

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Flood Memories

Ten years ago this month, Vernonia experienced its second "500 year flood" in eleven years. With the experience gained from the flood of 1996, citizens and community leaders rallied to help save lives and start the long recovery as soon as the waters receded. Residents who lived here during either or both of those events have many personal stories to tell of the courage, dedication and hard, muddy work that helped the community recover.

The topography of the Upper Nehalem Valley produces an ideal situation for flooding when sufficient rain or rapidly melting snow suddenly increases the river's volume. The Nehalem rises in the Coast Range east of Timber and nearly doubles its size as it passes through Vernonia and receives the waters of Rock Creek which also begins in the same mountains. From its source, the river makes a wide circle almost 120 miles long before emptying into the Pacific at Nehalem Bay. With the hilly terrain through which both streams pass, there are few places for excess water to go but up.

Floods have affected this part of the valley for millennia, but they have only been documented since the area was settled in the 1870s. Pioneer diaries mention the need to replace foot-bridges, loss of hay stores in outbuildings, stranded or drowned farm animals, and having boats tied at the ready to front porch posts. At the Vernonia Museum, we have an upright from a doorjamb that was in the basement of a house on Grant and A Streets. On it are marked the flood heights from eight previous events: February 1949, December 1955, January 1964, January 1972 (two floods within two weeks), January 1974, and February 1996. The second 1972 flood was said to be worse than one in 1937 for which

we have no information. The December 2007 water reached higher than the top of that six foot cellar door.

Stories and pictures in the Vernonia Eagle newspaper are remarkably similar to those of the more recent floods: all roads into the area were submerged; there were landslides on the roads between Vernonia and Mist, Timber, and Scappoose; the flats near the confluence of Rock Creek and the Nehalem flooded bringing damage to the former schools and school district office, and the former restaurant at Bridge and Washington; and homes on the east side of the Nehalem along Mist Drive in the area previously known as Riverview were flooded.

Last spring the Vernonia Library hosted a community conversation on the 2007 flood and asked participants to share the lighter side of this event with a focus on lessons learned and the good works of individuals. Our resident poet, Kala Cota, was unable to attend but sent a poem she had written entitled "Christmas in Our Neck of the Woods," based on "The Night Before Christmas." With her permission we share a few stanzas:

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the town
Everyone was praying the floodwaters would go down
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care
Thank goodness Santa was coming by air.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds
While the news helicopters flew over head
And ma in her raincoat and me in my ball cap
Had just jumped in the dingy to take one more lap.
Sand bags were flying as they were placed in tight stacks
Everyone looked like St. Nick carrying his pack.
The sump pumps were in tune, a nice cheery sound
And though things looked bleak, there was nary a frown.

They all worked together, even laughter was heard
They'd been through this before and they had all learned
Someone will be there in your hour of need,
The sun will come up and the water will recede.

We headed back home in our trusty yellow boat
Down past the goal posts and we took note
The floodwaters may rise, but they can't dampen our spirits
The wind may blow and at time we might fear it.

But in our little town, when the sun finally comes up
We'll hop in our trucks with a full coffee cup
Go check on our neighbors and see how they did fare
And find that Santa, once again, made it this year.

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. Although December 2017 has been very dry, one hundred years ago the rains were heavy in November and December.

Friday, December 14, 1917:
Went around by Pittsburg and got the mail first thing in the morning. Hauled some planks up the hill and fixed the barn in afternoon. Rained some all day. Foot bridge washed around.

Saturday, December 15: Went up to Vernonia 9:30 A.M. with Art in wagon and returned 3:30 P.M. Took beans up and thrashed them. Fanned. Rained considerable all day.

Sunday, December 16: Went over and up Boales Creek after salmon. Also up to Boales place. Got home 3 P.M. Rained pretty hard all day and the river up pretty high.

Monday, December 17:
Thrashed oats part of day. Rained awful hard all day. Received my check from Lumbermans Engineering Co. \$32.50.

Wednesday, December 19: Went over in the sled and got the beans

and fanning mill. Rained considerable all day.

Thursday, December 20: Pulled and hauled in turnips all day and got most of them in. Very good day.

Friday, December 21: Went down to Oak Ranch after the cattle 7:15 A.M. and returned 12:30 but did not get them. Rained pretty hard all day.

Saturday, December 22: Went up to Pittsburg and put in a gate in covered bridge. Very good most of 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.vernonia-handsonart.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.

Columbia County Awarded Grant *continued from page 6*

Auxier, Dickerson, and Evans already have a vision for how the new position will be used. Beginning in January, the prosecutor and PO will work together to identify defendants who truly have the potential to succeed on probation. Then, when the defendants are identified, the sheriff's deputy will focus his or her patrol efforts on these particular offenders to make sure they are following the rules.

"This collaboration supports the use of evidence-based probation practices by increasing the effectiveness of supervision, targeting criminogenic risks through treatment, and providing swift and certain consequences for violations. These practices have been found to increase public safety, reduce recidivism and improve offender outcomes," said Evans.

The grant award means that the DA, the Sheriff, and the probation department have \$1,114,337 additional dollars to spend on personnel at no expense to the Columbia County budget. Since the Criminal Justice Commission requires that a certain amount of their grant funds go to county victim services agencies, the remaining \$120,000 will go to the Amani Center and Safe of Columbia County.

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