



The Legend of Three-Fingered Willy

Since the Colonial times, Whitaker Iron Works had used furnaces to manufacture charcoal for its foundries. By the late 19th century the Iron Works' various furnaces were under the operation of the two Whitaker brothers, George and John.

In 1883 Cecil P. Whitaker, the son of George Whitaker, along with two other local men, was believed to have died in a boating accident just off Turkey Point in the Elk River, where it flows into the Chesapeake Bay. While a body was found and identified as Cecil, legend has it that another man claiming to be named Cecil Whitaker washed ashore on the beach of the very property owned by Whitaker Iron Works. This man, whether amnesiac or delusional, made his way up the bluffs and across Bull Mountain where he squatted in an old hunting shed which he turned into his home. To survive he scavenged for tools and food from the nearby furnace owned by Whitaker Iron Works. He lived alone and in secret for several years while living off of his instincts.

In the ensuing years John Whitaker passed away and in 1890 his so did Cecil's father, George. Whitaker Iron Works passed to other relatives and continued blasting for coal for several years but finally gave up that work due to more modern manufacturing methods. After several company mergers and purchases Whitaker Iron Works was eventually acquired by U.S. Steel, and the majority of the furnaces in the area were dismantled.



At some point in the last years of the 19th century the man calling himself Cecil Whitaker seemingly regained his sanity. Because there were no longer supplies to be found at the old furnace site he regularly raided, he began to travel further to scavenge for supplies. On one of his trips he met a local blind woman. After several subsequent visits by “Cecil” she fell in love and ran away with him.

In 1923 the Wilmington Council, which would one day become Del-Mar-Va Council, was searching for a location to hold summer camp. Captain Parker Ford, a local man with ties to Scouting, knew of the land near North East, Maryland that had once owned by Whitaker Iron Works. So Wilmington Council negotiated terms with U.S. Steel and had the dining hall from the old Camp Rodney at Red Point dismantled and transported to the new location.

The council used the property for summer camp each year and began to expand as the number of Scouts grew. In these early years, Cecil and his wife remained hidden on the south side of Bull Mountain and out of contact with the nearby camp.

In 1927 Mrs. T. Coleman DuPont, who had since purchased the land from U.S. Steel, donated it to Wilmington Council. Keeping the name Camp Rodney honoring Delaware’s Revolutionary War hero, the camp was dedicated to the memory of Mrs. DuPont’s late son, Eleuthere Irene DuPont, who had died in 1920 at the age of 17 as a result of scarlet fever.

In the early 1930s “Cecil” and his wife had a child they named William. They raised William in their small cabin that “Cecil” had built on the far side of Bull Mountain. Sadly and coincidentally, Willy’s mother died of scarlet fever soon after. While Willy was a child, “Cecil” made contact with the nearby camp. He volunteered his skills as a carpenter, hunter



and trapper in trade for various sundries that the camp had. “Cecil” had a hand in constructing several of Rodney’s lodges, including Fisherman’s Lodge, which was built on an additional tract of land that the Council had purchased from Sinclair Fisheries, and the Landship. Meanwhile, Willy participated in the camp’s summer program.

In the mid 1940s, Willy’s father, “Cecil,” died of unknown causes. Just a teenager, Willy found himself living on his own. Already skilled in hunting, trapping and carpentry, Willy continued his association with Camp Rodney. As the camp expanded further, he assisted with construction of the new facilities, including most of the new cabins built in the Wilderness camp.

However, as the camp continued to grow in the early-to-mid 1950s, disaster struck. Willy, while working on construction of the new Rifle Range in what was to be a third camp called Lenape, was distracted by a nearby group of Scouts who had sneaked into the work area. Working with an axe and chopping logs, Willy mis-struck and ended up severing the thumb and pinkie finger on his right hand. Willy’s injuries were quickly treated by a doctor who was volunteering in the health lodge for the summer. But afterward Willy disappeared and the camp never heard from him again.

It’s believed that Willy retreated to his cabin located on the far side of Bull Mountain, where years earlier he had buried both of his parents. Willy, much like his father had done some sixty years earlier, became a recluse and survived by scavenging for food and supplies. The popularity of Scouting meant an endless supply for Willy.

As the years have continued to pass by it’s hard to say what’s become of Willy. While nobody has definitively been in contact with the man there have been numerous sightings.



In 1983, while hiking on the far side of Bull Mountain, Scouts from Troop 70 came across a small lodging that was in disarray. The door was unhinged and the windows were broken. The carcasses of several animals lay on the ground outside the cabin.

In 1984, during a campfire in Bayview campsite, a member of Troop 70 spied a figure, cloaked in disheveled clothing, spying on the troop from behind a nearby tree. However, after reporting this to his SPL they found nobody behind the tree – only a torn piece of cloth.

Later, in 1986, members of Troop 70, again on a hike, found the skeletal remains of a large animal neatly piled off of a trail.

And in 2010, when a Scout from Troop 70 left camp after a Nentego Lodge event and rolled his car by the “Reverent” sign, it is said that he swerved to avoid hitting a bedraggled figure who had darted across the road in front of him.

Whether these events prove the existence of Three-Fingered Willy or not is up to you. But what is a fact is that year after year, while camping at Rodney, Scouts and troops report lost gear – gear such as axes, saws, rope, and food that are never again seen.

Perhaps it's simply the carelessness of young Scouts. Perhaps a mischievous raccoon has made off with the equipment. But if you hear noises in your campsite late at night, stay in your tent and leave your light off until the disturbance has stopped. Because perhaps Three-Fingered Willy is still scavenging, living somewhere on Bull Mountain.