



Clark County

Margaret Colf Hepola

“When I smell sawdust, I get excited. I would rather talk with a group of men about logging than a bunch of women.”

With a twinkle in her eye, Margaret Colf Hepola attests that she was born at the bottom of Lake Merwin, that is, before a dam created the lake. Margaret has survived two husbands and seen the area landscape change twice in her lifetime; once with the eruption of Mount St. Helens and the other with the three dams that went in on the Lewis River: Merwin, Yale and Swift.

She was born and raised in Clark and Cowlitz County and over the years has seen small country stores replace what were once thriving settlements prior to the dams. Margaret reflects on the area’s culture in the early half of the century, “When I was a child our social life was east – Old Ariel, Cougar and Yale. We’d go to Woodland for supplies. Yale and Cougar were quite active in those days.”

Her great grandparents, Andrew Jackson and Mary Jane Birt, sold 250 acres of farmland in California’s San Joaquin Valley and migrated north to homestead near Ariel, Washington in 1870. The Andrew Jacksons cleared the land to cultivate, farm, and plant a large orchard.

After leaving the family homestead, Margaret graduated from Woodland High School in 1934 and worked at a Finnish co-op in Woodland for four years and four days. She abandoned

her job for the love of her life, Walter Emil Colf. “I met my husband at a public dance. He was a young, Finnish man who lived up here in Etna, close to the Grist Mill. His mother was a widow and he helped her. He also owned the little country Etna Store. I always teased him that he married me because I knew how to work in a store.”

Farming and logging runs deep in Margaret’s blood. Her father, Albert Andrew Haller, was a donkey punch and timber faller. His brother “Sweet Haller” was a high climber. Her husband Walter also logged. Margaret was left to run the store, raise kids, and work the strawberries, while he went to work in the woods. Margaret, having an adventurous spirit, would take turns with her sister at running the store or working in the woods as a whistle punk. While whistle punking was an important job, it provided for a slow afternoon. Both decided that running the store and caring for the kids made for a more eventful day.



Shortly after their marriage, they bought 80 acres of forestland in 1943. A year later they bought the adjoining 80 acres that surrounded the Green Mountain School. In 1947, they purchased the farm across from Walter’s mother’s homestead in Etna, Washington. “The two of us felt that we wanted those trees to help pay for our grand-children’s education, and it helped the children after their father’s death. I

would take a little bit of timber out sometimes to put them in college. All of them got a college education. We kept branching out with logging. After the store, we would get one piece of machinery, get that paid for, and buy another one.”

At one point, Walter became ill with a brain tumor and was subject to seizures. Although the tumor was removed, he suffered blackouts while he continued to work in the woods for 12 more years. He was fatally injured in 1962 at the age of 46 from a logging accident, leaving Margaret to raise their five children. At the time of his death, they owned 400 acres. Over the years, their dream has manifest into 2,600 acres. The “Colf Family Foundation” continues to enrich the community by funding numerous museums, libraries, and local history projects.

Margaret belonged to the Farm Forestry in its early years, tapping into its services and the advice provided by resident foresters and tree farmers. Fred Pratt, Fred Pickering, and Walter Ek mentored her methods and philosophical approach to tree farming. Margaret, “I think it’s a wonderful thing to keep growing trees. It’s sad to see a clear-cut that hasn’t been taken care of. It really makes me a bit angry. I think the ground should be used. The trees should be there to grow again. It’s a good practice and a good clean life. It shows we love our land and we’ll take care of it and not ravage it. Some of the regulations are getting tight now. In the years past we took good care of our land, we were good stewards, so I guess we’ll continue. It shows respect. We have a wonderful world.”

Because there is a major stream running through her property, regulations will play a role in future harvest plans. But Margaret is not concerned. “Many people told us we should cut along the streams before the law went through. But I just figured we’ll let them grow. What happens will happen.”

Her application of wise forestry management earned Margaret the Clark County Tree Farmer of the Year award in 2001. With her last nomination in 1963, she says, “I had patience, I waited from 1963 till 2001.”



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COLF FAMILY TREE FARM

Margaret Leona Haller Colf Hepola, born May 27, 1917

Co-founder of “Colf Family Foundation”

Member Clark County Farm Forestry

41 years as Clark County Cemetery Commissioner for Hayes-Gardner cemetery

50 years on the Election board

La Center Citizen of the Year, 1998

Clark County Tree Farmer of the Year, 2001

Volunteer work: Cedar Creek Grist Mill, North Clark Museum, Hulda Klager Lilac Gardens,
Friends of La Center Library and numerous others.

Currently writing local history for Lewis and Clark Counties