

The History Corner

Orcas Island Historical Museum in
Eastsound, Washington

Napoleon in Olga?

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Historically it has been customary to memorialize the passing of people, famous or otherwise, in various ways. One way was planting a tree at the grave site and, subsequently, after the tree had grown, taking shoots from that tree to start other trees.

Following the Emperor Napoleon's death in exile on the remote island of St. Helena in 1812, a weeping willow tree was planted at his grave site. Shoots taken as a memento from this tree eventually were used to start a weeping willow tree at Mount Vernon, George Washington's home in Virginia.

The tree thrived, and a custom arose of taking shoots from this tree at the home of the Father of our country and using them to start new willows at special locations in the United States. The weeping willow tree at Pioneer Hall in Seattle was started using a shoot from the tree at Mount Vernon.

This tree also thrived, and shoots taken from the willow at Pioneer Hall were used to start the weeping willow tree located in the yard of Jane Barfoot-Hodde in Olga. Visitors to Olga can still see the willow tree, majestically shading the yard of a quiet residence in a small hamlet on another remote island, many miles and many years from the ancestral tree at Napoleon's grave site on St. Helena.

*editors note: This article is posted in honor of Jane's 97th birthday, which is December 8th.

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