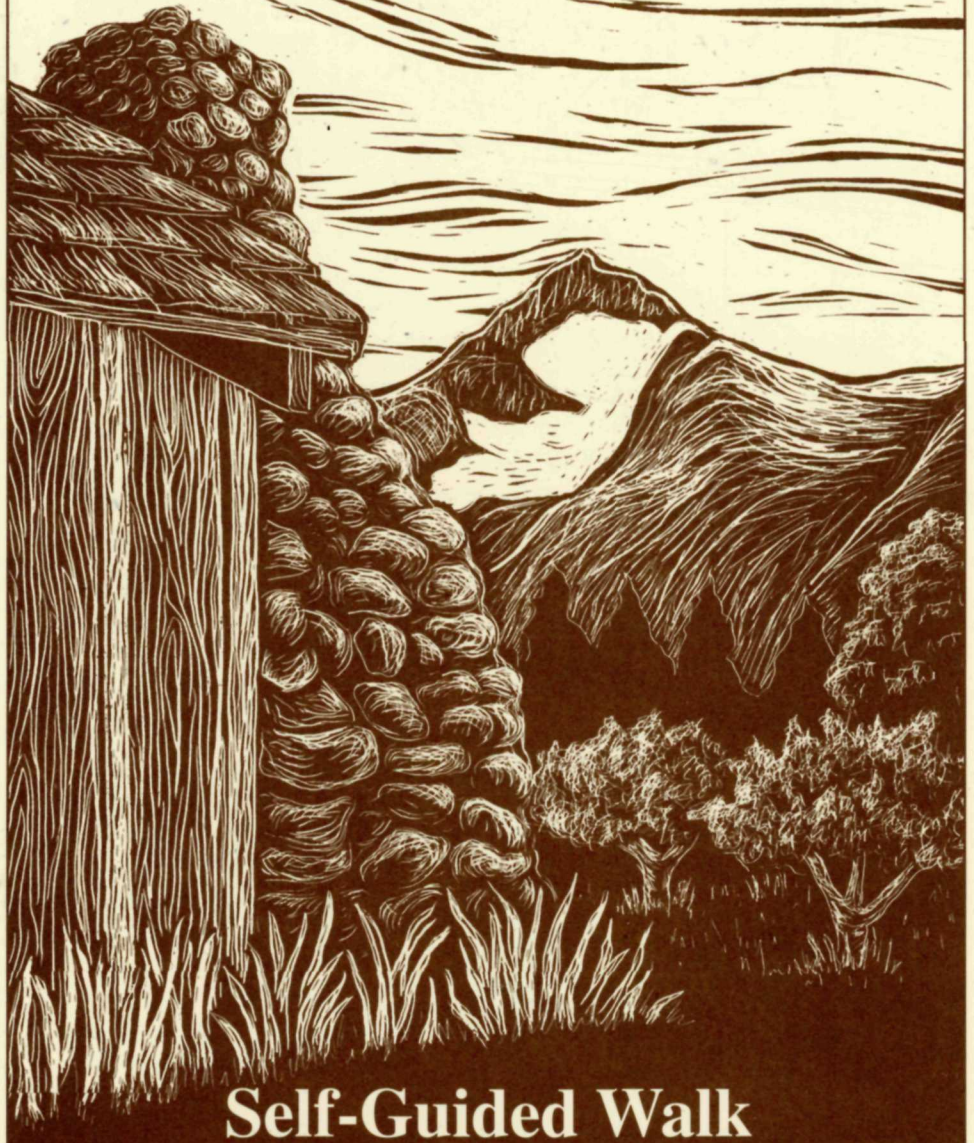


Buckner Homestead Historic District



Self-Guided Walk

Lake Chelan National Recreation Area
North Cascades National Park Service Complex



You can start this self-guided tour either at the trailhead to Buckner Lane or on the Buckner Road where it meets with the main irrigation ditch. Please follow the map in the center of this brochure. Each stop is marked on the map; there are no numbered posts.

The buildings and objects of the Buckner Homestead Historic District are fragile with age. Help preserve them by refraining from climbing or sitting on equipment. Leave everything as you found it for others to enjoy. Take only pictures, leave only footprints.

For your safety...

- ❖ Stay on trails. Western Rattlesnakes inhabit the area. They can be dangerous when surprised or threatened.
- ❖ Stay far away from bears and other animals that may be present in the orchard.
- ❖ Please don't drink the water from irrigation ditches, creeks, or the river. Giardia, a microscopic organism that causes severe flu-like illness, may be present.

By the turn of the 20th century, Washington pioneers had already settled most of the easily accessible agricultural lands around the shores of Puget Sound and the banks of the Columbia River. As the search for available land to claim became more difficult, settlers followed in the footsteps of trappers and prospectors up rivers and lakes into the foothills of the North Cascades and other remote areas. A handful of families ventured up Lake Chelan to build lives for themselves in the wild valley of Stehekin. This is the story of one such family.

