location for a dairy - close to the creek. There were many other dairies with the same type of location and I'm sure that is how the creek was named - Dairy Creek. I can't remember the exact date that the DEQ paid us a visit. It was in the early 1990s when we started to read that experts were blaming farmers for the pollution of the waterways - especially livestock farmers. We knew that they were taking aerial surveys of the area. We were the first farm in the county visited after those flights because of our proximity to the creek. If the government's intent was to scare us, they did a good job. We were told to move the dairy, sell the cows, or receive a heavy monthly fine until we complied. We had not polluted the waterway, but they said we had the "possibility to pollute."

The farm was not big enough for the family to make a living growing commercial crops, and it would have been impossible to buy or rent more land because it was already farmed by big operators or built up. So, they sold the cattle and decided to expand the small fresh market business that they had begun a few years back. The transition proved successful. Currently, Sun Gold sells 80% of its crops directly to the consumer through seven farmers markets and the CSA program. (If anyone wants to join Sun Gold Farm as part of its CSA program, just contact Vicki via email: vicki@sungoldfarm.com.)

Mourning the Loss

by Margie Waltz-Actor

Last Fall Forest Grove lost one of its oldest homes, the Latourette/ Atwell/ McGilvra House at 2314 "A" Street to a devastating fire. The entire home was engulfed in flames within moments of the fire starting. Several fire engines and tens of firefighters responded to the fire call, but they could not save the home. Thankfully, no one was hurt in the blaze.

Twenty foot flames could be seen shooting up from the roof line. Forest Grove residents who

live up and down "A" Street witnessed firefighters setting up hoses and watering down neighboring homes to keep the blaze from spreading. Sadly, the entire home was a complete loss due to an electrical issue in the kitchen. The home was later demolished leaving only the front porch steps.

It is believed the home was built in 1873, and the land it sat on was owned by L.D.C. Latourette who reportedly purchased the lot for the house in 1871 from Elkanah Walker. Latourette was an Oregon City businessman and was also a Clackamas County Commissioner. Walker, a minister, partitioned a part of his Donation Land Claim to create Walker's Addition where many fine old homes were built and still remain today. It is believed Latourette built the home for his sons, Dewitt C. and William H., who attended Pacific University from 1876 to 1878. William became a minister and moved to California. Dewitt became a teacher then changed careers and became a lawyer.

Photo courtesy of Forest Grove Fire and Rescue

L.D.C. Latourette sold the home and property in 1877 to Stephen and Parthena Blank. The house then went through a number of short term owners until Rose F. Burrell purchased the house in 1883 and later her sister, Jerusha Griswold, purchased it in 1908. Cora A. Atwell purchased the property in 1911 and lived in the house until 1946. Atwell's husband, Homer C., managed the Forest Grove Fruit Growers Association.

After Atwell's husband died in 1946, the house was sold to Hugh McGilvra. McGilvra was a prominent citizen and newspaper man. He co-owned the Washington County News-Times. He served in the Oregon State Legislature and served on a number of local Boards. He was a trustee for Pacific and Willamette Universities, and he was a member of Rotary and a number of distinguished civic organizations. McGilvra received a Forest Grove Distinguished Citizen Award in 1974.

Loren Waltz, who grew up in the W.R.Taylor, MD home, also on "A" Street, has many fond memories of playing with his childhood buddy, Paul McGilvra. As young cub scouts, Waltz remembers having scout meetings in the house with Paul's mom as the den leader. Upon talking recently to Paul McGilvra, Waltz described the interior of the house as having plank walls with few studs in between. The planks as well as window and door trim in the house were all fastened with square nails. The house had a simple layout: a living room, kitchen, one bathroom and three small bedrooms. Many of the interior doors were original dating back to the construction of the house. Waltz and McGilvra also remember the three car garage which was added in 1950. The garage attic was large and provided a great "secret" meeting area. In the house there was a wood burning stove and a warming stove in the kitchen. For as long as anyone remembers green shutters hung by the exterior windows.

The Latourette/ Atwell/ Mcgilvra House was a simple one-story building with Classical Revival characteristics. Classical Revival homes usually had low-pitched gabled roofs, boxed eaves and a wide frieze board. The house had double-hung sash windows with head molding, and it had original doors in its oldest doorways, as confirmed by Waltz and McGilvra. Over the years a vestibule was in-filled and made into a cottage; a rental house was built on the northwest end of the property and as previously stated a three car garage was added in 1950.

Sadly, the Latourette/ Atwell/ McGilvra House is gone, but pictures were taken before the fire to record its historical significance to early Forest Grove architecture. As Forest Grove citizens, we mourn the loss of one of our oldest residences, but we will continue to preserve and enjoy those that still remain.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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In this issue:
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