SECTION C

MYSTERY MONEY PIT

I believe in evidence. I believe in observation, measurement, and reasoning confirmed by independent observers. I'll believe anything, no matter how wild and ridiculous, if there is evidence for it. The wilder and more ridiculous something is, however, the firmer and more solid the evidence will have to be."

— **Isaac Asimov**, **The Roving Mind**

Chapter Seven

ROOT AND BRANCH OF THE STORY

Basically the soil was perfect. Just compact enough to hold its form. The moisture content was equally void of excess and no other duff or erratics were contaminating my construction. It appeared the ratio of sand, pebbles, and other available material would be sufficient for the height and load-bearing needs of my structure. *But then my Mom called for me to wash my hands and come in for dinner!*

Now I am writing a section in my first book about DIRT! All about settlement, compaction, and consolidation of certain formulas of soil! I should have informed my Mom how important in my future - digging in her garden would be. She could have wryly responded with my need to fully understand mathematics and do my homework, if I were to reach my dirt-digging pinnacle. And right she was. For it is my lack of math skills that forces me to hire experts to formulate soil settlement-over-time. These equations will tell us *WHEN* the Money Pit was filled.

In this section of the book we assist your putting on crime scene investigator glasses and see the answers in plain sight. Here we review the recordation of the area around the fabled depression and in the Money Pit itself. We will glean the forensic evidence, which builds our case as to *WHEN* this excavation was filled in.

Here In Chapter 7, "*Root and Branch of the Story*," we concentrate on examining just the areas around the depression and the depression itself. Then, in Chapter 8, "*Planting Evidence*" we will follow suit, concentrating inside the Money Pit, with specific focus on the soil, the rot, and decay of the oak logs. Both chapters will provide us with scientifically proven ranges-of-time that, when plotted, will tell us the *WHEN* of Oak Island.

First let us read what those before us have said they saw. Read it and yet, see with your mind what they were describing and what they were telling us.

Author's Reminder

Those of you who've read novels or nonfiction accounts of the Oak Island Treasure story know it's telling began over fifty years after the presumed discovery. Like you, we know of the embellishments, the aggrandizing, and the liberties with which long-ago storytellers painted this tale. Very little of the original story can be verified or properly evaluated due to the swarm of known mistruths buzzing around the legend. Some don't believe a word of the entire enigma and readily prate on about the pyrite of pirate puffery which is Oak Island. Of course the recent scientific finding of gold & silver traces within the water in a tight group of sunken shafts have the detractors shut down for now.

Yet we do have the unmistakable, unshakeable, and uncanny find of coconut fibers throughout the eastern drumlin. They are not fabrications or flimsy foists of folly. They are real fibers and attest to something having happened on Oak Island.

Therefore, it is with this trepidation we weed-whack the growth of gobbledygook that so gums up what is written as we work to determine the worthy from the waste. It appears more and more each day that in fact, something did happen there, and we hope to prove the *WHEN* of it all. We, however, are mining the written words for those bits of truth to the tale.

On the following pages are the most relevant comments taken from our Appendix C, "*On the Record*" collection of quotes. These are some snippets of lengthier quotations. Feel free to read more comments and in their full contextual quotations, comments, or reports which can be found in Appendix C, and have the same assigned numbering in chronological order.

What Others have Opined

8. "The Oak Island Diggings," by J.B. McCully, October 16, 1862. Published correspondence by "The Liverpool Transcript." Pgs. 3 & 8.

> *"A Mr. McGinnis went to Oak Island to make a farm, when he discovered the spot in question from its being sunken, and from the position of three oak trees, which stood in a triangular form round the pit. The bark had letters cut into it with a knife on each tree facing the pit, and one of the trees being so directly over the pit, that two large branches formed a crotch, were exactly perpendicular to the center, and had a hole bored through, and an oak tree-nail driven in, on which hung a tackle block…"*

I, personally, do not believe most of what is described here other than there being a sunken spot or depression. Think for a moment. You have three oak trees in a triangular form around this pit and one luckily has two large branches forming a crotch directly over the depression – exactly perpendicular to the center of that depression! What are the odds? Later we discuss this unlikely description in depth. Nor do I believe the supposed 'markings'. A Broad Arrow surveyor would want to place the marks to be visible by anyone in the area and not facing each other in a 13 ft circle. Northern Red Oak bark would definitely need to be marked with an axe. The rest is more treasure story fiction by a gentleman who was secretly doing this for a reason as you read in Chapter #5.

9. "Oak Island, The Reasons for Supposing Treasure is Buried There," by Paul Pry, February 19, 1863. Printed in the *Yarmouth Herald*. Pgs. 1-6.

> *"It appears that about 64 years ago* [1799], *a man residing on the island first discovered indications of a pit having been dug. A circular piece of ground covered with clover, and oak trees growing by the side of it, a large bough of one of them extending over the spot, and a strong oak tree nail driven through the bough into the body of the tree, …his surprise was very great on finding the circular clover field, where no clover was supposed to grow on the island. …They found the earth where the clover grew, sunken below the level of the ground immediately around it. And on digging the earth, required only the shovel and spade…"*

Assuming this storyteller is repeating an already enhanced growing legend, there is something within this clutter that deserves attention. Clover is not a familiar enhancement to pirate treasure lore. No other treasure legend is cloaked with red clover as some sort of oddity or indicator of mysterious men mounting a dig. Yet the description is quite specific and gives a clear and concise image to this anomaly. Why? Was it the sole 'fact' mixed in with the hype? We discuss this later and you may be surprised.