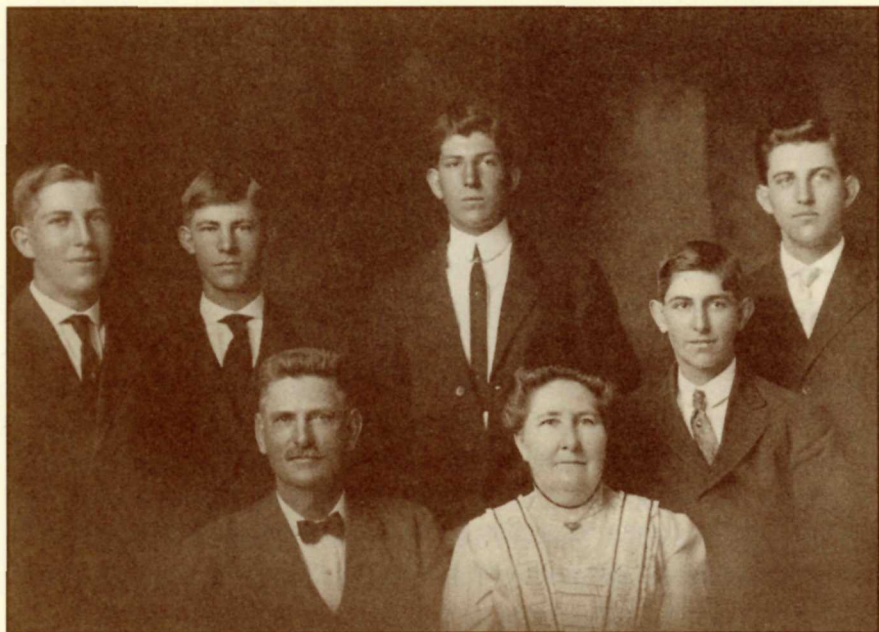
During the summer of 1910, William “Van” Buckner and his wife May traveled from their home in California to the Pacific Northwest and sailed through the Inside Passage to Alaska. On the way home, they made a side trip to Stehekin, where Van’s brother, Henry Freeland Buckner, had been living since 1898. Van and May saw much of the valley on that visit, including a prospector’s homestead located at this oxbow in the river. The owner of the homestead, Bill Buzzard, agreed to sell the couple the 147 acres remaining from his original 160-acre homestead for \$5,000. However, worried that he might drink or gamble away the money, Bill Buzzard made one unusual request: Instead of a lump sum, the Buckners were to pay him in monthly installments of \$50 for the rest of his life. The two parties honored their agreement until Buzzard’s death in 1919, one month short of receiving \$5,000. The Buckners used the remaining money to buy a headstone for Buzzard’s grave.

“Mr. Buzzard is very fortunate, as is every other settler in that the productive valley, in serving a home combining the poetry and romance of a wild and weird resort amid tumbling cascades and towering mountains, with extreme healthfulness of climate and fertile soil which will make its possessor wealthy, more certainly than a gold mine.”

—From *Chelan Leader*,
October 27, 1892



Bill Buzzard on the right



Van and May Buckner with their sons

In April 1911, Van, May, and son Frank moved to Stehekin for the summer. Their two youngest sons, Harry and Carroll, followed a month later. The family spent summers in Stehekin turning the homestead into a commercial orchard, which they called the Buckner Ranch. They returned to California each fall, and it wasn't until 1915, when Harry, the youngest son, decided to spend the winter after graduating from high school, that the ranch saw its first year-round resident. Two years later Harry married Olive Field, who was born and raised in the Field Hotel at the head of Lake Chelan. Except for Harry's absence while serving in World War One, the ranch was the couple's livelihood and home. Their three daughters – Irene, Hobbie and Bucky – grew up on a ranch much changed from the old prospector's homestead their father had known when he was 15.

One: Irrigation Ditch

During the first two months of that first summer in Stehekin, Harry, his father, and brothers worked hard to create a gravity-feed irrigation system. They hand dug double feeder ditches for each row of trees from the main ditch – four miles of ditches in all – from which water flowed where needed using the power of gravity.

The four men also constructed a rock dam and a series of wooden gates that controlled the flow of water from Rainbow Creek and diverted water to different parts of the orchard and ranch by means of gates, which were propped open with rocks. During wet weather, the main gate was lowered to divert water back to the creek. Today, National Park Service personnel irrigate the orchard using the same ditches and gates constructed by the Buckner family.

The ditches were also used to divert water for other daily needs. As you explore the ranch, you will see some of the various ways.



Van built a series of bridges across the irrigation ditch, creating a whimsical journey down Buckner Lane. The bridges you are crossing over today are replicas of the originals.

Van and May Buckner



Two: Bench

Building a homestead in the wilderness required hard work but the Buckners found time to enjoy life, too. Hints of this can be found throughout the ranch. Around the time the bridges were constructed, a bench similar to this fragile replica was built from bitter cherry wood that took hold after the last major forest fire in the valley in 1889. Please do not sit on the bench.



