# THE COQUILLE INDIANS AND THE CULTURAL "*BLACK HOLE*" OF THE SOUTHWEST OREGON COAST

By

George B. Wasson

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for a Master of Science degree
in the Department of Anthropology
at the University of Oregon.

Jon Erlandson, Advisor

December 1, 1994

# PROLOGUE

---

*The Coquille people have lived so many generations in their homeland environment and traditional hunting-gathering territories,*
*the years have become too many to count.*

*As is true with other southern Oregon coastal people, the oldest stories of the Coquelle (the original name) tell about the creation of the world*
*and its rearrangement to suit the needs of the People who were to come later.*

*Mythical beings such as Talapus (Old Man Coyote) told how the land was built from blue clay scooped from under the water and how that land was protected from wave action by lining the shores with woven mats and basketry.*

*The old stories relate first-hand accounts of the great floods and fires that repeatedly swept over the land from the west,*
*often changing the geography significantly*
*while scattering people and other animals far and wide (Wasson 1991).*

---

## The Cultural "BLACK HOLE" of the Southern Oregon Coast

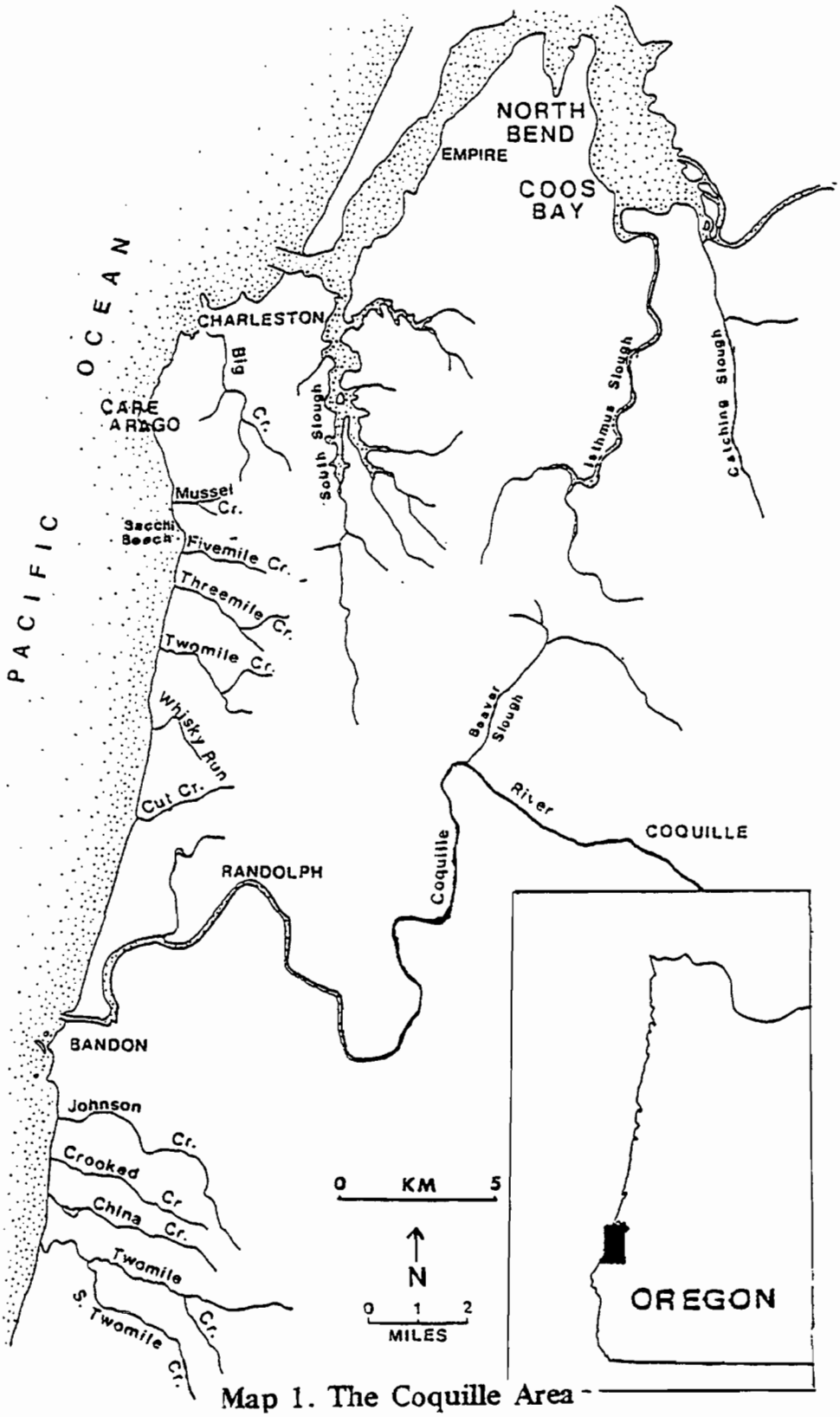
Because of the short time span from the beginning of everyday White contact among the native peoples of the southern Oregon coast, until the demise of their cultural, spiritual, and physical integrity, very little knowledge through scientific research was collected and preserved for posterity. In 1931 T.T. Waterman wrote, "A number of ethnologists worked in this region [Southern Oregon coast], prior to the writer's advent . . . , but relatively little concerning these groups has found its way into print" (Waterman 1931: 6).

Due to the thorough destruction of the villages, the people and their life-ways, only bits and pieces of their culture and languages survived after what might be understood as the "Oregon Holocaust." From this perspective, I have adopted the concept of a cultural or ethnological "BLACK HOLE" as a descriptive term for that area of Southern Oregon, where the surviving descendants "retain only a few relics of their indigenous culture" (Barnett 1954).

My approach to rediscovering and understanding the cultural contents of that "Black Hole" is to examine those characteristics of neighboring tribes for whom there is fairly adequate information and draw parallel inferences about the lost information.

The Coquilles are a group from that "Black Hole," and I propose to look at the "bits and pieces" of surviving knowledge about them in an effort to reconstruct (as adequately as feasible) their lost and forgotten cultural heritage.

Coos Bay and the Coquille People




Map 1. The Coquille Area

(Hall 1984: 3).

## COQUILLE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

For purposes of sociocultural identification, Coquille Indian tribal members are directly descended from people of the following geographical locations: villages at South Slough and Coos Bay, villages along the Coquille River, and coastal villages as far south as the Sixes River (Map 1). Due to inter-tribal marriages, many members are also related to Umpqua, Coos, Siuslaw, Tututni, Shasta Costa, Chetco, Tolowa, or other American Indian tribes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the common spelling was Coquelle (Zenk 1990: 579), pronounced Ko-Kwel' as in tribal use today.

