

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ARTWORKS BUILDING**

After ten years of independent growers' raising and marketing strawberries, the Orcas Island Berry Growers Association was formed in 1935. That year they made an agreement with the Olympia based National Fruit Canning Company (NFCC) to build a berry processing plant. The NFCC agreed to provide the plans, building materials, all the electrically operated equipment and to supervise the erection of the plant with the farmers providing the land and the labor to erect the building. The timeline was based on when electricity would reach Orcas Island. With the support of the New Deal's Rural Electrification Administration (REA) the electrical underwater cable reached the Island in 1938.

Glen Rodenberger purchased the half-acre lot just outside Olga at the intersection of the Olga and Pt. Lawrence Roads. In November of 1937 the building materials were brought from Seattle to the Olga dock on the freight boat "Bellana" and trucked to the site. In the early summer of 1938 the plant was ready and processing began. Flats of berries were unloaded from trucks through large side doors of the barreling plant and then weighed on scales that still exist just inside the front door. After going through the washing machine, they are whisked onto a belt where they pass the view of the sorters who remove all imperfect berries.

The main producers of the Berry Association were Glen Rodenberger, Oscar Carlson, George Loomis, Henry Leatherwood, and Merton Christianson. Together they had more than 450 acres of strawberries in the Olga/Doe Bay area.

Glen Rodenberger was one of only three certified growers of Marshall Strawberries in the state and Oregon. His operation provided many jobs for diggers of the year-old plants. The plants were then taken to the Olga Barreling Plant where they were cleaned, trimmed, and tied into bundles of 25 each.

The glory days of strawberry farming in Olga and Doe Bay was an industry that helped Islanders survive a depression economy. In 1941, at its height, Island farmers produced 241 tons of strawberries for market and shipped 2½ million strawberry plants to farmers around the northwest region.