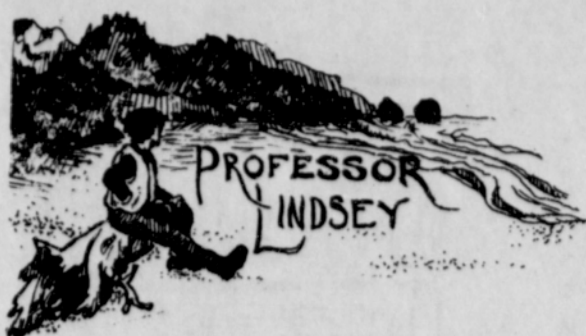

Your Professor has never been much on pretense, flexing his scholarly muscles, flashing credentials degrees and such. He's more the "professor" style, something on the order of Mark Twain's scoundrel, playing to a rube crowd at The Royal Nonesuch. I guess I hark back to those professors who operated out of the back end of a wagon in frontier towns, dispensing snake oil and wonder salves to the country bumpkins, traveling through towns called Paradise or Climax, or Clearwater. I'm cut from the same cloth as that old salacious professor in Raintree County , a blusterer and blatherer, presiding at bull-breeding events and the odd tavern horse-shoe toss.

I like to engage in dallying and lollygag, first chair at Bill's Tavern, dabbler at verbal riposte and parry, chronicler of local shortcomings, an old Sergeant-Major reviewing the troops. A Major Hoople sort of professor. When no one's available for a salty chat, I eavesdrop. Nothing purposive you understand. Strictly inadvertent. I cop a listen here and a glance there just to test the public pulse. I'm a spectator bird gathering a nest of impressions. The term "eavesdrop" or "eavesdrip" was present in the language by the 1600's. In 1641, in Kent, English Law made it illegal for the rain that dripped or dropped directly down from a house's eaves to land on neighboring property. Eaves could be built no closer than two feet from an adjoining property to avoid erosion. By extension, anyone inside of that line of raindrop fall was inside of private property and snooping, listening, violating privacy.

Your saintly Professor wouldn't snoop, but he can't help listening. My, the things he hears!

I overheard a couple discussing their amours one morning in a restaurant.

"Jim kept me up 'til all hours last night! He just wouldn't leave me alone and go to sleep!"

"I wanted to sleep," the gentleman responded, "but that new Japanese crouton mattress you bought kept me up all night!"

Reading on the beach one summer's day, I witnessed the following. Glancing up I saw a small boy helplessly chasing a kite string down the beach. Kite and string sailed irretrievably toward the firmament. The little boy crumpled near me, defeated and crying. An elderly gentleman stopped and consoled the child.

"Don't cry son. You should be happy, not sad. You've given that kite what it wanted most. Freedom. All its life it dreamed of soaring in the heavens, and you've set it free at last."

The crying stopped, and I choked back a sniffle or two myself.

Once I listened while a father discussed trees with his young son.

"Trees," he told him, "are terribly important. Their roots are like feet and toes. They grip the earth and hold it together and keep it from washing away. Their long arms reach up into the sky to catch the clouds and squeeze out rain. When a storm comes, you can hear them sighing and straining, struggling with the wind like wrestlers. All would fall apart if they weren't there doing their job."

A woman ordered from a menu in a Thai restaurant.

"What does that taste like?" she queried, and then, "Do you think I'll like it?" How does a waitress respond to that, I ask you?

Osburn's Grocery Store bench is a prime spot for tourist eavesdropping. The next two conversations were collected there in the last few years.

"I know it's true about the President, you know, I heard it on television!"

The only more truly true source would be Reader's Digest, I suppose.

Last fall, an enormous harvest moon inched up behind the eastern foothills, a great grinning fall pumpkin of a moon. A group gathered on Osburn's Porch commented on the inordinately swollen moon.

"That's one of the biggest full moons I've ever seen," a man suggested.

"Mighty big," another agreed, "but nothing like the size of the full moons we used to get in Texas!"

Your Professor sees some odd bits, dearly beloved. I watched a man seated on a commode, answering nature's call, speak to his office on a cellular phone. Strapped for time, I guess. Busy schedule.

