

Charles and Elizabeth Cottrell were early Mt. Pleasant and Washougal pioneers. Charles, with his son Glenn, built an electrical powerplant on McCloskey Creek on the Upper Washougal River Valley
It was located some six miles north of the Mercantile Store.

The late Otis Acker of Carson was a grandson of Charles and Elizabeth, and many descendants still reside in the area.

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The Life Story of the Cottrell Family

The following articles are taken from notes as they were related by one of Washougal's early pioneers.

Mr. Charles Warner Cottrell is prominent in the history of Washougal for his untiring efforts to serve his fellow man until his passing the evening of July 4, 1944.

The name Cottrell is of French origin. His grandparents came from Massachusetts, and he himself was born in Cleveland, Ohio, September 25, 1859. Not much was recorded of his earlier life; his schooling was short and he worked in the Maine woods; his mother died young and his father remarried. He had a brother, sister, and a half-brother. A daughter of sister still lives in Ohio (*She passed away in 1973 at the age of 93*).

At a place called Mulberry Corners a few miles from Chester Cross Roads, now known as Chesterland, he opened a general store and Post Office.

While here he met Elizabeth Evelyn Fessenden. The name Fessenden is of Scottish origin. Elizabeth was born in Kirtland, Ohio on January 3rd, 1860.

She was the eldest daughter of a family of four girls and two boys. She attended the Geauga Seminary, a fashionable girls' school of that day in Chester, Ohio. She had talent for music which she taught later, and was very good at oil painting and an excellent seamstress.

They were married and went to Chagrin Falls on their honeymoon. In those days that was quite a trip.

They lived at Chester Cross Roads a few years, then decided to move to Ellis, Kansas where they lived for two years. The drouth and pests the second year were forcing people to move.

They talked it over and Mr. Cottrell decided to come west. Mrs. Cottrell and the four children were to follow within three weeks if she did not get work otherwise.

When Mr. Cottrell arrived in Washougal, he stayed over night at the Braun hotel, which was owned by the father of the present Fritz Braun and Frankie Cheatham. It

stood near where the bank building now stands.

The following day Mr. Braun hitched up his team and took Mr. Cottrell up to Mt. Pleasant where some eastern friends of theirs had settled.

That was as far as the road went east of town at that time. Meantime no word had reached the family, so they decide to come west. They packed up their most cherished possessions, although some had to be left behind, and boarded the train for Portland, Oregon.

At that time they had Zella, Grace, Nina, and Glenn, and her sister Lillian also came with her.

They were met on arrival in Portland by Mr. Cottrell, and they all came up the Columbia River on the old stern wheeler "The Traveler," piloted by Captain Buchanan.

Mrs. Cottrell related that they landed here on her birthday January 3, 1888 and the sun was shining and the grass was green. This looked good to them after having been in the drouth area in the east. They did not leave the boat at Washougal, but stayed on it until it docked at Mt. Pleasant. They stayed with friends until Mr. Cottrell could get a house built.

The only land available belonged to a man who had disappeared so Mt. Cottrell improved the land and got a tax title to it.

Sawmill Started

He started a blacksmith shop, and later built a sawmill on the creek where the Mt. Pleasant Grange Hall now stands.

The flume extended down the canyon sough of the present highway. The small stream furnished water to run the sawmill. Here he sawed lumber for the neighbors and built himself a box house. The home on Mt. Pleasant was on the land where Mrs. Mollie Miller lived. The Cottrells lived on Mt. Pleasant for two years. While there a Post Office was opened and Mr. Cottrell served as Post Master, and he was also editor of a weekly paper called, "The Mt. Pleasant Breeze."

The local talent would meet together and hold entertainment, which they called "Literaries." The comedies, readings, and general get-togethers were enjoyed by all.

A Grange was started and both Mr. and Mrs. Cottrell were charter members.

Mr. Cottrell came to Washougal and bought a piece of land from the Ough Donation Land Claim, and brought down timber sawed at his sawmill and built a new home. This house still stands on Main Street. The home and sawmill on Mt. Pleasant were sold and the family moved to a temporary house while the new one was being finished. This was in the year 1890.

Relics Discovered

On this land many Indian relics were found, and it was also the site of an old Indian Camp and a grave was found there.

