

# The Kings: longtime grocers

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After nearly 60 years in the grocery business in Friday Harbor, the King family has sold their historic family store to Verne Howard of Bellingham.

The town's oldest family business, was started in the 1920s by Lyle A. King. It was passed on to Blair King in 1948 when his father died and has since become a family corporation.

The family business, a corporation comprised of Blair and Vi King, Rick and Karen King, and Susan and Bob Passarge, has seen many changes over the years.

"We don't know nearly as many customers as we used to," Blair said. "And the store has changed its services. Three-quarters of our business used to be on credit. The merchandise was bagged in bulk. People would give us orders that we could just fill from lists."

Vi also told of the big counter-bins filled with bulk products instead of individual packaging.

"We used to deliver in town twice daily," Blair recalled. "We still do town deliveries for the elderly every Saturday."

The store has been in three different locations and enlarged twice at its present site. "The first location was where Whitey's is now," King said. "The next was the other side of King's Toggery and we moved

into this building in 1948."

Blair began working for his father in 1935. "He put me on the ranch first and broke me in there before I started in the store," he said.

King also remembered back to the days when the store stayed open on Saturday nights. "People just sat around the wood-burning stove, drank coffee and ate cookies out of glass covered jars while their food orders were put up."

King's Market still puts up food orders — three times a week for Stuart Island residents, which are flown to the island.

Waldron Islanders send their orders which are picked up weekly and taken to that island by boat.

"We still have some families from away back that are shopping in the store," Blair said.

The family grocery business began when Lyle King "liked to make every trip pay when he went to the mainland. He slaughtered cattle which he raised on San Juan Island and took them to Seattle. He found it expedient to haul back groceries, hence the store began," Blair said.

"Dad also bought just about all the fresh vegetables daily on the island. Newt Gerard, an ex-sheriff had a farm on Beaverton Valley and Malcolm Road and we bought from

him," Blair recalled. "We buy very little on the island now, although we'd like to buy more."

"I remember when we used to buy eggs from island farmers and candle them ourselves," Vi added. They also sold the meat that Lyle raised and butchered.

The Kings told of twice yearly sales, once in the spring and a harvest sale in the fall. "The salesmen would come in and serve coffee and cake to the customers," they recalled.

Vi said she didn't work in the store when Rick and Susan were youngsters. Rick has been working in the family business about 11 years.

Kings will pass their store on to Howard in January. He has been working there since August. He plans no changes and will keep the store's name. They feel just a bit of a regret but are eagerly looking forward to their new freedom.

"We've been dedicated to the store and haven't taken as much part in community affairs as we'd like to," King said.

Vi is looking forward to moving in to their brand-new condominium in Cannery Village. Her eyes light up when she speaks of spending more time with their grandchildren.

"We still like the business and the people. It's been a good life," the Kings agreed. — JB