

WELCOME TO
WARRENTON
 A TOWN THAT OFFERS A DELICIOUS AND AFFORDABLE LIFESTYLE

As grandson of a Pacific Northwest sawmill worker, the feeling in Warrenton and Hammond of working people living well in a sensational natural setting gives me a sense of contentment. Grandpa and grandma would have felt at home there.

My family has tremendous affection for Warrenton, based on everything from seafood to sailboats to Camp Kiwanilong. If all you know of Warrenton is its big stores and auto dealerships, get off U.S. Highway 101 and explore.

Camp Kiwanilong, a thriving frontier outpost for young people back beyond the soccer fields, became a vital part of my daughter Elizabeth's life for the best part of a decade. Like Warrenton in general, it completely rejects pretension, but is full of fun, mutual support and confidence. It attracts kids from hundreds of miles away — including my nephews Garrett and Wynston from Dallas — and yet remains a genuine bargain. It gets my strongest possible endorsement. (www.campkiwanilong.org)



Matt Winters

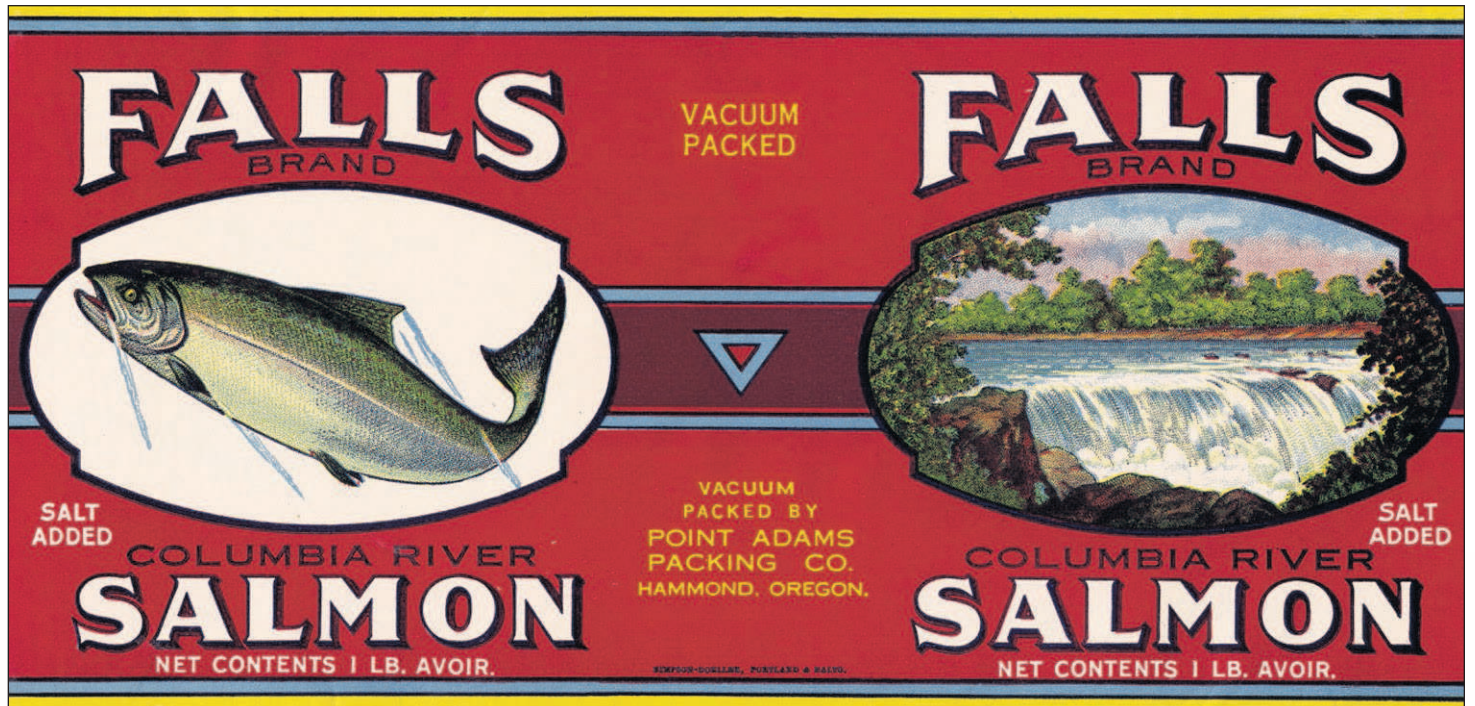
Nowadays, I mostly observe Warrenton and Fort Stevens State Park — named after first Washington Territorial Gov. Isaac Stevens — from my living room window in Ilwaco, about 10 miles across the broad expanse of the Columbia River estuary. A quarter-century ago, I loved wandering Warrenton's mooring basin with its expensive but apparently forgotten sailboats. They sparked daydreams of living aboard and popping out into the Pacific for some blue-water cruising. (I admit to continuing fantasies about spending my years between 70 and 90 sailing a Nauticat 44 around the by-then ice-free waters of the Arctic Ocean ...)

Less fantastically and far more affordably, Warrenton still provides some of my favorite fish. There can be few small towns in America with better opportunities to buy pure and delicious fresh and canned seafood. And, of course, all our local ports offer perfect access to go out and catch it ourselves. It's impossible to over-emphasize just how lucky we are in this region — how amazingly blessed. It's a delicious life.

Twenty years ago, near the start of my minor obsession with the history of the Northwest seafood industry, I found and bought a nearly complete set of old canning labels from Hammond's Point Adams Packing Co. They were glued to boards, perhaps as a school or county fair exhibit, but peeled off easily enough. Even after decades of trading, I still have a big one on my office wall: "FISHBO, A Natural and Unadulterated 100 Per Cent Pure Fox and Kennel Food, Fit for Human Consumption."

