

Diggin' in the Dirt: Columbia County 100 Years Ago

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Scappoose Bay Watershed Council's Native Plant Sale Saturday, April 15

Join the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council (SBWC) at their Spring Native Plant Sale Saturday, April 15, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. This is their semi-annual event to get you ready for spring and summer planting. They have lots of new plants at great prices - all native to our area. Staff and volunteers are available to help choose plants, suggest gardening ideas, and provide information on establishing and maintaining native vegetation. For more information see <http://www.scappoosebay-wc.org/native-plant-nursery/>.

The Plant Sale is from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm at the SBWC nursery, located behind Scappoose High School. Look for signs - go east on SE High School Way and turn into the parking lot between the high school and the school ball field areas.

Extension in Columbia County began 100 years ago

Mr. D.C. Howard was appointed as first Columbia County Extension Agent by Oregon Agricultural College

(OAC, now OSU) and started work on March 3, 1917. The logging boom was on (virgin timber stands went from 350,000 acres in 1895 to 50,000 by 1935) and salmon were an abundant resource to be caught and processed. Most people made their living directly or indirectly from one of those two industries.

Farming at that time was mostly subsistence with dairy and beef cattle providing significant cash income. There were lush grasslands along the river that were grazed after winter and spring floods receded and some less profitable grazing on the stump lands in the hills and coast range valleys. A number of small dairy processors produced milk products for local consumption and for Portland.

Grain, fruit, and vegetable crops were grown on the non-flooding upland "benches" along the Columbia. You can see where those were by where the railroad is. Everything from Scappoose to Clatskanie on the up-side of the river didn't normally flood.

D.C. Howard (he always signed his reports with his initials so I don't know his first or middle name) began organizing meetings in the 22 (!) separate communities he identified. He found that there were about 1,000 farms. More than half were subsistence at best with the owners making money in timber and/or fishing. Of the remaining 500, about 20% farmed less than 10 acres of tillable land, another 20% had less than 20 acres of land, and the remaining 60% had 20-160 acres.

Howard and his farm committees came up with the following sets of projects for advancing agriculture in Columbia County:

- Land clearing demonstrations
- Demonstration of the value of lime and various fertilizers on crops in the different areas
- Cooperative buying of feed and seed
- Organize potato growers for marketing

- Land drainage by diking along the Columbia and tile draining on other pieces of low ground
- Livestock improvement through milk cow testing clubs and bringing in purebred dairy sires and cows
- Silo construction and management
- Rodent control (moles, despite the fact that they aren't rodents, and ground



A farmer in his alfalfa field near St. Helens

squirrels).

Diking projects along the Columbia River were the highest priority. The Deer Island District was the furthest along in organization and had a detailed plan developed by the Department of Drainage and Irrigation at OAC that would have cost owners within the District \$40/acre to dike and drain the land.

But a month after Howard was hired, the United States entered World War I. All federal help (money, equipment, planning, etc.) evaporated along with the labor force to do the work, which went into the army or into defense related industries. All drainage projects were put on hold except for drawing up detailed plans for when the war was over.

High feed costs and high meat prices led to the slaughter of low performing cattle and the improvement of herds with better genetics. County Agent Howard assisted in the selection of 12 dairy sires, 32 registered dairy cows, and 35 registered hogs. Seed orders were pooled through the Extension office saving farmers \$1,100. He communicated through farm visits, office calls, meetings, newspaper articles and 1,200 letters. D.C. Howard resigned in October, 1919 to manage Ed Cary's Jersey dairy. He was succeeded by Thomas Flippin Jr. in December, 1919.

Why lady beetles fly away

Lady beetles spend the winter in rock cavities in the mountains. They are collected when they emerge in the spring. The lady beetles are then cooled and sent to garden centers.

However, in nature, when the lady beetle emerges, it has a certain amount of fat. Its instinct is to fly until the fat is largely used up. Then it looks for some aphids to eat. So when you open up the package, they are still fat and they will still fly away. In addition, there is some concern that collecting for sale may be affecting the native lady beetle population. Buying ladybeetles really doesn't make much sense. Best advice is to avoid the widespread use of insecticides and to plant a diverse botanical landscape. The lady beetles will show up.

Take excess produce to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. Cash donations to buy food are also greatly appreciated.

The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.

Free newsletter

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called Country Living) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed to you. Call (503) 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can sign up for email notification of when to find the latest edition on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>.

Contact information for the Extension office

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Vernonia Veterinary Clinic

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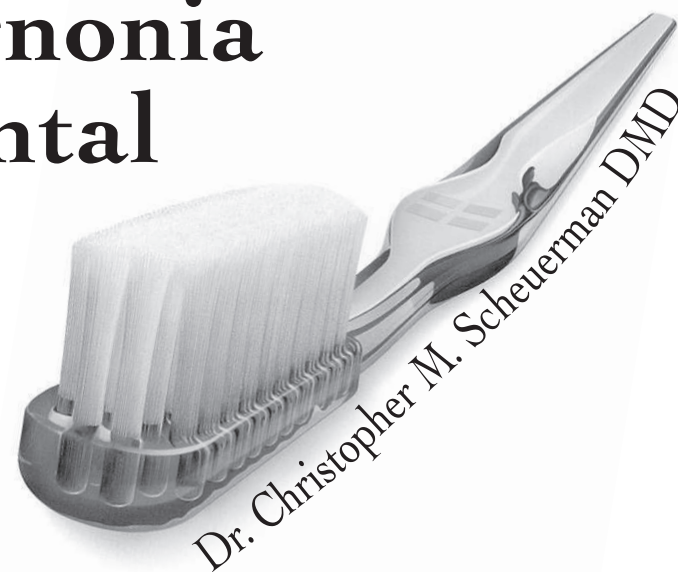
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Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday.
Look for our next issue out April 6.

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