

HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF WOODSTOCK FARM

The year 2005 marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Woodstock Farm on Chuckanut Bay. The Farm, actually more of a suburban estate, was named for the town of Woodstock, Vermont by its builder, Fairhaven capitalist, park creator and civic leader, Cyrus Lester Gates. Gates managed the "Larrabee Companies" and the personal interests of the C.X. Larrabee family between 1890 and 1927.

Gates led in the creation of Larrabee State Park, Arroyo Park, Fairhaven Park and construction of the scenic, mountain segments of Chuckanut Drive and Mt. Baker Highway. He loaned the City of Bellingham funds for purchasing the first part of the Sehome Arboretum and provided land for the Mt. Baker Lodge, the State Bulb Farm (now Bellis Fair Mall) and other civic facilities. In 1944 Raymond and Gladys Lee purchased Woodstock from the Gates family.

Prior to Mr. Gates the site of Woodstock Farm was used for thousands of years by native people, most recently the Mamosee, followed by their surviving kin among the Samish, Lummi and others. The first people's presence at Woodstock will be reflected in management and improvement of the site and in the making of its historical record.

The City of Bellingham acquired Woodstock Farm from the heirs of Raymond and Gladys Lee in June, 2004 for 2.9 million dollars provided by the 1997 Greenway property tax levy. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account provided \$600,000 in matching funds through the Washington Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, which will be used for trail improvements and planning. The site was purchased for public enjoyment of the marine shoreline and as a public heritage site featuring landscape features and structures from prehistoric times and the early 1900's. The purchase secured a critical 16-acre tract within the South Chuckanut Bay Greenway, connecting 23 acres of public land around Teddy Bear Cove Park with over 155 public acres adjacent to the mouth of Chuckanut Creek. Along with the headlands and tidelands the public also acquired the buildings of the estate and the Ray Lee boathouse. At the time of the land purchase the City of Bellingham also set its sights on encouraging creative use and preservation of the Farm's buildings. Its prehistoric resources are being researched and protected with the assistance of Western Washington University and others.

For the next several years, while planning, assessments and fundraising are underway, the Farm's parking areas, buildings, and lower meadows will be open only for work parties, research, partnership development and landscape restoration, activities that involve protection of resources and gradual preparations for the site's ultimate public use. Adaptations for a small-scale meeting, retreat and events facility, most likely reflecting and promoting resource stewardship and Gates' record of public service and open space preservation, are being examined by City staff and the "Woodstock Farm Conservancy" group. Site planning is beginning and will extend through 2009.