

Upper Puget Sound

Hinton Baker

“It wasn’t my intention to get into tree farming. My career had been in medicine. I had an MD and a doctor of science degree in microbiology. I was a biologist rather than a practicing physician. My part in medicine was the natural history of disease. It involved insects, arthropods and various creatures that would transmit diseases to man. When it came to living in the world of trees, biology was an asset that made the whole thing far more understandable.”

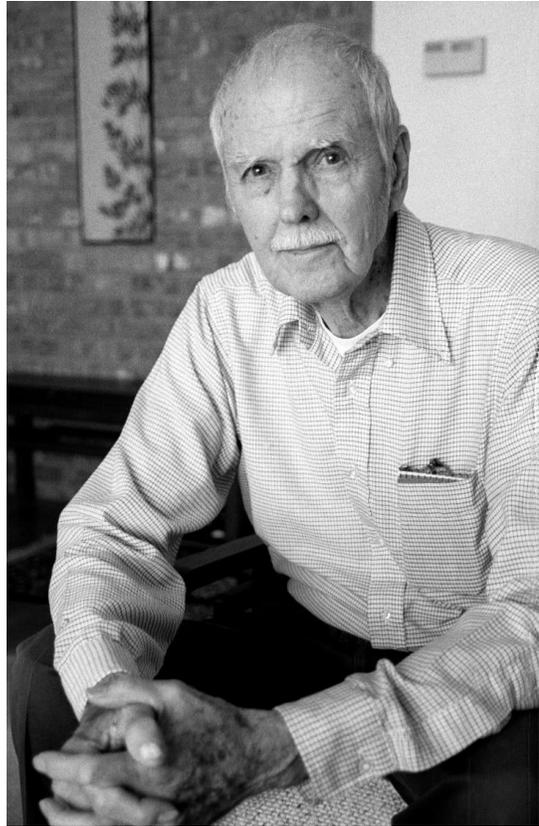
Doctor Hinton Baker’s career was devoted to biological research in the Army. Prior to his retirement in 1974, he and his wife Mary started looking for a permanent place they could call home. Raised in the dry heat of Texas, Mary opted for a cooler climate and they found it north of Seattle. Hinton, “We were looking for 20 acres and we wanted to live in the country. So we found some property on the outskirts of Darrington, Washington, which happened to be 70 acres. It was about the only thing available, so we took it. That was in 1972.”

The property had been logged and exchanged hands numerous times before Hinton took possession. Hinton, “What was left looked like it was predominantly hemlock, which was not merchantable at that time. About 1983 we did a thinning of hemlock, which was profitable and pleasing. That was encouraging.”

In 1975, prior to any harvests or management planning, Hinton became acquainted with Loren Curry, a forestry agent in Snohomish County. Loren encouraged Hinton to restart the Upper Puget Sound (UPS) Chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA), as it had been inactive for a number of years.

Hinton, “With three officers, we started and held our first meeting. I had a plan, which was to learn about forestry, and realized that the co-operative extension office had contacts with the universities and that they would provide lecturers for our meetings. With this resource available and with the help of Curry, I set up a complete course in forestry, which took a couple of years at once-a-month meetings to complete. The course involved selected lecturers who were experts in the primary basics, such as geology and soils. All of that was provided by the extension service. That’s when I became interested in forestry.”

In 1983, Hinton took on the position as president of the WFFA. Hinton, “That year as state president, I distinguished between the interests of the timber industry, tree farmers, loggers, timber harvesters, trucking and equipment people. Each group had a special interest with the state legislature. Some interests were common, so they had to be defined: What were the common interests and what were the special interests of the tree farmer? Then there was the matter of taxes, particularly death taxes, where people would have to sell the tree farm in order to pay the death taxes. I made a number of phone calls to people in congress to try to exempt a certain amount of money on the death of a tree farm owner.”



Hinton's enthusiasm and encouragement inspired many individuals to become involved with forestry. He introduced new ideas on how to manage trees and protect them from wildlife without upsetting nature's cycle. Jean Bolton was one of many initiated by Dr. Baker. Jean, "He was very persistent, I know, because I kept getting UPS mailings with handwritten notes. He was a person whose success was attributed to perseverance. When he worked on his tree farm, he gave it his full attention. He knew every tree. He gave tours of his farm explaining exactly how he planted. At one point he was collecting cedar seedlings from ditches around his area and replanting them around a pond that he put in. He could tell you from what ditch he found each tree. He had a lot of fun with his tree farm. Unfortunately, his wife got cancer. He made the drive everyday down to Madigan to visit her. You can imagine what that took out of him. He was really an extraordinary person and a man with tremendous endurance."

After years of battling cancer, Mary died in 1989. Upon Mary's death, one half of the land was put in the Mary F. Baker trust, with his two children from a previous marriage the beneficiaries. Hinton, the trustee, was responsible for maintaining the trust land for as long as he was physically able. Hinton, "It got too dangerous for me to go into the woods with a chainsaw. I was beginning to cut through my pants. When I came to the point that I was cutting through my underwear and had to go to the doctor, I gave up the chainsaw in the woods. My coordination wasn't good. I was 80 years old. I thought I better get out of the woods with a chainsaw."

In 1992 Hinton remarried Theresa Hamilton. When he could no longer work in the woods, and with his daughters' interests and lives elsewhere, Hinton and Theresa sold their 70 acres of land and moved to Vancouver, Washington to be closer to her family and children.

Back in the days on his tree farm, Hinton ran a small Christmas tree operation. The idea came to him after a man approached him and offered to pay a dollar a tree. Hinton, "I only had two acres of Christmas trees. I made money – not enough to support a family, but enough to pay expenses. I enjoyed shaping the trees and enjoyed people shopping for trees during Christmas. Families came from Seattle and from the suburbs around Everett. It wasn't like any other Christmas tree farm, as the trees were growing in a wild, natural state."

Over the 15 years, Hinton dealt with a couple generations of families. Emotionally he tells the story of his last year operating the Christmas tree farm. Hinton, "I held a contest for each of the families: 'Whoever finds the prettiest Christmas tree gets a prize.' They would search and search. Each family would come independently, not as a group, and I would tell them that they won the prize, which was the Christmas tree. I gave away all the Christmas trees the last year that I was there. Everybody won.

During this time, customers sent me photographs of the Christmas trees in their homes with their families. I enjoyed the whole thing. I was retired and had income from my army retirement. The money wasn't important."

SNOW MOUNTAIN TREE FARM

Hinton Baker, born November 7, 1919

Theresa Baker, born May 10, 1919

Founder and President Upper Puget Sound Chapter, 1975

President WFFA, 1980

UPS Tree Farmer of the Year, 1982