

## Life & Times in Vernonia

# Long-time Vernonian, Eleanor Thompson, shares recollections

by Jeri Cropp

### Part I

Eleanor Alice Thompson was born January 30, 1917, in Delamere, North Dakota, six mile from Milnor, to Berton John and Kati Gertrude Costain. She has four brothers and three sisters. Eleanor married Robert (Bob) Thompson in 1933 and has three children; DeDe Webb, Joyce Weller, and Jan Bernardi, all of Vernonia. Eleanor has seven grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren and 11 great-great-grandchildren.

In Eleanor's hometown of Delamere, she recalls their artesian well, riding in a horse and buggy, and a horse-drawn sleigh. She said that her family went to the Methodist church in a Model T Ford in the 1920s. She cannot remember how all ten of them fit into that Model T.

Her family raised milk cows, chickens, and sheep, and took cream and eggs to market on Saturday nights. They farmed the land for hay and vegetables and endured hot summers, cold winters and tornadoes. Eleanor drove a team of horses to cultivate their farmland and rake hay for the animals. She also decided farm life was not in her future.

In 1939, Bob and Eleanor

decided to move to Vernonia where Bob's sister was living, because there were more job opportunities. He quickly secured a job with the Chevrolet dealer (currently Meyer's Auto Body) for \$75 a month, and a rental home (without bath or covered flooring) for \$10 a

month, behind what is now True Value. His former job at a gas station in North Dakota paid \$45 a month so this was a great improvement. The first airplane crossed the Atlantic in 1939 and the helicopter was invented that year.

Eleanor was not too excited

about the bare wooden floors, the outhouse, the table made of 2x4s or the tin heating stove, but she looked forward to better times ahead. She bought beds at the local secondhand store. The electricity and water were very affordable, with the electricity supplied by a dam on Rock Creek at Keasey.

At the time, the roads in Vernonia were blacktop and the sidewalks were wood. Highway 47 went from Vernonia to Staley's Junction on to Banks and Forest Grove. That was the only route to Portland; the Sunset Highway had not yet been built.

It wasn't long before Bob and Eleanor moved to a house with indoor plumbing in both kitchen and bath. From there they moved up to the Vernonia

Cemetery, where they were the caretakers. Bob earned \$10 to dig and refill graves, and \$30 a month to mow, water and maintain the grass and headstones. There was no charge for rent or phone at the caretaker's house, which allowed Eleanor to start saving for new business prospects.

During this prosperous time in Vernonia, Eleanor remembers seven gas stations – one across from the grade school, one on Mist Drive at the end of the green bridge, one at Treharne, one at the Chevy dealership, one at NAPA, the recently closed 76 station, one at Vernonia Hardware, and the Union station at the former MacLean's Garden and Flower Shop. Bob and Eleanor bought

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**Eleanor Thompson seated at the Vernonia Senior Center.**  
Photo by Jeri Cropp.

## Bits & Bites

By Jacqueline Ramsay



O.K., so Fall is here. Rain, sun, wind and then hit the repeat buttons, but when it hits cool, it's nice.

What's cookin' with me? My broken wrist is having fits. Thumb and index finger are almost useless so, I may be hunting and pecking on my good old-fashioned Royal typewriter. Hope I can recall how it works.

I don't have much to say this week, but it took me two months to realize the paper is out on Wednesdays instead of Thursdays. Also, someone just told me Sentry was becoming a Hi in the sky store. Guess I'll have to get off Main Street the next time I come to town.

When the Mexican restaurant opens I'll have to miss lunch at the Senior Center to try it out.

My mind has become a total blank so I'll sign off for this week.

Maybe by then I'll have had a brilliant thought. (I said it, you maybe just thought it.)

Bye now.

Foot note: Went to the Doctor. He is sending me to a hand specialist, but, while waiting for him to see me, I got to visit with the hanging bones on the hook in the corner. Saw my two flat feet bones, spine, #3 & 4, left knee, missing left rib, left rotator cuff, right rotator cuff and my right deltoid muscle that is screwed to my right shoulder. Couldn't find my hiatal hernia.

Gee whiz. More later. Oh yes, and all 10 of my funny toes.

## 50 Years Ago This Month

The October 5, 1961, issue of the *Vernonia Eagle* included the following news story on the front page:

At the meeting of the Vernonia city council held Monday evening of this week, Charles E. Miller was elected as president of the council to succeed Robert L. Spencer who resigned recently.

By vote of the council, proceedings were initiated to vacate a portion of the alley in block 13, second addition to the city of Vernonia abutting lots three through ten. In accordance with legal procedure necessary to carry out such action, a legal notice concerning it appears elsewhere in this issue and announces a public hearing on the matter which will be held at the city hall November 6.

Robert C. Lindsay was again present relative to the replatting of portions of second addition, but

the city attorney was not present so the matter was again delayed to another meeting. Lindsay pointed out the need for a city zoning ordinance and city building code. The advisability of such as code was discussed at length.

A report was received from the recent (sic) inspection by state and county authorities of the local garbage dump which rated it second in the county. Rated first was Clatskanie which was scored 20 per cent (sic) of a possible 100 per cent (sic) according to state standards. In view of this, Vernonia may rate second of the four in the county, but has a very low rating in the eyes of the state. Vernonia was scored 15, Rainier 10 and St. Helens only 5 per cent (sic).

An order of the county court concerning garbage dumps and the matter of prescribing rules and regulations for operation of them was read in full. It set forth county

proposals to require licensing and requirements for conduct of such sites. Members of the city council and the Vernonia Sanitary Service were to attend a public hearing at the court house in St. Helens at 2:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 4, reports from which have not yet been received (sic).

The offer of R. L. Simmons of Seattle of \$700 for O.A. house 29<sup>1/2</sup> was rejected as being too low. The house had formerly been sold to Ted Stout whose contract was defaulted October 1.

Suggestions were received from the John Deere company that an angle blade for the city's backhoe could be obtained for \$180 and would be of considerable use to the city. Consensus of opinion was that it would be a good investment.

After approval of the bills, the council adjourned at 9:35.

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