

Context:

Gabriola, anthropology

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Errors and omissions:

References:

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Short stories

The story of the Euclataws¹

by Miss Marion Gordon, Nanaimo, BC,
found by Barrie Humphrey.

This story took a while to piece together for a couple of reasons. One was that one of the pages of the newspaper was dated October 10, even though it was an integral part of the November 14 edition. This made it difficult to relocate. The second was that the microfilmed copy had a wrinkle in the page that was not straightened out before filming leaving one line illegible. Unfortunately, a second copy I found had the same flaw.

B.H.

THE NANAIMO FREE PRESS
Friday, November 14, 1890

Some time ago, the *Montreal Witness* offered a series of prizes for stories written by the school children of Canada. The competition was open to all pupils of public or private schools in Canada. Among those who were attracted by this offer was Miss Marion Gordon of this city, and was one of those accepted by the board of examiners.

It may be mentioned that the *Witness* is now offering prizes for an 1891 competition, full particulars of which can be obtained by any teacher in the public schools of Nanaimo

¹ *Euclataw*, *Yuclataw*, and *Yakulta* are old synonyms for Lekwiltok (*Laichwiltach*) who are members of the Kwakiutl (*K^wakwaka'wakⁿ*) First Nation. Their traditional territory is the northeastern corner of Vancouver Island and adjacent mainland, around the inside passage north of Campbell River.



“Indian girl, showing conical form of skull”

R.C. Mayne, *Four Years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, p.277, London, 1862.

who would like to have his or her scholars enter into the competition by writing to:

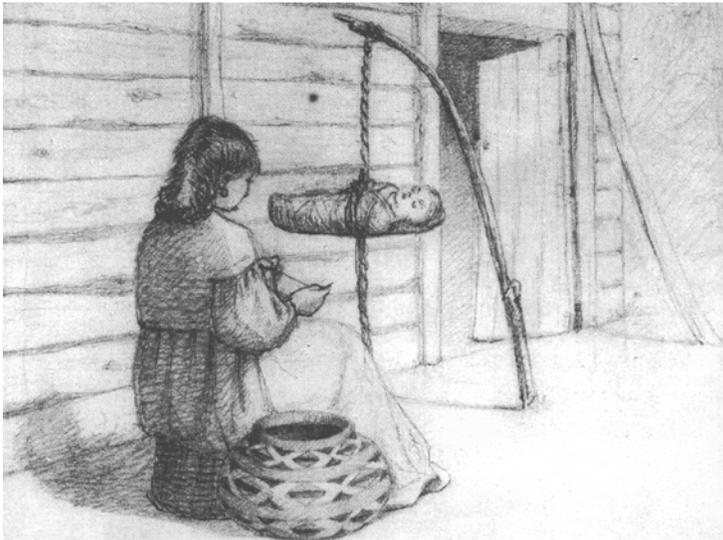
John Dougall & Son, Montreal, PQ,
“Canada Prize Competition”.

Miss Gordon's story

“The principal tribe of Indians near Nanaimo are the Yuclataws Flat-heads.

Soon after they are born, the children are placed in small bark cradles, into which they fit tightly, and wadding is placed on their heads; then over this a board is pressed. This makes the forehead slant, and the higher the peak on the top of the head, the higher the Indian stands socially. In going through the Vancouver forests, an Indian mother may often be seen sitting beneath a tree with a little bark cradle in its branches; a rope tied to the cradle and passed around the mother's foot; every time she moves her foot the cradle rocks, and thus she has her hands free for other employment, which is often that of braiding mats from the bark of the cedar.

“When an Indian dies, his relatives dress him in new garments before consigning him to his coffin. Sometimes they have not the money themselves, so they borrow it from their rich neighbours. It is believed that the soul of the Indian cannot rest until this debt is paid back, and so, as soon as they are able, the debtors give what is called in



“Indian mode of rocking the baby” (circa 1867)

Eleanor Caroline Fellows, BCA PDP00012

Chinook a potlatch (literally ‘give’) at which they pay back what they owe, and also give a great banquet, and make presents to their friends. The remains of the Indian are dug up to attend the potlatch but they are afterwards consigned to the tombs forever. Over the grave they build a small wooden house, on the outside of which they tack white calico. When this calico rots, they believe that the soul of the departed has entered the ‘Happy Hunting Ground’.

