

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Vernonia Dairies

In our May 2015 column we shared the story of Pebble Creek Dairy, established in the mid-1930s, by Oliver Graves. Dairying in the Upper Nehalem was an occupation for many, and most farms had at least a few cows to supply the family and provide income from the excess production. Because dairies so often changed hands as people moved away and sold their farms, it is challenging to try to identify them all. We've gleaned a few tidbits from memoirs and old newspaper articles, and the museum has an accounting ledger from a local creamery - more about that below.

For some families, their only cash income was from the cream they sold to larger creameries for butter production. Unlike milk, pure cream, a saturated and lactose-free fat, could be shipped longer distances without refrigeration. In Dora Marlin's memoir of life on her parents' farm on Deer Creek and Little Deer Creek near Natal, she recounts her young life on the dairy farm. One of her chores as a child was to chop up root vegetables the family grew and feed them to the cows along with their hay each morning. The enriched diet increased the butterfat content of the milk which resulted in a higher return for their efforts. Excess milk was fed to the pigs and other farm animals. They sold their high quality cream to the now-defunct Raven Creamery in Northeast Portland located on Union Avenue, now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. There was also a commercial creamery in Clatskanie about which we have no information, but the building still stands just outside the main part of town on the road to Quincy.

Separating the cream from the milk was accomplished by the gravity method. Fresh milk was poured into pans and the cream skimmed from the top. Later, mechanical cream separators used centrifugal force to complete the task. It reduced the amount of time the cream was mixed in with milk and thus lessened the chance it would sour. In either case, the cream was put into cans to be picked up by or delivered to local creameries. Empty pans and separators

had to be carefully cleaned each day, a task that often fell to the children.

The ledger mentioned above is presumed to be from the Nehalem Valley Creamery in Mist based on the supplier/customer names. It shows how a creamery kept track of receipts and payments. With one page per supplying farmer, the daily delivery of milk was recorded in pounds and percent of butterfat content. Payments were made based on the going rate for the product less a percentage for the creamery's cost of hauling, often one to two cents per pound of milk. The creamery issued monthly payment checks for the prior month's net total. Some took the finished butter as part of their payments.

With better roads and refrigerated trucks in the 1940s and beyond, more milk from local farms went to the Portland area for processing into pasteurized milk, butter and cheese. In the late 1940s through the early 1960s, the Bush family owned and operated the Nehalem Dairy. From their location near the railroad on Rose Avenue where West Oregon Electric stands today, the Bushes distributed milk, pop and beer to Timber and Vernonia.

In 1948 Henry Anderegg, who had worked for his cousin's Portland area dairy, Meadowland, for fourteen years, saw an ad for a dairy farm in Vernonia. Son of a dairyman and of Swiss heritage, Henry grew up in the business. He and his wife, Isabel, purchased the farm that was four miles out on Mist Drive. The herd consisted of eight cows. They first wholesaled their milk and built up their herd. He also worked for the Nehalem Dairy as a route driver. In 1952 he bought the Pebble Creek Dairy from Albert and Marie Stager who had acquired the dairy from Oliver Graves in 1946. Henry thus became an owner, producer and distributor - a very time consuming job.

By 1956, Henry and Isabel decided to focus on milk distribution, sold their cows and began buying processed and bottled milk. Later that year, they bought the Nehalem Dairy from the Bush family and renamed it Vernonia Milk Farms. The volume of local business had outgrown his existing processing plant, and enlarging it would be prohibitively expensive due to the new

demand for half gallon containers for which they were not equipped. Instead, he sent the raw milk from local farms by refrigerated truck to Meadowland Dairy for processing and packaging. He delivered milk to 150 homes daily on two routes, alternating days, and daily to local businesses until the early 1970s when he sold the business to Bob and Judy Bates. In addition to the milk business, the Andereggs were very active in community activities until their move to Forest Grove in the 1980s.

There have been many other dairies in the Upper Nehalem over the years with a few small operations still in business, but the family cow and home-delivered milk are now mostly fond memories of times gone by.

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 February 1907, his entries focused on Valentine's Day and a new cream separator.

Tuesday, February 12, 1907: Carried the mail to Mist. Mailed 125 post cards. Had more postals than I ever mailed before. Had my picture taken when I was coming up. Sent Valentine postal to Alice and also got a postal from Alice. Very bright all day. Got my Valentine postals in the evening.

Wednesday, February 13: Put some new runners on the sled the first thing in the morning. Trimmed up some of the apple trees in the afternoon. Very bright all day. Addressed 10 Valentine postals to Alice.

Thursday, February 14: Carried the mail to Mist. Had a pretty heavy mail. Sent several Valentine postals to Alice. Very bright all day. Brought my bicycle up as far as Ray's mail box. Had a pretty hard time with Lad when I went to put the wheel on him. Went up to Vernonia to a dance. Not a very large crowd there but had

a dandy time.

Friday, February 15: Got home from the Vernonia dance at 8 A.M. Only slept one hour during the day. Was too sleepy to do much work so bummed around all day. Very hot all day. Fixed up the bicycle a little in the afternoon.

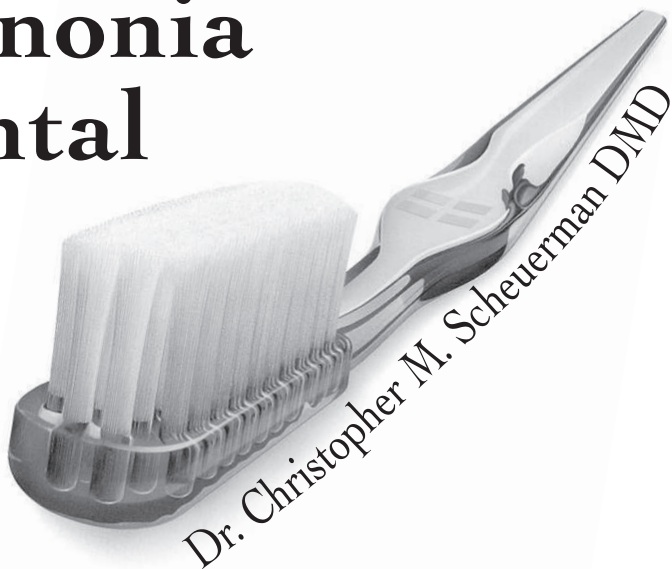
Saturday, February 16: Carried the mail to Mist. Grange day at Natal. Pretty bright all day. Got a beautiful picture button. Got home at 4 P.M. Got the new Tubular Separator. Got a Valentine postal from Minnie. Alice got back home from Portland.

Sunday, February 17: Did not do much of anything. Worked a little on the new separator. Bright and fine day. Went up to Pittsburg in the evening and mailed several postal cards.

Monday, February 18: Hauled posts for the river fence. Went up to Pittsburg and brought fanning mill down. Mr. Elliott came over after dinner and we set the separator up. Pretty good day but cloudy. Sprinkled a little in the evening. Albert Parker came down in the evening to get me to carry the mail for another week.

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.

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