

A VIEW OF THE PAST The Early Twentieth Century In the Powder Valley
As Remembered By Violet Louise Parker Dodson
Written in 2002 for the North Powder Centennial Celebration

PREFACE: The way of life has changed rapidly during my span of life (1904 to present). I am often asked to tell or record how we managed when I was growing up. These are some reflections that come to mind as I ponder those "good old days" of that early twentieth century.

I was born on a "foothill" ranch of the Blue Mountains. It is now the Elkhorn Elk Refuge. One of the last homesteads available to early settlers, this was the last ranch at the end of the country road at that time. We were ten miles from town.

Town Settlement

The Powder Valley didn't settle until the 1860's, because of conflicts with the Indians and no fort near for refuge. When Grandpa Wesley Parker and his brother, Jonathan (Jont), came through in 1862, there were no houses anywhere in sight. They returned later and settled here and near Baker.

Farm land sold for \$1.25 an acre and some "homesteading" was available. My folks homesteaded their ranch in 1900 on Anthony Creek, where the elk refuge is now. In 1905, they received title, signed by Teddy Roosevelt.

My father was the first "forest ranger" when this area became "Whitman National Forest" and that was his headquarters. He covered from Baker to Sumpter, La Grande and Starkey area, with a saddle horse and pack horse. He surveyed the Lakes Trail, stocked Anthony Lakes with trout and built log cabins and barns at strategic locations throughout the territory.

The Fourth of July

The Fourth of July was a festival day for old and young alike - something for everyone. Often, some carnival company brought their games and color to town. There would be a big parade down main street. The local band leading the way, with horseback riders, decorated buggies, ex-soldiers in uniform, carrying the flags, children with their favorite pets, clowns and popcorn vendors and high-stepping teams and buggies darting around. It was a common occurrence for "runaways" to dash down the street as some horse became spooked by a fire cracker or popped balloon. Someone would yell, "Runaway!" The street would clear and some sturdy "hero" would dash to

the rescue, or, team, buggy, and "hero" would all disappear out of town in a cloud of dust.

Picnic lunches appeared at noon and baseball games filled the p.m. hours, followed by a band concert and then a dance in the evening.

The town had three or four saloons. A boon to the men who could take refuge there where women never trespassed.

There was usually a local man - a peace officer - appointed for the day, who wore a big star and was supposed to stay sober for the duration. The one-room jail often was filled to capacity with those who couldn't handle their liqueur gracefully. They didn't mind "sleeping it off" until someone paid their fine and they were released.

The Fire Department

The fire department consisted of a two wheel cart with hoses wrapped around it like a spool of thread. A bell was rung in case of fire and volunteers pulled the cart to the fire. There was no city water system⁴ no hydrants, etcetera. Most homes had a well that either ran freely or had a pump, so the pressure obtainable was nil. Consequently, fires consumed whole blocks. The main part of town burned on several occasions, once including everything on the west side of Main Street except the lodge building (now an antique store). Another one took everything across the street except the corner hotel building. The huge old hotel down opposite the lodge building went up in smoke in the early teen years. Every block in town has had at least one fire loss.

Streets, Sidewalks, Homes & Fences

The streets were just dirt, no gravel or surfacing. So, when it rained or snowed, they often became a "lob lollie", as the old timers said. The sidewalks were made of boards and often rotting underpinning and wide cracks made them hazardous.

Almost every home had a horse, cow, chickens or pigs; sometimes all of them. Barns had hay mows. And outdoor "johns". Picket fences were the style, and if you could paint them white you were a member of the "in" crowd.

Country Folks - Trains

When the country folks came to town to trade (maybe once a week), they tied their team to a long "hitching rack" that ran along the side of the dance hall that was located on the corner of 3rd and Center Street, opposite City Hall.. Anyone going to Baker or Portland, etc., took the train. At least

one passenger train a day went each way. A water tank stood near the tracks to water the boilers on the trains.

Little children loved to hear the telegraph in the depot sending messages, hear the whistles, and watch for the steel arm signal to go up when the train was coming into town. The steam would blow out the side of the big engines and the brakeman would set a step stool down and call, "All aboard!" Mother would hurry you on and try to find a seat where we wouldn't have to ride backwards all the way. The only colored men we saw were the porters on the trains and children often panicked when one came by.

Family Life & Socials

The social life of the community centered around family affairs such as basket socials, dances, picnics, baseball and track, horse racing, church functions, sewing and quilting bees, celebrations, barn raising, and even thrashing bees.

There was much family to family relationships where all the kids went along, and there was something for all ages to enjoy. Ice skating and sledding in the winter. Town team baseball games and horse racing was weekend fun. Work always came first and farm children had plenty of chores to do. Drugs, smoking, and carrying weapons were just not heard of vices. Young people had too much work to do to goof off and get into trouble.