10. "History of the Oak Island Enterprise – Chapter 1," By James McNutt. January 2, 1864. Printed in *The Colonist*. Truro, Nova Scotia. Pgs. 1-4.

> *"…McGinnis, while roaming over the Island one day discovered a spot that gave unmistakable proof of having been visited by someone a good many years previously. He found that the first growth of wood had been cut down, and that another was springing up to supply its place. And some old stumps of oak trees that had been chopped down were visible. Near this place stood one of the original Oaks with a large, forked branch extending over the old clearing. To the forked part of this branch, by means of a wooden trunnel converting the fork into a small triangle, was attached an old tackle block."*
>
> *"…and on taking the block from the tree, it fell to the ground and tumbled to pieces. While investigating the place they found that the remains of a tolerably well-made road from it to the west shore of the Island, were still discernable. …They found that the ground over which the block and tackle swung had settled and formed a hollow. They cleared the young timber from the sunken ground and removed the surface soil for about two feet, when they struck a tier of flag stones, evidently not formed there by nature. Afterwards they ascertained that these stones were not indigenous to the Island, but must have been taken from Gold River, about two miles distant."*

Without going over future sections of this book here, let's note the introduction of "one of the original Oaks" found along our depression. It is said to have this forked branch growing over the depression and frequently described as 15 ft or 16 ft above ground and growing out over the depression. How lucky. Now look at the photos of those old canopied-trees. Do you see any of those trees growing any similarly described branching that could meet these

last two descriptions? We will read about this magic branch with the fork or 'crotch' exactly where any pirate engineer would require, so as to hoist laden chests in and out of the deep hole below. Perhaps this is why the other 364 islands would not suffice – *no tree had the perfectly formed branching!*

16. "The Story of Oak Island – 1895," by Frederick L. Blair. Included in "Buried Treasure", part of Oak Island Treasure Company's Public Share Offering. "Additional" Information included.

> *"In 1795, three men – Smith, McGinnis, and Vaughn, visited the island and while rambling over the eastern part of it, came to a spot, of which the unusual and strange conditions at once engaged their attention. It had every appearance of having been cleared many years before. Red clover and other plants altogether foreign to the soil in its natural state were growing. Near the center stood a large oak tree with marks and figures on its trunk. One of the lower and larger branches of this, the outer end of which had been sawed off, projected directly over the center of a deep circular depression in the land about 13 feet in diameter. These and other "signs" shortly after led the three men named to commence work.*
>
> *…Among the "other signs", which led the discoverers to dig, was the remains of a hoisting block, such as is used on sailing crafts, hanging to the limb of a tree, which over-hung the "Money Pit." Some accounts say this had fallen into the depression in the earth. It is not strange that at this late day there should be some variations in the story; but considering the nature of a hoisting fall, it is not improbable that both are correct.*
>
> *…The pirates had quite a road from the west of the Money Pit, quite visible to the oldest diggers of all, and easily traced when I was there, and could be yet if it has not been plowed."*

Mr. Blair, realizing the embellishments were getting out of hand, reigns in the retelling of the story so investors don't discard it as a carnival act. The tree limb remains. The block and tackle remain. The depression and its size remains. The marks on the tree remain. The red clover remains. And the pirate road remains. I would have suggested to our lucky boys to trace the markings on the tree as they could be helpful to find out if they were pirate markings or more concerning - ownership markings. And if not them, then

perhaps the Onslow Company should have thought to note those markings for later interpretation, or even to impress investors. Yet the tree(S) got excised, and the markings become firewood. Kinda like the 90 ft stone ended up in the mantle of a fireplace. Note: With all the hub-bub of "stone roads" leading from and around the swamp during Season #8 of Curse of Oak Island cable show, where are the remnants of that road leading from the Money Pit all the way to the western shore of the island?

18. "Oak Island Mystery: The Kempton Variant," by Reverend A.J. Kempton, Summer 1909. Written by a hired schoolteacher in preparation for a book.

> *"In 1795 one of these old settlers sauntering about the island came to a spot among the oaks on the highest part of the island where the ground showed plain signs of having worked over for quite a space as all was level – no cradle hills, and in some places white clover was growing in profusion. Of course, this seemed strange to him and on his return to his home he mentioned to his family, and a neighbor and they made a special visit to the island to examine more closely. While looking the ground over, one of his sons, a lad of 15 looked up and to the surprise of all, there suspended from a large limb of one of the giant oaks was a heavy block, such as are used for hoisting, and boy like, he went up to examine…*
>
> *…This block and the condition of the ground led the men to think that something must have been buried there, as the level ground and the white clover were unusual, and oaks do not generally bear such acorns and what could be buried there unless it was 'some pirates money'."*

When your wife is out and you are responsible for making dinner, what is the common plan? Simple. You take out remaining leftovers. Add a can of veggies or some other easily found item on the top shelf of the refrigerator, scoop out some butter, and mix. Toss into the microwave and heat! Here we have tossed in 'cradle hills,' strange acorns, a heavier block and bumped up the oak to gigantic size. But you forgot the red clover and mixed in white clover by mistake. How's it tasting? In this case, the fiction author did not do his due diligence, now did he.

60. "The Bones in the Pit – Who Built the Oak Island Money Pit and What's Hidden There," by Bill Thompson, Nov. 20, 2014. Historical Prelude. Pgs. 1-3.