“At a recent potlatch held among the Indians of the North, the chief, besides his many other contributions, gave one hundred dollars to the Bishop to be forwarded to the Queen, as a token of allegiance to her.

“About one mile from the Yuclataws are the Nanaimo Indians, but so bitter are the feelings between them that they rarely speak.

“Nowadays, all the disputes are settled by the British men of-war, but in earlier days the hostile Indians met on the battle-field.

Their weapons were arrows, which they poisoned with the juice of the buttercup root. On an ancient battle-field have been found arrowheads made of flint, which are fashioned so beautifully that even we, with all our ingenuities, cannot excel them, nor can any Indians of the present generation remember how they were...

[...one line illegible...]

...one long street with a row of houses on either side. In front of every house rose a huge wooden image, often carved from trees as they stood, made to represent eagles, whales or reptiles, sometimes two or three men standing on each other's

shoulders. These figures were then painted in the most ridiculous manner.² Rising above the houses is often to be seen a huge column with canoes nailed on one side. This indicates the wealth of the chief, as his worldly possessions consist mostly of canoes and blankets.

“Every summer evening, just at twilight, a faint noise, like the beating of sticks, is heard; this is followed soon by a strange, monotonous sound, which, wafted by the evening breeze over the water which separates the city of Nanaimo from the Indian reserve, seems doubly weird. The stranger will start, perchance, and ask us what it is, but we, who know full well the mournful strain, smile, and answer that it is only the song of the Indians.

“Probably calling it music would shock a Mendelssohn or a Mozart, but the Indians nevertheless keep splendid time together, the beating of the sticks taking the place of a musical instrument.

“The Indians of this coast have some pretty and interesting legends, but they are very reticent concerning them, fearing, no doubt, that their legendary lore would not be appreciated by the white man; consequently, my knowledge in this line is small, being limited to one, which is:

The legend of the Thunder-God

Many years ago a young Indian man went out hunting and lost his way. He was looking about him in despair when he saw a white lady with long golden hair sitting on a log. He went up to her and asked her if she knew where he could go.

“My husband”, she replied, “is the Thunder-God, and he holds bitter hatred against the

Indians; but if you will come with me I will take you to my house and hide you from him. Follow me.”

He walked behind her until they came to a low log cabin. The lady went into one of the rooms for a few moments, and then coming out bade the Indian go in and wash himself so that her husband could not detect him from his odor. In a little while the man came back to her, and she hid him in a huge wooden chest. Presently they heard a loud noise, and the Thunder-God walked in. He was very tall, and had on his shoulders, huge wings. Under one he carried a whale, under the other a cigar box. As soon as he came inside, he exclaimed: “Wife, I smell an Indian!”

In vain his wife assured him that he did not. He opened the chest and found the unfortunate Indian. The Thunder-God was about to kill him, when the poor fellow fell on his knees, and begged to be forgiven, and to be allowed to go home. At last the god relented. Taking up the cigar box, he crammed the whale into it, and said: “I will take you home on condition that you tell no one where I live. You may tell what you have seen, and if your tribe disbelieve you, open this box, and as proof the fire from my eyes and the voice of my tongue will come forth.”

So saying, he lifted the trembling Indian under one wing, and, putting the box under the other, he flew away and landed the lost one on the spit, a narrow neck of land near Comox. The Indian soon found his home. As the god had surmised, the people disbelieved him; so he opened the box, and out came thunder and lightning.

Whenever a storm comes on, the waves dash high against the spit, making a roaring sound. This noise the Indians to this day ascribe to the Thunder-God.

And now we will leave the brave sons of the forest, and I will say the simple Indian farewell, “Alahcaslah!”.

MARION GORDON, Nanaimo, BC. ◇

² This sudden departure from her hitherto sympathetic tone is likely something she had overheard. Racist attitudes were widespread at the time, and to expect a 15-year old to be unaffected by these would not be realistic.