

10-04

Exit Report – Western National Parks Association Grant #10-04

Title: Lone Woman Historical Research for “Connecting Youth to National Parks via Award-Winning Children’s Literature” Project

Principal Investigator: Susan L. Morris, Ventura, California, smorris121@msn.com

Park: Channel Islands National Park

Abstract

Scott O’Dell’s children’s novel, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, is a Newbery award-winning work of fiction used in nearly every elementary or secondary school in the nation. Based on the abandonment and retrieval of an American Indian woman who lived alone on San Nicolas Island off the coast of California for 18 years (1835-1853), the novel has inspired many readers to search for the facts behind the fiction. The Lone Woman Research Project was conceived to provide information for a multimedia web resource to be hosted by Channel Islands National Park, which would contain up-to-date documented details on the Lone Woman’s story, particularly as it ties in to *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. The web resource would also be a clearinghouse for the most recent research and discoveries relating to the Lone Woman.

Print, graphic and audio/video material, an interactive map, and a student/teacher section will be featured on the site. Site visitors will be able to learn about the Lone Woman, San Nicolas Island, the Channel Islands, the cultural and natural history of the area, along with information about Channel Islands National Park and other mainland locations and institutions that are tied to the story of the Lone Woman.

While San Nicolas Island is owned and managed by the U.S. Navy and visitation is restricted, the public can visit Channel Islands National Park, comprised of five of the eight islands. Park visitors have the opportunity to explore island wilderness and gain a sense of the isolation experienced by the Lone Woman. The web resource on the Lone Woman/*Island of the Blue Dolphins* should encourage Channel Islands National Park visitation and enhance understanding and appreciation of the unique history of the Channel Islands.

Research objectives for the project included review and evaluation of current resources related to the Lone Woman’s life story; discovery of new sources of information; communication with park administrators and knowledgeable experts; and preparation of reports, a newsletter, journal articles, and public presentations.

Western National Parks Association support allowed Morris to obtain and translate several significant new Russian American Company primary source documents that illuminate a dark corner of early 19th century history related to European interaction with native peoples on the west coast of North America,

Lone Woman Historical Research – S. Morris
Exit Report – page 2

Abstract (continued)

and describe a violent encounter on San Nicolas Island between Russian otter hunters and island inhabitants that may have resulted in a massacre of the island peoples. A second important discovery that resulted from project research was identification of the location of the Nidever adobe in Santa Barbara, California, where the Lone Woman spent the last weeks of her remarkable life in 1853.

Relevance to the Park

The Lone Woman/*Island of the Blue Dolphins* web resource resulting from the research project will support education, interpretation and conservation efforts by informing site viewers and park visitors, as well as park education and interpretation staff, about the Lone Woman events and the cultural and natural history of the Channel Islands. Considering the fact that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is required reading for students across the country, the Lone Woman web resource is likely to be used extensively by students and teachers nationwide. The web resource will therefore increase public appreciation of the unique history of the Channel Islands, encourage park visitation, and foster awareness of the need for resource conservation – an important theme in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

The significant new information that has come to light as a result of the Lone Woman research project (Russian document translations, and identification of the location of the Nidever adobe in Santa Barbara) will draw additional site viewers who want to keep up on the latest research on the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island. And additional findings on the Lone Woman and Channel Islands cultural history from other researchers will be posted on the web resource as soon as the information is available and evaluated, making the resource and the park website invaluable for anyone interested in finding information on the cultural history of the Channel Islands.

Process

Morris was able to follow through with all major objectives: resource review, discovery of new information, communication and collaboration with web resource administrators and key stakeholders, and production (or beginning the production phase) of various research products. There were some sources and sites to be used for research that were listed on the grant application that Morris did not investigate: Morris did travel to northern California to do research in the California Sutro Library, but did not visit the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. This was due to the fact that much of the material relevant to the Lone Woman story at the Bancroft was either on-hand, available locally, or accessible online.

