

New Tales From Old Haunts

The

# Legendary Pine Barrens



Paul Evans Pedersen Jr.

Illustrations by Jodi Weiss Pedersen

# Praise for *The Legendary Pine Barrens*

“Gather round this Pine Barrens campfire and listen to Pedersen spin his yarns ... a rich brew of the fanciful, the earthy, and the downright creepy.”

—Jim Waltzer, author, *Tales of South Jersey*

“The next generation of Pine Barrens legends has arrived, courtesy of Paul Pedersen! His fictional accounts of events set against the mystical backdrop of the pines leave a lasting impression. Readers will love the book’s entertaining stories, all told to the beat of a human heart.”

—Gabriel Donio, publisher, *The Hammonton Gazette*

“Pedersen is a Pine Barrens treasure. Reading his finely told tales, it’s easy to see why the Devil made him do it.”

—Dave Hart, co-author, *Mystery of the Jersey Devil* and other stories

“Entertaining and quirky. Pedersen’s tall tales are rife with backcountry wisdom and South Jersey flavor!”

—Brenda Kele, assistant to the director,  
Noyes Museum of Art, “Hangin’emton”

“[Pedersen] shines like a gem among the best of the legendary folk tale spinners of South Jersey.”

—Linda Stanton, founder, Lines on the Pines

“Paul Pedersen spins tales so clever and engaging you can hardly wait to get to the end to find out what happens. His yarns are sometimes funny, sometimes scary, and sometimes downright spine-chilling. Extraordinary!”

—Barbara Solem, author, *Ghost Towns and Other Quirky Places in the New Jersey Pine Barrens*

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# Welcome to My Pine Barrens

So, you'd like to hear some stories about the Pine Barrens? Seems like *lots* of folks want to hear stories about my Pine Barrens these days. Why not? This is a magical, mysterious place, indeed!

First of all, the Pine Barrens is a huge area of ancient forests, wetlands, bogs, and swamps in southern New Jersey. It has remained unchanged for a long, long time, although a lot of stupid people keep trying to change that: builders and land developers and the rest of that greedy bunch. But the Barrens has its own way of dealing with them, so not to worry too much.

There are a lot of special things, in and about the Pine Barrens, that happen here and nowhere else on Earth. Why, there are 30-some plants growing here that you couldn't find anywhere else in the world. Certain frogs and salamanders, snakes, birds, and other creatures live here, and call *only* the Pine Barrens of South Jersey home. On top of that, the largest reserve of pure water on the East Coast lies under the Pine Barrens.

What's more, the Pine Barrens is the only place "he" calls home. C'mon, now—you know who I mean! The famous 13th son of old Mrs. Leeds ... the *Jersey Devil*. He's still here, to this very day. Lurkin' about in the misty, quiet dead of the night, sneakin' hither and yon, and waitin' to scare the sweat out of anyone who happens to make his acquaintance.

So many other legends and stories are alive here, too. Where they've always been. Where they belong. And where they'll always stay. Like the legend of Joe Mulliner and his gang of Pine Robbers. Then there's the legend of Pastor Jack Morrison, and how he tried to bring the old hermit in the woods to the Lord and disappeared in a cranberry bog for his troubles. And it was here in the Barrens that an old Indian Chief cursed the rivers and streams to be forever stained red with the blood of his tribe. Then, too, there's the story of the Chakitty-Chikts—thousands of tiny trolls that *still* live in the Pines.

So what makes the Pine Barrens so special, you ask? Well, sit back and relax awhile, and I'll tell ya some stories, my friend. Stories from the south of Jersey.

Stories from the Pine Barrens.

## Dr. Mason's Patient

Other than the occasional songwriter, poet, or lollygagger who needs it to happen before they can get something done, nobody really thinks twice about a blue moon these days. But back in the mid-1800s, the folks who lived in a small Pine Barrens village called Bulltown had a good reason to celebrate the relatively rare astronomical occurrence. A blue moon is the second full moon in a given month, and the blue moon of October 1858 changed the lives of Bulltown residents by freeing them from the tyranny of a very strange man—a man whose demise was “memorialized by proxy,” you might say, on one of the most recognizable products ever to come out of the Pines.

