

AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE LOSS OF THE BOSTON
IN 1803

The story of John Jewitt, one of the survivors of the *Boston*, has appealed strongly to all lovers of adventure since 1815 when it first appeared in narrative form. His account of the capture of the *Boston* in March, 1803, and of his life for three years as a prisoner of Maquinna, the head chief of the Nootka Indians, is a root source for both the historian and the ethnologist. But little is known of the circumstances surrounding the loss of the vessel beyond what Jewitt has written. The Indians gave a version of the sad affair to Captain Rowan of the *Hazard*, which differs in some particulars; but, at any rate, it seems plain that the motive was the not infrequent combination of present insult and vicarious revenge for antecedent insult.

The account reproduced herewith is the first published information regarding the disaster, together with a short note of the arrival of the *Lydia* in Boston, and the statement issued by her commander, Captain Samuel Hill. These were obtained from the files of old Boston newspapers in the Widener Memorial Library at Harvard University. Captain Hill's statement was, it is presumed, obtained largely from Jewitt. It will be found to supplement in small details the account in Jewitt's rare *Journal* and in his well known *Narrative*.

It will be observed that the first news of the capture of the *Boston* was published a little more than a year after the occurrence, and also that it contains no reference to any survivors. This information, doubtless, was carried from the Northwest Coast to Canton in the fall of 1803 by one of the trading vessels and thence reached Boston. The ships usually left China in December or January and the voyage home ordinarily occupied about four months. More particulars must have arrived later, for Captain Hill told Jewitt that before he sailed from Boston it was known that there were two survivors and that Messrs Amory, the owners of the ill-fated ship, had offered a reward for their release.

The first short note of the loss of the *Boston* contains two odd errors. It gives the name of James Tillebrown as carpenter; but the carpenter was Adam Siddle of Hull, England, and the

joiner was Philip Brown of Cambridge, Massachusetts; the two surnames would appear to have been imperfectly combined. Again it mentions William Cowell as boatswain; but there was no person of that name on the ship; the nearest approach is William Caldwell, of Boston, an A B; the boatswain was Edward Thompson. Of the crew of twenty-seven, ten were from the United States; the remainder were principally English with a smattering of other races.

The notice of the arrival of the *Lydia* states that she was one hundred and twenty-three days from Canton; but Jewitt in his *Narrative* says one hundred and fourteen days from China. If she really brought sea-otter skins to Boston, as the item states, it was unusual; the market was always China.

Captain Hill's narrative shows that the capture of the *Boston* was known on the coast almost immediately: according to him the *Juno* and the *Mary* appeared at Nootka two days thereafter; according to Jewitt, four days thereafter. Over and over again the traders remark how rapidly news appeared to travel amongst the natives. Jewitt does not state categorically that these ships knew of the capture; but their conduct indicates, as Captain Hill states, that they were aware of it.

It may be of interest to insert here the following personal description of Jewitt as given to W.E. Banfield by an old Indian, who, as a boy, had known the "Prisoner of Nootka"; Jewitt, it seems, was a general favorite, owing to his good-humor and light-heartedness, and he often recited and sang in his own language for the amusement of the savages. He was described as a tall, well-made youth, with a mirthful countenance, whose dress latterly, consisted of nothing but a mantle of cedar-bark."—Sproat's *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*, p. 5.

A rough bibliographical sketch and a few short notes have been appended to Captain Hill's statement to make plain some of the allusions.

F. W. HOWAY.

First Items

"We are extremely sorry to learn that the ship *Boston*, Capt. JOHN SALTER has been taken at Nootka Sound (N.W.C.) by the natives of that place. The *Boston* was fitted out in England, where most of her crew were shipped.¹ The following are the names of the officers: capt., *John Salter* commander; Mr. *John*

¹ According to Jewitt, the *Boston* was "the largest, strongest, and best equipped ship, with the most valuable cargo of any that had ever been fitted for the North-West trade."

B. Delouisy, 1st mate; Mr. *William Ingraham*, 2nd mate; Mr. *James Tillebrown*, carpenter; Mr. *William Cowell*, boatswain"—From the *Columian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, April 25, 1804.

"May 12. Brig *Lydia*, Capt. Hill from the North West Coast of America; last from Canton, 123 days; cargo: otters, nankins, etc., to Theodore Lyman."—From *Independent Chronicle*, of Boston, May 14, 1807.

