

Cowlitz County

Dick Peters

“He lost his nest egg twice: once in Germany and once in the United States. He didn’t trust banks. He said, ‘My timberland is my bank. When I need money, I’ll go harvest a few trees.’ And he did.” Dick Peters describes his father Peter Peters.

“When he wanted to build a barn, he brought a portable sawmill in there and sawed enough lumber to build a barn. I was in high school then. When he wanted to modernize the house for mom, he would sell a few logs and modernize the house. But he didn’t put money in the bank anymore.”

Peter and Anna (Dick Peters’ parents)

Peter Peters was a persistent man with a colorful past. He was born in Germany on February 7, 1898 and moved to the United States after his father died. He moved with his mother Dortha and Hugo Kleeman, his new stepfather. Hugo continued the legacy of farming in the Peters’ family by purchasing a 640-acre section in Abernathy, Cowlitz County from the Federal Land Bank around 1925.

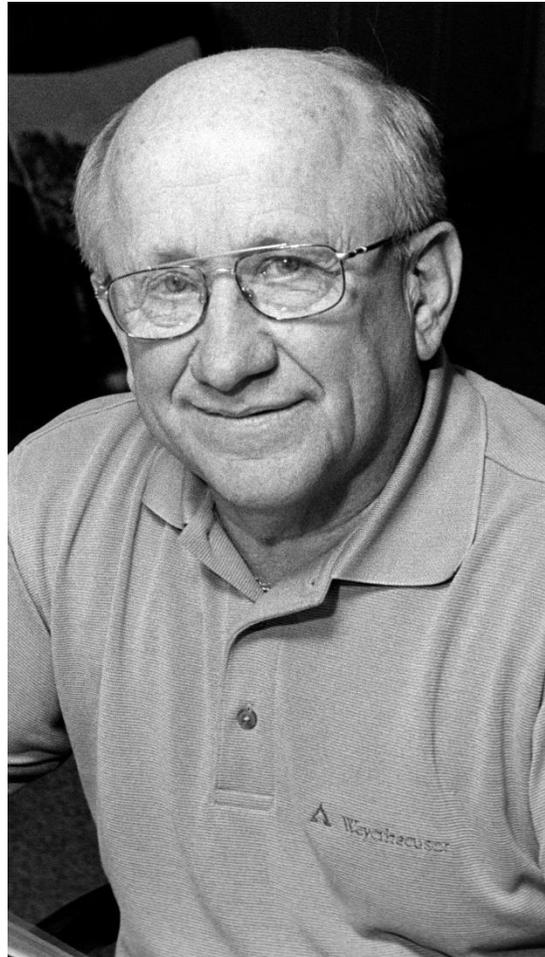
As a young man, Peter took a job in Portland at a creamery in the early 1920s. In 10 years he saved enough money to purchase land for his own dairy farm. During this time he met his future wife Ann Fulsche. The two purchased the 90 acres that cornered Kleeman’s 640-acre section.

Later, Hugo Kleeman, on the verge of losing his 640-acre section due to financial hardships, offered Peter the land. Unable to make payments on both parcels, Peter declined the offer, letting it go back to the Federal Land Bank.

The Depression hit Peter and Anna hard and they lost the savings that he had earned from working the creamery. Peter decided to live on his land in Abernathy in the early 1930s, taking a job at Weyerhaeuser until 1943. Using the money from that job, he paid off his mortgage on the 90 acres and started a Grade ‘A’ dairy farm and built the first elevated milking parlor in Washington State in the 1940s.

In the late 1940s, Peter’s interest began to shift towards growing trees. At that point he joined the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA), Cowlitz County Chapter. Anna received a plaque in 1949 for “Exceptional Service to Tree Farming“. Together, Anna and Peter maintained the tree farm including public tours. In 1989 they were awarded the “Long Time Supporter Award” from the Cowlitz County Farm Forestry for 49 years as active members.

Their tree farm was a popular tour destination. In 1950, an Austrian prince visiting the county toured the Peters’ farm. The school tours allowed a younger generation to experience the value and role of tree farming. In 1955 and 1962 Cowlitz County awarded the Peters “Tree Farmer of the Year.” By 1960 they had phased out dairy due to expensive required upgrades, and turned their focus entirely to managing timber.



Encouraged by Extension Foresters Chuck Chambers and Dick Woods, Peter started an experimental tree farm nursery that eventually gained national recognition and additional seedlings for resale.

Peter and Anna survived solely on tree farming from the late '50s until Peter passed away in 1972. Anna continues the legacy as the key decision maker for the farm. Her son Dick Peters currently maintains the land that he and his sister MariAnna Mitchell inherited from their parents.

Dick and Judi

Dick was offered a wrestling scholarship at Washington State College. Anticipating that his father would force him to be a dairy farmer, he turned down the scholarship and worked as an auto mechanic for four years. His mother Anna convinced him to study what he pleased and he eventually went to the University of Washington to major in forestry. After graduation, Dick served in the military for two years then worked for International Paper, where he met his wife Judi.

After his father died, he transferred back to Longview to be near his mother, Anna, who gave Dick and Judi five acres to build a home nearby. In 1990, Dick Peters took over managing his parents' 90 acres and set up a harvest plan for his mother's retirement. The task required convincing her to invest rather than bury her money in a coffee canister on the lower 40.

Dick carries on his family's legacy by participating in the WFFA. He is a board member on the Cowlitz County Chapter and advocates youth involvement. Dick believes in participation with natural sciences, where children learn from a hands-on approach. Dick serves on the Longview and Kelso Agriculture Advisory and Natural Sciences Committee, where his main role is to encourage curriculum.

"You wonder, 'Should I step aside and watch the trees grow.' But you've got to stay active in something." – Dick Peters

"Simple people often know what is best." –Anna Peters, quoted from the Longview Daily News

PETERS FAMILY TREE FARM : GENERATIONAL

Hugo Kleeman (stepfather), dates unknown

Dorthea Peters, 1902 - 1994

Peter Peters, born 1898 - 1972

Anna Fulsche Peters, 1901 - 1995

Richard (Dick) Peters, born October 13, 1932

MariAnna Peters Mitchell, February 7, 1930

Cowlitz County Board Member

Exceptional Service to Tree Farming, 1949

Cowlitz County Tree Farmer of the Year, 1955 and 1962

Long Time Supporter Award, 1989