

Finding the Fish Farm Founder

We were doing the books in the Museum when the phone rang. It was a gentleman calling from Everett, who said, "I've spent the day in Everett searching for some obscure information regarding Brenner's Trout Farm to no avail. The folks in the Everett Public Library suggested I call you." Of course, we have some information on the well-known fish farm, including pictures. But his question was, "Do you know the name of the person who originally created a fish farm on that site? [*Bummer, you mean it wasn't Brenner?*] I'm doing research on behalf of the Stillaguamish Tribes, and one of the details we are seeking is whether there were any unique water rights granted – those would likely be traceable only through the name of the original fish farm founder. In the course of my research today, I found the name 'Oberlander', but I'm not sure of the relationship."

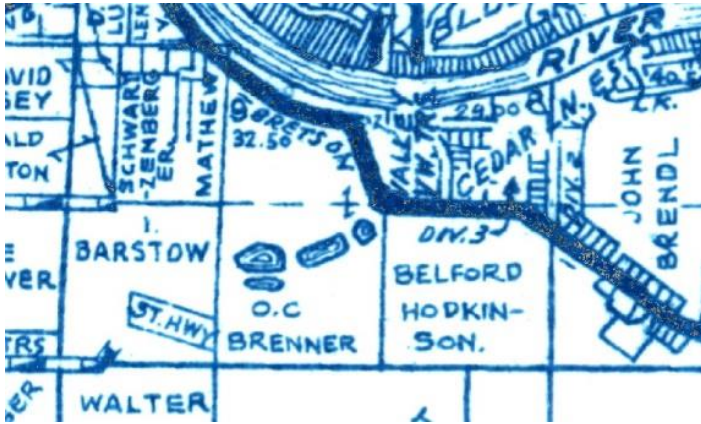
Needless to say, we love a research challenge that lets us exercise some of the tools that are unique to the museums in Snohomish County. In particular, we have 1) thousands of local pictures and documents that can be searched using keywords and names, 2) a mapping system that allows us to overlay historic maps (many of which show property owner) all the way back to the original homesteaders, 3) digitized historic texts that detail the development of business, industry, and communities across Snohomish County, all of which can be electronically searched by keyword and name, and 4) electronically searchable newspapers published in the Granite Falls area back to 1922.

The fish biologist on the phone said he could be at the Museum in 30 minutes, so we got ready. The first step was to look for Brenner's Trout Farm in our normal Museum collection. It rapidly became clear that Brenner's was a significant operation:

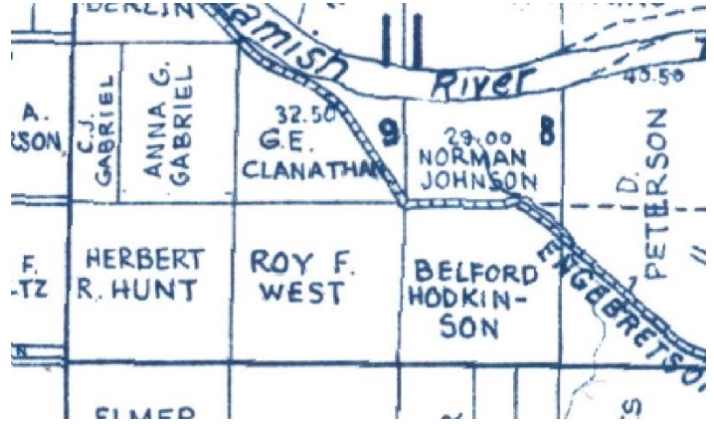


**O. C. Brenner, Owner
VISITORS WELCOME
Granite Falls**

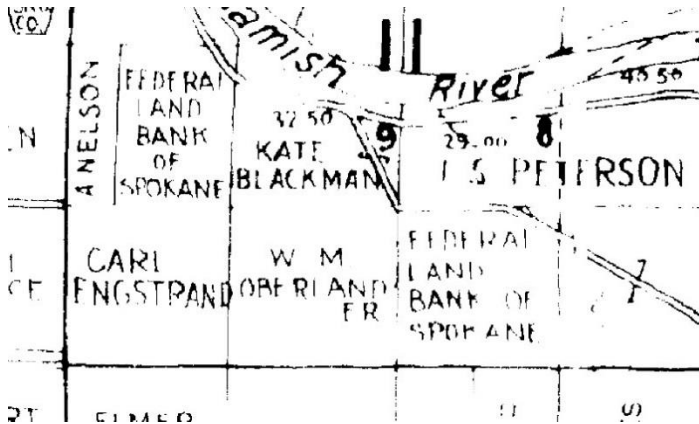
But nothing in our collection indicated whether Brenner was the original owner/creator of the farm. So, we decided to look back in our mapping system. Knowing the fish farm was near the western end of Engebretsen Rd, we started with a 1975 map showing "Brenner", then overlaid progressively older maps. Going backward in time, we found "Brenner", "West", "Oberlander" [a name we'd heard], "Cushman", "Dahlstrom", and finally the original homesteader "James Levi".



