



WAGON WHEEL

Making the history of Duvall an accessible & engaging lifelong experience for all

Pioneers to Pumpkins: Muddy Boots offers a real farm experience



Above: Owner Kerrie Roetcisoender and daughter Randi Stroble

By Brittany Don

Dark rainclouds gathered overhead as we traversed Woodinville-Duvall bridge out of town and took the first left onto West Snoqualmie River Road. Beyond the “WATER OVER ROADWAY” sign, the bumpy lane hugged the barns and litter of equipment and materials that characterize a working farm. We were here for the pumpkins and the corn-maze, sheets of rain be darned. In the large gravel parking lot, it was clear we would have the place to ourselves, and the kids used the wide open space to practice the Olympic sport of puddle-jumping. We had never seen it this empty and knew that the moment the downpour relented, visitors

would gather thick as the cornstalks in the pumpkin patch and around the campfires. We knew this because over the past couple years, visiting Muddy Boots Pumpkins had become a family tradition.

The appeal of Muddy Boots is at once simple and complex to describe. The authentic rural setting feels both cozy and spacious. Circles of chairs draw friends, family, and strangers together around bonfire pits. A magnificent display of pumpkins and Maddie, the farm pup, greet you at the sales trailer. And beyond, the corn maze and pumpkin patch stretch out into the valley. All five senses tingle with the timeless sensations of autumn – trees flushing with color, the sweet smell of decaying leaves, woodfire smoke softening the crisp air, the suck of mud on boots, little birds beneath the drooping heads of spent sunflowers, the prickly stem and smooth body of a pumpkin...

Not long ago, the fields now dotted gold, green, and orange with sunflowers, cornstalks, and ripening pumpkins were thick with harvest of a different kind. Kerrie Roetcisoender, visionary co-owner of Muddy Boots, laughingly recalled recovering 32,000 pounds of plastic tubing and a storehouse-worth of tools and equipment from the fields overgrown with grass, blackberry thorns, and weeds. These Pompeii-esque remnants were left behind when employees of the previous tenants abruptly left after the sale to the Roetcisoenders.

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These weren't the only treasures sequestered on the farm – history was all around.

Discoveries from the original homesteaders

The original homesteaders, Smith Philander and Hannah Allen Benham, arrived in the area from the Midwest in the early 1880s. Along with them came their adult son, James Henry Benham, his wife, Minnie, and their infant daughter, Myrl. When they arrived, the valley was thick with alder, crabapples, vine maples, and tangled underbrush. The Snoqualmie Tribe hunted and fished in the area, and erected seasonal hurry-up houses, but did not have permanent settlements in the vicinity.

Like many pioneering families at the time, the Benhams traveled from the east to take advantage of the U.S. Government's [Homestead Act](#), which incentivized people to settle the western territories. Because the Homestead Act required patent applicants to "prove up" – show they had cleared the land, built a home, made improvements, and lived there continuously for five years – it follows that the Benham's arrived at least five years prior to the 1887 record of sale.

Like most families in the Snoqualmie Valley at the time, the Benhams raised cattle and provided for the majority of their own needs through farming, hunting, fishing, and logging. The river was the only means of transportation, so trading was limited. The family lived in a canvas tent until they built their home. Since the foothills were flush with old-growth cedar, it was used for everything from the rough-hewn beams to the roof shakes and siding planks.

Since such shacks were erected quickly, the fresh-cut timber wasn't properly cured. As a result, the planks shrunk and pulled away from each other over time. The Benhams solved this by patching the gaps with sheets of tin and strips of cloth. This is known because the bones



The Gibson family, tenants, in front of the Benham's original cedar shack

of the original Benham home still stand today on the way to the pumpkin patch parking lot, beneath decades of updates and additions.

In fact, during a recent renovation, Kerrie Roetcisoender and friends found a piece of newspaper from 1886 wrapped around one of the cedar beams, along with flattened tin cans and what appeared to be a discarded shirt complete with buttonholes, glued into the cracks. Recovered from the attic was an old harmonica, a carton of Pall Mall cigarettes, part of a pre-John Deere Moline grain wagon, and a section of *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1873! Possibly the most nostalgic discovery was the ten layers of wallpaper hidden under 1960s sheet rock, a subtle chronology of the many lives lived in that home and on that land.