> *"…wandered around and saw a depression in the ground. A huge oak tree with an outstretched limb stood in a clearing. Hanging from the limb was an ancient block and tackle… the kind used on sailing ships. Directly below the end of the limb was the depression." The place looked to the boy as though someone had purposely cleared some trees and dug a hole, probably a long, long time ago. "They began to dig in the saucer-like depression. The digging wasn't difficult; the ground was loosely packed, indicating someone had filled it in at a time in the past. …2 ft down there was a layer of flat stones not indigenous to Oak Island. It soon became obvious they were clearing a round hole about 12 or 13 ft in dia."*

An *ancient block and tackle*… used on sailing ships! Unfortunately block and tackle devices have been used for quite some time, even back in 1795. The compound pulley system was invented by Archimedes around 250 BC, though it is reported people used a simple pulley as far back as 1500 BC. More pontification ahead.

64. "The Secret Treasure of Oak Island, The Amazing True Story of a Centuries-old Treasure Hunt," by D`Arcy O`Connor, 2018. Updated Version. Chapter One, Pgs. 2 & 3.

> *"As he was wondering through the island's densely wooded eastern end, he came to an area that appeared to have been worked at some far earlier time. It was a small clearing in which rotted, moss-covered tree stumps were visible. In the center of the clearing stood a large oak tree with a thick limb about fifteen feet up that had been cut off several feet out from the trunk. Below the end of this branch the ground had settled into a shallow, saucer-shaped depression. They set to work digging in the center of the depression and found that their shovels could easily bite into the relatively loose soil. Two feet down they encountered the first of many pieces of evidence that someone had been there before. It was a layer of carefully laid flagstones – a type of rock that is not natural to Oak Island. (The stones were later found to have originated at Gold River, about two miles up the coast on the mainland). When they cleared away the earth and removed the flagstones, they found themselves working in what obviously was a refilled circular shaft, about 13 ft in diameter."*

Like the quandary regarding the red clover's involvement in this story, we come to a significant description of what would normally be an overlooked issue: that of flagstone. We've read about finding flagstone or a flat stone level 2 ft below the topsoil. Now we read a peculiar narrative about it being foreign to the island and was determined to come from Gold River. What prey tell is the storyteller trying to communicate here? If the flagstone was found on the island, would its location several feet below in the deepening depression be no big deal? Why is it seemingly important to tell us from where it came? Did someone back then actually traipse around looking for a source of flagstone in a geology covered in slates and feel it critical to locate the source of "THIS" flagstone? Soon we will address yet another bizarre factoid.

71. "Oak Island Encyclopedia Vol. 1," by Hammerson Peters, June 2019. Part One – The Discovery. Pgs. 19-36.

> *"On the eastern end of the island, he came upon a clearing in the brush. In the middle of the clearing was a depression in the soil and suspended directly above the depression from a sawed-off oak branch was a rusted and rotting block and tackle. …Armed with picks and shovels, Daniel McGinnis, John Smith, and Anthony Vaughan rowed out to Oak Island and started digging in the depression on the eastern end of the island. They discovered that the soil in the clearing had indeed been previously worked and was relatively easy to dig through compared to the surrounding earth. Two feet from the surface, they uncovered a layer of flat flagstones which were not endemic to the island. Later, the young men learned that the stones had probably come from Gold River, a waterway which enters the Atlantic about two miles north, on the mainland. This evidence affirmed that the hole was man-made, and encouraged McGinnis, Smith, and Vaughan to dig further. After digging for some time, it became obvious to the three men that the hole in the clearing was really a circular shaft about 13 ft. in diameter which had been filled in some time in the past." P. 20.*
>
> *"A flagstone is a flat stone historically used for paving, flooring, fencing, and roofing. Many Oak Island researchers believe that, if a layer of flagstones was truly discovered in the Money Pit two feet below the surface, it was likely placed as a marker, and was gradually covered up by many years' worth of wind-blown dirt and detritus." (p. 22.)*

This reportage is a compilation of many descriptions made by others of the site of the depression. You can just about read the layers upon layers of conjecture with those curious bits of facts lumped in. In a way, those lumpy facts have remained and have met the criteria of possible forensic evidence. Now it is time to examine them with logic and commonsense.

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Observable Oak Island

I've limited the re-listing here of pertinent comments from Appendix C, *"On the Record."* Many more remarks are available. Indulge yourself to read what many more have said concerning these topics. As other authors have pointed out and you should keep in mind, these descriptions were written as early as sixty-four years *after* the depression was found and *after* those who undertook the challenge to dig down. Whether embellishments, or editorializing, or inconsistencies, this is all we have when forensically looking at dating this excavation and refill. There are many anomalous sightings or scientific improbabilities in these and other statements. This will be brought out shortly. I am not fond of showing glaring errors in one half of a statement, but then relying on the second half to forensically prove something. Yet, if I simply skirted some of these obvious and problematic issues, it would taint the entire validity of the work. So, I want to hold off explaining this statement after we review and analyze the "Field Observations" extracted from the multitude of comments.

Field Observations

We first deployed your 'crime scene investigator' skills, in Chapter 3, "*Wooden you Know.*" There we did field observations on many very old photographs of the mystery canopied-trees. Then, we attempted to glean taxonomic characteristics of those trees – from those photos. Once completed, we were able to compare what we saw, with a host of other tree species vying to be identified as those mystery trees. Here, once again, we would like you to use your crime scene investigator eyes and ears to filter the text, listening for descriptive clues. Of those snippets we just read and in Appendix C, can they really supply us with any usable forensic evidence that supports the time sequence this book is going to proffer in solving the *WHEN* of Oak Island? There is a lot of 'chaff' in this dialogue yet seeds of truth are told. Let's review what our Field Observation filtered out to use. The table on the following page is that reviewed rendition.

