

# The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

## Early Schools, Part Two

Before the larger, central schools, one and occasionally multi-room schoolhouses served the children of the small communities that sprung up throughout the Upper Nehalem Valley. With the large families of those days, it didn't take many homesteads to warrant a school. Parents built the simple structures of logs or split cedar boards, long cedar boards were turned into the first school benches and desktops. Like the homes in those times, there was no inside plumbing and most locations had separate boys' and girls' outhouses.

Teachers were not just instructors in reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, geography, and penmanship, they were also required to build the daily fire in the woodstove that provided the only heat. Sweeping, dusting, washing windows, and any required maintenance were also part of the job. Teachers often served multiple one room schools for three to five month school "years" and boarded with families of the students due to the poor roads and distance to the larger towns.

Students walked or rode horses to school. Each brought his or her own lunch, often packed in an empty lard pail. Older students helped the younger ones with their lessons, and in some schools the older boys could earn fifty cents for helping the teacher with schoolhouse clean-up. A few schools offered some ninth grade classes, but after Washington School in Vernonia added two classrooms for high school students in 1915, all high school education was held there.

Tucker School on Rock Creek (now Keasey) Road was built in the 1880s on the Tucker homestead near present day Edens Road and Cedar Ridge Camp & Conference Center. One of the teachers there was Mrs. Cornelius Hatfield, wife of the town's doctor, who commuted to her job on horseback. Four miles past Tucker was Rock Creek School, east of the Keasey homestead, Homewood. The logging camp and railroad switching yard at Keasey town even further out Rock Creek also had its own school.

The Wilson School on Wilson Cutoff Road near Timber Route was built in 1889; an even earlier school known as the Harding House preceded it. Pleasant Hill School, built in 1908, succeeded Wilson School. Located on Timber Road near the present golf course, it was home to the Vernonia Grange for several years after the smaller schools consolidated into town in the late 1930s. Kist School served the families who lived in that community near Clear Creek; it was converted to a private home that still stands. One older map also references a separate Clear Creek School but the museum has no documentation for it. Pebble Creek Road, southeast of Vernonia, was home to at least two schools: McDonald and Rogers Schools, the latter sited on the Rogers homestead.

North of Vernonia on what is now Highway 47, Pringle School stood on that family's homestead near present day Stoney Point Road's eastern end. The settlements in Pittsburg, Natal, The Burn (northwest of Natal), Mist (originally known as Riverside,) and Birkenfeld all had their own schools. Among the eighth grade graduates in 1921 were members of the Enneberg and Kauppi families. The Mathews children were also students there. The late Walter Mathews became known as a logger poet. The teacher, Florence Melis, was a graduate of Mist School and Oregon Normal School, the teacher's college in Monmouth that became Western Oregon University. Normal schools provided a two year program to train teachers, and many Upper Nehalem Valley educators received their degrees from the Monmouth institution.

Logging camps provided school rooms – often in railroad boxcars - for the children of resident workers. Such classrooms were used at Clark and Wilson Camp 8, four miles east of Pittsburg, and at Koster Camp, six miles down the rail line south of Vernonia near present day McDonald Road. An earlier school in Braunsport, also in this area, was located near the home of Mrs. Anna Braun. In 1920 another Braun School was built. There were about fifteen pupils at the time from the Braun, Schmidlin, McDonald, Holt and Seidelman families. Drinking water first came in a bucket from Beaver Creek, served with a shared dipper. Later, a stone jar with a spigot and personally owned folding cups replaced the water pail. The structure is now in private ownership and was moved to its present location on Highway 47 – Nehalem Highway South. Camp McGregor and Camp Olson, large logging camps in the Coast Range on Oregon American Lumber Company's timberland offered schoolrooms for the resident youth.

Schools at Vesper and Fishhawk served the children of those communities. The Vesper School was a two story building with its own residence known as a "teacherage." The first Mist School, sited where today's Mist gymnasium building stands, burned down shortly after the construction of the present four room Mist School that was built in 1918. Birkenfeld School was built in 1922

with classes for elementary and secondary students. The high school was later named Winema High School and was part of the Vernonia School District. By 1941, the high school students began attending Vernonia High. The elementary school continued until 1959 when the students moved to Mist. The Birkenfeld building is still in use as a community church.

Many schools came and went as the population fluctuated and ultimately declined with the end of the big timber and lumber mills. Road improvements, busing and school consolidation rendered the remote schoolhouses obsolete with the exception of Mist School. Part of the Vernonia School District, it serves the Mist/Birkenfeld community's children from kindergarten through fifth grade. Once students enter sixth grade, buses bring them to Vernonia. Parents in and near Vernonia who favor the small school, blended grades atmosphere may apply to have their children bused there on a space-available basis.

## 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 our Powell entries for July 1906, he refers to a Wilkinson School House, but we have not found any other references to a school by this name. Summer was the season for camp meetings, evangelistic gatherings held in a tent or outdoors and often lasting several days. Those attending often camped on the site. The "wheels" mentioned may have been bicycles as automobiles were still great curiosities in 1906.

*Saturday, August 18, 1906: Finished binding and shocking wheat at noon. Hauled in 4 loads in afternoon. Went up to camp meeting in evening for first time. The Natal boys rode their wheels up. Got back about 11:30. Sunday, August 19: Went up to Vernonia and stayed all day and took in night meeting of camp meeting. Ora and Miss Alderson went out to St. Helens. Big crowd came up from Natal and took in afternoon session.*

*Had a great time coming home. Messing rode his wheels down.*

*Monday, August 20: Messing left here about 10 then cut, bound and shocked the little piece of acots. Sent postal cards to I.D. A.P. L.P. H.P.*

*Tuesday, August 21: Finished hauling the wheat and oats at 12. Went down to Rays in afternoon and took hay rake back. Cloudy and looks very much like rain in evening.*

*Wednesday, August 22: Went up to Parkers and Newt put the dogs out. Ray Mills was down there on one stand.*

*Did not get the deer while I was there. Think it must of went into East Fork.*

*Thursday, August 23: Went down to Mist and over on the Burn also part way to Deep Creek. Stopped coming back at (Natal) Grange Hall where they were digging a well. Very warm all day. I got home at 4:15.*

*Friday, August 24: Sawed a little wood in morning. In afternoon went down to Cooks catching chickens that Throope let get away. Went down after supper and was catching chickens and Lamack came along and we went up to Vernonia to camp meeting. Got home at 9.*

*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.vernoniahanson-art.org](http://www.vernoniahanson-art.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.*

**True Value**  
START RIGHT. START HERE. SM

**Summer  
is here!**

**Green Mountain Grills & Pellets in stock!**



**Water Toys • Lawn Chairs  
Camping Supplies • Coolers  
Batteries • Sporting Goods**

*Family owned & operated for over 45 years*  
834 Bridge St., Vernonia (503) 429-6364

**Terry's  
Gym**



**JOIN  
THE TEAM!**

503-901-1705  
16720 Noakes Rd. Vernonia

Vernonia's Voice  
is published twice each month on  
the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Look for  
our next issue September 1.