

Whatcom County

Hank Reasoner

“I worked around logging camps and was familiar with them – not as a timber stiff, but very well acquainted. I interviewed with Mike Webster, the supervisor down in Olympia, as a forest practices forester in the Skagit County area. The job paid \$210 a month. They were very pleased that I would be able to talk the language with the tar heels and other gypo loggers. You have to



realize that this was in '48. At that time, regulations and the Forest Practice Act of 1945 were not very well accepted.” Henry ‘Hank’ Reasoner recalls.

Hank was a walking history book when it came to timber and forestry issues in Whatcom County, Washington. He was born and raised in Bellingham, Washington. His father Frank Merrill Reasoner ran a dairy that supplied the local logging camps with fresh milk daily.

Hank’s interest in forestry dates back to his time as an Eagle Scout. Hank, “I was very privileged to be part of a troop here in Geneva, which is a small bedroom type community in Bellingham on the north end of Lake Whatcom. I began as a Tenderfoot and eventually become an Eagle Scout. Scout Master Frank Childs was very insistent that we learn to be self-reliant and handle ourselves properly in a mountain and timber environment. We visited forest lookouts in the Glacier district and climbed the glaciers on Mt. Baker.

“I am very lucky to follow that experience with a career in forestry. I have spent time in both the private and public sectors of the industry. For the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in Washington State, I served 20 years as a forest management forester, farm forester, and local manager.”

In the early 1940s, Hank worked as a lookout fireman for the U.S. Forest Service in the Glacier Ranger District of Mt. Baker National Forest. During that time he met his bride to be, Melbourne Johnson, over a box of apples. Hank, “We had finished our job for the season and the manager of the Mt. Baker Lodge Company asked me to do some work around the lodge to prepare for the winter. We had a big old Ford van we drove to Bellingham for supplies. Melbourne, who worked for the Larabee Real Estate Company, would give me an order for this and that and a box of apples. There were two public markets in downtown Bellingham. The discussion was over which market had the best box of apples, and maybe you could say, we’ve been discussing apples for 57 years.”

During WWII, Hank served several years in the U.S. Navy then attended the University of Washington on the G.I. Bill. After graduating with a forestry degree in 1948, he took a job as a fire forester with the Kosmos Timber Company, a large gypo operation. The company employed 500 men during the mid-summer season to cut a million board feet a day and load the lumber onto 100 railroad cars.

In 1949, Hank began a 20-year career with the DNR. His involvement with the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) began 11 years later while working out of a bunkhouse with Farm Forester Olin Fosnaugh. Hank, “His little desk and office were at one side of the building and I had my drafting table, charts and all my stuff on the other end. My title was ‘forest

management forester,' which means you do everything. So, I'd help Olin out, including a tree sale he developed to sell two-year old tree seedlings to the members."

The Whatcom County Farm Forestry Association received guidance through the DNR and the Washington Co-operative Extension Service, who provided advice on marketing logs, protection, insect disease, and land ownership. In the late '60s, Olin retired and Hank took over the position of farm forester.

In 1971 the DNR revamped the organization, reducing its 13 districts to 7. Hank, "We worked out of a pickup. Our files and everything were right there on the seat because you had no desk out in the field. It was a very difficult time, not only for myself, but for many other people in the DNR in the Northwest. I was the local manager for the Nooksack and Lynden districts. We had no cell phones, so to get our messages we had to find a pay phone."

Sitting comfortably in his home on Lake Whatcom, Hank tells stories about the timber industry and gypo logging. His colorful language brings to life the days of tar heels and timber stiffs.

The most land that Hank and Melbourne ever owned are the seven acres their house sits on. Hank's interest was never to acquire land for himself, but more in the health and well-being of the forest for all. Long after retirement, Hank continued to be involved with the Whatcom County Farm Forestry and took pride in the development of its programs, such as the sixth grade conservation tour, a program started in 1959 to teach youths about the forest, wildlife, regeneration and forest management.

Hank passed away shortly after his interview for this book.

Overview:

Henry Albert Reasoner, 1916 - 2004 (Bellingham, WA)

Melbourne Johnson, born February 18, 1921 (Bellingham, WA)

Whatcom County Farm Forestry, Vice President

WCFF President and Board Member