Two women seated several tables away from one another chatted via cell phones.

"See me over here," one said. "I'll wave. Hi! Yes, I see you there. How's Jim?"

There are many strange stories in the village these days. A haggard family stopped into the cookie store last week. They couldn't find the beach. How can the species survive, I ask you?

The Writers' Block

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An idealist is one who, on noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage, concludes that it will also make a better soup.

H. L. Mencken

On the hills behind town, industrial forestry churns along, turning green hillslopes dirt brown. Mountains grow shorter, it seems, as the trees come down; the topographic relief drops a tree's height. Summertime clearcut air crackles, hot and dry, and wet forest soil turns to dust. Different birds fly there. Different animals scurry. Have a look: a thick tangle of new rock roads zig and zag across nearby mountain tops, obscured by the first row of trees. Their portentous paths mark the configuration of abundant clearcuts yet to come. This is nothing new. Mid-century roads wind down below the forest canopy, adorned in red alder, a tolerant tree which - by virtue of its roots' ability to generate nitrogen - can set up housekeeping on a badly scarred pit-gravel surface. The trees being cut today popped up as seedlings on clear-cut lands a generation ago. And yet, for all of this industrial forestry, Cannon Beach stands out as a non-industrial town. The trees are toppled in our backyards. But they are processed far away. The wood and the profits fly to the four winds. Despite industry's ragged mark our city's scenery, industry leaves little trace, for better or for worse, inside our city limits.

We occupy a peculiar place, this non-industrial town. For thousands of years, the land belonged to a non-industrial people (what we might term "pre-industrial" during moments of Eurocentric chutzpah) who got by just fine without ever stripping the hills bare. Then, residents beheld a brief and faint industrial moment - spruce logging camps, a handful of gyppo loggers, a small dory fleet launching into the surf - and then this moment too was swept away, swiftly, by late-20th century currents. Now we inhabit a place visited by some of the world's preeminent software engineers, getting away from their tidy and virtual assembly lines, doing nothing in particular, consuming scenery. It is a time of "post-industrial" economies, and the town of Cannon Beach sits at post-industrial ground zero - an aberrant outpost of the information age, a town of few big machines, its fortunes tied to the capricious business of human amusement, postmodern, post-Fordist, post-this, post-that, post, post, post. But can we really be "post-" that which we never really were??

At best, we can pretend. Historical society enthusiasms may be directed toward that very brief moment of first European occupation, the hard and dirty scramble to get by, the successful crafting of genteel small town life amidst the coarse clank and bang of resource industry machines, sounds rising and falling in uncontrollable, life-shattering booms and busts. And yet this period - this "historical period" - represents an infinitesimally small portion of the total human history in this place. The *vast* majority of our local history is of a different sort, non-industrial, pre-industrial, downright aboriginal. And this period, even if it may seem alien to us, deserves some sort of commemoration. As the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition approaches (an Expedition which brought the intrepid explorers to visit the longhouses of villages on the Cannon Beach shoreline) our editor, the venerable Reverend Billy Hults, has proposed the construction of a commemorative longhouse. A place of historical and environmental interpretation, celebrating those things unique to this town - a tourist-friendly meeting place where the beach and the watershed converge, where the tribal village visited by Clark and his team once stood, on a corner of the city land to be vacated by the proposed relocation of the Cannon Beach Elementary School. And I would like to second the motion.

In the past, longhouses sat in long waterfront rows, and each served several functions: living space, storage area, meeting hall, ceremonial space. The largest ones sat close to the center of the village, the homes of elites, the primary staging areas for large gatherings and momentous ceremonies. Today, not far to our north, tribal villages may consist primarily of modern, single-family homes, but still contain a single longhouse at their core, tidier and better lit than its predecessors perhaps, but still central to village social and ceremonial life. Longhouse events hold these towns together. They link tribal communities to their shared past, and serve as a place for communities to assess where they have been and where they are going. The functions of a Cannon Beach longhouse would be somewhat different, of course, but it could become quite an asset, socially, economically, environmentally. An appealing interpretive center, without equal on this coast, where tourists could visit. A meeting hall where local organizations could gather. (And both input and assistance could be sought from members of the federally-unrecognized Tillamook and Chinook tribes, which currently attempt to regroup nearby and revive some of their cultural traditions.)

