

Metz, Carl "Dump"



Shingle Maker

The Metzses have been a part of the West Feliciana community of Solitude since Carl "Dump" Metz's grandfather Christian Metz moved there in 1908. Boll weevils had destroyed the cotton industry solidifying the family's decision to head into the countryside and make a living harvesting timber.

Carl Metz's grandfather made cypress shingles. His son and grandson continue the tradition. Carl learned the craft from his father Jesse. "Pappa used to sell shingles for a living. He used to get \$4.00 a square," Dump explains. His father made about \$6.00 a day which was enough money to raise eight kids during the Depression. Metz doesn't make shingles for a living; he makes them for his own use and for others.

Metz makes the cypress shingles in a shed behind his log cabin. Although he describes the process saying, "Ain't nothing to it, nothing but hard work." The process takes more than hard work. Metz works with the "heart of cypress." He explains: "They [logging crews] call it sinking cypress. When it would flood many, many years ago, these logs would sink to the bottom. They were covered with silt and mud. By the time we dug them up, all the sap had rotted away." What is left is the core. The process takes hundreds of years.

Art critic Rod Dreher describes the process of making the shingles as follows: "With his left hand, Dump takes the frow, a short-handled cleaving tool, and positions it atop the block about a quarter-inch from the edge. No measuring needed; he instinctively knows where to put the frow to guarantee shingles of a near perfect width. A smooth, forceful blow from a mallet separates a thin slab of the moist, sweet-smelling wood from the block as cleanly and quickly as a butcher slicing beef." After he completes this "riving" process, Metz shaves the edges and flat sides with a draw knife, a narrow two-handled blade. The shingles usually measure 18, 27, or 36 inches, and barring fire, can last a lifetime.

Metz has roofed his own home and a log cabin he began building the day his father died with his handmade shingles. They are layered three deep on the roof, so there is no need for chemical sealants. As the shingles age they turn a light green. "The green can be so pretty." Leola, his wife, says.