The Story of Letitia Carson in Oregon, 1845-1888

Presentation by Dr. Bob Zybach, www.ORWW.org
Central Oregon Coast NOW
Newport High School, Newport, Oregon – February 28, 2017, 6:00 PM
African American Contributions to Early Oregon (1774-1860)

(Proposed Course Outline: MU 215, Tuesdays, 7:15 P.M.)

Bob Zybach, Instructor: January 17-March 7, 1989

This course will attempt to perform three functions. First, it will try to illuminate African American influences upon early Oregon history by concentrating upon the contributions and experiences of key black individuals. Second, it will try, by example, to place the roles of other contemporary minorities (particularly Indians, Metis, Hawaiians, and Chinese) into a better historical focus. Finally, it will attempt to show the value of historical information in regards to current individual opportunities and long term community planning.

The following outline is for a weekly lecture/discussion accompanied by a mix of proposed readings drawn from current books and magazines and from historical records such as journals, correspondence, newspapers, and memoirs:

January 17: Course Outline and Objectives. The initial meeting will be used to state the objectives listed above, describe the outline listed below, assign texts, and to ask and answer basic questions. Select current and recent events - such as urban gang problems, the Jackson campaign speeches in Corvallis and Jacksonville, and the opportunity of trade with China - will be discussed within the context of specific information to be covered during the course. If time permits, a rudimentary outline of early Oregon history will be given.

January 24: Legends and Explorations (500-1806). This meeting will concentrate upon the importance of the sea otter trade to the exploration of the northwest and upon the claims of Russia, Spain, England, and the United States to the area first named "New Albion." The current legal definition of the "natural" environment found along the Oregon coast and the western part of the Columbia River will also be examined. Personalities to be discussed will include Marcus Lopus, York, and Kilchis.

January 31: Mountain Men (1807-1833). This meeting will discuss the transition from otter to beaver as the medium of exchange in the northwest, the importance of Mountain Men to eventual American control of the western United States, and the joint occupancy of the "Oregon Country" by England and the U.S. The lives and careers of Edward Rose, James Beckwourth, and Moses "Black" Harris will be outlined.

February 7: Pioneers (1834-1849). This meeting will discuss the decimation of western Oregon Indians by disease, the settlement of the Willamette Valley by French Canadians and Americans, and the changes in local vegetation brought about by the replacement of wildlife populations with domestic livestock. The contributions of Winslow Anderson, George Washington Bush, and Letitia Carson will be highlighted.

February 14: Settlers (1850-1856). This meeting will examine the settlement patterns of Americans arriving in the Oregon Territory over the "Oregon Trail," the "expulsion" laws of the Provisional and Territorial
LETTITIA CARSON, PIONEER BLACK WOMAN

By George B. Abdill

I don't recall who first mentioned Letitia Carson to me; perhaps it was Harriet Munnick, that teacher, historian and dean of Northwest authorities on our French-Canadian pioneers. At any rate, it was ten or twelve years ago that the first references to her piqued my interest and a file on her was gradually accumulated. I mentioned her to the late Lavola Bakken, research historian for me at the Douglas County Museum, and she also became interested, gathering additional material for our file from Dr. Kenneth L. Holmes, teacher, author and historian at the Oregon College of Education in Monmouth, Oregon. At any rate, here is the story of Douglas County's early black woman, pieced together from many different sources.

The 1850 U.S. Census for Benton County contains the first mention of this unusual woman. It bears an entry for David Carson, a 50-year-old male born in Ireland. In this household is Letitia, aged 36, a female born in Kentucky; Martha, aged 3, a female Mulatto born in the Rocky Mountains; and one Mulatto male, Adam, 1 month old, born in the Oregon Territory.

The next mention of this family is to be found in the Benton County records and also in the microfilm files of the Salem "Oregon Statesman" for October 17, 1854. David Carson died and Letitia Carson, "a black woman," filed an action against Green B. Smith, administrator of David Carson's estate, "...to recover the value of her services rendered in the territory to the defendant from the year 1845 to 1852." Lucinda (the first mis-spelling of her name) had been a slave in Missouri but came to Oregon and served her master faithfully until his death. Her attorneys were D. Smith, Grover & Thayer; attorneys for the defendant were Logan & Kelton. In the absence of circumstances which would imply an agreement to pay, the jury disagreed - 9 for and 3 against - and the case continued.