There are many questions that arise at the beginning of such a project. One of the biggest: what would a Cannon Beach longhouse *look* like? Ethnographic accounts, and the Cannon Beach diaries of William Clark give us some ideas. Adventurous building contractors take note! Most local longhouses were rectangular, permanent structures, roughly 50 feet long and half as wide, each facing the waterfront. They were made almost entirely of cedar planks, with floors sitting slightly recessed into the ground. Cedar plank walls supported a gabled, cedar plank roof which sloped downward at low angles on both sides of its central ridge. (Temporary houses for summer use at fishing, hunting, and plant gathering sites often were smaller, and had a "shed" type of roof, sloping in one direction only.) Here in Cannon Beach, Clark reported that the floor pits sat roughly 5 feet below the outdoor ground level (often mounded almost this high with insulating soil). A short ladder, made by cutting foot-holes in a heavy cedar plank, would descend from the door to the house floor.

Cedar planks were placed side-by side, usually horizontally, to construct the walls, packed with moss in the crevices. These planks were cut from downed cedar logs or split from the sides of huge living trees, a practice which kept the trees alive with a discernable notch which can still be seen on some standing ancient cedar trees today; these planks were about three or four feet wide and up to about 30 feet in length. Trees from high-elevation sites, with dense wood grain, were preferred if they could be obtained. Charred on their exteriors, these planks were then chipped smooth with a hand adze to two to three inches' thickness. Short spruce pegs and spruce roots, peeled and steamed, were pulled through drilled holes to connect board joints, functioning like nails.

House support posts, usually square planks of roughly one-foot cross-section, set in holes in the floor, stood vertical along the center of most houses; some may have been carved, though little information remains on the content of their carvings. These posts supported a long, horizontal plank which ran the length of the house, serving as the center roof gable. Clark noted that Cannon Beach longhouses had one or two house posts, in the middle of each house, not including the posts lining exterior walls. A smoke vent board ran along one side of the roof gable, left loose so that it could be moved to allow smoke to escape. Clark reported doors at either end of the houses at Cannon Beach - each door was probably covered with a wide cedar board suspended at its top by flexible spruce root hinges. Floors were often covered with woven rush mats; firepits, aligned along the center of the room, were surrounded by split boards laid on their sides, rocks, and fresh sand. This sand was replaced regularly to keep cooking areas clean. In addition to these fires, houses were illuminated by torches of spruce or Douglas fir pitch.

Extended families lived in each longhouse, often including approximately four "nuclear families" as well as some distant relatives and slaves. Each family's area often would be partitioned off with walls, either of planks, or of wooden post frames covered with thickly woven mats. One couldn't see through these walls, but could hear through them, and at the end of the day people would continue conversations back and forth from their respective rooms. A wide bench lined each wall, about two feet above the floor, lined with cedar planks. Divided by partitioning boards, this bench served as seating area, bed, and storage area. The head boards delimiting shamans' beds would be carved and painted with images of their sprit guides. Skins and woven mats served as bedding and seat cushions. Shelves above these sleeping areas held clothes and other personal belongings.

A contemporary Cannon Beach longhouse, lacking human residents, would look a little different, but it could be retrofitted to conform to our post-industrial, non-industrial town of the present. A place to tell the tourists our local tales in the summertime. A place to gather year-round - distinctive, smelling of cedar, lacking the antiseptic flicker of fluorescent lights. It would look sharp, sitting there where the creek rolls down from the shrinking mountains and tumbles across the beach. Sort of like how it looked when William Clark stumbled into town. Envision it. Look at the pictures of longhouses compiled for such sources as Stephen Dow Beckham's *The Indians of Western Oregon* or the Smithsonian's *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 7: The Northwest Coast.* Like what you see? Anyone interested in this project, who wishes to pledge their allegiance to the concept, is encouraged to contact our editor, Billy Hults, care of this paper.

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