



Offbeat Oregon History: The Yaquina Bay ghost

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

Next time you're in Newport, on the central Oregon coast, if you haven't yet, take a few minutes to check out the Yaquina Bay Lighthouse. It's the only lighthouse I know of, in Oregon or elsewhere, that was saved from the wrecking ball by a nonexistent ghost.

This ghost's name is Muriel Trevenard, and she was born on a dark and stormy night in the late 1890s, when Eugene resident Lischen M. Miller — the sister-in-law of poet Joaquin Miller — created her as a character in a story called "The Haunted Light at Newport by the Sea."

In this charming and magnificently shudder-some little 2,400-word story, Miller wove a gripping story of a mysterious young woman left at a Newport boarding-house by her seafaring father, who plans to pick her up in two weeks. She takes up with a group of tourists from the valley, who are camping nearby.

One day the group of them decides to explore the old Yaquina Bay Lighthouse — a small structure built in an unfortunate spot in 1871 and shut down for good just three years later, to be replaced by the Yaquina Head lighthouse a few miles north. The story takes place just a year or two after that closure — so, probably 1875. (By the way, "Yaquina" is pronounced "yuh-kwin-uh" — it's a Native American name, not a Spanish one.)

Inside the abandoned lighthouse, the adventurers find a secret door leading to a shaft that apparently runs all the way down through the sandy bluff to a sea-cave. A chill fog moves in and the explorers decide to go, leaving the secret door open behind them.

As she is about to leave, the girl, Muriel, realizes she has left her handkerchief in the lighthouse and goes back to get it. Shortly thereafter, screams are heard; the party races back to the house and finds the secret door closed and locked,

and no sign of Muriel save for "a pool of warm, red blood." The door is securely and unmovably locked, the wainscoting is back in place — and they never are able to budge it again, nor do they ever hear anything more of Muriel or her father. And as time goes by, everyone forgets all about the incident — with one or two exceptions.

"But to this day it is said the blood-stains are dark upon the floor in that upper chamber," the story finishes. "And one there was who carried the little handkerchief next to his heart till the hour of his own tragic death."

Moreover, the lighthouse itself is, the story tells us, haunted by Muriel's ghost, which screams for help in the night when "the fog comes drifting in from the sea and completely envelopes the lighthouse, and then stops in its course as if its object had been attained."

The story itself is very nearly perfect, with deft touches of dread here and there, answering a few questions and leaving many hanging cryptically unanswered — what was at the bottom of that well? Who was Muriel's tall, dark, aristocratic father? How did Harold's hinted-at "tragic death" come about?

Such realistic touches, in a fictional story, are an invitation to the reader to wonder: is this really fiction I'm reading? Could this story actually be truth masquerading as fiction? Was there, truly, a Muriel Trevenard? In writing this spooky story of events long past, did Lischen Miller make it all up, or was she writing down for posterity an actual ghost story, whispered to her by one of the tourists from the Valley?

Questions like these were in the air almost from the start, when Miller's magnificent little gem was published in the August 1899 issue of Pacific Monthly Magazine. And they've gained strength and credibility with every passing year since. Visitors to the lighthouse still ask to see the blood-stains and the mysterious linen closet upstairs.

And, although most people familiar with the legend don't actually believe it, there are those who do.

Among those who believe the story, the stories of Muriel's ghost don't end with screams in the night and mysterious lights guiding ships at sea. Author Susan Smitten, in her book about ghostly hauntings, cites a 1975 article in The Eugene Register-Guard in which Lincoln County Historical Museum curator Pat Stone recounts the story of a young hitchhiker who came through, looking for work. Having nowhere to stay and no money to rent a room, he unrolled a sleeping bag at the lighthouse. That night, he said, a ghostly young woman appeared floating outside one of the windows. She told him not to worry, and that he would find work the next day. And so he did.

Probably the most intriguing derivative ghost story, though, is the legend of Captain Evan MacClure, skipper of the whaling ship Moncton. And, in fact, it may be that the Muriel Trevenard story is derivative of it, rather than the other way around.

The crew of this whaling ship, according to the story, mutinied and put him overboard in a small rowboat just off the Oregon Coast in the early 1870s. He was never seen again, but supposedly there were a number of hauntings of houses and taverns along the coast after that, by a red-bearded skeleton-faced character prowling in search of someone to "join me in death."

