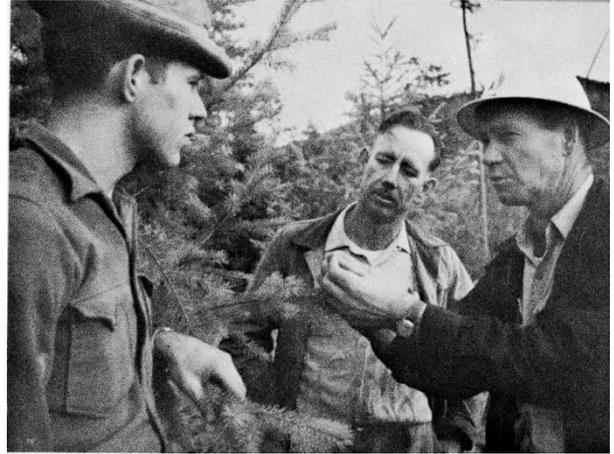


Northeast

Elmer Kegel

“He loved the forest and he shared it with everybody. Shared his knowledge. It wasn’t just his job, it was his vocation and his avocation.” Nancy Ann King remembers her father, Elmer Kegel’s generous natures. “He instilled a love for the forest and nature and an appreciation for both in all of his kids. Now, we all live within the homestead. We’ve lived away, and we’ve come back.”



Elmer was born with an innate love and understanding for the land. He was raised on the property his parents homesteaded in 1904 near Colville, Washington. After graduating from high school, he went on to get a degree in forestry from Washington State University then returned to Colville to live and work. It was 1940 and Elmer was fresh out of college when he married his childhood sweetheart, Mabel Anderson. Mabel lived on neighboring property and, like Elmer, had grown up in a forestry family. The two were a natural match.

Mabel, “I lived forestry all my life. When I was 10-years old, my dad and I would go out on Sundays and cut trees with a crosscut saw; we didn’t have power saws in those days. We would pick out big cedar trees for shingles because my dad had a shingle mill. The trees were big, about three feet, but not too big for the saw. The saws were generally about five-feet long. We did this on Sundays because he had a crew that worked during the week.”

In 1944, Elmer and Mabel bought the 160-acre homestead from his parents Bertha and Albert Kegel. Elmer was working for the Forest Service. Over the years, Elmer expanded the farm to 900 acres. Mabel, “We had several homesteads. We had land clear over the hill and bought property all the way to Crystal Falls – and that’s a long ways away. The homesteaders that were left in our area were few and were leaving. On the south side of the Kegel homestead, someone from Canada came in and bought that place. They didn’t last very long, and sold it to someone else. It was sold three or four times. When Elmer and I moved out there and bought the Kegel farm, we bought that neighboring property.”

By the late ‘40s, Elmer was working exclusively with the Extension Service in Colville, Washington. The work required that he cover a lot of territory between Stevens and Ferry Counties.

Elmer’s work as a forest management advocate was significant. A 1962 publication details just one of his many contributions, “Kegel assisted an average of 336 woodland owners per year. He made forest management recommendations on an average of 11,720 acres yearly. Through his recommendations forest stand improvements by pruning and thinning were carried out on 9,905 acres and 4,970 acres were saved from premature harvests.” [Excerpt from the Totem Volume 4, December 1962; No. 11]

Elmer was instrumental in the beginnings of the Eastern Division of the Washington Farm Forestry and lived to educate the public on good forest practices. Nancy Ann recalls her learning environments, which included helping her father on the tree farm, school, and 4-H, saying “I could, and still can, identify most trees around here by the bark, leaves, and cones. The tree farming we’ve done is taking care of the forest. We thin and prune so that forest fires will run through and not destroy everything. We plant replacement seedlings as needed.”

Fighting fires is a common theme for foresters and woodland owners. In the early years, Elmer worked on lookout towers spotting fires. Occasionally, one or two of his brothers went along. Mabel would hike up to visit him, picking the huckleberries scattered across the hills on her way.

She recalls numerous fires Elmer fought throughout the years and the fire training courses, where relaxation and sleep are hard to come by and snakes were a force to contend with. Mabel, “Elmer said you had to put up with the fear of snakes, because you had to lay down some place and get some rest. If you laid your coat, or whatever you had for sleeping, down on the ground and you felt your coat moving, you knew it was probably a rattlesnake or something coming up. If you didn’t like snakes it wasn’t a very good place to be.”

In memory of Elmer and all he stood for, the Kegel family plans on maintaining the homestead as a forest for future generations. Mabel, “When Elmer passed away, we decided we would just keep everything together and that’s what we’ve done.”

“It will always be a forest and always be in the family.” – Nancy Ann King

“My dad was so into trees. He always had to pick out our Christmas tree. Then, when we decorated the Christmas tree, it had to be perfect.” Nancy Ann King speaks fondly of her father Elmer Kegel, who was a good forest practices advocate.

KEGEL TREE FARMS

Albert Kegel, 1876 – 1960

Bertha Kegel, 1882 – 1966

Elmer Kegel, 1912 – 1984

Mabel Kegel, born 1922

Founder Eastern Branch of Washington Farm Forestry