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## [Canyon City Folkways]

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Beliefs and Customs - Folkways

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Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Canyon city folkways

Place of origin Portland, Oregon Date 3/10/39

Project worker William C. Haight

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date March 10, 1939

Address S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Canyon City Folkways.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Ford, 14th and Yamhill Street, Portland,  
Oregon, Brown Apartments.

Date and time of interview March 8, 9, 1939. Between 9 and 12, and 9 and 1.

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Place of interview 14th and Yamhill Street, Brown Apartments, Portland, Oregon.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

None.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Moderate priced, comfortable three-room apartment. Well furnished and pleasingly arranged.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date March 10, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon

Subject Canyon City Folkways

Name and address of informant Mrs. Ford, 14th and Yamhill Street, Portland.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

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1. Ancestry
  2. Place and date of birth
  3. Family
  4. Places lived in, with dates
  5. Education, with dates
  6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
  7. Special skills and interests
  8. Community and religious activities
  9. Description of informant
  10. Other points gained in interview
1. English.
  2. Canyon City, Oregon, approximately 1868.
  3. None.
  4. Canyon City, Oregon; Ohio, (no town, or date); Portland, Oregon.
  5. None, although she speaks excellent English, and has a fairly large vocabulary. Has none of the marks of an uneducated person.
  6. None. Housewife.
  7. None. Singing.

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8. None. A member of the Episcopalian church.

9. Mrs. Ford is a small, white-haired, blue-eyed lady. She has a great deal of grace in her walk. A pleasant laugh and voice. She is best characterized by the phrase "a gracious lady."

10. She had a proposal from a Chinese, but refused to divulge particulars. She learned to speak Chinese, a little, in return for teaching English to Chinese.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date March 8, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Canyon City Folkways.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Ford, Brown Apartments, 14th & Yamhill Streets,  
Portland, Oregon.

Text: I was the second child born in Canyon City. Jennie Nunes Powers was the first. She certainly was no credit to the village.

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My father left Kentucky in 1849 and went to California. He heard of the big gold strike in Canyon City, and left California to settle in Canyon. You know, then you could almost pick up gold nuggets by the handful; at least it was much easier than it is now.

Father made a great deal of money out of the mines and started a grocery store in partnership with Poindexter. The store was known as the Poindexter & Clark Mercantile Store. My father started in this business with a great deal of money and no experience. Mr. Poindexter started in with no money and a great deal of experience. The partnership ended with Poindexter having the money and my father the experience.

Father worked for the Wells Fargo company, and had the stage line from The Dalles to Canyon City. Every Saturday morning the Chinese would line up outside of my father's business with their bags of gold dust to be weighed and shipped to San Francisco. I can still hear the clock-clock-clock of the Chinese as they 2 talked to my father. They seemed to like him quite well. Often, father would have me come over to the office and sew the canvas he had into bags to hold the gold dust.

The Chinese were an honest, industrious race of people. Most everyone in Canyon had at least one working for him. Too, the poor fellows were often the source of much amusement, and the butt of many a practical joke in this rough and ready mining camp.

The mining they did was quite different than the white man's. Usually, the Chinese washed the gravel which the white man had thrown out as waste. They made a good deal of money by using the tailings left by the whites.

Joaquin Miller, the poet, is so often mentioned today, and people look at me with a new interest when they find out I knew him. It seems strange to me. He was just another man and not a very nice one.

I was named after his wife, Minnie Myrtle. The clearest memory I have of her were bursts of jealousy, and her long, dark, beautiful tresses. One time I was visiting with her. She was

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sitting in front of a mirror combing her hair. Joaquin came in and made some remark about her hair. Although it was a compliment as I remember it, she snapped back, "I thought you preferred a squaw's hair." Joaquin was noted for his weakness for squaws. The weakness is understandable. Many of the pioneers had Indians for their wives. No other women being around, they would naturally take a squaw.

Cooking in pioneer days was a real problem. There was hardly anything to cook. Father was a good provider and we always had the things we could buy, but there were not any choices. One example, was bread. We had to make our own yeast, first, before we could start to make the bread. Always on Saturday, we would make enough bread to last through the following week.

Coffee was quite expensive. We paid 50 cents for a very small package. Parching the coffee was my trial and tribulation. Oh! How I hated to do it.

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Green vegetables were a luxury almost never had. How many times I used to look at the green grass and wish I could eat it. Onions, little seed onions, were about the only green vegetables we ever had. Oh! How glad I was when they came in.

Fruit we seldom if ever had. Occasionally dried prunes and apples were served on our table. One man had an apple orchard but his prices were almost prohibitive. We considered them a great luxury.

The spring would bring with it literally millions of wild flowers. There was one flower that had a small bulb on it, something like an onion. I can't remember the name of it, I would often eat these. It's a wonder I wasn't poisoned. (Ed. Probably [camas?]).

