

Metzgers, Father and Son, Spanned 100 Years of Carson History

Henry Metzger Settled Here In 1883; Ernest Died in 1983 After 89 Years; Both Had Served Community Well

By Roy Craft

When Ernest F. Metzger died at his home in Carson January 2 at the age of 89, he had been a part of the Carson scene for almost nine decades. Add to that the 10 years his father Henry had lived in Carson prior to Ernest's birth and a century of growth, from 1883 to 1983, was embraced by the lives of these two Skamania County residents.

When Henry Metzger came here from Switzerland in 1883, Carson had not yet been given a name and was a settlement represented by a few houses on the flat overlooking the Columbia River. Today, Carson is the largest unincorporated community in the area and bids fair to outstrip Stevenson, the county seat, in population.

Ernest Metzger was born May 8, 1893 and except for brief periods away from home, including military service during World War I, he spent his entire life in the house in which he was born.

Ernest attended school in Carson and as a young man worked briefly with his uncle John Metzger in the railroad shops in Tacoma. During World War I he was stationed at Camp Lewis, now Fort Lewis, as an infantryman.

Upon discharge from the service Ernest set up a blacksmith shop on land given him by his father across from the family home. He shod horses and did other blacksmith work and when automobiles came into the picture, took a course in auto mechanics and converted his shop into a garage.



Henry and Maria Metzger are seen at their home place in Carson in their later years. Maria died in 1942 at the age of 77. Henry died in 1958 at the age of 96. They had spent their entire married life in the house which Henry had built of logs, with a two-story frame addition built later. The house still stands and was the home of the Metzger's son Ernest Metzger until his passing January 2 of this year (1983) at the age of 89.

He planted a grove of walnut trees on his property and also a small vineyard and took pride in the wine he produced for the enjoyment of himself and his friends.

Some years ago Ernest sold the property on which the shop was located to Cary Foster. When Metzger's health failed, Cary and his wife Wilma Foster kept a neighborly eye on him and helped see to his needs.

In recent years Metzger suffered from arthritis and other complications and frequently received treatment at the Veterans Hospital in Vancouver, but was at his home when death came. He would have been 90 years of age May 3, 1983.

Ernest never married and is survived only by his sister, Mrs. Donald (Louise) Bennett of Portland.

A brother, Samuel H. Metzger, who was born May 15, 1890, worked as a river boatman and was first mate on the steamboat *Beaver* when he was injured in a fall from the deck and died in Portland April 3, 1930 at the age of 39.

Ernest's death ended 100 years of Metzger activity in Carson but their imprint on the community will be long lasting.

Ernest's father, Henry Metzger, was born September 15, 1861 in Altdorf, Canton Schaffhausen, Switzerland. Henry came to America with his brother John and after a brief stop in Minnesota, they came west. John settled in the Puget Sound area while



This is original swinging bridge over Wind River Canyon north of Carson, near site of modern structure on present-day Wind River highway. It was built in 1912 after Carson-area residents had petitioned County Commissioners.



Maria and Henry Metzger are seen above while on visit to Government Mineral Springs Hotel above present day Hemlock. With them is daughter Louise, now Mrs. Donald Bennett of Portland, only surviving member of pioneer family.



This is a photo of Maria Schaub sent to Henry Metzger when he ran an advertisement in an East Coast paper. Maria, also an emigrant from Switzerland, was working in a silk mill in New Jersey when she read the notice and responded. It was common in that period for young frontier bachelors to advertise for brides and for romantic young ladies to welcome correspondence with adventurous gallants in the west.

Henry headed for Skamania County.

Henry came downriver from The Dalles, Oregon by sailboat, arriving in what is now Carson December 6, 1883. A sawmill was in operation there but Henry found working conditions difficult and the pay low and he and another young man chose to go into business for themselves, cutting cordwood at \$1 a cord. They lived in a small cabin one mile west of Carson.

The winter of 1884 was one of the most severe on record and when a blizzard hit the Gorge during the Christmas week, the men were caught unprepared. Running out of food, Henry and his partner walked across the Columbia on the snow-covered ice to Cascade Locks where work on the canal, which gave Cascade Locks its name, was underway.

Metzger made his way to The Dalles and worked there for a short time before returning to Carson.

He filed for a homestead in 1887 and built himself a small log cabin, the logs set vertically rather than horizontally. He was later to build a two-story addition and the



This is a photo of Henry Metzger sent to his sweetheart-by-mail. The picture was taken in Switzerland before he emigrated to America. Henry and Maria were married in Portland in 1887 and enjoyed a happy life together until her death in 1842, a total of 55 years.

house still stands.

As a young bachelor he was lonely and in keeping with the custom of the frontier period, he advertised for a bride in an eastern newspaper.