The man, of course, was the one and only Raymus O'Dell.

Nobody knew exactly where Raymus was from, to tell you the truth, or why he turned up in Bulltown. There were those who said he was an escaped slave from Georgia who had made his way north to the Jersey Pine Barrens. Others said he was a nationalized English deckhand, originally from the Congo, who had jumped ship in Philadelphia, having arrived, coincidentally, right after the “Devil's Footprints” were discovered in Devon, England. Still others claimed (usually after several swigs from the apple oil jug) that he just appeared one evening in front of Green's General Store on Bulltown Road—the main street through town—with that mule,

cart, and harmonica of his, and started his carryin'-ons that wound up terrorizing Bulltown's folk and ended up with Raymus at the end of a long hank of 2-inch-thick braided hemp rope.

Raymus O'Dell was damned peculiar right from the start, when he first appeared. To begin with, he'd only show up in town on the evening of a full moon, just before it got dark. Then there was his appearance. He carried a cane and wore a black tuxedo with tails, a bright yellow shirt with red, frilly ruffles on each side of the buttons, and a top hat. A very large red feather rose from just above the brim of his hat, fastened with a silver band.

Peculiar, too, was the ice-blue color of Raymus's eyes. They were cold and intense—"scary-cold" in the words of the townsfolk—and particularly striking set against the blackest skin anyone in Bulltown had ever seen. Those eyes insisted on your complete attention, and, once they got it, it was hard to break away.

But perhaps the *most* peculiar thing about Raymus is what he'd say and do after jumping down off his wagon each month when he came into town. He'd spring from his seat, hit the ground, smile, and say, "I'm the only patient Dr. Mason didn't kill, so pay me now or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!"

Then Raymus would start stomping his right foot in the dirt to set and keep time, and he'd play a strange, eerily haunting tune on his harmonica. The music seemed to hang in its own echo, settling over the Pine Barrens like wet mist. "Music that were wet with sin" is what most folks said who heard it.

As if a powerful, unseen magnet was somehow switched on, when Raymus started playing, folks in earshot dropped whatever



they were doing to gather around him. They'd just stand there, listening. They didn't sing. They didn't hum along or tap their feet or dance. They'd just listen, looking into the strange, ice-blue eyes of this strange man nobody really knew a thing about.

After Raymus finished playing his harp, he'd tuck it in a pocket on the inside of his coat, smile, flip his top hat off his head, and shake it slightly at the end of his outstretched arm. "Pay me now, or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!" he'd say over and over again. And even though these were lean times in Bulltown, somehow, each month, Raymus managed to threaten his way to a good many coins going into that hat. It was as though folks were afraid to see what would happen if they *didn't* pay Raymus.

Jed and Jane Hoffman and their family were the first to find out.

It was January 1858. The nonsense with Raymus, as most people thought of it, was in its third year. Folks had been very generous on December's full moon with Raymus's hand-out because of Christmas and all, but it was an extraordinarily cold and snowy winter taking place, and it looked like it was going to continue. Everything in the Pines was frozen and caked with ice and snow, making life that much harder. It was so cold that the coal buggers—men who made charcoal for a living—were finding it extremely difficult to cut enough wood to feed the glasshouse furnaces in Bulltown, Crowleytown, and Green Bank. Men were getting frost-bite, saws and axes were "sticking" in the cold, and life and income money were slowing down like molasses.

Jed Hoffman was a coal bugger with 12 years of experience under his belt. His hands were frost-nipped and hurt like the devil

with “the rheumatoid” from using them every day of his life to try to earn a living. When Raymus came to town on that cold January evening, Jed stood there listening to him, along with his wife and several other families who were in town doing chores, just long enough for Raymus to get about one minute into his song.

Suddenly, Jed raised his hands up in the air and hollered, “You can stop right there, ’cause I ain’t payin’!”

A deafening quiet filled the air as Raymus stood there, seemingly staring straight through Jed with his cold blue eyes, then finally saying, “I’m the only patient Dr. Mason didn’t kill, so pay me now or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!”

