

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2022-23

BLHS BIENNIAL EXHIBIT—August 13 & 14, 2022

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

April 27, 2023

BLHS Quarterly Membership Meeting—7:00 PM at Big Lake Community Church

Dave Granstrom and Mick Steinman will be sharing the early history and stories of Lake Cavanaugh.

July 27, 2023

BLHS Annual Meeting and Membership Meeting—7:00 PM at Big Lake Community Church

October 26, 2023

BLHS Quarterly Membership Meeting—7:00 PM at Big Lake Community Church

Whoa! It is time to begin planning and preparing for the 2024 BLHS Biennial Exhibit.



History is not the past but a map of the past, drawn from a particular point of view, to be useful to the modern traveler."

Henry Glassie,
US historian (1941—)



Some of our worker bees who gathered for a photo as the exhibit ended. Front left to right: Melba Hall, Dave Granstrom, Marilyn Olson, Trudi Davis, Jim Farmer, Barbara Hoffman, Norma Everett, Pattie Pleas. Back left to right: Andrea Xaver, Kym Larvie, Kyle Hoffman, Elizabeth Stewart, Phil Hoffman, Irene Johnson.

Photo by Christine Farrow

IN SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR ALL THE GOOD WORK!

Thanks to all of you for a job well done. The exhibit had a great turnout, and it was exciting to meet many new "lakers", some who had moved here very recently. Thank you, Kym Pickup Larvie, for sharing the Exhibit information with the Facebook Big Lake Neighbors group, it made a big difference.

Thank you to the setup and take down crew: Kyle Hoffman, Phil Hoffman, Lloyd Watkinson, Jim Farmer, Dave Granstrom, and Jim Davis. It couldn't have been done without you!

The inclusion of Andrea Xaver (Ehlich), Jim Farmer (Montborne), Dave Granstrom (Finn Settlement), and Marilyn Olson (Lake McMurray) in the PowerPoint was really appreciated, it was great hearing them share about their communities. Melba, thank you for including them and doing a nice job of reorganizing the PPT. Marilyn, it was nice having you aboard. While greeting guests I met those who came from McMurray because they saw your reader board announcement, thank you.

Barbara Hoffman and Phil Zimmerman deserve kudos for taking care of the exhibit staff; Barbara for the cookies and punch and Phil for making the coffee.

A special thank you to Dr. Gary Johnson who has developed and kept up the park amongst the maples (former town site) for the Big Lake community and has graciously given tours of the former Big Lake Mill site located on his property while sharing stories of the artifacts that have been collected there. Also, appreciation to Christine Farrow who drew a map and photographed all the exhibits, and the murals in the park for the BLHS as they prepare for the biennial exhibit of 2024.

A great big hug of appreciation to Big Lake Fire Department for allowing the BLHS the pleasure of using the Bob and Becky Gates Community Room and to the DNR crew who cleaned up after us, thank you!

Trudi Davis, 2022 Biennial Exhibit Chairperson

2022-2023 OFFICERS

Kyle Hoffman, President

Lloyd Watkinson, Vice President

Pattie Hanstad Pleas, Secretary

Melba Hoffman Hall, Treasurer/Historian

BOARD MEMBERS

Trudi Yarcho Davis
Norma Hoffman Everett
Jim Farmer
David Granstrom
Marilyn Johnson Olson
Andrea Millward Xaver

Books Are Available for Purchase

The BLHS 2023 Calendar has sold out! Thank you to all who purchased calendars. The planning of the 2024 BLHS Calendar is in the works.

Big Lake Valley, BLHS's book of the early history of our community, are still available at the Big Lake Store for \$21.99. Purchases may also be made by contacting: BLHS, 23694 DaLacy Ln, Mount Vernon, WA 98274, or email biglakehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

In Gratitude of Memorials and Contributions

We are very thankful for our supportive community that generously donated money to our organization during the Biennial celebration in August. We are a non-profit organization, and this money is used to support our administrative expenses, such as: printings, mailings, publicity, archiving supplies, and storage.

It is with deepest appreciation for the memorial we have received from Herman and Lois Knopf in memory of their daughter and granddaughter who passed away in October of COVID 19.

A sincere thank you to Dan and Maureen Royal for their donation.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

A big welcome to our newest members joining the BLHS this past year, we are delighted to have you as a part of our organization.

George Eusterman
Louise Eusterman
Marilyn Olson
Diane McMahan
Tristan Cook
Kevin Echols
Diane Echols
Chase Echols

Kurt Wold
Mick Steinman
Larita Humble
Scott Renstrom
Sean Kean
Kevin Echols II
Andrecia Echols

IF THE LAND COULD TALK—100 YEARS OF HISTORY Continues...Another Man Dreams

Contributed by Trudi Yarcho Davis

YARCHO (WIRTA) PROPERTY HISTORY: 1951-2023—there is lost history of the property between 1948 and 1951.