When Land Claims hearings were conducted in the 1930s and 1940s, the Coos (including many Coquilles), Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw appealed as a confederated group. The Court of Claims denied their appeal due to lack of evidence. The land claims for the "Coos" had been based on the testimonies of the oldest Indians alive at that time. George Bundy Wasson thought there could be no better evidence of aboriginal sovereignty and territorial occupation than the words of the old people themselves. The federal government declared their testimony to be merely hearsay.

However, after collecting ethnographic information from the old Indians of that area, John P. Harrington stated that the Coquilles were undoubtedly the true descendants of the aboriginal occupants of their land, hence the land claims settlement for the Coquilles. This decision caused a split between the Coos and Coquilles which ultimately resulted in separate federally recognized tribes.

For land claims payment purposes, the Coquille tribal area was defined in the 1940s as bounded along the Oregon Coast from approximately Floras Creek on the south to a point of rocks by Whiskey Run Creek north of the mouth of the Coquille River. From each of these

coastal points, the north and south boundaries extended easterly to join the north and south ends of an eastern boundary line which ran along the crest of the Coast Range of Mountains.

This territory encompasses all of the land, soil, plant, and animal types available in Western Oregon. There are high prairies and coastal mountain meadows containing lush grasses for sustaining large populations of Roosevelt Elk and Black-tailed Deer. Valleys were loaded with roots and bulbs for annual harvests, while the rivers and streams extending to the ocean produced abundant fish, eels, shellfish and sea mammals. Their forests provided the rare Port Orford Cedar for carving canoes and Western Red Cedar for plank houses. It also yielded the widest variety of basketry materials available anywhere along the West Coast.

The antiquity of occupation in the Coquille territory has been established by archaeological investigations and amateur discoveries at Camas Valley on the Upper Coquille River drainage.

The discovery of a Clovis-type point in Camas Valley (Wallmann 1994; Erlandson and Moss 1994), made from chert indigenous to that specific area, dates human occupation of the Upper Coquille territory to as much as 11,500 years before present, (B.P.).

Archaeological research on the Southern Oregon coast has revealed occupation dates as early as 8,200 years B. P. at the "Indian Sands" site in Curry County, just south of the Coquille territory (Erlandson and Moss 1994).

At the Standley site in Camas Valley, obsidian hydration evidence indicates that occupation may have begun between 4,500 and 5,000 years ago. Additionally there were fragments of clay figurines discovered there, which have been known to date between 1,100 - 400 years ago (Connolly 1991: 1).

EARLY WHITE CONTACT

In 1792, Capt. George Vancouver, while exploring along the Northwest Coast, anchored his ship somewhere between Cape Blanco and Port Orford. According to Beckham (1977:102):

> . . . The fine handwriting of Dr. Archibald Menzies, now hidden away in a large journal in the British Museum in London, tells about one of those encounters [between early sailors and Indians] . . . .
>
> In the spring of 1792, Captain George Vancouver brought his expedition to Cape Blanco on the southern Oregon coast. Menzies, the surgeon and botanist, became very interested in the Indians who paddled out in their canoes. He wrote:
>
> *'they were of a middling size with mild pleasing features & nowise sullen or distrustful in their behaviour, they were of a copper colour but cleanly, as we observed no vestige of greasy paint or ochre about their faces or among their hair. . .'*

Further descriptions state that the people were "*tolerably well limbed and preferred cleanliness of body to tattoos.*" Twenty-five years later, the fur trader Peter Corney sailed along this same section of the coast. Observing many villages along the shore, he sailed in close and also met some of the Tututni Indians. He noted:

> *About noon, several canoes came off within hail of the ship; we waved to them to come closer, which they did, displaying green boughs and bunches of white feathers; they stopped paddling, and one man, whom we took to be the chief, stood up, and made a long speech, which we did not understand. We then waved a white flag, and they immediately pulled for the ship singing all the way. . . . They also brought some berries, fish, and handsome baskets for sale. These men were tall and well formed, their garment made of dressed deerskins, with a small round hat, in the shape of a basin, that fitted close round the head; none of the women made their appearance (Beckham 1977: 103).*

Early in the nineteenth century, white explorers, trappers, and missionaries came to the Pacific Northwest, and especially to the places now called Oregon. By the mid-1800s, most of the West coast was well populated with white miners and settlers. However, that central portion of the Oregon coast that was nearly inaccessible by overland routes because of the rugged Coast Range mountains, and also relatively obscure from the ocean, was not much affected by the white influx until the 1850s.

Diseases of European origin (gonorrhea, syphilis, measles and smallpox) had drastically reduced the populations along the Northwest coast since the late 1700s and early 1800s (Drucker 1965). Between 1829 and 1832, "the fevers" had swept along the Columbia River, up the Willamette Valley and on over to the Rogue River Valley, and had jumped across to the Sacramento Valley, killing up to 90% of the village inhabitants in some places (Beckham 1971). Archaeological and ethnohistorical information indicate that the people of the Southern Oregon coast were not spared from those devastations, and an equally high percentage of their populations were wiped out in the same manner about the same time. It is interesting to note that an early explorer traveling up the Coquille River reported seeing hundreds of Indians working on the fish weirs (Chase 1873), while a few years later, the same area was described as having only a few workers in those locations.

Historian Orvil Dodge provided a sample of early attitudes toward the local Indians in his 1898 book Pioneer History of Coos & Curry Counties, Oregon.

> No wonder this favoured spot, where food and even luxuries abounded so plentiful, was inhabited with a class of swarthy, indolent Indians who had but little ambition or energy. They were

> square built and of medium height and those in the northern part of the county, who inhabited Coos bay and its tributaries and the various branches of the Coquille river, were naturally peaceable and friendly to the pioneers, in fact they never became hostile, and it is a fact that is not questioned, that in the early settlement north of Port Orford there were no massacres so common in the early settlements of the great West, and there were no more tragedies than is common among the Anglo-Saxon or white citizens of this country (Dodge 1969).

In fact, the native people were quite industrious, as indicated by Chase in his observation of hundreds of Indians working on the fish weirs along the Coquille River. Dodge also ignored well-documented evidence for massacres perpetrated by Whites against the Coquelles and their neighbors. The final impact came forcefully and swiftly, leaving many tribes and villages totally obliterated. The survivors were herded off to temporary concentration camps or dumped onto the reservations of other inland tribes, except for the families of the Indian women who were fortunately married to white men.

## "A MOST HORRID MASSACRE"

Early on the morning of January 28, 1854, the Nasomah village of the Lower Coquille was brutally attacked and destroyed by a mob of 40 miners from the nearby diggings at Randolph. Two of the main instigators were named Packwood and Soapy. A week later, special agent Smith wrote the following report:

> A most horrid massacre, or rather an out-and-out barbarous mass murder, was perpetrated upon a portion of the Nasomah Band residing at the mouth of the Coquille River on the

> morning of January 28th by a party of 40 miners. The reason assigned by the miners, by their own statements, seem trivial. However, on the afternoon preceding the murders, the miners requested the chief to come in for a talk. This he refused to do.

