

Ballou Family History

by Paul Hackett

Ballou is a major name in the histories of Firgrove, eastern Pierce County, and South Hill. Here's the story of why that is so.

In 1910 Helen Wilson was born to Robert and Minnie Wilson. Frank H. Ballou was born in 1905, and he and Helen were married in 1930. They came west from Des Moines, Iowa and moved in with Helen's parents, Robert and Minnie Wilson, who by then lived in Puyallup.

Three children were born to Helen and Frank:

Robert (1931), a daughter who died tragically at nine months (1933), and Gerald (1937).

In 1942 Frank and Helen Ballou bought ten acres on South Hill, opposite present-day Firgrove School. It was a stump ranch which Helen said, "We bought for a song."

(By way of comparison, a 1941 Puyallup brochure notes forty-one acres and a small house for sale for \$11,500.) Frank easily obtained a license to buy and use dynamite explosives, which in those days were called "powder monkeys," to clear his and some of his neighbors' land. Fire was used to burn remaining residue. These fires were kept going with improvised air blowers—electric blowers with garden hoses and water pipe placed in the holes by the stump roots. While Frank was away working, Helen and the boys kept the fires going.

On their south five acres they raised strawberries, which they took to market on Meridian, a two-lane road at the time. Only half of the road was paved. Meridian was right next to their front yard, and in an interview in 2003, Helen commented that in those days it was "twenty minutes between cars on Meridian, now it is twenty minutes to get out onto the road." On the

rest of their land they raised hay and raspberries, and cared for three sheds of chickens.

Frank held many meetings in their home with local families, and, energized by refreshments served by Helen, Firgrove Water Company was formed.

He also helped found the Pierce County Fair which started at the Fruitland Grange in 1947, then moved to Sumner, and eventually went to its present site in Graham. He was the first

manager. Frank, together with Reed Hansen, county extension agent, made a tape recording of three 4H boys in the early 1940s who were about to go to the Yakima Fair to make a presentation of their 4H work. Gerald Ballou was one of the three boys. The South Hill Historical Society has a copy of the tape.

Frank was Master of Fruitland Grange and a deputy Master for the Washington State Grange. Helen was also the Master of the Fruitland Grange for eight years.

Actively involved in the Firgrove School PTA, Frank served as president for a time. His son Robert (Bob) graduated from the eighth grade at Firgrove School in a class of two boys and three girls in 1946. Helen and Frank voted at the school, dropping their votes in a box with a slot on top, and enjoyed talking with Mrs. Irene Miracle, precinct chair, to catch up on the news. In her 2003 interview, Helen referred back to those days saying, "You didn't dare breathe or Edna Bence (Tribune columnist) would put it in the paper."

Frank held other jobs. One was helping build escort aircraft carriers at Todd Shipyard during World War II where he worked the graveyard shift. With two boys in his home, it was difficult



Frank and Helen Ballou, a familiar name to residents of Firgrove, Eastern Pierce County and South Hill.

to sleep in the daytime, so he went to the unemployment office looking for a better job. He was hired as a Farm Labor Representative to recruit workers to come to the Puyallup Valley to harvest crops. He gave talks to schools, and with a public address system on the top of his car, he played a recording to recruit pickers. During this career he recruited thirty to thirty-five thousand workers from the Tacoma area.

Frank H. Ballou died in 1964 and Helen Wilson Ballou died in 2005.

In 1971 a new junior high school, built in the Firgrove area, was named after Frank. Frank H. Ballou Junior High School is on 136th St. on South Hill.

Frank and Helen's son, Robert, turned out for track at Puyallup High School, and graduated in 1950. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1951 and served in the Korean War and the German Occupation Forces. Following his military service

Bob went to Washington State College on the GI Bill. He worked at Boeing for seventeen years and then bought his business, Grange Insurance Agency for Pierce County, where he worked for twenty-five years. Bob is currently active in the South Hill Historical Society, Fruitland Grange, and Good Samaritan Hospital's Celebrate Seniority Mobile Health Unit..

Gerald, the Ballous' second son, graduated from Puyallup High School in 1956 and worked at Boeing for thirty-seven years. He has traveled many places in the world with the AOG "Airplane On the Ground" program, coming to the aid of downed aircraft. Gerald married JoAnn Brooks, and they have four children and four grandchildren.

The Ballou family has been a significant part of the history of South Hill and Puyallup.