Lone Woman Historical Research – S. Morris
Exit Report – page 3

Process (continued)

Further, Morris discovered gaps in the primary source documentation relating to the background events of the Lone Woman story, and pursued those documents through different institutions: UCLA Young Research Library, UCLA Southern Regional Library Facility, and University of Alaska-Fairbanks Elmer E. Rasmusen Library, where an interlibrary loan request was approved because of Morris' ability to read some Russian. One institution Morris could not visit was the Southwest Museum because it was closed for renovation.

Morris continues to search for new Russian documents that could add details to the explanation of extraordinary events on San Nicolas Island in 1814, namely the alleged massacre of the inhabitants by a Russian otter hunting crew, which occurred following the killing of a Native Alaskan hunter. Depositions of the hunters who took part in that encounter were requested by Russian American Company chief managers in 1818. Morris will continue to search for those Russian depositions, and will look for additional funding as well to support travel to archives in Russia (St. Petersburg) to find the missing records, if they still exist.

Bookkeeping

The grant funds were allocated as follows: \$1,660 for travel expenses (including a research trip to archives in northern California) and \$5,600 for Morris' time (160 hours x \$35 per hour). An additional and unexpected expense (\$250) resulted from the discovery of three significant new primary source documents -- Russian American Company journal, explanatory note, and deposition -- and the need to translate the documents from Russian into English. This expense was deemed necessary to accomplish the objective of adding new information to the existing records on the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island, and one that Morris was willing to absorb as a work-related expense. In fact, the translation expenditure was very modest considering that the total pages translated, about 12.5 pages typed (8.5 pages of documents, 4 pages of commentary), came in at a relatively modest \$250, because a native Russian speaking graduate student from University of California Santa Barbara was hired to do the work, rather than a professional translator (with customary rates of \$.50 per word).

The WNPA grant acted as seed funding, bringing additional support for the Lone Woman project through a National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program grant and a National Park Service Parks as Classrooms regional grant that will be used to cover web resource production costs. Channel Islands National Park contributed staff time for Carol Peterson, Yvonne Menard, and Derek Lohuis to attend meetings and participate in field trips. The U.S. Navy provided logistical support with flights to San Nicolas Island for Morris and Peterson along with staff time of Navy archaeologists Steve Schwartz and Lisa Thomas-Barnett. And both the Santa Barbara Mission and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History donated staff time for site tours and discussions.

Products

Products resulting from the grant include an updatable web resource now entering the production phase; a Lone Woman/*Island of the Blue Dolphins* Web Resource newsletter (January 2011); and articles to be submitted for consideration to the *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, *Noticias* (the bulletin of the Santa Barbara Historical Society), and *Smithsonian* magazine. Presentations have been discussed for the Fort Ross State Historic Park Bicentennial Conference (April 2012), and the California Islands Symposium (fall 2012).

Park staff was routinely informed with new details resulting from the research project through correspondence with attached documents, maps, and graphics; phone calls; meetings; tables of data; and the newsletter, distributed to Channel Islands National Park staff and the Santa Barbara Educators' Roundtable members, printed at the end of the grant period.

The most recent information-sharing meeting with park staff (Yvonne Menard, chief of interpretation, and Carol Peterson, education coordinator) and Steve Schwartz, Navy archaeologist with oversight of San Nicolas Island, took place on May 24, 2011 at Channel Islands National Park.

Evaluation

The topic of Intellectual property rights concerning the ownership of research results would be a useful one to include on the Western National Parks Association website's research section. A question did arise as to when the new research findings resulting from the Lone Woman project could be published in articles by Morris, and what entity would have first publication rights. An agreement was reached with contacts at the park, allowing Morris to publish the new research findings in professional journals or magazines, even though the purpose of the project was to collect information for a Lone Woman web resource to be hosted by Channel Islands National Park (now in the production phase). The stipulation was that the park should receive a copy of the articles before they were submitted for publication. A policy statement on the stance taken by the WNPAA on the intellectual property rights of its funded projects, posted on its website, might aid other researchers and parks, and clarify the issue for the future.