

# The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

## The War is Over

A radio announcement on Tuesday afternoon, August 14, 1945, informed the nation that the Japanese had accepted the American terms of surrender, and World War II finally, formally came to an end. As was true across the country, Vernonia erupted into a jubilant celebration that lasted well into the night. Sirens and whistles sounded, the city's fire alarm brought firemen in to drive the trucks with sirens wailing in a spontaneous parade through the suddenly crowded center of town. Flags appeared everywhere borne by the happy citizens. On a more personal level, families rejoiced that their loved ones were now out of danger and motorists looked forward to the end of gas rationing when they could once again say "fill 'er up." A street dance with music from a local band ended the day.

## The Last Log Train

On August 27, 1957, Locomotive 105 brought the final load of logs to the mill in Vernonia, signaling the end of an era that began in 1924 when the first cargo from Camp McGregor rolled into town. Chet Alexander, engineer, drove as a bigger than usual crowd watched and waved. The train also bore some of the logging machinery and tool sheds from the camp. Chet came to Vernonia in 1922 as the tracks to the camp were

being laid, and worked as engineer for all but the years when the mill was closed during the Great Depression. Over the lifetime of Oregon-American, its 28,000 acres of timber yielded two and a half billion board feet of lumber, the bulk of which was delivered by this daily run.

Camp McGregor was built in 1922 far up Rock Creek beyond the rail yard at Keasey in the center of O-A's timberlands. Logging operations commenced while the big lumber mill in Vernonia was under construction. The camp consisted of bunkhouses, dining hall, cook house, commissary, offices, and a school. It housed nearly 300 loggers at its peak. Several families established homes there, too, but it all burned down in 1933's Wolf Creek Fire. It was left abandoned during the Depression-caused mill closure that began in 1933. When the mill reopened in 1936, bunkhouses needed for the camp were built at the mill and sent by train back up into the woods. In 1947, with logging operations now too far from Camp McGregor, Camp Olson was built further south in the Coast Range. It was dismantled and its buildings moved by train back to Camp McGregor in 1955. On August 16, 1957, with logging operations nearly over, the cook house closed and the end of Camp McGregor was nigh.

The last logs were cut into lumber over the next few months and the systematic dismantling began for the mill that at one time had been the big-

gest concrete and steel lumber mill in the world and had employed 750 in its most productive years.

## Another Poignant August Ending

Judd Greenman came to Oregon-American in 1925, succeeding Ed Hayes, the first Superintendent. He was promoted to Vice President and General Manager in 1936 when the mill reopened after its three year closure. Mr. Greenman retired in 1955. He suffered a fatal heart attack and died in August 1957 just days after the last O-A log was cut.

## From Virgil Powell's Diary

Virgil Powell (1887-1963) was a long-time resident whose family 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. He worked at a many jobs in addition to maintaining his family farm. He and his family moved into Vernonia when the children were small. He was a fireman at the O-A mill for many years, and as he neared his sixties, he worked on night patrol there. A lifelong hunter, in 1946 he built a hunting cabin near Westimber in the Coast Range. The old shingle mill he references was at the far East end of the pond opposite the mill.

**Sunday, August 18, 1946:** Went to Westimber and put roofing boards on. Left 6:45 A.M. and returned 4:45 P.M.

**Tuesday, August 20:** Took some brick loose from old shingle mill by pond A.M. Worked some on trailer and around yard. Pretty warm day. O.A. patrol eve.

**Wednesday, August 21:** Took trailer load of brick to Westimber cabin 8 A.M. returned 12 P.M. Saw 5 deer along road. O.A. patrol eve.

Virgil kept special documents folded in the back of his diary. John Stofiel, the museum curator who transcribed Virgil's diaries in the 1960s, added this note below the August 21 entry:

*Virgil got a letter today from Judd Greenman, "In recognition of your hard work and loyal cooperation with the Company, we are increasing your salary effective August 1, 1946, to \$285.00 per month. Our best wishes for your future health, happiness and prosperity go with this token of our esteem."*

*The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at 511 E. 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 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.*

## Community Health Fair Features OHSU's *Let's Get Healthy!*

The Columbia Health Coalition is working in collaboration with the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) to address breast health and diet concerns among seniors in St. Helens using an interactive, computer-based health education and research exhibit called *Let's Get Healthy!*

A Community Health Fair will be held on Monday August 25 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the St. Helens Senior Center, 375 S. 15 St., St. Helens, OR. This event is free of charge.