The theory is that Lischen Miller wrote her story with an eye toward supplying a dénouement to the Evan MacClure story — involving old Evan finally finding someone to take him up on his spooky offer. But, of course, it's impossible to document which ghost story came first, so we'll likely never know.



PHOTO COURTESY FINN JD JOHN
This image of turn-of-the-century beachgoers on the dry sands of the beach at Newport around 1905 shows the lighthouse above.

But Muriel Trevenard needed no help from Evan MacClure for her greatest achievement: the preservation of the lighthouse. By the time the 1940s had rolled around, the place was in awful shape, and wrecking crews had it on the schedule. In response, the citizens of Lincoln County formed the Lincoln County Historical Society specifically to prevent it from being demolished and to restore it — which, with the help of Ohio industrialist and Oregon native son L.E. Warford, they would eventually do.

Meanwhile, to buy the additional time they would need to complete their plans, a group of the citizens actually had to form a human chain around the building to stop the demolition from proceeding.

Would all this have happened without the fame and narrative excitement generated by Muriel Trevenard and her story? Possibly. It seems unlikely, though. In the 1940s, old buildings were generally regarded very unromantically — even old lighthouses.

Today, restored to its former glory, it's a state park. It's also the oldest structure in Newport and the only wooden lighthouse in Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The League of Oregon Cities would like to publically thank Senator Floyd Prozanski for his efforts during the 2017 legislative session to protect parks and open spaces for the public's enjoyment and health. An adverse Oregon Supreme Court ruling in March of 2016 exposed cities, as well as other public and private land owners who allow free access to their land for recreational purposes, to added liability that threatened the closure of some of Oregon's beloved parks and park features. Thanks to Senator Prozanski's leadership, an agreement was reached on SB 327 to restore the civil liability protection that allows the continued use and development of skate-parks, trails, BMX tracks and innovative playgrounds was restored. The League is grateful for the Senator's thoughtful efforts.

Sincerely,

Mike McCauley
Executive Director
League of Oregon Cities

Something on your mind? Write in to cmay@cgsentinel.com and we may print your letter.

Dr. Fuhrman: Carotenoids and you

Carotenoids are yellow, orange, and red pigments present in fruits and vegetables. There are more than 600 carotenoids; the most commonly consumed and well-studied carotenoids include beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, beta-cryptoxanthin, lycopene, lutein, and zeaxanthin.

Some carotenoids are converted to vitamin A in the body. These carotenoids are important for proper immune function. Carotenoids give the skin a healthy glow and defend the body's tissues against oxidative damage, helping to prevent chronic diseases and premature aging.

The richer your diet in carotenoids, the greater the likelihood of longer telomeres (DNA sequences at the end of chromo-

somes). The length of telomeres is thought to be an indicator of biological aging—the longer the telomere length, the slower the aging of cells.

Data from 3660 U.S. adults were analyzed for serum carotenoids and leukocyte telomere length. When they compared the groups with the lowest and highest levels of each carotenoid, they saw 5-8 % longer telomeres for the groups with the highest alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, and beta-cryptoxanthin levels. Researchers think that higher carotenoid levels may work by protecting telomeric DNA from oxidative damage.

Lycopene, a carotenoid found in tomatoes, grapefruit, and papaya, is concentrated in the prostate, where it has potent anti-cancer

effects. Lycopene-rich foods also protect the skin against ultraviolet radiation from the sun. In one study, after twelve weeks of tomato supplementation by healthy women, reddening of the skin, mitochondrial DNA damage, and markers of skin aging due to UV exposure were reduced.

Lutein and zeaxanthin, which are found in leafy greens like kale and collards, are the only known carotenoids located in the human retina. Light must pass through lutein and zeaxanthin before being transmitted to the cells that send visual information to the brain. These carotenoids filter some of the blue light that enters the retina, and this function protects the eye from damage and improves several aspects of visual performance.

Get your carotenoids from colorful vegetables and fruits. In fact, supplemental carotenoids are likely to be harmful. For example, high serum beta-carotene has been associated with decreased lung cancer risk, but beta-carotene supplements may actually increase the risk of lung cancer, especially in smokers.

In addition to their own beneficial effects, carotenoids like alpha-carotene, lycopene, and lutein in the blood are markers indicating the intake of thousands of additional phytochemicals that work synergistically to keep the body healthy. Keep in mind that carotenoid absorption during a meal requires the presence of fat — one of the reasons to use nut and seed-based dressings on salads and raw vegetables.

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