Three: Hercules Stump Puller

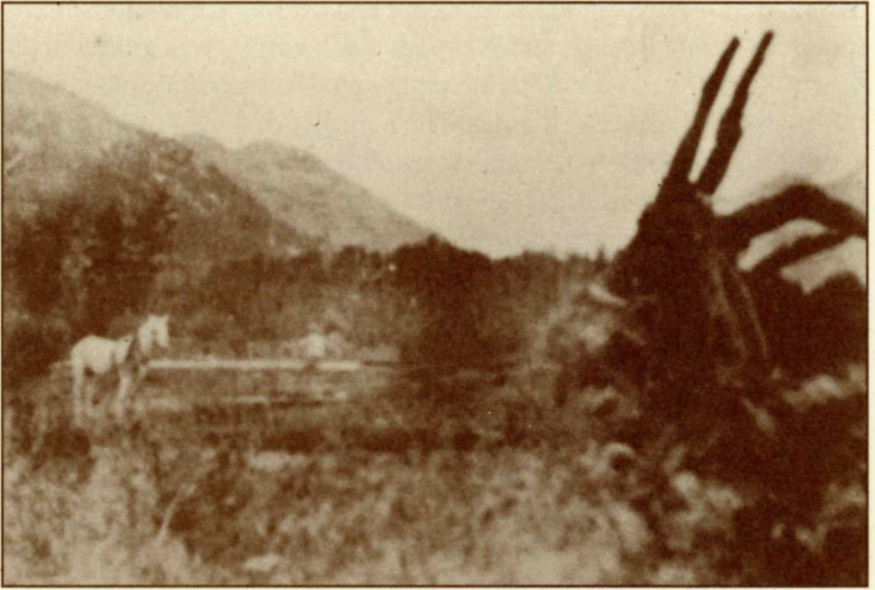
Once the irrigation ditch was dug, Van and the boys spent the rest of the first summer clearing stumps by hand, horse, and dynamite. A lot of stumps remained after Bill Buzzard had logged nearly 100 acres of his homestead. He had hired help to cut the wood with a crosscut saw for \$3 a cord. He sold the wood for \$4 a cord to the steamers traveling on Lake Chelan, which burned six cords round-trip.

On their initial trip to Stehekin, Harry and Carroll brought supplies with them, including the 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms) of black powder for blasting the stumps requested by their father. As it was illegal to take explosives on the passenger boat, the two boys smuggled the powder in their suitcases. Unfortunately for the young men, a fire started on the other side of the wall from where their suitcases were stowed.

“I didn’t know whether to throw that suitcase overboard or what to do with it. I finally moved it back into the cabin and it wasn’t but a few minutes until the boat crew had the fire out.”

—Harry Buckner

Their second summer in Stehekin, Van purchased a Hercules Stump Puller from Iowa. He and the boys attached one set of cables to a stump, then anchored the other set to a large tree or other large object.



“And this thing was powered by a horse walking around and around the main reel. And my mother drove the horse quite often. The horse didn’t go around the reel continuously, it just went around long enough to put a strain on the cable, and the ratchets were adjusted and another purchase was taken, and it was driven maybe two or three turns more, until the stump was pulled.”

—Jean Buckner, Harry’s nephew

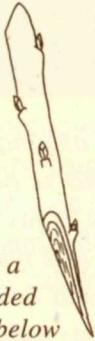
Occasionally, some stumps could not be removed with the stump puller and were blasted out.



our: Apple Orchard

During the Buckners' second summer, they planted 20 acres with 700 fruit trees. By 1925, the orchard covered nearly 50 acres and included four different varieties of apples: Common Delicious, Jonathan, Rome Beauty, and Winesap. Each variety was grafted to a hearty, disease resistant Siberian crabapple (Antanovka) rootstock that thrives in northern climates. The majority of the trees are Common Delicious, which are sweet-tasting apples that are small and mottled red in color. Today, they are no longer sold commercially because larger and more evenly colored apples like the Red Delicious have replaced them. Every fifth row was planted with Rome Beauties for cross-pollination. A cover crop of clover and timothy was planted throughout the orchard to add nitrogen to the soil.

How the trees were grafted:



1. Cut a two-sided taper below lowest bud on a young shoot.



2. Cut rootstock four to five inches above ground. Split the rootstock through to center of the wood.

3. Press shoot into rootstock until taper and stock are flush, making sure both cambium layers are touching.



The original apple trees have lived beyond their natural life span. As they die, National Park Service personnel are replacing them with seedlings of the same varieties grafted to the Antanovka rootstock. Wire fences around the seedlings protect them from deer that like to feed on tender young leaves. Wooden supports are placed over the young trees in the fall to shelter them from the winter snow pack.

Harry hauled the apples in from the orchard on a flatbed wagon with rubber wheels. He drove it through each row, stopping to pick up boxes under each tree. He marked in his little notebook how many boxes he picked up from each picker.



"...it was always great fun in the fall to come home from school, rush home and do the dishes which had been left from lunch, naturally, because Mother was sorting, and then I could ride the orchard wagon." —Bucky

Five: Packing Shed

"After our trees were in we started building the packing shed. In 1921, we poured the concrete floor base, 40 x 100 feet. Mixed it all by shovel, by hand. Three hundred and twenty sacks of cement. Then we put the building on the foundation in 1922."

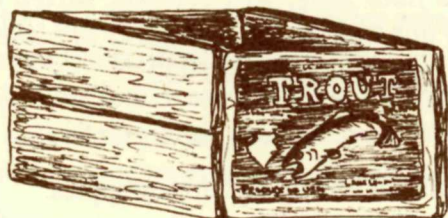
—Harry Buckner

This packing shed had two rooms for boxing and storing apples. During harvest season, the family and some of the valley residents

worked to get the apples ready to ship down lake. They nailed together wooden boxes, then spread out the apples on bins with canvas bottoms for polishing and sorting before packing. In the 1940s, the process was mechanized to help pack between 4,000 and 5,000 boxes of apples each year.