Maria Schaub, who was born at Datwil, Canton Zurich, Switzerland, August 15, 1865, had also emigrated to America. She was employed in a silk mill in New Jersey when she read Henry's notice and was later to recall how she and the other girls at the mill giggled as they studied the ads placed by Metzger and other western bachelors.

Since Henry had come from an area not far from her own home, she wrote to him and they exchanged the photographs which are reproduced with this article. They were engaged before they had actually met and when Maria came west to Portland they were already in love. They were married in Portland in 1887. Their long and happy life together ended with Maria's death November 8, 1942 at the age of 77. Henry was to live until February 5, 1958 when he died at the age of 96.

Both Henry and Maria had received good educations in their native Switzerland but they spoke only German when they came to America. With the aid of a German-English dictionary they learned English quickly. Henry's command of the language was evidenced by his style in the articles he wrote for the Skamania County Pioneer over a span of many decades.

Henry became an American citizen in 1895 and his daughter Louise Bennett has his citizenship certificate dated in Stevenson on the 13th of August, 1895. It was signed by C. G. Green, Clerk of Skamania County. The judge was the Hon. N. H. Bloomfield.

Mrs. Bennett also has Homestead Certificate No. 2951, issued to Henry Metzger for the 160-acre homestead where his house stands in Carson, dated the 24th day of October 1894. The President of the United States was Grover Cleveland.

Other papers of historic interest are the Skamania County tax receipts for the year 1895, one dated April 21, 1896 for one-half year's taxes in the amount of \$8.77 and the other dated October 24, 1896 in the amount of \$8.76, making a total tax for 1895 of \$17.53 for the 160 acres. F. W. Kale was County Treasurer.

Henry Metzger had a sense of history and Skamania County Pioneer files reveal that he frequently took occasion to write down his recollections of the growth of his adopted community. Following, in no special sequence, are condensed versions of some of his reflections.

In the late 70's and early 80's, Thomas Monaghan, A. S. Estabrook, A. C. Tucker and Isadore St. Martin, together with a few others, settled on the west side of Wind River on the lower Wind River Valley. M. Murphy, George Miller, Jos. Robbins and a man named McKeighan settled on the east side near the mouth of Wind River. These were the earliest settlers in the valley when he came in 1883.

In 1880 A. R. Estabrook built the first sawmill in the Wind River Valley, a water powered plant on Carson Creek. About 1881 a company built a steam sawmill where the town of Carson stands. Logs were dragged to the mill with ox teams and the lumber flumed to the Columbia River and shipped to The Dalles by Steamboat.

In 1886 the sawmill left the valley and permanent settlers took up the logged-over land on the lower flat: The Zurchers in 1885, the H. Metzgers, L. Imans, R. Glur, Gattons and others in 1887. In 1889 A. O. Crow, George Olmstead, Morace and C. C.

Wetherell and others settled across Wind River on the middle flat.

Further homesteading in the upper valley was arrested when the Columbia National Forest (now the Gifford Pinchot) was established. About the year 1900 many of the homesteaders on the upper and middle flat sold out to the Wind River Lumber Co. for about \$900 to \$100 per 160 acres.

Prior to 1883 the nearest store and post office was at Cascade Locks. To get there and back by rowboat was inconvenient and in that year A. G. Tucker, an old bachelor, started a store in a "miserable, run-down shack" which was built by the sawmill company. The shack was so primitive it even had a wooden chimney.

The citizens of the community applied for a Post Office and were granted twice-a-week mail service to the Tucker store. Tucker, an ardent admirer of frontiersman Kit Carson, suggested the name Carson for the post office and the name was adopted without objection.

After one year the Postal Inspector notified Tucker that he could no longer maintain the post office in the shack, whereupon Tucker put up a "half-way decent" building for his store and postal facility!

Before the town had a post office, Carson was known as "Sprague Landing". Early settlers got out cordwood, shipped it to The Dalles by sailboat from the landing and brought back a year's supply of groceries and other necessities.

By 1910, the town of Carson boasted five hotels, including St. Martin's and Shipherd's, one restaurant, four stores, two large livery barns, a bakery, a billiard hall and dance hall, two schoolhouses, one church and — when the railroad was built — seven saloons. Four of these saloons were in town, one at Shipherd's Springs, one at St. Martin's and one near the steamboat landing.

According to the census of 1890, Skamania County had a population of 744, then the smallest of any county in the state. About half of them were Indians or part Indian. Among the whites many were illiterate and a familiar jibe in neighboring counties was that Skamania lacked enough adult whites who could read or write to fill county offices. This was not true but in that frontier time an eighth-grade education was all that was required to qualify as a teacher in a rural school.