Loss of the Boston

(Communicated by Captain Hill from Canton).

"About two months after my arrival on the coast of North West America I received a letter (by the hand of an Indian Chief named Utilla)² the purport of which was, that the ship *Boston*, commanded by John Salter, was taken by Maquinnah, and his warriors at Nootka Sound on the 22d March 1803, and that the captain together with his officers and crew, (excepting JEWITT and THOMPSON) were inhumanly butchered. The letter was dated at *Nootka* and signed by JOHN RODGERS JEWITT and JOHN THOMPSON; and earnestly entreated whoever received the letter, would come and deliver them from their miserable situation.

"As my business was of a commercial nature, I could not, consistent with my duty, pursue any measures whereby the success of my voyage might be endangered; yet common humanity demanded that an attempt should be made to relieve these unfortunate men. The contents of the above mentioned letter was made known to the several commanders on the coast; but the idea of an attempt to recover the men was generally deemed rash and improvident. Whether from want of judgment or that my humanity got the better of discretion, I do not pretend to say; but it appeared to me that it could not be thought rash or imprudent to go to Nootka, and take a view of the harbour, and discover whether the natives were disposed to be friendly or not. With this view I sailed from *Newetta*³ on the 11th of July 1805, and arrived at *Nootka Sound* on the 16th.⁴ With the help of my glasses I observed six pieces of cannon mounted on a kind of

² This chief, whom Jewitt calls Machee Ulatilla, took a great interest in him. Jewitt wrote sixteen letters which he despatched by various chiefs, but that confided to Ulatilla, chief of the Kloosahts, a tribe living to the northward of Nootka, was the only one that appears to have been delivered. Captain Hill said that this chief had paddled miles out to sea to hand him the letter.

³ Nahwitte, a port at the northern end of Vancouver Island. It was a favourite resort of the maritime traders.

⁴ Jewitt says the 19th; but his *Journal* shows that he had omitted one day, the 29th February 1804, hence he would really make it the 18th July.

rampart in front of the village, at the head of *Friendly Cove*. Having ascertained that there were neither men nor guns on *Hog Island* (which commands the entrance) I stretched into the cove and anchored in a position to command the passage to *Hog Island* and about two hundred yards from the village. In the course of twenty four hours after my arrival I recovered the two above mentioned captives and the guns, anchors, a few muskets and some other articles of less consideration; these were all they had left in their possession belonging to the BOSTON.—They were very unwilling to deliver up the two men; When they were about to embark in the canoe to come on board,⁵ a council was held on the beach, wherein several of the Chiefs advised to kill them both, and hazard the worst rather than suffer the particulars of their conduct, relative to the capture of the ship to be known; but they were given to understand that if they did not immediately bring the men on board, alive and unhurt, I would most assuredly punish their chiefs and destroy the village. This had the desired effect; and I was happy in recovering the men together with the guns and ammunition, without entering into a quarrel, which would have occasioned the loss of the lives of many young Indians who were entirely innocent. I had kept Maquinnah on board, until my business was finished, when I informed him he was at liberty to go on shore whenever he pleased; this was more than he expected as he had reconciled himself to the idea that he should lose his life; but when he was repeatedly assured to the contrary he thanked me in a very earnest manner, and made many promises of good behaviour in future. In what manner he will regard these promises, I cannot pretend to say. I have since visited him at Nootka and he and his people behaved very well.

“According to the best information which I have been able to collect on the subject, the following are the particulars relative to the capture of the BOSTON.—Captain JOHN SALTER arrived at NOOTKA SOUND on the 12th March, 1803, and anchored in a small cove or bason, situated about four miles north of *Friendly Cove*, on the western shore of the sound; the place is called by the natives, *Abooksha*.⁶ This is a safe and convenient harbour; except that it is too much confined for hostile neighbours. This was the first port he had entered on the coast. Here they were employed in procuring wood and water, and making preparations

⁵ Jewitt's *Narrative* states that they went in separate canoes: Thompson, first; and Jewitt, later.

