

Memories of Rhubarb

Prepared by Jerry Bates, Member, South Hill Historical Society

South Hill doesn't necessarily come to mind when thinking about rhubarb. The valley areas around Puyallup and Sumner have been and continue to be the leading producers of rhubarb in the United States, but did the farmers of old South Hill ever get involved with this crop commercially?

Members Don Glaser and Bill Goelzer, life-long residents of the hill can easily remember when small farms dominated the lives of those who lived here, long before shopping malls and housing developments. They both recall a time when commercial rhubarb farming did exist on South Hill.

Don Glaser, SHHS Vice President, recalls a period during his childhood from about 1935 to 1943 when his grandfather owned and operated a rhubarb farming business on property next to where Don's family lived. Don's grandfather, Joe Glaser, farmed on forty acres located on the corner of today's 144th St. E and 122nd Ave E (Glaser Road). The ranch had 150 fruit trees, also raspberry fields, in addition to the 10 to 15 acres of rhubarb. The present-day pond that can be seen from 144th was, back then, drained by a long ditch the Glasers dug across their property, exposing rich peat soil where the rhubarb was planted.

In addition to the rhubarb fields, five rhubarb hot houses were built. The hot houses were windowless structures approximately 15 by 80 feet with walls low to the ground and a roof peak reaching about ten feet. The rhubarb started out growing in the field for two summers before it was ready for the hot house. Don remembers the hard work involved harvesting the rhubarb root balls. A single blade, horse-drawn plow would turn the roots up. Then Don, as a child among the farm hands, would lift the heavy root balls into a waiting wagon. The roots would be planted in the hot house. After two months they were ready to be harvested. The hot house was heated during the winter growing months, using 55-gallon oil drums made into wood stoves. The result of all this effort was hot house rhubarb, much superior to the field grown variety. Hot house rhubarb has a 50% greater sugar level,

and is more tender, therefore making better pies and preserves. Don and the Glaser family members would harvest the ripe rhubarb using a long sharp knife, one swipe to cut off the root and a second to remove the leaves.

Don's grandfather sold the ranch and retired from farming between 1948 and 1949.

Member Bill Goelzer remembers.....

My dad, Les Goelzer, was a farmer on South Hill. He grew daffodils, strawberries, and Christmas trees. He didn't grow rhubarb, but he did sell it by the train boxcar load. He shipped Christmas trees to the San Francisco Bay area in November and December. Our family stayed home through January and February while dad sold rhubarb in San Francisco. The Sumner Rhubarb Exchange shipped the stuff by the boxcar loads to California. It was packed in 20 or 30 lb. crates, and my dad got five cents a crate commission for selling it. This was in the late 30's and early 40's when the Puyallup Valley, Sumner, and Alderton had long black sheds everywhere. These sheds had

dirt floors and a large door on each end so a farm tractor and trailer could travel all the way through. The growers dug the rhubarb root balls out of the field and transported them to these "hot houses." The sheds were heated by stoves, sometimes made from 55 gallon oil drums, and fueled by kerosene, diesel, or used crankcase oil. This forced an early crop of rhubarb which was called "hot house" rhubarb. After this early season, the rhu-

barb plants sometimes were returned to the fields to rest for a couple of years to get their strength back before returning to the hot house. I've had rhubarb plants for over 30 years, and they're still producing. Rhubarb is good for sauce, pies, and as a filler for jams. It also makes a wonderful wine, but don't eat the leaves - they're poisonous.

Hot house rhubarb today?

Don Glaser has often wondered if there is a local source for hot house rhubarb he so fondly remembers from his youth. He called me last March, thinking he might have found a grower. While traveling across the valley floor through the farm-



The Puyallup Valley Rubarb Co. rhubarb hot house.

land along Riverside Road East, Don noticed what looked like rhubarb hot houses and rhubarb roots piled high outside—could this be rhubarb hot house farming?

