

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Museum News

We were pleased to have a visit in early November from Mark and Gordon Greathouse, sons of Kathryn Malmsten Greathouse, and their niece, a recent Pacific University grad. Their great-grandfather Olof Malmsten and several of his children were some of Vernonia's early "movers and shakers." Mark and his wife, Helena, established the Malmsten Family Fund at the museum. That fund has enabled us to restore and display Malmsten photos and artifacts in addition to supporting other projects.

The Malmsten Family in Vernonia, Part 1

Vernonia had its share of boom and bust cycles before the turn of the 20th century. Following the first wave of farming homesteaders in the 1870s, rumors of a railroad that would link Portland to the coast brought new residents who hoped for the economic benefit of rail service through a remote rural town.

Olof Malmsten, a master blacksmith, emigrated to the United States from Sweden in 1852. After several years of working in his trade and buying and selling farm properties in Minnesota, Upstate New York and Pennsylvania, he acquired a 160 acre farm in Vasa, Minnesota, to which he brought his fellow Swedish immigrant bride, Maria. In 1887 he traveled to eastern Oregon with one of his four sons, Elon, to visit an old friend and to investigate land around Pendleton. He returned home to Vasa when his family sent word about an insect infestation that was threatening their crops.

Still interested in Oregon, Olof and his oldest son, Otto, left for Oregon on June 12, 1889, arriving in Vernonia eight days later. He had heard of the famous Nehalem Valley from his friend, Simon Johnson, of Mist, Oregon. Olof and Otto both took up homesteads in Oregon three months later, in part because a railroad survey had been made. The railroad was expected to be built soon, but that didn't happen for another thirty-two years.

Otto contested a claim of 160 acres one and half miles southeast of Vernonia on Pebble Creek

Road where Pebble Creek empties into the Nehalem. William Adams had forfeited his right to the homestead by being absent over six months; Otto and Olof moved in. Olof then went northeast of Vernonia on Crooked Creek where a settlement of Swedish people lived. He filed for 160 acres northeast of Vernonia. Both Olof and Otto got various jobs in Mist, Scappoose and Vernonia. Olof, a horseshoer and blacksmith, had no problem staying busy.

Olof's sons, Elon and Franklin, took care of the Minnesota farms for the next two years. Franklin and his Uncle Holm then went to Oregon, arriving on February 9, 1891, by the Northern Pacific train from St. Paul to Portland. Otto was at the depot in Portland to meet them. After a night at the International Hotel in Portland, they went from the Union Depot by rail to the station in Cornelius.

Franklin was a year too young to file a homestead claim as the minimum age was 21. He worked with Uncle Holm to fell timber on his claim. When Uncle Holm's land had been cleared and a house built, Auntie Holm and Franklin's sister, Eva, came to Vernonia. Soon after Franklin was 21, he went to the regional land office in Oregon City to file on a quarter section of land. His claim was next to John Baker's and Bertha Gillihan's; she later married Otto Malmsten. Otto and Eva also went to Oregon City with Franklin. There Eva filed her claim for 160 acres east of Otto's and south of Uncle Holm's on Coon Creek.

While proving up the homestead, Franklin went out and took jobs wherever he could. Room, board and one dollar for a ten-hour day were the going wages. There were hardly any jobs in Vernonia, however, due to the Panic of 1893, a national depression that caused an out-migration from Vernonia and a temporary end of railroad dreams. Franklin worked mostly in logging camps in Yankton, cutting wood and building homes. He worked in sawmills in St. Helens and other places. He traveled from job to job on foot until he finally could buy a pony and ride back to Vernonia.

Part 2 will continue the Malmsten story in our December column.

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. The November 25 entry from his diary of 1907 mentions a telephone meeting at the Natal Grange. We're not sure if this was related to the "Swede Line" that the Malmsten family set up between their farms or the one Cad and Dow Keasey established in 1902 between Pittsburg and St. Helens that also connected some area families.

Thursday, November 21, 1907: Went up to Pittsburg in the morning and fished all day.

Friday, November 22: Went up to Pittsburg and fished most all day. Quite a crowd from above came down and fished. Lameck came up and fished awhile. Rained awful hard most all day.

Saturday, November 23: Butchered a hog in the morning. Rained terrible hard all day. Received a postal from Alice & Minnie.

Sunday, November 24: Cut the hog up in the morning. It weighed 306 pounds. Wrote postals in the afternoon to F.W. Jennie Dowling and went up to the Port Office and mailed them. Rained pretty hard all day. The river is up yellow and about 1/2 bank full.