From the evidence at hand, it would appear that David Carson was both Letitia's owner, master and husband, and the father of her mulatto daughter and son. The trail then fades in the antiquity of time until "Aunt Tish" Carson and her children appear in Douglas County. For many years she reportedly made her home with the Hardy Elliff family near Galesville (present vicinity of Azalea) in the upper Cow Creek Valley, where she worked for the Eliff family and also served as the community midwife.

In the Douglas County marriage records on Page 154, there is the record of the marriage of her daughter Martha. The affidavit (Page 271), signed by Joel Thorn and Peter Grodon, and in reference to the marriage of Martha Carson and Narcisse Lavadere on the 19th of January, 1868, states: "...said Lavadore is half Indian and said Carson is half Negro." The South Umpqua Historical Society's yearbook of several years ago, "Pioneer Days in Canyonville," mentions this marriage.
State Land Claims and Cessions
To the Federal Government, 1782-1802

- **British Possessions**
  - Claimed by N.Y., N.H., admitted as Vermont 1791
  - Disputed with Britain
  - Sold to Penn. 1792

- **Spanish Possessions**
  - Ceded by S.C. to Ga. 1787

- **Area ceded by New York in 1782**
  - Ceded by Mass. 1785
  - Ceded by Conn. 1786
  - Ceded by Conn. 1800
  - Admitted as Kentucky 1792
  - Ceded by N.C. 1790, admitted as Tenn. 1796

- **Area ceded by Virginia in 1784**
  - Ceded by Ga. 1802
  - Disputed with Spain, ceded to U.S. 1795

- **Area ceded by Georgia in 1795**
  - W. Fla.
  - E. Fla.
David & Letitia Carson's 1845 Route on The Oregon Trail

[Based on Wojcik 1976: frontispiece]

1. Elizabethtown, Mo.
3. Independence, Mo.
4. Big Soldier Creek
5. Chimney Rock
6. Courthouse Rock
7. Scott's Bluff
8. Fort Laramie
9. Fort John
10. Independence Rock
11. Greenwood cut-off
12. Bridger's Fort
13. Fort Hall
14. California cut-off
15. Sutter's Fort
16. Fort Boise
17. Trappers' Trail
18. Lost Hollow
19. Whitman's Mission
20. Wasco-Camp Mission
21. Fort Vancouver
22. Oregon City

Westward Overland Immigrant Trail Of 1845
American settlement, Wallamatta River, called Oregon City.
Appraision of the stock, agricultural implements, and household furniture belonging to the estate of David Carson, deceased:

1 barrel steer  $45.00
1 3 year old steer  $30.00
1 yoke white oxen  $80.00
1  oxen
3 yearling heifers  $15.00 each  $45.00
1 steer calf  $12.00  $12.00
1 red bull  $30.00
2 yearling steers  $15.00 each  $30.00
3 2 year old steers  $30.00 each  $90.00
4 2 yoke heifers  $35.00 each  $140.00
12 cows & 2 calves  $45.00 each  $540.00
26 hogs  $3.00 each  $78.00
1 yoke old horse  $45.00
1 wagon  $35.00
3 yoke chains  $2.00 each  $6.00
1 gun  $15.00
7 pieces pot metal  $10.00
1 box cup boardware  $15.00
2 trunks & bedding & books  $20.00
1 clock  $6.00
1 watch  $5.00
1 pair

Total: $1466.50
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<td>1</td>
<td>12.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 large buckets of carpenters tools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 small iron pans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 red cow</td>
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<td>6 hog</td>
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<td>6 black</td>
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<td>1 white oven</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 very pot lid</td>
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<td>2 large dishes</td>
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<td>12.50</td>
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<td>1 copper kettle</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 plates</td>
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<td>5 bay leaves</td>
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<td>6 pepper corn</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 pot</td>
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<td>1 large bottle of whisky</td>
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<td>1 thin pan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 large iron pot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 silver platter</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 large plates</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 small plates</td>
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<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 large bed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 small bed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 large cow calf</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 small bottle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 large bottle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 gun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 plow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 leg chain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.50</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 small and 1 large wagon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Hughes</td>
<td>1 iron pan</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 apple</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 horse</td>
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Total: $438.67
Territory of Oregon
Benton County

