

# Apples once populated East Farms and the “Double O”

By Jayne Singleton

SPOKANE VALLEY HERITAGE MUSEUM

Otis Orchards originally was a railroad stop called Otis. The story is that the person who manned the stop was named Otis. Other stories indicate Otis was an early settler. Still another story recounts that Otis was an early Northern Pacific engineer.

The area began to be called Otis Orchards around 1908 after a small post office was established. The area was being promoted as a fine fruit-growing center, and in 1912 the post office name was officially changed to Otis Orchards. East Farms is the area east of Otis to the state line. It was basically an irrigation district that formally established in 1924. Its agricultural and community history is similar to Otis Orchards.

With the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad through the Spokane Valley in 1883, land speculators could sell tracts to potential orchardists. William and Johanna Pringle arrived by train in 1883. They homesteaded on the southeast corner of Harvard and Euclid roads. Their first child, William, born in 1885, was the first child born in Otis. There are many descendants of these early pioneers still in the area. Other early pioneers to the Otis/East Farms area were the Canfields, Eschs, Murrays, Simpsons, Beckemeiers, Corriganes, Sweeneys, Clifts, Bohns, Goos, Staffords, Oldhams and Grants. Some of the roads in Otis Orchards still bear the names of these early settlers. In other cases, they used to: Campbell Road north of Trent Road was referred to as Canfield Gulch. Jacob Esch donated land for an early school. The Sweeney house still stands on River Road. The Coeur d'Alenes and the upper band of the Spokanes camped on the north side of the Spokane River near what today is the intersection of River and Murray roads.

Apple orchards were the landscape and livelihood of pioneers in Otis Orchards. The Seatons, Shinns, Segerstroms and MacLeans had orchards that produced abundant fruit. Their orchards were irrigated from water out of Newman Lake. A long canal was dug from the south end of the Lake to deliver water to Otis Orchards homes and farms. The inlet was covered by a screen to keep fish from entering the irrigation canal. Numerous times, the screen failed, and as Mr. Norm Whitford, a 50-plus year resident of Otis, relates, “sometimes fish were flopping around in my front yard when I received my irrigation water.” The Corbin Irrigation Ditch also provided water to Otis Orchards and East Farms.



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Above: Students from Otis' “Little White School on the Hill” are pictured in this 1897 photo. The Pringle, Rotchford and Murray children are among those represented.

At left: The Otis Orchards Pep Club and basketball team are featured in this 1927 photo. Marion Krebs Beckemeier is in the back row, last on the right.

One of the early apple box labels was the “Double O” -- used by the Otis Orchards Apple Company. Employment was always available in the fields as pickers and in the warehouses as sorters, packers and box makers. Wages were meager by today's standards. “Thinners” thinned the apples for about 25 to 45 cents per hour. Box makers averaged 65 cents per hour in the 1930s. Typically, during harvest, school children were released for about three weeks to help with the apple picking. Indians also helped pick apples and worked in the bean fields as well.

During the war years of the mid 1940s, the employment records of the Segerstrom Warehouse #3 reveal many Japanese names. The Segerstrom Warehouse #3, originally the Spokane Valley Fruit Growers, was demolished in the summer of 2004. One lone apple warehouse remains, now being used to store boats.

Lead arsenate was commonly used as a pesticide, but the leaf roller and then the severe winter of 1939 killed many trees.

Most orchardists pulled out the apple trees and planted crops.

As with any community that grows, a school became necessary to educate young people. The first school that Otis Orchards, Moab, East Farms and Spokane Bridge students attended was affectionately called the “Little White School on the Hill.” It was located about a half mile east of where Otis Community Church is today. Eventually, a one-story grade school was built, and a separate high school building soon followed. The cupola from the original grade school sits atop the new Otis Orchards Elementary School. Area students attended Otis Orchards High School until East Valley High School opened in 1961.

In the early days, the first families in Otis Orchards were predominately Catholic and worshipped in homes with Mass being attended to by the traveling missionary priests.

In 1892, St Joseph's Catholic Church was built on Trent Road, and soon after,

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The Otis Orchards Apple Company featured its Double O brand on labels like this one.

a cemetery was established to meet the needs of families who had lost a loved one. The German Evangelical Church was built in 1908 and later became the Otis Orchards Community Church.

Early merchants supplying basic needs were the Otis Mercantile, Dean's Store, Pringles Garage (now the Otis Grille) and the East Farms Cafe. Summer fun was to be found at Newman Lake or Liberty Lake, or if one didn't want to go too far, swimming in the irrigation ditches was always a quick way to cool off.

Today, Otis Orchards and East Farms haven't changed too much. There are still large parcels of land, farms, barns and animals. Most of the orchards of the past are gone, but a few remain. The Lloyd Orchard on Garry Road, the old apple trees on Wellesley west of Harvard and a few others scattered around are reminders of the once thriving apple industry that united the community.

Jayne Singleton is director of the Spokane Valley Heritage Museum, located at 12114 E. Sprague Ave. Additional items about the history and culture of the Spokane Bridge area — or any of the communities in the Valley of the Sun series — are available in the museum archives. For more information, call 922-4570 or visit [www.valleyheritage-center.org](http://www.valleyheritage-center.org).