

## KELSEY CREEK FARM HISTORY

The logging of timber-covered Wilburton Hill and surrounding areas helped clear the way for farming in this region. In 1901, partners Wade Hewitt and Charles Lea purchased property in the Wilburton area. The Hewitt and Lea Logging Company mined the area's timber from the early 1900's through the early '20's.

In 1921 the property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Duey. There was at the time 190 acres, of which all but five was un-cleared and stump-covered from logging activity. The Dueys cleared the stumps, built a barn for a herd of dairy cows, and began delivering to Eastside residents milk, cream and home-churned butter, stamped with their farm's name - Twin Valley Farm. Mrs. Duey recalls frequently buying flour in 50-lb bags and baking ten-loaf batches of bread several times a week to feed the hungry stump clearers. She drove the milk truck, delivering as many as 300 quarts of milk a day to Bellevue residents. Draft horses were used for much of the farm work until 1942.

The original barn built by the Duey's burned in August of 1933 taking 90 tons of hay with it. Mr. Duey, a skilled carpenter, along with some hired hands rebuilt the barn in two weeks. Today, this barn is the smaller of the two white barns and is called the Animal Barn. Mr. Duey also built the Red Barn, originally used as a milk house.

During the depression, the Dueys sold the land to the Haller family but continued operating the dairy until it was purchased in 1942 by Mr. John Michaels. The second dairy barn was built in 1943-44 by Mr. Michaels (This is the north barn now known as the Education Barn) and the dairy herd was increased in size. After the end of WWII, he sold the farmstead to Ray and Nettie Fisher. They phased out the dairy operation and began raising Hereford beef cattle. They built the current farm house in 1954 and moved from their home on Mercer Island to live on the property.

The Fishers lived on the farm and raised Hereford cattle until 1968. Over the years, much of the surrounding area had been sold to developers who began building single family homes in the early 60's. The farmland was soon hemmed in by a growing new neighborhood. With the rapidly increasing development came higher land taxes and this is what eventually forced the decision for the Fishers to sell the farm property. They were courted by developers who were anxious to buy the land and to build single family residences as well as apartment complexes on the site. At that time the Fisher's urban neighbors began a movement to petition the Bellevue City Council to purchase the property and secure it as a public park. The neighbors' petition succeeded and the City negotiated with the Fisher family to purchase the 80 acres, including the farm house, barns and out buildings. The Fishers sold their farm property to the City at a price much reduced from what they knew that they could get from developers. They did so because they believed in preserving the beauty and legacy of the agricultural buildings and the land.

In 1969 the farm house became the headquarters of the Bellevue Parks and Recreation Department. The oldest barn was modified to house an assortment of farm animals for public viewing and educational programs. The other, larger barn, commonly referred to as the Education Barn, was remodeled inside and used to accommodate a variety of community programs, including children's day camps, art classes, farm-themed classes, to name just a few.

To this day, the farm features live farm animals, the two historic barns and their outbuildings as well as fenced pastures often containing grazing livestock. In 1990, another parcel of land, mostly wetlands and wildlife habitat, was purchased south of the park, bringing the total acreage of Kelsey Creek Community Park to over 150 acres. This popular farm park receives over 200,000 visitors a year. The site offers a selection of unique children's recreational programs, such as seasonal day camps, pony care classes, farm experience classes and tours as well as community group and youth volunteer programs. No entrance fee is required, though donations are always welcome, and the farm is open 365 days a year, attracting visitors from the community, the region and beyond.