

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

History of Dewey Pool

Summer brings a distinct change in the pace of children's lives, and the transformation of Rock Creek into a creek-fed swimming hole is one of the most charming small town features in Vernonia. With the log replacement on the dam and the improvements made in recent years by the Lions Club, the pool just keeps getting better. We present a short history of this unique but welcome oasis that has been enjoyed by young and old alike for over eighty years.

In May 1936, the Vernonia Chamber of Commerce discussed a potential swimming hole in Rock Creek initiated by a petition from the students of Vernonia High School. According to the *Vernonia Eagle* article on May 29:

"\$400 in costs, of which \$150 will be for material and \$250 for labor, was announced by Lester Sheeley at the Chamber of Commerce meeting in the Masonic Hall Tuesday noon as an estimate for construction of the proposed dam in Rock creek. \$62.50 has been collected by private subscription, he said. A WPA project could be applied for, he maintained.

"The bank will have to be cribbed on the west side to prevent muddying the water, and also there should be bath houses, neither of which items is included in the estimate, he added. In order to protect the bridge from debris in high water the dam will have to be 75 or 80 feet above, he explained, and it will be necessary to blast out a section of the soapstone deep enough to form a diving hole.

"The level of the water can be raised only about four feet because of danger of flooding gardens if the level is any higher," he declared. "A fishway will have to be constructed. Judd Greenman suggested that the state board of health be requested to test the water for typhoid bacteria before the dam is built, so that the swimming pool might not be rendered useless if condemned after being constructed. Mr. Sheeley, as spokesman for the committee, agreed to this."

The General Manager of Miller's Mercantile, L.H. Dewey, championed this project and made the largest cash donation (\$10.00) of all who contributed, totaling the \$62.50 noted above.

The original petition and the business pledges are in the Vernonia Pioneer Museum archives.

Two years later, the pool became a reality with the design scaled back from the initial concept and made a seasonal pool just upstream from the bridge. City taxes were apparently used to complete the project. The May 27, 1938, *Eagle* announced that the pool was now open and named for Mr. Dewey who was also park board chairman. It should be noted that Nehalia Park, now known as Hawkins Park, was the lone city park at that time. It also housed the high school football stadium during the years the first high school was located on A Street between State and Washington. A catwalk across the creek was the students' shortcut to the stadium and the pool from the opposite shore.

The *Eagle* article touted the new pool proudly:

"Needless to say, L.H. Dewey's pet project is getting the largest play of any pleasure or business venture in the entire county. With the dam in this week, and other facilities being constructed as speedily as possible, a natural playground is available for all AT NO COST every suitable day during the late spring, summer and early fall months.

"The Vernonia City Council, the Vernonia Chamber of Commerce and all residents of the community, especially the incorporation taxpayers whose funds made available the current season's improvements, extend a hearty welcome and invitation to the world to swim in Vernonia's front yard. You'll be as welcome as the first warm weather was this week. You'll be as welcome to use Dewey Pool as the pool was welcome to the more than 350 children and adults who used it yesterday."

The wading pool and other improvements were added in later decades with the original lifeguard tower moved back behind the shallow pool once it was in place. The Vernonia Lions Club has been instrumental over the past several years in enhancing and maintaining this valuable community resource. In 2017, they raised the funds to completely reline the wading pool and have made several enhancements to the stairs and seating area. Most recently, a new log replaced the decaying one in the season-

ally placed dam.

The pool has been a favorite summer hangout for children and teens since its inception. Old timers recall the daily swims there throughout the warmer months, and there are a few tales of adults skinny dipping at midnight. Visitors and residents alike are charmed by the quaint swimming hole known as Dewey Pool. Thanks, Les Dewey, and the VHS students of the 1930s! And thanks to the Vernonia Lions Club for keeping it for current and future generations.

From Virgil Powell's Diary

Virgil Powell was a long-time resident who 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. In July 1909, he was busy, as usual, with haying and fire patrol but took berrying and hunting breaks when he could. Note the covered bridge mentioned in one entry used to cross the Nehalem River a couple of miles out Timber Route.

Sunday, July 18, 1909: Left Vernonia at 5 A.M. and went up to Bacona. Got up there for breakfast. Met Will on the road and we looked at the land in Sec. 36. Got through about 1 then I came down to Hotchkiss, fed my horse and got dinner. Left there at 3:45 and got home at 6:20 P.M. Pretty hot day.

Monday, July 19: Went up and finished cutting and raking Peterson's hay. Also shocked some in the evening. Pretty warm day.

Tuesday, July 20: Hauled up some wood the first thing in the morning, then fixed the hay rack on the wagon. Went up to Emmons in the afternoon. Very warm day. Started in at work at fire patrol.

Thursday, July 22: Finished hauling hay about 3 P.M. Then went up and hauled one load for Peterson. Went down to N.D. Petersons after supper horse-back and did not get back till 10. Very warm day.

Friday, July 23: Hauled hay

for Peterson all day. Received my life insurance policy. Also received a postal from Gay E. Awful hot all day.

Saturday, July 24: Finished hauling hay for Peterson at noon. Went up to Spencer in the afternoon to get some papers fixed. Got home about 7. Pretty warm day.

Sunday, July 25: Lameck came up about 10 and I went up with him. We went up as far as the covered bridge above Weeds (note: on Timber Route about a mile west of present golf course) Rained just about all day. Got back home at 6 P.M.


Tuesday, July 27: Went up to Clarks to see about fire in the morning. Did not do much of anything in the afternoon. Rained quite a little.

Wednesday, July 28: Went blackberrying in the morning and did not get back till 1:30. Got about 35 pounds of berries. Took the gun and went over across the river in the afternoon but did not kill anything. Rained a little in the forenoon.

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. 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. You will also find information on the museum on Facebook and the Vernonia Hands on Art web page. The board members 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 them know of your interest.

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

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