

Black Saul Held Off the British at Cape D

by Roger T. Tetlow, Seaview Observer
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Most folks living on the Peninsula have never heard much about a black man who singlehandedly thwarted England's plans for fortifying Cape Disappointment, but you cannot really blame them too much. James D. Saules, or Black Saul as he was known to the Oregon settlers of the 1840s, was a solitary free soul, content to live out his life in the wilderness without leaving behind any record of his place in history.

Saul was just a common old man, somewhat below average height, with sloping shoulders and a full, black face. He had only one outfit of clothing as far as anyone knew: a miner's gray woolen shirt, a pair of bell-bottomed navy dungarees and a wide-brimmed slouch hat. No shoes, of course, because shoes were mighty scarce back in the days before Oregon and Washington became states.

And how did he stop England from fortifying the cape? Well, Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Co. had been ordered to make a hurry-up trip down to the mouth of the Columbia River to take possession of Cape Disappointment before an American expedition under the command of Lt. John Fremont could do the same thing for the United States. He had been admonished, however, to do nothing if the cape was already occupied by the United States government or by any of its citizens.

When Ogden arrived at the cape, he found to his dismay a cabin in a small clearing, and a vegetable garden with a few hens poking around in the dirt. A man was dozing in the sun on a rickety chair propped against the cabin wall.

No historian was present to record the ensuing conversation, but it probably went something like this:

"Who are you," Ogden asked, "and what are you doing here?"

Saul looked at him calmly. "I am James D. Saules and I live here."

"And your nationality?"

Saul smiled gently. "I am an American, sir."

As the defeated Ogden turned and went back down the steep slope to his boat, Saul pulled his hat down over his eyes and went back to sleep.

But that was not the end of the matter. Ogden knew that possession and fortification of the cape was a must and so in September 1845, he bought Saul's claim for \$200. Then, to his dismay, he found that the black man did not own the cape at all but was simply holding it for the owners.

When asked about the deal, Black Saul merely shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Ogden did not ask me if I owned the cape. He just offered me \$200 for my rights to the land and he got all the rights I had."

The British never did get around to fortifying the cape, mostly because of the delay caused by Saul's residence on it. It was finally sold back to the United States.

There is no doubt at all about how Black Saul happened to be in the Oregon country. He came tumbling over the Columbia River bar in the wreck of the Peacock, an 18 gun sloop for the U.S. Navy.

On July 18, 1841, the Peacock attempted to cross the bar and hit the sands on the spit which now bears its name. It broke up and was abandoned, and the crew made its way to shore in the ship's launch. Later, the survivors were aboard the U.S.S. Porpoise—all except James D. Saules, ship's cook.

While the crew was waiting for help, Saul met an Indian woman he liked and the two of them went up to the cape to stay until the rescue ship had picked up the crew and left. Saul liked the Peninsula country better than he like navy life and decided to stay. He built his cabin on borrowed land and settled down to a life as a Peninsula pioneer.

Saul had a brief fling as a car pilot but the venture ended in near disaster. When the U.S. Navy's survey schooner Shark came to the bar and sent for a pilot, Saul offered his services, citing his naval experience, and was hired to take in the Shark.

[He used] smaller boats and tried to take the Shark across a shallow spot and grounded her solid. A few minutes later, Saul was seen paddling his canoe toward his home on the cape while the Shark, now being piloted by John Lattie, an experienced pilot, moved her off the sand and proceeded up the river.

Black Saul had better luck as the captain of an odd craft, a 35-ton sloop called the Calapooia, which moved up and down the river from Astoria to Linnton carrying freight and passengers. He also made occasional trips to other localities as the demand warranted.

The Calapooia was certainly a queer-looking boat but it was a staunch craft, built with more wood than most other boats twice its size.

Saul could not find an iron anchor so he got a big old crotch of a tree, fastened an ablong-shaped boulder in the crotch and held it in place with some tough saplings.

It was odd-looking but it worked. A few years ago, a fisherman at Astoria pulled up a similar anchor in his net and turned it over to the Columbia River Maritime Museum where it is displayed today. Some people think this is Saul's anchor.

Saul and the Calapooia were welcomed in every community along the river. Whenever the outlandish craft came in sight, creaking and groaning its way along the river bank, the women would set out a big supper, the men would hide a jug of "blue ruin" in a handy place, and they would all go down to meet Saul and his passengers for they knew that there would be dancing, singing and storytelling that night.