The county's school had to "scrimp along" on \$200 to \$300 of school money per year per district and a sixth grade education was about the average for children.

The Skamania County seat was at Cascades (now North Bonneville) in 1892 when Metzger participated in a Democratic County Convention to nominate county officials. There were no roads and only old Indian paths connected the communities. Metzger and his group went downriver by rowboat to the head of the Cascades (just east of present-day Bridge of the Gods), then walked another five miles down the Portage Railroad to the Courthouse, a 24. x 40 foot frame building.

A year later, in the spring of 1893, the county records were moved (unauthorized and under cover of darkness) to Stevenson and the county seat was declared reestablished. Metzger was among those who strongly disapproved of the move but was somewhat mollified later when a flood wiped out the village at Cascades and would have taken the records with it.

(This is, the first of two articles. The second will appear next week.)

Metzgers Made County History; Henry Metzger Helped Record It

By Roy Craft

When Henry Metzger came to America from Switzerland and settled in what is now Carson, Washington in 1883, he and members of his family were to play important roles in the development of the Wind River Valley and Skamania County for the next 100 years.

Not only was he to help make history, Henry Metzger was to help record it. Over a period of many decades Metzger made it a habit to pen anecdotal history for the Skamania County Pioneer and to reminisce about the frontier period.

Following his 90th birthday in 1951, Metzger expounded his philosophy while writing about his early experiences in the Columbia Gorge.

"We Nonagenarians (people between 90 and 100 years of age) have no future before us any more. We live and think mostly in terms of the past. We remember important happenings in our lives and sometimes feel that we should inform the younger generation about them so that they could learn from our experiences. So I will briefly describe my first trip down the Columbia River from The Dalles on a scow about 70 years ago.

"I was then in The Dalles and had taken a job to work in Wind River Valley. I was to go down there on a scow (sailboat) and had to go aboard in the evening as they were ready to leave for downriver, they said. But the whole crew, including the Captain, went up town to take a drink first and I was left alone on the boat on a dark December night. I was a lad of 22, only eight months in the U.S.A. and still a greenhorn, and about boats and navigation I knew absolutely nothing.

"About 9 o'clock the Captain came into the cabin. He was drunk and unsteady on his feet. After a while he got up and staggered to the door to go outside. I was afraid he might fall overboard and tried to hold him back, but he very unpolitely pushed me aside, went out and sure enough he walked right smack overboard. "He could swim, but instead of swimming toward shore, which was only a few feet away, he swam out towards the river. Then, as if guided by an unseen hand, I ran out on deck, got hold of a long pole which I pushed out where he was splashing in the water. He grabbed hold of the pole and thus I kept him from swimming out into the current of the river and in the meantime I hollered up towards the town: 'Help, Help, man overboard'.

"Soon two men came running down, jumped in a rowboat and pulled the Captain out of the water. Fortunately one of the men knew what to do in such cases and he succeeded in working the water out of the Captain's lungs. About one hour later the Captain was resting snug and warm in his bunk, all sobered up and glad that he had a new lease on life, while less than an hour before he had hollered, 'I'm dying'."

Describing his first trip downriver, Metzger noted the settlements of White Salmon on the north shore and Hood River on the Oregon side. "On account of the Railroad along the south shore of the Columbia being built at that time, Hood River had a great advantage over White Salmon," he wrote.

"Near what is now 'Cooks' I saw a flume coming down over a long, barren and

very steep hill and at the foot of that hill scows were loading lumber and cordwood to be shipped to The Dalles. That place was called 'Weidler's Flume'.

"Next, my attention was called to a rock formation on the south side of Wind Mountain which resembles an Indian face. That old Indian is still up there seemingly watching at the narrowest spot in the Columbia Gorge. On the Oregon side I saw a long stretch of the old immigrant road where it wound outside of Shellrock Mountain. That



Ernest Metzger takes wheel of family Model T Ford while on leave from Fort Lewis, 1918. His father is in back seat. Neighbor in front and child in back are unidentified. Ernest, a blacksmith, became automoblie mechanic when cars became popular.

very interesting, historical landmark is now nearly all covered up with shellrock, only on the east side of it is a short stretch still visible.

"Crate's Mill near Wyeth was then the only sawmill on the Middle Columbia which was close to the river.

"Sprague (Carson) Landing was the terminus of two flumes and much lumber and cordwood was shipped from there to The Dalles. There was the end of my trip on the scow, but soon after I went to Cascade Locks via rowboat and saw another flume flooding down cordwood at the mouth of Nelson Creek.