Field Observations

Created by David Neisen

TREE(S)
Very large, old oak tree alive near the edge of the depression in the center of clearing
Two other oak trees alive on other sides of the depression, forming a triangle around
Larger, older oak was an 'original' oak with large branch extending out over clearing
Large oak in center of clearing
BRANCH(ES)
Lower, massive branch 15 ft above the ground growing directly over the depression
2 large branches forming a crotch or triangle with an installed tree nail connecting both
Large singular branch has fork over depression with tree nail connection making a triangle shape
Large branch is over clearing where fork in branch is cut off and both branches very thick
Tree nail driven through bough into the body of tree
BARK
Bark had letters cut into it with a knife.
Trunk has marks or figures or initials or an arrow pointed down on it
Markings on bark were on side of the 3 trees facing into the depression facing each other
AREA AROUND PIT
1st growth cut within a small forest clearing - old rotten, moss covered oak stumps visible
2nd growth springing up in clearing, long time ago it had been worked, young timber in pit
Dense wooded eastern drumlin, Lg. oak tree in center of clearing with lower limb cut off
Middle of the clearing was a depression who's ground had clearly been worked over
Original oak in center of clearing with large forked-branch over the clearing
A clearing in bush with depression in middle of clearing. Oaks do not bear such acorns
Quite well-made tolerable road leading to island west shore, still discernable & traceable
Clearing on east drumlin on highest point, quite a space of level land with no cradle hills
ITEM AND METHOD OF HANGING
Hoisting block, block and tackle, old tackle box, wooden tackle block, rusted and rotted
Hanging from forked limb of oak tree,
Held in place with wooden peg, tree nail, trunnel
Tree nail through drilled holes in forked branch creating small pyramid
Tree nail through bough into body of tree
FLAGSTONE (Chapter 8)
2 ft. under soil in depression, nicely laid floor of flagstone carefully laid covering hollow
Flagstone was not natural or indigenous to the island, differed from Oak Island stones
Determined to come from mouth of Gold River & Atlantic Ocean, 2 mi. north of the island
Likely placed as a marker, later covered by wind-blown dirt and detritus
CLOVER (Chapter 8)
Clover was red, clover was white and growing in profusion, in a circular clover field
Red clover and surrounding plants were foreign to the island, not native to area, unique
No clover supposed to grow on island, or growing in soil in its natural state
Clover grew in sunken depression below the level of ground all around it [depression]
Clover only grew in circular sunken depression
DEPRESSION (Chapter 8)
Deep, Saucer-shaped, sunken hollow, shaped round, soil settled from previous dug hole
Between 7, 12-13 ft and 16 ft in diameter and deeper in center of depression
Deep bowl-shaped depression directly under extended branch from one of large oaks around it
Soft soil in depression, easy to dig with young timber in it. Clover grew in the depression
Located in the center of a clearing or area of cut trees at base of one large oak, under fork

Though repetitive at times as one commentator repeats what he may have read previously, we do hear a commonality in these statements that provide enough detail to envision our crime scene. Below, divided by the primary groupings of field observations, we discuss their probability and applicability forensically.

Trees & Branches

Those who opined wanted desperately to set the image of a magical, if not forbidden, area of the island and all under the canopy of a very large "original" oak tree. We immediately run into an issue with tree growth characteristics growing in a forest, versus growing unobstructed in a large clearing. One says the clearing is "*quite a space as all was level with no cradle hills*." Most others report the clearing was small in relativity to the 13' diameter depression. Yet both are problematic. Generally speaking, that part of the island is relatively level and if trees have been felled, is that not "being worked by the hand of man?" Or is this an implication of work done to level the land and flatten out any 'cradle hills?'

A small opening in a dense wooded forest with three large oak trees, and one being an "original Oak," is just as fraught with suspicion. I will reference the "original" oak tree as the 'patriarch' tree as it was not an original canopied-tree. Remember, some say the clearing also had signs of man's presence with oak stumps seen. So all in all, this is a stand or a grove of oak trees in a dense wooden forest. It appears one of these three trees creating a triangle of trees just outside the perimeter of this 13 ft. diameter depression had a huge branch growing directly over the deep sunken hollow. It was also centered in this small clearing.

Normally, had the patriarch oak tree grown by itself outside the forest with its large crown, thicker trunk with a large branch growing 90^{o} degrees out of tree then a small clearing would make sense. The tree itself with its dominant crown canopy would maintain a clearing around it as new growth would not acquire enough light.

However, as Dr. Craig Holdrege discusses in his article, "*The Forming Tree*" (an attachment to this book), had the patriarchal tree grown up "in" the forest, its physical description would be significantly different and not ascribe to this storyline. Below is a photograph of an existing older Northern Red Oak (NRO), currently living on Oak Island.

Oak Tree on Lot #5. Courtesy of Robert Young at www.oakislandlotfive.ca.

This photograph provides the best example of the descriptors with which our storytellers have infused into the legend. What is not present are the smattering of old oak stumps, moss, and a cadre of *three* large oaks, nor the 13' diameter depression covered in red clover. The thumbnail image to The right provides you a better recognition of the shape of the Oak within the stand of trees, as the speckled light camouflaged it well.

