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Cape Horn Site For Earliest Homestead In State History



Steamer "Dalles City" gets ready to pick up passengers at the Cape Horn Landing in 1910. This dock and the railroad track was destroyed in the aftermath of the Cape Horn blasting.

(The following history of the Cape Horn area was read at the Old Timers' Picnic at the Steel Bridge Park on Sunday, Aug. 8, by the author, Carolyn Mackey Bajema.)

Did you know that Cape Horn was one of the first settled areas of Washington? The State's first homestead was taken at Parker's Landing (near Washougal) in 1845. The year before this, 1844, James Walker crossed the continent by ox team from Pennsylvania to Vancouver. Then in 1846 he and his family moved to Cape Horn, thus becoming the first settlers.

They were later followed by the Stevensons in 1855, the Fosters, Smiths, Nevins, Hanlans, Haffey's, Buslachs, Gunthers, and McCures in 1875; the Brelins, Doughertys, McCartys, Masons, Baraccos in 1882; the Mackeys in 1885; and Del Grossos, Martells, Tavellis, Wantlands, and Andersons about the same time.

Italian Colony

About 1880 Dr. Candiano came here hoping to establish an Italian colony. He first settled on what later became known as the Froeschle place. Later he built a factory at Mud Flat on the bank



Cape Horn Hotel, store, saloon, warehouse, boat landing, 1908.

of the river between Cape Horn and Prindle. This factory was to make starch and syrup from potatoes grown by the settlers. It is said that hidden under a bushel basket was a still to manufacture spirits to brighten the time for the local blades. He later operated, on the island opposite Cape Horn, the first seine fishing. Amanuel Baracco recalls that his father worked on the seine with his team of oxen.

The first school in the community was a log cabin beside Canyon Creek near the Sam Angelo farm. Later a building was built on a knoll near the Elliot home, later known as the Walter Dugan place. This building served the community until 1911 when the present school house was built.

Some of the early day teachers were Nellie Wright, Mary McGreel, Katherine Daugherty Breslin, and Mr. Waterman in 1881. In late times Mrs. Mason, Ed

Hollis, Lena Strong, Lillie Miller, Mr. Hinkle, Miss Blackwood, Annie Orton Monaghan and Alice Hawkins taught.

The settlers raised practically all their food, buying only such staple items that they could not raise.

Boat Swamped

Elmer Walker recalls that his brother, Clarence, built a box boat and he and his father loaded it with wheat and corn to take to Vancouver to be ground into flour and meal. On the way down the Columbia the boat swamped, but they managed to land it on an island. It took them several days to dry the grain before resuming their journey. In the meantime they said grain was all they had to eat.

Most of the farm work was done by the sweat of the brow and help from a team of oxen or horses. In those days lack of machinery little daunted the hardy homesteader. I was told that Mr.

McCue cut his hay with a scythe, raked it by hand and then carried it to his barn shock by shock on a rope slung over his back.

Now mail delivery to our door every day is, we think, a necessity, but in the early days of Cape Horn, mail was brought across the river by sail or row-boat several times a week providing the East wind didn't blow too hard. It was up to each settler to go to the Post Office for his own mail. Mr. Wright was the first postmaster having the post office in the log house owned by J. W. Stevenson near the Cape Horn landing. He later moved to a farm at the top of the hill and had the post office there.

First Store

The first store at Cape Horn was operated by Ordway Logging Company. When they left, Jim Haffey, father of Irene Hoffman, took over.

Logging, which has continued to be such an important industry, had an early beginning in the community when Bridgeport and Ordway were the first company to log on the upper waters of the Washougal. They quit logging in 1885. In that year John James Mackey, father of Johnnie Mackey, moved here from Corvallis with his family to be watchman at their camp. Several years later they sold out to Buckley, Curtis and Whitney. Logging in those days was a very different operation than it is today. Trees were cut from spring boards high above the ground and the logs were hauled by oxen to the river.

Buckley, Curtis and Whitney Co. built a long chute from the top of the hill (near the old sheep camp) down to the Washougal River. Logs hauled to the chute by oxen were slid down at terrific speed, landing in a pond and sending a

spray of water up over a hundred feet. The logs were then floated down the Washougal river on the Columbia where they were rafted and towed to mills down the river.

Yacolt Fire

After the Yacolt fire of 1902, Jack Blazier and brothers bought the Buckley holding to salvage the burned timber. A railroad with a log dump at Fir Point near Prindle crossed the Prindle ranch, the Henry Miller place, skirted the Taveli and Baracco farms and then to Fletcher Flat where the main camp, consisting of roundhouse, bunk houses, mess hall, and commissary, was located. From there spurs were built out into various areas of the burn.

Miles of track were laid and many high trestle were necessary to cross the gullies among the hills. For years the toot of an engine with several cars of logs was a familiar sound and sight to the Cape Horners. When Blazier closed down he sold off the buildings to the local people, so nothing remains to mark the spot of the camp. However, parts of the railroad grade are now being used as county roads.

In the early days, the settlers depended on their own initiative and community for entertainment; spelling bees, dances, and picnics were the social events of the times.

In 1884 at the home of C. O. Hanlon, father of Maggie Hanlon and grandfather of Irene Hoffman, the Cape Horn Grange was organized with James Nevins, father of Eliza Nevins and Theresa Freeburg, elected as Master. Several years later Mr. Nevins was elected first State Grand Lecturer and in 1895 his daughter Eliza was elected State Grange Lady Assistant Steward.

Together they organized and boosted the work of this organization in the state.

State Land

In 1882 the Cape Horn Grange Hall was dedicated on the land donation by Mr. Nevins at the top of Hanlon Hill. I'm sure most of you can remember attending functions there. One of the reasons for organizations was for better roads and schools. The Grange sponsored a number of community gatherings. Two important events of the year in those days were the Fourth of July celebration and the Harvest Home picnic. A new dress and hat were a must for the ladies on the Fourth of July.

Lena Buslach Strong remembers that the Declaration of Independence was always read and she had the honor

many times to read this historic document to the assembly.

Another gathering place was the Fleming's Flat, a stone's throw from here, where ball games, horse races and foot races were enjoyed.

Now once again the descendants of the first settlers and those who came after to build up this community and country have come to an old picnic spot to recall old times and continue the history of our community.

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(The Post Record wishes to thank Mrs. Bajema for permission to publish her excellent essay. We would be happy to publish the history of other historic organizations and Granges in the area at any time.)



S.P.&S. construction crew and engine "Pioneer" is laying steel at Cape Horn, WA., on Nov. 16, 1907, at 10 a.m. Couple on the right looking on are Mr. and Mrs. John Stevenson, who homesteaded the land at the base of Cape Horn. They are the parents of Emory Stevenson.