“No, I won’t!” Jed said loudly. “I don’t give a damn *whose* patient you are or ever were. I don’t give a damn what’s wrong with you, who you are, or where you’re from. I work way too hard for my money, and I ain’t giving it to *you*! I need every penny for me and mine this month! Let’s go, Jane!”

And with that, Jed and Jane turned and headed down the street toward their home without paying Raymus or even bothering to look back. They hadn’t walked more than a hundred yards when the telltale column of black smoke started rising up into the deepening purple of the cold dusk sky.

“It’s the Hoffman place!” someone in the crowd yelled. Jed and Jane were running toward their home now, and as folks in the crowd started to follow, Raymus called out, “I’m the only patient Dr. Mason didn’t kill, so pay me now or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!”

They all turned, except the Hoffmans, and dropped coins into Raymus's hat as he stood there smiling a big smile, then continued as a group toward the Hoffman place to try to help put out the fire.

It was too late. The house had burnt to the ground. The many neighbors who had come to help just stood there in disbelief. The Hoffmans hadn't paid Raymus, and now their home was in ashes. Raymus's warnings, went the whispers in the crowd, were to be taken seriously, and in fact, they were from that night forward. On the rare occasion when they weren't, or couldn't be heeded, folks suffered the consequences.

In March, Dan Milnes happened to hear Raymus playing but had spent all his money earlier on some blacksmithing tools. Returning home that evening, he found all four of his horses dead.

In April, the Zane farm burnt down after Charlie Zane dropped a fake coin into Raymus's hat.

In May, none of the Fergusons' asparagus crop grew after Chet Ferguson tried to play along with Raymus on his fiddle, refusing to pay Raymus because, as he told the crowd, "Well, he ain't gonna pay *me!*"

And so it went for the rest of that summer in Bulltown. Raymus came to town each full moon and played, and if anyone heard it and didn't pay, catastrophe would follow.

After Raymus's visit in September, word of a secret meeting, to be held at Green's General Store, got around town. Most of the men in the area showed up for it. It was Jed Hoffman who spoke first.

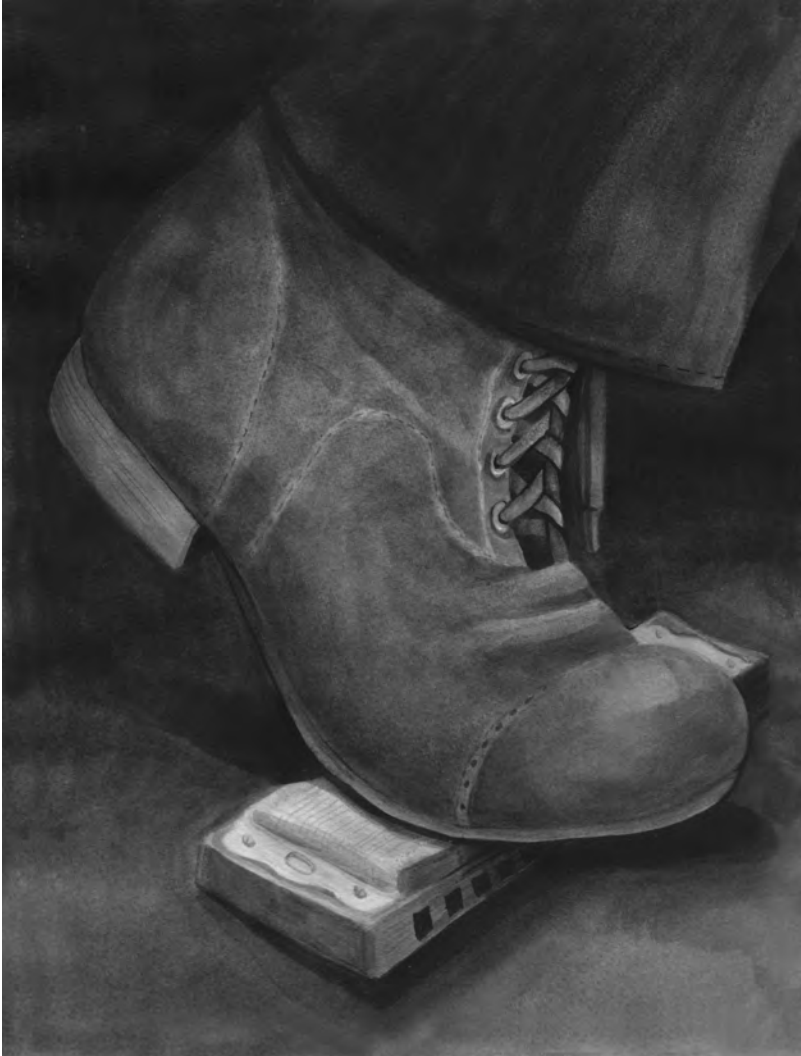
"As you-ins might or may not know, there's a blue moon comin' in October, and I'll be damned if I'm gonna pay that nasty old

