

Life's Work

Vernon Ludwick, Storyteller

Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society

2006

There were many people that lived in Three Pines and Hugo that had something to do with Vernon deciding what field to enter for his life's work. Vernon used to beg Eddie Kolkow to bring his banjo to school. Remember, there was no radio or television and banjo music was a real entertaining experience. Then there was Max Buffington, in Hugo, who was the first one to introduce Vernon to the guitar. He didn't really know what a guitar sounded like until then, let alone see one at close range. If he had ever heard one, it was probably on the family's old Hi tech "wind up" phonograph, with the steel needles that wasn't exactly high fidelity.

Lily McKenzie was his first piano teacher. John Webb, one of her students, probably made arrangements for Vernon to take lessons free because he knew the Ludwick family couldn't afford the 50¢ fee per lesson. Some of her other students were Maxine Brown, Genevieve McDonald, and Charles Wingard. The Wingards lived on the old Hutton place, and the entrance to the place was just south of "red bend," on Hugo Road. From time to time Lily McKenzie also treated her students to a genuine English tea.

Henry Steiger was probably the only Southern Pacific Railroad section foreman who played cello. Much of the time he would get an orchestra of young people together for a rehearsal or "jam session" at the railroad's Hugo Section House. There were some very unusual combinations of instruments at the session, and the group was sure that they were ahead of their time. Eddie Kolkow was there on the banjo; Henry's niece and Vernon on the violin, and sometimes Maxine Brown on the piano. Occasionally Helen Edleman would come across the "tracks" and listen.

Then there were the fiddle players. On warm summer evenings John Agee, who lived "up the hill," frequently entertained his neighbors from his front porch. You could plainly hear the accompaniment of his foot tapping on the porch. "Strawberry" Brown was probably a little more "sophisticated" fiddle player; he might even have had a few lessons. Brown's sons, Earl and Orla, could be considered "violinists." Earl at one time was a teacher at Hugo High School. Sometime George Grimes would come over and accompany Strawberry with a few chords on the piano. There were not many pianos in Three Pines, but there were a few old pump organs, mostly beyond their prime.

One of the big events during the week was going over to the Grimes home to hear the Major Bowes Radio show. In the 1920s there were not many radios in Three Pines, and the Grimes family many times invited the Ludwicks over to listen to the programs on their radio. On the Major Bowes show, patrons could hear a range of music from people playing on balloons, professional sounding violinists, operatic singers, and "under arm" artists. Some of these performers later become very well known. Vernon just hated it when Mr. Grimes turned off the radio during the advertising — to Vernon the radio was such a novelty that he even liked to listen to the commercials.

Much of Vernon's early musical experience was gained at the Hugo Church. Fern Larson was one of the "regular" Sunday School Pianists, and could make any song service lively. Her bracelets danced on her wrists when she played. Vernon thought she was a great lady! Walter Penny's wife sometimes filled in.

Vernon's brother, ElVon, also made a musical contribution. ElVon finally got enough money together to purchase a guitar for about \$4.95. Vernon was a little jealous of his brother's new guitar with the dancing Hawaiian girls painted on it. Vernon thought his brother was smarter than him, but he always thought he was a little more musically talented! His brother, Harold, was always surrounded by musical instruments and he influenced Vernon greatly. His sister, Eva, took a correspondence course soon after his father, Silas Ludwick, purchased the family piano in Medford. She offered to teach Vernon something about it, but 8-year old Vernon "smarted off" and she, thereafter, always declined to help him.



Photo 1. Grants Pass High School Band, Vernon Ludwick Sitting In Middle: 1941

Courtesy of Vern Ludwick

The Peterson brothers were well known for their dynamite blasts on the 4th of July. One of the best compliments Vernon ever had came from Roy Peterson after hearing him play at the church. He assured Vernon that he thought he was going to be the next Fritz Kreisler whom he had heard one time. Kreisler was one of the foremost violinists of the time.

Vernon received his high school diploma from Grants Pass High School on May 29, 1941. The commencement program was Grants Pass's 53rd. One of his friends, Maxine Brown, was in the Senior Orchestra. The 1941 school year book, *The Toka*, listed some of Vernon's interests and clubs that he had been involved in through his high school years. Of special note was his continued interest in music.

- Future Farmers of America - 1
- Orchestra - 1, 2, 3, 4
- Stamp Club - 2
- Band - 3, 4
- Concertmaster - 4

The sound of music was Senior Vernon's primary interest, and in 1941 he was one of 47 members of the orchestra and band under the leadership of Martin Trepte (Photo 1). The orchestra principally played for outdoor programs, and football fans looked forward to the half times at games when the band gave its field drill exhibition. Vernon's band played at several different out-of-town games. They had a large part in many of the exchange assemblies and presented the student body with an orchestra concert as well as a band concert. During the year several of the members were given the opportunity to conduct the orchestra for the experience and training it offered.

The first band concert ever presented was given as a free student matinee as well as an evening pay performance. This event was a tremendous success. Previous to this time the annual presentation had been an orchestra concert. The orchestra also took part in the band clinic in Medford on March 7, and the annual music festival in Ashland. They attended the band contest which was held in Marshfield, Oregon, on April 18 and 19, 1941. Vernon noted, "At a similar contest held here last year, our band was given a rating of first-class."

Officers for the band and orchestra in 1940 - 1941 were: Bob Platner, Mr. Trepte's assistant; Henry Howard, librarian; Dorothy Green, student body representative; and Marie Reinhart, publicity manager.

Even so, *The Toka*, was frank in Vernon's assessment of himself in that he had not decided, or perhaps had not fully developed his career goals as his conclusion was "*Undecided*".

Walker, Mike. March 2006. *Vernon Chester Ludwick's Three Pines & Hugo Memories: 1923 - 1941*. Education Chair for Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society. Hugo, OR.

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