

# History Nook

## 8 Things You Probably Did Not Know About Ralph Gott Rd., Deer Harbor

by SUZANNE P. GOTT  
for the Orcas Island Historical Museum

Do you know the Legend of Ralph Gott Rd. — located between Deer Harbor and Pole Pass?

Mega-millionaire Weyerhaeuser Executive Norton Clapp was respected by islanders for preserving most of Turtleback Mountain.

In the mid-1950s, Mr. Clapp purchased Mr. Shangle's Deer Harbor estate — located beyond the end of today's Ralph Gott Road.

In the '50s, the county road had no name and was shared by Norton Clapp, William & Mae Brown and Ralph & Gladys Gott.

Legend claims the three property owners discussed a road sign. Should it read — "Brown Gott Clapp"? "Clapp Brown Gott"? "Gott Brown Clapp"?

Do you know about the man whom that Ralph Gott Rd. sign commemorates?

He was a WWII USAAF (Army Air Forces) Civil Senior Aircraft Test Mechanic ... Deer Harbor businessman ... Fire Chief of the Deer Harbor Volunteer Fire Department ... Orcas Island Community Church Deacon ... and pioneer inventor at WWU in the development of fish harvesting on demand.

On April 9, 1943, while most of the world was ablaze in war, Ralph and Gladys Gott acquired enough gas-rationing stamps to invest in their future. They paid \$1,100 for a 5-acre working ap-

ple orchard and farm from Walter and Ereen Hilmer, husband and wife.

After the War, Gott moved his family from Los Angeles to Deer Harbor.

Gott operated Ralph's Motor Repair out of his old apple-packing building. Gladys ran their farm. Together, they worked hard, played hard, prayed hard, raised two girls — Suzanne (Peg) and Dorothy and looked after their neighbors.

Gott rented the Deer Harbor Dance Hall from Richard Norton and operated a roller rink during the winter months of 1951-1953.

In January 1950, Gott accepted a full-time position as International Industrialist Edgar F. Kaiser's private mechanic at his Deer Harbor estate called, "The Carousel" located near Four Winds Camp.

Gott maintained whatever mechanized — boats, cars, a generator, a pool pump, yard equipment, a greenhouse system, a golf cart and an antique circus steam calliope with keyboard and wooden pipes.

Gott co-designed several of Kaiser's luxury cruiser yachts with Brandt's Marina in Seattle. His favorite was Calliope II.

He also filled in for Mr. Kaiser's hydroplane pit crew, three times:

In 1955, the Hawaii Kai (U-9) and Scooter Too (mahogany), at Lake Tahoe.

In 1958, the legendary re-

cord-breaking Pink Lady, the Hawaii Kai III (U-8), at Lake Washington.

Gott said the real heroes during the 1958 Gold Cup were the sweaty guys in the pit.

The Kai's modified Rolls-Royce Merlin airplane engine was recognized as the power plant that won the Battle of Britain in WWII. The Merlin's marine crank shaft had a history of dangerously twisting or breaking in competition.

To qualify in the race, Mr. Kaiser had to prove that a new prop could be installed between heats.

The pit crew committed to a bold challenge of immense work and stress to meet the deadline for mastering a major never-done-before overhaul in the allotted 26-minutes.

In 1962, Gott sold his home to Norton Clapp and moved his family to the mainland.

Ralph G. Gott, at age 84, died on August 5th, 2004. In his memory, we have Ralph Gott



Gott Family; 1946



Ralph Gott; 1963



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