

# History Nook

## Captain Pete of Puget Sound When fiction becomes fact!

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Continuing our summer exhibit theme of “The Smuggler’s Blues-The Illegal, Illicit & Immoral on the Salish Sea” we look at an early fictional effort written about the San Juans. Captain Pete of Puget Sound, published in 1909, was written by James Cooper Wheeler after he left our region in the 1890s. Mr. Wheeler is notable for founding the San Juan Islander newspaper and a headline for the Friday, June 18th, 1909 edition reads: *The Islander’s Founder Here*. It is worth reprinting the article in its entirety here. *Mr. and Mrs. James Cooper Wheeler, of New York City, arrived on the Rosalie from Seattle Wednesday to spend a few days visiting old friends of Mr. Wheeler in this county. Mr. Wheeler is a talented journalist and magazine writer who was quite well known on the Sound twenty years ago. He came here from Port Townsend in January 1891 and with the backing of the business men established the Islander, which he edited and published for about two years. He is now connected with the New York Evening Post and also writes much for eastern magazines, his articles being illustrated with photographs of his own taking. One of his books, written some time after he left here, is entitled, “Capt. Pete, of Puget Sound.” The scene is laid in this county and the story relates to smuggling operations of twenty years ago. “Capt. Pete” was Peter Graignic, for many years a resident of Waldron Island, who died about 10 years ago. Another of Mr. Wheeler’s stories is called “Capt. Pete, of Courtesan.” Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler will return to Seattle tomorrow*

*and leave there on the 23rd for Alaska, intending to go as far north as Nome.*

What is so intriguing about the book “Capt.

Pete of Puget Sound” is that “Pete”, the book’s protagonist, is the 14 year old son of French fisherman Edward Graignic and his Native American wife as the story unfolds. Cooper wrote the tale as a young man’s adventure novel, ca. 1890. Captain Pete Graignic has a fishing boat named the TYEE and resides on Waldron Island. Pete sails all over our region and regularly visits local landmarks including Friday Harbor where he sells salmon. He works with Port Townsend U.S. Custom agents to break up a smuggling ring. Captain Pete’s actions are critical to putting “Smuggler Kelly” in prison, and he becomes a rich young man and local hero in the process. Reading like a historical novel the prose seems entirely appropriate for the period but also includes words and phrases that we would find racist today. Less than 20 years after “Captain Pete” was published, the real life Prosper Graignic of Waldron Island was reputed to be one of Roy Olmstead’s top rum running captains in a twist of historical irony. The book is fairly rare but worth finding on the antiquarian market.



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