Black Saul wasn't any great shakes as a musician but the settlers didn't care. He could murder three tunes on his battered old fiddle and that was enough for them. He would play these ancient wheezes over and over again, stopping only long enough for a swig of "blue ruin" or a jaw full of chewin' tobacco and then he'd go back to sawing music again.

The dance floor was bare sod and stumps served the intermission minded. If Saul didn't get too much "blue ruin," daylight would find him still entertaining the folks along the river.

"But good things always come to an end, and the Calapooia and Black Saul finally ended up on a pebbly beach near Astoria during a storm. It was the end of things for both of them. Saul tried to make a living in other ways along the river but was never the same man again. He finally disappeared forever in the wilds near Cathlamet Bay.

Nothing along the river is named directly for James D. Saules, but Jim Crow Sands and Jim Crow Point were both named for the well-known Lower Columbia black man.

An Indian's account of the death of Black Saul was printed in the Overland Monthly in 1875: "Narwit-ka, nicka cumtux Saul. Yaka Halo Halo; yaka memiluce Kathlamet il-lihe"—meaning that "Saul was gone, gone; he had died and was buried somewhere about the shores of Cathlamet Bay."

It may not be engraved on a tombstone, but it is as good an epitaph as any for Black Saul of the cape.

Roger T. Tetlow is a Peninsula historian and writer.

Koch Breaks Ground for Clean Water, Safe Sewers

City Commissioner Bob Koch turned on the water and helped dig ground for sewer pipes at the Portland Mobile Home Park, 9000 N.E. Union Ave., on Thursday, August 6.

The 18.5 acre park was annexed to the city in 1973 with a "health hazard" designation because of contamination between the ground water wells and the cesspools used by residents. For years these residents have protested to city and county officials to help clean the water, which has been tested and found to contain unacceptable levels of fecal matter.

Koch had jars of the contaminated water to show the progress made. He says his commitment to help the approximately 250 residents stems from "values that I hold that we have a social responsibility to provide clean water and safe sewers."

Koch is the commissioner in charge of the bureaus of Water Works and Environmental Services; the latter manages the city's sewer system.

The park is owned by an out-of-state partnership managed by Commonwealth Property Management Services Co. Brad Fudge, president of Commonwealth, spoke at the ground-breaking.

Commonwealth has signed a three-phase contract estimated to be more than a half-million dollars to bring the park into the city's sewer and water system and to do other improvements.

General contractor for the phase of construction is Interstate Mechanical of Portland.

Other speakers at the ground-breaking included LuVerna Lee, chair of the environment and land use committee for the Piedmont Neighborhood Association; Yvonne Haresf, park resident and activist in getting the area cleaned up; Fudge, and Commissioner Koch.



City Commissioner Bob Koch and Commonwealth Property Management Co. President Brad Fudge hold examples of the contaminated well water and clean city water.

Representatives from the bureaus of Water, Environmental Services and Buildings were also available for questions.

Girl Scout Reunion to be a "Campy Picnic Party"

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Girl Scouts, The Columbia River Girl Scout Council is inviting all former Girl Scouts and their families to a special reunion. The "Campy Picnic Party" will be held Sunday, August 16, from noon to 4:00 p.m. at Portland's Oaks Park.

Special features include classic camp food . . . hot dogs, ice cream and, of course, "Some-mores", those gooey marshmallow, chocolate and Graham cracker concoctions made over a campfire.

Music, entertainment and merry-go-round rides are all part of the day's events. In addition, a special award will be made to former Girl Scouts selected as "Women of Distinction" from their communities.

Prizes will also be awarded for the best "camp uniform".

Call the Columbia River Girl Scout Council, (503) 620-4567 for an invitation.

Co-sponsors of this historic event are Pacific Northwest Bell, U.S. Bank and Standard Insurance Co.

All former Girl Scouts and their families are invited!

The Columbia River Girl Scout Council, comprised of 13 counties in Northwest Oregon and Southwest Washington has a membership of more than 10,000 girls and adult volunteers.



Dr. Jessica Bailey, Portland Community College - Sylvania, and Don McInnis, Portland Community College - Cascade, met with community members and the Black Leadership Conference at a reception held at Columbia Edgewater country club. (L-R) George Richardson, McInnis, Bailey and Carl Talton.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

New Walnut Park Liquor Agent Named

The Oregon Liquor Control Commissioners have appointed Ronald Taylor as the agent to operate the Walnut Park liquor store. His appointment is effective Sept. 1. He

will replace Bruce Stickney, who retired after serving as agent for six years.

Taylor studied business administration at Portland State Univer-

sity, Portland Community College and Perata Junior College. He worked in retailing for several years and served as a loan specialist for HUD before his appointment.

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