

Cowlitz County

Chan Noerenberg

Chan Noerenberg reflects on the good fortune he's received from his ancestors, a fourth generation tree farm of 300 acres, "Darbhill Tree Farm is short for my great grandfather, Harry Darby Huntington, who was the first white settler in Cowlitz County in 1849. He came from Indiana across the Oregon Trail in a covered wagon.

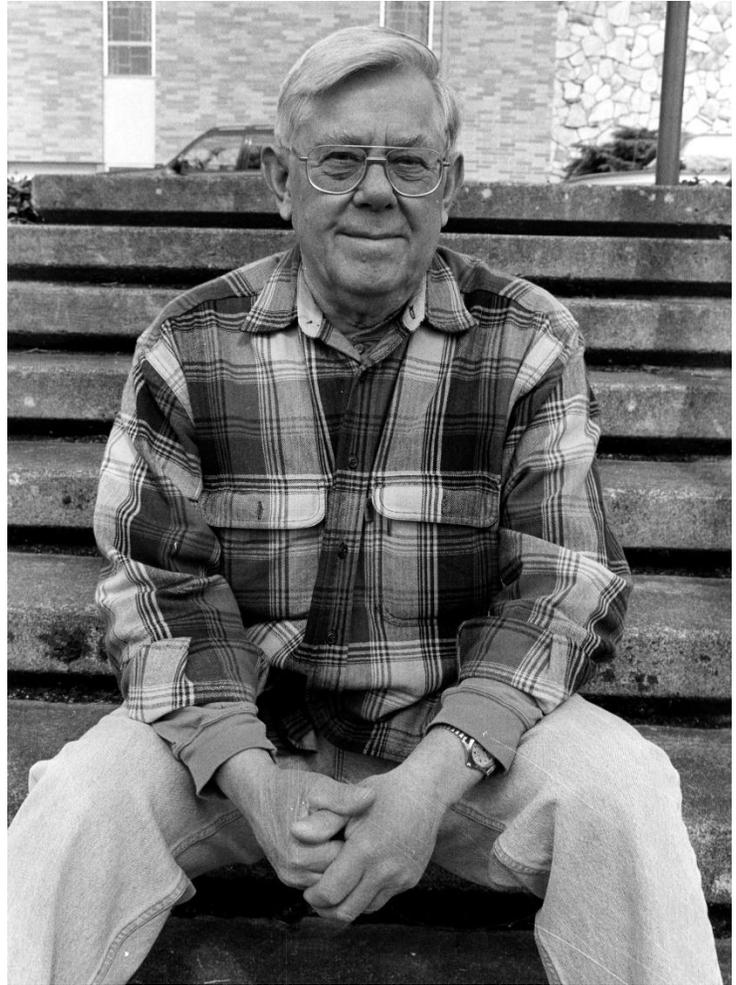
"The tree farm I live on has been in the family since about 1860. My Great Grandfather homesteaded at the mouth of the Cowlitz River where it flows into the Columbia. He had a full-blown ranch with all kinds of livestock. One of the first lessons he learned was the Cowlitz and the Columbia River flood every year. So they had to find some land that wouldn't flood. He went about six miles north of the homestead and acquired acreage up in the hills to run his cows on during the flood season. Settlements started in 1849 and went from there. There were all sorts of communities

starting up and down the Cowlitz valley. That's how our timberland came to be part of the family. He had 1,200 acres in the original homestead when he got done. I've seen old maps where he had about 1,000 acres up the valley where the tree farm is. Most of that was sold off in the depression."

Chan wasn't born on the tree farm, but spent most of his summers living in a log cabin with his grandparents. A house was later built where he lived with his mother and brother. "I can remember as a youngster... there was a tie mill on the land and they just cut trees and milled ties and shipped them wherever they shipped ties to. I think China. That would be in the '30s. Early on, people didn't replant trees. I don't think there were any reproduction planting until I started in the 1980s."

