

## **Waldport's seeds of the sixties**

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WALDPORT — As the years pass, sands shift, tides scour and time-hidden curiosities suddenly appear on Oregon beaches: a bottle with Japanese markings, the axle and wheels of a rusted-out car, maybe even remnants of an ancient petrified forest.

But nothing like this.

Just inland, across Highway 101 from Tillicum Beach Campground, Eugene author Steve McQuiddy has blown the sands off a story that still has me shaking my head in wonder: a World War II conscientious objectors' camp that, McQuiddy contends, helped spawn the San Francisco-centered social and cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Put it this way: Oregon's first hippie may well have been a guy named Glen Coffield, who, in the early 1940s, grew out his hair and beard in a personal anti-war protest — two miles north of Yachats and four miles south of Waldport.

"That's the most fascinating part of this story, this connection of the camp to the '60s," says McQuiddy, a Lane Community College writing instructor.

His just-released book, "Here on the Edge" (Oregon State University Press), brings to light the story of a government-sponsored camp born of religious opposition to war.

McQuiddy will talk about "Edge" — it is trickling into local stores — at 7 p.m. Nov. 6 at the University of Oregon's Knight Library Browsing Room.

Civilian Public Service Camp No. 56 — now the Angell Job Corps facility — housed some 80 to 100 men, most in their early 20s, from October 1942 through December 1945.

By day — and without pay — the men crushed rock, built roads, planted trees and, in the summer, fought fires, the things the government required them to do. By night, they wrote, painted, put on plays and talked philosophy, the things they wanted to do.

They played baseball on the beach, played music at "Cap's Beach Resort" just down Highway 101 and, when wives and friends visited, hung out at the nearby Shore Pine Cottages, which featured a cleaned and cured skeleton, "Tillie the Whale."

"The Summer of Love can actually be traced back, in part, to what was happening in Waldport in 1944," McQuiddy says.

Those dubious of the dots McQuiddy connects should know that this isn't some thrown-

together pamphlet by an author with no credentials. McQuiddy, who's been published by Salon and in Best Essays Northwest, spent 20 years on this project. His connections are reasonable and his claims well documented.

McQuiddy, 55, came across the story in the early 1990s when, as a freelance writer, he was trolling the UO's Special Collections & University Archives looking for story ideas.

Then-Archivist Keith Richard introduced him to the camp's papers, which had been given to the UO after the war because of the school's proximity.

"I saw this photograph of a long-haired, bearded guy (Coffield) who was part Rasputin, part boxcar hobo, part Eugene street guy in the '70s, but who was actually a guy in Waldport, Oregon, in 1944," McQuiddy says. "I said: 'I'm gonna write about this guy.'"

Coffield, he learned, later went on to do graduate work at the UO, became a prolific writer, founded the Grundtvig Folk School near Mount Hood and did some acting in San Francisco.

The Waldport camp, McQuiddy learned, was not only where Coffield's political, social and cultural passions incubated but those of many others who became precursors to the '60s counter-culture: William Everson, a priest whom Time magazine would dub the "Beat Friar" for his connection to the San Francisco scene, and Adrian Wilson, who founded San Francisco's Press in Tuscany Alley.

Some became part of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance of the 1950s, which influenced the Beat Generation of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

Many of the conscientious objectors have died. But McQuiddy was able to interview half a dozen of them, now in their upper 80s and 90s.

He also gleaned insight from some of the COs who were part of an oral history project that Portland State professor Katy Barber and students did in collaboration with the Siuslaw National Forest.

The rise of the Internet during McQuiddy's two-decade process helped unearth more relics from the past, including copies of a half-sheet pamphlet, "The Untide," that the men wrote and published.

"When I started this, I didn't even know there were conscientious objectors' camps during World War II, much less one in Waldport," McQuiddy says. "I said to myself: 'Why hasn't this book been done before?'"

The camp was among 150 such outposts across the country. With war looming prior to the U.S. plunge into it in 1941, leaders of three historic "peace churches" — the Brethren, Friends (or Quakers) and Mennonites — went to the government with the idea: use Civilian Conservation Corps camps — inspired by President Roosevelt's New

Deal — for the COs, since the men who would normally be working out of them would be off to war.

“The leaders argued that their men wanted to serve their countries, but their religion forbade them from fighting,” McQuiddy says.

What he finds so interesting isn't only that the Waldport camp existed, but the legacy it spawned far beyond, mainly San Francisco, where many of the men wound up living.

The conscientious objectors, McQuiddy believes, were ahead of their times in their concern for not only peace but for the environment, health and equal rights for women and minorities. Then, of course, there was the ever-edgy Coffield.

“He refused to cut his hair for one year as a protest for peace,” McQuiddy says.

Lots of other such places contributed to what would become the revolutionary '60s, he says, “but Waldport planted some of the seeds.”

Who knew?

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