

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Voices from the Past, Part 3

This is the final segment of the December 28, 1986 conversation that took place at Ruth Steers's home on North Street where she, Bob Spencer, and Harry and Arlie Emmons had gathered. Vernonia resident Tony Grebenc transcribed the audio tape recording he made that day. We have replaced some of Harry's frequent expletives with synonyms. At this point in the conversation, Harry had just quit the O-A Lumber Mill for good and bought a tavern

Harry: *I finally bought that tavern up there where Mike's was (currently Buckshot Betty's – and still called Mike's by some of our old-timers!). I bought that and went in there. I'd never even been in a gosh darned tavern in my life, and I'd never drank a danged beer or nothing. I went there that night and all that crew I'd worked with, the whole bunch, came in. And gee whiz, I got to where I couldn't even run the cash register or draw a beer. If you would have asked me, I wouldn't even know that I was scared to death. Well, anyway, I got to going alright I guess, and everything was working good.*

Arlie will never forget that Old Man Lilly came in there one evening, and he said "I'll have a beer, Harry," and you know it was ten cents a glass back in them days and he put down a dime, and I went and drew his beer for him. He said, "Harry, you gonna come back down to the mill and work for me?" And I said, "Just as soon as I'm ready to put in a hitch at the poor farm, I'll be down there." That old man, and you can ask Arlie, he hadn't even taken a drink of it, he just picked up his dime and slid that beer across the counter and went out the door. I never talked to him after that.

Bob: *First work I'd done there was unloading the rejects. I guess it was, I don't know if they were rejects but put back on the chain again.*

Harry: *They went back to the mill.*

Bob: *It went back to the stacker, didn't it?*

Harry: *No, it went back to the mill and had to be resawed, some of it.*

Bob: *I had that chain so full of stuff. The boss came along and he said, "Gee whiz, you have everything blocked up. Don't work so hard, don't work so fast. That's enough for today." I never had anybody tell me that before. Then I lined up a job on that bull planer on the other end of the mill.*

Harry: *That wasn't too bad of a job, was it, Bob?*

Bob: *Yeah, that was a good job. You just*

worked once in awhile whenever the timber out there were sized right, and every once in a while, I had to start that thing and run it a little bit to see if it was running. I used to sit, the sun shining in there, and go to sleep and sleep half the time.

Harry: *You know, I think I lacked three months of working there twenty years, and when I left there, I was getting \$6.00 for eight hours work. It seems to me like we started out at \$3.20 for eight hours work. You know you tell people that, they don't believe you but by gosh it was the truth. I worked on the darned railroad up there. I think it was \$3.00 for eight hours work, but we didn't work very hard.*

Their recorded conversation ends at this point. Last month, we said we'd research what the "trotting turkey" job was. Both Larry Bernardi and Al DeLemos worked at the mill; Larry said that trotting part was running the lumber from the "turkey" to where it would be stacked to go to the dry kiln. Per Al, who did this job, the turkey kept the boards going down the chute straight and kept the lumber sorted and spaced.

A Few Words about Bob Spencer

Bob Spencer, youngest son of Vernonia pioneer Israel Spencer, was born in 1890 and lived until 1993. Over his lifetime, he worked on the family farm, in the woods, at the mill, and in his later years as custodian at the first Vernonia High School. There are many stories about Bob, some of which we will share in future columns. As the high school custodian, he was well loved by the students, especially the boys. He was the kind of man a boy could talk to for advice. When high school boys got in trouble, they were sent to the basement to help Bob split wood and feed the furnace. Few of the boys really considered this punishment, and some of them got in trouble occasionally just so they could go to the basement and hang out with Bob. The cover of the book on Vernonia the museum published in Arcadia Publishing's *Images of America* series has a picture of Bob and his white horse in the woods by a steam donkey.

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. He continues to spend his spare time with his fiancée, Inez.

Thursday, July 18, 1912. Went

down and worked at opening up the trail from the Ray place to Enterprize road. Very hot all day. Inez and I went over to the Elliott place after supper.

Friday, July 19. Went down and finished opening up trail over to Enterprize road. Very hot all day. The boys finished hauling my hay about 3 P.M.

Saturday, July 20. Went out on Fire Patrol but was so wet up on Enterprize road came back and went up on St. Helens road about 4 miles. Went up town in evening. Big surprise party at Gessell followed by two severe accidents. Big thunder storm followed by a heavy rain.

Sunday, July 21. Went up to the big city of Pittsburg. (Note: A tongue-in-cheek description. By this time, there was not much left of the town of Pittsburg; the post office had closed in 1908, the newspaper, store, lumber and grist mill were gone, and most of the commercial activities had moved to Vernonia.) Went all through the school house, fooled around and came home. Rained considerable all day.

Monday, July 22. Did not go on the Fire Patrol so went across the river. Placed the hay rack in shelter. In afternoon went down to Mist, had a dandy little stroll. Weather fair in forenoon, rained in afternoon. Some-one feeling rather sad along about 10 P.M. Feeling fine about 11 just for a reason that will never be forgotten.

Tuesday, July 23. Weather fair in forenoon, rained in afternoon. Went berry picking. Also went to bed early in the evening like good little fellows. Was out on Fire Patrol.

Wednesday, July 24. Rained pretty hard all day so did not go out on Fire Patrol. Garfield came down about 12. The girl and I had a long talk about affairs late in evening.

Thursday, July 25. Was out after berries in forenoon. Did not go on Fire Patrol. Pretty fair day. Inez and I went up to Vernonia after supper in the buggy after the mail. Got back about 10.

Friday, July 26. Started out on Fire Patrol 6 A.M. and got back 2.30 P.M. Pretty fair day. Wanted to go for a horseback ride in evening but the girl could not see it that way. Tomorrow evening and then for Clatskanie.

Saturday, July 27. Started on Fire Patrol 5.40 A.M. and got back 1.30 P.M. Inez and I left in buggy for Clatskanie 2.30 P.M. and got to Clatskanie about 7 P.M. Took in the big city till about 11 P.M. Very hot all day.

Sunday, July 28. In Clatskanie did not get up till about 8 A.M. The girl and I went over to Depot in morning. Took in town in afternoon. Left out there about 4 P.M. and got home 10. Awful hot all day.

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. We now have a page on the Vernonia Hands on Art website, www.vernoniahansonart.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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