After graduating from R.A. Long High School in 1945, Chan enlisted in the Navy for 18 months. Discharged in 1946, he attended Washington State College in Pullman (now WSU) where he obtained a bachelor of science. He also met Joan Bjorkman, his soon-to-be wife, who graduated at the same time. They married in November of 1951 in Tacoma, Washington. Chan went on to work for Union Oil Company for the next 34 years.

The job required moving to large cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Salt Lake City. Chan, "The more we lived in metropolitan areas, the more I began to appreciate the lifestyle of living on forestland. No matter where we lived, we came back every summer and spent our vacation on the tree farm with whatever family there was around. We have had four generations



living on the tree farm. We love the work and being out in the woods, to have a little elbow room and solitude.”

Upon retirement, Chan and Joan returned to Washington State. Chan, “I retired from the Union Oil Company in 1984. After being all over the country, I moved back and tried to understand tree management as an amateur and became aware of the Washington Farm Forestry Association.”

Chan became immersed in farm forestry including the politics of forestry. He served as an officer, then secretary and later chapter president in 1991. He went on to be a state officer, vice president in 1994, and state president for three years ending in 2000.

Reflecting, Chan states, “During that very happy period of time we had what we call the 1992 rule package, which was a very oppressive, heavy-handed rule package – a clue to how bad it was going to get later.

“We testified against it. The Farm Forestry organization sued the State of Washington. We felt it was oppressive, not fair, not put together right. We filed a lawsuit and fought Jennifer Belcher and the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) people in court for a number of years. That lawsuit was still active when the Forests and Fish rules came down the pike. We were still fighting the ‘92 rules and here came the ‘99 rule package, which involved saving all the salmon. As a result of the Forests and Fish rules, we had a number of things happen on a positive side, although people don’t remember the good. We got a small forest landowner’s office, an advisory committee to the DNR, the riparian easement where they had to pay us for our trees and consideration for alternate plans. All part of our law suit. So, we said, ‘Okay, we’re going to drop the lawsuit because now the legislature has put in the law the very things that we were championing.’”

Passionate about the impact of legislation, Chan continues, “I don’t think legislators understand pride of ownership, the sincerity of the people who own it or what they want to do with the land. The many good things owners do. Others get caught up in the process and lose sight of the fact that we’re the ones that are doing the right things for the land. We’re not the problem. We’re the solution, and legislation made it so hard for us to be around, they undercut the objectives of trying to create good stream and wildlife habitat.”

Locally, Chan helped instigate both an annual estate planning seminar for forest landowners and the Charitable Forest Trust through Dr. John Nelson. Grateful to Dr. Nelson’s motivation, Chan describes it as a trust, “Where you can give forest land in perpetuity to a charitable foundation and devote the income from that working charitable forest back into education and research.”

While serving as state president, the sign program was implemented. Chan notes, “We have signs all over the state on individual tree farms saying this is a privately owned tree farm. We harvested and replanted on such and such date. This publicizes to the public that we manage our lands in a sensible stewardship way. Cut and run is not our style.”

To the next generation Chan’s message is one of strength, clarity, and pride, “Have hope, keep it up, you’re not the guilty one. We are stewards of the land and are doing the right thing in protecting our natural resources. What we need to do is let the public know in a more effective way the good that we’re doing and get all to back us and encourage us, rather than try to discourage us.

“Our neighbors may not be doing beneficial things and we somehow have to get them involved to get them to be part of the solution instead of being detrimental.

“It’s been an interesting evolution and I have to laugh because I should be just a happy-to-go-home-at-night, put-my-feet-up tree farmer. But, I get all caught up with these issues on a state level. So, I spent most of my energies up in Olympia fighting the legislators and not planting trees. Trees grow and things just go on.”

“Others get caught up in the process and lose sight of the fact that we’re the ones that are doing the right things for the land. We’re not the problem. We’re the solution.” – Chan Noerenberg

Darbhill Tree Farm

Chandler Noerenberg, born June 2, 1927

Joan Bjorkman, 1928 - 2001

President Cowlitz County Chapter, 1989-1993

President WFFA, 1997 - 2000