

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Early Churches, Part Two

While last month's article focused on the growth and construction of the Vernonia Christian Church, the first church in Vernonia was established in 1876, just two years after the Parkers and Van Blaricoms arrived as the first settlers. During those first two years the families met in homes for prayer meetings, but when C. N. Plowman, a United Brethren Church minister, arrived and homesteaded here, he began to hold regular services in the Vernonia area.

Due to problems in the United Brethren Church's parent organization, Mr. Plowman attended the 1887 conference of the Evangelical Church where he successfully persuaded that church to establish a mission here. Their first church was begun in 1890 with \$10 initial pledges from members of the congregation. The Evangelical Church, parsonage and stable for the worshippers' horses was built with donated labor on what is now Jefferson Street. It served as Vernonia's only church until the 1920s. The Keasey and Malmsten families were among those active in that congregation.

With the surge in the town's population due to the opening of the Oregon American Lumber Mill in the early 1920s, the church outgrew its first home and built a new sanctuary on State Street. In May 1924, members marched from the old church to the new in a big procession. The original church was converted to the Cherry Tree Apartments. In the 1950s, the national organization of the Evangelical Church merged with the United Brethren Church, and the church on State became the Evangelical United Brethren. Although the name has changed several times since then, the 1924 building is now home to Grace Family Fellowship.

Others who came during the big in-migration of the 1920s brought other denominations to town. Some groups met in homes while others rented space from the Grange, American Legion, the high school, and commercial buildings until their own churches were built.

Although there had been members of the faith in Vernonia since 1904, the Latter Day Saints officially organized in 1926 and met in members' homes for several years. In 1944 the

church purchased a house on Rose Avenue due to wartime restrictions on new church construction and continued to meet there for over twenty years before their present center was built.

The Seventh-day Adventists built their church in 1936, the same year the church was officially organized. Prior to that, homes of members were used for their Saturday services.

The Assembly of God was organized in 1936 and worshipped in the Grange Hall and later a commercial building until their sanctuary on Jefferson and Maple was built in 1942.

The Vernonia Bible Church was organized in 1951, meeting first in the American Legion Hall and later in a commercial building until their church on Adams was completed in 1953. They later sold that building which is now a private home and moved to the former Oddfellows Lodge on Grant and North Street where the church remains as the Nehalem Valley Bible Church.

Begun as a mission of the St. Helens Catholic Church, St. Mary's built its first church in 1923 at 2nd Avenue and Bridge on Corey Hill; Mr. Corey donated the land for that purpose. By 1929, the parish had grown and a new, larger church was planned. The decline in city population during the Great Depression and other factors kept St. Mary's in the Bridge Street location for fifty years. In 1962, they made an offer to the City of Vernonia for the former Oregon-American (and later International Paper) headquarters building but the offer was declined. By 1963, that building was leased to the Columbia County Historical Society for a museum, now known as the Vernonia Pioneer Museum.

The St. Mary's parish was able to acquire five unplatted acres on O-A Hill from the city in 1963. By 1970, the parish began its annual Quilt Fair that generated funds for the new building.

They also published a cookbook as another fundraiser. Their persistence was rewarded with the present day St. Mary's Church on Missouri Avenue. The original St. Mary's is now a private home.

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. Spring planting and his duties as local game warden feature prominently in these century-old entries. Automobiles were still a novelty, and we don't know how his wife traveled to Portland from Vernonia or how the wool was shipped. There was no train service until 1922 so we presume the majority of travel was still horse-powered. The weather was typical of April's changeability.

Tuesday, April 6, 1915: Sheared 5 sheep hides and sacked the wool in forenoon. Shipped the wool out to Portland in afternoon. Cloudy most all day but did not rain very much.

Saturday, April 10, 1915: Clod mashed the piece in lower end of field in forenoon. Went over to Elliott place and put in some garden in afternoon. Very good most all day, rained a very little late in evening. Dance at Natal Grange Hall.

Sunday, April 11, 1915: Was up the river about 2 miles all forenoon looking after some fishers. Cloudy all day and rained a little at different times all day.

Friday, April 16, 1915: Over looking after the cattle and sheep in forenoon. Took Inez up to Vernonia in afternoon so she could go to Portland. Got

back 3.45 P.M. Awful warm all day.

Tuesday, April 20, 1915: Disc harrowed the piece back of orchard also potato ground in forenoon. Cut seed potatoes in afternoon. Wind blew and it was awful cold all day. County Court of Washington County here in an automobile.

Thursday, April 22, 1915: Planted a few early potatoes and some garden in forenoon. Went up to Pittsburg for a little while in afternoon. Not very warm any of the day. Man here in auto from Lents in forenoon.

Sunday, April 25, 1915: Went up the river about 2 miles and some fellows just about ran a deer over me. Did not make any arrests. Bought a fishing rod from a fellow and fished a little while in afternoon. Started out 8:30 and got home 3:30 P.M. Very hot 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's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Our next issue will be out May 7th.

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 info: Donna Webb 503-429-5201 or donnatwebb@gmail.com



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