

# Oral History Digitization Project

## The Fourth Generation Dairy Farmer

Oral history of George Elliott

Date recorded: April 14, 1987

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*Background: Andrew George Elliott, Jr. was born in the summer of 1921 in Renton. He was the grandson of Robert James "R. J." Elliott, an Irish-Canadian who made his way to Seattle in the late 1880s. R. J. descended from dairy farmers and he set up a "modern" dairy on the outskirts of Renton near the Cedar River. He built two barns and a large house on his property in the early 1900s. His barn was patterned after the barns he saw in his childhood in eastern Canada. When R. J. died, the dairy passed on to his second son, Andrew George Elliott, who in turn, passed the farm down to his son, Andrew George Elliott, Jr. (known as George).*

*Elliott Dairy, a favorite of historic preservationists, was a King County historic site noted especially for the barns. The whole site was torn down in 2009. The two barns, two out-buildings, and house were a shadow of their former selves having been long since neglected.*

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At the time his oral history was recorded, George Elliott was still living on the dairy farm he had lived on his whole life. The dairy had ceased to operate, but much of the original farm land was still owned by the Elliott family. First started in 1906 by R. J. Elliott, the dairy operated in one way or another until 1968; it was the longest continuously operated dairy in the area.

George's oral history predictably focuses on Elliott Dairy and the dairy business in general. He describes the mechanization of the milking process and the advent of pasteurization. When asked what type of chores he was responsible for, George mentioned taking care of calves, cleaning, and this:

*...you're watching people milk cows and you think it's fun and they you try it. Well, then by the time you're 7 years old, 8 years old, then it's your job!*

George's father also started out young working for the dairy and for the logging industry. He described his father's childhood:

*...my father never went any farther than the eighth grade in school because the boys were working. He said he spend three years in the eighth grade and never was there for graduation...He would never get a full year in school because in the spring when the weather got better, they had to go back to work.*

Toward the end, the oral history veers off to discuss Elliot Dairy's neighbors. This included several Japanese truck farmers including the Hirai family. Gisuke and Tami Hirai had seven children that were school mates with the Elliott children. The Hiraes trucked their produce into Seattle to sell at markets. World War II and the internment of the Japanese changed the landscape of the Cedar River valley; suddenly, all the Japanese were gone.

*...they didn't return after the war. You'd have to ask somebody other than me as to the ownership or how that changed hands after the war.*

George only lived another three years after this oral history was taken. He passed away in 1990.

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Barn at Elliott Farm, 1989. (RHM# 41.10459)