"At Shepherd's Point (Stevenson) I saw two houses from the river, one the residence of Henry Shepherd, an early day pioneer, and the other that of Judge (Justice of the Peace) Ed Nineville, a bachelor. At Rock Creek Falls, Felix Iman, a pioneer of 1850, operated a waterpower sawmill.

"Over at Cascade Locks you could see derricks rigged up and when work on that ship canal was in progress you could hear rock blasting and the noise of hoisting engines for a long ways off. The Town of Cascade Locks had 3 stores, 1 hotel, 3 saloons, a railroad depot and many cheap workman's houses. Cascade Locks was then and for about 10 years more the nearest trading place for the people then living at or near what is now Stevenson, Carson, Home Valley and Collins."

Metzger included the founding of the Skamania County Pioneer, the county's newspaper, in 1893 as an event of historic importance.

In the Pioneer for December 16, 1949, he wrote: "If we had a reliable history, recording the important happenings in the Columbia Gorge as far back as the coming of the first white men to the Pacific Northwest, we would, no doubt, have some very interesting reading for those long winter evenings that we are having now.

"As the passage around the Cascade rapids, which used to be a few miles below Stevenson before The Bonneville Dam was built, was more favorable on the

Washington side of the river than on the Oregon side, it is safe to assume that the first white men coming here — among them the Lewis & Clark expedition in 1805 — once had their feet on what later became Skamania County ground; and later people by the tens of thousands passed through part of our county when transferring from one steamboat to another during the steamboat days on the Columbia River, about 80 years ago.

"Also in Skamania County was the battleground of the Indian War of 1856 when the Yakima Indians came over into the Columbia Gorge to stop the white men from going through the narrow and only passage they had, to get through to go inland.

"Three important happenings of recent history are worth mentioning.

- "1. The Skamania County Pioneer, our newspaper, was founded in 1893.
- "2. Also in 1893, the County Seat was moved (unauthorized and under cover of darkness) from Cascades (North Bonneville) to Stevenson and the perpetrators of this unlawful act got away with it without interference or punishment.
- "3. "Also in 1893, eighty per cent of the area Skamania County was put a forest reserve and was therefore lost to the County for tax purposes. That very nearly wrecked our County Organization, and now after many years of waiting the forest reserve is one of or County's most valuable assets."

While Metzger record the serious side of life Skamania County during in frontier days, he frequent lightened his articles wil amusing anecdotes. In wi ting about the early school in Carson, he had this to offer:

"In the early days school discipline was not so strict as now. In 1888, we had an elderly man for a teacher? He had fixed a door, with padlock, on a grocery box to serve as a kind of private teacher sanctum, which he always kept locked.

"One day he went out to lunch and forgot to lock it. Naturally the kids had wondered what the teacher had in the box so they investigated and sampled the whiskey and chewing tobacco which they found there. Th result was no school the



Ernest Metzger, son of Henry and Maria Metzger, was born May 8, 1893, in Carson, and died Jan. 2 of 1983 at the age of 89. Henry spent his whole life, except a few times, in Carson.

afternoon. The reason: Too many kids on the sick list.”

In 1951 he compared the "hard times" of the 1890's with the prosperity of the mid-20th century:

"If high wages, high prices and plenty of money in circulation in itself alone would make the people really happy (as many think it will) then we should all by this time feel as happy as if we were flying to Heaven in flower-baskets. Unfortunately such is not the case. The present generation is confronted with problems which are far more difficult to solve than those that we pioneers had to solve."

Metzger remained alert even in his final years and on his 96th birthday, September 15, 1957 enjoyed swapping stories with other old-timers who were among the crowd of well-wishers who gathered at his home to celebrate the event.

Henry Metzger died February 5, 1958. He was preceded in death by his wife Maria, who had also emigrated to America from Switzerland, and who succumbed in 1942 at the age of 77. A son, Samuel, a river boatman, died in 1930 at the age of 39 as the result of a fall while working on the steamboat *Beaver*. A son, Ernest, who had spent his entire life in Carson, died in the original family home January 2 of this year at the age of 89.

A daughter, Louise (Mrs. Donald) Bennett, youngest member of the family, is now making her home in Portland but maintains close ties with Skamania County. She grew up in Carson and graduated from Stevenson High School in 1924 as the class valedictorian.

The family records provide a rich lode for students of pioneer life in the Columbia River Gorge.



Samuel T. Metzger, first-born child of Henry and Maria Metzger, is seen here as a young man. He was first mate on the steamboat *Beaver* when, at the age of 39, he died in 1930 as a result of a fall from the deck.



Infantryman Ernest Metzger, home on leave from Fort Lewis in 1918 during World War I, strikes military posture with his dad's hunting rifle. Except for military service and brief periods away from home, Ernest spent his entire life in Carson.