

The unsuccessful attempt was by the Musqueam headman Shientin who went north to recover his wife and daughter—presumably the one who had not already been seized by the Cowichan warrior Lammus. He learned they had already been sold farther north, and so he abandoned the quest, but he returned safely. Occasionally alliances were formed. That famous Cowichan chief Shoshia may have been allied with them. At one point, expressing outrage at their attacks, he persuaded the fort to give him the ammunition to attack them. But it turned out he probably went north and sold them the ammunition instead. After many threats the Coast Salish later did mount retaliatory expeditions. In the light of all of this it appears to me that the image of the Coast Salish as perpetual victims is a myth and that relations between Salish and Salish and between Salish and Lekwiltok differed only in degree not in kind.

4. The fourth questionable notion is that the Northwest Coast was so rich in natural resources and these were so reliable that the Native peoples could get all the food they needed during the warmer seasons and spend their winters engaging in ceremonies and the arts. This notion, once standard among both popular writers and anthropologists, is no longer a common view, but if we need any more evidence to dispose of it, the journals provide it. Even in the three years they record, the salmon runs fluctuated greatly. In 1827 the fish were abundant, in 1828 they were scarce and the Natives were reluctant to sell them and were later hungry, but in 1829 they were so plentiful that the fort was turning the would-be fish sellers away. Sturgeon also fluctuated in abundance. It is also clear that there was no season during which the Native people could simply live off their supplies. They seem to have been out in the river fishing for sturgeon whenever conditions permitted it.

I know there is much more of anthropological value in the Fort Langley journals than I have described in my contribution to the book. I hope that now that the UBC Press has made them available, others will mine them further. I am grateful to Morag and to UBC Press for letting me play a part in the publication. But we all must be grateful to Barnston, McMillan, and McDonald for their work as journal keepers.



# Natives in the Fur Trade: Looking at the Fort Langley Journals

By Keith T. Carlson

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THE recent publication of Morag Maclachlan's edition of the Fort Langley journals provides the public with easy access to an important historical document which until now has been cloistered in the archives. Records relating to the Pacific Northwest Coast's early land based fur trade era are relatively scant compared to most other parts of Canada. Two fires and the intrigue of international compensation claims between the British Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the United States following the dividing of the Oregon Territory along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1846 have resulted in historians having to make more of less in terms of documentary records. For scholars of Aboriginal history and Native-European relations this has meant that the typical records relied upon by historians of the Canadian subarctic, for example, are generally absent or available only in miniscule proportions for BC's coast. Journals for Fort Langley exist only for the brief three-year period 1827–1830, despite the fact that the HBC operated the fort from its establishment in 1827 through to the 1890s. How then do the Fort Langley records contribute to our understanding of BC's Aboriginal history, and how does the information contained within them relate to the historical interpretations of earlier generations of scholars?

The first historian to seriously consider the role of Aboriginal people in Canada's economic and social history was Harold Innis. In *The Fur Trade In Canada* (1930), Innis presented his now famous "Staple's Thesis" in which he articulated the argument that Canada's political institutions were shaped by the centralizing forces of the continental mercantile fur trade: the fur trade created Canada by linking diverse geographical regions into a single economic unit. In his analysis he recognized the role of Native economic agency and commented on what he saw as the deterministic influence of European technologies on Aboriginal culture. He argued that as economic demands outstripped local production levels cer-

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tain Native individuals and communities assumed influential roles as middlemen acting as brokers between the HBC and more distant suppliers of furs. His analysis assumed that both Native and European participation in the fur trade were premised on the same economic motivations.

On the West Coast, the fur trade and aspects of Aboriginal history were being considered by the judge-cum-historian, the Hon. F.W. Howay. Howay was the first to make meticulous use of the voluminous maritime fur trade records housed in various depositories in New England. While in many ways marginal to broader events in eastern and central Canada, the Pacific maritime trade dwarfed the economic activities of the St. Lawrence and Hudson's Bay based activities of the North West Company (NWC) and the HBC of the same period. Howay interpreted the massive economic disruption caused by the fur trade to have been devastating for Aboriginal communities. He regarded the exchange as exploitative and the social interactions as manipulative. For Howay, the fur trade ushered in the beginning of the end for Native people.

Directly challenging Howay's interpretation (or what came to be known as the "degeneration" thesis) were the anthropologists Joyce Wike, Wilson Duff and Marius Barbeau. In Wike's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation "The Impact of the Maritime Fur Trade on Native People..." and as refined in Duff's popular booklet *Impact of the White Man*, the argument was made that the fur trade era actually saw the flourishing climax of Native culture. New technologies and increased wealth led to ever increasing artistic expressions and potlatch economic ceremonialism. Degeneration only occurred after Native usefulness as trade partners evaporated during the subsequent settlement era. Together, these writings came to be known as the "enrichment thesis."

