

The Chegwyn Family Farm



A History of Family Farming in Yamhill County

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Prepared by Garrett Chrostek,

Environmental Studies student at Linfield College and intern for the district.

Sponsored by Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District:

2200 SW 2nd Street
McMinnville, OR 97128
Tel.: (503) 472-1474 x3
Fax: (503) 472-2459
yamhill.swcd@oacd.org

The Chegwyn family farm is a 124.34 acre property in the northeast corner of McMinnville, Oregon. It is one of the last great open spaces within the growth boundary and an especially rare open space because it is still in farm use to this day. This farm has seen many changes in both itself and the community which is quickly surrounding the property.

Herbert Chegwyn purchased the original property in 1909 after finding advertisements



at a Minneapolis real estate company. The development was called the Grandhaven Orchard Tracts and was divided into five and ten acre parcels. A friend of brother-in-law Robert C. Mitchell was sent from Portland to investigate the property and its potential for farming. The friend even selected the best plot which Herbert purchased. Robert C. also bought an adjoining piece. Except for the young apple trees both tracts were undeveloped. In 1911

Herbert Chegwyn

Herbert moved his entire family to start a new life in the Willamette Valley.

This was the second major move for the Chegwyn family. Herbert was born in 1873 in the southwest England county of Cornwall.

He was married to Annie Elizabeth Mitchell Chegwyn who was the daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Daniell Mitchell also of Cornwall. In 1904 they had their only child, Winifred Chegwyn, while residents of Cornwall. Work was



Chegwyn Family 1919

becoming hard to find and Herbert's brothers-in-law(R.C. and W.J. Mitchell) who were Presbyterian ministers, informed Herbert of the opportunities in America. Shortly after his child's birth, Herbert took a steamship across the Atlantic via the St. Lawrence River and found work as a bricklayer in Minneapolis. Once he had established himself in Minnesota he called for his family including his in-laws to join him. The family came in 1906 as second class passengers on a steamship, allowing less rigorous onboard entry inspections by United States immigration officials. The family prospered in Minnesota but developed a disliking to the brutally cold winters and once again packed up their bags to head west.

Without a house on the property, the family rented a house in McMinnville on Alpine street. Herbert found more bricklaying work and was saving money to make improvements to his property. After a short while a barn was constructed on the property to house some of the recently acquired livestock including cows and horses. A year later the Chegwyns were finally able to move onto the property after the first house was constructed. The farm remained primarily a home and a hobby as Herbert continued work as a bricklayer.



**Robert Mitchell, Annie Chegwyn,
Herbert Chegwyn, Winifred
Chegwyn, family dog, horse-Pet in 1916**

The role of the property began to change after the farm expanded with two acquisitions. The first occurred in 1913 when Herbert bought the five adjoining acres his brother-in-law R.C. Mitchell held after the unexpected loss of his wife. Five acres in the lowlands on the east side were purchased from William James Evans after his orchards failed

in the soggy soil. Another five acres to the south were bought from G.A. Heinz in 1919.

Twenty eight acres of woods and pasture to the east were purchased in 1920 from the Malone family who were original donation land claimants. Herbert now had more room for his orchards and his beloved Jersey cows. Farming activities



Annie Chegwyn Feeding Chickens in 1920

increased during the 1920s and 1930s as Annie increased her chicken flock to 500 laying hens and the apple orchards were bearing their first merchantable crops. They had made it through the subzero(-18°F) temperatures of the 1919 freeze and were becoming a large enough operation that more help was needed.

The family was also changing with the death of Elizabeth Mitchell in 1913 and the



arrival of Percy Chegwyn in 1921. Percy came from Surrey, England after serving in the Royal Air Force as a mechanic during World War I. He was in search of work and Herbert was in great need of someone to assume the responsibilities of managing the farm. The apple crops were becoming too large for local markets so Percy would travel to Portland seeking buyers. His favorite was the Pacific Fruit and Produce Company on the east side of Portland. Success in the apple business allowed continued growth of the farm as Percy purchased twenty

Herbert Chegwyn picking

Winter Banana Apples in 1917

four acres of farmland from William J. Liljequist in the late 1920s. Additional buildings were also constructed with a smoke house/tool shed in 1915, a chicken house in 1920, a silo in 1921, an apple packing building in 1927, and in 1928 a shed adjacent to the barn for cows, calves, hay, and straw storage. It took more than sixty years before any more buildings were constructed on the property. In 1989 Charlie had a 40'x85' steel Butler building erected for machinery and hay storage. He felt in case of fire this type of building would not burn down.