The report goes on to say that a meeting was held and a courier was dispatched to obtain the assistance of 20 more miners from nearby Randolph. Smith further reports:

> At dawn the following day, led by one Abbott, the ferry party and the 20 miners, about 40 in all, formed three detachments, marched upon the Indian ranches and 'consummated a most inhuman slaughter,' which the attackers termed a fight. The Indians were aroused from sleep to meet their deaths with but a feeble show of resistance; shot down as they were attempting to escape from their houses. Fifteen men and one Squaw were killed, two Squaws badly wounded. On the part of the white men, not even the slightest wound was received. The houses of the Indians, with but one exception, were fired and destroyed. Thus was committed a massacre too inhuman to be readily believed (Peterson and Powers 1952:89).

Within less than two years, the people were gone, except for those few women who had taken white men for their husbands. The effect on the culture of the Coquilles and their close neighbors was devastating. Yet, through all the years of languishing in seemingly total deprivation, bits and pieces of tradition and cultural spirit remained alive among the tribal survivors, or were placed on record for scientific posterity. A few anthropologists and self-appointed historians recognized this unprecedented obliteration and felt compelled to save or write something of the cultures, however small a segment it might be.

LANGUAGES AND CULTURE

The dominant language of the lower Coquilles (along the coast from South Slough on Coos Bay and upriver to the present town of Coquille) was definitely Miluk, originally identified as a division of Kusan. The Upper Coquilles spoke an Athabaskan dialect. However, because of intertribal marriage practices, as well as social and commercial interchange, most tribal members also spoke the languages of their relatives and neighbors (Hall 1984: 20, 140-141).

Among the Coquilles, village and family life was patrilocal (upon marriage, women moved to the homes of their husbands.) It was therefore incumbent upon the women to know or learn the "new" language of their husband's village if it was different from that of their father's. It also seems probable that each young girl had already learned the several languages which her mother spoke, assuming that women in general had to learn more than one language.

Indications of this hypothesis regarding the special multilinguality of women can be noted in the number of multilingual female informants for the several linguists and ethnographers who collected language information from the Coos/Coquille area. Susan Adulsah Wasson and her mother (Gishgiu) were each known to have spoken several languages and dialects fluently (personal communication from George B. Wasson Sr. and Daisy Wasson Codding).

Along with Miluk and Athabaskan languages, Chinook Jargon, the lingua franca of the Pacific Northwest was used regularly by the Coquilles and their southern neighbors as far as the Tolowas and Yuroks in northern California.

Shamanism type doctoring was practiced by both men and women, yet all people were free to seek personal spiritual power from fasting, praying, and vision-quest.

Social and political leadership among villages and extended-family bands was acknowledged through group deference to dominant wealthy headmen or shamans with especially prominent healing powers. Slavery was not unknown to the Coquilles but was less common among them than the more northern tribes of the Northwest Coast.

Thus, Coquille culture included elements from the Northwest Coast (e.g. wealth accumulation and a form of potlatch, or "Give-away"). Their dance forms, ceremonial clothing, and spirituality (including reverence for flicker feathers and redheaded woodpecker scalps) were related to their southern neighbors- the Tututnis, Chetcos, Tolowas and Yuroks.

## WHITE CEDAR CANOES

Coquille canoes were basically of shovel-nose design, preferably carved from "Port Orford White Cedar." Special canoes with high prows were designed for ocean going (G. B. Wasson Sr., cited in Harrington 1943). However, the Coquilles were not known as whalers.

Legends tell that one such canoe carried a whole village of people across the Pacific Ocean to escape inevitable annihilation by a revengeful village from the Southern Tututni. Many years later, after World War II, some Coquilles in the U.S. Military reportedly found descendants in Japan who could still speak the "Coquille" Miluk language (Hall 1984: 35).

BASKETRY: MATERIALS AND PRODUCTION

The manufacture of baskets, nets, twine and other woven materials was among the traditional industries of all Oregon coastal peoples. The Coquille Indians and their close neighbors lived in the center of the most abundant resources for those weaving materials. Due to the untimely decimation of the people and their traditional cultural practices, the knowledge of the art and craft of gathering, preparation and weaving has been almost entirely lost.

However, a few weavers in Southern Oregon and Northern California have carefully maintained traditional knowledge and practices as learned from the old people. They have kept alive those nearly forgotten secrets and skills which once made Coquille ancestors some of the most proficient and prolific of West Coast basket makers.

In 1817, Peter Corney specifically commented on the baskets of the Southern coastal people:

> They also brought some berries, fish, and handsome baskets for sale. These men were tall and well formed, their garment made of dressed deerskins, with a small round hat, in the shape of a basin, that fitted close round the head; none of the women made their appearance (Beckham 1977: 103).

It's also interesting to note that although only men were in the canoes to greet the sailors, Corney's description of the hats they were wearing sounds exactly like the basket hats worn only by women in present day customs of the Yuroks. Such hats are reported as being customary for the Coos and Coquilles as well.

The importance of basketry and woven materials (e.g. twine, rope, mats and "wicker work") in the cultures of the coastal people is strongly indicated by mention of them in the coastal creation myths. For instance, mats and baskets were used by two mythical beings in creating the world. Baskets were split open flat and laid out to protect the newly forming land mass from erosion by ocean wave action (Frachtenberg 1913: 5; Jacobs 1940: 239-240). That highly important role implies that basketry is older than humans, who were obviously created later.

On the Coquille River, at the "Osprey Site" near Bullards State Park, open-work woven structures of both willow and split cedar, (which are presumed to be "fish traps") have been discovered buried in the mud and silt along with numerous fish weir stakes which have been radiocarbon dated to between 600 and 1,100 years old (Moss and Erlandson 1994). Several years earlier, a traditionally woven basket was also recovered from the silt just upriver at the "Philpott Site," but treatment with linseed oil rendered it undateable by the radiocarbon method.

## ANNUAL BURNING PRACTICES

Certain basketry materials such as Bear Grass and Hazel required burning off a year prior to collecting and preparing for weaving. Each Fall, people would go to the mountains and set fires in the areas where the best "grass" and "sticks" were growing. When they returned the following summer, the Bear Grass would have grown into fresh clumps ready for harvesting. However, the Hazel needed to grow for another season after

burning and was harvested the following Spring when the sap started flowing again (Thompson 1916: 31).