Robin Fisher, who had studied under Duff, elaborated on the enrichment thesis literature and provided the interpretation a degree of legitimacy among historians that had hitherto been lacking. Fisher himself enriched the literature by emphasizing the importance of personal relationships forged through interracial marriages during the land based fur trade. European traders formed lasting, meaningful, long-term relations with Native communities through their Aboriginal wives and "mixed-blood" children. As demonstrated by the relationship between Governor Douglas and his Metis wife Amelia, interracial

relations could be successful. It was the arrival of a new community of European colonists, ones who did not depend upon Native generosity or labour, that turned the enriching forces of the fur trade into the conflict driven exploitation and marginalization of the modern settlement era.

Working with heavily Manitoba Red River Valley centered sources, Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk explored in much greater detail the social and sexual relationships between fur traders and Native women. They showed that the contribution of Native wives stretched into the economic realm as well as the social. Brown in particular also discussed how the cultural background of the Europeans—Highland clansmen or English merchants—played a role in shaping the communication and understanding between the two communities.

Barry Gough in *Gunboat Frontier* and James Gibson in *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods* have recently revisited the enrichment thesis. In doing so they have drawn new conclusions not unlike the earliest analysis of Howay. Looking at the military relations between the diverse Native communities and the British admiralty, and the violent encounters associated with the initial maritime fur trade, Gough and Gibson conclude that if "enrichment" was a feature of early contact, so too was violent oppression and military coercion.

Most recently, the courts have been the primary forum for engaging and advancing key debates over aspects of west coast Aboriginal history. The "Vander Peet" decision of 1996 focussed on the question of whether or not Stó:lo Coast Salish people engaged in the economic exchange of salmon prior to 1846. Evidence of such exchange would support the position that market sales are an Aboriginal right.

How then do the newly published Fort Langley journals of 1827–1830 fit into this historiographical mosaic? What do they contribute to our understanding of Aboriginal economic and social history? What do they say about Native-European relations? Appended to the published journals is an excellent discussion of their ethnographic significance, compiled by the senior scholar of Coast Salish anthropology, Wayne Suttles. Read in conjunction with Maclachlan's edited journals, Dr. Suttles's ethnography provides an insightful and readable discussion of the culture of the Halqemeylem speaking Coast Salish and their neighbours. The journal entries them-



Left: "Interior of a Lodge with Family Group." by Paul Kane (1810–1871). Watercolour on paper. 14 x 23.5 cm. Slightly cropped.

Courtesy Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.—No. 31.78/87, WWC 88

selves, however, speak directly to the historiographical debates introduced above.

From the journals we learn that the market exchange of salmon was not something the Coast Salish had to learn from Europeans. Indeed, the HBC struggled to modify the Stó:lo economy away from salmon exchange and into the fur trade. Failing in this endeavour, they then adapted themselves to the local salmon economy and became middlemen in an expanded version of the traditional Aboriginal economy. Similarly, the journals show that cedar bark, sturgeon isinglass, berries and even slaves were also part and parcel of the dynamics of Aboriginal-European exchange associated with Fort Langley.

In terms of the debate of "enrichment," the Fort Langley journals indicate that Native people did indeed enjoy and benefit from the introduced European technology. They were just as eager as the Europeans to secure the benefits of the fort for their own use, and arranged marriages with the HBC employees to get an edge over their Native competitors. The HBC, on the other hand, found marriages to Aboriginal women at Fort Langley not only important for trade purposes, but also for staff morale. The journals describe the comic and tragic case of one lonely servant who, frustrated with Fort Langley's isolation, attempted to walk his way south to civilization only to return naked, hungry, covered in mosquito bites and delirious a few days later. Fort Langley's chief trader determined that marriages into the local community were the "only means of reconciling" the men to the place. These mixed marriages resulted in long term meaningful relationships that fulfilled a host of social, economic,

sexual, and other more subtle and gendered requirements and needs among the individuals and communities involved.

Enrichment must be tempered as an explanatory model, however, by recognition of the omnipresent threat of force behind all HBC activities. Cannons were mounted in the fort's bastions, torture was used to extract information and confessions from the slaves of the Native wives who married into the fort's community, and Natives who arrived and refused to trade according to European standards of market exchange sometimes found themselves receiving a swift kick in the groin.

Violence was a common feature of life on the Fraser River in the 1820s. The fort journals describe inter-community raids and retaliatory raids involving the Cowichans, Musqueam, Kwantlen, Chilliwack, Scowlits and others. Larger scale conflicts are also described between the Yukletaws (from Johnstone Strait) and the Coast Salish. The HBC generally refrained from involving themselves in these conflicts, but considered supplying the Coast Salish with guns to counteract the technological imbalance created by the American sale of arms to Yukletaws to the north.

Readers of all interest levels, from armchair history buff to academic scholar, will find things of interest within the Fort Langley journals. Likewise, those with interests in ethnography and anthropology will not be disappointed either. This publication provides the reading public with easy access to primary records previously available only through archival manuscript collections. Its entries are thick with detailed description and titillating accounts of a host of matters. ~