

Early Adventures of Henry La Zinka

The Stirring Tale of a German Sailor Who Has Made Good as a Cattleman—E. F. A.

Posts may be born but a highly successful sailor can be transformed into just as successful a rancher. It may not happen very often. Indeed it seems like an inconsistency, but Henry La Zinka, the Camas Prairie stockman, is a living testimonial of the fact that it can be done.

Born in Germany almost exactly 52 years ago, Henry La Zinka went to sea at the tender age of 14 years. He became a "deep-water" sailor, soon was so much in love with the sea he chose to follow it as his life work and though for 20 years his home has been more than 400 miles from the ocean he says it still calls to him at times. His greatest ambition was to become an officer and some day have a ship of his own.

A Life of Adventure.
The life of a sailor, always exciting and romantic, was exceptionally so in the case of Mr. La Zinka. In the seven years he followed the sea he was five times around the tempestuous Cape Horn, four times around the Cape of Good Hope, in storms without number and in several wrecks. He passed through plagues of cholera and yellow fever where his fellow sailors died like flies.

At the age of 21 years Henry La Zinka was third officer on board the ship Solitaire, with Captain Sewell in command. In the words of Mr. La Zinka, "Captain Sewell was an old man—a good man but weak. Weakness at sea is as bad as badness. His crew were the scum of the water front. The sailors discovered the captain was easy going and lacked courage. They mutinied near Cape Flatery. I alone against the whole crew could do nothing. I saw a sight that made me writhe with disgust and shame—the captain of the ship pleading with his men to come up on deck and man the ship to prevent it being wrecked in the storm which was raging. He ought to have taken a belaying pin and beaten their blocks off.

"We got to Seattle between Christmas and New Years. The crew, including myself, took to the lifeboats and went ashore, leaving the captain alone on the ship in the harbor. Fearing we would all be hanged for having mutinied if we remained in Seattle and were caught, we scattered to the four winds."

Destiny Changes Life Plans.
Here is where destiny stepped in and changed the tenor of La Zinka's life. It so happened that there was a young Englishman on board the ship with whom the future cattle king chummed. The English boy told his chum he had a brother near the town of Heppner who had written that he was the owner of a large ranch and thousands of head of sheep, so they decided to go see this brother.

Neither had any money but the Englishman had a watch so this way was pawned for enough to pay their way to Portland but they had very little to eat. By walking and riding on freight trains they finally reached Lexington. Here they made inquiries and found the supposed wealthy sheepman was in reality only a herder. To cap the climax he had lost his job and was flat broke.

Short Rations.
They hunted him up and he took them in with a crowd of four other young fellows who had a little shack in the foothills between Lexington and Heppner. The total capital of the seven was less than \$3.00. Their larder contained a side of bacon, a can of syrup, a sack of potatoes and part of a sack of flour.

Those pioneers who can recall the last part of the winter of 1882-83 will remember it was bitter cold. The walls of the little shack kept out most

of the wind but very little of the cold. The appetites of the seven were as those of so many hungry wolves. The bacon and syrup were soon gone. Even the bacon rind was cut up and cooked with the potatoes and flour.

The conditions of life in this shack are best described in La Zinka's own words.

"There were seven of us. We had no real bedding so we all lay on a bear rug on the floor with a cougar skin over us. It was the skin of a large cougar but any one who has ever tried to stretch a cougar skin until it will cover and keep seven people warm on a cold winter night will know it cannot be done. It felt to my lot to have one of the outside positions. When a particularly cold blast of wind would come howling through the cracks of the cabin I would try to pull a corner of the skin over my shoulders but the man on the other side would jerk it back. His language on such occasions being far from polite."

Harkens to Call of Sea.
It is therefore hardly to be wondered that the sea with all its storms, mutinies and shipwrecks began calling to the young German sailor. The worst kind of a storm was not to be compared to an empty stomach, accompanied by a shivering night on the floor.

He told the other boys he was going back to sea. He was as full of jokes and good humor then as he is today and his fellow partners in misery tried to dissuade him, begging him to stick it out until spring when they would all be able to get work. The call of the sea was irresistible, however, so without a cent in his pocket he struck out for Portland.

He walked to Arlington where he caught a westbound freight train. Being active as a cat and as hard as nails he had no difficulty in getting to the top of a box car. He says he did not mind the swaying of the car but the top of it was glazed with ice and there was no rixing to cling to. Several times he came nearly being thrown from his perch but he finally reached Portland only to find the man he had left his ship's papers with had sent them to him at Heppner.

He went down to the water front and found a ship due to sail in two weeks for England. The captain was in need of an officer and asked to see his papers. He explained his predicament and told the captain he would go to Heppner, get the papers and return to Portland in time to sail with him.

Waiting until dark he boarded another train. This time he crawled into a coal car. The night was one of the coldest he had ever experienced, his clothing was originally intended for summer wear and after several weeks without change it was nearly threadbare. He therefore burrowed into the coal to keep warm. Late the next forenoon he crawled out of his hiding place at a small station. The surroundings were totally unfamiliar and even the river was flowing in the wrong direction. In place of the sage brush and sandhills he had expected to find himself among here were green fields and real trees.

