

City's **gem** of a home

Tukwila's Story is written by Louise Jones-Brown, acting director of the Tukwila Heritage and Cultural Center.

A beautiful turn-of-the-century house stands in the City of Tukwila between several modern hotels just south of I-405 on the West Valley Highway near its original location on the bank of the Duwamish River. It was built in 1905 as the home of James and Mary (Dobler) Nelsen and is where their youngest daughter, Helen, was born in the same year. Helen lived in the house for the majority of her lifetime. Her parents both died there, James in 1952 and Mary in 1934.

James Nelsen, along with five of his siblings immigrated to America in 1881 and had settled in Illinois before he came to Washington Territory. In 1883, James came to the White River Valley and went to work on Martin Nelsen's (not related) farm. He decided to homestead on 20 acres and eventually purchased another 260 acres. He and his brother Ole later leased additional farmland where they raised potatoes. A portion of the original James Nelsen farm property was leased in 1934 by the Washington Jockey Club as horse racing had been legalized. The land was eventually sold and became known as Longacres Race Track. One of the original paddock barns from the track complex was moved across the road and placed near the current location of the Nelsen House.

Helen Nelsen was known as a hard



ABOVE: The Nelsen home in 1907, and **BELOW,** today. Submitted

worker much like her father James. They both believed that value was in the land. She felt very sorry for the old houses of the area that no one cared for anymore but took measures for the Nelsen House would not only be cared for but be preserved for many more generations. The Nelsen Family Trust was established and allows the preservation for one of the original farmhouses in Tukwila.

The full-time caretaker, Craig Wooton, maintains the house and its beautiful grounds as well as managing the occasional rentals.

If you have personal stories about Helen Nelsen or the Nelsen House, contact Louise Jones-Brown, treasurer/Tukwila Historical Society-acting director/Tukwila Heritage and Cultural Center at 206-244-HIST (4478) or email at tukwilaheritagectr@tukwilahistory.org.

From farms to furlongs at historic Nelsen mansion | Tukwila's Story

Our annual December Holiday "Open House," which is hosted by the Tukwila Historical Society and the Nelsen Family Residence Trust, will be held on Thursday, Dec. 17, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tours of the home at 15643 West Valley Highway, Tukwila, and refreshments will be provided. Please join us to celebrate the Season.

Thursday, December 17, 2015 5:52pm



ABOVE is how the paddocks barns appeared at Longacres Racetrack in an historical photo. BELOW is a photo by Richard McLeland-Wieser that shows one of the barns that was moved to the Nelsen property.

By LOUISE JONES-BROWN

Tukwila Historical Society

James Nelsen, with brothers Herman and Fred, immigrated to the Duwamish River valley from Denmark in the 1880s. The farms they established stretched from Renton Junction (in the area of Interurban Avenue and Grady Way) to the area known as Orillia as well as Westfield Southcenter. A family home was built in 1905 and the structure is now known as the Nelsen Family residence. Helen, the youngest daughter of James Nelsen, was born in the home in 1906. She was a local businesswoman, former Tukwila City Council member and founding officer of the Tukwila Historical Society.

A 1909 ban on gambling closed the racetrack known as “the Meadows” located on the south end of present day Boeing Field. The ban was lifted after a bill became law on March 20, 1933. Then on June 20th, 1933, Vinson “Joe” Gottstein founded the Washington Jockey Club. Some of the dairy land originally owned by James Nelsen was purchased by Gottstein and others to operate a one-mile track which became Longacres Racetrack in August 1933. A permit was obtained and the Longacres Racetrack was created in only 30 days.

The Longacres Racetrack was in operation from Aug. 3, 1933 until Sept. 21, 1992. At the time of the sale to the Boeing Co., the track was owned and operated by members of the Alhadeff family, who were related to the Gottstein family. This facility hosted an exhibition by Triple Crown winner, Seattle Slew, and saw the famous jockey, Gary Stevens, on several mounts at the track. A former paddock barn (featured in the photo by Richard McLeland-Wieser) which was originally located at Longacres can still be seen next to the Nelsen House.

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Louise Jones-Brown is president of the Tukwila Historical Society. The society operates the Tukwila Heritage and Cultural Center, 14475 59th Ave. S., Tukwila. The center can be reached by phone at 206-244-HIST or via email at tukwilaheritagectr@tukwilahistory.org.