Days later, Don and I went exploring around this area. We drove by the Knutsen Farms Inc. complex, circled around and visited the business office. Sure enough, besides commercially growing flowers, Knutsen Farms Inc. are commercial growers of hot house rhubarb, known as the Puyallup Valley Rhubarb Co. Don managed to persuade them to give us a tour a few weeks later. During our tour we were given some free rhubarb to take home, thanks to our guide. Don's wife Mary made good use of our haul, baking pies and making preserves. She rewarded this writer with a home made pie and a jar of preserves. Don't expect to buy rhubarb from the farm, it's not distributed to the public, nor will you find any of the Knutsen crop at local Grocery stores, all their rhubarb is exported to California and the East Coast.

On the hill today rhubarb exists in back yard gardens only, but in days past, besides trees, berries, hops, rabbits and chickens, let's not forget to add rhubarb as a product of old South Hill.



Ready to be shipped, Puyallup Valley Rhubarb Co. hot house rhubarb.

The Torch Passes



Paul Hackett received a certificate of appreciation for his five years as President of the South Hill Historical Society. Carl Vest presented the certificate on behalf of the membership. Paul received a Borders book store gift certificate. Also we welcomed Yvonne Thorpe (left) as our new president.

As one of our founding members, Paul became the first president of the South Hill Historical Society. He has demonstrated unbounded energy, encouragement and leadership. None would question, the success of our organization would not have been possible without him. Paul may be stepping down, but not out. He will still be actively engaged in society research, data organization and will continue producing video interviews of South Hill old timers. Carl Vest made a motion, during the June meeting, that Paul Hackett be appointed President Emeritus. The motion was seconded and passed.

Welcome aboard Yvonne!

We are all happy to have as our new president, Yvonne Thorpe. We all look forward to working with her, as we join together and continue the good work that has been accomplished over the past years.

Society Officers Recognized by Paul Hackett



Paul Hackett, outgoing president of the South Hill Historical Society, presented the Society officers copies of the Washington State certificate of incorporation, issued by the Secretary of State for the South Hill Historical Society. The current officers were re-elected to continue in their positions for the 2006 -2007 term. Left to right: Paul Hackett (former SHHS President) Ben Peters (Treasurer) Carolyn Nelson (former Secretary) Joan Vosler (Secretary) Carl Vest (Research Director) Don Glaser (Vice President) Jerry Bates (Newsletter Editor).

President's Annual Report

This is a time of transition for the South Hill Historical Society. After five years as president, I am stepping down from this position.

First to summarize the accomplishments of the past fiscal year from July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006, here are some highlights. We have 69 members and a treasury of over \$2,400 as of June of this year. The workshop idea at monthly meetings has been well received and is important for the future. In the Meridian bus stop historic motif project, we worked with art students at both high schools on South Hill. The congratulatory letters from the Society have been signed and sent to the students who participated.

There are two concerns which I will mention. As I reflect on a recent description which I wrote of the "Job of the President", I see that further delegation of work is necessary for the Society to continue to advance. Secondly, a recent flooded carpet in my study underlines an increasing need. One or more locations should be found for the important papers which have been collected over the past five years and for those in the future. A safe and available place is greatly needed. Suggestions are welcome.

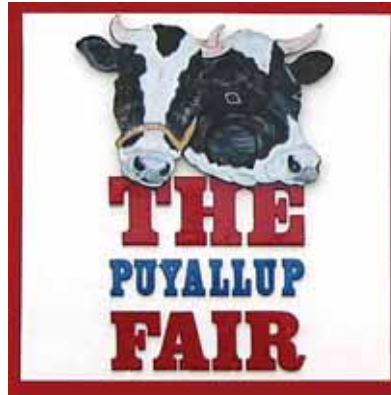
I have delighted in putting in probably twenty hours a week for these past five years. My work and the work of the rest of you have given birth and growth to a fine organization. I will continue to work in the Society, primarily in research and the organization of material. I am willing to have my address remain the legal address of the Society so that mail can come to this address, as seldom as that takes place.

Many hearts and hands have been involved in the development of our organization, particularly this past year. When I think of the work that each officer has accomplished, I am amazed. Each of the officers deserves a huge pat on the back for their continued, loyal, and thorough efforts.

