

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED **AUG 1 1979**  
DATE ENTERED **OCT 4 1979**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Arndt Prune Dryer

AND/OR COMMON  
same

**2 LOCATION**

*SE of Ridgefield at*

STREET & NUMBER  
2109 N.W. 219th Street

CITY, TOWN  
Ridgefield

VICINITY OF  
CODE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE  
Washington

COUNTY  
Clark

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Fred A. Arndt

STREET & NUMBER  
2109 N.W. 219th Street

CITY, TOWN  
Ridgefield

VICINITY OF

STATE  
Washington 98660

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Clark County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER  
1200 Franklin Street

CITY, TOWN  
Vancouver

STATE  
Washington 98660

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Clark County Cultural Resources Inventory

DATE  
1977-78  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS Regional Planning Council of Clark County

CITY, TOWN  
Vancouver

STATE  
Washington 98660

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The present-day farm of 20 acres owned by Fred Arndt is located in the gently rolling farmland of southwestern Washington about three miles east of the Columbia River. The prune dryer as well as a 1912 barn, a modern house, and other outbuildings are situated just below the crest of a high hill, affording magnificent views to the west and north over the gentle pastoral landscape of rural Clark County. About four acres of an original ten acres of prune orchard remain. These productive trees are about fifty years old, and several bearing prune trees which were planted in the 1890's still grow on the property.

The natural draft prune dryer is a simple, one-story, wood frame building standing on the northwest slope of the hill adjacent to the orchard. The original portion, built by a local carpenter for William Arndt in about 1898, measured approximately 14' by 15'. William's son Fred expanded the building himself, the last alteration occurring in 1920, so that the present dimensions are about 20' by 40'. The gable-roofed, rectangular building incorporates a partially roofed open loading platform at the southeast corner and a narrow shed-roofed extension on the north elevation. The exterior is sheathed in rough sawn vertical board-and-batten, though a section of horizontal butt siding on the west elevation and in the north gable indicate original portions of the building. Window openings vary in size, shape, and type of frame, their purpose and placement being purely functional. Wood shingles cover the roof surfaces replacing the original shakes. A long, narrow ventilator stack rises above the ridge and is covered by a new corrugated metal cap with gutters. The stack has been recently painted, but the building itself remains unpainted both inside and out and presents an appearance virtually unchanged since 1920.

The supporting posts rest on squared stones providing an air space under the building and around the furnace, which is located under the north end of the building where the downslope provides access to feed and stoke the fire. The original primitive furnace was a large clay pipe covered with tin. This was soon replaced by a cast-iron stove which served for many years. In 1954 Fred Arndt obtained a used cast-iron "Hercules" stove, manufactured by Montag and Cleave of Portland, Oregon, from a nearby defunct prune dryer and installed it with a brick-lined concrete firebox. Wood is still the fuel, and six to eight cords are consumed during a drying season. A smaller Montag cast-iron stove outside the southwest corner of the building is the heat source for boiling water needed to process the prunes.

The interior forms and spatial arrangement are dictated by the processing and drying of the prunes. The housing for two tunnels

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(kilns), each of 50 lb. capacity, fills the central portion of the interior space. The passageways around it are used for various functions in the prune drying process. At the south end of the building the fresh fruit is first weighed, then immersed briefly in a boiling water and lye solution, dipped in clear rinse water, and then transferred to a shaker (invented by Fred Arndt) where it is evenly distributed on trays. These drying trays measure  $1\frac{1}{2}'$  by  $3\frac{1}{2}'$  and eleven of them fill each of the eleven runners in each tunnel. The trays are placed in the higher (south) end of the tunnels and, in the course of three or four days, are gradually moved to the lower (north) end. This slow drying process assures a soft, juicy product. A narrow door and a short flight of exterior stairs at the north allow access to the wood pile and the furnace opening under the building, while a thermometer behind a glass panel in the north tunnel door indicates the dryer temperature. Empty trays are stored in the passageway along the west wall, and a small room off the east passageway provides storage space for tools and other equipment.

This very simple, purely functional building, though lacking architectural distinction, houses all of the specialized apparatuses and equipment necessary for hand processing and drying prunes--virtually a lost art in today's automated world.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1898, 1920

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Fred Arndt

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Though small in scale and undistinguished in appearance, the Arndt Prune Dryer nonetheless bears the distinction of being the only operating wood-fired, natural draft dryer remaining in Clark County. It is the last vestige of a once flourishing agricultural industry which was one of the most important factors in the county's economy around the turn of the century.

The thought of a dried prune does not conjure up an image of beauty nor indeed a conception of commercial success. Yet at one time "dried prune" meant prosperity in Clark County, and the prune industry was a vital factor in the agricultural development and economic growth of the area. In 1888, the Vancouver Independent advised: "Put out an orchard. There is more money in it than in the average gold mine, and much more sure." A common saying at the time was: "As the prunes go, so goes Vancouver," and in these early days, before other industries moved into the area on a sizable scale to diversify the economy, this was true to a considerable extent.