This same burning technique was applied in other locations to control certain weeds and to produce new shoots, which enhanced various berry production. Peter Boag (1992) writes about the Willamette Valley being seasonally burned by the Kalapuyas for the collection of Tarweed seeds (*Lemolo Sapolil*, "wild grain" in Chinook Jargon). By this practice, the valley was virtually developed into a garden like park-land.

Burning along the Oregon coast was such a regular and obvious practice that early sailors often referred to the area as Fire Land. Smoke shrouded the coastal mountains and fires could be seen burning the entire length of the coast. This regular burning, which prevented the growth of brush and cleared out the understory of the old growth forests, also produced extensive grassy prairies on the ridges and southwestern slopes of the coastal mountains. On these ridges, people dug their deep pits, staggered in series along a ridge-line where the immense elk herds could be driven and some would inevitably fall in.

## SALMON: A SACRED FOOD FROM THE OCEAN

Surely there never existed a more spiritual and ritualized relationship between humans and fish than has flourished among the cultural groups of the Northwest Coast and their beloved Salmon. So special was salmon to the Coquilles, as with other coastal people, that a highly sacred ceremony was performed upon the arrival of the first salmon. There was an obvious intent to pay honor and tribute to the salmon for

returning again to the streams where the people could obtain them for food. A common and primary element of those rituals required that the bones of the honored fish be maintained intact. The flesh was cooked and shared with many people and eaten ritually with great reverence. The whole skeleton was then placed in the water, usually with the head pointed upstream to insure that the salmon would continue to multiply and return the next season.

Salmon fishing was done primarily in the streams, where weirs or "fish dams" were constructed to either catch them in basket-like traps or contain them in areas where they could be readily speared or dipped out by hand nets.

## A LEGEND OF OLD MAN COYOTE AND THE FISH DAM

One of the most intriguing stories of "Old Man Coyote" was collected by John P. Harrington from an Upper Coquille informant, Coquel Thompson. It told of a notable "fish dam" on the Coquille River and how the place came to be called "Thet suh-wuh-let sluh dunn" (a place where two large round stones are located on either side of the water). This place, where there was a riffle, lies on the Upper Coquille River somewhere around Myrtle Point at a broad stretch of gravel bar. There, the Upper Coquilles built a fish weir and a salmon trap in July or August to catch the salmon, which came in September. This was a notable dam made of willow stakes driven straight down into the gravel bottom, whose immensity spanned the full width of the river. The construction of this dam was obviously a great undertaking and required an extensive communal effort to cut, sharpen, and pound the great stakes into place and weave smaller branches between them to form the secure barricade fence.

Such an enormous salmon weir always seemed to be of special importance to all the people along that river. Each coastal stream with a salmon run had reason to have such a structure, and those people who were dedicated and accomplished enough to build one that reached from shore to shore had reason to be proud of the accomplishment. The larger the dam, the more prestige it bestowed on the builders.

No one seems to know where Coyote was coming from on the occasion recounted in the following story, or just why, but he was poling his way upstream in his canoe--along with his current wife, the former Mrs. Fish duck--when his progress was halted by the enormous salmon weir. Coyote tried to push his way through, but the structure was too sturdy. Of course, true to form, he became angry and vowed to smash through. So he went back down stream and loaded two large round boulders into the bow of his canoe and placed his wife at the stern. Even though he was pushing against the current, Coyote was determined to break through the barricade, but his first attempts were too feeble and he failed. Finally in a fit of rage, he poled as fast and hard as he could and broke through. But just as he got to the up-stream side, his pole slipped, he lost his balance, and the current threw his canoe back against the weir, flipped it up on end, catapulted the boulders out onto either shore, and dumped Coyote and his wife into the water. Using *Tamanawis,* the magical powers of his mind, Coyote brought the canoe up from under the swift current and quietly took his wife back downstream. That's why the place was called "Thet" (stones) "suh-wuh-let" (spherical) "sluh-dunn" (on opposite sides of the water-place) (Wasson 1991: 86).

SOME NOTABLE COQUILLE LEADERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Susan Adulsah Wasson (1841 - 1917) is the most frequently mentioned Coquille ancestor on the final tribal roles. She was the daughter of Kitzn-Jin-Jn Gallahd-a-lu'ee "Man Too Big For Elk Robe To Meet In The Middle" (also known as Kitchen, Kitzn-Jinum), headman of the major South Slough village on Coos Bay in 1828, and his wife Gishgiu (also known as Gekka), daughter of an Upper Coquille headman. Her parents' marriage was said to have united the Coos and Coquille Tribes.

From her first marriage to Charles Hodgkiss (Hodgkin), who died at sea, Susan had one daughter, Laura. Her second marriage to his partner George Richardson Wasson (who sailed from New Brunswick in 1849, around South America to San Francisco and then traveled overland to Coos Bay in 1853) produced nine more children. Susan spoke several coastal languages and was famed as an historian of the Coos Bay tribal area, having memorized detailed information on family ties, land ownership, myths, and legends.

My father, George Bundy Wasson (1880-1947), was the youngest child of Susan and George R. Wasson to reach adulthood. In his youth, his grandmother, "Gekka" (meaning Little Old Woman), stood with him on a hill above South Slough in Coos Bay. With a slow sweeping gesture of her extended arm, Gekka said, "All this land belongs your Hyas Papas (Grandfathers in Chinook Jargon). Someday “Chawch” (‘George’ in Chinook Jargon) you get it back." George Bundy Wasson attended both Chemawa and Carlisle Indian Schools, along with his sister Daisy Wasson Codding (the first Registered Nurse south of Portland, Oregon). George spent his adult life as a tailor, timber cruiser, and lobbyist in Congress for Indian land claims. He was the first and most thorough organizer among the

Coquilles and an adamant defender of Indian human rights. He married my mother, Bess Finley, in 1923 and they had five children. George died of a heart attack at Cape Blanco while assessing tribal mineral rights and land values in 1947, before the final Coquille land claims inheritance was paid.

As a young man, Coquel Thompson (1839 - 1946) was moved from his Upper Coquille village to the reservation at Siletz. His vast knowledge of myths and legends, history, traditions, and language diversity made him the most prolific and reliable Coquille informant of the 20th Century. He shared information with J. O. Dorsey in the 1880s, with Philip Drucker in 1934, probably with Elizabeth Jacobs in 1935, and with John P. Harrington in the 1940s. It was this information, through Harrington's testimony to the Court of Claims, that firmly established the Coquilles as true descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants of their tribal territory.

Charles Edward "Eddy" Ned (1889 - 1956) was the son of Charles and Susan Ned. He served in World War I, worked many years in the "logging woods", and assisted George B. Wasson in cruising timber. While living with the Wasson family off and on for many years, he served as a "tutor" of Coquille cultural heritage for the Wasson children. In his elder years he was fondly known as the last full-blooded Coquille.

