



Lewis County

Charley & Dorothy Burton

“In 1986, along with our partners Ron and Dorothy Palmer, we won the right to take the Christmas tree to the Blue Room of the White House. It had to be exactly 18 ½ feet tall. We went back there on December 4. At the White House there was a little ceremony out in front and a decorated horse-drawn carriage brought the tree up to the front entrance. Mrs. Reagan came out and the tree was presented to her. She took us into what was called the diplomatic reception room. Pictures were taken and we had coffee and tea and wonderful fruitcake. Mrs. Reagan visited with us, oh, almost an hour and a half. Afterward, the chief usher took us aside and said that we could come back Saturday night and help decorate the tree, which we did. The Palmers had to hurry home to the partnership farm called “Windy Knoll” in Mossyrock, Washington to finish harvest. The afternoon of the morning we took the tree, we also had the opportunity to meet the president. We waited in the garden room until he came in from a conference and we shook hands with him. He seemed to be a wonderful person. He looked you right in the eye when we spoke and was truly interested in tree farming. We were rather spellbound.” – Dorothy Burton



Charley and Dorothy met on November 10, 1944 on an arranged date to Treasure Island near San Francisco. They were wed on Christmas day that same year. Their marriage was described as a wartime affair; Dorothy was in the Navy, Charley, was a pilot in the Navy. After the war, they attended UC Davis. Charley earned a bachelor of science in agriculture and a master in education while Dorothy left college to become a mother. In 1949, during Charley’s senior year at UC, they purchased 40 acres in Bear Canyon, Washington, near Morton – Charley’s hometown.

Although their property was in Washington State, the couple was living near San Francisco. But they wanted a rural lifestyle and moved to Chehalis, Washington in 1952 to raise chickens and grow strawberries for their livelihood and attend

to their Bear Canyon property.

The Burtons planted their first crop of Christmas trees as an experiment. Charley, “We started as soon as we bought this property in 1949. At first, there wasn’t a source for seedlings. With the help of Bill Sauerwine, from Soil Conservation, we found seedlings through Crown Zellerbach.”

Dottie, “We wanted to see if they would grow here. For all we knew they wouldn’t survive at the elevation of only 1000 feet.”

Charley, “The nobles were making good trees, so we planted one field of five acres in 1955. We planted everything – two or three kinds of pine, noble and silver fir. I don’t think we planted Douglas fir in there. But we didn’t plant more Christmas trees.” The Burtons intended to phase out Christmas trees until they proved through analysis that Christmas trees were lucrative.

Without further ado, the Burtons got out of the poultry business, purchased a mobile home and moved onto their property. Dottie, “I’m afraid it was my doing, influencing the buying of an all-electric mobile home. I thought that surely we would be able to have electricity, because when we bought the property in 1949, there had been power to a little Bear Canyon ranch house down the hill. We thought PUD would bring us power. In fact, we went three and a half years with no electricity in an all-electric mobile.” With a pioneer spirit, the couple raised trees and five children.

In the early ‘50s they joined the Lewis County Farm Forestry, then took their level of involvement to the state level. Charley served as president for a term and Dorothy served as secretary from 1968 through 1970. Dorothy, “Here we were, no electricity and just a little kitchen table. I would have to clear the table and bring out all that stuff. I had to send out receipts for memberships and keep track of it all. I still have the old Remington that Dick Woods loaned to me because I didn’t have a typewriter.”

Charley, “When I was president of the association, I was roped into the Forest Protection Association. We were members of the tax advisory committee that pretty much wrote the timber tax laws we have now, and was personally responsible for getting Christmas trees separated from timber, so that we didn’t have to pay severance tax on Christmas trees. I had a bit of a tough time there.”

Sitting snugly, peering out a panoramic window in the living room of the cozy house that Charley and Dorothy built, we watch snow drifting and creating a white wonderland scene. Their property has been divided and is now in their children’s hands. They are comforted to know the legacy will continue. All five children currently have their own Christmas trees or timberland.

“The river runs through our property, so we have a campground. It’s a very active place in the summertime. All of our children just love this place. It is what it is because it’s a tree farm.” – Dorothy Burton

WINDY KNOLL TREE FARM

Dorothy (Dottie) Wardman Burton, born May 7, 1922

Charley Burton, 1917 - 2004

Charlie: WFFA State President, 1970

Dorothy: State Secretary, 1968 - 1971

Lewis County Tree Farmer of the Year

Lewis County Distinguished Service Award, 2002

Christmas Tree Association Herb Plumb Award, 1990