

Wilsonville pioneers: the Boeckman family

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The Boeckmans came to Wilsonville in the 1860s



Photo Credit: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - The Boeckman siblings (L-R Steven, Candace and Judi) gather at the crossroads of Boeckman and Stafford Road, the same spot their father Elmer posed for a photo for the Spokesman some 30 years earlier.

Like many of the oldest pioneer settlements in Oregon, Wilsonville still bears the names of many of those original settlers.

From Elligsen and Tooze to Seely and Boone, those local streets, places and even former irrigation ditches (in the case of the Seely family) feature the names of those early pioneers. Of those original settlers, however, one of the most familiar names in Wilsonville remains that of the Boeckman family.

With a road, creek and even a primary school in Wilsonville bearing that name, it is one of the most well known in the city, even if most residents have little idea of where it came from or who the family was.

The Spokesman, however, recently had the chance to sit down with Wilsonville natives Candace Boeckman-Bennett and Judi (Boeckman) Martin, who both grew up in Wilsonville on 40 acres of land originally acquired by the family under the 1862 Homestead Act.

“It is funny, I have it (the Boeckman name) on my business card for that reason,” Bennett said. “I think what was the most fun was when children and students would pull up my card and say, ‘Look mom, she has the same name as the school.’ And then the conversation would start. That was the fun.”

Both sisters are proud of their family heritage, which is mainly agricultural. But the occasion for the interview was Bennett's retirement this month from the banking industry after 35 years with Bank of America and other institutions.

After nearly four decades in banking, Bennett has seen the path of the industry coincide with that of her hometown. From an analog world with more emphasis on real relationships to a new digital age, the changes have been profound and deep.

Bennett started as a "regular old" bank teller in Eugene after finishing her degree at the University of Oregon. She worked in that capacity until her husband was transferred to Portland through his own job.

With the move, Bennett also was promoted to what is known in the business as a financial services advisor. Instead of taking people's money over the counter she instead was tasked with dispensing advice on how to spend or save that money. In addition to opening accounts, she helped with credit and loan applications and other related areas.

"I did that for a long time," Bennett said. "I went to four different branches doing that. You answer questions like 'I have \$50,000, what should I do with it?'"

Over the years, she said, the banking industry, like many others, has grown more aware of the need to focus on customer service.

"Back then it wasn't like that," she said. "But that's what it's gotten to because we've really gotten to know our customers."

Years ago, she said, banks used the same type of "product pop" sales techniques used by other retail businesses. And that's because, at heart, banking is a retail business. But that changed as competition in the banking world grew over time.

"It changed to trying to figure out what your customer needs and then meeting that need," Bennett said. "You used to sit and talk to your customers and they'd walk in and you'd be done in 10 minutes. Now it's more like 35 minutes because you're really getting to know what this customer wants and needs, so that's kind of the difference."

At the same time, she said, banking is so much simpler than it used to be.

"For the customer, you don't have to make plans to go the bank to get money or send money or write money," she said. "You can do it on your phone, so it's much easier for the customer. Technology has certainly changed, and it's gotten harder to adapt. But it has made banking easier. It's always changing, all the time."

Wilsonville homestead



Photo Credit: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - The Wilsonville Toyota dealership may be known for its no-bull advertising. But it's also the location of part of the Boeckman family farming empire that started in the 1860s and continued until recent decades when the valuable property was sold off to commercial developers.

For the Boeckman family, a massive change of fortune actually started during the Lincoln Administration.

"My sister knows about it more than I do," said Bennett, "but there were four Boeckman brothers, and around 1860 they homesteaded 160 acres and that was divided between four sons.

Today, those four parcels located along the railroad line on the west side of Wilsonville are long gone, sold to Nike and other companies for development. But in the 1960s, that area remained undeveloped for the most part, and it proved to be an ideal place to grow up for the Boeckman sisters.

They grew up on a 40-acre farm with their parents, Elmer and Hilda, and middle brother Steven, who still lives in Wilsonville. Their farm happened to be right next to another Boeckman family farm, this one owned by Elmer's first cousin, Vernon Boeckman.

"My parents themselves never lived more than a mile away from Boeckman Road," Bennett said. "Our first farmhouse that I remember is where the Toyota dealership is now. Those were farms, all in a row."

Over the years, Bennett moved away from Wilsonville only to return for good 20 years ago. Through the years, the sisters have seen an unincorporated farming post transform into a south metro business hub.

"What's weird now is that when I tell people I'm from Wilsonville, they know where it is," Bennett said with a chuckle before gesturing out the window of her bank office. "The bad thing is the traffic. Friday night in Wilsonville, look at it."

"It still shocks me when Wilsonville is on the news," Martin added. "It's the Toyota ads that mention Boeckman Road — that shocks me. We've never heard of that before."