In this recent photograph you can make out a patriarch tree with a large branch extended horizontally outward into the clearing. Notice how no branches appear on the left side of the tree. Also, all the trees around this oak appear much younger and growing in the typical forested fashion of straight up to reach the canopy for light. It is obvious that the larger oak has dominant canopy control, which is why there is this clearing in the first place. The understory would not have received the necessary light for growth. The photo appears to be taken early in the day based on the shadows and the brightness of a day's sunrise. Still the larger oak's crown shades the forest floor.

I await exact measurements, but it appears the Larger oak has a 90^{o} branch approximately 15-18 ft above the ground, with a branch diameter estimated at 16 inches. The size of the "clearing" is approximately 22 ft. across. No stumps or moss are evident, and the penetrating sunlight gives this forest floor only partial shade.

Northern Red Oak shoots or saplings require more than 30% sunlight for six hours a day to sustain growth. This clearing appears to be naturally formed due to the control of this biome by the larger oak tree.

What about the large branch growing directly above the depression?

First, we would assume the depression came after the branch, as the branch is utilitarian for the purposes of the pit below. Secondly, the branch grew in this manner as it was accessing the light available on that side of the tree, which would be the westerly sun. The emphasis by the tree in growing such large branches on this side shows the lack of "competition," or, *as Dr. Holdrege may assign* - a 'cooperation' with the existing lack of forest canopy limiting light access on that one side. Therefore, the tree shows us there was ample light on its right side to support the branching we see at the start of its life. With this assumption, we can further postulate the lack of branches on its left side was most likely due

to older growth (bigger than this large Oak) on its left side offering little light. Perhaps, this Oak was on the forested edge or on the perimeter of a stand of trees earlier in time.

In the previous photograph the question is which came first - the predominant Northern Red Oak tree, or the surrounding forest? I think the answer is obvious with the size and shape and branching of this *Quercus rubra*.

In these next three washed-out photos (for context), these images show the patriarch tree and views of its upper and left side. These images were cleaned of foliage, so tree shape was clearer. Note the bark on the tree!

Again, below is the same patriarch tree as identified in the first photograph but looking up its trunk on its left side.

This is the side of the tree closest to the older forest growth and was the opposite side from the clearing. The large lower branch is the same one protruding into that clearing, as we have discussed.

Yet what about three large Oaks, ringing the 13 ft. diameter depression?

Good question. The first photograph if scaled properly would require two more large oak trees in triangular formation. In imagining such a scenario, are we simply enlarging the clearing to fit them? Or would their addition and their age affect both the surrounding newer growth and perhaps even the patriarch tree?

Had the patriarch tree grown up amongst two other similarly sized trees, would not their close proximity to each other (triangulating around a 13 ft. diameter pit have prevented the patriarch tree from growing such a large branch into the center of their midst? As those two other brethren would now be blocking it from those afternoon hours of sunshine, which is critical for the species to form a more open crown – *and those 90^{o} branches*. The two other oaks we have no description of other then they were large as well. Yet it does beg the question if they too had large branches or were they morphologically characteristic of forested growth? If the latter, then we know the other two trees were juvenile to the patriarch Oak or part of a newly emerging forest understory, most likely in a previously cleared field. Remember, the description of the depression was long after our ancient voyagers departed the island. They would have had to clear over a hundred trees for their below ground constructs. The patriarch tree remained for its utilitarian purposes, and the later Oaks grew faster than others as they most likely grew from a recently cut stump. Northern Red Oaks prefer to grow from stumps (stools) rather than from acorns. Though I will remind the reader – *these were not Oak trees!*

Those smaller trees surrounding the soon-to-be pit would meet their demise as they were all felled for construction of log platforms within the pit, and the mystery road to the west end of the island.

The image we have from the recent Oak Island forest can explain the order with which our storytellers may have some credibility. Or, again, not!

Some argue the large “patriarch” oak tree was one of the “original” oak trees of which we have photos. This book refers to them as ‘mystery canopied-trees.’ We surmise the shape of this large oak tree because of its huge lateral branch extending so pronounced. This taxonomically helps define it as most assuredly growing outside of the forest or on its periphery. Yet none of the photographed mystery canopied-trees, which all grew in domination of the forested canopy where they resided, show any similarities in shape to the oaks described at the depression. None have large lower branches. None have any discernable branching below 30 ft. None have any branching at 90^{o} angles to the trunk. None have similarly described bark. None would have been effectuated by phototropism (branching issues) as they towered over their understory brethren. All of the branches visible in all the photos show their limbs growing upwards at 60^{o}-80^{o} angles. Furthermore, the description discussing branch dimensions after the fork suggest that they are as thick as a man’s thigh. I’m a big guy and that would put the circumference at 24”, or at 7.6 inches in diameter. Again, none of those photographed canopied-trees appear to have the girth and volume to grow or have such limbs.

In addition, we have the insistence of a three-tree pyramid layout surrounding the 13 ft diameter depression. This paints the image as if the trees themselves were protecting that “hollowed” ground (pun intended). Odd isn’t it that the oldest living tree amongst them had the enormous branch extended out exactly over the depression. And the bough was 15 ft above the ground. I suggest it was quite a lucky setup. Had the branch grown several degrees to either the right or to the left on its trunk, then the pit within the depression would have been under one of the other two trees of the pyramid. This doesn’t even address that these trees are too close to each other if they grew the way they were described. Try this test…

Stand in your bedroom which is about 13 ft from wall to wall. Now imagine three large, old NRO trees growing in three of the corners. One has a branch that just so happens to grow a large enough forked limb to be directly out over the center of your room. Remember, these oaks are big and tall and have been there for a very long time. Now imagine you dug down a deep shaft, from wall to wall to wall of your bedroom. As deep as 110 ft down! Next chapter we will discuss the unbelievable volume of dirt and boulders and stones you would have had to excavate from that hole as well as the number of trees you needed to fell to build the ten or eleven platforms on the way down. But just imagine how many roots from those three oak trees you would have needed to chop your way through to dig down into that hard blue clay ground.

