

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Vernonia Businesses, Part Two

Restaurants are a valued enterprise even in the smallest of towns. They often serve as hubs of community life and are a vital service to people traveling for business or pleasure. Sadly, we have no documentation of the first Vernonia restaurants in the earliest decades of the city's history, but one can assume that the first hotel in the early 1880s likely had meal service for its guests and perhaps also accommodated local residents. The logging camps, of course, had dining halls for the resident loggers and served abundant but simple, hearty fare.

The coming of the big lumber mill and the resulting explosion in population from a few hundred to over 2,000 during the 1920s also saw an accompanying growth in the number of restaurants. During the first year of publication, the *Vernonia Eagle* boasted that the town had six restaurants in addition to its many other new businesses. Ownership of these establishments seemed to change often. Among the named establishments in 1922 to 1923 were the Lunch Box, located at the stage line (bus) depot; the Fountain Lunch that served fountain drinks, ices, candy, and light lunches; the Blue Bird Café; Jolley's Restaurant that advertised short orders and dinners; the Horseshoe Restaurant that touted a homemade pastry case; White's, formerly the Dew Drop Inn; and Betty Jane's. The newspaper article that announced the pastry case addition at the Horseshoe noted that "this will appeal to the housewife who wants something in a hurry when it's too hot or too late in the day to bake."

Due to the huge number of restaurants that have come and gone, we will focus on a few for which we have anecdotes from Vernonians past and present. In the late 1930s, Gladys Dial opened a restaurant, the Squeeze Inn, located where part of the Cedar Side Restaurant is today. There were nine stools in the Squeeze Inn; a sign in the restaurant read "We can serve 1,000 a day, 9 at a time." The Inn was open nearly 24 hours per day most days to accommodate the loggers and mill shift workers. Her daughter, the late Pauline Dial King, worked long hours along with her mother. Pauline, in an interview with the Vernonia Pioneer Museum in 2006, was asked about the menu. She especially remembered her mother's excellent chili. Other menu items included turkey dinners and a ham and eggs breakfast for \$1.95. Coffee was 5 cents a cup. Business was brisk throughout the day with the mill and all the logging camps active. The railroad and logging crews came in early to pick up lunches that were made up for them in the wee hours of the morning. Gladys had a dog named Whizzer who sat outside the Squeeze Inn while she was working. Loggers would buy him ice cream cones and put them in a

nearby flag stand so he could eat them at dog height. Whizzer even got Christmas cards from some of the logging camps.

Oscar Vike worked in the woods as a timber topper and operated the first skidder on the Pacific Coast. In the mid to late 1930s, his wife, Ragenia "Ma" Vike, took in boarders to supplement his income during the Depression years when work in the woods was scarce. In 1942, she reopened the former Terminal Café located at the bus station. It later became the Palace Café. In 1945 she opened another café called Vike's next to what is now Grey Dawn Gallery. From 1947 to 1948, she opened the White House Restaurant in her own home and served steak and chicken dinners. Her last restaurant, Ma Vike's Café, was located next to Hawkins Motors, the large brick building on Bridge Street across from Mike Pihl's office and Spike Table food stand. By 1953, Oscar retired from logging and became Ma's dishwasher at the restaurant. The menu cover featured logging themes and boasted that their milk came from the Nehalem Dairy (on Rose Avenue) and meats and food supplies were purchased from Vernonia groceries. The slogan on the menu front read "If your wife can't cook, keep her for a pet and eat with us." Coffee was a nickel and breakfasts were all a dollar or less as were the burgers and sandwiches. A large T-bone steak was the priciest menu item at \$2.25.

The Pal Shop was a favorite hangout for teenagers in the 1940s and 1950s. Bob New, former resident and spokesman for the Old Timers group, worked there as a high school student in the mid-1940s. He made the twenty-plus flavors of ice cream, waited on customers, grilled hamburgers, and prepared ice cream and fountain items. Because the owner, Aaron Wagner, Pal Shop founder Fred Hatcher's nephew, was volunteering for the U.S. Navy during World War II, Bob also helped Aaron's wife, Marge, with caring for their two children. He made a dollar a day and worked after school hours during the school year and all day in summer. Besides the "Super Creamed Ice Cream" used in the shakes and sundaes and sold hand-packed in pints, quarts, and five gallon containers, the Pal Shop served coffee, sandwiches and soup. The Pal Shop was first located in the current dental office building but later moved next door to the ground floor of the Lusby Building.

Kate's Café was located on the north side of Bridge Street directly across from the US Bank. Kate's was in business in the 1960s and closed in 1972 per the Vernonia High School annual, the Memolog. In one of the restaurant's Jamboree ads, a patron's verse was quoted: "The food is good and nicely served, the coffee is always hot. You can read the news and chat with friends, and friendship means a lot." According to a present-day Vernonian, Kate was also famous for chain smoking and letting the

ash on her cigarettes grow long. Another Vernonian who worked for Kate sometimes noticed a long ash dropping into the pancake batter.

The City Café, used in some scenes in the 1960 filming of *Ring of Fire*, served breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. They featured tacos, pizza, and fountain service in their Jamboree ads and noted their extended hours during that weekend. The City Café was located on the south side of Bridge Street where the laundromat is today. Pat and Darlene Knight established Lew's Place at the site of another restaurant. Later purchased by George and Donna Tice and renamed the Buckhorn Restaurant, the establishments served full meals and had a separate bar that was a popular nighttime gathering place. We're sure that stories about Friday night at Lew's can be coaxed from some of our current residents!

After the *Eagle* newspaper ceased operations, the building in which it was housed transformed to the Eagle Office Restaurant. In later years, Mario Leonetti moved his pizzeria from Bridge Street to this location where it eventually became Mariolino's, a full-service restaurant. There are so many other restaurants that were part of people's lives in Vernonia, it's difficult to cover them all. In recent history, the long standing Spar Tree Restaurant in Pittsburg became the first location for the Blue House Café, and the Pine Cone, later the Country Kitchen, was another popular spot for pizza, breakfasts, burgers, and sandwiches. Located next to the former Senior Center, both buildings were badly damaged by the 2007 flood and had to be demolished. The site is now a parking lot for Spencer Park, site of the former grade, middle, and high school.

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.

Thursday, March 11, 1909: Plowed in the field below the old barn. This is my first day's plowing this year. Got two lands plowed. Very hot all day. D.W. Keasey's store burned at

Vernonia about 9 A.M.

Saturday, March 20: Plowed in the lower end of field and finished about 2 P.M. Started for Vernonia at 3. Rained hard all day. Stayed up for the skating, had a big time kicking the stove over and after while took the stove outside and made up a big fire in it. Got home at 12.

Monday, March 22: Finished up the plowing over in the field that I left last fall. Finished up at 12:15. This is all of my plowing for grain. Hauled the posts and rails that were left from building the road fence in the afternoon. Very warm all day.

Wednesday, March 24: Done some washing in the forenoon. Started up to N. J. Parkers about 12. We all walked up to the skating at Vernonia in the evening. Came back down and stayed at Newt's over night. Pretty warm day.

Thursday, March 25: Walter and I left Parkers about 7 A.M. and came down here. Went on up to the Cook slashing to go bear hunting, but the dogs got after some deer and ran two into the river. I got some shots at them but did not get either one. Very warm day.

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.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.

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