The town of Washougal had at that time Braun's Hotel and Saloon, H. C. Carpenter's store and a general store known as the Grange store, later known as the Hendrickson store. Mr. Cottrell was asked to run the grange store which he did for three years. Next he was asked by Mr. Gray to run the Post Office which had a store included. This he accepted and ran for about a year. This was a building west of where Surbeck's store stands. Soon word got around that when the lease on the building

expired it was not going to be renewed, so Mr. Cottrell bought two lots from Mr. Braun across the street east, and built a store and moved into it three weeks before the lease expired. This was done to save the Post Office for the town. He ran this for several years. Later this location was bought by Mr. Nagel and he ran the store until it became the present Surbeck store.

Somewhere along this time the original parsonage for the Congregational Church was built by Mr. Cottrell, and he also helped with some work on the church.

At this time the road north from town ran through the dense woods, winding and muddy in winter. The settlers worked on the road to keep it passable. This road ran to the banks of the Washougal river where it was fjorded as it was some years before the bridge was built. On the North bank the road ran West to Camas. This winding road through the trees is now Washougal's Main street.

The town had a variety of nationalities represented in its population and the Hudson's Bay Co. had taught the Chinook Jargon to the Indians so that they could trade better. Mr. Cottrell learned to converse in Chinook Jargon as many Indians traded at the store, and if he was away they would wait for his return so they could talk with him.

In 1897, Mr. Cottrell erected a grist mill on the bank of the Washougal river. The mill was located north of town, east of the south end of the bridge which now crosses the river at the end of Main street.

The burrs to grind the flour came from France. It was a twenty-five barrel rolling grist mill, three stories high.

A dam was built upstream from where the bridge now is to furnish water power to run the machinery. On the east end of the mill was a sawmill with a steam plant to furnish extra power during low water. Logs were flumed down by ditches built upstream along the bank.

At this time much grain was harvested in the adjoining districts, and farmers would bring it to the mill in four-horse wagon loads to be ground into flour. Some came from Amboy and Eureka with their loads of grain.

Some time later a pest invaded the wheat and made this crop short-lived, so the mill was used to grind feed and corn for the farmers.

Honest Indian

Mr. Cottrell told of the honesty of an Indian who once came to get some flour during a cold winter. He said his family was hungry but did not have any money although he told him that some day he would pay for it. Mr. Cottrell believed it to be a charity case, and promptly gave him the flour and forgot the incident.

Some years later on the streets of Portland, Mr. Cottrell saw an Indian approaching. He stopped Mr. Cottrell and reminded him who he was and about the sack of flour, and promptly paid for it.

The grist mill held much interest for the children and grandchildren of Mr. Cottrell. He never tired of showing them how it worked. They like to watch the grain being poured from the sack into the square bin with the small opening at the bottom, and then see the grain disappear through it, then to have the door on the shaft open and see the cups full of grain on a belt carried upstairs; then to see him test the flour for specks of hulls with a slick.

Mr. Cottrell would adjust the burrs and watch as expert hands hang the empty

bag to be filled on the hooks on the long square shaft that came down from the ceiling and the “paddle” was pulled out near the end of the shaft and see the flour pour into the bag, a little at a time, regulated by the opening and closing the “paddle.” Then it was tamped, & this went on until the bag was full, then it was unhooked and quickly sewed shut with twine & a long curved needle.

The grain was weighed before grinding, and afterwards was placed again on the cart and run on the floor scales, checked and labeled ready for the farmer.

The upper stairs in the mill were always white with flour dust and sometimes the children played in it even though it was forbidden, and many scoldings resulted. This mill continued until 1915 when the machinery was sold to a man from Beaverton, Oregon.

The idea of utilizing the water power for electric lights grew and in 1910 this was undertaken. A franchise was taken and to keep it wires were strung down town to the Post Office and to Camas to the telephone company. The power continued in the basement of the mill for 9 years.

The mill pond froze over in winter and was a popular place for ice skaters. Mr. Cottrell was a good ice skater, and would often pull children on the ice on a sled as he skated up and down stream much to their delight.

During this time a well 90-feet deep was dug south of the mill. Mr. Hank Sodawasser was one of the men who helped dig this well. It was cemented on the sides and a roof place over it several feet up from the ground.

People would walk quite a distance to get a bucketful or a drink of the water which was cold on the hottest days. Soon pipes were laid up town and the town’s first piped water system got underway. This well never ran dry and is still in use today.

The pipe line was sold later to Mr. Pierce and he took over the town water system.