Included in this chronology was James Henry and Minnie's growing family, with the births of Willis (1904), Earl (1906), and Ethel (1907). Now with four small children, the family could not shake the constant threat of the river. Not only did the Snoqualmie River's path hug closer to the home than it does today, but it would occasionally overflow its banks, running into the house and filling it with sand, soil, and debris. After a particularly harrowing scare involving toddler Willis, the Benhams ultimately moved to higher ground and found suitable renters (the

Gibsons) for the home in 1910.

At this time, the fledgling village of Cherry Valley, located across the river to the north and accessible by swing bridge, had been relocated uphill to make way for the railroad. Yet unnamed, the rudimentary town consisted of little more than a mercantile, Methodist church, schoolhouse, and saloon, but was poised for rapid growth in the coming year.

Learn more about the Benham family in [Vignettes of Duvall II](#) (p. 122)

A century of living and farming

The current footprint of Muddy Boots covers sections of many smaller historic homesteads. One that bordered the Benham family's homestead to the south was that of Horatio Allen, relative of Hannah Allen Benham. Originally arriving in San Francisco, Horatio Allen traveled to Washington by sailboat, then sent for his wife and two children waiting in Minnesota before settling in the Snoqualmie Valley in 1884. Frank and Elsie (Leyde) Owen took over the Allen farm in 1902 (*see [Vignettes of Duvall I](#), p. 47*), when Horatio relocated to Cherry Creek.

Over time, the acres now occupied by Muddy Boots were lived and worked on by families including the Pinkertons, Funks, Wallaces, Sadliers, Millers, and others. These families, a mix of owners and tenants, were predominantly dairy farmers, with some crop farmers and others holding professions in town. They oversaw the sweeping changes that took place around the little village of Cherry Valley and, later, Duvall: the railroad, the first boom of the 1910s, the great depression and WWII, the integration of the 'free spirits' in the 1960s and 1970s, the second boom of the 1980s, and the reckoning of a town and valley whose composition and identity was evolving.

The last dairy farmers on the property were the Benthem family. Originally from the

Netherlands, Jan and Sijke Aaltje (Sylvia) Benthem established their dairy farm in 1980. Their son, Henry Benthem, took over the operation in 2000, but due to mounting challenges and economic pressures associated with dairy farming in the region, relocated his farm and family to the Moses Lake/Ephrata area in 2006.

The availability of the Benthem farm proved to be an opportunity for another long-time cattle farmer in the valley, Ward Roney, Jr. Having faced the same challenges as Henry and others, Ward had pivoted to growing culinary herbs and, with the help of business partner, Ted Andrews, purchased the land from the Benthem's to expand their HerbCo operation. Roney's HerbCo later merged with a Virginia-based corporation, Shenandoah Growers (later Soli Organics).

Fortunately, this wouldn't be the end of family farming on this stretch of the valley.

Bringing a real farm experience to the community

Up West Snoqualmie River Road to the north remains one of the last dairy operations in the lower Snoqualmie Valley today. Green Acres Dairy is now run by fourth-generation farmer Jason Roetcisoender and wife, Kerrie. Kerrie (Johnson) also grew up in the valley and remembers an idyllic childhood down Tolt River Road in Carnation, with summers marked by playing in the woods, horseback riding, and river floats. While not raised on a farm herself, Kerrie was drawn to the unique challenge and learn-as-you-go lifestyle that dairy farming promised. Under Jason and Kerrie's management, Green Acres Dairy has implemented modern technology to sustain their dairy operations. However, they also had a dream of doing something that would engage the growing valley community – perhaps a pumpkin patch?

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The idea grew legs in 2016, when Jason Roetcisoender called to say he had ordered the pumpkin seeds. Kerrie recalls warning him that once you start and create a customer base, you're committed. "I don't think either of us fully grasped how big it would become, and how fast," she said.



Original Muddy Boots Pumpkins location. Just north of current location.

Their first pumpkin patch was just north of their current location, hemmed into the corner of Woodinville-Duvall Road and the river. Jason planted and tended to the pumpkins. Kerrie didn't set foot on the patch until a month before opening day, overwhelmed by her lack of knowledge into the economics of pumpkin pricing. She reached out to other farmers in the valley for advice, which they were happy to share, and opened their doors to an enthusiastic public in September 2016. The next season, 2017, they added a corn maze.

By 2020, it was clear they were outgrowing their current location – parking, high water, and lack of growing space were constant challenges. Fortunately, the adjoining Shanandoah Growers site was going to be available and offered 160

acres of growth potential. Through hard work and creativity, Muddy Boots opened the season in their new location in 2021.