Paul Hackett, South Hill Historical Society, Copyright 2008

Oldfield Art Donated To Society



Thanks goes to member Joan Vosler! While Joan was volunteering to help out the Oldfield Western Heritage Center with a recent mailing, she took time to look through some of artist Fred Oldfield's prints. Joan noticed one print that was especially relevant to the South Hill Historical Society. It was reminiscent of our logging past on South Hill, even had Mt. Rainier in the background. Her friend who invited Joan that day, Freida Swindler, could get a 5% discount. Joan thought if she bought it for our Society maybe she could get 10% — doesn't hurt to ask. Joan approached Joella Oldfield, Fred Oldfield's daughter, for the 10% discount. Joella said: "I'll do better than that" If our society belonged to the Pierce County Heritage League (which we do), she would donate the print to the society.

Rabbit Farms* boy makes Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

by Jerry Bates



For those of us who were teenagers in the early 1960s the Ventures music meant cranking up the volume while cruising up and down Meridian. The Ventures made all the national pop charts of the time, and best of all they were a Tacoma band!

The Ventures have finally been recognized by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (long overdue). If you were at the Liberty Theater in Puyallup last March 10th around 7 PM, you could have watched the ceremony awarding the Ventures, along with Madonna and others, their award. The ceremony was carried to the Liberty Theater over a live feed from Cleveland, home of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

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Member Joan Vosler relates the following story of Nokie Edwards, the bassist for the Ventures when he was a boy living on South Hill:

Nokie (Floyd) Edwards was born on South Hill. He lived on the “Rabbit Farms.” I didn’t know Nokie although he rode the bus to Puyallup High School.

All of his family were very talented musicians. His sister, Louise, could play anything on the piano you could hum. She couldn’t read music, but who needs to when you have that talent. All of the Edwards family played: fiddle, guitar, bass fiddle, etc. Nokie was the only one that took his talent to a higher level. I do believe all are deceased except Louise and Nokie. I was thrilled when they made it into the Rock and Roll Hall of fame. But the Ventures were very diverse and played country, swing, etc.

We bought their records in Pennsylvania, and it was my husband that noticed Nokie’s name on the album cover. We said, “Holy Cow, that’s little Nokie Edwards!”

* Years ago a place called the Rabbit Farms was well known among Pierce County residents. It was located along 122nd St. E (Main Street in those days). The Rabbit Farms began in the 1930s as a Depression era real estate/livelihood scheme. It was a development consisting of very small cheaply built houses on adjacent lots each with rabbit hutches. The site was designed to be a communal effort to raise rabbits commercially. The idea was to attract residents that would pool together to make incomes raising rabbits during the hard times. Rabbit meat was a growing market back then competing with chicken. For many years after that enterprise failed, people would still refer to the general area as the Rabbit Farms—not South Hill. Maps of that time are so marked.

Our society’s knowledge of the Rabbit Farms is sketchy. Anyone that can add to, or embellish our limited information, please contact Paul Hackett: 253-845-7691, 11711 92 AV E, Puyallup WA, or email, phackettj@comcast.net.

South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name _____

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Home E-mail Address _____

Signature _____

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Renewal, check here

Annual Dues: Society membership \$25.00

Note Please do not send cash.

Make check or M.O. payable to South Hill Historical Society and mail with this application to:

SHHS Membership, 11711 92ND AV E, Puyallup, WA 98373

From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

A warm welcome to our new members:

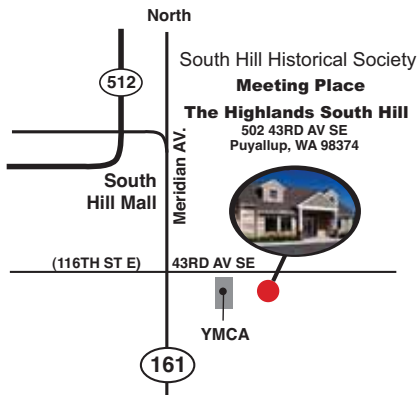
Pat Drake
Philip R. & Shirley M. Healy
Ronald Moe

Please don't forget that we are a 501(C) (3) non-profit organization. Dues, donations, etc. are fully deductible from your income taxes, if you are able to do so.

Where to Find Us

The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of the month 11:15 AM (*No meetings July and August*) at the Highlands in the Community Center. This complex is located at 502 43RD AV SE, adjacent to and east of the Mel Korum YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information contact our former president, Paul Hackett, at **(253) 845-7691**.



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11711 92nd AV E
Puyallup WA 98373

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