Fire Hits Mill

One Sunday evening in 1919 in the summer while Mr. Cottrell came to the house to eat some supper, a cry went up, “The mill is on fire.” The first thing Mr. Cottrell thought of was his books, souvenirs and valuables in his office in the mill. He dashed in. First trying to get his new firehose working, but it tangled & he knew he could not spend time with it so he dropped and hurriedly closed the trap door on the stairs to the basement where the fire was raging. The floor was getting so hot he rushed to his office to try to save a few items he could carry. Gathering them up he started through the dense smoke and flames to the door in front, but stubbed his toe and fell, dropping everything. He crawled to the front door to be met by a wall of flame coming out from under the four foot high porch. He jumped through the flames to the ground just as the floor collapsed behind him, his hair, eyebrows, and lashes singed, but safe. His wife rushed to beat out the flames on his clothes, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief that he was safe. Hardly a moment passed before the whole tinder-dry building collapsed.

There was no insurance and everything was a total loss.

While all this was going on, a big crowd had gathered. As there was no adequate fire department at that time a bucket brigade worked like beavers and saved the well-house though the front of the building was charred.

A lumber shed and well house was full of oak lumber, and burned but a nice pile of lumber was saved by willing workers.

Car Saved

The family car was driven out of the garage near the mill by Mr. E. J. Benedict and parked at a safe distance from the fire. This was one of the first cars in our town. Thus ended one of the colorful landmarks of Washougal's early days.

When the ashes cooled, it was noticed that the water wheels, which were in the basement of the mill supplying the power for the town lights, were still running. A brake was made and they were stopped. Debris was cleared away and building began to house them and set them to work again.

Not many weeks went by before the machinery had been set up, the family, children and grandchildren, gathered to watch the wheels start again to provide the town with light. It was a thrilling moment.

During this time a dam was being built up the river, contracted by a Portland firm, but due to logging operations, the dam went out. The firm wanted to build for Mr. Cottrell, but he decided to undertake the work himself.

Meanwhile the state legislature passed a law which prohibited the rafting of log in the vicinity of the, so this problem was solved.

Then the new dam was built and was referred to as the "upper dam," another dam was built later downstream and was called the "lower dam," a third dam was built this side of Cougar Creek but it was never destined to serve the community. It was started twice but had to be abandoned when the river flooded so work was speeded up to beat the flood time. At last it was finished, and all were on hand to watch the water rise and spill over the top. The next thing was to get a power house built.

Dam Exploded

Late that night the caretakers at the upper dam, Mr. and Mrs. Moyer, were awakened by a loud rumble and the sound of high water which they could not figure out. In the morning came the explanation. The third dam had been blown up; all that was left was a mass of twisted, splintered, chewed up timbers. Only an explosion could have left such results.

The theory was that a dam spoiled the fishing area, which seemed to be more important to someone than the money and work involved in seeking more water power for the community. The concrete abutments remain as grim reminders of another great loss suffered by a determined man who worked against terrific odds regardless of setbacks. This spirit makes for greatness.

About this time diesel engineering was coming to the front, so with the urgent need for more power and no time to build a new dam, Mr. Cottrell and son, Glenn, decided to install diesel power. A tile building was put up to house the first diesel engine. This was at the original site of the grist mill.

One at a time four diesel engines were installed. Day and night, they produced power with the two dams in the river.

The booming beat of these engines became a familiar sound and everything seemed unusually quiet when they were shut down, which was not often.

The old well came into vigorous use as water was needed continuously to cool each engine, and as a safety measure a supply tank was built above the well house for

storage of water in case a pump quit. Water could still be used until repairs were made, otherwise the engines would have to be stopped. With the loads they carried this could not be done.

Big tanks to hold a week or two supply of deisel oil were installed and filled regularly. Repair work on the engine was sometimes done while running, but excessive repairs were often made after midnight when the water power was adequate to take care of the load. Once in a while an engine had to be down for a day for repairs.

Mr. Cottrell needed two pay stations for his customers, so he purchased the hardware store from Mr. W. Rich. This building is now occupied by Mr. Hamillik and Mrs. Munch. A pay station was operated in the Vehrs building.

The company was known as the "The Western Light and Power Company."

(to be continued)

From the Columbia Valley Advocate, Washougal, WA: June 15, 1950

The Life Story of the Cottrell Family

Part 2

Mr. Cottrell operated a hardware store along with his pay station in Washougal, and handled everything in the hardware line that could be purchased from the entire Portland wholesale market. He made regular trips to Portland nearly every day of the week, and sometimes twice a day if the need arose. Mr Cottrell was a good driver and drove his Packard up until a few days before his passing.