The stores used to keep huge barrels of pickled mackerel and salmon bellies. The fish was a real Sunday treat in the winter time. Fresh meat was plentiful. We killed the chickens,

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pigs, stock (cattle) and had plenty of wild game. Too, we could usually catch fish in the small stream that went through the center of our town.

Soda crackers were a luxury. I used to steal these when my father had his store. A cracker to we children was much like a piece of candy to children now. These crackers were always kept in a large barrel back in the store. I suppose they were kept in back because there was so little call for them. People could not afford such luxuries in those times.

Coal oil was another expensive commodity. A very small can cost fifty cents. You see, all of our foodstuff was freighted in from The Dalles. These 4 trips would always take at least a month. How tragically often the coal oil would spill into the sugar and flour on those trips.

Life was so hard. It demanded the most from everyone for mere existence. However, it was the only life many of us knew so we accepted the hardships fairly willingly.

It seems strange to me how much the weather has changed. Canyon had long, cold, hard winters when I lived there. Now, quite often the winters are open. Too, it seldom gets as cold there now as it did in early days. Why, I remember that even our bread would freeze as hard as a rock in the worst part of the winter. (Ed. This change in the weather has been noted by many).

I was fourteen when my mother became very ill and passed away. The tragedy of her death has been with me all these years. Mother desperately wanted an orange. Oranges were a real luxury then. In order to get mother the oranges father had to dispatch a man to Baker City to buy her some. Mother died, asking for orange juice. The rider got back too late with the oranges. Baker City was over 100 miles across two mountain ranges from home.

I remember a lady, Mrs. Dean, gave to we children what she called a missionary hen. All the eggs this chicken laid we children were to sell and give the money to the Methodist

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Church for foreign mission work. We made quite a little money for the church from the sale of these chicken eggs.

This Mrs. Dean kept house for us for two years. Dear, she was a trial! She was as deaf as a nail, which used to irritate us. Along with being deaf, she was quite religious.

One evening she had all of we children down on our knees saying our evening prayers. Dick, my brother started to snicker. She scolded him sharply for laughing at God and told him to stand up. To punish him severely she told him he couldn't pray again until he quit snickering. Well, you know Dick, I don't 5 think he has quit snickering, or prayed, to this day.

Mrs. Dean was a widow, and casting around for a man her eyes lit on a man by the name of Sagadoll. We used to call him sugar-doll. Sagadoll, was a bachelor of many years standing, and quite wealthy. Mrs. Dean, undaunted by her 65 years — and some 15 years the older of Sagadoll — started to work on him.

The Fourth of July picnic, a big event in those days, was to be the turning point of the courtship. She felt that under the stress of patriotism and liquor she could exact a matrimonial promise from Sagadoll.

Her hair was quite thin so she sent out (to some larger city) for a wig, and some material for a new dress. My, how we did work on that dress! In those days bustles were all the rage. Mrs. Dean felt that bustles were too heavy for the spine, and if God had wanted her to look that way he would have made her a hump. I pointed out that paper could be used for the bustle and that wouldn't hurt her spine. Mrs. Dean agreed with me, so she had a paper bustle, instead of the usual wire one.

The day of the picnic dawned with nature more than playing her part in the courtship. The morning was spent in putting the wig on, and pinning a new bonnet in place. The dress, with its paper bustle was made and pronounced a perfect fit. On the way to the picnic the

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wind lifted the wig and bonnet off of Mrs. Dean's head. The humiliation must have been great, but she was a determined and courageous woman. Undaunted, she re-adjusted the wig and bonnet and exacted a matrimonial promise from Sagadoll. They lived quite happily until she died, oddly enough, from tuberculosis at the age of 75.

The Fourth of July celebrations were the great events in our lives. A typical celebration would be a picnic at noon, with barbecued sheep, hogs, and young steers. The tables would be piled high with the good food prepared by excellent cooks. After the picnic everyone would gather around a platform that was set up in the middle of the grounds. The band would play patriotic pieces, and popular music of the day. A preacher would usually open the services with a long, dry, exhortation to God to preserve and protect the union.

Judge Dustin, a noted character, of the day gave the Fourth of July speech. Always he read the Declaration of Independence. Then, he would deliver an excellent address. Mrs. Sagadoll, of whom I have spoken of, usually recited a patriotic piece of some kind.

I have often heard told an amusing incident that occurred several years before my time. The Hon. J. C. Luce, arose to read the Declaration of Independence, his voice boomed out in clear, rich tones nearly half of the Constitution of the United States, before, H. W. Lair Hill pulled the tail of John's coat and informed him of his mistake. See Small Town Folklore no.

The evening of the Fourth was always spent in dancing. We would dance the Virginia Reel, Polkas, Schottish, Fireman's Dance, Mazurka, and the Varsouvienne At first these dances were danced to the hop craze. We would hop polka, and schottish. Later the glide craze came in and we would waltz to the Minuet and other glide dances.

Other forms of amusement in the summer time were, swimming, hiking, and racing. Of course, the men had the saloons in the winter and summer. The winter time would bring

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coasting and skating; toupe shows would come through; home talent plays would be produced; candy pulls, church bazaars and parties would be held.