At times, the packing shed became a community-gathering place and dances were held. The girls would bring the family's hand-cranked phonograph out to the packing shed to play their big band records. In later years, Harry would call an occasional square dance. They would sprinkle spangles (soap flakes) on the cement floor to make it slippery for dancing. Today, the community still gathers here for weddings and other special occasions.



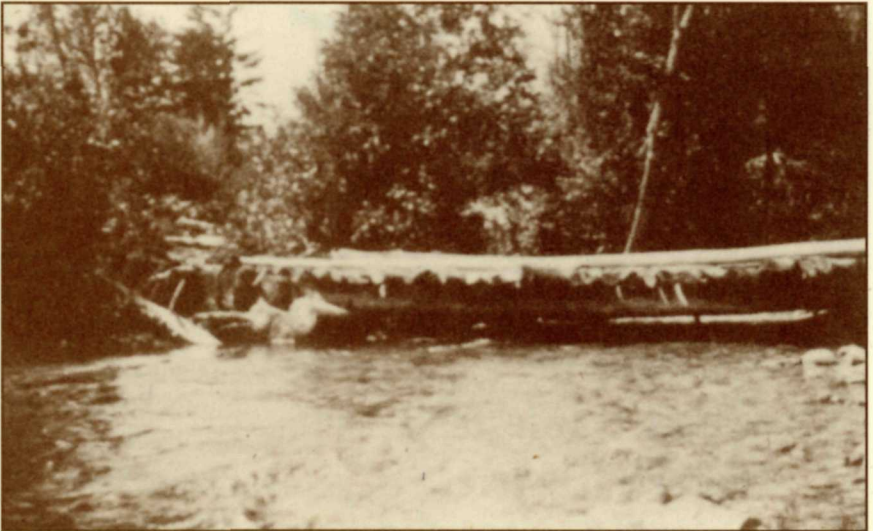
In 1924, the Buckners joined Lake Chelan Fruit Growers and sold the apples through that cooperative.

Six: Sprayer

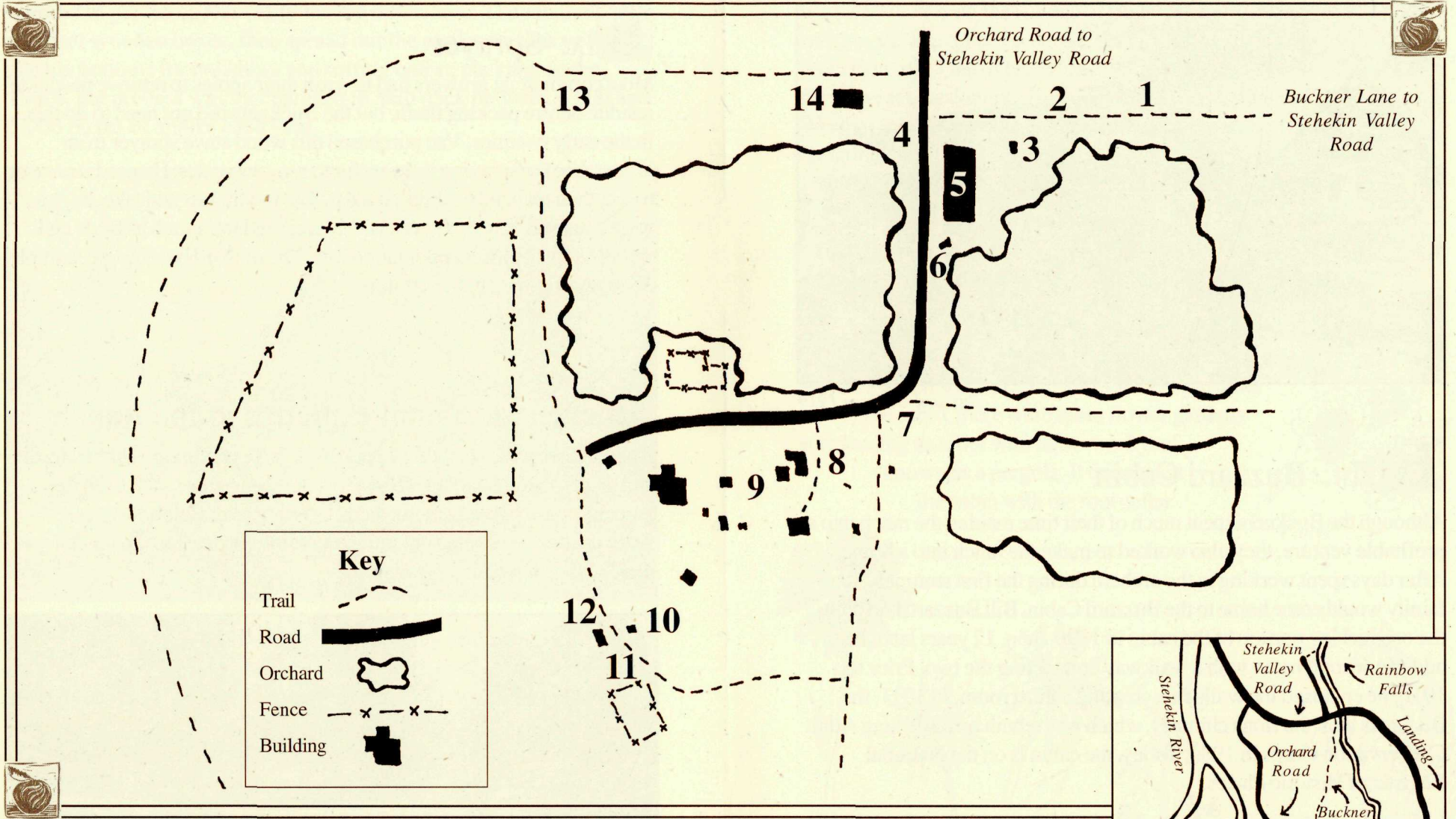
Most commercial growers had to wash their apples to remove pesticide residue before packing them, but the Buckners did not need to do this. In the early twenties, Van purchased this wood stave sprayer from Wenatchee for spraying lime-sulfur to remove scales. He used it once or twice, then realized he didn't need it. The mountains and lake, he saw, were a natural barrier to insects. Natural predators such as birds and spiders kept the insect population low. The orchard became an example of organic farming before its time.

