

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Vernonia Veterans' Organizations

Many of Vernonia's first settlers were veterans of the American Civil War (1861-65). They had served in the Union Army in units from their home states such as Ohio and New York. Coming west, some took advantage of the special homestead provisions for veterans of that conflict. Vernonia had a chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, the G.A.R., a fraternal organization founded in Illinois in 1866 for those who had fought for the Union cause. Israel Spencer and Judson Weed were two notable members.

The G.A.R. was among the first organized advocacy groups and supported voting rights for black veterans, promoted patriotic education, helped make Memorial Day (originally known as Decoration Day) a national holiday, and lobbied the U.S. Congress to establish regular veterans' pensions. From a peak membership of nearly half a million in 1890, the organization ended with the death of the last Civil War veteran in 1956. In Vernonia, the G.A.R. members led parades on patriotic holidays such as Decoration Day and the Fourth of July.

Armistice Day, November 11, was established in 1919 following World War I (then known as The Great War) in recognition of the formal end of that conflict on November 11, 1918, with the signing of the armistice between the Allies and Germany. Congress made it an official annual event in 1926, and it became a national holiday in 1938. The name was changed to Veterans' Day in 1954 by President Eisenhower to recognize veterans of both World Wars and now includes veterans – living and dead – of all U.S. armed services. Memorial Day is the official national remembrance of those killed in action, first just for Civil War veterans but later those who died in other conflicts.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars, the VFW, resulted from several societies formed immediately following the Spanish-American War of 1898. Veterans returning from campaigns in Cuba and the Philippines formed local groups to share their experiences with those who had also "been there." In 1913, they merged their interests into a national organization now known as the VFW. Their purpose was to help the nation's disabled

and needy veterans, assist veterans' widows and orphans and the dependents of needy or disabled veterans, promote education in patriotism, and by constructive service to local communities.

Vernonia had a VFW chapter and built a hall in the early 1940s on Bridge Street across from what is now Spencer Park. When the local VFW post closed (we presume in the early 1960s), the building was used by the Community Action Team for a few years and later sold to the Vernonia Senior Citizens to become its Senior Center and Thrift Store. It was demolished in 2013 due to FEMA requirements following the Flood of 2007. The VFW was active in the community and held twice monthly business meetings, had a bowling team, sponsored dances, and jointly planned and led Memorial Day services along with the American Legion. The VFW also had a basketball team that played a regular season of games against the VHS Loggers and other organizations' teams in the late 1940s. Former VHS players such as Ralph Sturdevant played on the VFW team.

The American Legion is a U.S. war veterans organization founded on March 15, 1919, at the American Club in Paris, France, by members of the American Expeditionary Forces who had served in World War I. It was officially chartered later that year by the U.S. Congress. The Legion has played a leading role in drafting and passing the GI Bill during World War II as well as organizing commemorative events and providing assistance at VA hospitals and clinics. The organization also lobbies on behalf of veterans and service members.

Vernonia's American Legion Post No. 119 was started in 1924 after a group of World War I veterans were sharing their service stories at Jack Carlin's Tailor Shop. They received the charter in 1925 and by then had seventeen charter and new members. By 1927, it had grown to its record high of 308 members. That same year, they built the hall on Adams Avenue where the post and Vernonia Cares now operate. Over the years, Post No. 119 has performed a variety of services to the community including purchase of an ambulance and inhalator/resuscitator for emergency medical services; hosted dances, picnics and junior and senior gem clubs; built an airfield in Riverview (Mist Drive area);

and many other projects for the good of the community, state, and nation.

If you are a veteran, the local American Legion Post would welcome your participation. Watch for their open house notices.

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. Two major events marked this month for him: his mother moved to Portland and the Pittsburg Post Office closed.

Sunday, November 8, 1908: Started down the river in the buggy at 8:30 and got down to Fishhawk at 11:30. Lameck went down with me. Went clear down to Vesper Church Day at Fishhawk. Got back home at 6 P.M. Fine bright day.

Monday, November 9: Looked after the mail then nailed up boxes till about noon. Picked a few apples in the afternoon. Pretty good day. The roads are fine for this time of the year.

Tuesday, November 10: Looked after the mail then came down and loaded up the things and Ma left for Portland. She got started about 10. I commence my batching today for the first time. Fine bright day.

Wednesday, November 11: Looked after the mail then came home and got breakfast about 10. Picked apples the balance of the day and got a lot picked. Sent postals to Ellen and May Bern. Fine day. Very cold in morning.

Saturday, November 14: Hauled up a load of cedar for kindling also hauled up a log for wood. Started for the dance at Vernonia as soon as the mail went. Got to Vernonia about 5:30. Had a fine time at

the dance. Danced lots with Agnes. Got home at 2:15.

Thursday, November 19: Rained awful hard all day. Was up at the (Pittsburg) dam fishing most all day. Received 4 fine postals from Easy Bruze. Wrote a postal to Ellen Berg.

Saturday, November 24: Went up and looked after the mail then came home and butchered two hogs. Finished them about 2. Pretty fair day.

Saturday, November 28: Done up my things and Dippolck came along and wanted me to go to the dance at Buxton so went. Started at 12:30 and got to Buxton at 6:15. Took in the dance and certainly had a fine time. Danced till about 1 A.M. Very fine day.

Sunday, November 29: Left Buxton about 9:15 and got home at 3. Pretty cold day but had a good trip coming over.

Monday, November 30: Did not do much of anything. Got word in the evening to discontinue the Pittsburg Office today. Received a lot of mail.

The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at 511 E. Bridge Street and is open from 1 - 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.vernoniahandonart.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.

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

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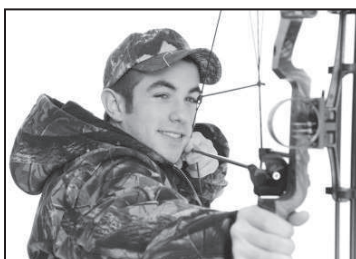
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