Making A Living

If any family had a misfortune, everyone was ready and eager to help with work, food, goods and sympathy. There was no government aid, no social security, no paid insurance, no unemployment payments or subsidies of any kind. You either made it or you didn't have it. Many were the 160 acre ranch that clothed and fed and educated a family or 10 or 12, because they grew what they ate. They made most of what they wore, even shoes, coats and hats. You could trade wheat for flour; sell eggs, milk and butter to buy sugar and oil, etc. Many a house wife made their soap and carded the wool for knitted articles. The men made much of their furniture, cut and hauled wood from the hills. There were no gas, electricity, telephone, sewer, or water systems. There were no licenses. Very few had insurance of any kind: fire, theft, health, etc. One dollar a day was top wages and farm. labor was sometimes \$15 or \$20 a month with board and room Chinese workers got 50 cents a day and boarded themselves. Team and man worked on the

railroad tunnel for \$1.50 a day. A day's work was daylight to dark, rain or shine.

Barter and trade provided much of the living in those days and if one needed money they often just borrowed it from a friend and paid it back when they could. One family would trade potatoes for hay, or wood for meat. They took wheat to the mill to grind into flour, Every family had gardens, milk cows, chickens, pigs, and sheep. All added to the nurture of the farm family. About all they bought was sugar, fruit, syrup, rice, beans, calico and foot wear.

Mothers seldom worked away from home. There, she was the baker, seamstress, gardener, teacher, cook, and doctor, family organizer. Always there to care for the ill and discipline the tardy, boost the faltering, and provide solace to the troubled. The woman's work was "never done" and she was home stoking the fires, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes by hand, feeding the stock and chasing kids. Children took an active part in all the labors and rearing of the younger siblings. They learned responsibility early.

Fathers provided the income and did the managing - often worked at added jobs, as well. Wages were low, like 50 cents to \$1 a day. Ranch hands often worked for \$30 a month, plus board and room Teachers, \$50 a month and had to pay their own board and room and drive miles to work, eight months a term.

Communication was a big problem. There were no phones, electric lights, running water, radios, TVs, or computers, refrigeration or daily paper. Even the daily mail box was 4 miles away.

Travel By Horse

Travel was a problem in those days, as we had dirt roads. Winter snows often 8 or 9 foot deep had to be "road broke" when it snowed and were mud holes later. It took a long day just to go 10 miles to town.

Travel was by "horse and buggy," saddle horse, carriage, sled or buggy, all drawn by horses, or on foot. Livery stables for stabling the horses were near every hotel and room & board establishment. For man and beast, the cost was from \$1.50 to \$2.50 a night. When a farmer came to trade for supplies, he would tie the horse to a long hitching rack, and if the weather was cold, throw a horse blanket over them Many a poor saddle horse stood all day and half the night waiting for his master who was in the saloon or playing poker in the pool hall. Many times the horse took his master home in pretty "dozed!" condition.

If ranchers lived near the mountains, where -the snow was much deeper in winter, they often had to provide a wheeled conveyance about halfway to town so when the snow turned to mud they could exchange runners for wheel conveyances.

Blacksmith shops were as prevalent as garages are today. Grandfather Wesley Parker told about driving a new hack home from Baker in about 1885, and his team ran away and wrecked it before he got it home. When trains (and later cars) came to be used, there was many a clash between them and frightened horses.

We rode to school in 1915 to 1920's on a white horse named Mabel, who was deathly afraid of trains. She had been raised deep in the woods where there wasn't a train for a hundred miles and she dumped us every time one caught us near the track in town. It took over an hour to come 4.5 miles to school - dark to dark in winter months. Temperature often crept down to 30 degrees below zero. It was a far cry from a warm bus and hot lunches now days. We didn't have a car until 1923 or 1924, after I graduated from high school. Mother drove a fine blooded trotting horse named Dan, but we kids, couldn't handle him. He practically pulled the rig by his bit.

When my Aunt Laura Kelsey was a young lady, she had a beautiful black saddle horse. One fall day someone stole the horse and my dad's new saddle and bridle. The next spring, the horse came home - minus the equipment.

Stealing horses and cattle was a very common practice. A noted bank and stage robber band, "The McCartey Brothers," lived where the Powder-River bridge is on the freeway now, near the highway park this side of Baker. That road to Baker was known as Stew Road, then. Jonathan Parker lived near it.

