

Three Meadows

...a rare vision



Story by Alice Cook

Sketch by Jim Vedder

The mirror-still surface is suddenly pushed into smooth miniature swells as a muskrat pilots into view around an island of cattails and sedge. The swift descent of a red-tailed hawk halts abruptly as the muskrat senses danger and with a splash of alarm disappears beneath the pond surface. The water settles once again to glassy sheen, perfectly quiet, and perfectly reflecting details of the marsh edges and the distant image of the soaring hawk.

A remote wilderness scene?

It certainly could be -- but this serene marsh is in the middle of San Juan Island. It is a part of 218 acres held in common by 30 property owners of Three Meadows, a 368-acre subdivision conceived with rare vision in 1971.

In that year, geologist-turned-realtor Manning (Bill) Cox and his wife, Jeanne, purchased Three Meadows Ranch with an eye toward developing the property. Theirs was not, however, a vision to maximize density and thereby profit.

Instead, they converted a low-ground oat field into the marsh we see today. They began refurbishing a venerable 100-foot-long cedar-post barn. They dug eight ponds and developed access roads from two directions, connecting them with "winding graveled roads to preserve the deep country flavor of the area."

Bill Cox explained their dream and their goal: "Foreseeing a time when larger open space preserves will be the perquisite of the very rich or will be enclosed in public parks, Three Meadows Ranch was established ... to give the ordinary man a place to build and raise a family in country surroundings permanently set aside from development."

To achieve this purpose, 30 five-acre residential sites were selected to provide for privacy and screening from neighbors. These properties are set in clusters interspersed around forests,

rocky hills, meadows, pastures and the marsh the owners share in common.

As a result, Three Meadows today exists as an exemplary outgrowth of environmentally sensitive land-use planning. The care and foresight with which the area was developed provides undisturbed natural areas as well as useful pasture and woodland. The crowning achievement is not only the quality of the environment, but the quality of life experienced by the people who have chosen to live there.

Like other residential developments in the San Juans, Three Meadows is incorporated as a home-owners association. Owners

Please see next page

Three Meadows

From previous page

must comply with covenants and restrictions.

Some of these are: the five-acre residential properties cannot be subdivided; homes cannot be built on the marsh or pasture side of the road (though gardens and orchards are allowed); mobile homes or trailers can be used only temporarily, while a home is being built, for instance; permission from the association is needed to cut large trees on private property; the number of individual outbuildings is limited; and no community- or road-impacting commercial enterprises are allowed. That is, a resident may not convert a home to a B&B or raise animals for commercial purposes.

Instead of one large, complex water system, common to other associations, Three Meadows has six wells designed to serve a few homes each.

The residents in these clusters are responsible for the maintenance and repair of their small system.

The roads within the development are owned by the association and the costs are shared by all owners. The roads are thus privately maintained, and public access is prohibited except with express permission from the owners.

While water and road systems are common to most owners associations, the management of 218 acres of land is not; and in this land lies the charm, and the challenge, of Three Meadows.

Owners may run small flocks of sheep or herds of cattle and horses on the pastures, and use the barn for stabling and feed storage. They may canoe on the marsh ponds, hike the roads and trails and cut firewood and building logs from the woodlands. However, without proper care and management, it's possible pastures can be overgrazed, barns can decay, fences can fall, forests can be overcut, and marshes can fill in.

There is no hired manager to husband these resources. Owners take turns serving on various management committees. The forest management committee, presently co-chaired by Jim Vedder and Craig Staude, designates where firewood and building logs may be cut, and is responsible for clearing tangled brush or downed trees. This past year, because of the many trees blown down during the winter of 1990-91, they arranged for the commercial sale of downed timber. The sale netted Three Meadows thousands of dollars for investment and improvements -- a true windfall not privileged to many other owners associations.

The farm committee determines where large animals may be pastured, and charges a nominal fee per head for grazing and barn use. The responsibility for pasture restoration and fence maintenance belongs with this committee, as does barn repair and restoration. Work parties are called together for these activities, most recently for work on the barn which is done not only for practical purposes, but also to preserve the aesthetic and historical value of this handsome old structure. Sharon Spangler is currently the farm manager.

Before owners can graze large animals on the common pastures, Sharon asks that they serve a year on the farm committee. This period becomes an educational experience for prospective "ranchers" to provide them with an understanding of what animal husbandry means as to individual responsibility, and also demonstrates the impact animals have on the land. At present

there are only two horses and Sharon's own small flock of sheep grazing on Three Meadows commons.