My brother, Wilfred Carlisle Wasson (1924 - 1990), the eldest son of Bess Finley and George Bundy Wasson, was known for his wealth of knowledge on Coyote stories, myths, legends, tribal history, and culture. After studying Anthropology for several years, he earned a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Oregon in 1974. Wilfred served on the faculties at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Western Washington State University in Bellingham, University of Oregon in Eugene, and was a member of the Board of Directors at D.Q. University in Davis, California. He worked many years on educational and economic development projects for

coastal Indians. He served as Coquille Tribal Chairman and was instrumental in restoring federal recognition to the Coquille Indian Tribe.

Roberta Hall (1984) has published brief biographies of numerous other Coquille Indian people of historic times.

## TREATIES AND LAND CLAIMS

Coquille headmen signed the Treaty of 1855 with the United States Government (the Unratified Port Orford Treaty of 1851 also identified several signatories as Coquille Indians), which would have ceded tribal land to the United States in return for a reservation and various tribal rights. Although the treaty was never ratified by Congress, the survivors of the Rogue River Wars of 1856 (and of earlier village massacres by white miners and U. S. Army retaliations) were marched overland, or shipped up the coast by steamers to concentration camps at Reedsport and Yachats. Some were moved later to the Siletz Reservation, while many others died or ran away.

In 1916 George Bundy Wasson began investigating Indian land claims based primarily on broken or unratified treaties and "began a 30-year campaign for claims settlements in western Oregon," (Beckham 1990: 186). For eleven years he lobbied Congress and finally won permission to go to court in 1929. Stephen Dow Beckham portrays "Bundy's" quest to right the wrongs against the Tribes as follows:

> The concern about injustice, legal rights, and land claims was voiced most clearly by the Coos, lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw. These three tribes--operating as one unit since their treaty agreement with Joel Palmer in 1855--pioneered in using the

> "system." Their efforts, which set a pattern for other Indian groups throughout the Pacific Northwest, began in 1916. In the summer of that year, George Bundy Wasson, a graduate of Chemawa and Carlisle, went to Washington D.C. to investigate the Indian land claim. Wasson had grown up on his mother's allotment on South Slough on Coos Bay. That trip began eleven lonely and frustrating years of lobbying by these Indians. Like other American Indians they were prohibited by law from suing the United States government. To bring a suit for their land claims, the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw had to gain a special act of Congress. Not until 1929 did Congress pass the measure which permitted them to go to court.
>
> Case K-345, the lawsuit of the Coos, lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw for settlement for land claims, took nine years to get a judgment in the Court of Claims. During all of the time between 1917 and 1938 these Indians had to pay for their own legal expenses. . . Each family that could gave $5.00 a month to help pay for George Wasson's trips to Washington D.C., and to pay for the work of the Attorneys (Beckham 1977:37).

In 1931, George Bundy Wasson called upon the most knowledgeable members of the Coos and Coquille tribes to provide evidence for aboriginal land claims. Historian Stephen Dow Beckham reports participation in those hearings as follows:

> In 1931 Court-appointed clerks took Indian testimony in North Bend, Oregon. Seventeen members of the tribes spoke, several of them in their native languages. The aged James Buchanan was one who remembered much of what had happened. . . . In 1875 he had spoken at the Yachats Conference and protested against the closing of the Alsea reservation. Now in 1931 he spoke again for his people and their land claim. Lottie Evanoff named the villages and fishing places. George, Maggie Sacchi, Annie Peterson, Laura Metcalf, Frances Elliot, and Mrs. William Waters spoke (Beckham 1977: 180-181).

The federal Court of Claims decided favorably for the land claims of the Coquilles (and other coastal groups) on April 2, 1945. The United States Supreme court overruled an appeal by the Justice Department on November 25, 1946. The case was finally closed in 1950, awarding $1.20 per acre for 722,530 acres. Coquille descendants were awarded an inheritance of $3,128,000.00, and after numerous federal deductions, the remainder equaled approximately $2,000.00 per person. Unfortunately, final settlement was made in "per-capita" payments, in which the total was divided equally among the eligible tribal enrollees.

Perhaps the tribal members were glad to at last get something for all they had lost by not having a treaty and giving up all of their land. It seems as though they believed that the end of their status as a legitimate Indian tribe was at hand. It surely seemed impossible to fight the federal government's efforts to destroy their "Indianness" and render them *persona non grata,* as had already been done to the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw.

## RESTORATION AND POLITICAL TURMOIL

The Coos and Coquilles were among those terminated and among those whose cultural losses became most evident after federal restoration was accomplished. Along with restoration as federally recognized tribes, there came a whole new set of problems to compound the cultural turmoil. Restoration required the establishment of a tribal council and adoption of a tribal constitution (upon approval of the BIA and Dept. of Interior) as well as accepting federal dollars in the form of new tribes funding.

On August 13, 1954, along with 42 other Western Oregon Indian Tribes, the Coquilles were effectively terminated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower's signature of Public Law 588, making termination effective on August 13, 1956.

Termination was not a satisfactory solution to problems of American Indians and did not fulfill the obligations of the federal government to Indian people. A core of determined and hard-working tribal members such as Sharon Parrish and Sidney Richards continued to communicate with others through means of a news letter which they printed through their own homes and distributed as best they could. Meanwhile, tribal leaders, spearheaded by Wilfred Wasson, worked with Native American Program Oregon Legal Services (NAPOLS) attorneys Rod Clark and Michael Mason to reverse termination as had happened for other Indian tribes. The Coquille Indian Tribe was finally restored to federal recognition again by an Act of Congress on June 28, 1989, by passing the "Coquille Indian Restoration Act" (103 Stat. 91).

Today, the Coquille Indian Tribe has over 600 members and is governed by a seven member tribal council: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Chief, Secretary/Treasurer, and three representatives. This governing structure is outlined in the tribal constitution adopted April 6, 1991, by the interim tribal council, pursuant to the Indian Reorganization Act, which was voted upon and accepted by the adult tribal members on August 27, 1991.

In 1994, the Coquille tribal land holdings (held in trust by the federal government) are 6.2 acres of a sacred site where once stood Tupper Rock (traditionally known as "Ohmawsh" or "Grandmother Rock") in the town of Bandon at the mouth of the Coquille River. Tupper Rock was a

monolith of Blue Schist, rising several hundred feet above the ground. It was the primary sacred site of the Nasomah or Lower Coquille people, and that designation was a major factor in demonstrating to Congress that the Coquilles were still cognizant of their spiritual and sacred traditions in their plea for recognition and federal restoration. Even though the rock had been blasted to pieces and used for jetty construction at the mouth of the Coquille River by the Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1900s, the site was yet sacred to the Coquilles. In the 1980s, Tribal Chairman Wilfred Wasson began negotiations with Alex Linke, Director of the Port of Bandon to regain tribal ownership. Further planning and discussions continued through the efforts of the Tupper Rock Committee, Roy Gilkey, Linda Procter Mecum, and myself. Thus in 1991, the Port of Bandon donated the Tupper Rock site to the newly restored Coquille Indian Tribe. It was soon taken into trust by the federal government and became the first reservation land for the Coquilles.

