

## Senior Stars: Vernonia and the Oregon State Police

The Vernonia community has a long and storied tradition with the Oregon State Police (OSP). Over the years, several persons have served with the OSP who have had ties to Vernonia, most notably Holly V. Holcomb, Jr. who was the Superintendent.

Former Vernonia resident Jerry Hays, a veteran of OSP himself, provided the following information to *Vernonia's Voice*, about Vernonia ties to OSP.

### History of the Oregon State Police

The Oregon State Police was formed in 1931 with a total of 112 officers. Most of the officers were transferred from various fragmented enforcement agencies. The majority came from the old State Traffic Department. The rest came from other state agencies that were responsible for fish laws, game laws, forestry, prohibition, criminal and arson laws. The primary reason for the change was to combine all these agencies into one organization that was better trained, more efficient and fiscally responsible.

The agency now has six divisions with 655 sworn employees and six support sections with 600 support staff. The six divisions provide state wide

support in Patrol, Criminal Investigations, Fish and Wildlife, Forensics, Medical Examiners and Gaming Enforcement.

Six former Vernonia residents were members of the OSP. Some were full time career members, others worked part-time. This is quite a large number from such a small community.

### Vernonians of the Oregon State Police

The member that is best known was Superintendent **Holly V. Holcomb, Jr.** Holcomb moved to Vernonia when he was six. His father was employed at the Oregon-American mill in the planer mill section, working his way to supervisor. Holly graduated from Vernonia High School in 1935 and worked for the Oregon-American woods crew while he attended Oregon State College (OSU) from 1935-39. He was an outstanding athlete and three year letterman playing quarterback for the Beavers. After graduation

he joined the Oregon State Police as a patrolman until 1943 when he enlisted in the service during World War

II. He was a pilot in the Pacific theater attaining the rank of Captain and earning several air medals. In 1946 he returned to OSP and worked his way through the ranks, becoming Superintendent in 1966. While serving as Superintendent he was shot and killed on the steps of the Public Service Building in Salem in November 1975 by a former disgruntled employee. He was married and had two daughters. In 1988 the State Police established the "Holly V. Holcomb Award" which is presented to officers who distinguish themselves in a heroic manner.



Holly V. Holcomb, Jr.

**John R. "Jack" Heenan** was born in Vernonia in 1923 and attended local schools. His father worked for Oregon-American on the train crew until the mill closed. After graduation Jack Heenan joined

*continued on page 17*

## The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

### Museum News

The museum's summer hours began the first Friday of June and will continue through Quilt Fair weekend in mid-September. In addition to Saturdays and Sundays, the museum will be open Fridays from 1 - 4 pm. Museum volunteers welcome the additional visitors during the beautiful summer months that bring bicyclists, motorcyclists, campers, and vacationers to Vernonia.

We are pleased to have an intern this summer. Rachel Brown is studying history in college and agreed to spend some of her vacation time helping us update and digitize our artifact tags. The informational labels for our older artifacts were typewritten back in the 1960s and have faded with age. The new tags are being prepared by computer and printed in a larger font for improved readability. Rachel's help is greatly appreciated.

Ms. Rogers sixth grade class for the Vernonia Middle School visited the museum in early June as part of their local history curriculum. The students enjoyed seeing the artifacts and pictures of early Vernonia and learned a little more about life in Vernonia several

generations ago.

### Independence Days of Yore

Although the summer months were busy ones for the early day Vernonians, there was also time for some fun and relaxation. Just as we do today, the Fourth of July was celebrated with community events. A July 1925 article in the *Vernonia Eagle* described the 1882 Fourth of July gathering in Mist: "At that time there were merely trails through the woods and people lived several miles apart. The chief means of transportation was horseback due to the lack of roads. About fifty people participated in the festivities, the children amusing themselves at games and swings. A community outdoor picnic was one of the features of the occasion. Nelson Cole of Mist made a speech on the caption of Independence Day."

The same issue of the *Eagle* also recalled an 1883 picnic in Natal held in Nels Peterson's barn. People from Vernonia and Mist attended the entertainment that consisted of fireworks, dancing, a picnic in the afternoon, and a midnight dinner at Mr. Peterson's, the dance lasting all night. Roads had been built and more families had moved to the area. The paper also noted that during

the current holiday, local resident Virgil Powell, his wife and children spent the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in Tillamook, Garibaldi, Barview, and Rockaway, returning home by the way of Seaside. The article stated that they had a wonderful time at Rockaway but the Seaside coast was too crowded with people and not even enough room to park a car. Some things haven't changed!

### From Virgil Powell's Diary

Virgil Powell was a long-time resident who had a farm in the Upper Nehalem Valley between Natal and Pittsburg. Each year from 1906 until 1955, he kept a regular diary of his activities. These excerpts from July 1917 show Powell's practice of taking a holiday trip for the Fourth as a break from all the chores of the farm started well before 1925:

*Tuesday, July 3: Left 6:30 A.M. went up got Parkers and went down to Seaside. Got there about 4:30 P.M. Cloudy in morning but very good in afternoon.*

*Wednesday, July 4: Was in Seaside, Gearhart and Cannon Beach all day. Rained awful hard early in morning but very good during the day.*

*Thursday, July 5: Left Seaside 9 A.M. and got home 10 P.M. Had all kinds of tire trouble. Rained a*

*little but pretty fair day.*

*Sunday, July 8: Raked, shocked and cut hay all day. Very hot in forenoon but cloudy in afternoon and looks very much like rain.*

*Thursday, July 12: Hauled hay all day and got considerable hauled. Awful hot all day. Ora came over.*

*Thursday, July 13: Finished hauling hay 11 A.M. Just fooled around in afternoon. Cultivated potatoes after supper till 8:30 P.M. Awful hot all day.*

The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at E. 511 Bridge Street and is open from 1 to 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays (excluding holidays) all year. From June through mid-September, the museum is also open on Fridays from 1 - 4 pm. There is no charge for admission but donations are always welcome. Become a member of the museum for an annual \$5 fee to receive the periodic newsletter; and if you are a Facebook user, check out the new Vernonia Pioneer Museum page created by Bill Langmaid. The museum volunteers are always pleased to enlist additional volunteers to help hold the museum open and assist in other ways. Please stop by and let one of the volunteers know of your interest in helping out.

**Don't Sell it!  
Pawn it!**  
**For fast cash!**

010412

**Baseline Pawn, Inc.**  
2245 Baseline St., Cornelius  
(Across from Fred Meyer)  
**503-530-8119**  
Open everyday at 9 a.m.  
State Licensed PB-0388

**Vacation Bible School**

June 24th thru 28th  
9am-12:15  
Vernonia Christian Church  
410 North Street, Vernonia

**God's Backyard BIBLE CAMP**  
\* under the SUN \*  
Where kids have a blast serving Jesus!

**Ages:** "going into" Kindergarten thru 6th grade  
**Cost:** Free

Register early at: [www.vacationbibleschool.com/vernoniavbs](http://www.vacationbibleschool.com/vernoniavbs)  
or call Susan Mullikin at 503-429-0181 or 503-369-3245

**VERNONIA SERVICE & REPAIR**

**NAPA AUTOCARE CENTER**

Warranty on all parts and labor

**ASE CERTIFIED**  
Now offering 2 and 4 wheel alignments

**58605 NEHALEM HWY. S.**  
**Next to Storage, Too**  
**503/429/7972**