Life As A Child Though College

Young people today wonder how it was for people their age in the teens and twenties. In many instances it was a major problem even getting to school. Most of those attending came from miles out in the country, and roads and weather conditions were far from perfect for children riding horses or in open carriages. Some times it would be 30 degrees below zero and we started from our horse before daylight, (we lived 4.5 miles out) and returned after dark. Mother would pack hot rocks and hot water bottles around with several blankets, mittens, scarves and boots. Everyone wore "long johns" and the girls wore dresses (no jeans) and high over shoes or boots. Many times our horse would have 3 inch icicles hanging on her nose and eye

lashes. Our hands would be so cold we couldn't unsnap the harness and bridle to put her in the barn.

There were no hot lunches. You took sandwiches and whatever else was handy to eat cold. Schools were heated with wood burning stoves and those who sat close got too hot while those at a distance froze. The rest rooms were away outside in the school yard - outhouses. Water, if any, was from a well. All ages I played in the same space and it was "survival of the fittest."

It was a case of all dressing, manners and grooming being the conservative mode and to be "different" was just a "mortal sin." I can't imagine such "way out" hair dos and baggy clothes and bad manners as we sometimes see today.

School programs were also social affairs - spelling bees, long poem recitals, minstrels and plays acted out by students, singing, dancing, and music. Debates were held. I recall being in one on "Who was the greatest, Washington or Lincoln?" Of course we solved nothing, but had some good arguments.

We had one principal who had the entire school line up in front of the school house every Monday morning and salute the flag and name all of the presidents in order. Wouldn't be a bad idea today. I can still remember the first ten, even after more than eighty years.

The teachers took care of their own discipline problems with a strap or paddle, and there was no sending (students) to someone else to take care of the problems. Consequently, there were fewer problems.

Reading was taught by learning the sounds of the letter and writing by "Palmer Method." Arithmetic by the "time tables" and practical applications. No adding machines to do your sums and certainly no computers, or even type writers to do the writing and spelling for you.

College cost in the 1920's was about \$500 for a year, board and room included.

Cost of Living

In the 1900 - 1930's, the ice plant and sawmills were the places where employment was attainable, as well as farm labor. But wages were low and risks high in all of them and you didn't have social security, health insurance or retirement fund in any of them. Wages averaged from 50 cents a day to \$30 a month. The men who worked with teams and horses and slips on the railroad tunnel in the 1880's got \$1.50 a day and board. The Chinese who worked there got 50 cents a day and boarded themselves. No fringe benefits,

insurance or worker's compensation. If you had an accident, it was your hard luck.

Homes could be sold or built for around \$300 to \$2,500. Three loaves of bread cost 25 cents; a quart of milk, 15 cents; butter, 50 cents a roll (2 lbs.); eggs, 20 cents a dozen; and ice cream, 5 cents for a double dip; coffee, 5 cents a cup; hair cuts, 25 to 35 cents; stamps, 1 and 2 cents; ticket to a movie, 10 cents.

In 1923, I bought a fine two-year-old saddle horse for \$50, and later, in 1927, a new car (Ford) for \$500. My teacher wages in 1925-26 was \$130 a month and I had to do the janitorial work and drive four miles to school. The wage was for 8 months only and I had 18 pupils in all grades, even one in high school. I weighed less than 100 pounds and had students six feet tall in my room. Also, two little boys who walked two miles to school in the snow and couldn't even bring a lunch. They ate crayons and grasshopper legs when they could. I earned my money!!!

And then came the depression in 1928 to 1935, when the bottom dropped out of everything. \$125 cows sold for \$25; a five gallon \$5 can of cream for \$1.30, and wages sank to 50 cents a day. And now people think they have it tough! At \$4.50 minimum wage an hour, and expect fringe benefits of health insurance for the family, retirement, accident insurance and wages around \$10-20 per hour, vacation time off and many other benefits like social security and Medicare.

Times have really changed, but are we happier, safer, or more grateful and contented than we were before? And what will all this communication explosion of the last ten years do to change our lives again? Will the status of the "haves and have nots" become more pronounced? Will family values and caring for others continue to erode? Will our faith become less of a factor in our lives? Are "material luxuries" becoming so extreme that the simple pleasures and rewards of hard labor are lost completely in the push for "bigger and better," and we forget that the good Lord made us all and admonished us to Love one another and remember his teachings and sacrifices?

THOSE GOOD OLD "GROWING UP" DAYS Louise Parker Dodson
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Looking back a bit and thinking of those many adventures and "close calls" I had growing up and surviving to be "Queen" of the North Powder celebration of one hundred years, I was tempted to jot down a few for posterity. So, when your children seem to have and exhibit a thirst for adventure and hazardous experimentation, you can blame it on "Grammie D;" that last leaf on the family tree.

It started on a cold winter day in 1904, January 30, in a homestead cabin, one of the last homesteads - ten miles from town, snow eight feet deep and drifted. No telephone, electric lights or indoor plumbing. Doctor in town and no way to contact him "Tony express" and helpful neighbors assisted and a tiny baby girl - two months premature and the last of a set of twin girls, one of which had arrived a month-and-a-half earlier and not survived - was born to forest ranger Thomas Henry Parker and Violet Kelsey Parker. They named her "Louise" after a great aunt in Canada who had raised Henry when his mother died at his age of two years.