Muddy Boots: A highly anticipated seasonal event

For many, visiting Muddy Boots Pumpkins and Corn Maze is a highly anticipated annual event, drawing repeat visitors from as far away as Arizona. Each year, visitors can expect their favorite attractions including rustic bonfires, perfect autumn gourds, and a one-of-a-kind corn maze complete with innovative, hand-made, meticulously crafted scarecrows.

Every season, Kerrie and her team fashion the scarecrows from salvaged and upcycled materials – sometimes they go hunting for items to fulfill a vision, sometimes they let a found object inspire their characters. If you've been to Muddy Boots, you've likely met Dorothy. Last year, she was on her journey down the yellow brick road with the Tin Man. The year before, she shared a cozy corner of the maze with Scarecrow. The idea for Dorothy's story began in 2020 when an unexpected windstorm flattened the cornfield the night before opening day of the maze.

"That night we were out in the field until 3am, tying up cornstalks by moonlight," Kerrie recalled. "Someone joked that the flattened corn looked like Kansas after a tornado." Thus began the Wizard of Oz storyline. Just as Kerrie turns old things into new creations, she also turns challenges into inspiration.

Another fan favorite is “Toilet Guy” – kids and adults alike can’t stifle the snickers upon discovering what quandary he’s gotten himself into this year.

“Everyone is out to help each other”

This sounds great! You might be thinking. But I haven’t heard any mention of the bouncy houses, barrel trains, and spooky spectacles. Well, there aren’t any. [“Our vision was to provide people with a real farm experience that is friendly, fun, and affordable,”](#) said Kerrie.

Not that there is anything wrong with those types of attractions-based pumpkin patches. In fact, variety is healthy, according to Kerrie. “You think all the pumpkin farmers are rivals, but in reality, we’re all friends who work together,” she explained. Once, when they had a shortage of field trip pumpkins, Gary down at Remlinger Farms invited them to load up a trailer with as

Toilet Guy, 2019



much as they needed. When Bob’s Corn is full, he sends customers down to Muddy Boots. “Everyone is out to help each other. We all bring something different and there is room for everyone.”

Muddy Boots itself is the result of investment by family and friends, not only in the form of the critical capital needed to take on the Shenandoah property, but in the form of time. “I have friends and family that have put in literally hundreds of hours and don’t ask for anything,” said Kerrie. “It’s a place where people get to be a part of a family and part of something bigger. All who work here bring a different type of creativity or skill that comes together to make something that’s really special.”

This kind of collaboration reflects the best of life in the valley. And Muddy Boots Pumpkins represents the past, present, and future of family farming in Duvall. This September, come take in the timeless sensations of autumn and discover for yourself what is so special about Muddy Boots Pumpkins – and what Dorothy and Toilet Guy are up to this year.

Check [Muddy Boots Pumpkin Patch & Corn Maze](#) for 2024 season details.

Visit [Duvall Historical Society](#) to learn more about each of the homesteading families and farmers mentioned here and much more!

Celebrating a decade of the Twilight Tours: A living history

The Novelty Hill Cemetery Twilight Tour is marking its 10th anniversary this year, a milestone for an event that has become a cherished tradition. As dusk settles on Novelty Hill Cemetery on the eve of August 24, attendees will spread out picnic blankets and plunk down their lawn chairs in anticipation of this year's Ghost Speakers, including the benefactors of one of the valley's most beloved parks, two sisters who arrived to the wilderness of the valley in 1892, and a mad genius responsible for one of Duvall's most infamous events. Against this poignant backdrop, the stories of these known and lesser known figures of valley history will spring to life through a presentation that is part history lesson, part memorial, and part comedy skit.

Learn more about the upcoming [Novelty Hill Cemetery Twilight Tour](#)

The origin of the Twilight Tour

In 2014, the Duvall Historical Society (DHS) conceptualized the Twilight Tour as a powerful way to honor the memory of Snoqualmie Valley pioneers and early residents of Duvall. They would transform the quiet cemetery into a stage where ghost speakers narrate the stories of their lives.

Diane Baker, a former resident of [Big Rock](#) and sexton of Novelty Hills Cemetery, played a crucial role during the program's early years. With her deep community ties and access to DHS's Wagon Wheel newsletters, Diane meticulously researched and crafted scripts that brought the pioneers' stories to life. Her dedication laid the foundation for the Twilight Tour's success.