sum'bitch twighst in one month. I vote we grab and hang him! As soon as he pulls up in that wagon, we gang-rush him, poke out those starin'-blue eyes so he can't trance anybody to death with 'em, and string him up right and proper out front here in that buttonwood tree." The vote was unanimous. Hang Raymus!

And so, on the evening of the blue moon in October 1858, Raymus O'Dell pulled into town, jumped down from his wagon, pulled out his harmonica, stomped his foot in the dirt, and started playing that eerie song. After a few seconds, he stopped abruptly. He was playing to nobody! Not a soul was to be seen, as if the town had been deserted. Raymus looked around and around, again and again, then suddenly shouted, "I'm the only patient Dr. Mason didn't kill, so pay me now or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!"

Suddenly, the saloon started smoking. Then Green's General Store burst into flames, followed by some of the smaller shops and houses on the street. It seemed that smoke was rising from every building in Bulltown, as if the entire town was burning.

All at once, from behind Green's, some 50 men rushed out into the street and tackled Raymus to the ground, and as fast as you could shake the stick that was used to poke out those strange, scary-blue eyes, Raymus was hanging from the big old buttonwood tree in front of Green's. Jed grabbed Raymus's harp, threw it into the dirt, and stomped on it, breaking it into pieces. Then the men ran into the woods to escape the burning town, leaving Raymus behind. Even as he was dying on the end of a rope he was heard to say, "I'm the only patient Dr. Mason didn't kill, so pay me now or pay me later, but pay me, yes, you will!"



When the townsfolk returned in the morning, their town was gone—burned completely to the ground, save for the buttonwood tree they'd hanged Raymus from. Under the tree, a small pile of ashes was all that was left of Raymus.

Since then, and to this day, buttonwood doesn't burn very well. Some say it was the curse Raymus put on that tree, and all buttonwoods, just before he died that caused the demise of the charcoal industry in the Pines.

It was Jane Hoffman who scooped up Raymus's ashes, putting them in a jar so he could later be buried, being the good Christian soul that she was. On a piece of paper she glued to the jar with pine sap, she wrote, "RAYMUS O'DELL ? 1858." But when her husband Jed saw it, he said in anger, "We aren't ever going to hear, mention, or write that man's name again around here, as far as I'm concerned!" He scratched out what Jane had written, and instead wrote: "MASON'S PATIENT (WITHOUT THE EYES) ? 1858."

Jed, who'd found work as a wooden mold maker at the Crowleytown Glass Works near Bulltown, kept that jar full of Raymus's ashes on top of his whittling tool chest. He looked at it several times a day for years and years while he was carving the wooden molds used by the glassblowers, thankful that the reign of the man contained therein was cut short and proud that he had been instrumental in bringing it about.

One morning, whilst having his coffee, an idea, along with a smile, came to Jed after he looked at Raymus's jar of ashes with the note that he and Jane had written still stuck to it.

It took close to a week, but he carved a solid maple fruit jar mold that would go on to be used to make thousands and thousands of fruit jars, recognizable the world over. The jar would become synonymous with the Pine Barrens and set Crowleytown Glass Works firmly in history's glasshouse hall of fame. It also served as a kind of secret commemorative item among those who remembered what happened in Bulltown in the fall of 1858.

