

THE DISTINGUISHED PRINCESS

BY CONNIE ROSE ANDERSON

Celiast Helen Smith has been dead since 1891 so she probably doesn't have an opinion of her epitaph. I think it stinks. I discovered the metal plaque embedded in a large rock in the middle of the Pioneer Cemetery, an open and windy little graveyard on the Clatsop Plains, which was originally established in 1846 to accommodate the bodies of shipwreck victims that were frequently found on the beach in those days. Today the cemetery is bordered on the west by Camp Rilea, a National Guard (and police) training camp, and on the east by Coast Highway 101.

I was more than vaguely aware of the steady drone of summer tourist traffic as I stood reading the inscription:

Beneath this native stone lie Oregon's first school teachers; Solomon Howard Smith of New Hampshire — pioneer, missionary, millwright, farmer, merchant, state senator; and his wife Helen, born Celiast, princess-daughter of Coboway, Chief of the Clatsops.

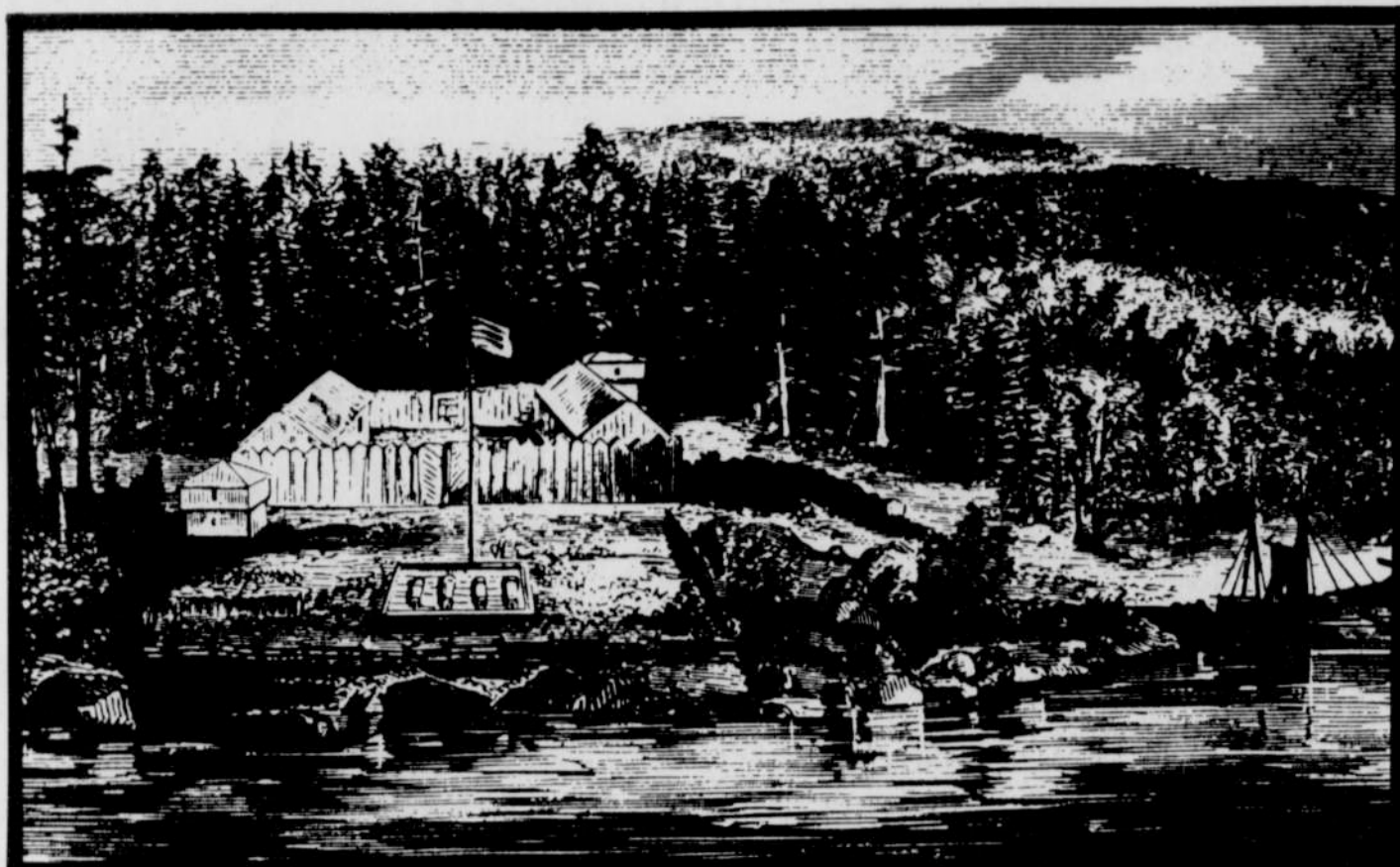
Solomon Howard Smith Helen Celiast Smith
1809 — 1876 1801 — 1891