"I asked a man," says La Zinka, "how far it was to Arlington. He said, '250 miles.' I thought he was crazy. I said, 'Arlington is 128 miles from Portland. I left Portland last night and have traveled all night and now you say I am further away than when I started.'"

"He looked at me and said, 'you are a sailor aren't you?'"
"I said, 'yes, but what has that got

to do with it?' he said. 'If you want to go due east and lay a course due south, how long will it take you to reach your destination. You got on the wrong train. This is the Southern Pacific train and this is Cottage Grove.'"

A few hours after landing in the southern end of the Willamette valley a train pulled in from the south. One coach was loaded with workmen. La Zinka mingled with these men and before the train pulled out he walked into their coach and when the conductor came through he did not observe the new passenger and the young sailor was permitted to ride back to Portland under much more favorable circumstances than on his outgoing trip. When he reached Portland he hunted up the English ship a second time, went down into the galley and got a square meal.

That night he started out a third time for Heppner. He was careful to select a train eastward bound but being unable to find a car unsealed he took a standing position between two cars. In telling of this part of his terrible experience he said it compared very favorably with some of the worst experiences he had ever had on shipboard. He says, "It was bitterly cold. The wind from the Columbia chilled me to the bone. My breath was like smoke. Presently I got so numb I thought I would surely be compelled to let go my hold and fall between the cars. I discovered one of the cars had a small door in the end. I thought if I could only get that door open and crawl inside I would be saved. After struggling with the door for a long time I finally got it open and crawled in, only to find I had landed in a car loaded with ice. When I discovered this I thought fate was against me sure."

Stuck in the Snow.
"At Cascade Locks the train got stuck in the snow. Seeing something was wrong I tried to climb out of the window but was so numbed by the cold I could hardly move. I finally pitched head-foremost into the snow with my feet on the couplings between the cars. I expected the train to start any minute but I was so nearly frozen I could not move my body from its perilous position for what appeared to be to be an age. Finally I got onto my feet and managed to stagger to a small house where there was a light. It proved to be the home of a railroad man who gave me something to eat and who built a hot fire to thaw me out."

The next train to pass through was a passenger so La Zinka climbed onto the "blind baggage," reaching The Dalles about 4 o'clock in the morning as nearly frozen as he had been before.

The trains were blocked and as he could go no further on them he struck out a foot. Before he reached Arlington however, the trains had made a passage for themselves through the snowdrifts and he was able to catch a ride into Arlington.

Tramping Through Snow.
From there he struck out across the hills toward Heppner. The snow was crusty but at times he would break through. Soon his light shoes were cut to pieces. He says, "It was dark and I had 30 miles to go. I had a silk handkerchief which I had put over my head to keep from freezing. I soon discovered my nose was numb. I rubbed it with snow until it hurt. Then I decided it would be better to lose my ears than my nose for I could let my hair grow long and cover my ears but there would

be no way to hide my face if the nose should be frozen off so I removed the handkerchief from around my head and fixed it so it would protect my nose."
"The country between Arlington and Heppner is rolling. I kept climbing one rise after another, thinking all the time 'this will be the last one.' I became so nearly exhausted it seemed I surely must drop in the snow and die. Finally I said, 'I will climb one more hill and then if I do not see the cabin I will lie down and quit.'"
"It is funny how a man wants to live. The next hill was like all the rest—an open expanse of snow with no house in sight. I decided I had come too far and had missed the cabin. I stumbled on and at last at the top of the next rise I saw the cabin. Then the strength which had enabled me to pass through the experiences of the past few days seemed to forsake me and it seemed I could never reach the cabin. I did, however, but my strength was so nearly gone I could only fall against the door, awakening the fellows inside."

They allowed him to crawl into the middle of the bed this time and he lay there for 40 hours. The only medicine they had was coal oil, tobacco and sheep dip. "They saw my face, hands and feet were all frozen so they rubbed coal oil nearly all over me. My face and hands and feet puffed up like water blisters. They pricked the skin to let out the water. After a while all of the skin peeled off and I fully recovered. But by the time I could travel the ship had sailed and left me stranded in the sage brush so I resigned myself to my fate and accepted a job as a sheep herder."

"But I could not wean myself from the call of the sea. I made up my mind I would herd sheep just long enough to get money sufficient to enable me to get back to Portland where I would try for another position on a ship. I told the camp tender I was going to quit as soon as I had money enough. I discovered afterwards I had made a mistake by telling him of my intentions for herders were scarce. The camp tender would therefore wait until I was out in the hills with the sheep before bringing in my supplies and would leave before I returned in the evening. I did not want to leave the sheep alone to be eaten up by the coyotes so I staid with them for four months, seeing scarcely a man in all that time."

"After that I got a job riding after cattle. I never had been on a horse but the man for whom I was to work saddled the animal up for me, helped me on and told me where to go. The horse proved to be mighty lively and it seemed much more difficult to stay on his back than it did on the deck of a ship. I got awfully tired and sore but I was afraid to get off for fear I would not be able to get on again so I stayed on in the saddle until evening. That night when I went to remove my trousers I found they were stuck to me in places where the skin had been rubbed off my body until the blood came through. I had to sit in a tub of water and soak them off. This was my first introduction to riding."

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