



Reminiscing on a beautiful summer day were (front row l-r) Duke Gortler, Eleanor Thompson, Joe Magoff and Trudy Magoff; back row, Robb Wilson, Ed Kamholz and Lionel Youst, at the O-A Picnic.

Remembering . . .

By Charles D. Comstock

In many parts of our country, a reference to early settlers means a long time ago. Not so in and around Vernonia, as the first brave and adventurous pioneers arrived in the valley just over a hundred years ago. During the time I was growing up in Vernonia about sixty years ago, many of those families and their descendents were still living in the community.

One such pioneer family was Franklin and Bessie Malmsten. I have very fond memories of my friendship with them as they had a special influence on my childhood. Perhaps some of those recollections are worth sharing.

Franklin Malmsten, one of seven children, came to the area in 1891 and homesteaded for several years. He returned to Minnesota and in 1903 was married to Bessie. A year later with their daughter, Hazel, they returned to live in the valley. Later, a son, Marshall, and another daughter, Kathryn, were born.

During the years I knew the Franklin Malmstens, they always spoke fondly of living in Vernonia. It was obvious they were ambitious and involved in the community. At one time, they owned most of the property along the north side of Bridge Street from Grant to East Avenue, as well as the land the family had homesteaded in the Coon Creek area. Both were active members of the Evangelical Church and gave generously to its financial support. They owned and operated the Vernonia Hotel for years. Bessie Malmsten was a volunteer and longtime supporter of the public library. She sold aluminum pots and pans through house parties and was the local Raleigh Products distributor for several years, often just a step behind the more aggressive Watkins Products salesman. Franklin Malmsten often appeared quiet and reserved, but he was an active man, too. Alfalfa was a relatively unproven hay crop in the thirties. He encouraged and supported—financially, I'm sure—a struggling farmer to develop his land and produce a profitable crop of alfalfa. His hobby in later years was woodturning and many hours were devoted to this interest with a small lathe ordered from the Montgomery Ward catalog. Franklin Malmsten's last active employment was as night watchman at the Oregon-American Mill after it re-opened in 1936. To my recollection, neither Franklin nor Bessie Malmsten ever owned an automobile, nor did they learn to drive. Above all, they were the most devoted couple, had the highest respect for family values — theirs and others — and were always at peace with themselves and their surroundings.

During the week for the school year 1936-37, I stayed at the Malmstens' home at 242 Bridge Street in order to attend Washington School. A daily trek from the power plant beyond Keasey would have been difficult as school buses did not go out that way until the following year. They were fantastic surrogate parents, always expecting me to behave yet giving me certain independence and responsibility. Breakfast and dinner were served in the dining room; lunch was often around the kitchen table. Mrs. Malmsten was a wonderful cook. She stressed wholesome food and her time in the kitchen was a labor of love. After all these years, perhaps I still have one confession: that Raleigh Products pudding mix was never one of my favorites! Saying the blessing before meals was routine and proper manners were expected. There was always plenty of pleasant conversation. After dinner, Mr. Malmsten and I regularly played several games of checkers...oh, how he enjoyed that game. My regular bedtime was one of the few definite regulations; it was not negotiable.

I was aware then that this was a wonderful family home, but my appreciation of that fact has multiplied manifold in the years since. If the Malmstens' fine qualities of ethics and respect for others prevailed throughout this land, what a wonderful influence that would be.

The son of another early pioneer, the Ed Sessmans, lived in the house next door. He had served as City Recorder for Vernonia shortly after the turn of the century.

Franklin Malmsten's four brothers and two sisters migrated to the area as early settlers also. A younger brother, Charles, married Alice Soule, the daughter of another pioneer family. In 1907, they became the parents of twin daughters, certainly one of the first, if not the very first, sets of twins born in Vernonia. The names of those daughters will be familiar to more recent residents. They were Louise Malmsten Thomas and Lois Malmsten Clark, both very active in church musical activities for many years. Back in the late 1930s, Mrs. Clark was my piano teacher on Tuesday afternoons after school. I believe the charge was either thirty-five or forty cents for a lesson.

Even now, a number of the early pioneer names, such as Weed, Keasey, McDonald, Bergerson and Sessman remain familiar, but the special times and my wonderful experiences with the Malmsten family will always be remembered.

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Church Directory

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

Bob E. Holbrook, Branch President
1350 E. Knott Street
Vernonia, 429-7151

Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m.
Sunday School & Primary 11:20 a.m.

Relief Society, Priesthood and Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Michael Jackson, Pastor
662 Jefferson
Vernonia, 429-6353

Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Evening Service 6:00 p.m.

Women's Bible Study,
1st & 3rd Mon. 7:00 p.m.

Women's Ministry, alt. Wed. 7:00 p.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rev. Robert Grafe, Vicar
700 Adams Ave.
Vernonia 429-1860

Sunday Services, 10:00 a.m.

FOURSQUARE CHURCH

Chris Brush, Pastor
850 Madison Avenue
Vernonia, 429-1103

Sunday Services
Morning Worship 10:30 a.m.

GRACE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

D.J.Dickey, Pastor
Grant & North Streets
Vernonia, 429-1919 or 429-8720

Sunday School, All Ages 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Evening Worship 6:00 p.m.

Wed. Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

John Cahill, Pastor
952 Washington Avenue
Vernonia, 429-1161

Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study 6:00 p.m.

Visitation, Monday 7:00 p.m.
Bible Study, Wednesday 7:00 p.m.

VERNONIA EVANGELICAL BIBLE CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue
Vernonia, 429-6790

Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Children's Church w/Nursery
Evening Fellowship 6:00 p.m.
Nursery Care
AWANA, Wed. 7:00 p.m.
Prayer Meeting, Wed. 7:00 p.m.
Adult Bible Studies, Mon. 7:00 p.m.

The Churches of Vernonia Welcome You

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Dick Halaas, Pastor
410 North Street
Vernonia, 429-6522

Sunday School 9:40 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Children's and Junior Church
Evening Service 6:00 p.m.

Ladies' Bible Study, Mon. 7:30 p.m.
Women's Fellowship, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m.
Every Wednesday:
Ladies' Bible Study, 9:15 a.m.
Evening Bible Study, 6:30 p.m.
Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Pastoral Administrator Joan Dotter
Ass't. Administrator Lani Vandehey
960 Missouri Avenue
Vernonia, 429-8841

St. Vincent dePaul Society
Irish Bruers, 429-7201

Mass Schedule
2nd & 4th Sundays

Word & Communion Services
1st & 3rd Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
Holy Day Services 7:00 p.m.
Sacrament of Penance
Schedule by Appointment
Before or After Mass

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

Roger Kruger, Pastor, 397-6883
2nd Ave. and Nehalem St.
Vernonia, 429-1941

Sabbath School 9:15 a.m.
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday Prayer, 7:00 p.m.