*Let's Get Healthy!* was developed by OHSU scientists to share health information while also engaging individuals in the scientific process. Information collected through the program will be kept private but will help assess the community's overall breast cancer risk and how to reduce it. It will be used by the Columbia County Health Coalition to determine the programs that would be most effective in reducing the community's overall breast cancer risk.

The Community Health Fair is a result of a

collaborative community assessment completed in 2013 by the Columbia Health Coalition and Knight Cancer Institute's community health educator, Niyati Desai. A community readiness assessment includes engaging key community stakeholders in an interview process. Participants represent diverse sectors including health and medicine, media, education, social services, government and community events. Desai interviewed nine stakeholders to determine the health risks in Columbia County. The interviews were compiled, coded for anonymity and scored using an anchored rating scale system. The consensus scoring process determines the local capacity to address breast health needs.

According to the results, community members recognize breast cancer is a concern, but there is little recognition that it might be occurring locally. The interviews found that community members believe there is a sense that even if it is a local issue, there is nothing that can be done at that level to reduce cancer

risk.

The goal of the health fair is to raise awareness that breast cancer exists in Columbia County and can be addressed locally.

The Columbia Health Coalition views this collaboration as a launching point to increase awareness of how to improve breast health. To learn more about this process contact Claire Catt at the Community Health Fair or at the OSU Extension Office (503) 397-3462.

For more information about *Let's Get Healthy*, visit [www.letsgethealthy.org](http://www.letsgethealthy.org).

### About Columbia County Health Coalition

The Columbia Health Coalition is composed of community stakeholders who care about creating a healthier Columbia County. The Columbia Health Coalition's vision is to partner with organizations and agencies for improving health where we Live, Work, Learn, and Play.

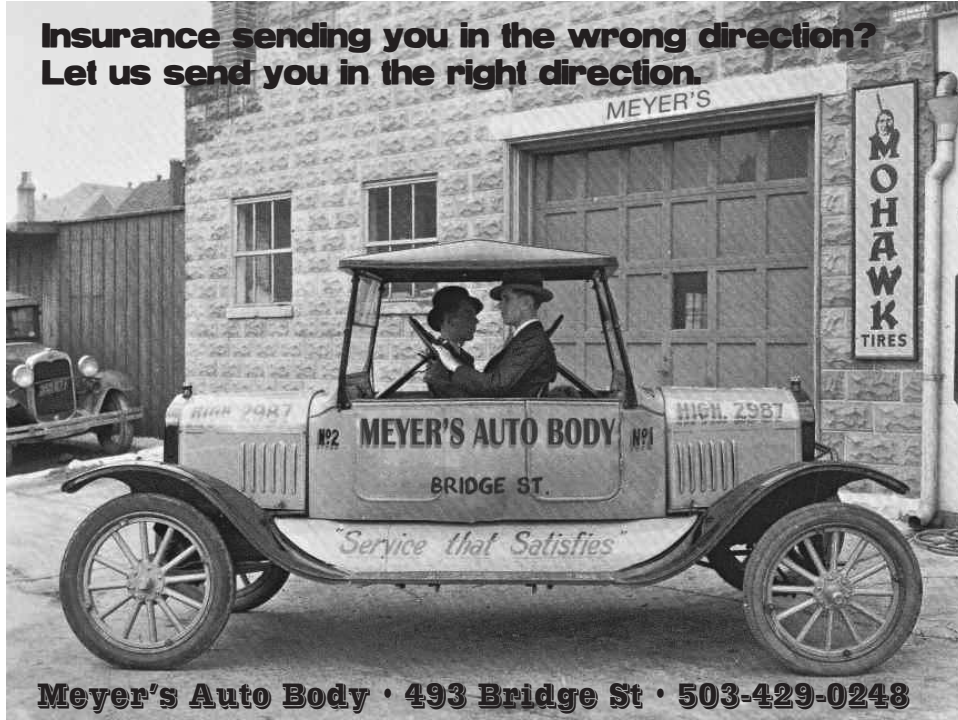
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