So here was our man, Solomon, single-handedly building a nation. And where was his partner, Celiast all that time? Hanging around the cabin, sipping mineral water and planning her spring wardrobe? Having her hair done and pushing back cuticles? After all, this woman spent 23 more years here than her dynamic husband, and all this historian has to say about her, aside from a reference to a mom & dad teaching stint, is that she was born to Male Coboway and married to Male Smith.

With the image of this slothful creature loitering at the back of my mind, I began, in my wanderings through local history, to notice her name frequently, usually in brief, incidental passages. I started taking notes and slowly, through many rainy days historical journals and files of notes and records kept by local pioneers and their descendants, Celiast's story emerged. Clearly, this woman has been struck with an unfair epitaph.

Celiast was 4 years old when her father, Coboway, as Chief of the Clatsop tribe, greeted Lewis & Clark at the mouth of the Columbia River. Coboway ruled during the last of an era, when his and the other Chinook tribes were rapidly being decimated by diseases brought by the white man. By the time Celiast was of marriageable age, the empire of Coboway had faded to a 20th of its previous population.

As was customary in her culture, Celiast married to strengthen the position of her tribe. The Clatsop Indians, it seems, were no slouches in the business world and when the white man arrived, they recognized power and a helluva new market and welcomed the whites with inflated prices and enthusiastic prospective social ties. Sometime in the 1820s, Celiast was "given in marriage" to Frank Porier, a baker with



Astoria, Oregon is 190 years old April 12, 2001. It is the oldest city in the American West. Established as a fur trading outpost ten miles inland from the mouth of the Columbia River in 1811, it grew into a fish and timber boomtown by the end of the 19th century. A disastrous fire destroyed much of the city in 1922. The two World Wars of the 20th century gained it a brief prosperity but already by then fish and forests were rapidly declining from extensive exploitation, until at present Astoria stakes its economic survival on its lost glory through tourism with especially high hopes for the for the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial.

~MPMc



Dr. John McLoughlin's company of soldiers and traders at Fort Vancouver (Wash.) With Porier she had two sons and survived the changes forced upon her as a "squaw" wife in the early western pioneer movement.

One of the major differences, probably, between Celiast's native culture and that of the highly moralistic and sternly religious settlement ruled by Dr. McLoughlin, "Little King" of the Oregon territory, was the whites' horrified attitude toward polygamy. The Chinook tribes' tradition was that any man worth his salt should afford to keep several wives. Imagine Celiast's surprise when, having learned to restructure her own beliefs to accommodate the white man's, it was discovered in 1832 that Frank Porier already had a wife and child in Canada.

Imagine, too, Celiast's audience before Dr. McLoughlin, whose tall, stiff form inspired the Indians to refer to him as "The Great White Eagle." Ever formal in his long blue coat and brass buttons, the proctor must have towered over the short, barefoot squaw, and with the glory of his unforgiving religion in his icy blue eyes, informed Celiast, in a voice oiled by Christian self-righteousness, that he had decided that she must leave her husband and children forever and be shuffled off to French Prairie to live with her sister, Yi-a-mist. He was eager, I'm sure, to remove this embarrassment from his Christian domain.

McLoughlin, it is recorded, kept his own "squaw" wife in purdah (in this instance the tradition of the seclusion of Indian women of rank). She did not sit with him at meals and was kept totally out of the picture whenever visitors arrived at the fort and were entertained in McLoughlin's baronial style. So it is easy to believe that he felt no qualms in commanding this squat, slope-browed native woman to abandon her children and move even further away from her homeland and the few surviving remnants of her tribe.

Enter Solomon Smith.

Having arrived at Fort Vancouver as a school teacher with the Wyeth Expedition of 1832, Solomon Smith had known Celiast briefly before her disgraced departure from the fort. In 1834 he followed her to French Prairie and, in traditional Indian contract style, joined Celiast in marriage. It was at French Prairie, then, that the two of them performed the teaching stint for which, interestingly, Celiast is given credit at her gravesite.