The girls grew up on the farm alongside "woods, creeks, cows, chickens and pickups," Bennett said. Although, it must be said, the latter was not always welcome.

"We didn't want dad to take us to school in it," Bennett said, "because we didn't want to be seen in them."



Photo Credit: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Boeckman Creek is one of many features in Wilsonville bearing the family name.

"We were totally geographically undesirable for West Linn High School," laughed Martin. "Our fathers were farmers and they couldn't take us anywhere. When they finished with farming for the day they'd come in, have supper, maybe take a bath and usually go back out. They didn't have time to take us to football games, pep rallies or that 'foolishness,' as they would say."

After graduating from high school, Bennett attended first Southern Oregon State College and then the University of Oregon. She lived in Eugene for 10 years, got married along the way, and later moved to Beaverton for career reasons.

She found herself moving back to Wilsonville in the early 1990s, however, and she later transferred to what was then the new Bank of America branch on Town Center Loop when it opened a few years later.

“We didn’t ever plan on Wilsonville,” she said. “And what was weird about coming to this banking center was I saw a lot of my parents’ friends. My era had moved away, but their era was still here, and there were a lot of elderly people there.”

Both eventually returned to Wilsonville. And both found a much-changed community that nevertheless remained familiar in all the right ways.



Photo Credit: PHOTO COURTESY OF CANDACE BENNETT - Elmer Boeckman is shown in this photo taken in the 1980s. He never lived more than a mile away from Boeckman Road.

“Our grandfather (George Boeckman) built the church on Boeckman Road, the Frog Pond Church, and it started out as an evangelical and reform church,” said Martin. “It was built by German immigrants, as the family on both sides are German immigrants. Our grandfathers helped build that church and services were done in German until about 1941, 1942-ish.”

After that, she laughed, “it was not a good idea to do things in German at that point.”

The church, of course, still stands where it was built just west of the Stafford-Boeckman road intersection.

Other former landmarks are gone, however.

“Back when we were going to school here in the old Wilsonville School on Boones Ferry Road, we would walk through the woods to Lowrie’s store and buy their five cent candy bars,” said Bennett. “It was five cents for Milky Way and Snickers, that’s kind of what I remember growing up here is we walked everywhere, rode our bikes, there were gravel roads. I was in college when my mom wrote to me and said, ‘We have a stoplight on Boones Ferry Road.’ Before that it was always a four-way stop.”

In all, however, Wilsonville has been good to both sisters.

There is one thing the sisters wish might have been done differently: “Don’t we wish we had those 40 acres now,” Martin said. “We would be millionaires.”

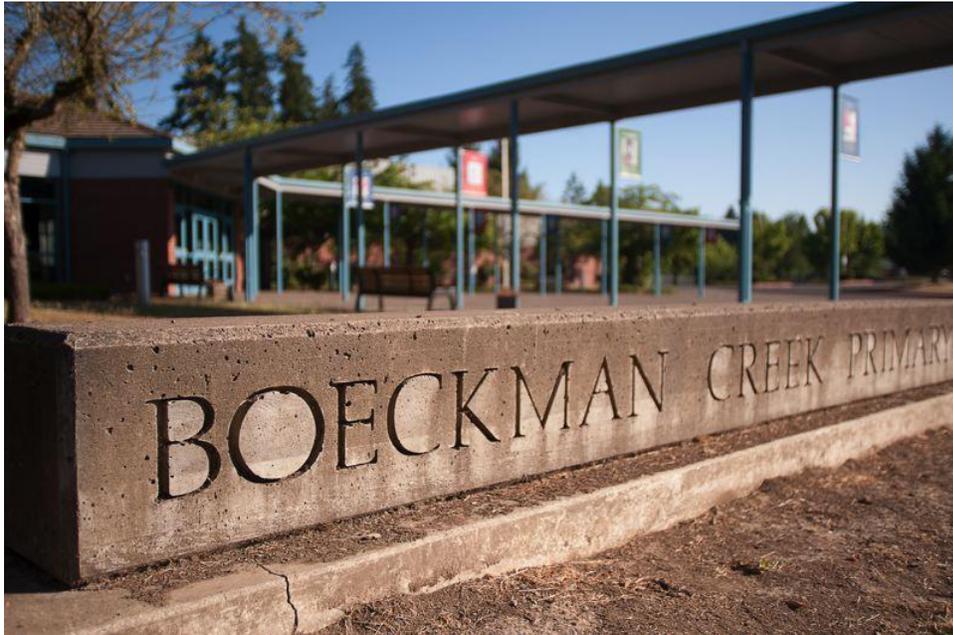


Photo Credit: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Boeckman Creek Primary School bears the family name in part because of the work done behind the scenes by Candace Bennett-Boeckman and her siblings.

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