The first commercial orchard in the area was planted by Arthur Hidden in 1876, and in the early 1880's he began developing a method for drying the fruit. His early success at turning a profit from selling the dried prunes encouraged others to enter the field, and by 1888 a total of 200,000 pounds of dried prunes had been prepared for the market by eight dryers, and preparations were being made to ship the fruit in carload lots. In 1890 an association of Clark County Fruit Growers was organized to publicize and market the local products, as the tart Italian prunes grown in Washington and Oregon were in competition with the sweeter variety of sun-dried prunes being shipped from California. A collection of fruit was sent to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and plans were being made to begin shipments abroad. By 1895 Clark County led the state with 5,000 acres of prune orchards. This was more than any other county in the Northwest, except for Douglas County in Oregon which had a similar number.

Though some fresh fruit was marketed, dried prunes were the most economically feasible product. They were cheaper to ship to eastern

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arndt, Fred. Personal interview, February 19, 1979.

Scheffey, Tom. "If you didn't have prunes you were nobody." The Columbian (Vancouver), June 1, 1973

Van Arsdol, Ted. "Prune History," a series of ten lengthy articles appearing in The Columbian (Vancouver), Sept. 19 - Oct. 2, 1963.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Ridgefield

QUADRANGLE SCALE 7.5 minute

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,0 5,2,3,9,4,0 5,0,6,9,3,2,0

B         

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is the 20' x 40' prune dryer building located on the 20-acre farm of Fred Arndt which is recorded as Tax Lots 1 & 9, Section 4, T.3N, R.1E, W.M.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Shirley L. Courtois - Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

THE CONSERVATION COMPANY

DATE

March 1979

STREET & NUMBER

1955 Sixth Avenue West

TELEPHONE

(206) 284-8556

CITY OR TOWN

Seattle,

STATE

Washington

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Jeanne M. Welch 7/27/79

TITLE

DATE

FDR NPS USE ONLY

HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

John Paul Skell

DATE

10-4-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: W. Ray Luce

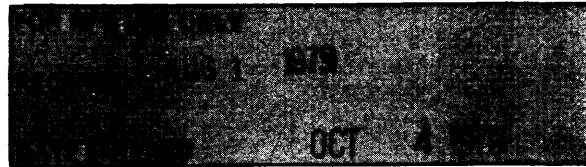
DATE

10/4/79

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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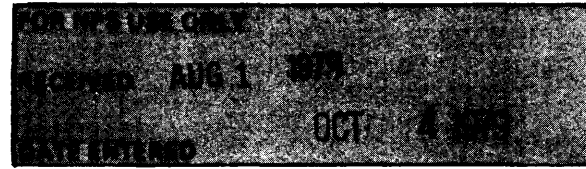
markets, could be held longer and were not subject to spoilage. During the 1890's dryers began to dot the countryside, appearing wherever orchards existed or were being planted. In 1894 there were 43 dryers in the county, and by 1901 some estimates of the number of dryers were as high as 200. Many of these were small affairs, little more than sheds housing the necessary apparatuses and equipment, with a wood-fired stove or furnace underneath as the heat source. These small prune dryers were as common as chicken coops on the farms of Clark County. But large commercial dryers were also being built. These were substantial buildings of two stories, some with steam heat, and the largest with a capacity of 15,000 pounds of fresh fruit. This type of large evaporator was known as the Vancouver dryer since so many of them were built in the vicinity of that city. Packing plants also were constructed near the Vancouver waterfront and carloads of dried prunes were shipped to eastern markets via the railroad or ferried to Portland and put on ships bound for Europe. Germany was a major importer of the Northwest's dried prunes before World War I and again in the 1920's.

The disruption of trade during the war affected the local prune industry, but uncertain harvests had a greater adverse effect and contributed to its decline. A partial failure of the crop in 1927 and a total failure in the following year caused importers to turn to other sources. With the Depression of the 1930's came depressed prices, narrow profit margins, unsold surpluses, and finally unharvested crops. Also during the thirties an infestation of thrip attacked the trees, and many orchardists could not afford the expensive spray needed to control the insects. The fruit that was harvested was sold fresh to a newly established cannery in Vancouver, and as "canned" products became accepted and were considered "modern," the old-fashioned dried prunes lost in popularity and the dryers began to disappear.

Though only memories of the glory days of the prune industry remain, when the Prunarians staged parades and selected a Prune Queen, and family excursions in a "tin Lizzie" through the blooming orchards were an annual spring occurrence, some vestiges of its presence are still visible. Such county place names as Fruit Valley, Prune Hill, and Orchards attest to the early importance and widespread growth of prune cultivation. Many of the small farmers' dryers are still standing, emptied of all the drying equipment, their roofs

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now covered with corrugated metal and used as storage sheds. The big commercial dryers are almost all gone, some destroyed by fire, others demolished when they outlived their usefulness. A few remain, gutted hulks now used for storage or, in the case of the Firestone dryer, expanded and modernized, fired by gas and fully automated, converted to the drying of nuts.

Thus, when Fred Arndt goes out to his wood pile in the fall and starts the fire in the cast-iron stove under his dryer to begin the process of drying his prunes and those of his neighbors, he is the last living link with a part of the history of Clark County which will hopefully never be forgotten. Some trees of the orchard purchased by his German immigrant father in 1896 still stand close to the dryer which his father began and he continued and expanded. The last remaining old-fashioned prune dryer in the area is still operating and stands as a significant reminder of the county's agricultural heritage.