

## Blue Lake: Unhappy Hunting Ground

Many Portlanders have gone picnicking at Blue Lake, a summer resort located a few miles east of the city on the Columbia River highway, but few know that the area around the lake was once a favorite camping ground of the Nechacokee Indians. Little remains today of the once powerful and numerous tribe, only their stone implements have withstood the deterioration of time. Beautifully worked arrowheads, stone axes, bowls and other stone tools are found in profuse number at this site, as silent reminders of their once extensive population. Contact with the white man and the ensuing epidemics wiped them out, along with thousands of other Columbia River Indians until the tribe became extinct during the first half of the 19th century.

Mention of the tribe can be found in the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition. At the time of the expedition, the tribe was estimated to be only about 100 strong. However, the number of Indian artifacts found in and about the site indicates that at the time many people inhabited this place.

It may have been the ravages of smallpox which decimated them. Captain Clark estimated the disease to have prevailed in this region 30 years prior to their expedition. Evidently, the pestilence was introduced about the same time of Captain Cook's visit at the mouth of the Columbia in 1788. Many European vessels were reported stopping there to trade with the Indians. Some of these ships came by way of the Orient, which may account for the virulence of the epidemic that spread its fury over all the tribes living in the Columbia watershed.

Another great plague swept through the Indian encampments along the Columbia in the year 1832, wiping out so many that an early missionary estimated that 90 percent of the native population was swept away. So many died that the survivors were unable to bury



them.

Several of the farmers now living at Blue Lake, remember the tales of their grandparents, who told them of finding a great number of skeletons when they were clearing the land.

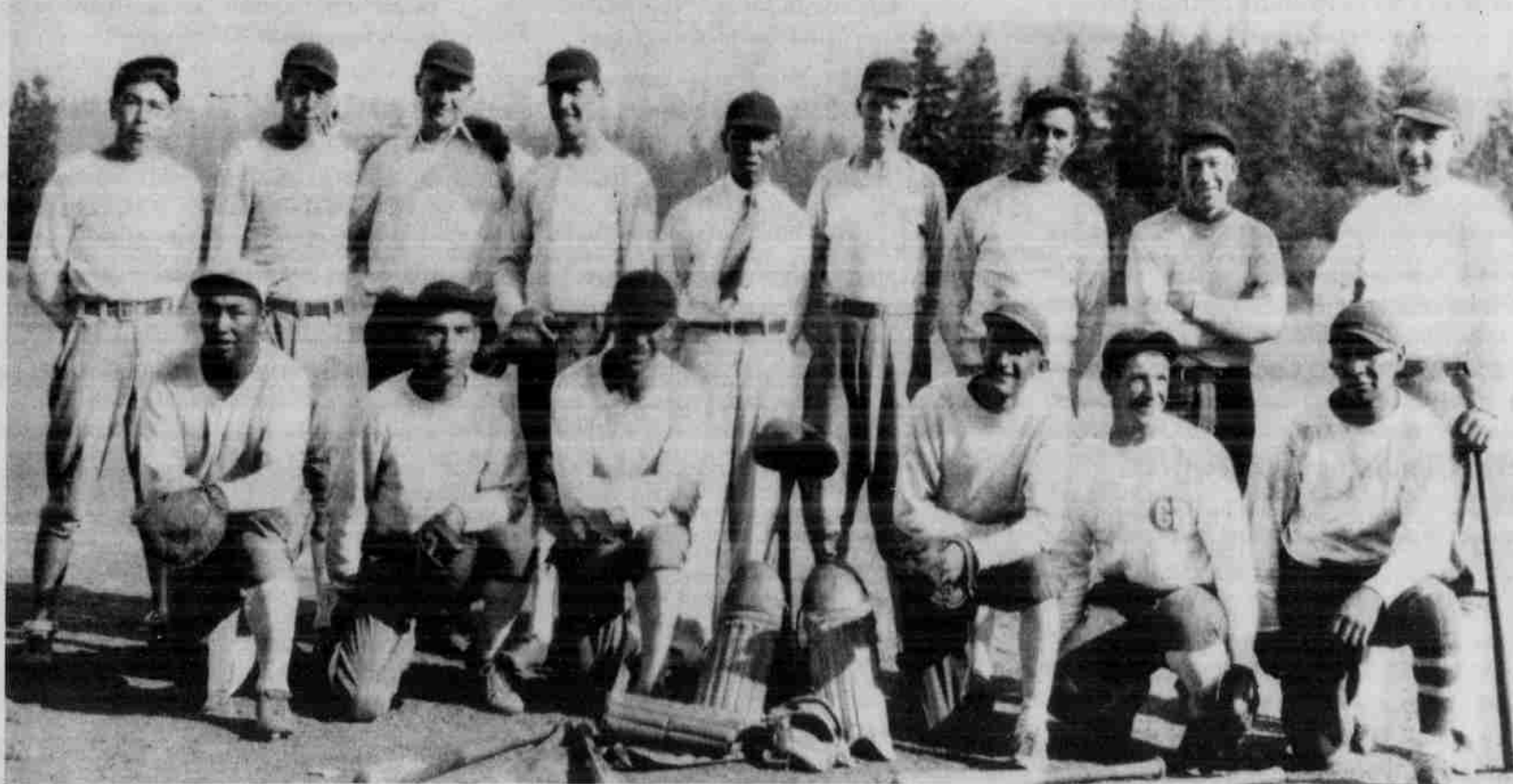
Because of the lack of appreciation by many people of the historical value of relics, much of the knowledge of this race remains sketchy. What information we do have is based on the journals of early explorers, and from the tales of the first pioneers.

The great number of fish net sinkers and anchor stones for canoes show us the tribe's dependency on fishing as one of their main sources of diet. One of the methods of preparing fish was to split them open and expose them to the sun on scaffolds. When they were

sufficiently dried, they were pulverized by pounding between two stones, and then placed in baskets made of grasses or rushes and lined with the skin of dried salmon. The early frontiersmen assure us that fish were kept well preserved for several years by using this method.

Another common food described by early explorers was the bulb of the arrow-head lily, which the Indians named wappatoe. Fish and wappatoes were not only their main articles of food, but also the staple items used in trading by all tribes along the Columbia. The Blue Lake area was well-supplied with these necessary substances. Salmon, smelt, sturgeon, and other fish were plentiful in the Columbia, while wappatoes could be gathered along its shores.

---submitted by Vernon Kennedy, written by Joseph D. Meyers



We have the winners of *Smoke Signals*/Spirit Mountain Store name-the-ball-players contest. First Place: Bud Leno, Second Place: Orville Leno and Third Place: Ivanetta Cook. We wish to thank Roy Langley for helping us correctly identify the players. The 1935 Polk County team from top left: Clayton Riggs, Sylvester "Shaw" Simmons, Ray Conrad, Jack Dorn, Joe Issac, Red Dorn, Ed Larsen, Sr., Herman Hudson, and Emanuel Hudson. Bottom, left: Elmer Tom, Mark Simmons, Roy Langley, Andy Riggs, Adam McPherson, and Ery Tom.