The Coquille Economic Development Corporation (CEDCO) was created by tribal charter in February 1992, with a governance consisting of a president and a five member board of directors. CEDCO has pushed aggressively for economic development, including the controversial building of an assisted care living facility at the Tupper Rock site in Bandon. Other projects include purchasing land in the Empire district of Coos Bay and in North Bend, to be placed in trust with the federal government. Development at those sites are projected to include tribal headquarters and housing projects, cranberry bogs, and other business ventures.

The primary business enterprise and major money making endeavor is focused on development of an "entertainment center" which will contain

a gambling casino, hotel and restaurant, and other tourist-type services. Additionally, CEDCO is negotiating with the BLM to obtain possession of 59,000 acres of timber lands on the upper Coquille River drainage for management and timber harvesting revenues.

## CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL AWARENESS AND PRACTICES

Today, there is virtually no knowledge or common use of the Coquille tribal languages among its members. Incidental words and phrases have been passed on to a few descendants, but often it was Chinook Jargon being spoken instead of the original language (Miluk or Athabaskan.) However, a detailed list of Miluk words was recently compiled by tribal member Troy Anderson while studying linguistics at Stanford University. There is a growing desire among several members to relearn our languages and revive old customs.

Storytelling has remained alive but is practiced regularly by very few people. The two most active storytellers in the tribe today are my older sister, Susan Wasson Wolgamott, and myself. Susan is known for her volunteer work with local schools, explaining Indian life, history and stories to Grades K-12. I work primarily at the college and university level, lecturing on myths, legends, culture and history of the Coquilles and other Western Oregon tribes.

A form of Sacred Salmon Ceremony is re-enacted for the Annual Salmon Bake in June, and a Mid-Winter Gathering is scheduled each January. A group of tribal members are now re-establishing a World Renewal Ceremony, traditionally held around the Winter Solstice.

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF COQUILLE HISTORY AND OREGON HISTORY

The "History" taught in Oregon schools is only the "official" version of Oregon history. That is only one "truth." There are other truths. For instance, it is true that the settlers didn't have to fight off the Kalapuyas, Mollalas, Luckiamutes or any others of the beautiful Willamette Valley to obtain control and possession of that splendid park land. The Natives of this verdant valley practiced controlled burning to inhibit certain vegetation and encourage growth of other food producing plants and grasses which were feed for the abundant deer and elk herds. Some sportsmen hunters claim that due to modern scientific management practices, there are more deer and elk in the country today than ever before. That is pure ignorance talking.

Early American settlers did not have to fight for the Willamette Valley. Those native peoples had been so severely decimated by the "fevers" of 1829-1832 that their villages had become virtual "ghost towns" with scattered survivors stunned into permanent shock, as though a massive Viet Nam War had just mowed them down. And to the good fortune of those settlers, the remaining Indians had been gathered up by the missionary Jason Lee and his helpers in what Stephen Dow Beckham referred to as a virtual Indian death camp, even though the residents were there as recipients of Christian charity.

It was quite different on the coast in subsequent years, when the Southern Oregon Indians were herded to the concentration camp at Yachats. There was no Christian charity, only the government agents. Yachats was nothing more than an extermination camp, and many of those

people were the survivors of village massacres, just like the villagers who were slaughtered in My Lai during the Viet Nam War.

Merely 260 people were covered by the signatures on the 1855 treaties in Southwestern Oregon. The other 2,000 were just dumped in with them, and the provisions guaranteed them by the treaties seldom arrived (or were too few to effectively divide among all who were starving). Fifty percent of them died in the first decade (personal communication by Stephen Dow Beckham) from starvation or even drowning on the ocean rocks while attempting to obtain mussels for food.

Most of those concentration camp secrets have never been told publicly, but several accounts of the wretched social and cultural clashes have been documented by some of the more assiduous ethnologists. With the loss of family and group integrity necessary for appropriate spiritual and social guidance, decadence and moral decay claimed many victims. This was especially the plight of the younger women who learned from experiences with the soldiers and miners the basic skills of survival by readily doling out sexual favors. One ghastly account tells of a jealous woman punishing an outsider (a woman from another tribal area) who was an "unpurchased wife" of her husband. "To be respectable a woman had to be purchased in marriage" (Miller and Seaburg 1990: 585). She was pounced upon, beaten, and dragged to the fire where her undergarments were ripped off and she was sexually humiliated. In a second and similar incident, the offending woman was ultimately chastised with a burning fire brand (Jacobs 1939: 116, 117).

Another seldom-told story is about a young Milluk woman who was brutally murdered by a drunken miner who was attempting to rape her. She managed to escape temporarily and ran down the beach to hide, but

he caught up with her and was infuriated with her attempts to thwart his desires. He found her desperately stuffing sand into her vagina, so he killed her (Hall 1984: 105).

My great-grandmother, Gishgiu, went with the American soldiers in good faith, first to the concentration camp at Reedsport and then on to Yachats, because she believed the treaty signed by her husband, Kitzn-Jin-Jn, would eventually be honored. Unfortunately, conditions were so bad there that she finally lost faith in the word of the American government and ran away. Along with my father, Aunt Lolly, Aunt Daisy, and Aunt Mary often told me the story of "Gekka" running away and coming back to South Slough.

Diving into the ocean, she swam around the major headlands such as Cape Perpetua and the Sea Lion Caves to avoid the soldiers on the trail above. After hiding in the bushes during the daytime, she walked the long beaches at night, arriving at Coos Bay through the sand dunes. At the turn of high-tide, Gishgiu entered the water and swam with the ebb-flow until it carried her across and down to South Slough. There she walked up the slough to near her daughters home and made herself a comfortable den in a hollow log not far away. At night, "Gekka" made contact with her daughter, Susan "Adulsah," who gave her food. They met secretly that way, until grandfather became suspicious of his wife talking to someone in her Indian language late at night. He usually thought nothing of grandmother getting up and doing things in the middle of the night, but this became more secretive, and when he discovered that his mother-in-law was living not far away in a hollow log, he became indignant and insisted that she move into the house with them where she belonged. However, the soldiers from Fort Yamhill had orders to round-up those run-away Indians, and a

detachment was sent out to scour the country where they might be hiding.