And, as lucky as you were to find the only oak on this island that had such a sturdy branch… with a fork in its limb at just the distance out from the tree, think of how many tens of thousands of times you would have needed to haul up the rope with a heavy sack, barrel, basket, or bucket of dirt! I bet they went through lots and lots of 'block and tackle.'

Finally, the trees were said to be large and alive. If they were NRO's, this species grow deep, lateral-spreading roots that spread out as much as 3-7 times the tree's crown diameter! Again, look at the images of those canopied-trees. Do you see any of them within 13 ft of the other? Furthermore, NRO trees require much space above as they are shade intolerant, and below ground, as their root systems do not like being obstructed by rocks and boulders.

Yet our treasure-seeking trio were able to dig down 30 ft in the soft, previously disturbed soil without needing pick axe or much effort. If the trees were still alive when the trio dug, then the tree(s) had been growing roots. Would not the tree roots grow back after they were hacked out during the initial dig?

With the pit so close to the trunk of three trees, all so close together, the combined root system would have already regrown dramatically within the soft fill of the depression. Yet not a peep about roots. Talk about a lucky find! Had this "clearing" once been within a dense forest or stand, the oaks would not have grown as described. Instead the NRO would have grown tall with a columnar bole, incidental underdeveloped limbs, and topped with a small, rounded head. These specific taxonomical characteristics can be found in Chapter 4, "*Barking up the Wrong Tree*."

Most descriptions impress upon the reader the size of the branches, the fact limbs were cut off past the fork in the branch, and how high above the ground the lowest branch grew. Later I will point out why a branch 15 ft. above the ground is too low to use the hoisting apparatus they claim was used in the excavation.

Bark

Image of NRO Bark. Courtesy U.S. NPS

To the left is a close-up of Northern Red Oak bark. Heavily fissured, rough, and dark grey/green color in maturity, this is not a bark you attempt to use a *Swiss Army Knife* on. You would have more success using a *chainsaw* to sink letters or 'unknown' marks into this trunk. This photo does not appear to match the bark seen on those canopied-trees in the degraded photos, as shown in Appendix F, "*Guardians of the Keep*."

Yet, it does look similar to the bark on the photo of the patriarch NRO at the start of this chapter. So this is the bark of those hypothetical three Oaks where they grew around the depression and were marked on the inward facing trunk of the tree? One would imagine, like with the 90 ft stone, the letters or marks ought to have been recorded if indeed there was excitement of this being buried pirate loot. Could such marks have indicated which pirate or ancient voyager was involved? Wouldn't this provide tantalizing marketing material to sell the treasure story to investors? It appears the Onslow Company had no interest in those marks as they were quick to cut them down as they built their pit collar and cribbing operation. If it was good enough for our ancient voyagers to dig the pit originally, why not keep those mighty oaks around the pit now? *Odd*.

Area Around the Pit

I have already performed a protracted pontification on this clearing issue. A few more squabbles before we move on. We were told this area was on the highest elevation of the island. It was not. We are told it must have been worked as there were no cradle hills seen. Cradle hills? Well like everything else, there is a new term, which is "*Tree-tip pit and mound topography*." Yep! If you ever walked into an old growth forest, you find the ground is rarely level. As trees fall or are blown down, their root-ball is uprooted and leaves a hole or sunken pit where it once was. The tree rots away, the hole fills in with some organic material, but it still remains "pock-marked." Over time, the area appears to have been under artillery assault! These are considered "micro-elevational" changes to the forest floor horizon. Not sure why hummock, knoll, or mound would not suffice. But *Tree-tip pit and mound topography* it now is. So this observation seems to encompass a much larger area than simply around a 13 ft diameter depression and some big trees. *Back to the observations.*

A few write of rotted oak stumps covered in moss surrounding the clearing or were part of the clearing. Possible. The moss most prevalent on Oak Island today is Pin Cushion Moss (*Leucobryum*

glaucum), which is a bryophyte, a long-lived, evergreen moss. This moss persists on duff, exposed roots, and soils in Coniferous and mixed Coniferous/Deciduous forests. They prefer it moist and appreciate medium shade to partial sun in the afternoon. Though they can tolerate some morning sunfleck, they like to start the day in the dark. The issue for me is the stumps.

The Northern Red Oak more frequently grows new shoots and suckers from cut stumps than other Boreal forest trees. For the NRO, 85% of their successful propagation method are shoots from stools (live stumps), rather than from acorns. The success rate is even higher on smaller oak stools than large ones. This would be the condition described as those ancient voyagers would have targeted nearby trees with bole diameters of 6-8 inches or less. It is possible our ancient voyagers were using the practice of "coppice" to manage the taking of timber without destroying the tree and its root system. This agricultural procedure would expedite the forest's regrowth, hide the work performed, yet provide them with the smaller bole size logs they sought. The utilization of coppice started before the Roman Empire, which used it on long military campaigns. Our description talks about "rotted stumps." Had the forest floor received a minimum of 25% light, those stools would not have turned to dead stumps. Once dead however, the stump would take 25-50 years to become totally decayed and be reclaimed by the forest.