Talking at the time with a Point Adams retiree, he told a familiar story of being ordered by an owner or foreman to burn the contents of the cannery's label room — in retrospect like burning \$100 bills.

Equally sought after, by at least some of my eccentric fellow collectors, are items from Warrenton Clam Co., which used to be located near the present-day marina. In something of a consortium with the Wiegardt family of Willapa Bay, the Sigurdsons canned razor clams from Washington, Oregon and Alaska for a

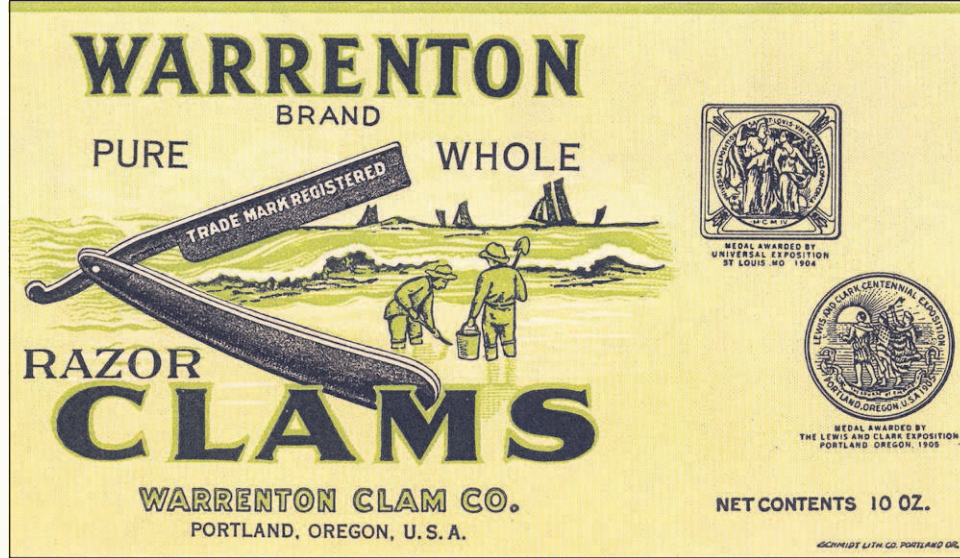


Contributed Photos

Falls Brand is an uncommon salmon can label from Hammond's Point Adams Packing Co., founded in 1920.



A dump-truck load of razor clams awaits processing in Warrenton Clam Co.'s Nahcotta plant, circa 1930.



Contributed Photo

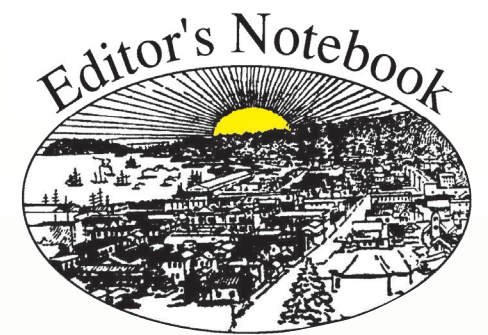
ABOVE: A Warrenton Clam Co. label from 1930 advertises that the company's products were awarded first-place medals at the Universal Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904 and at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland in 1905. BOTTOM: A World War I-era Warrenton Clam Co. letterhead advertised the company's product line — not just razor clams, but also salmon, berries and string beans.

couple generations, from around 1900 until about the outbreak of World War II.

Housewives were encouraged to write for a free recipe book that calls Warrenton razor clams "wholesome little vegetarians. ... They dig into the clean white sand and there the clam diggers hunt them at the exact moment when the receding tide covers them with a

foot or less of sweet salt water, washing them clean and adding to their fresh flavor of mingled sea and sunshine."

A 1921 trade journal reported resumption of canning after World War I, during which "practically all of the members of the Warrenton Clam Co. volunteered for military service." But the renewed clam pack that year



wasn't going well, "due to strikes among the clam diggers, extremely heavy seas, and unfavorable tides."

Commercial razor clam harvests continue there in the 21st century, though on a much-reduced scale compared to the glory days. An estimated 15 percent of Clatsop County razor clams are sold commercially, while in Pacific County, for-profit digging is limited to the Willapa Spits, small tidal islands near the mouth of the bay. (The spits have been closed to harvesting for two years due to slightly elevated levels of the marine toxin domoic acid.)

However, other species of clams are safe and abundant inside Willapa Bay — including manilas, softshells, cockles, bent-noses, butters and gapers. Since about 2000, some of these have become a major part of Willapa's economy, supplementing oysters.

Shellfish grower Warren Cowell, a friend who exemplifies Willapa's do-it-yourself ethos, published this concise manifesto earlier this week:

"So this is how we dig clams, on our hands and knees. This is how I got what I have today. Decades of hard work. No inheritance. No handouts. No grants. No subsidies. I did it with my back and my tenacity. Now we have to fight politically to keep what we have. To those more entitled, self-righteous individuals in the different government agencies, and especially those nongovernment organizations that want to keep me from farming the way we always have, I have only this to say to you: You can kiss my muddy ass! I'm not going anywhere!"

Past generations of clam-men and women are applauding. Let's make sure there are always places in our region for clams and all who dig them.

— MSW

Matt Winters is editor and publisher of the *Chinook Observer* and *Coast River Business Journal*.

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FIRST PRIZE AWARDED AT WORLDS FAIR ST. LOUIS, 1904 AND PORTLAND, OREGON, 1905 ON RAZOR BRAND CLAMS.