Percy and Winifred were married in 1929 and moved into the newly constructed brick house in 1930 shortly after the start of the depression. The depression caused a major slow down in the growth of the farm, as it was difficult to find buyers for their apples. Tuberculosis claimed the life of Annie in 1929 and her father died at the age of 92 in 1931. The family also gained members when Winifred gave birth to Kathleen Elizabeth in 1931 and Percy “Charlie” Charles Chegwyn followed in 1932. With Winifred looking after the children, Percy had to shoulder a lot of additional work to maintain the farm. Times were tough and some farmers had to



Percy Chegwyn

start selling their land including two and a half acres Percy acquired from the Wallace family in exchange for some spray work. It was a struggle, but the family persevered through this difficult period and the markets slowly regained their strength in the mid 1930s.

The post depression pre-World War II period saw great changes in the activities performed at the farm. With a poor apple market, Percy and neighboring farmer Bruce Black, rented several fields in the area to grow grain and make some extra income. The demand for agricultural products grew heavily as the United States entered



**Charlie with cross cut saw removing
apples trees in 1945**

World War II. Percy expanded the number of cows on the farm as the price of milk rose. The apple orchards were cleared to make room for

grain, hay, and field corn. At the age of forty three and after the birth of his third child Agnes Betty Chegwyn in 1942, Percy was to be drafted by the military. However with the expansion of his dairy farm and the importance of milk he received a deferment to produce dairy products for the military. More space for silage production was required and Percy purchased another five acre parcel from cousin, A.P. "Mitch" Mitchell, an electrician who had done all the wiring to bring electricity to the farm back in 1927.

After the war, the demand for milk fell and the Chegwyns had to find a new source of income. Charlie became a high school graduate in 1950 and wanted to acquire his own land. Over several years and in small parcels, he purchased forty four acres of filberts(hazelnuts) of which twenty five acres remains in filberts to this day. The family also raised sheep as an independent project for the children. Winifred liked tending sheep and expanded the flock to as many as thirty five breeding ewes.



**Winifred, Charlie, and Betty
weighing lambs in 1946**

Herbert, the founder and patriarch of the Chegwyn farm died in 1961. He watched his original five acre tract of apple orchards expand into 121.84 acres of mixed agricultural uses. In his time he witnessed the growth of McMinnville, the addition of electricity, and the

mechanization of farm work. Herbert loved the land and loved seeing it cared for by his descendants.

The final acquisition of land occurred in 1962 when the family purchased the other two and a half acres of land Percy had received from the spray work. The Breitsprechers came from North Dakota during the depression to find better living conditions and purchased the two and a half acre tract. The couple had become close friends of the Chegwyns as they acquainted them to Oregon life. After both of the Breitsprechers passed away, Charlie bought the land from the estate.

The passing of the Breitsprechers was followed by the Columbus Day wind storm in mid-October. A few filbert trees were lost on the farm as well as large amounts of limb breakage. A few farmers in the area had their barns and buildings blown down. Floods struck



Flooding in 1972

the farm in 1964 around the holiday season and in early 1972. They caused some significant erosion and loss of topsoil. Beginning in the mid 1950s the spring malting barley was being affected by yellow dwarf virus. The heads on the barley were significantly smaller and referred to as “thins.” As a result it was no longer a profitable crop. Another subzero(-8°F) period occurred in early December of

1972. Filbert farms in colder places(-14°F) of the Willamette Valley experienced great loss to their orchards, but Charlie suffered only minor damages.

The second generation of Chegwyn farmers faded away with the death of Percy in 1976 and Winifred in 1983. Although they were not born farmers, Percy and Winifred were able to learn from the agricultural community and from their own experiences to become a successful farming family. After his death, Percy left the house to Winifred and the farmland to Charlie. The continuation of the farm was important and after witnessing the experiences of other farms, Winifred knew it could not be sustained if it were divided among her three children. Therefore she gave her land and buildings to Charlie and remembered the daughters in other ways.

