A History of the House on Metolius

1881: A Settlement
Pioneer settler John Banford established the first permanent Euro-American residence on the site of the House on Metolius on 9 June 1881. With his wife and four children, he began cultivating his land from the meadows adjoining Jack's Creek to the Metolius River in the wilds of Oregon's Cascade Range. The only evidence of prior visitors was an old, abandoned and uninhabitable log cabin. Banford constructed his own small log and over the course of the next few years, he continued to improve the land, eventually erecting a barn, stables and fencing in an area of arable crop land. Four years later, John Banford sold his homestead to fellow farmer John C.Riggs who continued to improve the property, cultivate forage crops and raise Livestock. By 1893 Riggs had expanded his cultivated lands to one-hundred and sixty acres.

1908: The Heising Resort
After farming and ranching the Banford Homestead for twenty-two years, the landed was deeded to Alice Heising in 1908. It was the Heising family that first welcomed visitors from the Willamette Valley and farther afield–many of them weary urbanites seeking rejuvenation along the banks of the Metolius. In 1925, San Francisco Stockbroker John Gallois and his wife Eliza visited the Heising Resort. Enamored of the area, they decided to purchase a 2.63-acre parcel for $789 as a summer home site. They built a cabin on the bluff overlooking the gorge carved out by the Metolius as it enters the property, and called their home the 'House on Metolius'.

1929: Jantzen Mills, the Zehntbauer Family
The Heising's Resort also attracted John Zehntbauer, president of the Jantzen Knitting Mills of Portland. In 1929, he purchased a three acre parcel from Alice and Harry Heising on the east bank of the Metolius River. The deed restricted Zehntbauer to constructing a "private residence worth not less than $3,500." Zehntbauer complied and built a three-story, twelve room Summer home on a stone-foundation, complete with electricity provided by a water-powered turbine at Heising Springs. In 1934, the Zehntbauers acquired an additional 137-acre parcel that forms the bulk of the property today. The original Zehntbauer summer home was lost in a fire in the 1950s, and was replaced with the current 'Main Lodge.'

1950: Guests Welcome, Hospitality Charms Locals
Eleanor Bechen purchased the smaller property from the Gallois in 1947 and started the 'House on the Metolius' resort while the Zehntbauer family retained the larger portion of the land. Eleanor used the existing structures and added a larger five-unit building overlooking the meadow. In all, she could accommodate twenty guests and served meals on the deck of what is now called 'Eleanor's Lodge,' overlooking the meadow and the river gorge. Eleanor Bechen had previously worked in the restaurant business with Maren Gribskoe, founder of the still existing and local favorite, the Pine Tavern. Ms. Bechen's meals on the Metolius River became well known and much appreciated, by customers braving the country roads for miles around. The resort prospered, with guests coming from far afield to enjoy the fishing and the food. Ms. Bechen ran the House on Metolius until 1965, when she retired and sold her property to the Zehntbauer's daughter, Evelyn, and her husband, Leonard Lundgren.

Today: The House on Metolius

The resort continued operations, with Eleanor residing in the original Gallois house every summer until she died in 1985 at the age of 95. Since that time, the House on Metolius has remained an elegant, quiet resort, with only a few changes. In the 1990s, Eleanor's three-unit structure was replaced with a smaller and more comfortable building, the Lundgren Lodge. The original Gallois house was renovated and restored to its original 1920s pioneering style with modern amenities.

The 2012 season brings a complete renovation of the Main Lodge on the east bank of the river. The new Lodge is a seven-bedroom building with dining, living room and terrace space for gatherings of over a hundred people; it makes a substantial and welcome addition to the House on Metolius resort.