

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Hunting and Fishing a Century Ago

The salmon have returned to the Nehalem River and Rock Creek to spawn, and hunting season is well underway. How different it was back in the earliest days of Vernonia's pioneers and through the early part of the twentieth century when no licenses were required and there were no limits on what a man could take for his family's table. With most farms needing to be self-sufficient, wild game was a welcome addition to the limited menu.

Before the first white settlers came into the valley in 1874, Clatskanie Indians hunted and fished seasonally along the Nehalem floodplain. The dense, tall timber in the forests beyond limited the growth of forage crops for ruminants such as deer and elk. Brush plants and berries only grew along the streams and margins of the stands of Douglas fir and in areas burned by forest fires. White trappers came into the valley in the mid-1800s for the abundant beavers, raccoons, muskrats, foxes, and otters. These trappers and other itinerant hunters also found coyotes, wolves, cougars, bears, and skunks, but these men did not establish permanent homes here.

Word of the Upper Nehalem Valley's abundance of wildlife reached Clark Parker, a hunter and trapper, who lived in East Portland. He spent the autumn of 1873 trapping beaver, the pelts of which were then a valuable commodity. His son, Andrew, later recalled his father took over 600 beaver that year. Clark returned the following spring with his family to settle and

established his homestead on the east side of the Nehalem along what is now Mist Drive. The same stories of good hunting and fishing inspired David "Frank" Baker to talk his wife's family patriarch, John Van Blaricom, Sr., into looking the valley over. John brought the Van Blaricom clan to the area soon after the Parkers had arrived and settled in what is now the central part of Vernonia.

The autumn salmon runs were so rich that many of the Vernonia area pioneers gathered at the mouth of Rock Creek and other falls along the river to catch them with pitchforks and shotguns. These became social events as well as subsistence fishing. The fish were dried for consumption throughout the long winter. With no refrigeration, the denser deer and elk venison was usually eaten right away. In later years, some of the meat and fish was preserved by canning.

Oregon established its first hunting and fishing regulations around 1911, but with few game wardens and Vernonia's isolation, most people went on as they had by taking fish and game whenever they could for their own use. Virgil Powell's diary entries for this time period reflect that. They also show that the camaraderie of hunting parties was as much a part of the sport as it is today.

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. Here are a few edited entries that refer to the hunting and fishing this time of year. The pheasants he mentions were brought to Oregon from China in

1882 and became abundant throughout western Oregon through the middle of the twentieth century.

Wednesday, September 18, 1907: Went after salmon in the morning but did not catch any. Went after salmon in the night and caught one.

Thursday, September 19, 1907: Carried the mail. Cool most all day. Put two fish traps in the river and caught 18 salmon during the night.

Friday, September 20, 1907: Worked cleaning fish most of the day. Caught 16 salmon tonight. Bright all day.

Thursday, October 21, 1909: Did not do much of anything in the morning. Was shooting at some white geese over in the field in the afternoon. Killed three. Rained quite a lot all day.

Saturday, October 15, 1910: Went up the river pheasant hunting in the morning. Went down the river in the afternoon and did not kill a thing. Very fine all day.

Sunday, October 16, 1910: Went down to Rays in the morning and a lot of us went out on the Enterprise road hunting. Killed 2 small bucks. This is my first one since the snow. Got back home at 5:30. Certainly had a lot of fun. Rained just a little.

Sunday, October 13, 1912: Garfield and I went up to Vernonia in morning after the old horse and got back about 1:30. Went pheasant hunting for a little while in afternoon. Bright and fine most

all day.

Monday, October 14, 1912: Garfield and I started out in morning for Clarks place to find a place to set bear trap and ran on to two bear and killed them. Got back about 1:30. Pretty fair day.

Thursday, October 17, 1912: Garfield and I went down below where some of the boys were hunting and did not get back till about 2:30. Walter stopped here in the evening. We all went up to the Pearson place and killed a big band of pheasants. Rained quite a bit all day.

Friday, October 18, 1912: Walter and I took the dogs out East and put in a large buck which Garfield killed. We came down Oak Ranch and got home about 2:30 p.m. Cloudy all day and looks very much like rain.

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.



Fall Carnival

October 31st
7-8:30 pm

Vernonia Christian Church
410 North street

Free Carnival games:
Cup cake walk
Bouncy Toy
Ring toss
Dart toss
Face painting
Gold fish
and much more!

Refreshments Too!

Fun for the whole family!

For more information call 429-6522 or 429-4901



FALL FESTIVAL

NOVEMBER 2ND
69163 HWY 47 MIST SCHOOL GYM

DINNER AT 6PM
ENTERTAINMENT AT 7PM

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