

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

End of an Era

On Wednesday, September 11, 1957, at 11:30 AM, the last log was cut by the giant saw at the former Oregon-American mill, just little more than thirty-three years after the first. Over the next three months, this log and the rest of the remaining cut timber were transformed into finished lumber in the dry kilns and planing department. The last shipments of finished lumber left Vernonia for IP's Longview operations in April 1958. By May, only three office staff, three watchmen, three caretakers, and three workers in the timberlands remained on the payroll that once had over 700 workers. During its thirty years of operations over two and one half billion board feet of timber were processed into finished lumber; the mill was closed for three years during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

International Paper (IP), Long-Bell Division, had acquired all of Oregon-American's holdings in 1953, well aware that the supply of logs near the Vernonia mill would run out in a few years. IP was focused on the 20,000 acres of timber-growing land that would be improved and replanted for future harvests. During the last months of mill operations, plans for disposition of company-owned assets including the sixty-six homes on O-A Hill were also underway. By the end of 1957, over a

fourth of the homes were vacant but the remainder was being rented by former O-A/Long-Bell employees. In November 1958, IP deeded the homes plus a building lot in the business district and other acreages to the City of Vernonia. The homes were sold over the next several years to individual homebuyers.

Shay Engine 102 was steamed up in June 1958 by former O-A rail engineer Chet Alexander and brought along the tracks to the end of Second Street (now Jefferson Street.) This section of tracks eventually became part of the Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail. Heavy equipment and lots of helpers moved the engine to its final resting place at Bridge and First (Adams) Street where it was ultimately refurbished, fenced and covered by community volunteers and many donors who bought bricks to pave the perimeter almost fifty years later.

The closing of the lumber operations also meant the silencing of the mill whistle. R. A. Simmons first heard it as a boy in Texarkana, Texas, and later in a mill in Conroe, Texas, where he worked. When the Conroe mill burned, Simmons salvaged the whistle and brought it here in 1923. It became part of the community's life as it signaled the start and end of work days and the noon lunch break. A double-blast sounded at quarter to eight to let employees know they had fifteen minutes to get to work. It also blasted to augment the call for firemen and welcomed in each New Year. It went silent

in late December 1957 when the planing department closed for good. This writer was told that the whistle then went to the mill in Gardiner, Oregon, and would appreciate confirmation or correction of that notion. The final stanza of Vernonian John Brown's poem so poignantly states:

*I don't know where whistles go
When mills have to shut down,
But Vernonia lost its heartbeat
When it lost that familiar sound.*

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. Having purchased his first car in the spring of 1916, many entries now referred to that auto – the trips and the troubles. The Columbia River Highway, the first planned scenic roadway in the United States, was begun in 1913. By 1914, the road was completed as far as Horsetail Falls. Then as now, the road drew sightseers from Portland and elsewhere who could motor on that engineering marvel.

Saturday, September 9, 1916: Left 7 A.M. and got to Portland 3:15 P.M. Stopped at Hillsboro to hear the Thompson murder case. Rained considerable all day and the roads were terrible.

Sunday, September 10, 1916: Was in Portland till 3 P.M. then went up Columbia River Highway as far as Multnomah

Falls with Chas. Heinen and others. Got back 8 P.M. Pretty fair day.

Monday, September 11, 1916: Went up Columbia River Highway 10 A.M. as far as Multnomah Falls with Ora & Eva. Got back 4 P.M. Pretty warm most all day.

Tuesday, September 12, 1916: Left Portland 9 A.M. and got home 8 P.M. Broke a spring on Gales Creek and had several blow outs. Pretty warm day.

Friday, September 15, 1916: Walked up to Vernonia 8 A.M. and returned 12. Sold 3 steers to Orwig for \$92.50. Very warm 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 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.

ODF&W Aware of Cougar Activity

continued from front page

- Deer-proof your garden and yard with nets, lights, fencing.
- Fence and shelter livestock. Move them to sheds or barns at night.

If You Recreate in Cougar Country

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Leave your dog at home or keep it on a leash. Pets running free may lead a cougar back to you.
- Hike in groups. Make noise to alert wildlife of your presence.
- Keep children close to you. Teach them about wildlife.
- Keep campsites clean. Sleep 100 yards from cooking areas.
- Store food in animal-proof

containers.

- Carry deterrent spray.
- Be cautious at dusk and dawn.
- Never feed any wildlife. Prey attracts predators.
- Do not approach any wildlife; stay at least 100 yards away.
- Steer clear of baby wildlife. Mother is likely nearby.
- Be alert when sitting quietly or stopping to rest.
- Be especially alert at dawn and dusk when cougars are most active.
- Be aware that animal calls and animal kills can attract a cougar.

If You Encounter a Cougar

- Cougars often will retreat if given the opportunity. Leave the animal

a way to escape.

- Stay calm and stand your ground.
- Maintain direct eye contact.
- Pick up children, but do so without bending down or turning your back on the cougar.
- Back away slowly.
- Do not run. Running triggers a chase response in cougars, which could lead to an attack.
- Raise your voice and speak firmly.
- If the cougar seems aggressive, raise your arms to make yourself look larger and clap your hands.
- If in the very unusual event that a cougar attacks you, fight back with rocks, sticks, tools or any items available.

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