They didn't expect that wee 2 pound mite of a babe to survive against such odds, but the Lord was good to us, and let her stay. And what a great time it has been to live to be part of the changes in life-style and adventures of so great a span of years - 1904 to 2002. Horses and buggies to going to the moon. Some fun and fancy adventures:

In 1904, some Indians came by our ranch on Anthony Creek. I was lying in a buggy cart in the yard. The Indians wanted to trade for pelts my father had trapped. - Joking, my mom asked a "squaw" who had a "papoose" the same age, if she wanted to trade papooses. She grunted, took a look at me and compared her husky big girl baby and said, "No! No Trade! She heap too pale - heap too pale!"

Growing up, I had some narrow misses. Jessie Goff, my cousin, and I were swinging at a July 4 picnic in the mountains. The swing was hung on a big pole between two trees. The rope that tied the pole to the tree broke and it came down on Jessie's head. A knot cut a big gash in her hairline. I had just got out of the swing a minute earlier.

Was riding bareback after cows. I slid off when the mare stumbled, swung around in front of her and she stepped on my foot. She moved every foot but that one - pinned me down for some time. Another time I M out of an apple

tree backwards. Only a sturdy lower limb caught me long enough to check the fall to the ground on my head.

Once I was climbing on the roof of a shed and found some "sticks" that looked interesting, so I whacked one over the edge of the roof. It scattered a powdery inside over me. Later, found out it was sticks of dynamite my dad had put up there for safe keeping. Lucky they were damp!

My dog Queenie and I climbed into a grain box in the barn. I had a lid that tipped up; hinges on the back. There was a latch that fit over a catch on the box. We bumped it down and the latch caught. We were trapped for about an hour. It was air proof and we could have smothered, but I bumped my head on the lid and it finally came loose.

One Christmas at Aunt Laura's, we girls were making an upstairs bed. We got to pulling the sheets across the bed. I was back of the bed, before an open window. One of the girls let go quick and I fell back into the window opening. There was only an old rotten cloth screen on it that just caught me long enough to scramble out or I would have gone backward to the ground. There was a foot-long split in the rotten old screening.

I was told that I could have a little pig, whose mom was plowing up the pasture down by the river, if I could catch it. I was on one side

of the' rail fence, she and her mom on the other side. I reached through and caught it. It squealed and here (the mother) came. I climbed on the top with the baby pig, but she could almost reach me. I was determined to hang on to the piglet, but if a man hadn't of come by and rescued me ... ? She was one mad marmna!!

Going to school horseback one morning when I was in high school, my horse shied so suddenly, I was thrown off in the middle of the road on my head. I sifted sand out of my hair all day in school.

I took my boys to Fisher Springs to swim, along with some other boys their age. They could swim, but I and one of the other boys couldn't. Unexpectedly, he (the nonswimmer) ran out of the dressing room and just jumped into the deep end of the pool. He was about to drown, so I jumped in to help. I couldn't swim either, so it was a good thing Don rescued us both.

While spending the summer camping with the Goff family on Wolf Creek, we girls - ages 10 to 14 - had been reading "Tarzan of the Apes." So, as we camped in a big grove of aspens, we decided to play we were apes and travel in the tree tops. This was done by swinging the tops from one to another and thus being able to travel for long distances. I happened to get a tough tree to swing and it snapped back, leaving me caught between two trees, unable to go either way - sorta like a spider in a web. Uncle Lane was called to rescue me, and he wasn't too happy with us because he had warned us to stop doing it! While in the mountains, we girls were getting berries on a hillside. The yellow jackets were bad that year and had made their nests on the ground. Jessie yelled at me, who was down the hill from her, and said I had bees on my back. I called for her to "knock 'em off!" When she came, the bees met her half way and she got stung several times. I didn't get stung once! So, she was mad at me for a week.

Coming home from school in the one-horse buggy, Gif and I met a train in the place where the track and road were side by side. Old Mabel was afraid of trains and she reared up, spun around, tipped the buggy over halfway and dumped us out, and down the road she went, back to town. Luckily some boys caught her and we went home okay.

My most embarrassing experience that I never lived down for years was spelling matches where the class of fifth or sixth graders stood in a line and "spelled down." I hated them because I was a terrible speller. As each one in the line got their word, I stood and shivered, worrying about what word I would get. When it got to me, it was "hatchet." Well, bravely I started, "hat"...pause ... then in desperation I blurted out "s h i t!" Well, that brought the house down, and I like to never live it down. No wonder! And I later became a school teacher! Wow!