Celiast wasn't happy in French Prairie and by 1840 was able to use her considerable persuasive powers to convince Solomon to move with her back to the Clatsop Plains, scene of her childhood, and establish a homestead.

Now Solomon begins to shine. Introducing several new crops to the area, building a personal farming empire for himself and a few select friends (some of whom were even half-breeds, the journals are proud to point out), and racking up a long list of business and political ventures. And such a thoughtful man. One historian smugly points out that, even after white women finally appeared on the Clatsop Plains, he never abandoned or rejected Celiast even though he was probably referred to as a *squaw-man*.

I had to dig a little harder to find out what Celiast was doing all that time. Mostly little things like saving lives, both white and Indian; preventing numerous incidents of bloodshed and one potential all-out war; working alongside Solomon in the farming labors; aiding the newly-arrived pioneer families by helping them become established and teaching them compatibility with their new environment; and on the side raising six children of her own and three foster children.

Of course, there is no way of knowing the actual number of times Celiast's talents as mediator were used in the transition period between the last of the Indian culture and the new, fast-growing pioneer era, but a few such incidents are recorded, apparently authentic in that they are often duplicated in separate records or accounts.

A rather impressive account of such an incident took place between Reverend John Frost, the local missionary, and Katata, a somewhat hostile headman of the Clatsops. Acting on a grudge involving a stolen and retrieved hatchet, Katata was discovered leveling a musket at Frost, preparing to blow his

head off. Celiast ran from her cabin and grabbed Katata by his long hair, jerking him off his feet and publicly embarrassing him. She then brandished her wisely maintained prestige as Coboway's daughter to prevent any further repercussions.

Another account describes Celiast hiding W. W. Raymond, a lay member of the Methodist Mission, in her root cellar for four days while performing massive amounts of public relations work and mediating with an angry tribe that was after the man's hide.

W. S. Kenney, of Seaside, is credited with recording the story of how Celiast stopped a potential bloody uprising. Apparently bent on revenge for the killing of an Indian by Thomas Owens, a white settler, a number of Clatsops and Tillamooks who had banded together with the intentions of a total massacre, were intercepted by Celiast, who was able to convince the party to return home and the band finally dispersed. One source states that on this occasion Celiast "perhaps prevented war in the whole territory."

No one to show partiality, Celiast is described in yet another journal putting the brakes to her own husband in his incautious attempt to do in an Indian in a fracas over an insult to Solomon's hired boy. (And they sent him to Congress and kept her home on the farm?)

Between babies and heroic rescues Celiast adopted Eli, an orphaned French Canadian boy and Bill Stoddard, a half-breed. Several accounts also refer to Celiast's purchase of Jesse Bill, a Hawaiian girl whom she bought from a sailor as a slave. Celiast eventually adopted Jessie Bill and raised her as one of her own children.

As the first pioneer family to settle on the Clatsop Plains, Solomon and Celiast Smith were greatly depended upon to help those who followed. Their home served as temporary quarters for countless individuals and families while new shelters were being built. It was Celiast's responsibility to organize the crowded and ever-changing household and to feed the large groups that gathered for the meals. Many of these new pioneers were totally unfamiliar with the climate and environment and Celiast was a source of information on the gathering and preparation of indigenous edible plants and wildlife. To the new settlers she passed on her knowledge of the best methods for collecting clams, mussels, roots and local berries and shared her Indian methods of cooking the fresh products or drying them for year around use.

The years and changes, the loss of her tribe and the loss of her first two children were hard on Celiast. There is no mention anywhere as to whether she ever again saw or had any knowledge of those two young boys that were taken from her at Fort Vancouver. Her picture, taken in her middle years, suggests that she never forgot them. Finally, in 1876, when Solomon died and the children were grown (one, Silas, a New Hampshire attorney), Celiast sought peace and simplicity and reverted back to the Indian ways of her youth, living quietly on Clatsop Plains, speaking her native language and practicing her original Indian way of life as much as possible in the altered environment. In 1891 she died and was buried beside Solomon in the Pioneer Cemetery.

I don't know when the plaque was embedded on Celiast's gravestone, but it obviously happened back when women were still being defined by their relationships with a man or men. (Let's not kid ourselves that this particular injustice isn't still going on today.) Here lies Celiast, teacher and appendage to Coboway and then appendage to Solomon.

