

# Crow: Name comes from old, deeply racist tradition

Continued from Page 1A

Others say it is not an urban versus rural issue — it's a simple question of right versus wrong.

## 'It's embarrassing'

Columbia River Kayaking owner Andrew Emlen is one of many locals who told Jayapal they support the change.

"We've taken to calling it Jim Saules Point because we think that change is gonna happen eventually," Emlen said, adding that he often takes out-of-state visitors on tours around Jim Crow Point.

"It's embarrassing. I've taken African-Americans out there. I don't want that to be part of their impression of this place," Emlen said. "If that place is to be named after Jim Saules, then let's use his real name."

County Commissioners Blair Brady and Dan Cothren have said they don't think the name is racist.

"I have an issue with it because we have a lot of crows here. You have a real abundance of crows," Cothren said.

"I guess that's been bit of a surprise to me too, to see how much education we need to do," Jayapal said. "I guess that it's not clear to everybody, where (Jim Crow) comes from, and what that means."

Jayapal thinks there is a lot of local support for her proposal.

"I've been getting emails from people who are saying, 'We're with you and were afraid to speak out.' I think that's a terrible thing in 2016, that there are people who are afraid to come out and say that they think ... it's a blight on the county," Jayapal said.

## Who was Jim Crow?

Most people know "Jim Crow" describes the discriminatory laws that were prevalent before the civil-rights era. But the name comes from a much older, deeply racist tradition that cast a long shadow over American culture.

Minstrel show performer Thomas Rice made the name "Jim Crow" famous in the 1830s. Dr. David Pilgrim, president and founder of the Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, said. Rice dressed in blackface and gave exaggerated, capering performances of "Negro Ditties," including "Jump Jim Crow."

"He wasn't the first to use greasepaint on his face and act like a buffoon, but he was the first to do it as a complete show," Pilgrim said.

The minstrel shows made Rice wealthy and famous. Soon, he had scores of imitators, who ridiculed African-Americans as ignorant, lazy or hypersexualized.

"Jim Crow remained one of the stock characters," Pilgrim said. After slavery ended, the Jim Crow character lived on, fueled by whites' romantic ideas about plantation life. Starting in the 1880s, an "extremely popular" genre of music known as "Coon Songs" carried vicious stereotypes of blacks "into people's parlors," Pilgrim said.

By the early 1900s, African-Americans used "Jim Crow" as a way to describe the discrimination that affected every aspect of their lives.

"(Jim Crow) became a synonym for not just the songs that put black people down and the stage personas that put black people down, but for anything that put black people down," Pilgrim said.

Jim Crow characters persisted well into the 20th century, inspiring characters in movies and shows, including the five crows in Disney's "Dumbo."

## Whose county is it, anyway?

The disagreement over Jim Crow is symptomatic of a larger debate about the county's future: Should Wahkiakum continue to be an insular place with an identity rooted in its almost exclusively white recent history? Or should it become a place that welcomes tourism, along with the money, new residents and change that it would bring?

Commissioner Cothren, a lifelong Wahkiakum resident, isn't interested in trying to please outsiders. People who grew up there "relate to Jim Crow" and "don't like to be dictated to," he said.

"We're getting agencies tell-



Image from "Gallery of comicalities" 1880  
A woodcut depicts Jim Crow, a derisive symbol used by supporters of a racial caste system in post-Civil War America.

ing us what we do with our property. Now they're telling us what to name our creeks," Cothren said. "It hasn't killed anybody, the name. It hasn't hurt anybody. Do we have any colored people here? I don't see it. Nobody's ever come up to me and said, 'We need to change this name.'"

Cothren isn't convinced the names would make black visitors or residents feel unwelcome.

"I don't know. We grew up with that. They didn't grow up with that," Cothren said.

Commissioner Brady did not respond to a call from the Chinook Observer.

"If you really want to change the name, pony up the \$5,000 and put it on the ballot for the people to vote," Brady said in a recent Wahkiakum County Eagle article. "If this senator doesn't have enough work to do, maybe she should get another job."

"I really don't think most people in Wahkiakum feel that way. I think it's disappointing, but as the discussion continues, I hope (the commissioners) will see that it is an opportunity," Jayapal said.

## Who was James Saules?

"If it was named as a racist name, I probably would have an issue with that, but we don't know that. It was named in the 1850s," Cothren said.

A few records do say the places were named for a tree where crows perched, but these all seem to be based on the strength of a single letter, written by settler Nellie Megler in the early 1900s. Emlen, an avid bird-watcher, says crows are not actually that common at the point, and would have been less common more than 160 years ago.

In 1987, Oregon historian Sam McKinney noted "the obvious racial connotation of the name," and said he believed the local geographical features were named for Saules.

Accounts about Saules differ on many points, such as the spelling of his name, where he was from, whether he was a "black giant" or rather short, and whether he was any good at playing fiddle. But they are unanimous on one point: he was never dull.

Historians believe Saules settled in a cabin near Cape Disappointment after jumping ship. He married a Chinook woman and briefly worked as a bar pilot. In 1842, he started a business running a boat between Astoria and Cathlamet.

Saules briefly moved to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. But during the "Cockstock Affair" of 1844, he was accused of inciting violence among natives, and ordered to move back to the Long Beach Peninsula.

A short time later, Oregon passed the "Lash Law" — a policy that banned blacks from

moving to the region south of the Columbia River. In his 2014 dissertation, Portland State University historian Kenneth R. Coleman argued that the timing was no coincidence.

"Oregon politicians suggested the legacy of the Saules case by stressing the need to prevent black men, particularly sailors, from coming to Oregon and collaborating with local indigenous groups to commit acts of violence against white settlers," Coleman wrote.

## Big life, obscure death

Saules returned to Cape D, and worked on a schooner that carried freight and passengers throughout the region.

