

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Trains and Boys

Some readers may know Bob New, Vernonia High School Class of 1947. For many years he has sent email reminiscences about his childhood in Vernonia to a long list of current and former Vernonians. Sadly, he's had to discontinue the wide distribution due to new restrictions from his email service provider. He recently sent the Vernonia Pioneer Museum a disc with many of these stories and gave us permission to share them in *Vernonia's Voice*.

Bob's family lived right by the railroad tracks that ran to the Oregon-American Lumber Mill. The railroad right-of-way that goes from the mill to Banks is now the Banks-Vernonia State Trail, but back in the days when the mill was active, that railroad and the freight it carried was a lifeline for the town and the O-A Mill. The train depot was located about where the City Library stands today, and a feed store and fuel storage occupied the block where the Vernonia Health Center is now located. The track to Keasey ran on what is now Weed Avenue. Here's one of Bob's childhood memories of the daily cargo run:

"About 3:30 or so every weekday afternoon you could hear the SP&S engine blow the whistle to cross a road alongside Highway 47, on the south side of Vernonia. That was my signal to run to the depot, two blocks away, to watch the train arrive at the Vernonia Depot. I always did that and became friendly with the train crew. Usually, they did not go up the main line toward Keasey except to the railroad turnaround about a mile up the tracks. Occasionally, however, they would have a delivery to Keasey. A few times the SP&S crew I became friendly with would let me ride in the caboose up to Keasey. That was great fun for a little boy, and I really felt special when I got to do this. The crew was always the same people: Mr. Scruggs, Conductor; Bo and Perry, brakemen; and the engineer and fireman whom I did not know by name.

"The SP&S would haul in a bunch of empty cars. They'd put them on one of the two sidings adjacent to the track that went to the O-A Mill,

alongside the house where I lived. Those empty cars were where I played each day. SP&S would deliver a loaded car, if they had orders, to the depot, feed store, or one of the three oil company storage facilities alongside the track. I think those were Shell, 76 and Chevron. Sometimes new cars would be delivered by train to one of the three local dealerships. By the time the train crew had their empties, their full cars and their orders all set up, it would be after 5 p.m., and the O-A mill would have shut down for the night. The train crew would deliver empties to O-A and then hook onto the loaded boxcars inside the mill. They had a scale there, and they'd push those loaded cars onto the scale, one by one, and they'd be weighed. This took until about 9 or 10 p.m. My brother-in-law, Ralph Aldrich Jr., was the O-A head grader and also railcar weighmaster. The loaded railcars would be hauled out of the mill and put onto a siding off the main line, adjacent to the depot and Vernonia Feed Store.

"The train crew would spend the night in Vernonia, either at HyVan (today's Ride Inn) or McDonald Hotels as they were closer to the railroad tracks than the Ovesen Hotels (located on the north side of Bridge Street just east of Rock Creek between Grant and State.) Gene Goodman, a local lad, was hired to look after the engine during the night and make sure steam was up for the next day's run to Portland. In the morning the SP&S crew would gather from their hotels and head out to Portland with the load of cars from the O-A Mill. Occasionally there would be a load of shingles or pulp or slab wood from other logging or mill operations to go with the SP&S out to the world from Vernonia."

In the course of its time in operation from 1924 to 1958, the O-A Mill shipped two billion board feet of lumber by rail from Vernonia.

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. January 1907 was exceptionally cold and snowy. From the entries, it sounds like the Nehalem River was frozen hard enough to

support a heavy sled with occupants and presumably a horse or two.

Sunday, January 13, 1907: Went down to Natal Grange Hall about 11:30 A.M. to church. There were not much of a crowd there. Seen everybody down that way. About 3 inches of snow on and several were out sleigh riding. Got home at 4:15 just about froze.

Monday, January 14: Sawed wood the first thing in the morning and then hauled it up. Hauled 2 loads of hay down the road in the afternoon. Very cold all day. About 3 inches of snow on. Done a very large day's work. Wrote for 20 more valentines.

Tuesday, January 15: Went up where the surveyors were working the first thing in the morning. Very cold all day. Sent post card leather one to Alice. Also got postal from Alice. The mail did not leave Pittsburg until 10 A.M.

Wednesday, January 16: Made my iron runner snow sled. Got it done about 4 P.M. Then a crowd of us started down the river in it at 7. Got down to N.D. Petersons at 8:30 P.M. Started home at 11:30. Pretty cold all night. Had a dandy time.

Thursday, January 17: Did not do much work because it was so cold. Minnie Peterson went out to Portland. The surveyors are locating one mile above Pittsburg. Went up to Pittsburg after the mail. Got post card from Nellie.

Friday, January 18: Went down to Mist with Carl and Claus in the sled. About 4 inches of snow on. Got to Mist at 12. Started back after the mail came about 2:30. Broke the tongue out of the sled coming along by the Grange Hall and we had a sweet time coming home. Got home at 6

P.M.

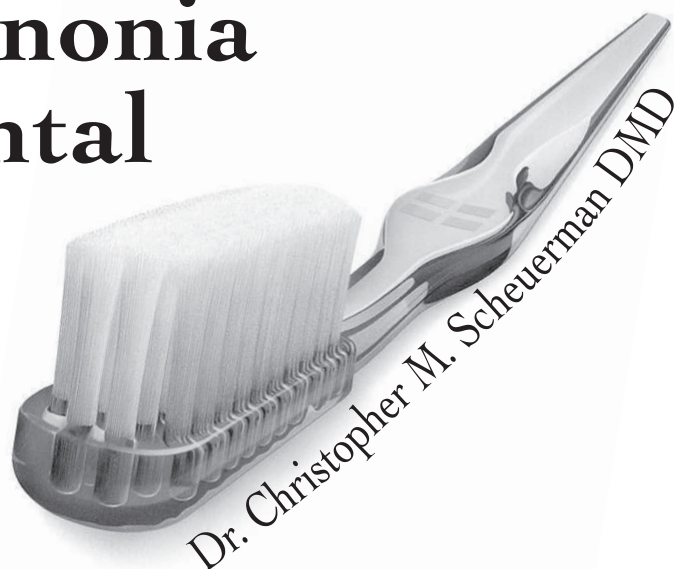
Saturday, January 19: Went down to Natal Grange about 11:30 A.M. and got to the Hall about 12:45. Danced a little before meeting. Grange closed at 4:15 and I came up and stopped with Emil and went to the party at Ruddimans that night. Staid until 2 A.M. Had a good time. About 2 inches of snow on. Sent 2 postals to Alice also got one from her.

Sunday, January 20: Left Emil's at 11 A.M. and got home at 11:45. Pretty good day and the snow is thawing fast. Emil came up in the evening and we went up and spent the evening with the surveyors. Rained pretty hard in the evening. Got home at 9:45.

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. Look for our next issue February 2.

Vernonia Dental



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