Let's give Celiast equal time on this rock. This woman is a symbol of a graceful and dignified transition between two eras and two cultures. Her story shows a person whose dealings with others, both Indians and whites, were based on respect and equality.

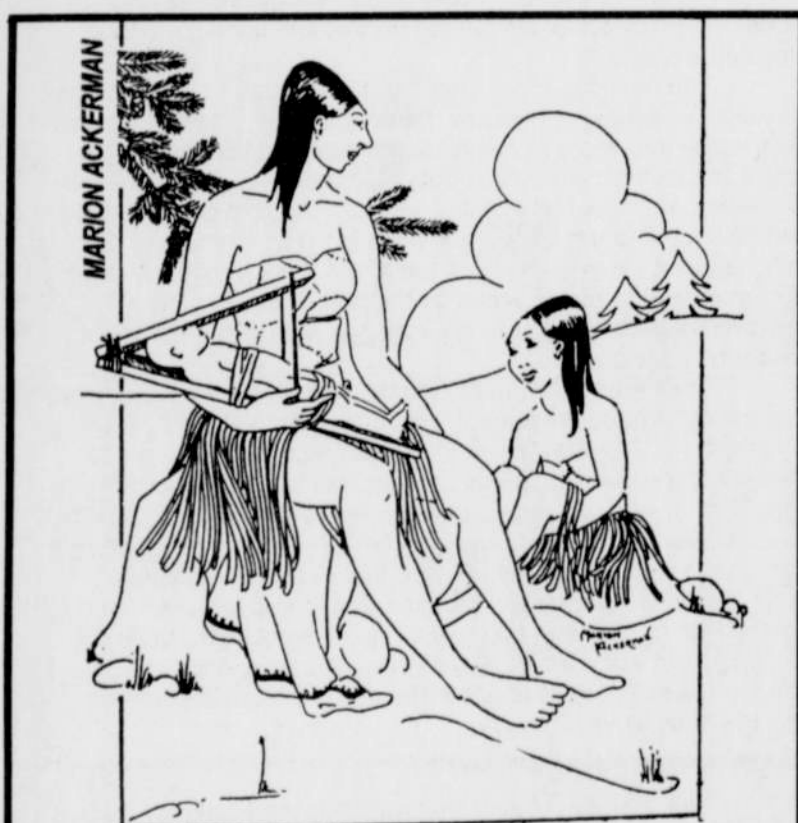
She also represents the proud dignity, instinctive wisdom, and strength of a now extinct race. The last full-blooded Clatsop Indian died in 1905.

I would like to see her epitaph changed to read:

...and his wife, Celiast, distinguished princess of the Clatsop Indians, pioneer, educator, naturalist, mediator, stateswoman, philanthropist, farmer and mother.

Aren't there any women on that Pioneer cemetery board?

Connie Rose Anderson used to live in Cannon Beach.



THE CHINOOK

Along the lower Columbia River, from The Dalles to the Pacific Ocean, lived the various divisions of the Chinook. The great fame of the Chinook nation comes from their early history as middle-men in the aboriginal trade north and south along the coast and the interior. They traded slaves from California for Nootka canoes up the coast, and for prized dentalium shells.

The Chinooks who settled on the south side of the Columbia near the ocean, as far upstream as Tongue Point and down the coast as Tillamook Head, were known as the Clatsop, which in English is translated as 'Dried Salmon'. They took the name of one of their villages.

The Chinooks came closer to the white man's standard of living than any other natives of the Pacific Northwest. Food was fish, some game, roots and berries. Almost from the beginning the Chinooks split cedar planks for low-roofed houses. Stone, wood and bone were their tools. Carved wooden bowls and sea shells were used as dishes. Food was stored and cooked in boxes or baskets, some of which were tightly woven to hold water. Mats were made from tall, hollow cattails, which the women gathered from canoes along streams and lakes. Fish nets and short skirts for women were made out of shredded cedar bark. Their canoes were cedar logs hollowed out with fire and scraped and smoothed with shells, bone and stone tools.

The Chinooks were sometimes known as 'Flat Heads'. The process of flattening the head was limited to male members of the nobility and for the daughters of chiefs. The malformation was effected in earliest infancy, while the bones were soft and the forehead was easily pressed into the distorted shape. A crib or cradle, sometimes in the form of a small canoe, had a vice-like headpiece in which the baby's head and shoulders were kept in the same position from three to eight weeks. If the child died its cradle became its coffin.

~C.R.A.



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