

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

The Pebble Creek Dairy

Millie Thacker Graves, VHS Class of 1953, grew up in Vernonia and is historian for her and her husband's (Selwyn Graves, VHS 1947) family. She recently shared an article she wrote about her father-in-law's dairy and gave us permission to excerpt it for our column.

Oliver Graves and several other family members came to Vernonia from Sumrall, Mississippi, in the mid-1920s. They all found jobs in the construction of the Oregon-American Lumber Mill, although one brother-in-law, Sidney Ratcliff, soon moved into the printing business and worked for newspapers including the *Vernonia Eagle*.

Because of the housing shortage caused by the rapid increase in population due to the new mill, Oliver converted a chicken house into living quarters near the Nehalem River on what is now Lone Pine Road. He sent for his wife and young daughter, Florieda, to join him. In the late 1920s, he built a house for the family on O-A Hill. The inside of the house burned in the early 1930s so he gutted and rebuilt it. A short time after that, he bought and remodeled the Omar Spencer home which was close to the other house. The combined homestead was known as the Spencer Farm.

In the early 1930s, Oliver built a large chicken house behind his O-A Hill home and began raising and selling chickens, five thousand at a time. Like many other families, the Graves had a cow for their own milk needs. Oliver reasoned that a few more would not be that much extra work, so he bought five cows and began to sell the surplus milk. He soon built his own pasteurizing plant behind the house. This was the start of the Pebble Creek Dairy, named for the ninety acre farm on Pebble Creek Road he subsequently acquired from Ed Malmsten in 1935. He continued to manage both farms, expanding the dairy herd on the Malmsten place to twenty-four cows.

Oliver established a milk route for home delivery using a pickup truck to make deliveries to Vernonia homes and the surrounding area. Customers included the cookhouse and residents at Camp Eight, four miles east of Pittsburg; the Sunset Highway construction camp in Manning; and O-A's Camp McGregor. The Camp McGregor delivery was a two-part process: Oliver took the large milk cans to Keasey where they were put on the speeder, a small motorized rail car, and Darrell Devaney took them out to the camp. When the road to Camp McGregor improved, deliveries were made by truck.

At first Oliver made all the deliveries himself, but later he used other drivers, especially relatives. Younger family members made bottle deliveries. His son, Selwyn, remembers one hot summer day when he and his uncle, Ernest, were driving a load of five and ten gallon cans to Camp McGregor. Ernest accidentally maneuvered the truck into a ditch, spilling the contents of the cans inside the truck. The milk swooshed

forward, backward and all over the inside of the truck and its occupants. By the time they returned home, the milk had soured and smelled awful. Even though Selwyn continued to milk the dairy's thirty-two cows, he never drank milk again.

Selwyn also recalls the day the panel truck broke down and couldn't be repaired quickly enough to make deliveries. Oliver spoke with Jewett Bush who ran the town mortuary and arranged to use the hearse as a delivery wagon until the truck was back in service. We don't know what the customers thought of the unorthodox milk van, but we presume they were glad to receive their orders on time.

The Graves family operated the dairy until 1946 when they sold it to Al and Marie Stager. The Stagers kept the name, Pebble Creek Dairy, despite the fact that they lived on the road to the airport off of Timber Route.

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. In May 1910, Virgil, still a single young man, went by steamship from St. Helens to Portland where he bought a new buggy for \$78.50.

Saturday, May 21, 1910: Bummed around town all morning. Came down to St. Helens at 2:30 P.M. on the Iralda. Got to St. H. at 5:15 P.M. Went out to the skating rink in the evening and certainly had a dandy time. Met several St. H. girls also saw Bertha. Went to the dance at Houlton after the skating. Got to bed about 2 A.M. Very hot all day.

Sunday, May 22, 1910: Left St. H. about 9 A.M. Came over in my new buggy. George came over with me. Got over here at 1:30 P.M. Did not do much of anything in the afternoon. Very hot all day.

Monday, May 23, 1910: Started up Rock Creek about 10 A.M. George went up with me. We went up about 6 miles. Came back to Vernonia about 2:30 P.M. Fooled around Vernonia all afternoon. Took somebody for a buggy ride after supper. Went up to the second bridge above Vernonia. Got back to Vernonia at 12 and home at 1 A.M. Very hot all day.
Tuesday, May 24, 1910: Did not get up till pretty late.

Poured down rain terrible hard till noon. George and I went up and stayed over night with Jack Ray. Had a dandy time. Did not rain very much in the afternoon.
Thursday, May 26, 1910: George and I went down to Mist in the buggy. Started down at 10:45 and got to Mist at 12:25. Was around Mist till about 3 P.M. Had a dandy talk with Grady. Got back home at 5:30. Rained pretty hard in the morning but fine in the afternoon.
Saturday, May 28, 1910: Was around the house most all day. Started down to Mist after Grady at 4:30. Got to Mist at 6:30, left Mist at 6:40 and got to Vernonia at 9:10. Danced till about 4 A.M. It was a fine dance. Rained a little in the evening.
Sunday, May 29, 1910: The dance broke up at 4 A.M. Went over to the hotel and bummed around till about 7 A.M. Then hitched up and started for Mist. Turned the buggy over down by Natal and certainly had a great time. Got to Mist about 10:30. Got back home at 1:15. Went to bed for 2 or 3 hours in the afternoon. Awful hot in the afternoon.

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.vernoniahandsnart.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.

School Celebrates LEED Platinum

continued from front page

heating and cooling; heating from local biomass fuel; local materials and labor; and wetland education features. Overall, annual energy efficiencies will result in long-term operational savings for the school district.

"This represents what I have always called the rural definition of sustainability—where the local economy, natural resources and community's own identity all work together to push a community toward its future,"

said Commissioner Hyde. "Our LEED Platinum and Green Globes designations means that this building will continue to give back to our kids and the community and the state."

"We have rebuilt, redesigned and reinvented our school and our community over the past eight years," said School Superintendent Miller. "This building and our programs will serve our kids and our community for decades to come."



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