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Gabriola's heritage farm machinery

by E. Joyce White

As you pass the collection of old farm machinery in the Agi Hall¹ grounds at the top of the hill coming up from the ferry, have you ever wondered where this machinery came from, how it was used, and who owned it? Howard Houle, a past president of the Gabriola Agricultural Association, has many of the answers.

Jenkins Dairy Farm

The red wagon² sporting a crop of grass, in one corner of the collection, is a gear-driven manure spreader. It could be drawn by either a horse or a tractor. This came from the Jenkins Dairy Farm on South Road—where the El Verano sub-division is now.

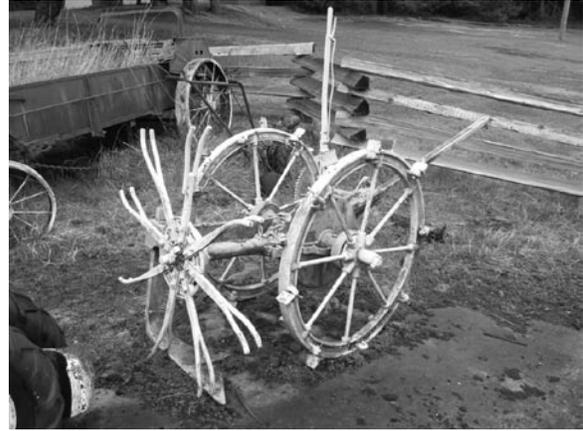


Manure spreader—Jenkins Dairy Farm

Near the manure spreader is a machine with a rotating wheel on the front end. This is a two-horse-pull potato digger that was brought to Gabriola from Glasgow, Scotland, in 1909 by William Nairn Shaw.

¹ Gabriola Agricultural Hall. Venue for meetings, events, and in summer, a weekly farmers/craft market.

² Not a “cart”; they only have two wheels.



Potato digger—Campbell Potato Farm from the Jenkins Dairy Farm

It was made by John Wallace and Sons, a company that was started in 1857 and went on to become the largest manufacturer of agricultural implements in Scotland. In its day, the digger would have been leading-edge technology.

John Morgan Jenkins acquired the digger, when he bought the land from William Shaw; however, the soil at the Jenkins Dairy Farm turned out to be too heavy for growing potatoes, and in 1949, Jenkins sold his potato digger for \$35 to Claude Campbell.

Campbell Potato Farm

Claude's property was on the South Road, at the crest of Brickyard Hill. The property is still owned by Claude and Jean Campbell's daughter, Barbara, who uses it as a family retreat.

Claude was a veteran of both World Wars. He served in the cavalry in World War I and in the navy in World War II. Between the wars he taught high school in Victoria. Following World War II, he worked as a school inspector on Vancouver Island's

rugged west coast, from Bamfield in the south, to Kyuquot in the north. The Canadian Pacific's MV *Maquinna* would drop him off at the first village, but as the ship only visited every eight days, he was ferried from one settlement to the next by an Aboriginal boatman.³

Claude drained the area for growing the potatoes, but after three years the soil was depleted. The digger was left idle for a time until Howard Houle saw it and asked if the Agricultural Association could add it to the collection of early farm machinery. Howard thinks that Peter Bell, who lived on the island for many years, may have put the spikes on the wheels to improve the traction.

The Goat Farm



Set of discs used for breaking up clods and preparing the soil for seed—Goat Farm

In the opposite corner to the manure spreader is a set of discs that was used to break up pasture and kill weeds before planting seeds. Discs like these performed a similar function to a harrow, which had a heavy frame fitted with spikes that was dragged across the surface like a rake. They were often used after a field had been deeply

³ Joyce White, *Boat Builder*, Western Producer supplement Western People, Sept. 21, 1989.

plowed. This set came from the Goat Farm on the land where the Commons is now.

The Goat Farm was operated by Louis Brossard and his wife, Phillipa Brown. Louis and Phillipa came to Gabriola from Québec in 1981 to pioneer the making of goat cheese on the land owned by Phillipa's parents. A few heads must have turned on the MV *Quinitsa* the day they boarded the ferry with the unusual load of six goats, two cats, and three rabbits.⁴

Sears Farm—Yerba Buena⁵

The bottom plow, close to the discs, came from the Sears Farm on North Road. The plow has two disc coulters that cut into the sod. The plowshares immediately behind



Bottom plow for cutting and turning sod—Yerba Buena Farm

⁴ Joyce White, *Separating the curds from the whey*, *Gabriola Times*, March 27, 1986.

⁵ *Yerba* is the South American spelling of the Spanish word *hierba*. *Yerba Buena* thus means something like "good garden-stuff".

the coulters then lift and turn the sod over creating furrows.

Jacqueline Cecil Sears was a founding member of the Joffrey Ballet in New York City. In 1957, she married painter and dancer, Michael Sears. Returning by ship from Alaska, where Jacqueline was dancing with the Nishitani Modern Dance Company, they became intrigued by the Gulf Islands;



Garden tractor—Yerba Buena Farm

so intrigued that they bought an old farm on Gabriola's North Road.

At the same time as learning the farm trade, Jacqueline continued to teach dancing. Yerba Buena produced hay, wool, and strawberries, and the old farmhouse became a dance studio. After the Sears marriage ended, Jacqueline continued her dual careers as a farmer and a dance teacher. She died in March 2010.⁶

Several more implements in the display are from the Sears Farm. In addition to the bottom plow, there is a garden tractor and a small plow used for working between rows in the market garden. The side mower—John Deere No.2—is also from the Sears



Small plow for working between rows of a market garden—Yerba Buena Farm



Side mower—Yerba Buena Farm

farm, although Howard Houle says he didn't think it was ever used by Jacqueline Sears.

The idler arm, which moves the saw back and forth, is made of wood. Should the mower hit a rock the wood could break but this was replaceable; the saw would be undamaged.

⁶ Obituary by Alicia Anstead, *Gabriola Sounder*, April 6, 2010.



Mower's "deer" trademark used 1876–1912.



Small tractor equipped for stump removal—
Rowan Farm



Early 1900s plow—Yerba Buena Farm

The farm also had a plow. This has a gauge wheel in front that ran along the soil surface and so fixed the depth of the furrows.

Rowan Farm

The small tractor was owned by the Rowan family of South Road. This was a real workhorse and could be used for plowing, weeding, and harrowing, but its best use was for clearing land. It is displayed with an attachment for removing stumps. There was a small platform for the operator to stand on.

The patriarch of the Rowan family, James H. Rowan, was a coal miner. He was born in Scotland in 1862, and came to Canada in 1899. His Scottish born wife Anna, and their two sons James Harvey and John, joined him in 1900.

James, Anna, and the sons moved to Gabriola in 1904, where their third son, David, was born.

The family bought a quarter section of land from the Penberthy family and James retired from coal mining to become a full-time farmer. John White Penberthy originally pre-empted the land in August of 1865 and it is described in the pre-emption map as the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 12. This is in the South Road-Dunshire Drive, Dirksen Road-Conville Road area. Diatomaceous earth was found on the property in 1928 and it became the location of an active diatomaceous mine during the 1930s.⁷

Rowan descendants still live on Gabriola, in Nanaimo and elsewhere in British Columbia.

Farming has become more mechanized over the years, but the Agricultural Association's display is a reminder of farming as it was in the earlier part of the 20th century and the important role it played in Gabriola's past. ◇

Acknowledgment: Thanks to Howard Houle for giving us most of the information about these old treasures.

⁷ Jenni Gehlbach, *Unearthing the past—Gabriola's diatomaceous earth mine*, *SHALE* 24, pp.11–30, June 2010.