The marsh committee is chaired by Craig Staude, an employee of the University of Washington Marine Laboratories. A major problem in the marsh is the incursion of cattails which have gradually colonized the water verges over the years. Cattails thrive only in a certain water depth, which the marsh has apparently attained. For a while, resident muskrats kept the plants under control; cattail leaves and roots are a favorite muskrat food. A few years ago the muskrat population disappeared, and with them went the cattail control. After much negotiation, the marsh committee was able to get assistance from the Washington State Department of Wildlife in transporting new muskrat pairs to the marsh. At the moment, no one is sure how many of the animals remain. They don't seem to have flourished, but the cattails have.

Cattails are a concern for another reason. Since their proliferation, the areas of open water have been reduced, limiting the landing area for trumpeter swans -- as many as 30 at a time -- that used to frequent the marsh. The tall cattails also limit visibility for the swans, which prefer open areas of shallow water.

The value of the marsh to wildlife has been well documented. The Audubon Society has permission to conduct annual bird counts in the area, which Three Meadows has designated as a wildlife sanctuary. No hunting is allowed. The owners are anxious to enhance the marsh by creating more open water, various depths and islands to provide suitable habitat for more species.

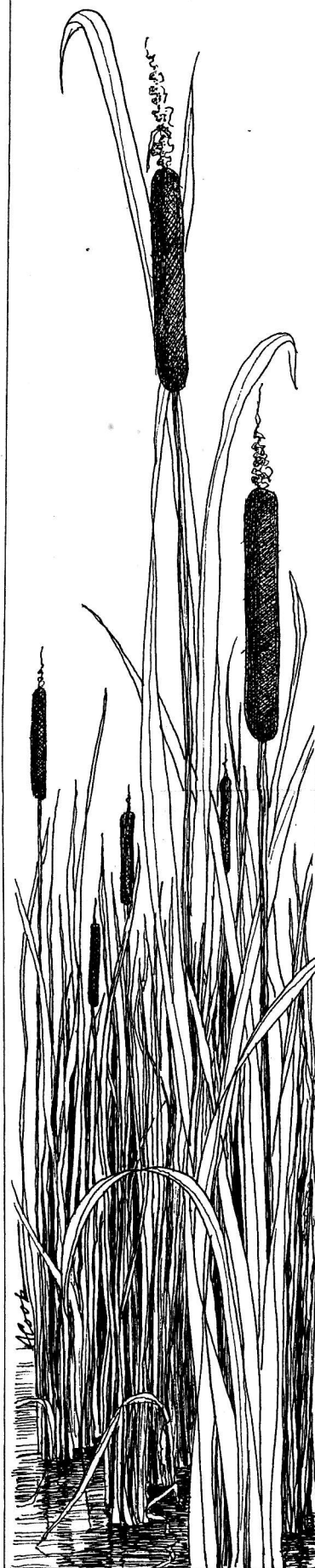
And what of the human species in Three Meadows? Bill Cox dreamed of giving the ordinary man a place in these surroundings. The residents are a diverse lot, but it would be hard to call them ordinary. The very fact that they have bought into the dream and made it reality sets them apart in extraordinary ways. Represented among their vocations are science, medicine, law, education, construction, architecture and real estate.

Vanda Randall runs a small and elegant landscaping service. Her home is set in the forest overlooking a pond and a meadow. She had the pond built three years ago and its margins are already displaying her landscape design talents.

As you enter Vanda's home from its surrounding flower-splashed deck, you enter an enchanted space of soaring windows and beams that lets the forest inside. Old enameled signs and antique kitchen implements frame a lovely wood stove in the corner. Large paintings in joyful colors laugh at you from the walls. A conversation corner displays bright chintz and vibrant cushions. A window seat (a bed, really) repeats the colors, and you get the impression of hand-made, hand-crafted artistic celebration.

The walls are recycled siding from the cannery that used to stand next to the ferry landing in Friday Harbor. You are surrounded by classical music and books and treasures gathered on travels. Some people call this place Vanda's Tree House, but its foundations are planted firmly in the ground. If a house and its gardens can be outward manifestations of

Please see next page



“ The fact that you can have five acres, not many neighbors, and over 200 more acres to use as your own is wonderful. ”

Three Meadows

From previous page

inward character and creativity, then Vanda Randall is extraordinary indeed.