Monday, November 25: Went down to the Telephone meeting at the (Natal) Grange Hall. Also visited Natal School. Got down to the hall at 12:15 and got back home about 5 p.m. Rained awful hard all afternoon.

The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at 511 E. Bridge Street and is open from 1 - 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.

Donations Needed to Help Fill Christmas Food Boxes

Vernonia Cares Food Bank (VCFB) plans to offer Christmas holiday food boxes to low income households within the Vernonia community. Registration opened November 11 and the application deadline is December 9, 2014.

The boxes will be disbursed December 19, as registered households pick them up from Vernonia Cares Food Bank. The holiday food box will contain the basic groceries for a Christmas meal. "Our target group is the households who fall within the USDA eligibility guidelines," said Vernonia Cares Director Sandy Welch. "That is \$1,799 gross income per month for single person households, plus \$626 per month for each additional person in the household. However, anyone who is a Vernonia resident and does not have the groceries for a Christmas meal is eligible to apply for this special food box," she concludes.

Applications may be obtained from Vernonia Cares Food Bank, which is open Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. It is located in the American Legion Hall at 627 Adams Avenue. To obtain a form by phone, call VCFB at 503-429-1414, leaving clear mailing information. Pick up information will be mailed to verify registration. All applications must be received by Vernonia Cares by December 9. Only pre-registered households will be served.

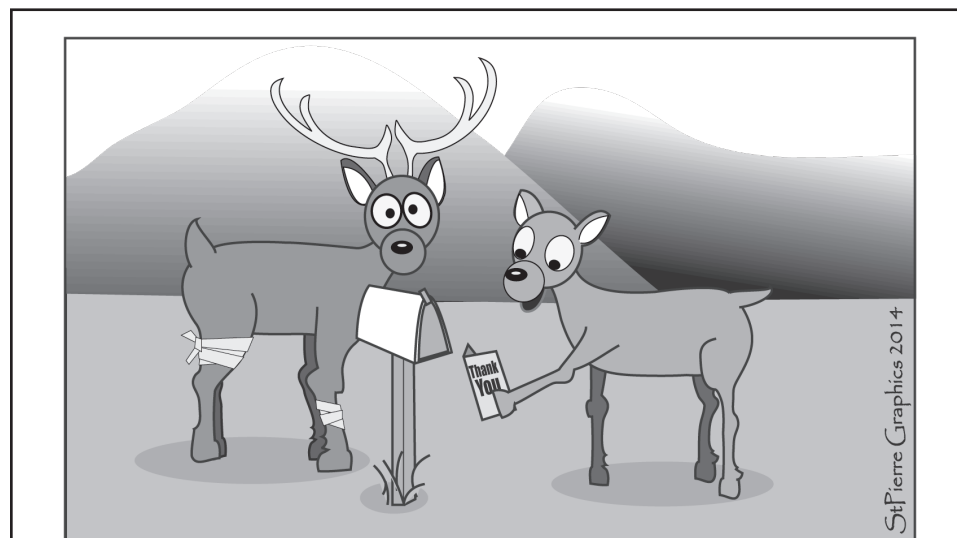
"At this point, we are planning to provide this service to 200 families and are praying the food and funds arrive to support it," Welch emphasized. "We've had great support for the holiday food boxes from our community in the past and I'm looking to that same support again this year. Several businesses and organizations have committed to items within the boxes, so that really helps. Each donated food item is one less the food bank has to buy. I'm so glad we are able to brighten people's Christmas through these groceries.

What's Christmas without, at the least, a Christmas meal together?" asks Welch.

"Between now and Thanksgiving is a great time to buy a turkey and donate it towards the Christmas Box Project. That's when the sale prices are available," says Vernonia Cares President Rosie McCoy. "All turkeys will be stored frozen at the food bank and then distributed near Christmas."

R & S Market (Vernonia Sentry), a strong supporter of VCFB, makes it simple to donate. Through their check-stand giving, patrons can designate \$30

which will be used to buy the groceries and a turkey. Individuals and businesses interested in supporting this worthwhile cause, whether through food or funds, may contribute directly on Tuesday or Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at VCFB. Checks may also be mailed to Vernonia Cares Food Bank, PO Box 126, Vernonia, OR 97064. Receipts for your tax deductible donation will be sent upon request. Any questions may be answered by contacting Sandy Welch at the food bank, 503-429-1414.



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