Sue Wishaw Carson Plff

by

Gunn B Smith
Administrator of the Estate
of David Carson deceased

In the District Court of the United States
for Umatilla County

Plaintiff against

Ada Thayer

Defendant

The above stated action by Ada Thayer
now不起诉 Complainant of the above Gunn B
Administrator of the Estate of
David Carson deceased. For the reasons
above stated, plaintiff worked labor and performed
services for the said David Carson during his life
time at his special instance. I request for the
sum of seven hundred dollars. I certify to the County
Benton Register of Oregon and also on the road
between while crossing the plains between the
State of Missouri and the Territory, which labor
and services were done and performed between
the 1st day of May in the year 1848 and the
12th day of October in 1853. Wherein said labor
and services were reasonably worth the
sum of one thousand dollars for
above all stipends, Whenon said Plff
Claims brought the above describes that
she is justly due the above all stipends.
The sum of one thousand dollars, besides
the costs of this action for which she
brings suit.

Benton Corvallis 22rd. Oct. 1854

Ada Thayer

Plff. Dff.
Be it remembered that on this seventh day of May, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four, the United States District Court for the County of Benton and Territory of Oregon, commenced its regular session at the Court house in said county, present honorable Geo. W. Williams, Judge etc.

let which said term the following proceedings were had, that is to say:

[Signatures]

Now on this day came the Plaintiff by Thomas and Smith his attorneys and the Defendant by Roger and Kelby his attorneys upon issue being joined, thereupon said attorneys being duly sworn, the court finds the Plaintiff, William Smith, Alfred Kincaid, Wesley Winkle, Joseph Sanders, George Blevins, John Arment, John Hillhouse, George Newton, Solomon Lethbee, Lyman Dancilbers and William B. Cardwell to be duly compensated and sworn and after hearing the whole case gave the following verdict to wit: "As the jury for the Plaintiff the sum of three hundred dollars, therefrom it was awarded and adjudged by the court that said plaintiff have judgment and execution for said sum of three hundred dollars together with said costs in this cause to be taxed."
Oregon Territory
Butte County
Justice of Peace

vs.

Greenbury Austin, Administrator of the Estate
of Daniel Carson, Dec'd


Upon the 27th day of OCT. 1856, the above mentioned debt for the sum of $1200.00, together with interest on the above mentioned debt, and the costs which amounted to the sum of $199.95, and the costs amounting in all to the sum of $1399.95,

I hereby certify that on the above mentioned date of Court below, I was present and served action for the above mentioned debt, and the costs which amounted to the sum of $199.95, and the costs amounting in all to the sum of $1399.95.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of said Court.

This 27th day of OCT. 1856

[Seal]

[Signature]
ALICE ELLIFF
AUG. 1854- OCT. 1855
DAUGHTER OF HARDY AND MELVINA ELLIFF
DIED DURING THE ROGUE INDIAN WARS
FIRST WHITE CHILD BORN IN THE COW CREEK VALLEY
(UPPER COW CREEK TO GLENDALE)
APPLICATION,

LAND OFFICE at Roseburg, Oregon, June 17th, 1863.

I, Letitia Carson, of Douglas County, Oregon, do hereby apply to enter, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved May 20, 1862, entitled "An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain," the part 2/4 of SW 1/4 of Section 28, in Township 29 S., Range 2 W., containing one hundred and fifty-three acres.

LAND OFFICE at Roseburg, Oregon, June 17th, 1863.

I, John Kelly, Register of the Land Office, do hereby certify that the above application is for Surveyed Lands of the class which the applicant is legally entitled to enter under the Homestead act of May 20, 1862, and that there is no prior, valid, adverse right to the same.

 letting up the manifest and the above acres, etc., etc., etc.,

Register.
Homestead.
Land Office at Roseburg, Oreg.
June 19th, 1868.


It is hereby certified, That pursuant to the provisions of the act of Congress, approved May 20, 1862, entitled “An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain,” Delitia Carson has made payment in full for the Tract of Section 20, containing 153 1/2 acres, of Township 29 South, Range 3 West, of the said Delitia Carson shall be entitled to a Patent for the Tract of Land above described.