Charlie continues to successfully farm filberts on the property(although Eastern Filbert Blight is becoming a problem).

Throughout his years in the farming business he has seen many changes in the methods used and in the industry itself. When Charlie took over the farm all the neighboring properties were involved in some sort of agricultural practice. Slowly these properties



Charlie Chegwyn pulling a filbert harvester over a row of nuts in 1997



Development bordering southern property line in 2006

converted to housing developments for people with suburbanite professions. Those still in the farming business were becoming increasingly mechanized and industrialized. They produce large quantities of product on larger acreages with many outside workers and supplies.

Agricultural products were also being sold to buyers further and further away as local auction yards, canneries, and distributors went out of business. The family farms on smaller acreages, were being rented to larger operations or sold to developers for housing. Increasing prices for land and demands for cheaper bulk products were making it increasingly difficult for small family farms to survive and for new farms to be established. As a result dairies, walnuts, tree fruits, strawberries, corn, beans, and other vegetables that were strong in the past are raised on fewer and fewer acres around McMinnville.

Current agriculture in Yamhill County includes animal agriculture, nursery and greenhouse crops, wine grapes, grass seed, and an assortment of other commodities. Large scale dairies and nurseries represent the largest portions of the total agricultural output in the county. However, small scale farming is making a comeback with the popularity of organics and an increase in the number of people looking to “return to the land.” These farms are reestablishing a local market for meat, dairy, and other produce.

As Charlie has grown older he rents out sections of the land to other farmers. Bob and Ted Boyer rented out the fields for grain and grass seed from 1979-1985. They were followed by John Morrow from 1986-2004 and Jack Bernards from 2005 to present. His filbert orchards also became appealing to Larry Christenson who has farmed them since 1995. Charlie and the family would like to keep the land and quality soils in farm use despite the increasing value it would have subdivided for homes.



The farm is a valuable asset to the

Silo filling crew in 1921, left to right-unknown, Harold Casey, Bill Bernards, Percy Chegwyn, Cyril Henderson, Del Henderson, Mr. Durant, Ray Casey, Milo Hall-seated, using Bernard’s McCormick-Deering ensilage chopper)

McMinnville community. It preserves the agrarian roots of Willamette Valley life amongst the new homes which are taking over the landscape. The property also provides beautiful open space which is treasured by neighbors and townsfolk alike. Plant and wildlife benefit from the riparian and wooded areas alongside the North Yamhill River. The Chegwyn farm has endured nearly a century of changes yet has remained true to its family farming origins. With management from the Yamhill County Soil and Water Conservation District the wishes of the Chegwyn family will be fulfilled and the benefits to the community will be preserved for generations yet to come.

Appendix I-Genealogy

Robert Mitchell (1839-1931), Elizabeth Daniell Mitchell (1840-1913)- father and mother to Annie, moved with Annie to America, moved to Oregon in 1911, woodsman by trade

Herbert Chegwyn (1873-1961) - First Chegwyn in America, from Cornwall England, Lived in Minneapolis first because of brothers-in-law and Presbyterian Ministers(R.C. Mitchell, W.J Mitchell) were already out here, bricklayer by profession,

Annie Elizabeth Mitchell Chegwyn(1866-1929)- Married Herbert, daughter of Robert and Elizabeth also of Cornwall

Winifred Chegwyn (1904-1983) born in Cornwall, moved to America with mother and grandparents in April 1906, only child, came to Oregon in 1911

Percy Chegwyn (1898-1976)-married to Winifred came to America from Surrey, England after WWI, served in Royal Air Force,

Kathleen Elizabeth Chegwyn Mastenbrook(1931-Present) eldest child of Percy and Winifred, Nurse by profession, currently living in Lebanon, Oregon with husband Harlan close to 2 sons, 1 daughter, and their grandchildren.

Percy "Charlie" Charles Chegwyn- (1932-Present)

Agnes Betty Chegwyn- (1942-Present)

Arthur Percival. "Mitch" Mitchell- Cousin to Chegwyns owned a 5 acre plot south of the brick house.

