

# History of Rickenbach Construction

John Rickenbach started Rickenbach Construction Company in Astoria in 1965. In 1989 Rickenbach Construction incorporated and has worked to become one of the Pacific North Coast's foremost commercial General Contractors.

## 1963

John and Diane Rickenbach moved to Astoria and the John Day Trailer Park was their first residence..

John, at this time, was working for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints as a construction manager. He was assigned to oversee the construction of a new church located on Niagara in Astoria.

## 1963-64

John worked on the Astoria Megler Bridge construction. He worked mainly on the building of the causeway.

## 1964-65

John worked for Wright, Schushart and Harbor Construction building projects at the Wauna Paper Mill.

## 1965 (Winter)

John and family traveled to Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada to complete a new building project for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints. They were there for about 3 months.

## 1965-1975

John started Rickenbach Construction. His first substantial job was restoring the British Embassy Building into a residence for Bob & Margaret Chopping.

John built a residence for Dick & Shirley Stemper located on Kensington Avenue in Astoria.

John also did a small amount of railing and “gingerbread” repair work for Mary Flavel on the residence located at 14th and Grand. This involved repairing items on the widows walk at the top of the roof. Mary asked John to report all this work as wind damage for insurance purposes. John felt that it was not due to wind damage but typical rot and lack of maintenance and would not report it any different. Mary refused to pay the bill and Rickenbach Construction placed one of the first liens on this piece of property.

During these years John built a shop for the business and used it as a place to build cabinets for kitchens, and bathrooms. He was quite well-known for his attention to detail and craftsmanship in working with wood. One of the houses he remembers building cabinets for was Jack Olsen, another contractor.

He also worked as a carpenter for Roy Duos



In 1963 John Rickenbach moved his family to Astoria. Working for Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints he was in charge of the construction of a new church located on Niagara Street.

building George Fulton's residence. John and George's friendship continued until George passed away a few years ago.

During this time, John also met Homer Tunks, a structural engineer, who moved to Astoria and had a vision of building a round, domed concrete house. John and Homer worked together on the design and construction technique and it still stands today. Homer covered the outside concrete dome with oyster shells. Around 1980, Homer came to John again with an idea to build a garage with a parabolic-shaped roof. Parabolic-curved shapes and straight lumber do not go together. He remembers waking up in the night with the idea of how this could be accomplished. Homer and John soon had the only parabolic-roof structure at that time probably in Oregon.

1970 brought the recession. The construction work was spotty and often the bills were difficult to collect. John and Diane just barely made it through this time as did many of the other members within the community.

After the economy picked back up, Rickenbach Construction was invited by Bank of Astoria as a joint venture to purchase and build four homes on Cumberland Street as spec homes. This was a positive experience for Rickenbach Construction.

Shortly after these were completed, Columbia Savings Bank and Rickenbach Construction formed a joint venture for two spec houses built on West Lexington.

In the later 1970s, Columbia Savings Bank and Rickenbach Construction did a joint venture for three more houses located on Skyline Avenue. These sites were very steep and considered unbuildable. A piling system was engineered for the foundation system and the work went ahead. Michelle was in high school at this time, interested in architecture and was able to design and draw up the plans for these three houses. The piling was placed on all three of the sites but only two houses were built at this time. The last one someone bought and built a few years later. During the construction of these houses, Jared was about 7 years old. He was climbing on the scaffolding and fell off breaking his arm.

Diane had become involved in the business doing the paperwork, billings, bidding and some design. She would often take the kids out on the job sites as she took lunch to John or helped out with something. As soon as the kids could sweep with a broom or pick up boards they were helping on the job site. As they got older, the kids all became involved in construction and most spent a good percent of their time in Junior High and High School, working on the jobs or in the shop finishing cabinets. Diane and Michelle learned how to paint, stain wood, install carpet, tile, insulate and lots more as the business became a family affair. Michelle worked nights in the shop staining and spraying the varnish on large quantities of cabinets John had built so they were ready to be installed in a client's home.