He continued his strenuous work until his health forced him to retire, so he sold his hardware stock and rented the building to Mr. Danielson.

Next he sold the light company to his competitors of long standing, then known as the North West Electric Light Company.

At this time his customers numbered in the thousands.

His policy was "continuous service" and was seldom interrupted for any length of time but, in 1916, during the great silver thaw, lines were down all over and service was impaired for a time. The line crews worked night and day to restore power. His power rates were among the lowest in the state.

His son Glenn has a dam and sawmill on McKloskey creek. Power goes in on the P.U.D. lines from this dam today.

Shortly after Mr. Cottrell sold out he and Mrs. Cottrell took a trip back to Cleveland, Ohio, the first time they had been back since coming west and their first real vacation from business.

They enjoyed the trip by airplane, United Mainliner both ways. They were in their eighties, and this was their first flight and it was a big thrill to them both.

They were among the oldest members of Washougal Grange. Mrs. Cottrell held the office of Chaplain for several years. She held a life membership in the Washougal Women's Club, was a member of the Congregational Church, and Ladies aid, and W.C.T.U.

She has a sister still living in Corona, California, and her sister Lillian lives in the old home in Washougal. One brother lives N. of Vancouver.

Mr. and Mrs. Cottrell celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary November 18th, 1942, and on December 21st of that year Mrs. Cottrell passed away at her home, and her husband passed away at his home in his 85th year in the evening on July 14, 1944.

The children of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Warner Cottrell are all living in Washougal, except their oldest daughter, Mrs. Zella Perry, who passed away in 1929. She taught school in Washougal in the early days, and was a wonderful pianist, and church organist. Her husband lived at The Dalles, Oregon. Their two children live in Washougal with their families, namely Mrs. Buck(?) Mueller & Datus Perry of Carson.

Another daughter, Mrs. Grace Acker, is the wife of the mayor of Washougal, she passed away in 1966. They have four children, all married, Otis, Merle, Harold, and Mrs. Lella White. She lives in Seattle. Otis and family live at Carson, Washington. They have four children, Merle and wife lived at Prineville, Oregon, Harold and wife have two children, and live in Washougal.

The third daughter, Mrs. Nina Starr and son Gilbert live west of town. Mr. Starr passed away a few years ago, in May of 1944. They have one grandchild. The first greenhouse in Washougal was owned by them.

The son, Mr. Glenn Cottrell and wife have their home to the north of the Muellers, and their property reaches to the banks of the river. Their oldest daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Higgenson and small daughter, Peggy, live near them. Their younger daughter lives near Camas. They are Mr. and Mrs. Keith Curry.

Mr. and Mrs. Cottrell lived to see eleven of their great-grandchildren.

Many incidents crowded the busy life of Mr. Cottrell, a few of which may be mentioned here.

He had a very keen sense of humor and liked nothing better than to tell a good joke, and he was a lover of music.

When the mill burned down he knew that his pet calico cat and her family of kittens had perished in the flames. He loved animals and had a big gray cat, Ike, for company when driving during his last years. He could not bear to see an animal go hungry or be left out in the storm. He did a bit of farming at his place in early days and had cows, horses, chickens and pigs. He raised a big garden, set out and grafted various fruit trees, and planted nut trees.

Hupmobile Balked

An incident is told of his quick thinking. One time when his Hupmobile got stalled on the railroad track east of town, the front wheels were over the first rail, & looking up he saw an approaching train coming fast. He put the car into reverse gear, stepped on the starter, and car jumped backwards off the track just as the train whizzed by.

Another time, Mr. and Mrs. Cottrell and two grandchildren took as their guests the caretakers of the upper dam, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Moyer and son Kenneth, one Sunday to go on a picnic at Government Mineral Springs. A nice picnic lunch was packed in a lined apple box and they set out. This was before the present highway ran through town so the river road was the way to go. It was the main highway at that time.

Everything went fine and promised to be a clear day, but as they neared Beacon Rock where the road was narrow an approaching truck failed to stop at the turnout, and to keep from hitting him Mr. Cottrell moved over on the narrow road to let him by; there just wasn't enough room & suddenly the bank caved off turning the Cottrell's car bottom side up on a slanting ledge about five feet down from the roadbed, beyond this ledge was a steep bank down to the railroad.

