
Annie Miner Peterson

Who was Annie Miner Peterson?

Annie Miner Peterson was an **accomplished** basket maker and storyteller. She was also an important source of information about the language and culture of her people. Annie was a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. She was one of the very few American Indian women from her time who left behind a recorded story of her life in her Native language.

Annie was named after her mother's aunt. In her language, her name was *ts'mii-xwn*, meaning "Tricky [like Coyote]."

Early Life

Annie was born in 1860 at the site of a traditional Hanis village, across Coos Bay from North Bend, Oregon. This place is still called Willanch Slough after the village's Hanis name. Her mother, named Matilda in English, was a Hanis and Miluk person. These were two of the groups of people forced onto the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. Hanis and Miluk people speak different languages, but are often lumped together as Coos Indians. Annie's father, James Miner, was a non-Tribal settler.

Annie was born at the time when settlers had begun to steal the land that Annie's family had lived on since time immemorial. That means longer than anyone can remember. Soon after she was born, the U.S. government forced Annie and her mother to leave their village and move to Yachats on the newly created Coast (Siletz) Reservation.

Life on the reservation was hard. There often wasn't enough food. Armed soldiers guarded Annie and her people and wouldn't let them leave or move around freely. Settlers and Native people both often treated Annie differently because of her mixed background. But Annie was strong. As a child, Annie learned the traditional life ways of her maternal ancestors—her mother's family. She learned about berry picking, root digging, and how to hunt and fish. Annie attended traditional dances and learned the history and stories of her people from elders, the wise older people. She also learned the right way to behave as a Native person. Annie remembered these lessons for the rest of her life.



Annie Miner Peterson *(Continued)*

Many different Tribes were forced to live on the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. Annie learned the cultures and languages of some of these different Tribes. In all, Annie learned five different languages! In addition to Miluk and Hanis, Annie learned Alsea, English, and Chinuk Jargon, a language that many different Pacific Northwest Tribes used to talk to each other and trade. Annie also learned and remembered stories and songs of people from further away, like the southern Oregon coast.

Adult Life

Annie was a very independent woman. She always stayed strong and proud of her ancestors even though she had many difficulties. Annie was forced to move several times in her early adult life. When part of the Reservation around Yachats was taken away, Annie relocated to Siletz. Then she went to the Siuslaw River near Florence. Finally, she went back to her family's homeland around Coos Bay.

Annie married a few times in her life. She had children with her second husband, William Jackson, an Alsea man who was also a Siletz Tribal member. Annie worked many different jobs to help support her family. She worked in a mine, at a cannery, and as a washerwoman. Later, she bravely left her small community on the coast to look for work in the big city of Portland. Life wasn't easy for Native people during these times, but Annie was always able to support herself and her family.

Later Life

In her later life, Annie moved back to her ancestral homelands near Coos Bay with her last husband, a Swedish logger named Carl Peterson. Annie spent much of her later life working to preserve the culture and language of her ancestors. She shared the songs and stories she learned as a child with her grandchildren and other Tribal youth. Annie became a master basket weaver and created beautiful designs. She also loved to sew and made both traditional and modern clothes for herself and her granddaughter. She collected baskets and other artifacts from her people. In 1933, Melville Jacobs, a professor from the University of Washington, was working to record speakers of the Native languages of Oregon. He asked Annie to help with the Miluk and Hanis languages. She spent many weeks with Melville making notes and recordings that are still used today. Annie recorded stories and the songs of her people in English and her Native languages. She shared many things about the history and culture of her ancestors. Annie also shared her life experiences in her own language, working with Melville to write an autobiography.

Annie died on May 9, 1939, at the age of 79 years old. Today, her descendants (her children, grandchildren, and their children) are members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Her work and legacy **impact** all the different Tribes who have members of Hanis and Miluk descent—including the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

Annie Miner Peterson *(Continued)*

Sources

Youst, L. (1997). *She's tricky like coyote: Annie Miner Peterson, an Oregon coast Indian woman*. University of Oklahoma Press.