

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

The Detricks of Pittsburg

In the winter of 1877-78, three farmers from Crete, Nebraska, settled near the mouth of the East Fork of the Nehalem River. Peter Brouse (spelled Brous in some histories), Joe Kenkle and Isaiah Detrick and their families established "squatters rights" on their lands until the official government survey was conducted a year or two later. Brouse was the first postmaster for the new community that he named Pittsburgh in hopes that it would become a big industrial city like the one in Pennsylvania. That city may also have been his birthplace according to one source. The Post Office dropped the "h" in 1892.

Brouse and Detrick had plans to establish a saw and planing mill as well as a buhr-stone grist mill. They first built a twenty foot dam across the East Fork to create water power for their mills. Along with other settlers, they built a market road to connect Pittsburg to Yankton. Their partnership was dissolved some eighteen months later. Brouse established a sash and door business at the mill that became one of the two largest in the Pacific Northwest at the time. Detrick stayed in the area, logged timber for the mill and perhaps worked at the lumber and grist mill following the dissolution of the Brouse partnership.

When Brouse found a location on the Cowlitz River with better transportation and left the area in 1888, he took the sash and door equipment with him. He sold the remaining mill enterprises to a newly-formed organization, the Pittsburg Milling Company, with partners W.D. Case, E.O. Darling, S.N. Cross, and Isaiah Detrick. Case ran the planer and grist mill, and Detrick logged and did the hauling to St. Helens with his oxen, two or three yokes (4-6 oxen). Detrick also ran the overall operations.

In a history of the Nehalem pioneers in a Columbia County Historical publication of 1963-64, Isaiah's son, Lloyd, recalled the time as a teenager that he was a temporary driver for the mill. It took three days with two yoke of oxen to make the round trip to St. Helens. The nights were spent in the hills, and Lloyd slept under the wagon to feel safe from cougars. When set-

tlers down the river purchased lumber, he and his father constructed a raft and brought it downstream to the military road crossing above Mishawaka (near Elsie) in Clatsop County. They returned to Pittsburg by the old military road up the Salmonberry River and crossed to the headwaters of Rock Creek.

Cash was scarce in those early days so mill goods were often purchased with farm products or labor. According to mill records, among the local men who worked there were members of Virgil Powell's family and one or more of the Keasey brothers. Customers included the Keasey family and other early settlers such as Van Blaricoms, Spencers, and Pringles.

Lloyd Detrick and his sister, Bertha, along with their mother, temporarily moved to University Park in Portland so that they could get an education beyond the eighth grade. Omar Spencer, son of pioneer Israel Spencer, was a student at University of Portland, at that same time. He had completed his teacher training in Clatskanie and convinced Mrs. Detrick to move near the university so that he could board with her and her two children.

Returning to Pittsburg, Lloyd resumed his work at the mill. For a brief time, he and Isaiah were officers of the Weekly Sentinel, a newspaper that was published in the late 1890s, a successor to the Nehalem Journal (1889-94). In 1905, Lloyd married Rosa Parson in Portland, Oregon. His sister, Bertha, married Carroll "Cad" Keasey in 1898. She was misidentified as Lloyd's daughter in our column last month.

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. The school mentioned in his entries below was likely the Pittsburg School that was located on the bluff above the Nehalem downriver from where the East Fork joins the main river. The later entries in the month show that he was working on the Pittsburg Road, constructed by the first settlers some twenty years earlier and then still the closest link to Yankton and St. Helens.

Tuesday, October 15, 1907:

Hauled wood for the school also hauled manure most all day. Bright all day. Sent a postal to Alice. Gladys came.

Wednesday, October 16: Sawed wood for the school till noon. Fixed the saw in the afternoon. Hitched up the buggy about 3 P.M. and took Gladys down as far as Petersons for a ride. Saw Alice, Minnie and had a fine talk. Got back home at 5:30.

Thursday, October 17: Filed the saw and cleaned out the well in the morning. Bright and fine day. The roads are just about as good as they are in the good old summer time.

Friday, October 18: Sawed wood for the school all day. Pretty hot all day.

Saturday, October 19: Went down to Natal Grange. Started at 8:15. Stopped at Petersons a little while going down. Went down in the buggy. Not very many at Grange. Cloudy all day. Grange was out at 3:30 and I came up to Petersons and stayed overnight. Had a fine time.

Sunday, October 20: Was at Petersons till 12. Alice, Minnie and I went down the road for a buggy ride about 10:30. Had a dandy time. Got back to Peterson about 11:30 and then I came on up and got home at 1

P.M. Took some pictures in the afternoon, one of house, one of bluff. Washed the buggy.

Tuesday, October 29: Commenced to work on the St. Helens road. Commenced at Pittsburg and got out about 1 1/2 miles. Rained a little but pretty fair day.

Wednesday, October 30: Worked on the road all day and got about 2 miles out. Cloudy but pretty good day for working. Sent a letter and postal out by Yankton to Alice. Got a package of postals in the evening. Saw a deer out on the road as I was coming home.

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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