Seven: Original Entrance to the Ranch

Apple boxes were stacked by hand, five boxes high, on a flatbed truck and driven to the Landing. Originally, the road to the ranch from the Stehekin Valley Road entered here, crossing over Rainbow Creek. After the bridge washed out three times, the entrance to the ranch was relocated near where it is today.

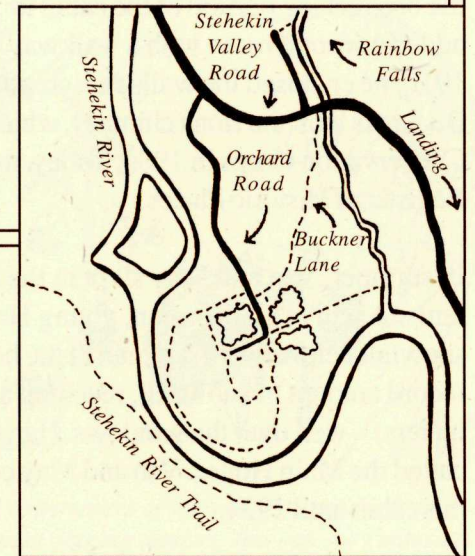


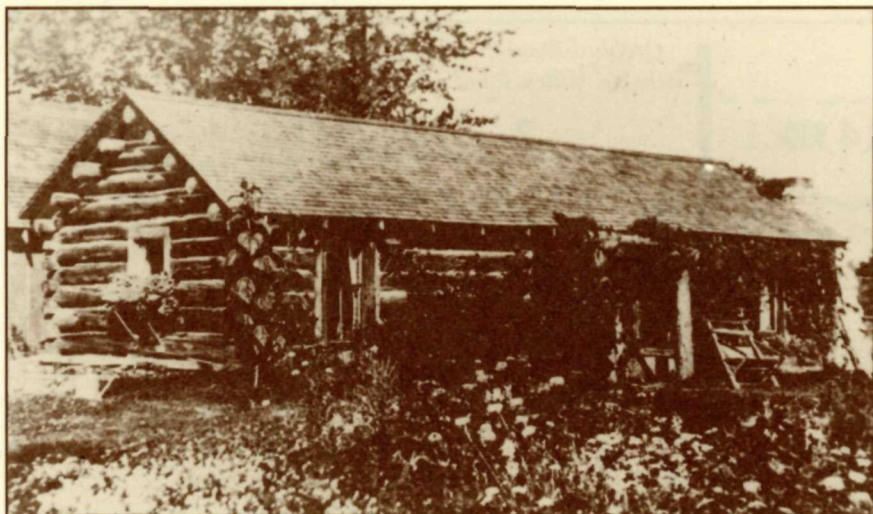
Bridge over Rainbow Creek



Map of Buckner Homestead Historic District

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Irrigation Ditch | 8. Buzzard Cabin |
| 2. Bench | 9. Main House and Buildings |
| 3. Stump Puller | 10. Milk House |
| 4. Orchard | 11. Back Field |
| 5. Packing Shed | 12. Fuel Rack |
| 6. Sprayer | 13. Bench |
| 7. Fork in the Road | 14. Swimming Pool |





Buzzard Cabin – 1919

Eight: Buzzard Cabin

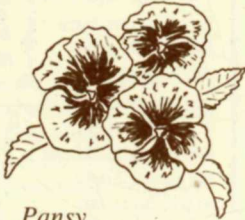
Although the Buckners spent much of their time making the ranch into a profitable venture, they also worked to make the ranch into a home. After days spent working in the orchard during the first summers, the family would come home to the Buzzard Cabin. Bill Buzzard had built the original log portion of the cabin in 1890, then, 12 years later, he added a second room with a walkway connecting the two. Prior to 1910, he enclosed the walkway, creating a third room. In 1911, the Buckners built the stone chimney, which was rebuilt by the Young Adult Conservation Corps in 1981. Today, the cabin is on the National Register of Historic Places.

