

# The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

## Who Was Here First?

Clark Parker came to the Upper Nehalem Valley to trap beaver in 1873. He went back home to East Portland with 600 pelts, a disturbing number to our modern sensibilities but a way of supporting his family in those days. While Parker was not the first non-native to pass through exploring or trapping, all known records show that he was the first to bring a family and establish a home on the east side of the Nehalem (Mist Drive and Heather Park area) in 1874. A few months later, the extended Van Blaricom family that included Sheeleys and Bakers settled in what is now "downtown" Vernonia along Rock Creek and both sides of the Nehalem near the confluence. As a result of their location, the Van Blaricoms claim to be the first true Vernonians.

According to the history of the Nehalem Valley written by Veldon Parker and edited by Ruby Condit for the 1937 Memolog, the Adams and Tucker families soon came, the Tuckers moving from further down the valley in order to have neighbors. Albert Parker, the first settlers' child to be born in the valley and the seventh of the Parkers' children, arrived in 1875. By 1876, Judson Weed, Ozias Cherrington, Israel Spencer, Edgar Brand, Charles Plowman, William Wood, John Kerr, and John Pringle were part of the community. Several were young bachelors at the time, but others brought families. When John Van Blaricom, Jr., and Julia Etta Parker wed in 1878, it joined the two "first families" and was Vernonia's first wedding. Thirty-nine ballots were cast in the first local election in 1878; at the time, only men could vote so one can see that the population had increased substantially in those four short years.

All of the history noted above is fairly well documented in family histories and records from that time, so imagine our surprise when Bill Weed, a descendant of two Vernonia pioneer families, the Van Blaricoms and the Weeds, recently found an old Sunday *Oregonian* newspaper article, written in 1922, about a man who claimed to be the real first settler. Bill is an amateur historian who researches his family heritage and

shares the results with other members of his family and with the museum. The August 6<sup>th</sup> *Oregonian* article was about the exploding growth of Vernonia due to the coming of the mill and railroad with predictions that the town would grow to 10,000. It should be noted that the maximum population during the 1920s reached about 2,500, and it's never been larger.

The *Oregonian* article stated that "the first man, who more than 40 years ago settled in that section of Columbia County where now is arising a new Vernonia, did so by virtue of the fact that one of his oxen died and left him stranded. This is the story that N.H. (Shorty) Entler, engineer in charge of the works of the Hill interests (*Note: the Hill family owned the railway*), who are building a railroad into the heart of the Nehalem timber district, would have the casual visitor absorb and believe."

Surprised at this new information, Bill researched BLM online land records and found no records of him in Columbia or any other Oregon county. Survey crews from the Oregon and Central Railway came through parts of the Upper Nehalem in the early 1870s for a potential route to Astoria that was never built, but no evidence of any of them settling in the valley is known. The 1922 article concluded that the railroad executives "are glad that the ox of which Shorty Entler talks died where he did and caused the original settler in the Vernonia district to remain." The stories from the Parker and Van Blaricom families of the narrow trail into the valley that required thirteen crossings of Pebble Creek and room only for single file trekking cast further doubt on a claim that a team of oxen (at least two abreast) could have made it that far before the first road was built in 1876.

Vernonia Pioneer Museum board secretary, Barbara Larsen, figuratively did a bit more digging using Findagrave.com. Norman Entler's parents lived in Yamhill County, having moved there circa 1904 from Virginia according to the obituary of his father, Daniel T. Entler and youngest brother, William. They died in March 1912, frozen to death while hunting on their timber claim eighteen miles east of their home. Norman was born in Virginia in the ear-

ly 1880s, several years after Vernonia was settled. Census records from 1910 through 1940 list him as a civil engineer for various railroad companies and living in Portland. His father's obituary states that Norman was working for the Hill family in Southern Oregon in 1912.

As Bill and we collectively concluded, it appears that the reporter heard a tall tale that gave him a good human interest perspective on the Vernonia article but although skeptical of the story did no fact-checking.

## From Virgil Powell's Diary

Virgil Powell (1887-1963) was a longtime 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. June of 1907 entries show that he "worked on the road" most days except when the rain was too heavy, Sundays and when he was feeling "bum." We wish we knew which road or section of road this was, but we presume it was the road between Pittsburg and Vernonia.

*Sunday, June 16, 1907: Went up to Vernonia and played ball with Natal. Score 11 to 1 in favor of Natal. Cloudy but pretty good day. Got home about 6 P.M. and then went back up to Vernonia to the Chivelrie (Note: Perhaps he meant "shivaree") at Mills. Camped on way coming back and did not get home till 4:30 A.M.*

*Monday, June 17: Did not get up till pretty late. Sawed some wood in the morning and hauled wood and went down to the Haselett place and brought up a load of bark in the afternoon. Wrote several postals. Received a leather postal from the East.*

*Tuesday, June 18: Worked on the road all day. Awful hot all day. Sent several postals.*

*Wednesday, June 19: Went up Rock Creek with Mr. Carlson and cruised S.W. ¼ Sec 24-5-5.*

*Got up there at 9:30 A.M. and got back home at 2 P.M. Pretty hot all day.*

*Thursday, June 20: Worked on the road. Cloudy and pretty cool most all day. Planning for next Saturday at Grange at Vernonia.*

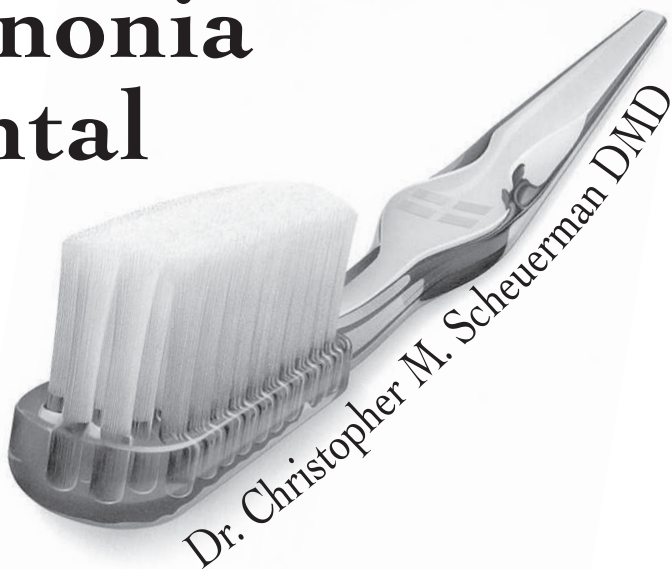
*Friday, June 21: Cloudy and not very warm any of the day. Shoveled hard all day and you bet I am good and tired.*

*Saturday, June 22: Worked on the road all day. Came home in the evening and Alice was here so we went up to Grange at Vernonia. Got up there about 9:15 P.M. and got back home at 2 A.M. Had a dandy time. Pretty cool all day.*

*Sunday, June 23: Was home till 11 A.M. then went down horseback with Alice and I went on down and we played Mist a game of ball. Score 18 to 19 in favor of Mist. Pretty warm all day. Had a dandy time going down. Wm. Deeds and sister came up and spent the day.*

*The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at 511 E. 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](http://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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