In 1845, he fueled the growing tension between the British and Americans over Cape Disappointment, when he got involved in a dispute over an important land claim.

In 1897, Astoria settler Silas B. Smith described Saules as a skilled fiddler, who "could sustain a very interesting conversation on a variety of subjects."

Saules' life took a turn for the worse in the late 1840s. A December 1846 Oregon Spectator article said Saules was brought before an Oregon City judge, on suspicion of causing the death of his Indian wife, but he later disappeared.

"After a while, Saul got into bad ways, and the settlers decided that should be given a public flogging," Smith wrote. He witnessed the whipping in 1848.

"It was a shocking scene to witness," Smith recalled. "Saul never recovered from his disgrace. His troubles affected his mind, and he became partially insane. ... He died soon after, just where I am not able to say."

In 1850, as black-exclusion policies were strengthened, Saules' land at Cape D was given to a white man.

The last record of his life is a set of ledgers from a Cathlamet store that listed him as a debtor in the early 1850s. Some accounts say he died around that time, while living on the banks of the Columbia, west of Cathlamet, leading many historians to conclude that he lived near the "Jim Crow" landmarks.

## What's in a name?

Pilgrim, the diversity expert, said too often, African-Americans have been "honored" with racial slurs instead of their real names.

"People say this was done to honor this person, or changing this will not change anything in any meaningful way, or this is just an example of political correctness, and on and on and on," Pilgrim explained. "If you can find a way to make sure the conversations are intelligent, then you've had a real victory. A big part of that process is to listen," he said.

In this case, Pilgrim said,



john-adcock.blogspot.com  
White entertainer Thomas "Daddy" Rice performed in blackface as a "Jim Crow" minstrel character, c. 1830. Jim Crow became a catch-all term for laws designed to maintain the racial caste system in the segregated South between the Reconstruction Era and the 1960s.

there's an obvious way to honor Saules, while still preserving the history of the place.

"This one just seems easy to me," Pilgrim said. "If it really is a positive affirmation, then it would make no sense not to honor (Saules) as a person."

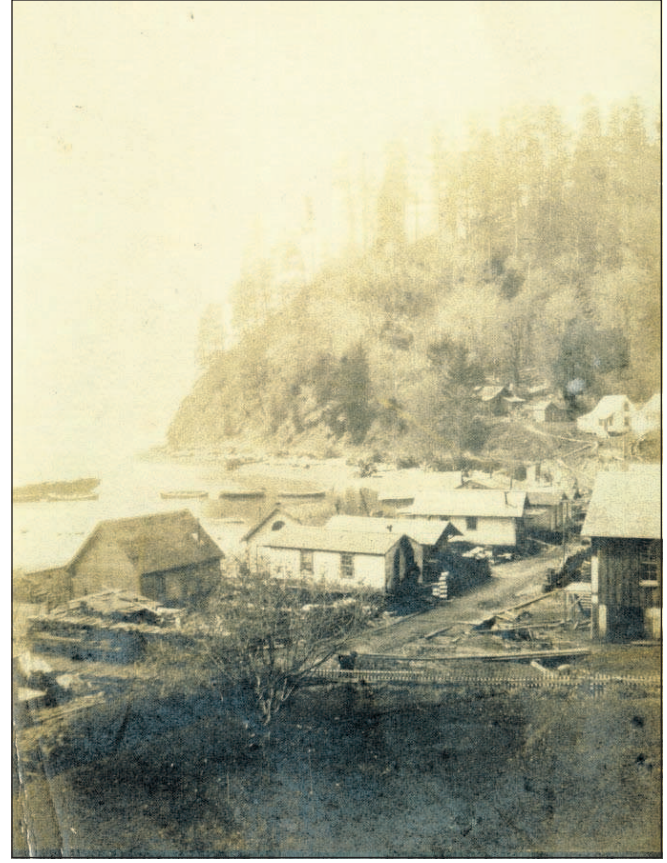


Image courtesy of the Irene Martin Collection  
The town of salmon-canning company town Brookfield, which no longer exists, once sheltered inside Jim Crow Point on Wahkiakum County's Columbia River shoreline. Owned by Joseph Megler, speaker of the Washington State House of Representatives, the town was abandoned in the early 20th century. Its site is now covered by sands dredged from the river.

ATTENTION

## Looking for co-workers of Frank Tarabochia

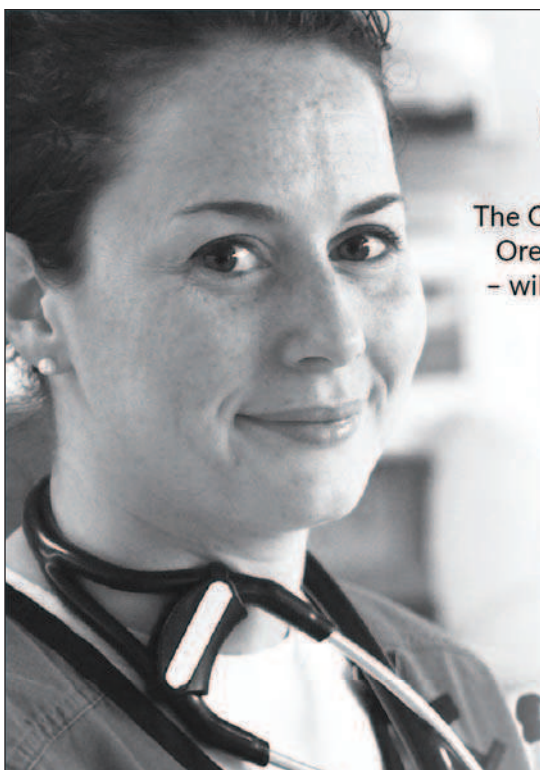
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