

Grimm-Jensen Farm



Owner: George Grimm

**Above: George and grandson,
Aaron, feed calf**

Right: The Jensen's first houses



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The Jensen-Grimm Farm, just west of the Junction of I-5 and the Pioneer Highway, was founded in 1878 by Thomas Jensen, a carpenter from Lowenstedt, Germany. It has received numerous awards through the years including Dairy Family of the Year in 1968, a Century Farm Award in 1983, the Washington Centennial Farm Award in 1989 and last year's honor from Snohomish County.

Jensen was 20 when he emigrated to America in 1869. He spent several years at trade of carpentry in Louisiana and Iowa before going to San Francisco. From there he came to the Puget Sound country in 1878 and, impressed with the potential of the land and climate, filed a 160 acre homestead claim. For several years he worked the claim during spring and summers, spending his winters in San Francisco in order to earn enough money to support himself and the claim.

In March 1886 he married Johanna M. Jens, also of German heritage, and soon after, settled on their homestead. He had built and lived in a small one-room cabin on the banks of the Stillaguamish River and, in anticipation of marriage, built a small frame house for himself and his bride. Still, the shock of the extremely primitive conditions compared to life in San Francisco must have caused Johanna to wonder at her choice once in a while. It's clear from the prosperity that they soon achieved, that she dove right in to the farm wife's role, for it definitely takes both husband and wife to make a success of such a venture.

Two daughters were born within 2 ½ years, Dora and Martha. Jensen saw that a school was built, donating ¼ acre of his homestead to adjoin a similar donation from a next door neighbor for the first Island School. A 2nd Island School was built a few years later. The Jensen daughters were the complete class and the first to graduate from eighth grade at Island School in 1904.

Unknown to the Jensen family, but critical to its future was, a young fellow, William G. Grimm, from upstate New York who set out for Alaska, having heard tales of the gold to be found there. He worked his way across the country to Seattle where, in 1904, he had to stop to earn money for the rest of the trip. With no farming experience, he answered an ad in the paper to be the Jensen's farm hand. He must have been a quick learner, for after two years of Grimm's help, Jensen leased the north 80 acres to him.

It wasn't long before Jensen built a third large home on the south 80 acres across the Arlington-Silvana road which bisected the homestead. He and his wife planted pear and prune trees, lining both sides of the road. By 1906 the farm had grown to 200 acres with nearly a third under cultivation. Back then, all clearing was done by hand and there was a forest of stumps to pull out and burn. In addition to land-clearing, planting crops, and building a home, the Jensens had 50 head of cattle to care for, a team of oxen, and a horse for the girls to ride and to pull the family buggy.

Not only was Grimm learning about farming, but courting too, for in January 1907 Grimm married Dora Jensen and they began their married life in the same small frame house that Jensen had built for his San Francisco bride. Three years later, Will Grimm bought the 80 acres he had been leasing and built a large dairy barn, horse barn, pig shed, chicken house and other out-buildings. His dairy barn was equipped with one of the first milking machines in the county. He also built a large home to accommodate a family which eventually included six children.

In 1917 farmers of the valley experienced severe hardships in marketing and expanding their dairy products. Jensen was already active in the cooperative movement to solve agricultural problems, serving as president of the board of both the Silvana and Arlington cooperative stores. He had helped found the Arlington Creamery Association and served as president during the early 1900s. The Arlington Times reported, "In politics he often could count more enemies than friends, a very high recommendation in view of the fact that most of the ideas he favored have long since been enacted into law."

Inspired by his father-in-law's efforts, Grimm helped found the Snohomish County Dairymen's Assoc. (eventually named Darigold), and was elected to be its first president. Later he remembered, "They decided they needed a manager and talked me into taking it for a little while." A "little while" stretched from 1920-1946. Grimm laid down a couple of rules which have guided the Association ever since: make the best product it is possible to make and get the producer as much money as you can. A Darigold publication states, "The problems and pitfalls confronting a cooperative business would have discouraged most men, but not Will Grimm. He had the welfare of dairymen of all Snohomish County at stake and he refused to desert them in their time of need."

In 1924 Grimm decided it was impossible to be a full-time farmer and also serve as manager of the Dairymen's Association. Johanna Jensen had died in 1921, leaving her husband in failing health in the big house on the south eighty. Therefore in 1924, after selling the north eighty acres, Will and Dora Grimm and their five children moved across the road into the Jensen's home, where another girl was born to them. The patriarch of the family, Thomas Jensen, finally died in 1927.

Grimm spent hours driving forth and back to his office in Everett during the week. Before and after work and on weekends he continued the land-clearing on the forested clay-loam soil that Jensen had spent so many years on. The Evergreen Fair tabloid of August 1983 reported, "His children remember him rising at 4:00 a.m. in the summers to work among the stumps, then driving 20 miles to his office in Everett. Evenings, after dinner, he would be out among the stumps again through the remaining hours of daylight. They also remember being able to get out of doing the dishes in order to help with the setting and filing of saw teeth or turning the whetstone as their father sharpened the axes and other hand tools he used."

After retiring from the Dairy Association in 1946, Grimm continued digging out huge old stumps. He spent many hours making toys and trinkets from the long-buried stumps for his grandchildren's pleasure. In 1954 he finally made the long-deferred trip to Alaska with a friend, 50 years after he originally planned it.

The farm is now owned by Grimm's second son, George, who works with his son Bob to keep the farm producing field corn, peas, vegetable seed crops. Thomas and Johanna Jensen would be happy to know that their large house,

with the beautiful catalpa tree out front, is now home to their great-grandson and his family. And, that the tradition for hard work and caring for the land lives on.