Dr. Craig Holdrege Ph.D., and founder of the Nature Institute, is well known by the ecological community and has even been referenced in other Oak Island-related books. Kerrin Margiano, in retelling the McGinnis stories, reprints parts of Dr. Holdrege's *"The Forming Tree,"* which is also an attachment to this book. I've enclosed an abbreviated section from Dr. Holdrege as he attempts to make the similar point I am arguing here. Here is part of his clearer explanation:

> *"The figure depicts two white oaks with dramatically different forms. The broad-crowned oak grew as a free-standing tree at*

the edge of a pasture. It had, as a young tree, no neighbors growing close by. As is typical for a solitary tree, the crown gradually spread out broadly in all directions, attaining a relatively spherical shape. In general, branches grow outward and ramify into the space of greater brightness surround them… The crown as a whole is not growing toward the light source (the sun), but toward the brightness of the surrounding atmosphere… What about the small-crowned white oak with its long, upward-soaring trunk? This specimen grew in the woods. It partnered in growth with red oaks, sugar maples, and red maples. You have to imagine this single tree surrounded on all sides by other trees of similar height. All trees together form one large crown – the forest canopy. By growing up together, perhaps out of an abandoned pasture about 80 to 100 years ago, these trees began growing upward and unfolding. They produced shade for each other, and the dominant growth direction was upward into the light-filled space. The lower branches, which never grew to great size, died off in the increasingly shady environment of the upward-shooting trees. In this way, the long, branchless trunk developed, and we need to imagine the seemingly meager crown of the individual trees as part of the larger, dense, green canopy of the whole forest."

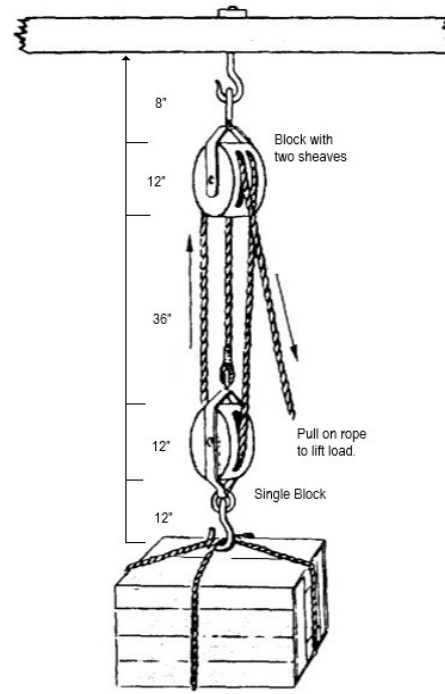
Images of the trees discussed here can be seen in Appendix G and Appendix O, titled, "*The Forming Tree*." Finally, did the adventurers take a boat to the island? Did they go pheasant hunting? Or did one of them have a romantic frolic in the forest? Well, since those who lived on Oak Island resided on the western drumlin, why not simply follow the old road that probably crossed through their lot? With the remains of a "*tolerably well-made road from the clearing to the west shore of the island,*" I do not see how it was missed by those living there. Walking the mile-long road to the east drumlin and finding it suddenly stop at a depression *– isn't that an interesting find indeed!*

Item and Method of Hanging

There isn't as much intrigue regarding these scant set of field observations. I do have a few queries that have no impact on our forensic investigation, other than to sew further doubt in what little

we have to work with. I am not a mariner, seaman, nor fisherman. I wouldn't know the port from starboard or aft from bow. Again, I have this gnawing thought that the block of any 'block-n-tackle' is another fancy of fiction.

Our year is supposedly 1795 and this wooden Block is so weathered and old, it either shatters into pieces or disintegrates into powder, as the story goes. Said to be rusted, which is odd for wood, but let us assume it did have metal pieces to it - *so not that old*. Note how convenient the block is to disintegrate, leaving no evidence. Anyway, a block and tackle is basically an array of pulleys used in lifting and lowering heavy loads with less effort. The arrangement of these pullies has a major impact on the use and benefit of the simple mechanics. A "block" is itself a pulley, and it can be opened to add additional "sheaves" (rotating wheels) which adds advantage for lifting the weight. The "tackle" (or fall) is the rope that is fed through the pulley or pulleys. A single pass through a "fixed" block (say attached to a tree limb) does nothing to increase your lift ability on your load. It only allows you to change direction of your effort (pull up or pull down). However, if there is a block attached to your load (movable) as well as affixed to an object, each pass through the blocks (pulley) adds a single advantage. Each advantage is equivalent to a percentage of the weight of the load. So in our Oak Island story, we would realize the system used was more than just a single "block" attached to a tree. When it came to excavating sacks or



Courtesy: Block and Tackle Basic Machines,

kibbles (buckets for removing materials) of dirt and lowering

NAVEDTRA 14037 1994.

logs down into the Money Pit, a more complex or sophisticated apparatus would have been erected, such as a Luff Tackle as previously shown. The Luff Tackle assembly is a pulley system (block and tackle) that would likely have been needed at the minimum to operate effective excavation on Oak Island, and perhaps most probably in concert with a windlass. So when we read that our Treasure Trio found an old block attached to the limb of the large oak tree, we are probably hearing of only half of the pulley contraption used in the excavation. The rest, the second unfixed block and the fall – or rope, was easily removed when done.

