



Ruth Steers

Jenelle Wiggins

Nehalem valley people *Those who were here*

Ruth Steers

by Jenelle Wiggins

Ruth Steers' face is a familiar one around Vernonia. Perhaps you first saw her behind the counter of Vernonia Variety which she owned and operated for 21½ years, or maybe your first night in Vernonia you slept at the Rose Motel like I did. Ruth was the first person I met here, and was a pleasant prelude of friends to come.

Ruth tells me she was raised in Mist, and her family was neighbors to Clyde Johnson. "I remember every so often Clyde would get out his touring car and all of us kids would pile in. He would drive to Vernonia and take us to Lincoln's Candy Kitchen or Dad's Hamburger Place."

"In summertime, my brother went haying with Clyde and I would go up and cook for them. I can't imagine what they ate, because I don't cook very good!" she laughs.

"An old homemade bus used to come by and pick us up for school. There were no windows, just a canvass covering which could be raised to let in sun or lowered to keep out rain. George Taylor was our bus driver. He would pick us up in the morning, drop us off at school, and then hang around Crawford's Market all day until school got out. On especially chilly days he would give us each a heated brick, wrapped in canvas, to keep our feet warm during the cold ride home." Ruth grins at the thought of it.

"Because we lived in the country and rode the bus we weren't able to go out for any girls athletics at school. So instead, when the bus was two or three miles from home the driver would stop and let us out and we'd hike the rest of the way home. In that way we were still able to earn a school letter."

She pauses for a few moments to think. "Lots of years have gone by and my life seems broken up in bits and pieces. I met my future husband, Marion Steers, in Fall City, Washington, and after we were married we returned to Vernonia. We lived at Big Eddy Park and ran a service station there for 8½ years. It was a Grange park then and underdeveloped. In the front room of the gas station we stocked a few groceries and lived in the two back rooms. The railroad track crossed right at Big Eddy and every night the loggers would come in to buy gas or a handful of peanuts to get them home."

"In 1944 we bought Herb Condit's place on Stoney Point and went into the turkey farming business. We raised some 2,500 turkeys, great big toms. They say you don't have to be crazy to raise

turkeys but it helps. It took 48 hours a day to care for those birds what with watering, chasing, herding, and fighting with them. We lived on turkey meat and turkey eggs because we couldn't afford red meat. Fall was turkey picking time and we would sell those birds to King's Grocery and Sam's Food Store."

"In 1953 we sold out the turkey business and bought Thomas Variety Store. I stuck with that store for 21½ years. I not only worked in the store but did all the ordering, bookkeeping, and even hauled supplies from Portland. I knew absolutely nothing about running a store but I learned. My mother, Laura Carmichael, lived across the parking lot and spent a lot of time in the store."

Mrs. Carmichael was almost a permanent fixture in the Variety Store. When Ruth was off buying merchandise, her mother would take care of business, but most of the time she sat, with her chair pulled up close to the stove and her hands in the perpetual motion of crochet, or knitting.

"In 1972, after my husband died, Harry Emmons called me up and told me I should buy the Rose Motel because it would be a good investment. 'I don't know anything about running a motel,' I told Harry. 'I've never even stayed overnight in one. No way! But Harry talked me into it, and I have no regrets. I've met some great people and a few scalawags. But no one stays long and we are kind of like ships that pass in the night.'"

Last year was Ruth's 50th class reunion and 16 of the 24 graduates attended. Ruth has made a hobby out of keeping track of everyone who has ever graduated from Vernonia High School from the very first class of 1918 to the present. She also keeps a memorial list.

"It's kind of a history of the town," she explains. "For instance, the second graduating class of Vernonia, in 1919 consisted of only two girls. World War I had just broken out and all the boys had enlisted. In 1925 there were 10 graduates, and the next year the O.A. Mill opened and 28 students graduated!"

Ruth tells me she is retired now and finally has time to do as she pleases. Her house shows the efforts of that spare time. Beautiful and brightly colored latch hook and punch rugs decorate her living room, some of which she designed herself. The impressive eagle rug, which can be seen at the Eagle Office Restaurant is one of her creations. But most of her designs are roses.

"I guess I just like roses," she laughs.

American Legion Auxiliary

The regular meeting of the American Legion Auxiliary was held at the Pine Cone with member Irish Bruers for a no-host luncheon. Some business was taken care of, but most of the two hours was an enjoyable social time. The Auxiliary will again sponsor two girls to the Girls State that is held in Salem each summer.

Next regular meeting will be February 28 at the American Legion Hall at 1 p.m. There are several items of business to be taken care of at that time, and President Reatha Horn is looking forward to as many members as possible to be present.

Recreation Council

The Vernonia Recreation Council will hold a meeting February 21, at 7:30 p.m. at West Oregon Electric Co-op.

Local artist have show

During the month of March, the work of local artists Dee Vadnais and Katherine Shiver will be shown in the Women's Studies Gallery at Portland State University. The show will include woven and embroidered collage by Ms. Shiver and wood sculpture by Ms. Vadnais.

The Women's Studies Gallery is the only gallery of its kind in Portland. It started two years ago as an informal place where women could show their creative work without the traditional artistic scrutiny. They are particularly interested in showing work that is free of sexist imagery and presents a positive image of women.

There will be an Artists reception on March 9, at 7:30. The Gallery is located on the corner of SW 10th and Market in Portland. Its regular hours are 9-5 Monday through Friday.

Recreation council bake sale

Vernonia Recreational Counsel is having a bake sale to raise funds for the Community School Activity Center February 24, 1979 at Vernonia Market Place from 10-4.

Spirit Night at VHS

Scheduled for Tuesday Feb. 27, at Vernonia high School is SPIRIT NIGHT. The purpose is to raise money for the Athletic Fund and to increase school spirit. Students from VHS will be involved in a variety of skits, dances, songs and other original talents.

It is hoped that many people will turn out for the spirit raising event to make it a success like last year.

School opens late due to eclipse

Vernonia schools will open at 10:00 a.m. Monday, February 26, the day of the solar eclipse.

Golf Association starts 9th season with crab feed

The Vernonia Men's Golf Association will kick off the 1979 Golf Season with their 9th Annual Crab Feed. It will be held at the Vernonia Golf Course Club House on Saturday evening March the 3rd. Everyone is invited to come out and get acquainted with Vernonia's Golfing family, players, managers and owners and for \$6 feast on excellent Oregon crab. See you there. Fore.

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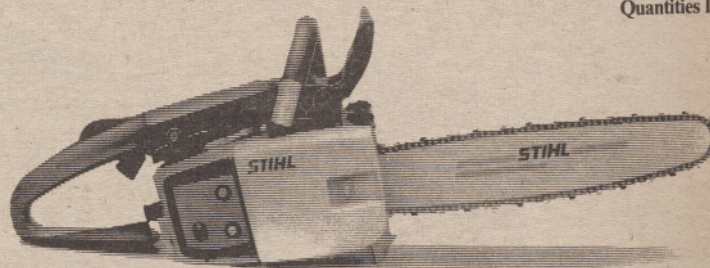
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