

Item 1.4 of “Adapting Woodstock” Charrette “Site Planning Topics & Reference Items”

Challenge for WSU Extension Staff Discussion Regarding Woodstock Farm

Prepared for Drew Betz and staff, WSU Extension. Tim Wahl, July 2008

Drew,

Article 0.8 on the “Adapting Woodstock” charrette website, presents a series of challenges and constraints associated with adapting and opening Woodstock Farm for the public. Article 1.4 will provide a straw-man vision for how the Farm might be adapted, including some of the ideas and themes expressed below. You may consider these items along with this challenge statement. See article 0.7 for a map and list of named places and features on the Farm.

FIRST, SOME BACKGROUND ON AGRICULTURAL THEMES

The Farm’s creator, Cyrus Gates was from rural Vermont and was employed in the agricultural business, apparently farm supplies and equipment. (We know his employers name.) He named Woodstock Farm for Woodstock, Vermont, whose prominent property owners (of the same farm at different times) were the Marsh family (including George Perkins Marsh) and Frederick Billings. Marsh and Billings were keenly aware of environmental issues associated with farming, grazing and timber harvest and became internationally renown for their efforts to promote land stewardship and science-based innovations in agriculture that would redeem Vermont, and the world (in Marsh’s book *Man and Nature*, 1864). Visit the website of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Park to learn about today’s heritage park-demonstration farm in Woodstock, Vermont, dedicated to sustainable farming practices and land stewardship.

Along with creating many other civic sites and parks, Gates assembled the property for the US Agricultural Research Station at the site of today’s Bellis Fair Mall. He and C.X. Larrabee and others donated the “Bulb Farm” to the public after experimenting with bulb propagation at Fort Bellingham and flax growing elsewhere in Whatcom County. Gates and Larrabee virtually created the Skagit County bulb industry, which moved south from Whatcom County. Gates pioneered the local sugar beet industry, and who knows what else at this point in our collective research. Woodstock Farm had its own hydropower plant, demonstration plantings and showpiece grounds. There were 26 head of cattle when Gates died in 1927 (probably mostly across Chuckanut to the east). The connected hen and incubator houses were primarily for raising new or exotic varieties of chickens. The place was more of a demonstration site, scenic highway showpiece and a private estate than a working farm.

Many of today's orchard trees and many specimen ornamental trees and shrubs were planted by Gates. A list and a preliminary map of the orchard and heritage trees are available. Orchard fruit tree varieties have been tracked by Denis and Georgie Bailey over the past 3 decades, in consultation with Extension personnel and others.

SOME GUIDELINES AND WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

Buildings Retained. Let's assume an organization steps forward with funding and leadership to retain and upgrade the Woodstock buildings and that the Farm becomes a managed, minimum-vehicle access learning, events and meeting center, nested in a public greenway.

Buildings Not Retained. You can try this, in whole or in part, but it will not resonate quite the same way.

Public Access. Members of the public will be encouraged to walk and bike to the site at all times and must be welcomed and provided for with some degree of wayside type shelter, restrooms, amenities etc. These visitors cannot be excluded and they need to flow around the outsides of the building compound and through it, if not through every yard and room. All members of the community must have some level of access to the site, although drop-in SOVs and LOVs (single- and low-occupancy vehicles) may not be part of the picture. (Reservations may be possible through a site operator.) Transportation services of some kind may be the key to providing access to the young and the old and the motorbound.

Minimal Paving and LOV Use. If we are to protect the historic character of the place and its open landscape, than driving in will probably never be accommodated on an on-demand drop-in and low-occupancy vehicle basis. Assume that the Farm driveway at Chuckanut Drive will be improved and that it will be safer and easier to enter the farm with a motor vehicle. Assume that there may be only 30 parking stalls (maximum) on site, plus several passenger van pick-up/drop-off points and some grass-crete type special event parking. To make visioning easier you may develop several working assumptions about how the site would be operated and used, from, say, a center dedicated extensively to horticulture and agricultural heritage (please find some money) to a scenario in which one or two leading site themes guide and focus 1 to 3 program operators. While you are at it, have these operators get along very well and compliment each others efforts, jointly accommodating a range of meetings, social and learning events to serve a broad spectrum of the public.

Where to Plant and Demonstrate. Today's Orchard Pasture, its adjoining Flag Pole Hill and the lawn areas located around the barn and garage are likely candidates for demonstration plantings, with many of the outer edges of the maintained compound being suited to a variety of permaculture plantings.

Flower, berry and kitchen gardens could compliment dining and meeting uses, which are being considered. There were once lots of roses, but now? Demonstration and show gardens are probably feasible and desirable on and around the lawn area below the Gates-Lee House, although regarding and partitioning of that area will be considered for assembly activities and foot circulation. Tasteful new sheds and enclosures are possible. The Cow Man's Cottage and barn basement are most likely for grounds-related staff use and equipment storage. The upper floors of the barn, the garage, and the Chicken House Studio are probably not good candidates for grounds support uses and will be more valuable as programmed gathering or activity support structures.

"In Between Areas". Landscape treatments for Stone Chopper Bank and the Gates-Lee House Lawn, the Beach Pasture and the Tennis Court Terrace are excitingly undetermined. These areas are suited to mixtures of meadow and formal plantings, subject to their ultimate use and desired character.

Sheep. Sheep pasturing may continue, subject to other uses. Sheep and chickens are beloved by much of the public, in the right places and doses. The existing sheepfold should probably move, perhaps to the Orchard area, and, while we are relocating things, the Farm seriously lacks a "bone yard" for storage of landscape materials.

The Historic Landscape Component. Let's say that outside of the presently mowed lawn area significant areas should be dedicated to passive use and presenting the Garry Oak Meadow and Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems, based on nearby reference sites. (See plant list, Item 3.2.) These areas are probably best as less-formally maintained, meadow, seasonally mowed and enhanced for "old landscape" species from nearby Chuckanut wildlands. They are also essential elements of many funding proposals and environmental mitigation measures. Permaculture and new Eurasian ornamental plantings will not be allowed in these areas if they are to be historic landscape demonstration and learning sites. The surviving Gates heritage plantings can be retained in these areas and interpreted as persisting (and non-persisting) human elements. Climate change and human exploitation patterns should be a critical element of this theme, based on documented changes in Chuckanut and Olympic Rainshadow vegetation patterns. Consider the Old Boathouse Ravine, the Chuckanut Creek Shore and the bulk of the forest east of Woodstock Creek and the Farm driveway as off-limits to all but passive trail uses and diversity enhancement using old landscape species. Again, some permaculture plantings may be appropriate for edges and transitional areas.