

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

City Lights

The start of construction of the Oregon-American Lumber Mill in 1922 also marked the beginning of a rapid change in Vernonia's infrastructure. Up to that point, the city did not have generally available electric power, a sewer system, or city water. Homes and many businesses were lit by kerosene lamps, and wells or rooftop water tanks provided the water. Outhouses served as the toilet facilities, and household garbage was sometimes just piled up in the woods or tossed into Rock Creek or the Nehalem if the house was close by. As noted in last month's column, some businesses like the hotels, stores, and restaurants had their own light plants that used gas-driven generators to produce electric power that was stored in an array of batteries. Telephone service was brought in much earlier and will be discussed in a future column that will update one we published several years ago.

Based on city records from the early 1920s, the rapid expansion of the population exacerbated the existing challenge of sewage and garbage disposal, street lighting, running water, and unpaved streets that were dust in summer and axle-deep mud in winter. In September 1922, the Vernonia City Council granted a franchise to George Burdick to build and operate a power plant to provide electricity to the city from a dam on Rock Creek above the town of Keasey. This included the right to install the necessary poles and wires to connect customers to the source of power. Burdick was an electrical engineering graduate of McGill University in Canada and had experience in developing power systems. Work soon began on the construction of the dam, and by 1923 there was a limited supply of electrical power for downtown Vernonia businesses. Four 100-watt street lights and electrical signs at both entrances to Vernonia were part of his pledge to the City in exchange for the franchise, Vernonia Light & Power. Shares were sold and the *Vernonia Eagle* trumpeted what a boon to industry this new power plant would be.

Another source of electrical power became available in 1924 with the construction of the lumber mill and its steam-powered electric generation system. Oregon-American (O-A) generated its own electricity for the homes on O-A Hill occupied by mill employees and for the entire mill complex itself. The steam plant was fueled by wood not suitable for lumber. The fuel was stored in a 36 by 100 foot bunker next to the steam plant. This fuel shed (also known as the chip shed) is the one building – besides the mill office which now houses the Vernonia Pioneer Museum – that is still standing, albeit roofless, on the former O-A Mill site. This Vernonia icon is often mistakenly referred to as "the mill," but it was tiny in comparison to the other buildings on the site.

O-A had an agreement with the City's electric utility to provide standby power from 1928 to 1946. The mill provided a substantial share of the City's power during those years as the City's utility was unable to provide sufficient

power from the dam's powerhouse. Vernonia Light & Power went bankrupt in fairly short order and was taken over by Oregon Gas and Electric Company. OG&E served Vernonia, supplemented substantially by the mill's power plant, until 1943 when the mill notified the utility of its intention to cancel the surplus power contract due to increasingly heavy demand on the mill's system. An interesting side note is that during the Depression years when the mill was closed (1933 – 1936), steam locomotive 102 provided the steam power to keep the electric generation system operable as the town now depended on it.

West Oregon Electric Cooperative was formed in 1944 and took over the delivery system which would soon receive its power via transmission lines from outside the Nehalem Valley. See the April and May 2019 Ruralite magazine for Scott Laird's excellent two part series on the history of the 1935 Rural Electrification Act that brought electricity to rural areas and the formation of electric cooperatives including WOEC which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.


Addendum

In last month's column on hotels, the Columbia Hotel that was located where the west half of the R&S parking lot is today was later called the McDonald Hotel. We also found an old city map that showed the Vista Hotel was on what became Madison Avenue and was opposite where the Masonic Temple is sited. Thanks to Robb Wilson for his sleuthing.

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. Note that he mentions several telephone calls from his time in Portland. We think his mother had moved to the city so that was his other home.


Wednesday, May 12, 1909: Drove up to Bacona in the morning and looked at some timber. Came back, phoned for a rig and went to Hillsboro. Took the 6:15 train and came to Portland. Pretty good day. Cool.



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Thursday, May 13: Was around the house in all morning. Went over town and bummed around about all afternoon. Cloudy most all day. Miss Easy Bruze called me up in the evening and talked for an hour or so..

Friday, May 14: Went over town in the morning. Took a car and went out to Will's new home.

Saturday, May 15: Was home all the forenoon. Went over to town about 1 P.M. and stayed till about 4:30. Went back over about 6:30 and stayed till about 10. Had a talk over the phone with Miss Easy Bruze. Rained just a little in the night.

Monday, May 17: Went over town early in the morning. Went up to the office and saw Mr. King. I guess we will go out on a cruising trip tomorrow. Got a suitcase and some other things in the morning. Went over town and got me a compass in the afternoon. Got home about 4:30. Pretty good day.