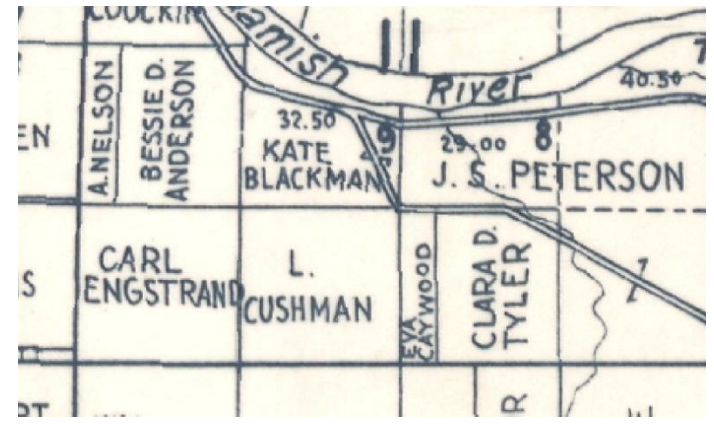
Brenner (1975 map)



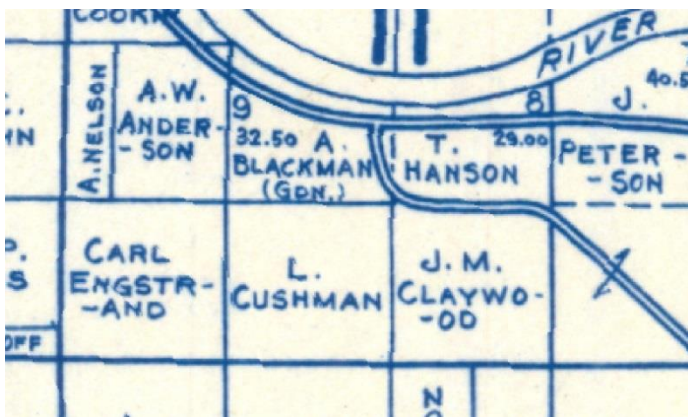
West (1952 map)



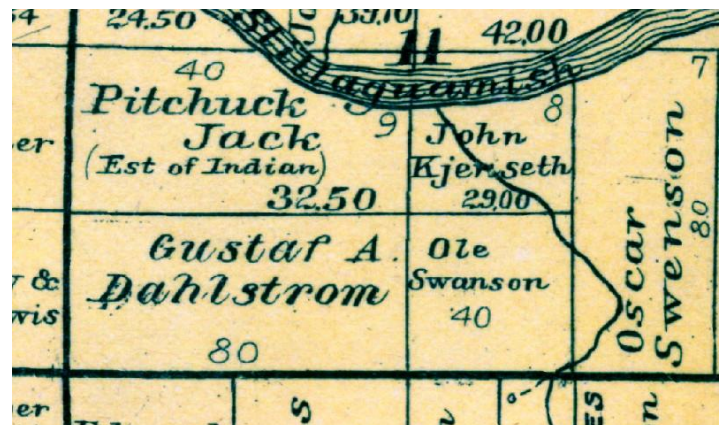
Oberlander (1940 map)



Cushman (1934 map)



Cushman (1927 map)



Dahlstrom (1910 map)

Overlaying the original homestead lines, it was revealed that the property of interest was originally part of the James Levi homestead. He had been granted homestead patent #9447 on July 18, 1889. He was, by definition, the first official owner of the property.

Armed with a set of names, we tried the suspect "Oberlander" in our newspapers. From the June 18, 1936 issue of the Snohomish County Forum came the article describing the purchase of the fish farm by Oberlander from Cushman.

So we knew that Cushman (or someone earlier) was the creator of the farm. We went back to the newspapers using "Cushman" and "fish farm" as our search terms. They appeared many times in the 1930s, stocking many area lakes we fish today.

Cutthroat Trout Planted

Cutthroat trout, totaling 8,500 were planted in Lake Chaplain and 8,100 rainbow trout were planted in Wood's creek Monday by Game Warden William Leekie and Deputy Wardens J. J. Jackson and Filt Furness. The fish were from the hatchery of Levi Cushman at Granite Falls.

FISH PLANTED

Eighteen thousand minnow cutthroats were planted in Swartz Lake southeast of Granite Falls, Monday, having been planted by the game warden's office. They were purchased from Levi Cushman's private hatchery at Granite Falls.

OBERLANDER BUYS CUSHMAN FISH FARM

Sale of the Cushman fish farm by the Granite Falls State Bank to Mr. W. M. Oberlander was completed last week.

Mr. Oberlander owns a service station at Murphy's Corner near Silver Lake on the Bothell Highway, and he plans to operate the fish hatchery for commercial purposes.

For the present, he will remain at his present residence, and Mr. Cave, a relative, will be in charge of the farm.

Then, we found the article that solved the "history mystery", and explained all the details behind the creation of the fish farm . . . by Levi Cushman in 1924 ! Here's just a portion of the Sept 15, 1932 article, one of many that appeared over the years with details of this "new industry".

A COMING INDUSTRY

One of the most interesting places around Granite Falls is the trout farm of Mr. and Mrs. Levi Cushman, situated about three miles northwest of Granite.

A trip to the farm and the information gleaned is an education in itself.

The water for the industry head on the Cushman farm and Mr. and Mrs. Cushman started this industry in 1924. Starting with two hundred fish and a very small pond the first year they produced about 7,000 fish, but they experienced a little bad luck as a crane got about 4,000 of the little fishes. The following year a larger pond was added and a few hundred fish were sold to Snohomish county for stocking rivers and lakes.

The first three or four years were not very flourishing or prosperous and they were mostly spent in learning, as the skunks, cranes, owls etc., seemed to enjoy the young fish very much.

Five larger ponds were added in the meantime and in 1931 200,000 baby fish were again sold to Snohomish county and again in 1932 the county bought a like number.

A large hatchery was added this year and an eight inch water main was installed. There are now thirty-eight troughs in place of the two original ones in the hatchery. Besides the five rearing ponds a large pond of about one-half acre was added last year.

GOOD LUCK & GOOD FISHING ! - Fred