In summer, Van and May slept in the cabin while the boys slept in tents. A native Californian, young Harry had never experienced a snowfall before his first winter at the homestead in 1916. That year, a record amount of snow fell, reaching a depth of 10 feet 2 inches (3 meters) – well over the windows. Harry later moved into what is now called the Main House. Van and May continued to spend summers in this cabin until 1924.

In 1920, Harry built the sundial in front of the cabin out of river rock and copper. The time is accurate, except during daylight savings when it is one hour off. One of Harry's activities was collecting weather data. For 58 years, he continually took weather observations for the U.S. Weather Bureau, earning national recognition for his volunteer efforts. He calculated that he measured 595 feet (181 meters) of snowfall and 164 feet (50 meters) of water falling as rain or snow during this time.

May planted various flower gardens around the sundial and cabin. She created a "flag" garden, using red Gaillardia for the outer circle, white Shasta daisies for the middle circle, and blue larkspur with a flagpole for the center. In a "B" for Buckner garden, she grew lily of the valley and violets, and in a third garden, planted only pansies, the seeds of which she collected and sold. On the other side of the cabin, there were more flower gardens surrounding an arbor with latticework roof,

known as a pergola. It connected the cabin with the root cellar.



Pansy



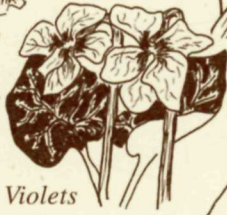
Gaillardia



Daisy



Larkspur



Violets



Lily of the Valley

During the first summer, May painted watercolors of the wild flowers she found growing in the valley while the men were digging ditches. You can see copies of her paintings hanging on the wall in the Buzzard Cabin.

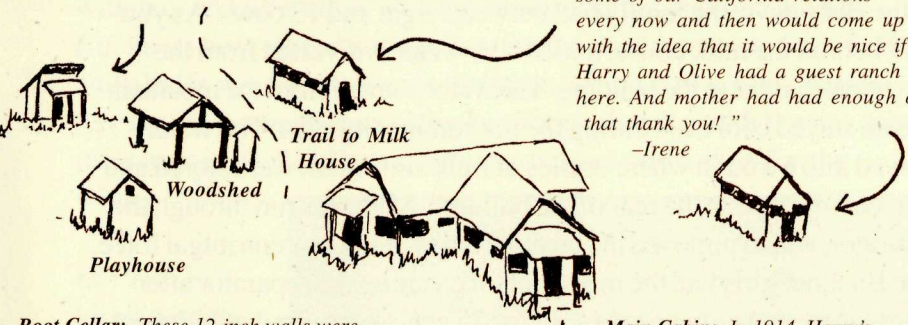
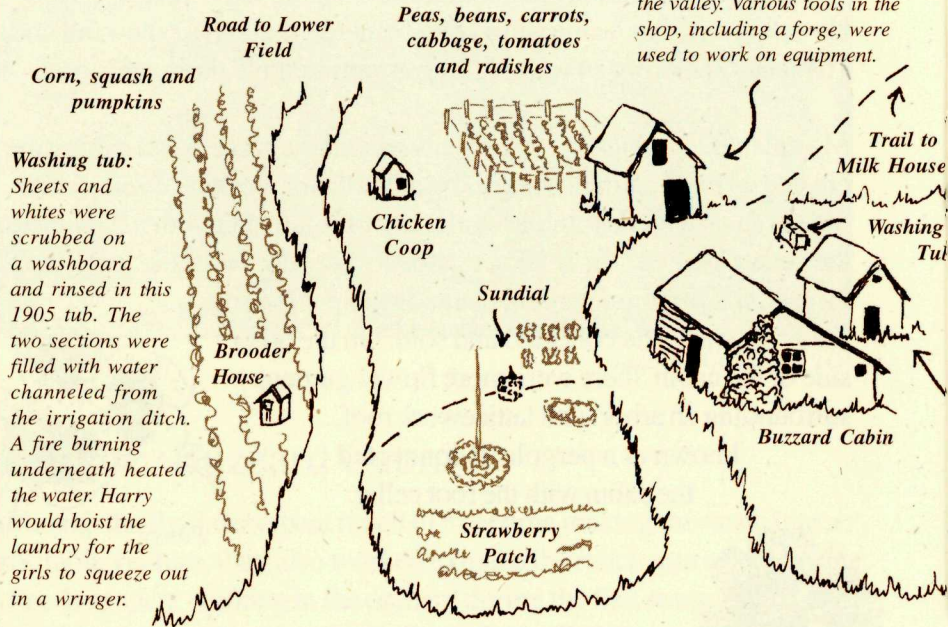
Olive tended the gardens. She canned corn, tomatoes, green beans, peas, and soft fruit, along with venison and beef for the winter months. Squash and other vegetables were stored in the root cellar.

Shop: When farming equipment broke down, projects could be delayed for days if the family had to rely on help outside of the valley. Various tools in the shop, including a forge, were used to work on equipment.

Delco House: This building was used as a smokehouse until the Buckners converted it to house a gas-powered generator and batteries for DC electricity. In 1943, the power was converted to AC current generated from a Pelton wheel on Boulder creek. Each homestead had its own source of electricity until the 1960s. Chelan Public Utility District built a power plant off Company Creek with a larger Pelton wheel and backup diesel generators. The power plant still supplies most of the valley with power.