Tuesday, May 18: Went over town in the morning. Stayed home and talked to Miss Bruze about all afternoon. Very fine day.

Friday, May 21: Was over town most all day. Went up to Council Crest and then out to St. Johns in the afternoon. Pretty 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.

FORM LB-1 NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING

A public meeting of the Vernonia City Council will be held on June 17, 2019 at 7:00 pm at 1001 Bridge St Vernonia, Oregon. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020 as approved by the City of Vernonia Budget Committee. A summary of the budget is presented below. A copy of the budget may be inspected or obtained at 1001 Bridge St Vernonia, Oregon between the hours of 9am and 5pm. This budget is for an annual budget period. This budget was prepared on a basis of accounting this is the same as used the preceding year. If different, the major changes and their effect on the budget are:

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FINANCIAL SUMMARY - RESOURCES			
TOTAL OF ALL FUNDS	Actual Amount 2017-2018	Adopted Budget This Year 2018-2019	Approved Budget Next Year 2019-2020
Beginning Fund Balance/Net Working Capital	2,056,488	1,914,382	2,254,632
Fees, Licenses, Permits, Fines, Assessments & Other Service Charges	2,426,855	2,620,694	2,496,016
Federal, State and all Other Grants, Gifts, Allocations and Donations	211,045	1,919,542	1,861,112
Revenue from Bonds and Other Debt	0	0	0
Interfund Transfers / Internal Service Reimbursements	495,124	294,500	288,507
All Other Resources Except Current Year Property Taxes	54,980	21,500	58,175
Current Year Property Taxes Estimated to be Received	736,883	745,000	807,000
Total Resources	5,981,375	7,515,618	7,765,442

FINANCIAL SUMMARY - REQUIREMENTS BY OBJECT CLASSIFICATION			
	Actual Amount 2017-2018	Adopted Budget This Year 2018-2019	Approved Budget Next Year 2019-2020
Personnel Services	1,132,051	1,386,664	1,419,241
Materials and Services	1,625,190	3,176,288	3,081,540
Capital Outlay	0	0	0
Debt Service	618,562	617,293	818,153
Interfund Transfers	495,124	294,500	288,507
Contingencies	0	704,523	956,365
Special Payments	0	0	0
Unappropriated Ending Balance and Reserved for Future Expenditure	0	1,336,350	1,201,636
Total Requirements	3,870,927	7,515,618	7,765,442

FINANCIAL SUMMARY - REQUIREMENTS AND FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES (FTE) BY ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT OR PROGRAM *			
Name of Organizational Unit or Program	FTE for that unit or program		
General Administrative	531,653	653,844	797,952
FTE	4.0	3.6	3.6
Library	106,018	114,042	120,392
FTE	1.4	1.3	1.5
Police	484,071	626,796	559,830
FTE	4.0	4.8	5.7
Airport	4,830	10,851	17,687
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Cemetery	16,200	17,696	30,730
FTE	2	0.2	0.4
Parks	173,858	188,685	189,270
FTE	1.1	1.4	1.5
Water	475,262	623,394	588,910
FTE	2.6	2.8	2.9
Sewer	397,612	615,448	509,538
FTE	2.0	2.1	2.1
Streets	220,902	188,476	186,037
FTE	5	0.7	0.8
Parks SDC	0	39,631	56,631
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Water SDC	0	172,143	222,061
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Sewer SDC	0	217,468	267,237
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Storm SDC	0	74,866	97,646
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Streets SDC	0	43,741	58,327
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Sewer Rehab	457,619	0	0
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
CDBG Fund	13,836	1,933,482	1,838,413
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Timber Fund	0	5,774	5,774
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Abatement Fund	0	0.0	10,000.0
FTE	0	0.0	0.0
Not Allocated to Organizational Unit or Program		1,336,350.0	2,147,447
FTE			
Total Requirements	2,868,025	6,862,687	7,704,782
Total FTE	16.4		

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN ACTIVITIES and SOURCES OF FINANCING *

PROPERTY TAX LEVIES			
	Rate or Amount Imposed 2017-2018	Rate or Amount Imposed This Year 2018-2019	Rate or Amount Approved Next Year 2019-2020
Permanent Rate Levy (rate limit 5.8163 per \$1,000)	5.8163	5.8163	5.8163
Local Option Levy			
Levy For General Obligation Bonds			

STATEMENT OF INDEBTEDNESS		
	Estimated Debt Outstanding on July 1,	Estimated Debt Authorized, But Not Incurred on July 1
General Obligation Bonds		
Other Bonds	\$6,939,858	\$0
Other Borrowings	\$860,773	\$0
Total	\$7,800,631	\$0