A special word of thanks to Marsha Wirta Bonay and Peggy Wirta Dahl who shared their grandparents (John and Hilma Wirta) and father's (Roy Wirta) story of this property from its beginning. For their story, see the Winter 2022 Newsletter: <http://www.biglakehistory.org/resources>. This continues the biography of the 80 acres located on "Starvation Ridge", now better known as the Mt View Road. More accurately, the property is located at the north end of the Andal Road that intersects with Mountain View Road. I will be writing the rest of the story with the collaboration of my siblings. Our mother, Madlyn was an activist and a founding member of BLHS, she worked side by side with Melba Hoffman Hall to research and uncover the early history of the Big Lake community and to put into action what would become the BLHS Biennial Exhibition. Our father's family was from Germany and immigrated to the Midwest, Dad grew up in Texas but just before WWII, he and his family returned to farm in Iowa. So begins the next chapter. .

Madlyn and Albert Yarcho,
Burlington, Summer 1947



Albert and Madlyn Yarcho were married June 13, 1947, in Clarksville, Iowa, and thus began their journey together. They immediately headed west with the hopes of homesteading in the Matanuska Valley in Alaska. After arriving in Washington and receiving discouraging reports of homesteading. They purchased property on the north end of Ershig Road on Bow Hill, and it became their new home. Al built a small home and they settled. This home fit them well for the next 2 ½ years but their family was expanding, and Al had his dream of owning a farm and not just any farm, he wanted to raise chickens.

Late 1950 Al began to look for working farm properties as he was now the father of two little girls and in the summer of '51 another child was expected. He and Madlyn needed more room. By word of mouth, he heard of a bank owned property near Big Lake. He inquired from the bank, and they sent him out to look it over. What they found was an

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80-acre stump ranch that included house, barn, hay shed, two chicken houses, several colony houses (for chickens), bunk house, two wells, Finnish sauna, garden, root cellar, and small orchard, the price \$9,600. They had scrimped and saved for a down payment to buy property. By early spring 1951 they were able to get a bank loan and move their family into their new home on the Wirta property on Starvation Ridge.

Very few changes were made in those early years except the family kept growing, by 1953 there were four kids to feed on the farm. Al was milking a few Jersey cows and selling milk to Darigold, he also had laying hens and was selling eggs, all this while working on the railroad. Madlyn was helping as best she could with four little ones at her feet. She would gather, candle, and clean eggs and churn butter and make cottage cheese. They grew vegetables in the garden for fresh use and canning.

Roland, Bill, Trudi, Sheldonna, Al
and Duke-Christmas 1957



Changes gradually began to take place. The brood house where Wirta raised his baby chicks would be the first of the buildings to be razed as Al's dream of growing the farm grew larger. The big chicken house continued first as a home for laying hens but soon moved to becoming a building for fryers and at the end of it was a small milking area for the family milk cow. The milking barn came down as lack of repairs and age took its toll and Al was no longer selling milk and except for the family cow, he had replaced the milk cows with Angus beef. The Finnish sauna (evidently not so much a German thing) and outhouse also came down as they were not so popular, and stumps were bulldozed making way for more pasture and room to produce hay to feed the cows as well as the girl's riding horses.

Al's dream was always to farm but following WWII, it became increasingly difficult for small farms to produce a living wage for a family. Al did leave his railroad job and went to work for the farmer's cooperative in Mount Vernon, he enjoyed his work with the farmers in the valley. The chicken fryers and beef raised on the farm comfortably supplemented the family income.

In 1959, Al began construction of the first of two new chicken houses that would replace the originals. It was a 36' x 120' pole building and would house 8,000 fryers. That fall before the first batch of chicks arrived, Al and Madlyn hosted a huge chicken BBQ for their church. It was decorated with bales of hay, corn stalks and pumpkins. Al was ambitious and in 1974 with the help of a family friend with a bulldozer, the final original chicken house came down. The hay shed had been removed earlier now there was room for new expansion. The new pole building was 60 x 300 feet and would house 20,000 fryers and be fully automated. The Yarcho fryer farm was either legendary or infamous among the boys of Big Lake. Just about any boy that grew up around the lake during this time had the opportunity to be employed by the Yarchos. The fryers went to market at the end of seven weeks, at which time several young men were hired to come about 1:00 AM in the morning and round up chickens while they were roosting. It was dirty, dusty, smelly work but it paid well, and Madlyn always provided fresh cinnamon rolls for the young workers.

