

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Christmas in Vernonia

Christmas may have been a simpler holiday in the early days of Vernonia, but celebrations of various types were still to be found. Dances and community suppers were the traditional way people came together for various holidays, and Christmas was no exception. In later years, Christmas festivities grew with the population. Christmas pageants with music and short plays were performed at each of the consolidated schools (Mist, Lincoln and Washington), and the various churches had special services and music. In the 1970s, the annual Christmas cantata featured singers from the various churches. Improved roads meant more people could travel to relatives' homes or host out of town family members for the holidays so the programs were held before Christmas Day.

According to a December 1978 *Vernonia Freedom* article, the first Community Christmas Festival was held at the American Legion Hall on Adams Street the second weekend in December. Similar to our current Christmas Bazaar and the Spirit of Christmas events, the community festival featured booths and tables staffed by local businesses and organizations. Handicrafts, art and baked goods were offered for sale with music performed throughout the Friday and Saturday event. The highlight that first year was a talent show on Friday night. Sponsored by the Vernonia Recreation Council, the purpose of the event was to draw the community together for an enjoyable time while raising funds for various organizations. The proceeds were to go to the Community Center then operating in the Legion Hall.

By February 1979, the Community Center had become the Community Schools Activity Committee (CSAC). CSAC continued to offer the adult education classes started by the Community Center but not the Christmas Festival. That same year, the first annual Christmas in Vernonia Bazaar was organized by two former shopkeepers, Louise Hamnett and Jo Hall. They had handled consignment items made by local craftspeople while in business and wanted to continue to provide an outlet to showcase that talent. Held the first weekend in December at the Odd Fellows Hall on Grant and North (now the Nehalem Valley Bible Church), the two day bazaar established the ongoing tradition that only handmade items could be sold.

Musical performances by various choral groups occurred throughout the day, and the Odd Fellows' auxiliary, the Rebekahs, provided food and beverages for sale. Although the organizers and venue have long since changed, the Christmas in the Country Bazaar and

more recently the Spirit of Christmas event continue to start the holiday season with an enjoyable social and shopping experience.

This month we've included a larger selection of entries from Virgil Powell's diary of 1906 to give a glimpse into how a young man spent his time during the season.

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. Here are a few entries from December 1906; like November, it was cold and rainy. He certainly kept the post office busy with the getting and sending of postal cards. Christmas Day for Virgil meant a community dance at the Natal Grange.

Thursday, December 6, 1906: Threshed wheat with the flail most all day. Got 2 postal cards. Sent postal cards to Alice, Ada and Ena. This makes 21 postals to Ada.

Saturday, December 8: Went down to the lower school hunting. Killed two pheasants and one quail. Rained awful hard all afternoon and snowed for about 5 minutes. Wrote to Dickson Postal Card Co. Went up to Vernonia about 6 P.M. to a basket social, amount took in \$43. Had a pretty good time. Got home next morning at 4 A.M. Mailed postals in Vernonia to A. and A.

Sunday, December 9: Did not get up until 10 A.M. and did not do much but set in the house the rest of the day. Wrote to Lameck & Rob and fixed some postal to send to Portland to Alice and A. Rained most all day and very cold.

Monday, December 10: Did not do much work because it rained so hard. The wind blew awful hard in the evening. Patentionally (sic) waiting for Christmas to come.

Friday, December 14: Went down and traded my 22 special to Emil for his bicycle and outfit. Got back home at 1:30 P.M. Very cold all day.

Saturday, December 15: Carried the mail down to Mist. Got to Mist about 10:45 A. M. Grange Day at Natal, had a feast on pie at the Hall when I came up. Got to the Hall at 1:15. Rained awful hard all day. Sent a postal card to Alice; the one from Portland came that day also. Got home at 3:30.

Monday, December 17: Went down to Mist to Mr. Wright's funeral. Got down there about 11 A.M. Started home at 4 P.M. Seen the Natal Grangers coming up and agreed to haul the Vernonia music down for them Xmas. Got home at 6:30. Pretty good day but cloudy. Carl went over to Armstrongs to stay.

Thursday, December 20: Went up to Vernonia to Mr. Emmons funeral. Got some postals and mailed to Alice and Ada. Also sent the postal to Ada of Elmer and I. Rained awful hard all day and the river is up very high. Have rode horseback 2220 miles in 1906.

Sunday, December 23: Went down to Natal about 11 A.M. to the shooting match at got home at 5:15. Pretty good in the afternoon but rained quite hard in the morning.

Monday, December 24: Fixed things to go to Vernonia after the musicians. Pretty good day, did not rain any. Got a Christmas present from Myrtle. Also got 6 postal cards, one leather from A.F. mailed at Clatskanie. Tomorrow night there will be something doing at Natal Hall.

Tuesday, December 25: Went up to Vernonia the first thing in the morning after the musicians. Started from Vernonia for Natal at 12:30 P.M. Arrived at the Grange Hall at 4:30. Rained quite

hard all day. Sent postal to Alice and also got one from her. Had a pretty good time.

Wednesday, December 26: Left the Hall at 3 A.M. and got home at 6 A.M. Slept until 9. Went up to the Post Office and got the mail. Very bright all day. Mailed a postal to Alice. This makes 29 that I have sent her.

Thursday, December 27: Went up to N. J. Parkers and did not get home until 2 P.M. Very bright all day. Got a postal from Claus. Counted how many times that I have been to Mist this year. Total 88.

Sunday, December 30: Went up to the Post Office the first thing in the morning and mailed some letters. Started to go down to church at Natal and got down as far as Dave Kays and heard the preacher did not come so came back home. Snowed all the way coming and the ground was white when I got home.

Monday, December 31: Started for Natal at 2:30 P.M. and got Alice and went up to the dance at Vernonia. Got to Vernonia at 8:30. Had a dandy time, there were 32 numbers sold. Pretty fair day. Snowed just a little in the evening.

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. 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.



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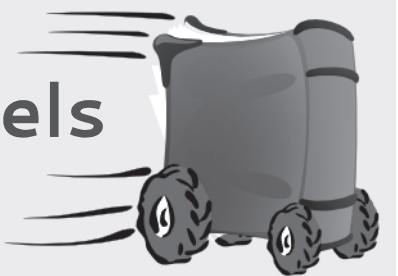
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