

# The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

## First Christmas Community Festival

This month we look back just 41 years to see how Vernonians celebrated Christmas in 1978. The December 6, 1978, *Vernonia Freedom* newspaper announced the first annual Christmas Community Festival, a forerunner of our current Christmas in the Country Bazaar. The event was planned for Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> (3 to 10 pm) and Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> (noon to 10 pm) at the American Legion Hall which was then being used as a Community Center. Local organizations and businesses were encouraged to reserve booth and table space to sell handicrafts, fancy work, art, baked goods, refreshments, a flea market, and local products.

Local musical groups such as bands, choruses, and carolers were invited to provide live music to accompany the sale, and a talent show was to be the highlight of the entertainment Friday night. June Wilson (Note: Robb Wilson's mother) chaired the event with the stated purpose of bringing the community together for an enjoyable holiday festival, a fundraising opportunity for local organizations, and a venue for local businesses to display their wares. Proceeds from the festival were to help pay expenses of operating the Community Center.

## Local Family Christmas Celebrations

The late Jenelle Wiggins was a talented photographer and writer for the *Vernonia Freedom*. In late 1978 she wrote a series of articles about how local families celebrated Christmas. The following two stories are reprinted from her articles with approval of local members of the families and Cory Colburn, Jenelle's husband.

## Christmas at Everetts

This Christmas has extra special meaning for Janice Everett. Janice, who is pregnant, eight months and counting, thinks the birth may fall on Christmas day. "What better present could I give to my family for Christmas than a new baby?" she asks. Her family includes husband Gary Everett, three year old son Eli, Grandma Mary Everett, and Janice's younger sister, Michelle.

Just in case the baby is slow to arrive, Janice has been working on Christmas presents. Her gifts are her own creations, with lots of love, thought, and time going into each one. She remembers one Christmas when every gift was hand crocheted. This year she has spent many hours collecting old family photos and arranging them into picture albums.

"Christmas is a time to celebrate our love for each other," Janice explains. "This year our son Eli will get to help put up the tree and wrap presents. I want him to learn to enjoy giving gifts as well as getting them." Three years ago Christmas time, Janice was eagerly awaiting the birth of her first son. When Christmas day came and still no baby, Janice tied a big red ribbon around her middle with a note attached that read: "Merry Christmas Dad, we tried!"

The Everett Christmas tree is as beautiful as it is traditional. All the ornaments are handmade by Janice. The family strings popcorn and cranberries around the tree and hangs peppermint

candy canes from the branches. Christmas Eve is spent with Grandma Mary and Christmas Day everyone gets together for turkey with all the trimmings. Janice's parents will be visiting from California over the holidays and with a house full of friends, relatives, and hopefully a new baby, Janice wonders if she'll get around to baking Christmas cookies this year.

## Christmas with the Curls

Christmas comes early for Betty Curl. It begins two days after Thanksgiving when she begins playing Christmas records to psyche herself up. A few days later she begins to drape the outside of her house with colored lights, 5,000 to be exact. It is no small project, especially this year since many of the lights are worn and need to be repainted. But then nothing Betty Curl ever attempts is small. A good example is her family of nine children, eight of which she delivered at home.

As Christmas approaches Betty finds she spends more and more time in the kitchen. While the cashew and peanut brittles are cooling, she whips up some divinity, red and green hard candy, a nut log or two, and handmade caramels. These goodies are wrapped and distributed throughout the community.

Betty decorates the Christmas tree herself. She readily admits to being a picky perfectionist. If the kids want a tree, they can have one of their own upstairs. She begins to trim the tree two weeks beforehand and sometimes is still touching it up come Christmas morning. The tree in all its splendor makes Betty very happy, so happy that one year she left it up until Easter.

Betty somehow seems to leave color and beauty in her wake as casually as a broom leaves dust. "I remember a couple of years ago during the power shortage when we couldn't have any Christmas light," she laments. "It was our saddest Christmas, the world looked like a dead planet." Husband Bob gets into the act, too. Every year he dresses up like Santa Claus and rides through the town on the fire truck.

"Traditions?" asks Betty. "We have no real traditions. We try everything. We do hand stockings every year and we used to put out cookies and milk until Santa got fat and now we put out a carrot." It's tough buying presents for nine kids. One year (daughter) Deb bought all nine presents with only 80 cents. Chewing gum and Lifesavers go a long way. And then there was the year Becky gave used magazines with the covers torn off. It's the thought that counts. And Betty Curl is full of good thoughts. She already wrote a children's book for the Cancer Society and is now working on a cookbook for the Catholic Church. In her spare time she writes poems to her children. In her own words: "There will be peace on earth when everyone learns the basic 3 R's - to Respect others Rights and accept the Responsibility to preserve them."

## 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. The formation of a telephone company for the Natal area begun in November continued through December.

*Saturday, Dec. 18, 1909: Went down home about 8.30. Done up the things and started back up at 11.30. Got back to Vernonia at 1. Had a big time in the afternoon. Certainly had a big time in the night, tore the door off and done a lot of throwing out. A full house of people. Very cold in the morning. Fine in afternoon.*

*Sunday, Dec. 19. Bummed around town till about 12, then went down to Parkers to see -----, got down there at 2 P.M. Very cold in the morning but bright through the day. Got back to Vernonia at 12.30.*

*Monday, Dec. 20. Went down home and commenced setting telephone poles about 1 P.M. Got all of Elliotts set and about 1/2 of mine. Frozen very hard in the morning. Got back to Vernonia at 6.10 P.M.*

*Tuesday, Dec. 21. Went down and set telephone poles all day. Got them all set to Cook place. Went over and stayed overnight with Elliotts. Very cold till about 10 AM.*

*Wednesday, Dec. 22, 1909. Commenced setting poles about 9 A.M. and had them finished to Pringles by 12. Did not work on line in afternoon. Came back to Vernonia about 3 P.M. Frozen up solid in morning but fine through the day. We will put up wire tomorrow. Went down to Woods to skate in the evening, but nothing doing. Got back to Vernonia at 10.*

*Thursday, Dec. 23. Bert and I left Vernonia at 7 A.M. and commenced at Pittsburg putting up wire. Got down to Armstrong road. Put in my phone after supper about 7.30. Stayed overnight at Elliotts. Frozen very hard in the morning but fine through the day. Got Elliotts phone in and we were talking in the evening.*

*Friday, Dec. 24. Worked putting up wire all day. Finished down as far as Pringles at 3.30.*

*Left down there at 4 and got to Vernonia at 6. Took in the doings in the church and went down below for a walk after the doings. Got back about 1.30. Snowed a little in the evening.*

*Saturday, Dec. 25. Did not get up till pretty late. Fooled around town all day. Went down to Wood's at 6.15 and spent the evening, also stayed all night. There was a doings over in the school house also a big fight. Pretty good day.*

*Monday, Dec. 27. Went down home about 9 A.M. Sacked up some oats for Wm. Deeds. The up River Telephone Co. connected on to our line about 3.15. Got back to Vernonia at 3 P.M. Went over to Spencers in the evening to a party. Had a fine time, lots of fun going home. Got back to Vernonia at 1 A.M. Very fine day.*

*Wednesday, Dec. 29. Went up and cut down a big tree up by the Tucker School House for bark. Hauled down 3 loads. Worked at it all day. Frozen very hard in the morning, but very fine day.*

*Friday, Dec. 31. Did not do much of anything in the morning. Went down to Woods at 12 and Gaynell and I went over and visited the school in the afternoon. Got back to Vernonia about 5 P.M. About 1 inch of snow on and snowed quite a bit all 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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