To this very day, you can find Jed's jars in use and proudly displayed in antique shops and on collectors' shelves all over the world, bearing the words: MASON'S PATENT 1858.

So you see, Jed Hoffman made sure with that stick on Bulltown Road, and later with his wood mold carving tools, that to this day Mason's "patient" has no eyes.

## About the Author



Born and raised in southern New Jersey, Paul Evans Pedersen Jr. fell in love with the Pine Barrens in 1962, on his first camping trip with Haddonfield's Boy Scout Troop 64. In the dead of night, the campsite was visited by what Paul and his fellow campers—and, indeed, the troop leader himself—believe was the Jersey Devil. Having survived the inci-

dent, Paul found himself captive to the many lures and charms of the Pine Barrens, and inspired by its stories and songs to become a writer.

An avid collector of antique glass bottles, Paul has traveled throughout the Pine Barrens in search of these and other treasures—as well as spent time entertaining in Pinelands bars and taverns—fueled his curiosity about South Jersey's "primeval backyard" and the people and creatures who call it home. Many a story flowed from Paul's pen after a day or night spent exploring the swamps, sugar-sand roads, and out-of-the-way watering holes of the Pine Barrens.

In addition to writing short stories, Paul is an accomplished songwriter, performer, screenwriter, journalist, and photographer. He has been a reporter for *The Hammonton Gazette*, *Hammonton News*,



*Daily Journal* (Vineland), and *Retrospect Weekly*. He has worked as a professional firefighter in both New Jersey and Houston, Texas, and as a volunteer firefighter in Collingswood, New Jersey.

A prolific songwriter, Paul's songs have been widely recorded and can be heard on both terrestrial and satellite radio locally, nationally, and internationally. Among his notable hits are "Cape Lonely," performed by Michael Mason, and "The Screamin' Holler Inn," performed by Paul, as Paul Evans, on the album *Agua Noir*. Seven of Paul's songs, all sung by his wife, Cookie, appeared on the soundtrack of the 2012 movie *Breathless*, starring Val Kilmer, Gina Gershon, and Ray Liotta.

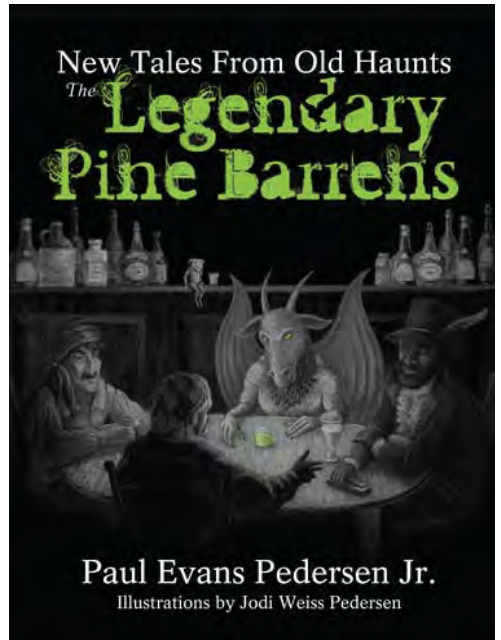
As a performer, Paul has been singing and playing drums and guitar in bands from the time he was 12. In the 1990s, he toured the U.S. and Canada with the Hall Of Fame Show out of Nashville, Tennessee, which featured such country music greats as Bill Monroe, Grandpa Jones, Hank Thompson, Johnny Paycheck, Little Jimmy Dickens, and Jeannie C. Riley. A South Jersey favorite, Paul performs locally whenever he can.

In 2009, Paul self-published *Required Restroom Readings*, a collection of his short stories and Haiku poetry. He has developed many of his short stories into screenplays.

Paul is known to South Jersey fashionistas as the inventor and maker of "Pine Barrens Diamonds," a line of jewelry he handcrafts from antique glass. He lives in Elm, New Jersey, with Cookie, with whom he shares four children, 10 grandchildren, and one overgrown blond Labrador retriever.

He is currently working on his first novel.

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