John Kelly
Register.
Leetitia Carson

Andrew Carson

This indenture made the twenty-first day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four between Leetitia Carson of the County of Douglas and State of Oregon of the first part and Andrew Carson of the same place the party of the second part. Witnesseth That the said party of the first part

Andrew in Consideration of the natural love and affection of said party of the first part toward the said Andrew Carson (my natural son) and for the further consideration of the sum of five dollars to be paid to Martha Jane Carson within thirty days after my death hath granted bargained sold aliened remised released conveyed and confirmed to the said party of the second part and to his heirs and assigns forever all of the following premises to-wit: The West half of the North East quarter and the fractional East half of the North West quarter of Section Twenty in Township Twenty nine South of Range three West in the Districts of Lands subject to sale at Roseburg Oregon containing one hundred and fifty three acres
McGINNIS FAMILY, STARVOUT, OREGON, 1913-1914
Dave McGinnis -- Lilly Rondeau -- Joe McGinnis -- George (Gans) Rondeau -- Edward Rondeau

Angelique Lavadour–Mary Alice Bigham Lavadour–Fred Campian–Virgil (Matt) Campian–Susan McGinnis Campian
Asa Jones
Frank Jones
A Light in the Wilderness

Jane Kirkpatrick

Author of A Clearing in the Wild
Friends of Letiticia Carson
Public Figure

Timeline About Photos Likes More

What have you been up to?

Friends of Letiticia Carson
Posted by Bob Zybich [1] · 2 hrs · 
Here is a photo advertising the presentation I will be giving in Roseburg tomorrow regarding Letiticia Carson's life in Douglas County. Got a sell-out and further proof that my "will work for food" sign is still effective.

Spring Dinner Meeting, March 14, 2015
March 14, 2015, at China on top of the hill on Stephens Avenue, Roseburg, Oregon. Join us from 1 pm to 4 pm. Call President John Robertson for more information:
The Search for
Letitia Carson
in Douglas County

Part II

Written by
Bob
Zybach, PhD

Spring Hunt
2015
Vol. LI
Number 1
History found

Historian to relate story of black pioneer woman

CARISA CEGAVSKE
The News-Review

MYRTLE CREEK — In the middle of the Civil War, just four years after Oregon became a state, black pioneer Letitia Carson filed one of the nation’s first Homestead Act claims for 160 acres on South Myrtle Creek.

Carson is believed to have been born a slave in Kentucky around 1814, but she died a free woman in 1888, as the owner of a farm valued at $3,000. In between, she traveled the Oregon Trail, filed a lawsuit demanding a fair share of her husband’s estate, survived the Rogue River Indian War, managed her own ranch and served as a midwife.

For the past 30 years, historian Bob Zybach of Cottage Grove has been piecing together Carson’s fascinating history one document at a time. The digging has become a habit, something like smoking, he said.

“It’s what I do for recreation,” he said.

Zybach will present the information he has uncovered at the Douglas County Historical Society’s Spring Dinner Meeting March 8, at China Palace in Roseburg.

David and Letitia Carson were early pioneers. They traveled the Oregon Trail in 1845, and Letitia Carson gave birth to their first child, Martha, along the way.

Zybach discovered that Carson’s paper trail becomes particularly interesting after her husband’s death in 1852.

Carson’s gravestone, and several others in the cemetery, were previously damaged by vandals. Above, historian Bob Zybach of Cottage Grove lines up segments of a gravestone marking the final resting place of Letitia Carson at a cemetery outside Myrtle Creek on Wednesday. Carson’s gravestone, and several others in the cemetery, were previously damaged by vandals.

IF YOU GO...
WHAT: Douglas County Historical Society spring meeting. Historian Bob Zybach will discuss his research about black pioneer and Myrtle Creek homesteader Letitia Carson.
WHEN: 1 to 4 p.m., March 8.
WHERE: China Palace, 968 N.E. Stephens St., Roseburg.
REGISTER: Contact DCHS President John Robertson at 541-673-0466. Cost is $15 and admission is limited to 50 people.
Oregon Websites and Watersheds Project, Inc.

www.ORWW.org
Launched January 15, 1997