One day when grandfather was out in the logging woods with his bull-team, word came to the house that soldiers were headed there to take "Gekka" back to Yachats. Quickly, the women emptied the storage space behind the living-room staircase and tiny Gishgiu crawled back under the bottom step. Then all the boxes and trunks were shoved into place as though nothing more could possibly be under there.

While the soldiers were ransacking the house looking for Gishgiu, some of the younger kids, caught up in the excitement of a fun game with real soldiers, were running around pointing to the bottom step of the stairs saying "Gekka, Gekka." Fortunately, those soldiers had no idea what the kids were saying, and just pushed them out of their way as they hurried with their search, nervously pounding the floor with their rifle butts, looking for loose boards under which the old woman could be hidden.

Swiftly, one of the older children raced through the woods to summon grandpa for help. They say Grandpa Wasson was a big man, and no two soldiers could possibly stand up to his fury. He marched into his house, grabbed them both by the back of their necks, and threw them out into the yard (some say that he threw them through the parlor room window). He told them to never come back and, needless to say, they didn't.

Gishgiu lived out the remainder of her days with the family, mending clothes which she could do even though she was blind by then, yet doing all the things any old grandmother would need to do while sitting in the dark.

ACCULTURATION IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES AS FEDERAL POLICY

Colonel Pratt -- *"Kill the Indian and educate the Man."*

Since the Coming of the Whitemen, many generations of Indian children have been taken from their home environment, as part of an insidious U. S. Government program to "Kill the Indian and Educate the Man." Those were the very words of Colonel Pratt in announcing his plans after the Indian Wars to establish a school for civilizing young Indians (as much as could be expected) and replace their "savage" ways with the "superior" life-style of the Whiteman. This became the impetus for establishing the military-style Indian school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

In 1898, my father was one of those earliest enrollees at Carlisle, and it changed his life forever. His first choice for a course of study was Law, which was acceptable to the school officials, but they made certain that he became proficient in a trade also, because it was well understood that Indians could never be successful at professions which required a college degree. As was the case for all students there and at other Indian schools, he was required to choose a trade to learn so that he might have a realistic chance at success later on. He ended up becoming a tailor, and quite a good one. His practicing of law, however, was more beneficial to all the Indians back home, but it never brought any income from his constituents other than meager amounts to cover his living and travel expenses between Coos Bay and Washington DC.

In 1853, my grandfather, George R. Wasson, built the first log cabin in Empire on Coos Bay. By 1856, nearly all of the older Indians had been either killed off or taken away to reservations. My father was born in

1880, the first generation after the coming of the Whiteman. His mother didn't want to hold him back by hindering him socially with the use of her native languages, so she insisted that he learn English and become educated in the best possible schools. Carlisle was free to Indians, so that's where he went. He had also attended school at Chemawa. He was doomed to spend the rest of his adult life between the two worlds of Indian and Whitemen, battling to explain each to the other, and never having an opportunity to just be himself in either place.

That was a common story for many capable and intelligent young Indians just after the turn of the century. The land, hunting and fishing rights, culture and traditions, were all considered gone with the unratified treaties of 1855. Language was of little use, except for talking with old people or occasionally to keep nosy Whites from understanding personal conversations. However, for most young people, the stigma of being Indians (or Half-breeds), was a major obstacle to overcome, and talking "Indian" was not one of the better qualities to show off with in public.

Speaking in native languages was discouraged and punishable in the government schools, as the primary intent of education was to make better people out of the "Savages." Naturally, many young Indians all over the country grew up with little or no use of their native languages. Along with that loss of language was the deplorable prohibition and loss of cultural and spiritual traditions and tribal identity. Equally deplorable was the anxiety and frustration caused by those young Indians knowing and experiencing major concepts of their ancestral culture, knowing the difference as compared to the dominant culture which spoke English, and yet not being given the freedom and pleasure of expressing themselves in the languages which were so vital to their ancestral heritage.

It was rare for some families to maintain a steadfast interest and determined effort to keep ideas and traditions alive, if not always in practice, then often just in family memories. So it was with my Dad and my family. We cared about history and traditions and never hesitated to let it be known we were Indians. Without the knowledge of our language though, it was sometimes difficult to defend our cultural heritage and pride against the derision of others who mocked Indians in general.

Among my siblings, it was my brother Wilfred and I who continued on to college and who shared in exchanging information on our tribe's culture and history. There were many times, however, that I realized how limited my knowledge was compared to the vast amount of culture that was lost or systematically destroyed and obliterated. The ultimate product was a truly devastating "Cultural Black Hole." There was also the fact that we had not grown up on a reservation like "Real Indians" and we weren't even able to prove our tribal background. At that time, we weren't from a federally recognized tribe.

At college, I became really embarrassed when I couldn't bring myself to confess that I didn't even know the names and locations of the major popular tribes in the United States. I didn't know the histories of U.S./Indian relationships. I didn't know the full histories of our treaty, our language or culture, and the more other Indians I met, the more inadequate I felt.

After some years of struggling to complete an undergraduate degree, I finally succeeded and immediately entered into a masters program in counseling. It seemed the thing to do and back in 1969, universities were hungry for Indians (and other minorities) to enroll in higher education. At the same time I was accepted into a graduate program, I was offered (and

accepted) a position in the university administration as an Assistant Dean of Students.

Because I proudly claimed my "Indianness," it seemed I was expected by other administrators to be able to answer any questions concerning Indians, and to relate in a "culturally correct manner" to any other Indian on campus, whatever tribe they came from, and whatever problem they had for the University to solve. I was expected to know how to deal with other Indians and their problems equally well.

I could understand my own problem of not knowing my own tribe's culture and history, but not knowing much about other Indians as well compounded the situation enormously. One solution was to read and study all I could about all Indians in America. That was a monumental task, one which would lead me into years of study and research. It seemed to take more years and skills than I ever hoped to have. That struggle for knowledge just produced more frustrations and self doubt than ever before. It sometimes seemed hopeless.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, there was a major surge in the search for self awareness for concerned Indians all across the country, along with the various movements for cultural realization and revitalization of other minorities. However, there was no grand plan, no road maps or formulae for young Indians to follow in finding themselves in the big picture of the American Indian cultural-historical milieu. Each tribe or nation was in a different situation; in a different boat (or canoe as it were) adrift without adequate knowledge of navigation or with no obvious means of propulsion.

It seemed as though the ancient Flood Myth of the Coos Bay area was being lived out again, wherein the People who had rushed to their canoes in advance of the rising waters were set adrift, except for those

who had prepared by stashing long ropes in their canoes. They could tie-up to the tops of the tall Fir trees protruding from the mountain tops and gradually let themselves back down as the water receded. While those with shorter ropes were either capsized or forced to cut loose, others with no ropes at all were swept far away into another land.