What makes little sense to me is why attach the first block to the tree permanently. They make notice of the fork in the branch of the tree along with the use of a trunnel (tree nail or dowel) to create a triangular fixture. Yet this is completely unnecessary for the mechanical operation. The trunnel would be the weak link in the triangular fixture as it is simply threaded through holes drilled in the forked limbs of the branch. The drilled holes in both of the limbs is quite time consuming and dramatically reduces the load-bearing capacity of the two forked branches. Much less load bearing than had the block been directly attached to the main branch. You've simply complicated your mechanical system and potentially reduced its capabilities as well as lost the use of a good trunnel and block. Nothing should be less capable than the rope strength, and this contraption as rigged could be problematic. Had they simply "tied" the block to the tree, the block would be as structurally load-supporting as the same rope used within the hoist system. Also, had the block been 'tied' to the branch, the contraption would take up less vertical distance below the limb and allow you greater height above the lip of the pit for a longer fulcrum swing giving better maneuverability of the load. You could also retrieve your block for later use, instead of leaving it hoisted up in a tree for people to see.

Finally on this topic, I imagine the 15 ft tree branch may not have been high enough over the pit for this block and tackle setup to effectuate the excavation below. This may explain why they had to create this unnecessary wooden triangle if it provided them additional height above the ground. I cannot imagine it doing so.

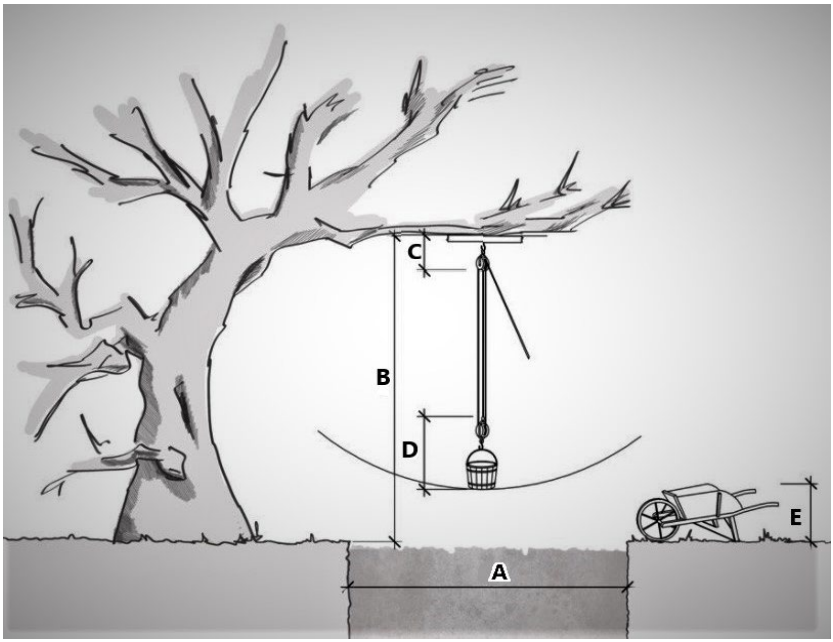
The Luff Block and Tackle consisting of two blocks as shown in the previous diagram, provide the mechanical force-multiplier which would be necessary to bring up and take down heavy loads in our Oak Island scenario. However, the setup of this system takes up significant vertical clearance from the bottom of the oak branch. In most riggings for this sort of load management, you would need a minimum of 3' (rope or fall) between blocks, and bigger sheaves in the blocks, creating the better mechanical lift and reduction in friction. So the wooden blocks themselves could be as large as twelve inches in diameter each. This configuration is going to significantly take up most of the 15' vertical distance between the ground and the Large Oak tree branch of the story's lame lore.

Though the romantic thought of such a hoist may have added 'gravitas' to the genre of buried pirate treasure, it added no engineering benefit to those who actually dug the money pit on Oak Island. The storytellers seemed bent on creating a maritime theme using the block and tackle as representing pirates at work – *Arrggh!*

Perhaps they dismissed the well-familiar windlass setups used for hundreds of years for digging pits and shafts; just so they can promote the pirate pizazz postulated in this prevarication.

However, to elucidate my previous point about not having enough vertical space below the Oak tree's branch as the saga describes, the illustration on the following page is provided. As you examine the image, think of when you were younger and swinging on a tire swing or rope hanging from high up in a big tree. The lengthy vertical hang of the rope would give you a wide arc for a long controlled swing. Now imagine you are on a backyard swing set,

hanging just five or six feet from the horizontal pole. As you swing, you are quickly arced up high in the sky and the distance in either



direction is quite short. Now imagine you were trying to drop something in a bucket while doing so.

Created by 'Anna Orel Designs'

Legend:
A = Width across Money Pit, or 13'
B = Height to Large Oak Branch protruding directly over Pit, or 15'
C = Fixed distance of top of Block & Tackle Hoist pulley system, or 20-24"
D = Fixed distance of bottom of Block & Tackle Hoist with 2' tall load, or 4'
E = Average height to clear load above spoils cart, or 3'

In addition, the Luff Tackle Hoist system needs 3' of fall (rope) between blocks to achieve the *advantage* offered with this pulley configuration. The total vertical space used simply for the hoist system totals 9', which must be several feet above the mouth of the pit to be able to clear the 3' tall cart along the edge. Yet the shorter radius swing, caused by the branch not being high enough to allow this operation to move the load 6.5' horizontally to the edge, will lift the load much higher than optimal and creates an unstable operation.

In my mind, it is quite apparent the block and tackle reference was not at all factual or functional. In the following Chapter 8, "Planting Evidence," Section "*Don't Pity the pit Diggers*," we fully dig up the proper way the Money Pit was dug down.