

## Life &amp; Times in Vernonia

## Long-time Vernonian, Eleanor Thompson, shares recollections

by Jeri Cropp

Part 2

For fun and relaxation, Bob and Eleanor took camping trips – including a memorable one to the Wallowa Mts. While riding their horses, they stopped for refreshment with other campers who offered them cool lemonade that they had buried in the ground.

In the early 50s, Bob and Eleanor, and John and Jenny Seidleman started the Vernonia RidgeRider Saddle Club (VRR). They had trail rides and cleared the brush at Anderson Park that is now the arena area. Before this property, made available to VRR by the city, was cleared, they held horse gaming at Hawkins Park under the lights. The Wilkerson Trail Ride started during this time, but was not a VRR event. Bob and Eleanor blazed new trails with machetes to keep the trail rides interesting. There were usually about 40 riders.

Eleanor won the oldest rider trophy at age 73, in 1990, when she completed a ride which included a dance on Saturday night and gaming on Sunday. Rodgers Park was another favorite camping and picnic spot for Vernonians. Bob and Eleanor were also members of the Washington County Mounted Sheriff's Posse.

Eleanor enjoyed going to the local theater and to Pal's for ice cream. The Jamboree was an annual event that the VRR participated in each year. She remembers that they got wooden nickels about the size of a silver dollar. This was a fundraiser for Jamboree. She still has some of the wooden coins. There were street vendors and a logging show with choker setting and line splicing.

Bob and Eleanor liked to listen to music and dance, and attended the dances where Wayne Welch and Duke Gortler were playing at grange

halls in Natal, Chapman and Pumpkin Ridge, and Oddfellows Hall. Eleanor also enjoyed going to the dance hall above the Birkenfeld Store.

In 1991, Eleanor joined Wayne and Duke's band as a washboard player, then joined the Golden Oldies in 1994 playing the drums, as she does to this day. The group plays at the Vernonia Senior Center on Wednesdays, and occasionally at other places. Eleanor has also been a member of the local bridge club since 1952 and the pinochle club since 1962.

Eleanor had an opportunity to be in the movie "Ring of Fire" filmed in Vernonia in 1960. David Janssen helped her onto the train along with her daughter, DeDe. She earned \$10 for her part and received her very first Social Security card. She remembers that the film company evacuated the streets of town for filming and paid their

Union Gas Station \$300 for the day. One of the scenes was a burning car on the lot where Wauna Federal Credit Union is now located.

Bob and Eleanor created some excitement in Vernonia one early Saturday morning. They, along with John and Jenny and other RidgeRiders, staged a train robbery on horseback with guns firing blanks. They ran the train down to the Vernonia Depot scaring passengers and onlookers. At that time, in the late 1960s, an excursion train was traveling from the valley to Vernonia at Anderson Park. This was almost 10 years after the mill closed.

People from out of town liked to ride the rail to Vernonia for weekends of camping and fishing. That weekend they got their money's worth. Bob and Eleanor were quite the rebels on horseback. They bought property behind the water plant

to pasture their horses and store hay in the barns. There is also a Sequoia tree planted at Anderson Park, still standing, that was donated by the Thompson family.

Today, Eleanor is 94 years old and still maintains her drivers license and vehicle, though she rarely drives. She plays in the Golden Oldies Band and continues with her bridge and pinochle clubs. Her husband, Bob, passed away in 1986 after being on dialysis from 1977. The community and the band fundraisers helped pay to build a dialysis room onto the back of the Thompson home. Bob and Eleanor were both very grateful for all the contributions and support during that difficult time.

Now Eleanor shares her time between her family, her close friend Duke, playing in the band at the Vernonia Senior Center and playing

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## Bits &amp; Bites

By Jacqueline Ramsay



Rain, rain go away. It's supposed to be Fall; warm breezes, soft sunshine, autumn leaves of gold, brown, and red falling from the trees. Not cold wind and splish-splash when you go for your daily outing. Oh, well, this is Oregon, maybe it will snow for Halloween.

(Note: only Rebecca will see this article is hand-printed, 'cause I've lost the ability to write.) Have you ever tried to type with

your index finger stiff as a poker? It even messes up the hunt and peck system. So, not wanting to disappoint all of my faithful followers, I've come down to chicken-scratch reporting. At present I can still knit and crochet, but sewing with a needle and thread is taxing the outer limits of a true crafter. Wandering in the shops here in "the jungle" is becoming interesting. Halloween, Thanksgiving and even Christmas cards are showing up. Avoid the rush. Stock up early. Ho, ho, ho.

Another saga for you to enjoy. Question: How long should it take to powerwash and paint the trim on an 8-plex building? Who knows? Anyhow, the crew has been at it for about 2-1/2 months now. The other day, a painter raps on my door and says to me, "Can ya' leave your door open?" Says me to he, "Why?" From he to me, "I got to paint your door." "Oh, okay," says I. 10 minutes elapse. Then a voice says, "Just leave the door open about 20 minutes and you can shut it, Okay?" "Thank you," I reply. Later I shut the door. Much later, Shadow and I start out the door and as I shut it – Good Grief, he has painted around the outside edge of the door and left the center unpainted. That was 2-1/2 weeks ago. I found out someone else will be by to do the rest of the door, one of these days. I hope I live long enough to see the door, and my patio fence, painted.

From the peaceful unhurried, life in the Big City.

EEEE – Bye now!

## 24 Years Ago This Month

The October 29, 1987, issue of *The Independent* included the following news story on page 14:

A fire of undetermined origin that started near Pebble Creek Road and Tophill on Sunday afternoon, October 18, burned nearly 180 acres of timberland before being brought under control the following Tuesday evening.

Hundreds of volunteers spent thousands of hours fighting the fire and, with the aid of manpower and equipment from seven rural fire districts and State Forestry, they managed to contain the fire before it damaged homes or other buildings in the area.

The fire crossed Highway 47 approximately 8 miles south of Vernonia, causing road closures on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, but the only structural damage was to a 650' long wooden trestle, unused for many years, that was severely damaged.

After the fire was contained, dynamite was used on Monday to remove a section of the trestle adjacent to the unburned part in order to keep the fire

from working its way across the trestle to an area of standing timber.

The following day badly burned portions of the trestle were pushed down by Darrell Gwin of Vernonia, using a D7 Cat. The remainder of the still burning trestle was pulled down, using a cable winch on the D7.

Setting chokers for Gwin were local loggers, Bill Wolsey and Russell Lende, who attached the cables to each section of the trestle as pieces of burning wood and liquid creosote fell more than 80' from the top of the span.

Of the total acreage burned, approximately 130 acres are owned by Longview Fibre, and the remainder is owned by Hampton Tree Farms.

Howard Hopkins of Longview Fibre said that most of the trees they lost were three to seven years old. He praised the response of local loggers and the good efforts of the rural fire departments.

"In fact the response of everyone was just great," he added.

Among the volunteers were many people who purchased,

prepared and delivered food and beverages to the hungry firefighters.

Rural fire districts that responded to the emergency were Tri-Cities, Vernonia, Washington County Fire District No. 2, Gaston, Forest Grove, Cornelius and Hillsboro.

The efforts of all the volunteers are appreciated by a grateful community.

**BEAR  
CREEK**



**PUB & BAR**

**GOOD FOOD**

**GOOD FRIENDS**

**GOOD TIMES**

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