Perhaps that old story equates to the people today who maintained cultural integrity through the years of acculturation, and those who ignored their cultural background and drifted into the mainstream or "melting pot" of the dominant societies. Of course, it must be remembered that some tribal people were removed from their home areas, relocated into urban settings and offered education and retraining opportunities at government expense. They were not forewarned that they would be left in those urban areas with their newly acculturated skills and training to fend for themselves. Not all Indians experienced such a desperate loss of self identity, but such was the case for nearly all of those tribal members and descendants from the federally terminated tribes of the 1950s.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Many tragic tales could be told about the conflicts and atrocities suffered by Oregon Indians, such as the horrible slaughter or outright mass murder at the Nasomah Village instigated by Packwood and his sidekick Soapy. The effect on the tribes of Southern Oregon was an American holocaust just as suffered by the Jews during World War II in Germany. Just as the holocaust in Germany must be taught and remembered, so must the holocaust in Oregon be taught in our schools so Oregonians and other

Americans will know the true history. That knowledge might better insure that such a Holocaust never happens again.

Federal policies of acculturation thoroughly decimated the cultural integrity of small Oregon tribes, including the Coquilles. The struggle for self awareness and self sufficiency has produced extensive social and political schisms among Coquille tribal members and between the tribe and outside public agencies. Many young tribal members are desperate to gain insight and understanding of the overall processes of cultural change and acculturation of the older generations. Foremost in their needs is to develop insight into the history, language, and cultural traditions which have so thoroughly eluded most tribal descendants today.

In pondering the analogy of the Cultural "Black Hole" of the Southwest Oregon coast, it should be noted that Black Holes of outer space are thought to absorb and condense all available matter within reach, but then are no longer visible or identifiable to the outside observer. With that analogy extended to the culture of the Coquille People, it would seem that extensive and diligent research from an inside perspective might reveal the condensed or hidden information so vital to the "reculturation" of the Coquilles and their neighbors.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The topics and contents of this paper are the direct result of many years of conversations with my closest cultural companion, my older brother Wilfred C. Wasson. He inspired me to contemplate life now and long ago. His death in 1990 left me feeling I would never again share the thoughts and memories of Old Man Coyote, family anecdotes, myths, legends, or traditional stories. Now, as I have chosen to write what I have always known and believed, to research the missing information I've always wanted, I find strength and support in remembering how he would have responded to my questions and ideas. I'm grateful my brother "Will" gave me so much to remember and think about.

Other members of my family, particularly my mother, Bess Hockema, inspired me to go back to college and write the "true" history of the Coquille Indian Tribe. I'm honored they think I could do it. I'm humbled by the experience.

Finally, I appreciate the support, confidence, and inspiration of the Department of Anthropology faculty and my fellow graduate students. Mel Aikens, and Madonna Moss have been positive listeners to my creative ideas, and stimulating critics to my academic products. Jon Erlandson, however, is the catalyst in my academic endeavors and accomplishments at this time. His encouragement and advisorial persuasions have helped bring my Master of Science degree to fruition.

## REFERENCES CITED


Barnett, Homer G. 1954 "Learning About Culture, Reconstruction, Participation, Administration 1934-1954." *Observers Observed, Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork,* George W. Stocking, Jr. ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press (1985).

Beckham, Stephen D. 1971 *Requiem For A People: The Rogue Indians And The Frontiersmen.* Norman: University Of Oklahoma Press.

1977 *The Indians Of Western Oregon: This Land Was Theirs.* Coos Bay: Arago Books.

1990 "History of Western Oregon Since 1846", *Handbook of North American Indians.* Vol. 7, pp. 180-196, Smithsonian Institution.

Boag, Peter 1992 "The Valley of Long Grasses," *Old Oregon,* Winter 1992. Vol. 72, No. 2, p. 18.

Chase, A. W. 1873 *Shell Mounds: Oregon and Notes on Native Tribes.* Bureau of American Ethnology Archives, Smithsonian Institution, No. 3230. "unpublished field notes."

Connolly, Thomas J. 1991 "The Standley Site (35DO182): Investigations into the Prehistory of Camas Valley, Southwest Oregon." *University of Oregon Anthropological Papers No. 43* Department of Anthropology and Oregon State Museum of Anthropology.

Dodge, Orvil 1969 *Pioneer History Of Coos And Curry Counties, Or.* "Heroic Deeds and Thrilling Adventures of the Early Settlers." 2nd. ed. Bandon: Western World.

Drucker, Philip 1965 *Cultures Of The North Pacific Coast,* Scranton: Chandler Publishing Company.

Erlandson, Jon and Moss, Madonna 1994 "Cultures and Environments of the Pacific Coast of North America from 11,500 to 8,000 years ago." As the World Warmed: The Archaeology of the Pleistocene-Holocene Transition, L. Straus, B. Eriksen, J. Erlandson, and D. Yesner, eds. Plenum (in press).

Frachtenberg, Leo J. 1913 *Coos Texts ,Vol. I.* New York: Columbia University.

Hall, Roberta L. 1984 *The Coquille Indians: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.* Lake Oswego: Smith, Smith, and Smith.

Harrington, John P. 1943 — "*Unpublished Notes of Interviews With Some Coquille People at Siletz in 1943.*" J. P. Harrington Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Jacobs, Melville 1939 — *Coos Narrative and Ethnologic Texts. Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 1-126.* Seattle: University of Washington Publications in Anthropology.

1940 — *Coos Myth Texts. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 127-260.* Seattle: University of Washington Publications in Anthropology.

Miller, Jay and Seaburg, William R. 1990 — "Athapaskans of Southwestern Oregon," *Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 7, pp. 580-588,* Smithsonian Institution.

Moss, Madonna and Erlandson, Jon 1994 — *An Evaluation Survey and Dating Program for Archaeological Sites on State Lands of the Southern Oregon Coast.* Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon.

Peterson, Emil R. and Powers, Alfred 1952 — *A Century Of Coos and Curry.* Portland: Binsford and Mort.

Thompson, Lucy 1916 — *To The American Indian: Reminiscences of a Yurok Woman.* Berkeley: Heyday Books.

Wallmann, Steve 1994 "Camas Valley Clovis Projectile Fragment." *Screenings*

Wasson, George B., Jr. 1991 "The Memory of a People: The Coquilles of the Southwest Coast." Chap. 12, *The First Oregonians,* Buan & Lewis, Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities.

Waterman, T. T. 1931 *The Athapascan Indians of Southwestern Oregon and Northwestern California.* Archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, No. 3183, "unpublished field notes."

Zenk, Henry B. 1990 "Siuslawans and Coosans," *Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 7, pp. 572-579,* Smithsonian Institution.