The truck continued on its way. It was a Hiway truck being used without permission for personal use and Mr. Cottrell knew the man and reported him. As a consequence the man lost his job on two counts.

No one was seriously hurt, although all were pinned securely beneath the car. The high back seat kept the car from crushing one person.

The first one to get out jacked up the car and helped the others out by opening the doors. The battery, located under the front seat of cars at that time, leaked acid and ate the back out of Mr. Cottrell's good suit coat before he got out.

The tops of cars in those days was made of heavy canvas-like material coated with a shiny black waterproof material on wooden ribs to hold it up and materiel of some was used for side curtains which(?) rising glass windows. These curtains snapped on to the top and had iron posts that fit in holes in the top of the doors so they could be taken off in summer. This top and all was a total wreck and only three prongs were left on the steering wheel.

The car was righted and cables hooked on and pulled up on the road. The car was not hurt mechanically, so it was pulled to the garage near Beacon Rock and the battery filled up. The picnic was a mess. The debris was cleaned up and all climbed into the car with many painful bruises and came home. All thoughts of a picnic were gone but each one was thankful to be alive.

Sawmill Mishap Recalled

One day at the mill while Mr. Cottrell was planing some lumber the little finger on his left hand caught in the buzzing blade and before he knew what happened it was ground off in a circle down to the last joint, just like a wood shaving.

He went to the house to phone Dr. Clearwater. No one was home at the time and he was having quite a time working the phone and trying to hold a pan under the finger. His granddaughter came in from school just then and helped him out. A little piece of the finger next to it on the top was cut loose but grew back in place. He came close to losing two fingers that day.

Bank Robbers Flee

One day the bank in Washougal was held up and the men headed up the river road spreading carpet tacks along the road behind them.

The posse was in hot pursuit but found the car abandoned some distance above the upper dam. The robbers had used a scow at the dam to cross the river to the wooded hillside on the opposite shore. A search was organized but only one man was

caught. Two were still at large. Some big timbers at the upper dam lay near the road side to be used in construction work at the dam, made a good shelter for the posse one night as shots were exchanged from across the river by the posse and the robbers.

The search died down a little and one hot summer day a black patch under a tree on the hillside kept the attention of the people at the dam and towards sundown a man rose from the spot and started making his way through the brush upstream. A hurried telephone call from the dam brought the sheriff and posse and the two men were caught near each other downstream.

The upper dam was raised higher a couple of times and much crib work was installed to hold up the extra weight of water for more power.

One spring day a big flood came and so much water poured over the dam that it looked like a bump in the river. The water crept higher and higher and rain continued a steady downpour day and night for weeks. The river got so high that sand bags were filled and piled along the retaining wall that extended to the power house, which was below the wall, and water began to trickle down into the power house. Quite a big of concern was felt that if the river continued to rise the machinery would have to be raised off the floor so a watch was stationed to record the rise and fall of the river.

Preparations were made for moving the machinery. After some suspense the river began to recede and a sigh of relief went up. The Washougal river has never reached such a stage again.

In the wintertime ice was a constant worry. If the ponds froze over good, if not, look for Anchor ice. It formed in the swift water and choked up the water wheels a time or two until they gradually stopped running and the ice at one time had to be blasted out to free the wheel so it could run again.

It was quite a sight to watch the salmon jump in the falls in high water and to see the schools of fish of all sizes go swimming up the fish ladders. These ladders were located at several different points during the life of the dams and a great many fish went through them to the ponds above the dams and many came down the same way.

Eels and crayfish were a common sight at the dam especially the upper dam. Eels would sometimes cluster on the wet slippery planks where water trickled out

One day a visitor from the east decided he could hold one in his hands. We watched him put sand on his hands and grasp the eel hard as he could, but it slid out of his grasp easily — much to his amazement. The camera fans enjoyed taking pictures of the water spilling over the dams and Sundays were the days visitors took most pictures.

The dams no longer exist in the river and the deisel engines no longer boom. They were shifted to Alaska, but the history still remains fresh in the minds of the family. It was this interested group of Cottrell family who helped all they could during all the years of public service that Mr. Cottrell was engaged in.

It was this cooperation and family pride which made success a possibility in this great career in the building of this fine town of Washougal which we call home and of which we have a right to be proud as we watch its growth for the betterment of mankind.

—Submitted by request by a granddaughter, Mrs. Nick Mueller