Sleeping Cabins: Guests and relatives visited the ranch throughout the summer. They slept in the sleeping cabins or Buzzard Cabin. Olive, an experienced hostess from growing up in the Field Hotel, prepared meals for the guests. "She'd been raised in the Field Hotel and some of our California relations every now and then would come up with the idea that it would be nice if Harry and Olive had a guest ranch here. And mother had had enough of that thank you!"

-Irene



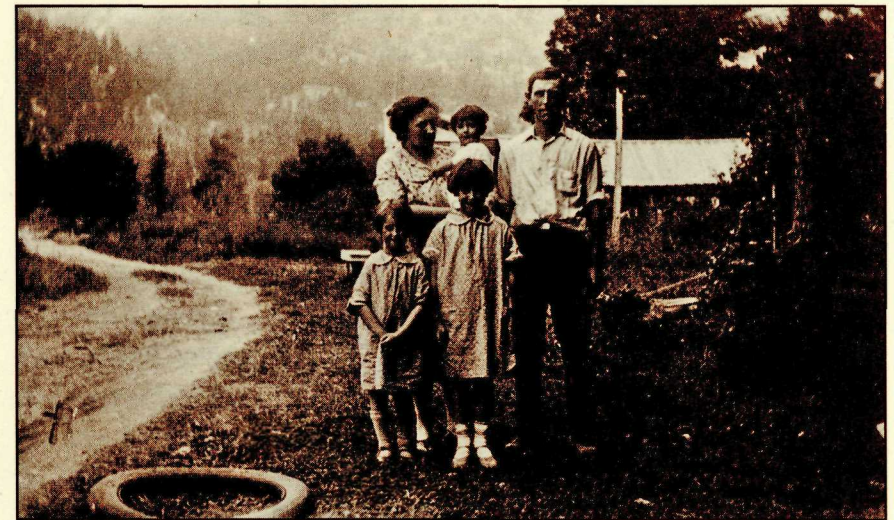
Root Cellar: These 12-inch walls were originally filled with sawdust, creating a cool, dry environment to store produce and canned goods for most of the year. Because the sawdust attracted ants into the walls, it was replaced with potting soil called vermiculite.

Main Cabin: In 1914, Harry's brother Frank refurbished the sleeping cabin into a one-room home for his bride who died four years later in California, a victim of the flu epidemic of 1918. Frank chose not to come back to the valley. When Harry returned from the war, he and Olive moved into the house. As the family grew, Harry added room after room, transforming it into the house you see today.

Nine: Main House and other Buildings

"The most satisfying thing up here is that everything we got we built ourselves or got ourselves. Maybe it's not so good but there's satisfaction in having done things." —Harry Buckner

The modern day conveniences of the times were not as easily accessible in the valley due to its isolation. The Buckners and other families needed to be creative and depend on their own resources. Examples of their self-reliance can be seen throughout the buildings. You are welcome to peek into all the buildings except the main house, which is currently a residence for park service employees.



Harry, Olive and their daughters

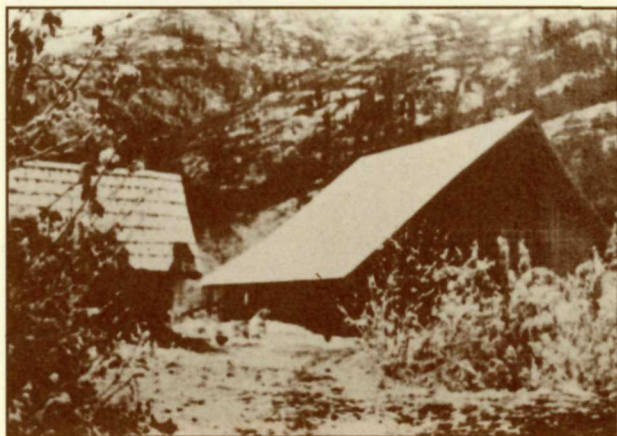
Ten: Milk House

"...they made wonderful ice cream out of pure cream, which they separated from the milk. I never had anything like that since."

—Jean Buckner, Harry's nephew

In the early days, the family had between eight and 13 cows. As you look behind the milk house, notice how water is diverted from the irrigation channel to the building. The water coming from the mountain stream stayed cool even during the hot summer months. The water flowed into a trough where bottles of milk and cream were stored and then out of a pipe in the rear of the building. Milk was run through the separator, which removed the cream from the milk by centrifugal force. The Buckner girls had the messy job of cleaning the separator afterwards. Any extra cream was sold for 75 cents per pound of butterfat.

Across from the milk house, nestled below the hill, once stood the icehouse. During the winter the Buckners collected ice and snow, which they kept frozen all summer by covering it thoroughly with sawdust. The family used the ice to make ice cream every Sunday for their traditional fried chicken dinner. There was always just enough ice to make ice cream for Hobbie's birthday on September 15.



Remains of the barn can still be seen hidden under the grass.

