

EDGE LORE

By Peter Lindsey

Just as the wind, sea, and rain give shape to the natural features of the upper Left Edge, so the folk traditions - the tales, superstitions, humor, and legends in the oral tradition of our area shape its cultural history.

Tillamook Head and Neahkahnie Mountain both figured prominently in the lore of the Clatsop Chinooks and the Nehalem Tillamooks (Killamooks). Tillamook youth reaching adolescence were sent to Neah Kahnie Mt., long the site of choice for vision quests and "power" dreams. Young men fasted on its slopes in isolation, ultimately hallucinating and dreaming. "Power" arising from the interpretation of these dreams linked these new adults with their past. Wild Woman, a shape-shifter like Proteus, played a prominent part in these visions. Initially of rare beauty and charm, she could transform rapidly into a tattooed harridan, treacherous and ghastly to behold.

Lower Columbia Clatsop Chinooks followed certain rituals and techniques when preparing the first spring salmon caught each season. Many contemporary sport fisherman also handle the first returned fish with extreme care, propitiating the forces responsible for its arrival. For Chinooks, the following rules prevailed when the prized first fish was obtained: 1) The fish must not be cut (steaked out) but split along the spine 2) It must not be steamed, but roasted 3) Spits must be made: one for the head, one for the back, one for the roe, one for the body 4) The gills must be burnt.

The legend of the Neahkahnie Treasure persists as the most famous lost treasure myth location in Oregon. According to some versions, the famed Tillamook Indian chief Kilchis descended from a black sailor who alone survived the shipwreck of a Spanish galleon bound for Spain from the Philippines loaded with gold bullion. Scores of treasure dreamers have sought its location and continue to do so.

The arrival and settlement of this niche of the Left Edge by Europeans, Russians, Asians and "Boston Men" from the eastern United States, introduced additional ingredients into this basic broth of legend and native tradition, now become a rich stew of myths, tales, folk techniques, jokes, traditional recipes and general flap doodle.

I collected the following local materials on the north coast. Versions appear in *Oregon Folklore*, edited by Suzi Jones, and *The Well Traveled Casket* by Tom Nash and Twilo Schofield. A few are collated and indexed in the Randall Mills Archives at the University of Oregon.

Frank Hammond, venerable Cannon Beach fisherman, told me this anecdote over a jelly glass of whiskey:

"Two old fisherman up at Astoria were tellin' how big a fish they'd caught. This one old fisherman said he'd caught a chinook salmon weighed a hundred and forty pounds. The other fisherman spit out a gob of snooze.

"I don't believe that", he said.

"Well, I did."

"That's nothin" says the other old boy. "I was fishin here the other day and caught onto somethin. I drug it around and it was an old ship's light."

"An old ship's light?"

"Yeah."

"Well, what's that? An old ship's light could'nt be much."

"But," he says, "the light was still burning in it."

"Oh, the light was not burning."

"Well" he says, "tell you what you do. You knock off about a hundred pounds of that fish and I'll blow out the light."

Cannon Beach has its weather: bone rattling winds, rain at 60 angles, foam scuffs driven like snow balls during November gales. We well-barnaced coastal types revel in stories and recollections about weather severity and adversity. Vic Olson, the dean emeritus of local Munchausing told me of this fog encounter several years ago.

"Well, this one summer morning, my pardner and me were going to shingle this old barn. Foggy, whew! That morning the ground fog lay in around here thick as oatmeal. Could'nt see nothin. Had to get the job done that day so we get up on the roof and started shinglin'. Along about noon, the sun come out bright and burned the fog away. We was out on the edge of the roof, when the roof broke off and we fell eight feet to the ground!

"Damn fog had been so thick we could'nt see that we'd shingled eight feet past the edge of the house! Fog so thick it had held up that roof solid til the sun came

on strong and melted that fog away."

Local coastal grocery establishments, taverns, American Legion Halls, and post offices have long been gathering places for the raconteurs who disseminate village lore. Bill's Tavern, the Arch Cape Grocery, and Osburns Grocery porch, home of the "jaybirds", are no exception.

Thirty some years ago, the Sunset Tavern occupied the plot now taken up by Grant's Landing Restaurant in Cannon Beach. Stanley Wytaske, proprietor, was a taciturn and notoriously frugal man. On a certain evening in 1963, a local logger brought his cohorts into Stanley's place, slurped up gallons of Miller beer and tried to get the old boy to buy the stalwarts each a free one. Stan wouldn't budge. No free beer. Stories are potentially powerful. This one moved Stanley to utter in his rough voice: "A round on the house for you boys."