In 2018, Country Roney took over the program after Diane stepped down to care for her husband. Country, who is the current DHS member, is passionate about preserving the legacies of those buried in the cemetery. Having lost her father in 2020, she recognizes that sharing these stories offers comfort to the living and helps them process grief, making the connection between the past and present even more poignant.

Memorable performances over the years

The Twilight Tour has always been a community effort. Initially supported by Cascade Community Theater, it has evolved as a platform



Twilight Tour actors from 2018

DHS is proud to partner with:



for community volunteers and descendants of those in the cemetery to step into the history of their hometown and family. Stepping into the life of someone who influenced the roots of their hometown has been embraced as an honor and a privilege.

Over the years, some of the memorable portrayals include:

2017: Featured homesteading and pioneer farmers William Benham (Gary Fahrner), James Q. Wallace (Charles Dawson), and William Roney (Michael Martinez).

2018: Included a story about Country's great-grandfather William Roney, who arrived in the valley in 1912.

2019: George Anderson III shared memories of his grandfather, George Anderson I while Nicole Kohn portrayed Cherry Valley's best-known teacher, Margaret McCormic. The love story of Emmit and Ruth Minaglia was shared along with a controversial story about a 1950s teen pregnancy.

2021: Duane Davidson, Novelty Hills Cemetery board member, introduced a creative twist by sharing stories of his generational descendants, each portrayed by members of his family. This year also marked the transition from "guest speakers" to "ghost speakers."

2022: In partnership with family members, this year featured the love stories of recognizable couples like Ray & Tove Burhen, Vern & Mildred Pickering, and Franke & Rudy Vanhulle.

2023: Included stories of 1900s pioneers such as the Boshaw family, Verle Bowe (granddaughter of Duvall's first blacksmith), Bill McCormick (namesake of the downtown park), and Cora Roney (namesake of Roney Road off Big Rock Road).

Rousing line-up of ghost speakers for 2024

This August, guests of the Twilight Tour 2024 will meet Larry Van Over, the infamous 'hippie that ruined Duvall.' Portrayed by Rob Holdeman, host of the Roots of Duvall Historic Walking Tour and amateur improv actor, we will hear from the man who imagined the piano drop and whose influence helped shape the culture of Duvall in the early 1970s. Attendees will also meet the Westman sisters, whose family homesteaded at Novelty in 1892; Kate



Ernest and Kathleen Scheffer

and Earnie Scheffer, who both graduated from Cherry Valley Highschool, were known as known as "parents to all the valley boys," and

later donated part of their land to create McDonald Park in Carnation; and Lorraine Minshull, who will tell the story of the life she shared with her husband, Gary.

A tribute to community

While the idea of spending time at a cemetery may strike some as odd, regular attendees of the Twilight Tours report feeling a sense of reverence and deep connection as they learn about the lives of those buried in the place where they stand. Even if guests are unfamiliar with the characters portrayed, they leave feeling as though they have known them.

As we celebrate a decade of the Twilight Tour, we invite you to join us in keeping these stories alive, ensuring that the memories of our community's pioneers and residents continue to resonate for generations to come.

Learn more about the next [Novelty Hill Cemetery Twilight Tour](https://www.duvallhistoricalsociety.org/twilight-tour) coming up on **Saturday, August 24, 2024, at 7pm.**

Upcoming Events

Aug.—Sept. Dougherty House: Open for Season:
Every Sunday (1 - 4pm), May-Sept.

August 24 Twilight Tour
@ Novelty Hills Cemetery (7 pm)

Sept. 14 Root Historic Walking Tour
with Rob Holdeman (10am)

Sept. 28 Movie Night on the Farm
@ Dougherty Farmstead (6pm)

Dec. 6 Light Up Duvall
@ The Depot (5 pm)

Dec. 14 Wreaths Across America
@ Novelty Hills Cemetery (10am)

More info: Duvall Historical Society Facebook page



DHS 2024 Officers

“Country” Roney ~ President (2024-2025)

“Fiver” Pilon ~ Vice President (2024-2025)

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Become a member of the Duvall Historical Society

Support DHS with a yearly membership that assists volunteers in properly archiving, sharing history and planning free events to share with the community.

\$15 Individual Membership

\$5 Students 18 & Under

\$250 Friends of DHS

Ways to get involved:

- Museum docent
- Event organizer
- Interviewer
- Grant writer
- Education outreach
- Photographer
- Exhibit design
- Archiving
- Program planner
- Building & garden maintenance

AND
MORE!