Ice House and Barn, 1919



Eleven: Backfield

The Buckners planted the first apple trees in the lower field, between here and the river. A valley resident removed most of these trees during the 1950s, except for a few trees close to the river. In exchange for his work, the Buckners allowed him to plant the field with hay and alfalfa for his own family's cows and horses. The Buckners only stored enough hay for the workhorses and cows. Hay and alfalfa were cut between the trees for the cows. They barged up hay for the horses because bracken ferns growing with the hay made their horses ill. Saddle horses were barged down lake for the winter.

In 1915, Van hired carpenters from Chelan to build a barn for livestock and hay. Hay was cut and pulled into the



barn using a Jackson fork. Harry would drive the hay wagon up to the front of the barn, unhook the horse, and take it out behind the barn and hook it to the cable of the Jackson fork. After Harry placed the fork in the pile of hay, Hobbie would drive the horse diagonally across the corral. Bucky held the cable to keep it from getting under the horse's feet. The fork was pulled along a track under the roof of the barn. When the hay was where Harry wanted it, the girls would stop leading the horse and he would trip a rope so the hay would fall. They would repeat this process until all the hay was stored. One afternoon while storing hay, a storm moved into the valley. The family worked quickly before cloudbursts dumped rain and ruined the hay. Lightning struck close. The horse bolted one way and Bucky went the other way over the fence. Both wanted out of there quickly!



Twelve: Fuel Rack

In the late 1920s tractors and trucks began to replace horse-powered equipment. Modernization reduced some of the work and brought new challenges to managing the ranch. Instead of harvesting enough feed for the horses, the Buckners needed an ample supply of fuel to run the machinery. Fuel was barged up from down lake as it is today. Harry needed to store enough fuel for the equipment to last between barge runs. He designed a fuel rack to hold 55-gallon drums that could be rolled into place. Then fuel could be gravity fed into the equipment. Spare parts or creative problem solving were also needed when equipment broke down. Harry had two 1925-26 Fordson steel-tired tractors. He kept one running and used the other tractor for spare parts until 1959.



Thirteen: Bench



The orchard was at its peak in the 1930s and 1940s, producing between 4,000 and 5,000 boxes of apples yearly. Trees grew on both sides of the main irrigation ditch. The trees on the right side of the photo were never very productive. The soil was of poor quality and rocky. These trees were eventually removed.

“I wouldn’t say that the Stehekin River Valley is particularly suited to grow apples. The apples we did grow were of a hard and good quality, but small, and we couldn’t grow very big crops.”

—Harry Buckner

Fourteen: Swimming Pool

From pruning in late winter and early spring to harvesting in the fall, the family worked hard to produce the annual crop of apples. After hot summer afternoons of thinning apples in the trees, the Buckner sisters cooled off in the swimming pool. At first the cement pool was watertight.



Once filled with water from the irrigation ditch, the inlet and outlet were closed allowing the water to warm up a bit. After a few years, the pool developed cracks and water had to run constantly through the pool to keep it filled.

“The pool was the sort of thing where you got in and got numb before you could enjoy it.”

—Bucky

Once the girls reached high school age, they went down lake to continue their education while staying with grandparents, the Fields. Each summer, they returned to Stehekin.

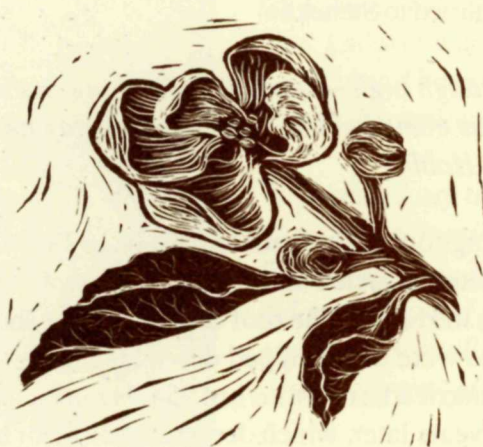
“When I got through high school, the only thing in the world I wanted to do was come back to Stehekin and stay here.”

—Hobbie

Life was changing for the Buckner family. In 1948, Olive passed away. The daughters married and started their own families. Harry continued to run the ranch. The roof of the packing shed collapsed in 1953. The apples were then shipped down lake unsorted and unpacked. Harry married Lena Ward in 1954. He became Stehekin’s postmaster two years later, which demanded more of his time.

By the 1960s the orchard was no longer run commercially. The trees were not producing large crops due to their age, and shipping apples down lake had become more costly. In 1970, Harry Buckner sold the ranch to the National Park Service. He kept some land down river from the Stehekin School and lived there until his death in 1976. The Buckner sisters and their families continue to spend part of each year in Stehekin.

There is a special feeling about the Buckner Ranch. With its rustic buildings and apple trees, it still feels alive and not frozen in time. It offers us a look into the pioneer way of life and the dreams that brought people to such remote places. Harry felt that writers often exaggerated or romanticized the lives of pioneers. He believed that most were hard working people who simply went about their business making a living. With their hard work, self-reliance and creativity, the Buckners and others carved a livelihood and home from the Stehekin Valley. The deep-rooted methods they used to cultivate the land can be seen throughout the ranch. The methods illustrate how yesterday's technology and practices – such as farming without pesticides and irrigating with the power of gravity – can still work today. Wandering through the old homestead offers more than a glimpse into the past. It is a view toward the future.

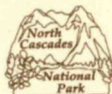


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