We have a unique approach to history, one that binds the future and the present to the past, which we are uncovering and linking. This has

resulted in a comprehensive Society which is recognized by the Pierce County Council and the South Hill Community Council, and apparently by the South Hill public. We are ready for takeoff in chosen directions to be hammered out by the incoming president and continuing officers.

Sincerely, Paul Hackett



A few spots left!

The South Hill Historical Society will be part of the Puyallup Fair again this September. Our booth will be in the Pavilion Education complex (right inside by the Gold Gate entrance). We will have two sessions, September 8th and 9th and again on the 17th and 18th. As done last year, we are asking our membership for volunteers to man (woman) our booth. This is your chance to get involved promoting our organization and letting people know about history on the hill!

Get hold of Bill Goelzer, our Fair team leader—organizer—coordinator, at 253-841-4149

South Hill Historical Society Officers

President, Yvonne Thorp
 Vice-President, Don Glaser
 Secretary, Joan Vosler
 Research Coordinator, Carl Vest
 Treasurer, Ben Peters
 Newsletter Editor, Jerry Bates

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South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Home E-mail Address _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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 newest member:
Senator Jim Kastama

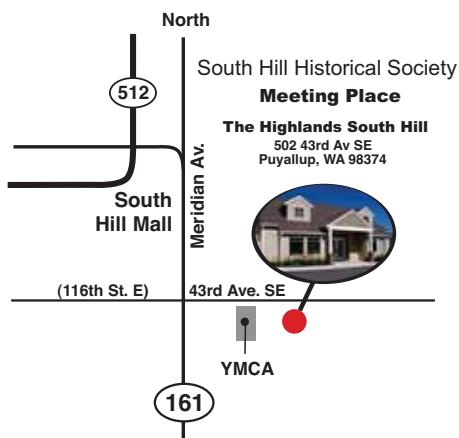
Reminder

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 AVE 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**.



11711 92nd AV E
Puyallup WA 98373

Our Current Members

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Andy G. Anderson | Dorothy Nelson |
| John & Ruth Anderson | Juanita Nordin |
| Jim & Elizabeth Anema | Mark & Dorothy Norris |
| Bob Ballou | Christopher O'Kelly |
| Jerry Bates | Don & Helen Otto |
| Ward F. Bradley | Ron & Lois Pearson |
| Marilyn Burnett | Wes & Suzy Perkinson |
| Bob Crabb | Ben Peters |
| James H. Dixon | Bill Riley |
| Mildred A. Dobbs | Bernice Fisher Rinehart |
| Linda Forsberg | Barbara Huff Ringo |
| Arthur & Luverne Foxford | Roy and Sheila Rinker |
| Lloyd Freudenstein | Vern Rockstad |
| Dianna & Fred Fritz | Helen Rohlman |
| Eunice Barth Gilliam | Earl Root |
| Don and Mary Glaser | Jim Ruble |
| William (Bill) Goelzer | Frank Ryser |
| Hazel Whitford Miller Goheen | Stan & Margery Salmon |
| Calvin & Amy Goings | William & Doris Scott |
| Stanley & Ila Goter | Clara K. Singer (Wallace) |
| David Hackett | Bonnie Nicolet Starkel |
| Paul Hackett | Lori Stock |
| James Hawley | Bill Stover |
| Cecil & Doris Herbert | Marge (Crosson) Swain |
| Evelyn Swalander Hess | Ralph & Yvonne Thorpe |
| Charles & Maybelle Hoen- haus | Margo L & Joe Tucci |
| Matt Holm | Carl Vest |
| Ernest & Irene Hopp | Neil & Celia Vincent |
| Dale Huff | Richard & Joan Vosler |
| Jim Kastama | Vivian Wepfer |
| Art Larson | W. Lynn Williams |
| Art S. & Marvella Massie | Kevin Wimsett |
| Olive McDonough | Marilyn Larson Winter- ton |
| Laurienne Stewart Minnich | Lenore Nicolet Winton |
| John A. Mosolf | Allen & Ellen Zulauf |
| Carolyn Nelson | |

To: