

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Early Churches, Part One

We frequently receive photographs and other artifacts of early Vernonia life that people discover while going through their family archives. A woman whose parents and older siblings lived in Vernonia in the late 1920s sent Mayor Mitchell a copy of a panoramic photograph that she presumed was taken here between 1927 and 1929. She was curious what event was being celebrated and also asked if we had information about one of her brothers who died in childhood. The mayor forwarded her email and the scanned photo to the museum for our help in identification.

Panorama photographs were taken by professional photographers of major events, scenery or large operations such as the Oregon American Lumber Mill. We have several such photos at Vernonia Pioneer Museum, but this was one we hadn't seen before. It was taken of a large crowd of people in their Sunday clothes standing before a large, white building. The patron presumed it was a school, but we recognized it as the Vernonia Christian Church. A quick review of the *Vernonia Eagle* (digitized version) had many articles from the late 1920s that discussed the growth of that church from twenty people in the early 1920s to 175 members by 1926. They met first at the first Washington School then at the old high school on A Street and other sites until they were able to build their own sanctuary.

Begun in 1926, by early spring 1928 the new church was ready. Over 400 attended the first Easter service in the new building, and the formal dedication ceremony was held on May 20th. Based on the age of the vehicles and the clothing of the congregation, we assume this panorama was taken at the dedication. The newspaper reported that over 200 people attended. As with several of the houses in the photograph, the home shown on the left side has long been gone; the Christian Church Youth and Family Center stands in its place. The house on the right, however, remains on the northeast corner of North and Washington, directly across from the Vernonia Grange.

That church's rapid growth paralleled Vernonia's own as the

population swelled from 350 in 1922 to 2,500 by 1928 with the opening of the mill and the other businesses that quickly followed. Several other churches were established during that same time period, and we will discuss those in next month's article.

The search of *The Eagle* also netted the brief article about the death of the patron's brother, LeRoy, aged three, from an operation for appendicitis. In those days before antibiotics or easy travel to Portland area hospitals, we can only surmise that by the time he had his operation, his appendix had ruptured and he perished from peritonitis. It could also have been due to other complications from the surgery.

Segregation in Vernonia

The civil rights marches and the changes in our national consciousness fifty years ago at last ended official segregation in the southern states. We also must recall that our own community in the 1920s was racially segregated. The owners of the mill came from the Deep South and maintained that part of their culture. The housing built for mill workers had separate areas on the western end of the mill site called the "Filipino Colony," "Negro Colony" and "Hindu Bunkhouse." While workers of those groups were paid equal wages, they - especially the African-Americans - were expected to remain separate from the white population in town. Domestic workers had to enter homes through back doors, and they were all expected to step off the sidewalk when a white person approached.

The "Negro Colony" had its own Baptist Church at the southern end of its lane, and at first they were not allowed to attend the public schools. In 1928, thanks to work by Portland members of the NAACP, the school was desegregated. If blacks chose to worship at the Evangelical United Brethren church (now Grace Family Fellowship), they were expected to sit in the balcony. This was also true at the Joy Theater. The mill closure due to the Great Depression caused families of all ethnicities to move elsewhere, and most of the remaining black workers left during World War II for employment in the Portland shipyards.

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. March was the month for shearing sheep and bobbing the lambs' tails along with the regular chores.

Wednesday, March 17, 1915: Just fooled around all day. Coffee & Tea man was here in afternoon. Rained considerable all day. Was up to Ericksons for a little while in afternoon.

Thursday, March 18, 1915: Butchered a hog first thing in morning. Cut the lambs tails off in afternoon. Bright and fine all day.

Sunday, March 21, 1915: Went up to Pittsburg and took the hide off of a sheep that died. Just fooled around balance of the day. Bright and dandy all day.

Wednesday, March 24, 1915: Went over to Elliott place, got a load of hay and hauled down to Tobin. Got back 2 P.M. Went up to Pittsburg in afternoon to see about the sheep. Cloudy part of the day but pretty nice.

Thursday, March 25, 1915: Took a load of hay from the Elliott place down to Tobin. Got back home 1:30. Went up to Pittsburg in afternoon and got a tank to dip the sheep in. Bright and dandy most all day.

Friday, March 26, 1915: Thomas McMullen came up and sheared the sheep. I dipped them and they certainly were covered with ticks. Finished about 2:30. Pretty cold most all day.

Monday, March 29, 1915:

Plowed in lower end of field and finished 10 A.M. C.W. Loughery came about 11 A.M. Finished two hardwood doubletrees in afternoon. Rained a little 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. We now have a page on the Vernonia Hands on Art website, www.vernoniahansonart.org If you are a Facebook user, check out the Vernonia Pioneer Museum page. 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.

Vernonia Men's Golf Club

Wednesday play has started for the season. Join now while dues are only \$45. You will be able to establish a USGA handicap. Play with a fun group of guys; different games every Wednesday. Skill levels run the gamut. Fun and helping each other is the goal.

SAVE THE DATE Make Vernonia Shine Day Saturday, April 25th

9 to noon

Register at City Hall, 1001 Bridge St.

Transfer station will be open this day.

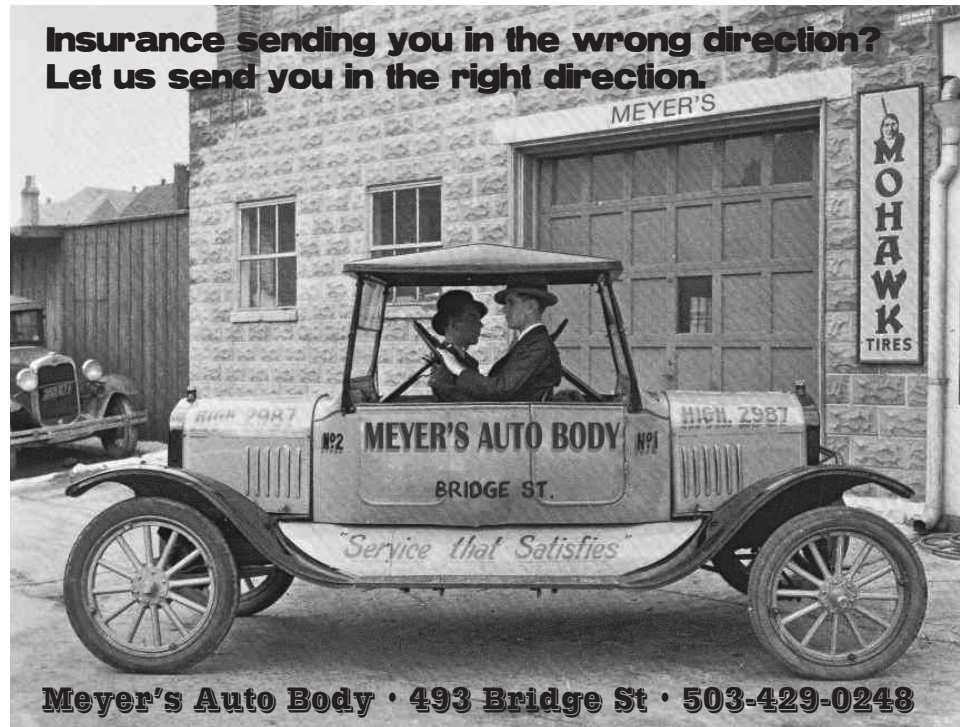
There will be HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION this day as well.

For more information: Donna Webb 503-429-5201 or donnatwebb@gmail.com

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