During this time not only was the farm growing but also the family. Both Al and Madlyn had come from large families, and they were looking for ways to add more love and beginning in 1961 and continuing for another decade plus, they adopted four children through Holt International and WACAP adoption agencies. The house that Wirta had built was not large enough for a brood of eight, so it went through a transformation and a remodel in the early 60's adding space for the larger family. The expansion included a new kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, utility room, and garage. The house would evolve as the years progressed and

the family's needs continued to change.



The Yarcho Home 2020

Al and Madlyn known for their hospitality, loved making the farm the center of the family and a place for friends to come, visit, and relax. For the children there was swimming and fishing in the farm pond, horses for riding, and lots of woods for building forts and playing games. The Yarcho's hosted church fellowship get-togethers, WACAP campouts and picnics. The farm bustled with family activity.

But change happens—the mid 1960's through early 1970's saw the older kids move on to college and marriage and eventually adding grandchildren to the ever-expanding family. During this time properties would be sold, and other acreages purchased. In the 60's and 70's 40-acres on the east side of the Wirta property was sold and in 1977 Al would purchase 40 acres bordering the north end of the original Wirta property, called the Stewart property.

But the late 70's would bring a dramatic change. In the spring of 1978 Al would be diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer and a few days after Christmas 1978, Al passed away. Madlyn was now a 48-year-old widow with five dependents, and she had never worked outside the home. But the property kept on giving. Bill, their son, was establishing himself in the building trades, building custom homes, he and his wife Vicky had purchased 10 acres (Stewart property) from Al and Madlyn on which they built their first of three homes. In the early 80's Bill and Vicky purchased 5 acres on contract from Madlyn on which to build the second home. This and following sales of 5-acre parcels would provide Madlyn with income and allow her to live in her home until her passing. The original \$9,600 investment would pay out hundreds of times its value. Trees would be commercially harvested and sold to provide cash for the

construction of new chicken houses or remodeling the house or adopting a child. Daughters Trudi and Darlys would each purchase 5-acre lots from Madlyn and build homes on the property. Today, Trudi, Darlys, Bill, and Granddaughter Wendy all own parcels of the original Wirta property. In the 90's Bill and Vicky would buy back the 40-acres Al had sold in early 70's. Today, there are 10 families who have homes on what was once the Wirta property. Two years ago, Trudi's husband sold the last 5 head of cattle to graze the property. The "new" chicken house saw its last batch of fryers in 1978 and since has served other purposes, it was a stable with large box stalls to rent with turn out paddocks as well as lots of room to exercise horses under cover of the weather; it provided shelter for Bill's mobile saw and a hangar for his airplane; but most of all it has collected family "treasures." Today it is not as pristine as it was 50 years ago but it's still standing and today has chickens in it again, Wendy has eight hens providing eggs for family and neighbors and three goats that keep the last of the pasture clipped.

Wendy & Aaron help Grandma Madlyn in the garden—early 80's



June 20, 2020, Madlyn passed from this life from her bed in her beloved home looking out over the property that she had loved and called home for 69 years. But the story does not end there, there was an estate to be settled with property to be divided eight ways. Bill's daughter Wendy did not want to see Grandma Yarcho's home leave the family after all those years, so she and her husband Chris, bought the farm, now just 10 acres of the original 80 which includes the home, the "new" chicken house, orchard, garden, and farm pond. What does the future hold?

Now Wendy dreams. . .

You are invited to share your history!

Please do! A special thank you to Carol Nersten, Marsha (Wirta) Bonay, Peggy (Wirta) Dahl, Carol Rondell, Pattie Pleas, and the Yarcho family for sharing their stories.

Send your stories to:

Big Lake Historical Society

23694 Da Lacy Lane

Mount Vernon, WA 98274

OR

Email: biglakehistoricalsociety@gmail.com

HELP!..

...Deter costs—we would like to communicate as much as possible by email. The mailed newsletters cost \$3.02 each. Currently, we are mailing 144 newsletters with a total cost of \$434.88 per mailing. If BLHS does not have your email address, please contact Trudi Davis at biglakehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

We appreciate those who have contacted us with email addresses, our list is growing, thank you very much!

...Digitize, inventory, and archive—historical photos and artifacts.

We began this process pre-pandemic, and it is time to begin again. We are looking for willing helpers, experienced or not! This will require a time commitment. We are beginning by separating BLHS photos and documents from private collections. If interested contact the BLHS, see below.

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**"History gives answers only to those who know
how to ask questions."**

**Hajo Holborn, German American historian
(1902-1969)**