The shows that would occasionally come through were always an exciting event. I was a most ardent attender of such performances. My secret ambition was for the stage. My mother put a stop to such an ambition when she told me an actress couldn't be a decent lady. However, I must have been fairly good for a 7 child, because one troupe wanted me to go with them and play little Eva, in " Uncle Tom's Cabin " .

I can remember of sitting on the front row and calling out in loud protest at the villain. "The Last Loaf", a play where a man took a poor widow's last loaf of bread, nearly caused me to be kicked out of the hall. When the actor took the lady's last loaf, my protestations were loud and long.

A popular play often produced by troupes and home talent was called, "The Good For Nothin". Often the charade, "Cinderella," was performed. " Old Black Joe ", a song, was sung by someone off stage and another person would act the part of Old Black Joe. To me, Old Black Joe was a thrilling performance. Negro / Minstrals came through once or twice, causing plenty of interest among the settlers.

The home talent plays were always fun for everyone. I usually got to play the lead, and a Mr. Mills, a professional tenor, that who looked like a dying calf when he sung, played opposite me. Our costumes were made from cambric material. The scenery was put together by local carpenters, and the furniture was borrowed from homes near the hall.

The festivals we had were enjoyable. I remember a strawberry festival that featured a huge floating island pudding. At this bazaar (festival) I sold candy, and wild flowers. My mother baked a huge sponge cake. I know she used 20 eggs and brown sugar in making the cake. She used brown sugar because we didn't have any other kind. During the first

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part of our life there white granulated sugar was unheard of. This cake was decorated with tissue paper flowers, and cut in extremely small pieces, so every one could have some.

The biggest thrill in my life was during the fall round-up of cattle. The buckaroos would drive the wild, ferocious, cattle right through the center of the town. They tried to keep the cattle in order but quite often the beasts would get out of control and stampede, causing much damage to property.

One time I was walking down town with a bright red dress on. When I was in about the center of the town I noticed the cattle come over the brow of the hill leading into town. I can still remember how I stood there literally frozen to the ground as the cattle charged down the hill. Fortunately I was standing in front of a saloon, and one of the men came out and quickly jerked me inside, slamming the door of the saloon just in time. The door slammed and a long horned steer butted into it. I can still see that long horn sticking through the broken panes of the window in the door.

I was caught another time with my small brother, Burt. This time we laid as still and close against the building as we could. The buckaroos saw us and headed the cattle away from where we were. My, but that was a frightening experience.

Perhaps the second biggest thrill in my life was the Indian attack we went through. Those miserable Indians were on the warpath all around us, but for some reason all of us felt fairly safe. Which later events proved to be a fool's paradise.

On a peaceful Sunday the horrible news came that the Indians were coming to attack. Everyone was ordered to the caves above the town. My mother and I were preparing dinner. She told me to gather all the clothes and valuable things in the house and put them in a stone cellar we had.

Later mother and I joined the townspeople up in the caves. I believe we were there for about three days. We had very little to eat and nothing to prepare food with. We children

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slept in the caves. I can remember how terrified I was at the large rocks hanging over my head. Mother slept out under the stars. The attack was stopped several miles before the Indians got to Canyon, and we were allowed to go back home. No one in Canyon was injured by the attackers.

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The religious life in our mining camp was nearly as active as the hell-raiser's life. We had three churches, Methodist, Episcopal, and Catholic. Each church had its minister and life peculiar unto its needs. The Catholic priest, with two sisters, had a private school for a short time. The Episcopal church was built by popular subscription. It stands today, one of the most picturesque and beautiful churches in Oregon. The windows in that church are real stained glass. Strangely enough, though right in the center of town, it has survived all the fires of the town. There have been either four or five serious fires.

Perhaps the most noted hell-raiser in the history of Canyon City was [Marie St. Claire.?]. The wildest, toughest, and most beautiful light woman the houses there ever had. Marie was kind and generous to everyone. If crossed, though, she could draw and plug her man with the best of them. I remember that she would go horseback riding in men's clothes; something no lady, scarcely a light one, would do. When she dressed in her gorgeous velvet dresses she could dazzle anyone. Marie lived extravagantly. Her home had every luxury known to the world at that time. Her silver service was particularly beautiful. Wild, beautiful, dangerous Marie St. Claire had the secret admiration of everyone, despite her profession. Story here

Form D

Extra Comment

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### OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date March 10, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Canyon City Folkways

Name and address of informant Mrs. Ford, 14th & Yamhill Street, Portland,  
Oregon, Brown Apartments.

Comment:

Mrs. Ford was more than willing to talk. Although she hated the town she was born and raised in, she seemed to enjoy the fact that she knew so much of its history.

The town in which she was born and raised is noted for its picturesqueness. It is truly one of the great historical towns in Oregon. From this small village many noted men have come. Joaquin Miller, is perhaps the best known.

The town itself has suffered every disaster a town could, but after each disaster arose to flourish again.