

# The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel  
Memories of Vernonia, Part 2

The following is a continuation of a letter from former Vernonian, Charles Comstock, wrote in 2010 to his friend, the late Ralph Keasey, recalling his memories of growing up in Vernonia. He gave the Vernonia Pioneer Museum permission to use as desired, and therefore we share it with the readers of this column.

"At one time, pre-Depression, Keasey was quite an active railroad junction, primarily serving Eastside Logging and Camp McGregor. There was the typical 'cookie cutter' railroad depot with freight storage, a waiting room for passengers during the time of passenger trains to Keasey, a ticket window and telegraph service; also a turntable to reverse the heading of steam locomotives. Water was plentiful, and there were two supply towers sourced from nearby springs. During most of our years at the power plant, the population of Keasey was two or three families, focused near the Post Office at the end of the road.

"During the ten years my family lived at the power plant beyond Keasey, there were many trips along the nine miles of that bumpy gravel road into Vernonia, and we knew many of our neighbors along the way. Family names I recall are these as we drove into town. There were others, but seventy or so years have those memories clogged by cobwebs. Resident Postmistress at Keasey was Bessie Cummings and her daughter, Betty. Later, Zelda Miller Lamping assumed that position when she married Milt Lamping, a worker on the railroad section gang. Heading down the road, there were three generations of the White family. They were beekeepers and produced honey.

"Just across the first bridge there was the Devaney family. Doc Devaney and one of their sons, Darrell, alternated shifts operating the large speeder serving Camp MacGregor. Rather often we would get a ride from Keasey up to the power plant. Beyond was the Lindsay family, and I remember the roses in bloom along the fence and around the entry gate. Across the road and down a bit were the Gillams (?) and across the next bridge on the left were John and Ann Luther and their son Jim. Well known and long remembered for the pork sausage they made and sold several times a year. John Luther fell and was killed while working on the construction of the bridge adjacent to their property.

"Cross the railroad track and on the left were the Reids, large house with a wrap-around porch on two sides. Cross the tracks again and the third bridge and Vic Bergerson, a bachelor as long as I knew him, had a place that set back on the right side of the road. For a couple years, he teased and taunted me that the best way to shell green peas was to put them through the wringer on the washing machine – and I thought he was serious!

"Down the road and up around the bend was the Keasey family home. Seemed there were always about five young folks anxious to board the school bus every morning. My mother was quite friendly with Hilda Keasey. Just

beyond and hidden from view on the right was the McDonald family. He drove the school bus that took us to school. Their son (Jack or Pete?) was killed in a mill accident in the late 1930s. Daughter Ellen was working at the office at the high school in the 1950s when I visited Vernonia.

"Down the hill and around the bend was the Duncan home. He operated the butcher shop in the back of King's Grocery for many years. Their daughter – Elsie, I believe – was always late for the school bus. A couple warning toots on the horn, and she came running out. Why would I ever remember something like that!?! And then there were the Bradys a bit along on the left side. For a couple years, the front entrance and steps were 'under construction' and the kids would come running from the back of the house down to the bus. For some reason, the snow was not as deep in the winter as we came into town on State Avenue. Just a little ride along memory lane.

"And I sorta warned you, I talk and write too much and it's hard to put on the brakes. So, just maybe as a final topic, here are a few names and memories dusted off from the cobwebs of three score and ten years ago from my recall of Vernonia. Reaching back is just one of the joys of getting older.

Ben Brickle – Longtime barber in town. The shop, now closed, still shows the faded spot on the back wall where a picture of Franklin Roosevelt hung for many years and was the frequent topic of conversation while getting a haircut for 50 cents.

King's Grocery – Allowed charge accounts and then put a couple candy bars in the bag when the bill was paid at month end.

Thomas Variety Store – Always busy in early September when kids bought school supplies for about 50 cents.

Bergerson's Feed Store – Kids romping around on feed sacks and bales of grain. Armitage Drug and Nance's Rexall Drugstore – At opposite ends of Bridge Street competing.

Dr. Roland Eby and Dr. R. I. Hall – The two doctors – very different personalities – with offices next door to one another and who cared for the local medical needs.

Thor Gronbeck – An affable Danish man who operated the 'stage' for two roundtrips every day to Portland and back to Vernonia.

Mr. L. H. Dewey – Best known for Dewey Pool, but he was the manager of Miller Mercantile dating back to the time of J.C. Penney's – that name is still in the threshold at the entrance.

Treharne's Gas Station and Garage – On the corner of Bridge St. and State Ave. Pumped gasoline for 11 cents a gallon in the mid-1930s.

The Vernonia Eagle – The local news-

paper published on Fridays with all the local news.

Rev. Livingston and Rev. Sharman – Longtime ministers of the Christian Church on North Street and the Evangelical Church on State Avenue. The competition was brisk for participation.

Wooden stairs to OA Hill – From the base near the end of North or A Street, well-constructed stairs were a popular route up the west side of OA Hill, ending near the water tower. Popular with the kids visiting playmates in one location or the other.

The Joy Theater – And who doesn't have special memories of this landmark in our town? I remember sitting in the front row to see Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1936 and, a year or so later, the musical Alexander's Ragtime Band with Don Ameche and Alice Faye.

"The trail of memories is endless!"

## 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. Among his other entries for November 1909, he documents the formation of a telephone company for the Natal area.

*Saturday, Nov. 6, 1909: Worked fixing up some little things in the morning. Was also after a deer that the dogs ran through the pasture. Started down to the telephone meeting at the Natal Grange Hall at 12. A telephone company was organized. Each member paid in \$20. Pretty good day. Got home after dark 6.30.*

*Tuesday, Nov. 9: Butchered hogs all day. Duggins came down and helped me. We killed 6 and got through at 3 P.M. Rained terrible hard all morning but pretty good in the afternoon.*

*Wednesday, Nov. 10: Loaded the hogs on for Keasey to take out. U.S. Mellinger came down and got 960 pounds of oats. Was working around the house most all day. Pretty fair day.*

*Thursday, Nov. 11: Went to work getting out telephone poles. Got out 12 by 3.30. Mr. Gerber came at 3.30 so did not do anything the balance of the day. Heard from the hogs, they brought 354.80. Very good day.*

*Friday, Nov. 12: Mr. Gerber and I went over and cruised on Sec. 14 and 10. Finished and got home at 3 P.M. Rained pretty hard and I was good and wet when I got home. Willie Pringle and Mart came up and stayed overnight.*

*Saturday, Nov. 13: Mr. Gerber went back to Portland. Went up to Vernonia about 9.30 with Mart. We fooled around up there for a while. Got back home at 3.15, done up the chores and then went on down and stayed overnight with Mart. Awful cold all day.*

*Sunday, Nov. 14: Got home from Rays at 10.30 A.M. Hitched up the team about 1 and went over to Elliotts and got 10 sacks of potatoes. Sold my goats to him. Frozen pretty hard in the morning, but very fine all day.*

*Monday, Nov. 15: Frozen up pretty hard in the morning. Went out and cut 7 telephone poles. Done my washing in the afternoon. Very fine 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, and if you are a Facebook user, check out the Vernonia Pioneer Museum page created by Bill Langmaid. 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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