

# Community

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## 100 years on the land

### Cook family celebrates century of farming beneath the butte

By **BILL COUTANT**  
Staff Reporter

The dining room table at the Cook Farm off Stafford Road was full of homemade pies brought by family members, friends and neighbors for the celebration of a century Sunday.

A 1930s, wood-cabinet, rounded-top Zenith radio in the parlor played soft music, but a little imagination could conjure up the dramatic voice of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Jim Cook, 71, who rebuilt the radio knows the quirky house and remembers fondly the farm life he left behind when he first opened an electronics business — “a radio repair shop before there was television.”

“There is no way to insulate the house,” said Cook, who left the area in 1959 to open a field office near Los Angeles for Tectronix. “It’s a box-frame house.”

The Cook family, beginning with James Preston “J.P.” Cook, has owned the house and barn for 100 years, though most of the original 130 acres have been sold.

J.P.’s great grandson, Richard J. Cook, 45, now lives on the farm.

Between teaching and coaching at Westview High School and working on the restoration of the house, built in 1862 by A.R. Shipley, “Rick” Cook has brought much of the remaining 6.25 acres into wine grape production with Bruce Biehl, who markets the finished product.

“He knows wine and I know dirt,” Rick Cook said.

The family is part of a greater Lake Oswego story.

J.P. Cook had come from southern Ohio to Oswego to work for Shipley in the town’s iron foundry along with Bill Wanker and others.

J.P. Cook arrived in 1883 and worked for Shipley before returning to Ohio to bring out his bride, Suzie



**RICK COOK**, left, his father Jim and his uncle Bill stand in the doorway of the barn built in 1862 at their farm. (Staff photo by Bill Coutant).

been home to two Chinese immigrants who helped build the Oswego Canal, and a cellar.

Rick Cook is working on preserving and restoring the house, which is already on the historic register.

In front of the house, Bill Cook looked at

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The couple married, and in 1885 W.B. “Bill” Cook was born.

“I was born in the first Wanker house under the cedars” near Childs Road and the canal, he told the *Oswego Review* in 1956.

W.B., who died in 1960, seven years ahead of his wife Ethel, had recalled the discovery of the Willamette meteor by Ellis Hughes in 1905.

“My mother’s maiden name was Baker,” said Bill Cook Jr. “She used to say that she had to stay in the kitchen because she was a Baker who married a Cook.”

The couple farmed crops, raised lambs and hogs and tried to cultivate cauliflower on the steep slopes during the Depression when he could not afford a tractor.

“It was too steep,” said his son Bill Jr., now 77, who farmed with his father before taking a job with Crown Zellerbach. “He was only getting three cents a crate for cauliflower. He gave that up.”

Over time, W.B. sold off most of the land, of which about 45 acres ended up as Cooks Butte Park in Lake Oswego.

But the historic house and the barn, with its rough-hewn timbers, remain in the family.

The historic house has a kitchen with seven doors; two rooms upstairs that had



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In front of the house, Bill Cook looked at a pine tree that towers more than 100 feet above him.

“I helped my father plant that tree about 68 years ago,” he said.

Then he and his brother Jim pointed out beechnut, eastern hickory, redwood, cedars and sugar maples that have graced the farm for most or all of its time in the Cook family.

“I have a nephew who is interested in the property,” said Rick Cook, 45, the younger brother of Steve Cook, 47, and Sue Matherly, 49. “I’ve been told that this property would be worth a lot of money. But I think it is going to stay in the family.”

The trip home to Oregon is one Jim Cook makes frequently.

“I come at least once or twice a year,” he said. “And I’m thinking of moving back here.”

A water tower that had been next to the house, along with a giant maple, literally fell victim to the 1962 Columbus Day storm. And the hillsides to the west offer a stark contrast to the historic farm, thanks to a new housing development.

For this family, the land remains a magnet for homecoming even as the young children of another generation swing on the tire hung from a tree that has marked those 100 years.



**JAMES PRESTON “J.P.” COOK** sits in his rocker next to his grandson Bill on the farm that he bought 100 years ago. Bill Cook, now 77, lives in Tualatin. (Submitted photo).

## Progress made on path easement from Cooks Butte to Luscher Farm

A plan to connect Cooks Butte Park and Luscher Farm has been helped by a recent pathway easement donation and a \$12,000 grant.

Cooks Butte, an undeveloped park of about 45 acres on the southern edge of Lake Oswego, was at one time part of a 130-acre farm owned by the Cook family.

The City of Lake Oswego and the Three Rivers Land Conservancy have been interested in connecting the park with Luscher Farm, but they needed help from property owners.

“With the donation of the pathway easement from Jeff and Diane Evershed, there is only one property left in between,” said Jayne R. Cronlund, Three Rivers Land Conservancy executive director.

That property owner, Dennis Derby, has a development application pending and would like to accommodate the city’s desire.

“The proposal would bring the path through property I own from Luscher Farm to the top of Cooks Butte,” Derby said. “I’m in favor of

the idea.”

“It’s a goal of the city’s to connect Cooks Butte to Luscher Farm,” said Chris Jordan, assistant to the city manager. “But where it goes is unknown.”

Jordan said the remaining link, on Derby’s property, would likely extend between 500 and 700 feet. The city is requesting the pathway as part of any development on the property.

The path would include a 30-foot easement, Cronlund said.

Cronlund said a \$12,000 Meyer Memorial Trust grant will help the conservancy continue to work on planning a path that would be acceptable to the city and property owners.

Another Meyer Memorial Trust grant had allowed the conservancy to purchase 17 acres called Sunny Slope, on Childs Road, she said.

“Three Rivers develops plans, through voluntary efforts, to connect pieces of open space,” Cronlund said.

— By Bill Coutant