Appendix II-History of the Property

Original property bought in 1909 by Herbert, Advertised by real estate company, called "Grandhaven Orchard Tracts". A Portland friend of R.C. Mitchell came to McMinnville to inspect the property. He thought it was a good buy and even selected the original tract.

1909 Original tract 5 acres- young apple trees, no house

Robert C. Mitchell- brother-in-law bought an adjoining piece to the north-also apple tree covered, never lived on the parcel sold it to Herbert in 1913

1911- Barn built on property to keep cows and horses

1912- House built on property for Herbert and family

1913- Bought 5 acres from Robert C. Mitchell

1918- Bought 5 acres from William James Evans who moved to California after failed orchards due to soggy ground

1919- Bought 5 acres from G.A. Heinz, where brick house sits

1920- Bought 28 acres of woods and pastures from the Malone Family, W.W. and wife Mary Johnson

Late 1920's- 24 acres Percy Purchased from Liljequist on east side of road- originally planned to be a hop farm, Percy purchased it outright with cash which helped during the depression because of difficulty of paying off loans

Mid 1930's- 2.5 acres from the Wallace family west of road, another local orchard farming family, owed money to Chegwyns for some spraying work done on their property during the depression, gave land to pay bill

Mid 1940's- 5 acres Percy Chegwyn bought from cousin A.P. "Mitch" Mitchell, professional electrician, did all the electrical work on buildings on the property, sold it to Chegwyns before moving back to England for \$500. Mostly pasture used for alfalfa and hay, etc.

1951-52- Small acquisitions of small failed local orchards purchased by Charlie after high school, area west and north of Grandhaven School. Filbert orchard tracts were neglected due to poor prices and out of state owners. Purchase process involved research of county records, title insurance company assistance and letter writing by Winifred Chegwyn to property owners.

1962- 2.5 acres, other half of 1930's acquisition but new owners the Breitsprechers. Old North Dakota farmers moved out west after depression to pursue carpenter work. After their death, no relatives were interested in property so Charlie bought it from estate.

Appendix III-Evolution of Farming on Property

Apples- Apples were the first primary crop on the farm. They were boxed and shipped up to Portland. Focus was shifted away from apples during World War II when milk for the armed forces was more desired. Most of the orchards were removed in late 1940s to make room for grain and other crops.

Timber/Firewood- Robert Mitchell was a woodsman back in England and responsible for managing the woodlot on the farm. With the heating and cooking dependent on wood, keeping a good supply was essential. On a few occasions saw logs were sold to local mills.

Logan Berries- Logan Berries were planted in between the apple rows for additional income. This was a short lived project as they had to be removed to make room for the growing apple trees.

Cows- Jersey cows were a personal favorite of Herbert. The cows produced milk, cream, and meat. Originally they produced products for the household. As more were added the milk was sold to the local creamery. When milk was highly demanded during World War II, milk became the primary product of the farm. Guernseys became the chosen breed during this period. After the death of Herbert the herd was sold except for a couple for family use.

Hay, Alfalfa, Clover- Hay, Alfalfa, and Red Clover have been grown on the farm throughout its history. These products were usually used on the farm for feeding livestock. The fields are currently planted in Red Clover.

Grains- Percy first planted grain around the 1920s after the Liljequist purchase. Grain was important because it could hedge a bad apple crop. Occasionally it was used for livestock feed.

Sheep- Sheep were added to the farm in 1941 by Charlie and Kathleen as an independent project. Agnes Betty received her first sheep at age 3. This along with the high prices wool fetched during World War II inspired Winifred to add more sheep to the farm. Lambs were also raised for market.

Corn- After construction of the silo field corn was grown for silage for cows and sheep. The last crop of corn was grown in 1961 because the family moved out of the dairy business.

Hazelnuts- A filbert orchard was Charlie's project after acquiring his own land in the 1950s. The property was already planted in filberts. Some of the land was cleared for grain production. Charlie reverted 10 acres back to filberts starting in 1969, making the orchard its present size of 25 acres. These orchards still remain the most profitable crop on the farm to this day.