Betty and Don Hood live at the forest edge overlooking the marsh. A greenhouse is attached to the front, south-facing side and extends the length of the house. Their apple orchard produces some 30 varieties, and the Hoods have been generous over the years in sharing their growing knowledge with organizations like the Horticultural Society.

The marsh affects their lives. Betty misses the swans and hopes for their return. Don raised pheasants one year until a mink from the marsh crept into their raccoon-proof cage and killed four of his birds. A retired professor of oceanography and editor of scientific texts, Don finds the concept of Three Meadows fascinating.

"The fact that you can have five acres, not many neighbors, and over 200 more acres to use as your own is wonderful."

A small dock juts into the marsh pond out in front of the Hoods' home. By it lies a small canoe, just waiting, it seems, for its owners to step in and explore in quiet contemplation.

Jim and Karen Vedder moved to Friday Harbor in 1974.

They had taken up birdwatching and enjoyed traveling to fresh and salt water marshes to pursue their hobby. Karen worked with a man at the Marine Labs who spoke proudly of "his pasture, his barn, his forests."

Curious about their friend's extensive land ownership, the Vedders paid him a visit and discovered Three Meadows. One look at the marsh and they were hooked. They bought their five acres across the expanse of marsh from where the Hoods' house sits. Their windows frame the beauty of the marsh.

Karen is an attorney who commutes to Mount Vernon. Jim taught school in Friday Harbor for



Photo by Alice Cook

The historic cedar-post barn at Three Meadows stands testimony to early island ranching.

14 years, but is now committed to a writing career. He has recently completed a mystery novel. For both, their joy in living in Three Meadows remains the opportunity for birding at their doorstep.

They've observed resting Canada geese, mallards, ringnecks, Virginia rails, hooded mergansers, redwing blackbirds and the beautiful wood duck whose babies are required to leap from their nest in the trees to fall with a plop into the marsh pond. Marsh wrens and yellowthroats are here, too, and all are observed by (and probably help feed) the great horned owls that nest above the marsh in the forest.

Sharon Spangler and her architect husband David Waldron lived in a tepee for some years while they built their home. Their lives were made miserable by a family of raccoons who enjoyed mucking about in the garbage. Not satisfied

with making a mess, the raccoons took to entering the tepee and staring with unnerving intensity at the couple within.

It wasn't until they sprinkled liberal doses of cayenne pepper over the ground that the nightly marauders got huffy and left. Sharon and David's home is located at the edge of a meadow near a farm pond. Their sheep graze on the meadow. Sharon takes great pleasure in raising animals. She doesn't find much joy in having to break the pond ice so the sheep can drink on freezing winter days, but the hassle in smashing the ice with a crowbar is rewarded when she notices wild creatures -- birds of prey, herons -- have been watching and waiting for a drink themselves. Her most pleasurable

times in Three Meadows have to do with her animals, especially during spring lambing.

"Walking out in the mornings before the sun is up, waiting for the babies to be born, is something I really treasure -- and there's nothing in the world so captivating as a new little lamb."

Three Meadows, in Bill Cox's own words, "is a different concept of how to use land so that people may live on it, cherish it, and live in harmony with nature." Bill no longer lives in the San Juans, but his dream lives on in the place he and Jeanne envisioned 21 years ago. His vision gave a great gift to this island, and perhaps in the future will inspire other developers to consider taking Bill Cox's dream as their own. N



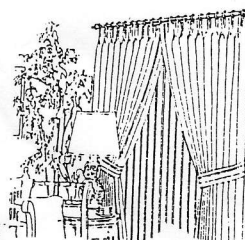
Call Teddi for a free
in-home estimate
293-8444
1-800-223-8444

Custom Drapes,
Cornices and Valances
Over Thousands of Fabrics
to Choose From
Also
Mini Blinds
Micro Blinds
Verticals
Soft Light Shades

Tracys

Open 7 days a week.
20th & Commercial, Anacortes

DEL MAR
WINDOW
COVERINGS
A Division of Home Fashions, Inc.



FEBRUARY SAVINGS

Special Savings on
METAL BLINDS

FREE Valance
on

VERTICAL BLINDS

This offer ends Feb. 29, 1992

MARCH SAVINGS

FREE Valance

on

VERTICAL BLINDS

METAL BLINDS

New Metal Blind Colors

March 1 -31