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Remembering Yakima By Those Who Were There

Each week the YAKIMA VALLEY SUN presents a feature about a Yakima pioneer.

Joe Alexieff Takes Pride in Hard Work and Adopted Homeland

by Cindy Warren

There's nothing Bulgarian about Joe Alexieff except his accent, still strong in the 73-year-old even after having lived in the United States for 53 years, and in Yakima 40 years.

Now a resident of Central Convalescent, Alexieff's memories of other times and other places are not those respondent with pleasure; his long life seems to have been one of long days and years of work. Not toil, but good hard honest dirt-under-the-fingernails work, of which Alexieff takes great pride.

Alexieff's recollections of his early years take him back to Bulgaria, where he grew up in the small village of Sophia, with seven brothers and two sisters.

During his youth, Sophia had a population of 2-3,000. When he returned there as an adult to do some visiting, he found it a teeming city of one million.

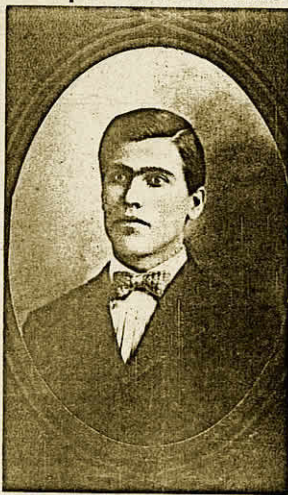
Alexieff credits his still healthy green thumb to his parents' growing just about everything on their farm in Sophia.

Then as a soldier in the Bulgarian king's regime, Alexieff decided America was the place where he wanted to be. He was not alone in that thought. He joined a couple hundred other Bulgarians on a ship bound for America, where they would all work for the railroad that hired them.

To his new home in America, Alexieff brought nothing but his command of the Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Rumanian, Yugoslav and Polish languages. The remainder of the trappings of his long life he would gather in various American cities and towns.

His first home and place of work was Milwaukee. Alexieff's railroad work then took him to Idaho, where he built tunnels. Not for long, however; he saw how many men were dying on the job because of poisonous gasses in the tunnels.

For a time, then, Alexieff lived in Seattle's Skid Road, when it was not a haven for tramps, but transient workers, many of whom were also immigrants. He'd spend a few days in his small hotel room



FORMERLY A BULGARIAN CITIZEN, Joe Alexieff, now a resident of Central Convalescent in Yakima, has enjoyed 53 years of American life, 40 of them in Yakima. He has a son working at Ray's Meats. Photo was taken in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

and then go to work in a logging camp, a routine he followed for a decade.

A move to California followed. At first, Alexieff found it "the best" a phrase he used for that state until the population became too much for him to handle.

Pasco, Washington was his next home. There he again worked for the railroad, this time painting railroad cars. He took out U.S. citizenship in that town, in 1930.

That was the year he went back to his home country, to visit relatives and bring back a wife. As she spoke little English, her new husband had to introduce her to American ways as well as to married life.

He found Bulgaria prospering, with big buildings. His former home held no attraction for him. "Uncle Sam is good enough," states Alexieff.

A move to Yakima was next on the life's itinerary for Joe Alexieff. "The best" is how he recalls his first meeting with the Yakima country. Trolleys were the mainstay of city transportation when he first arrived.

The mainstay of Alexieff's livelihood was growing and selling fruits and vegetables. Even when no one was buying, Alexieff the farmer was growing. He'd load up his Model A pickup with produce, unload it for sale, and not finding any buyers, would load it back up again and head for home.

It wasn't always like that; his cucumbers, tomatoes and other edibles did earn him and his family a living.

Not all was work, either. His family would often join other former Bulgarians for dinners and dances. Often it would be a couple of hundred folks that would meet in Wapato for these get togethers. He does not mention any other recreation.

Alexieff's main recreation now is caring for the rose bushes and other greenery around Central Convalescent, his home after four years at Sun Towers. Now twice a widower, Alexieff says he would get married again. "You bet your life," declares this man who has plenty of life left in him yet.