One day a logger was working up behind Cannon Beach setting chokers and complaining. Suddenly a ferocious voice came out of the sky, asking what all the griping was about. The logger looked up and realized it was God talking, so he started to explain what a miserable life he had been leading. His only hope was that he might go to a better place of rest when he died.

God looked down and said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you can accomplish a few things that need doing around here - projects that I haven't had time for - I'll make sure you get into Heaven." The logger agreed.

God said, "The first thing I want you to do is move that big mountain off there (Saddle Mountain) farther south, close to Cannon Beach." So the logger worked for years and finally finished moving it a shovel full at a time. Then he called God and God spoke to him and said, "That's good, but I've got another thing for you to do. I need the south fork of Elk Creek moved about two miles farther north." So the logger slaved away for years and finally rerouted the creek and went to call on God again. God said, "That's good, but there's one more thing you've got to do, and then you can be assured of a place in Heaven."

"What's that?" asked the logger. "Go down to Stanley's Tavern in Cannon Beach," said God, "and sit there drinking til he buys you a beer on the house. When he does that, you can be sure of a place in Heaven." As the story goes, you can go down to that tavern to this very day, and that logger is still sittin' there waitin' for a free beer.

The lover's lane saga "The Man With the Hook" has long been a titillation to teenage sensibilities. Cannon Beach has its variant, "The Story of the Bandage Man." The Bandage Man skulks from the undergrowth just north of Cannon Beach, terrorizing passing motorists on rainy nights and sloughing off gory shards of his mummy-wrapped bandages.

Oral traditions infuse our lives with richness and color. Our coastal community bears its own unique stamp of traditional material. I would like to leave you with a recipe for pickled spring salmon given to my brother by a gentleman of Finnish descent.

Pickled Salmon

Combine:

- 1 1/2 cup vinegar (5% white)
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tbs brown sugar
- 1 tbs celery seed
- 1 tbs mustard seed
- 3 crushed bay leaves
- 1 tbs cloves (whole)
- 3 lbs spring chinook salmon
- several onions

Bring this liquid to a boil. Cool completely. Loosely pack chunks of onion and salmon (bite sized) in quart jars. Pour liquid over fish and onions. Seal jars and wait a week before consuming. Keeps 4-6 weeks.



MEANWHILE, IN NEWPORT...

ALEX LAOLETE

I don't understand women. This will come as a great surprise to most of my female acquaintances who consider me to be kind, sharing, gentle, caring, deeply sensitive, yet a cynosure of manly vigor.

Thus, I was surprised when Herself, the light of my life, reacted to a cautious, sensitively phrased comment about a departing friend with: "Alex, you are so prejudiced! I....." Words seemed to fail her. She turned and looked away from me in apparent disgust.

"What do you mean I'm prejudiced?" I managed to keep my voice from going up more than one octave. "All I wondered was how long Ol' Bob has been wearing makeup." (No answer. A glance of simmering, feminine hostility.)

"Well, I guess makeup's OK, maybe he's got zits. I suppose it's possible for a man in his 40's to have zits. I guess it was the eyebrows that got me."

"That's another of your typically brutal, sexist remarks. What's wrong with a man plucking his eyebrows into subtle, pleasing curves?"

"Err...nothing, I guess, never thought of it that way. I'll have to look closer next time. Probably really looks great."

"Alex, in Japan and some European cities it's simply considered good grooming for men to wear makeup."

"But Light, this is Newport. Innocent fishermen frequent this place. What would happen if.....?"

"Why don't you just come right out and say it?"

"Say what?"

"Say what your stone age mentality wants you to say, something about Bob's gender orientation."

"Gender orienta...Bob? I've known Ol' Bob for years. All evidence I've seen indicates he's a raving, testosterone drenched heterosexual. Why I remember one time in Coose Bay when..."

"You really are a pig aren't you. I don't even want to be seen in public with you. Take me home!"

"Home? It's only just after nine, the band just started."

"I said take me home!"

Driving her home I began to hope there was something good on TV. It was obviously the only entertainment I was getting that night.

Harry from West Virginia says that the same people who were worrying something might happen to George Bush and leave us with Dan Quayle now worry that something could happen to Hillary and leave us stuck with Bill. Could be ..

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The individual who pollutes the air with his factory and the ghetto kid who breaks store windows both represent the same thing. They don't care about each other or what they do to each other.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

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VICKY & DAVID



LOOKING SOUTH FROM CANNON BEACH

6 UPPER LEFT EDGE APRIL 1993