

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Vernonia Study Club

When the population of Vernonia increased dramatically in the early 1920s with the opening of the mill, many fraternal, social and service clubs were established that brought people together for friendship and to help the community. Several lodges with their men's and women's sub-groups, the Vernonia and Natal Granges where membership was open to men and women equally, and special interest groups attracted local members. One such service club was the Vernonia Study Club, founded in 1925.

I recently visited Faith Reynolds, a nine decade member of the community who will be 99 years young next month, at her retirement home in Beaverton. She presented the museum with a history of the Vernonia Study Club compiled in 1991 by member Maude Wells from minutes of the club from 1925-1973. The club limited its membership to eighteen, and only when someone moved away or resigned were others added to fill those vacancies. The club was organized for the purpose of "self-improvement and civic betterment." Most of their regular meetings had a business component followed by a program of study. Occasionally, if a guest speaker offered a topic of general interest to the community, the public was invited, and once a year a special meeting welcomed husbands and friends of members.

Programs included book reports and studies of topics such as drama, music, government, geography, world travel, and the arts. The "civic betterment" portion of the club's mission began with offering cash prizes to local students for birdhouse building (for the boys) or window box displays (for the girls.) In another project, the PTA and the Study Club asked the City Council to form a city park and cooperated with the council to raise the necessary funds. Other accomplishments of the Study Club during the 1920s included raising funds for the City Library, book drives and sponsoring a Garden Club.

In the late 1920s, the club asked the Vernonia City Council to clean up vacant lots and wash windows in vacant downtown buildings. The council refused, so the ladies went to the Chamber of Commerce, a men's organization in those days, to ask for help that the Chamber gladly gave. Similar to the work done in later years by Vernonia Pride, the Study Club sponsored clean-up and fix-up days and asked the council in 1940 to establish garbage service in the city.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the club asked the American Legion to help organize a Vernonia Community Chest to help needy families. The club raised funds that they turned over to the Community Chest; a Study Club member was also a member of that board. When the first Legion Hall collapsed in 1969, Study Club spearheaded a community drive to build another hall.

The club raised money for the first Scout Cabin and donated a framed picture and three flowering trees for the new Washington Grade School in 1930. That same year, the members asked the school board to hire an art and music teacher. By 1936, the problems of the needy in the community overwhelmed all other causes. They raised funds to provide one especially desperate family milk for a whole year, paid for badly needed dental work for a high school girl and bought a dress for another girl who could not have otherwise attended graduation. Food and clothing were given to other families in temporary need including Christmas dinners for twenty or more families. Until the 1990s when Vernonia Cares and the Vernonia Senior Center took over some of these activities, the Study Club continued its dedicated community service. When they found that Doernbecher Hospital wouldn't take Vernonia's children because the town had never contributed to the hospital, the Study Club took up a donation so that local youth would be served there.

During World War II, the Study Club took on fundraising for the Red Cross, rolled bandages and held War Bond drives. They sponsored the Girl Scouts for several years and took part in collecting donations for

what is now called disaster relief. The support of the Vernonia Public Library was a focus of the club from its founding, and the members attended City Council meetings en masse to forestall any cuts to the library budget. At the same time, book drives and silver teas held during Library Week added books to the collection.

By 1991 when this history was written, club membership had declined and many of the activities formerly done by Study Club members were being handled by other organizations or public entities. The club continued to support the library and the food bank, however, and held regular but less frequent meetings until 2011. With so many of the long-time members moving away or passing, the club has been on hiatus, but what a marvelous impact this group has had on the history of Vernonia.

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. With lambing season in full swing now with some of our local 4-H families, it's interesting to look back at the scope of livestock management that was such an important part of the early residents' lives one hundred years ago.

Wednesday, April 1, 1914: Took Pet up to the bull at Tuckers. Went on over and got the mail. Got home 3 P.M. Pretty fair all day.

Thursday, April 2: Left 5 AM for Clatskanie. Got out there 9 AM. Went up and bought 42 head of sheep and drove them out to foot of mountain. Got 29 head old sheep and 13 lambs for \$190. Went back to Clatskanie and stayed overnight. Rained considerable in evening.

Friday, April 3: Left Clatskanie 7 AM. and drove the sheep over as far as Johnsons. Got home 5:45. Pretty good day.

Saturday, April 4: Went down to Johnsons and brought the sheep on up. Got here 3:15 P.M. Went down in the wagon. Went up to Vernonia in the evening to the big show given by the Mist people. Very good time. Got home 1 AM.

Thursday, April 9: Rained awful hard most all day. Took the cattle and sheep up to Pittsburg pasture. Edwin brought his colts down.

Saturday, April 11: Went up as far as Vernonia with Edwin & Ben. Got back home 1:45 P.M. Rode Babe up. Rained considerable most all day. Went up to Pittsburg in afternoon and cut the lambs.

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.



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MARCH 22ND RANDY OXFORD BAND
MARCH 28 BLUE SKIES FOR BLACK HEARTS
MARCH 29TH ROOT JACK
APRIL 4TH CARRIED AWAY
APRIL 5TH BRITNEE KELLOGG
APRIL 12TH CHAMPIONSHIP
APRIL 18TH COUNTRYSIDE RIDE
APRIL 19TH LEWI LONGMIRE
APRIL 25 THE SMOKING FLOWERS
APRIL 26 THE STACY JONES BAND
MAY 3 KEVIN SELFE & THE TORNADO
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