



The South Park Farms 1948

When Margaret Marra took the photograph from the front yard of her and her husband Carl's house at 534 South Director Street, World War II had been over for almost three years and the city was enjoying the fruits of a booming post-war economy. By the end of the decade, Seattle's population would be 467,591, almost 100,000 more than it was in 1940. It's African-American community would more than quadruple to 15,666 drawn by the growing number of well paying jobs in the Puget Sound area. Japanese-Americans were slowly returning, the prejudices against them discredited by the outstanding combat records of the returning Nisei veterans.

The world famous Kalakala was ferrying passengers across Puget Sound while Spokane politician Albert Canwell was investigating alleged communist activities at the University of Washington. Meanwhile the Seattle school board had approved that married women teachers would be allowed starting that fall year. The board had already hired its first black teachers in 1947.

Boeing was in the middle of a strike by Local 751 of the Aero Mechanics Union that would last until September. Later there would be another major strike this time on the waterfront by the International Longshoreman and Warehouseman Union.

In sports the Seattle Rainiers baseball team would finish the season tied for third in the Pacific Coast League. Nationally the Cleveland Indians would beat the Boston Braves in the World Series 4 games to 2. That fall the University of Washington Huskies football team would finish 2-7-1 under new coach Howard Odell. The World Olympic Games would reappear for the first time since 1936. The first televised broadcast in Seattle would be in November of a high school football game.

In elections that fall Harry S. Truman would defeat Thomas Dewey for the presidency of the United States. Locally Arthur B. Langlie would beat incumbent Monrad Wallgren for state governor and William F. Devin would be reelected Seattle's mayor. Both bond measures would pass overwhelmingly, one for street lighting and another for upgrading parks, playgrounds, and the zoo. Scheduled to open next year would be the new regional airport at Bow Lake to be called Seatac and the new University of Washington Health Sciences Medical facilities.

Today virtually all the buildings in the above photograph no longer exist as some were torn down or replaced by the recycling plant. In the picture's upper left towards the distant farmland is where the Roadway trucking facility is now located. Fourth Avenue which once wandered up the hillside to join with Myers Way now ends at South 96th Street. The present Highway 509 (also known as the Burien Freeway) was built in 1967/1968 and the dirt and clay removed from the construction project was deposited upon much of the farmland shown in the photograph elevating the land some 15 to 20 feet. Consequently this marker is located roughly 100 yards to the West. As a point of reference the large barn would be directly ahead of you to the South where the recycling plant is. While it is unfortunate that the above picture is of considerable distance from the marker it may be viewed as an accurate representation of what it was like here years ago.

The Italian Truck Farms Of South Park



Between 1890 and 1920 Seattle grew from 37,000 residents to a major city of 315,312 and this rapid expansion spurred the growth of new markets for dairy and poultry products and for fresh produce. Among those who took advantage were the immigrant Italian peasant farmers known in Italy as "Contadini" whose old world knowledge readily adapted to developing the fertile lands in and around the city into thriving truck farms. A truck farm is so named because it grows vegetables and other produce which are then transported, or "trucked", to market where they are either sold directly to the consumer or through a wholesaler or commission house. A farm could range in size from as little as a few acres to well over 100.

Here in South Park many of the Italians came from the Campania region of southern Italy in general and from the province of Avellino in particular. Theirs soon became a very close knit community. Religious life centered about the old "Our Lady of Lourdes" Catholic church that once stood on the hill overlooking the farms and the community. The children attended either the old South Park school on 12th and Sullivan or Concord Elementary then West Seattle High School until 1927 when Cleveland High School opened or Highline High School in Burien. In some cases the children's family names were changed or "Americanized" and often created some confusion among the immigrants.

The Italians would work their farms seven days a week from before dawn until well after sunset although Sunday afternoons were usually set aside for rest and relaxation. When possible, fellow Italians were employed as help. Later Filipinos were used and, on rare occasions, Japanese. Rare because the Italian and Japanese farmers engaged in spirited and often heated competition that lasted for years until the outbreak of World War II when the Japanese were interned for the war's duration. The Japanese farmers never recovered and few returned after 1945.

The post war years also marked the beginning of the end of many of the local farms including those of the Italians. Already it had grown increasingly difficult to compete with the huge farms in California and now as a result of the booming peacetime economy the farmlands themselves were becoming too valuable for agricultural use. Housing projects and shopping malls were developed and built. In 1935 there were 154,274 acres of farmland in King County. By 1967 it had fallen to little more than 50,000. Here in South Park the farms gave way to warehouses, manufacturing plants, and business parks. Finally time itself caught up with the Contadini as they grew old and one by one began to pass away until they were all gone and with their passing so ended an era in Seattle's history.

Carmine and Maria Marra

From before 1920 when this property was purchased on a handshake from Joe Desimone (of Pike Place Market fame) until well over 40 years later when time and economics finally caught up with them, Carmine and Maria Marra worked this land and were an integral part of this community.

Carmine Marra (1885-1968) was born in Sala Di Serino in the Italian province of Avellino southeast of Naples. Following his older brother Anniello to Seattle in 1903, Carmine worked for Joe Desimone on his truck farm in South Park and soon became forever known among his fellow Italians as "Alaskio" since he often joked to Joe's young son Pete that he was going to Alaska to strike it rich. He never left Seattle but he did find gold when he married Maria Crocifissa Pinorini (1891-1977) in December, 1908.

