word nerd

By RYAN HUME
FOR COAST WEEKEND

KNAPPTON [NÆP•TƏN]

noun

1. Once a thriving mill town built out onto a temperamental cove on the north bank of the Columbia River estuary. The Columbia River Manufacturing Co. began operating the mill there in 1870. The next year a post office was established. In 1876, the pioneer of salmon canning Joseph Hume would open the Eureka & Epicure Packing Company just down river from the mill. The cannery would close in 1897 as the canned salmon market flooded and prices decreased.

Two years later, spurred by a fear of ship-bound emigrants carrying infectious diseases, the U.S. government established the Columbia River Quarantine Station on the same site, using parts of the old cannery in its disinfection and delousing operations, which was known as a lazaretto, Italian for "pesthouse." All incoming foreign ships would unload their passengers onto the wharf for inspection prior to the site's decommission in 1938. During its operational time, the facility came to be known as the Ellis Island of the Pacific Northwest.

The cove would again experience a revitalization when the Bell family purchased the abandoned station in 1950 and turned the surrounding property and buildings into a sport fishing camp, though that too would fade by the time the 1970s rolled around, after the construction of Washington State Route 401 bisected the properties from the shoreline.

In 2005, Nancy Bell Anderson, daughter of the original camp owners, started a nonprofit to salvage and restore what was left of the dilapidated properties. With help from local contractors, architects and Clatsop Community College's preservation program established the Knappton Cove Heritage Center to preserve these important stories for generations to come. As for the mill and the town, fire and storms have washed it away, leaving only thousands of pilings standing against the current to remind us of what was.

ALEX PAJUNAS PHOTO

The Knappton Cove Heritage Center, once home to the Columbia River Quarantine Station

Origin

Shortly following the rise of the British flag over Fort Astoria, the supply ship Isaac Todd traveled north from San Francisco to what was now Fort George, with the beauty Jane Barnes aboard the vessel. It is said that her charm was so distracting to the men that she was sent to live aboard the Isaac Todd anchored in a cove across the river. The cove that came to be known as Todd's Bay in 1814 would be renamed Knappton in 1870 after the entrepreneur Jabez Burrell Knapp, who opened the mill there in that same year.

The surname "Knapp" has two separate origins. The British is a location-specific surname. J.B. Knapp, who is of German descent, more likely received his last name from the derivation of the German "knappe," which means "servant" or "squire." J.B. Knapp was the brother of Aaron Knapp, Jr., the namesake and first postmaster of Knappa, who established the post office there in 1872.

"The beach at Knappton Cove is today still strewn with driftwood and at high tide on a stormy day … Winter storms called *sou'westers* still frequently batter the area. It is not uncommon for wind gusts to reach over 60 miles an hour. Today power outages occur at such times nearly every winter. But if you're cozy inside by a wood-burning or oil stove, listening to a howling windstorm can be quite exhilarating."

—Nancy Bell Anderson, *The Columbia River's "Ellis Island": The Story of Knappton Cove*, Heritage Folk Press, 2012, P. 25

"Rumors that James J. Hill intends to father a city at the mouth of Columbia on the Washington side appear to have a substantial foundation. It is known that the Hill interests are negotiating for the purchase of a strip of waterfront seven-eighths of a mile in length at Knappton across from Astoria. Captain A. M. Simpson, a San Francisco multimillionaire, who owns the property, is now in Portland to meet Hill representatives who have made overtures to him for the purchase of the land….

"The property in question includes the site of the village of Knappton and the large sawmill at that place. Knappton is a mere hamlet and is supported by the sawmill."

—"Knappton To Be Hill's New City," *The Morning Oregonian*, Saturday, Oct. 27, 1906, P. 12

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