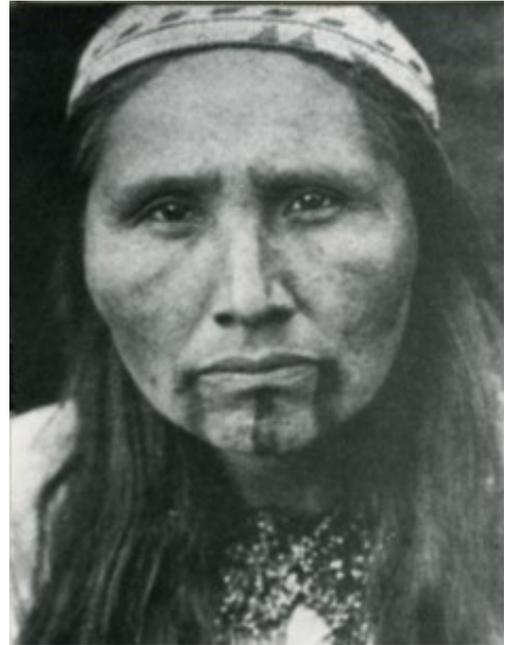

Expressing Identity

Tattooing was common among tribes along the Oregon Coast. The III or “one-eleven” symbol on a woman’s chin (see photo) was probably the most prevalent and most noticeable. A few Upper Coquille ancestors are known to have had these tattoos, along with women from many coastal tribes in Northern California. The Lower Coquille and Coos Bay tribal women had skin-stitch tattoos on their wrists and sometimes dot tattoos on their faces, while tribal members of both sexes got lines tattooed on their arms at an early age to measure dentalium (a decorative seashell that was frequently used as a kind of currency). Most tattooing was done during puberty ceremonies, which included fasting, food restrictions, and seclusion and lasted from a week to 10 days. Each tribe had a different meaning behind its tattoos. For some it was a status symbol, for others it represented good luck, long life, or beauty.



Revitalization of tribal tattoos is taking place today. For many decades, tattooing, like many other traditional customs, was restricted by white authorities and religious groups, and Native people did not want to draw attention to themselves. Today, many Native people are feeling more confident about their racial and tribal identity and are interested in connecting with their tribal traditions.

How do you express your identity to others?

Sources

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