Maria had arrived in Seattle the previous year and was living with her uncle and aunt Frank and Maria Porrini - neighbors of the Desimones. Maria was a northern girl from Brebbia, a small village near the shores of Lago Maggiore at the base of the Alps. Unlike most of the southern Italians who were illiterate, she was educated and later taught herself to read and write English.

At first, because they spoke dissimilar dialects, Carmine and Maria could barely understand one another. Maria's father Paulo back in Brebbia was so upset when he learned of the union that he was prepared to pay for an annulment and passage for his daughter's return. Still, Carmine had won her over and promised her a beautiful piano to grace their home. Their marriage lasted over 59 years until Carmine's death and produced 8 children, 12 grandchildren, numerous great and great-great grandchildren, and an old piano whose keys sometimes stuck.

They became known throughout the neighborhood as Grandpa and Grandma Marra and their home at 9017 4th Avenue South, particularly Grandma's kitchen, was known for many, many years for its warmth and generous hospitality.

They have long since passed on and the world they knew and lived in has disappeared but their memory continues on with the family, friends and this garden.



Carmine and Maria Marra with two of their children, Anna DeQuericco (born 1911) and Minnie Hordan (born 1913)



The Marra Barn - Spring 1937

The barn consisted of a main structure with lean-to additions on either side (the eastern addition is out of view to the left in the photograph). Behind was a green house, a glass covered hot bed, and partially visible behind the cedar bean poles, an outhouse. The main building had a wooden planked floor. You are roughly now standing in what was then inside the barn to the left of the large sliding door in the spot where the farm truck was parked. To your right and above was the loft and below was a work area where produce was washed, cleaned, and weighed and included benches, a large galvanized wash tub and a set of scales. The nearer addition with all the bean poles leaning against it was where first "Dolly" the workhorse was stabled and later the tractor was kept. The larger eastern addition housed the cultivator among other equipment. In the far distance of the photo can be seen buildings on land now occupied by the recycling plant. During the farm's heyday every Sunday afternoon many of the Italians would gather for several games of Bocce (Italian bowling) played on the dirt road that once existed in front of the barn.



The Shack - Spring 1937

The shack as it was both commonly and affectionately known was located on this site and was built in 1921 shortly after Carmine and Maria Marra had purchased this land. For many years it served both as living quarters for the seasonal Filipino workers employed on the farm and as a place where many of the Italian farmers would gather, usually on Sunday, to enjoy an evening of cards such as Scopa and Biscola. In the 1950's, the building was occupied by Marra family members and later functioned as a rental property. The shack was vacated in 1977 following Maria's death and soon fell into a state of neglect and disrepair. It was torn down years later after King County purchased the property from the Marra estate. This photograph was taken by county officials and the view is from several yards to the northwest on what was the old garden road which once extended from 4th Avenue to Director Street.



Maria and Carmine Marra bunching beets near the top of the garden around 1947. Their home at 9017 4th Avenue South can be seen to the left of Maria. Between them in the background can be seen the farm shack. The view of the barn is hidden behind Carmine.



Dietrich Hamm

23 June, 1859 - 6 September, 1918

Dietrich Hamm, for whom Hamm's Creek is named, was a successful Seattle restaurant and real estate entrepreneur who came to this area in 1887 and remained a well-known and respected member of the community until his death on 6 September 1918.

Born in Mainz in what is now Germany on 23 June 1859, he emigrated to the United States at the age of 16 arriving at St. Louis Missouri in 1875. He later moved to Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado; New Orleans, Louisiana; Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; and Victoria, British Columbia before he settled in the Pacific Northwest. He opened Hamm's Coffee House and German Bakery and soon became partners with one Ferdinand Schmitz. The Seattle fire of 1889 wiped them out and the partners were left virtually penniless. Undeterred, they reopened business using a tent. Later they opera-

Dietrich Hamm

ted the Snoqualmie Hotel, then the Arlington, and finally the Butler Hotel until 1903 when Hamm retired to supervise his own private business interests and farm.

Perhaps Hamm's greatest contribution to Seattle came in 1909 when he became one of the four original members of the Duwamish Waterway Commission and was instrumental in the efforts to "straighten" the Duwamish River between Harbour Island and Turning Basin #3 just south of Boeing Field. As one of the largest property owners in the district he was assessed more towards the cost of the waterway than any other person or corporation. Mr. Reginald H. Thompson, Seattle's city engineer from 1892 to 1911, said that Hamm "undoubtedly did more than any other person in making the waterway possible. He paid a dollar for every five dollars that were spent on the project."

Dietrich Hamm was married twice. His first wife was Emma Weiler of Victoria who died in 1891. The next year he married Aline Demaray and together they had 6 children: Benjamin Franklin, Charles Henry, Aline, Katherine, Elsa, and Lewis. The Hamm's mansion on Des Moines Memorial Drive overlooking the Duwamish River still stands although it is no longer owned by the family.

While largely forgotten today, Hamm's contribution to the straightening of the Duwamish Waterway and the resulting contribution thereby to the growth of Seattle into a major metropolis remains as a fitting tribute to his courage, determination, and pioneering spirit.