⁶ Near the site of the present cannery village of Nootka.

to sail for a more northerly port, the first opportunity; and during their stay here, the most friendly intercourse had hitherto existed between Captain SALTER and the Chiefs of *Nootka*. On the 18th March MAQUINNAH borrowed a double barrelled musket of Captain SALTER for the purpose of shooting fowls; he returned on the 19th, bringing several pair of ducks of which he made a present to Capt. SALTER; at the same time presented him with the musket and informed him he had broken one of the locks.—Capt. SALTER used some very harsh threats on this occasion and taking the musket by the barrel he struck *Maquinnah* on the head with the breach of the musket.⁷ Soon after this MAQUINNAH and his attendants went on shore;—the news spread through the village of the high affront their King had received;—The Chiefs and warriors assembled on a sandy beach fronting the sea, to the S. W. of the village.—here the nature of the abuse was heightened with all the effect of savage eloquence—not by MAQUINNAH;—he sat silent and attentive to the orator, who, after he had set forth the unjust and unprovoked manner in which their King had been treated by Capt. SALTER, proceeded to remind them of their fathers and kindred who were slain by Capt. HANNAH some twenty or twenty five years past.⁸—He said their spirits cried loudly for revenge, and as yet had never been gratified with the blood of white men. He concluded by observing that now was the time to appease the injured spirits of their forefathers and take revenge for the abuse offered to their King. A deep silence ensued.—At length a warrior named YAHPANE'TZ, rose up, and first offered to make one of the party in the bloody attack. He said he had lost a father by the cruelty of the white men; and now he was ready to revenge his death. His example was followed by another and another, and finally by the whole council except one man, named TOPASHOTTAH. This chief declared that himself nor his family should aid or assist in the affair; he was accordingly expelled the council of warriors and despised as a traitor;—but it seems he persisted in his first resolution. The council next proceeded to lay down a plan of operations, which being settled the council broke up.

“On the 22d March the weather and wind seemed to promise

7 In Jewitt's *Narrative* he states that the captain presented the fowling-piece to Maquinna and on its return broken used strong language and tossed it to him to repair.

8 Captain James Hanna, who in the *Harmon*, a small brig, in 1785, pioneered the maritime fur trade. We know, as yet, but little concerning this voyage or its incidents. An affray with the natives did occur, but the circumstances are in doubt. It is usually said that in revenge for the theft of a chisel Captain Hanna turned the brig's guns on the natives.

a favourable time to proceed northward; and Capt. SALTER had made known his intention of sailing that afternoon; the Indians had visited the ship daily, and it appears that Capt. SALTER had not entertained the least idea of any serious affront having been given to MAQUINNAH. About 10 o'clock in the forenoon of the 22d March MAQUINNAH went on board the *Boston*, attended by a number of his chiefs and warriors; MAQUINNAH was painted and had a mask in imitation of a bear's head: When they came alongside of the ship they all shouted several times and MAQUINNAH performed a kind of mystical ceremony with an empty bottle, which he had under his garment: These ceremonies took place in their canoes along side; after this they went on board, and remained very quietly until noon; when Capt. *Salter* invited MAQUINNAH to dine with him, which he accordingly did:—While they were at table MAQUINNAH observed to Capt. SALTER that there was great plenty of salmon in *Friendly Cove* and expressed his surprise that Capt. SALTER did not send his officers and people to take salmon, which he said other captains had often done;—Capt. SALTER immediately turned to Mr. DELOUISA, his first officer, and expressed a wish for some salmon.—Mr. DELOUISA set out immediately with nine men, in the pinnace, accompanied with the drum and fife, in order to take salmon in *Friendly Cove*. Let us now take a view of the crew on board:—The armourer was at work in the steerage, cleaning muskets—the sailmaker between decks repairing sails—the steward on shore washing clothes—and the first officer with nine men gone to *Friendly Cove*: At this juncture Capt. SALTER ordered the second officer, Mr. Ingraham, to hoist the launch and get ready for sea by the time the pinnace returned—Mr. Ingraham called the men from below, viz., the armourer and sail-maker, to assist; but Capt. SALTER ordered these men to remain at their work; and when his people were ready to hoist away, the Indians were desired to assist. The men being placed at the tackle falls and the order given to hoist away, the signal was given by MAQUINNAH, who at the same instant seized Capt. SALTER, and threw him overboard, where the old women in the canoes along side, killed him with their paddles, and he expired, crying out 'WHACOSH, MAQUINNAH',⁹ while MAQUINNAH looking over the ship's side, laughed at the farce of the old women beating SALTER'S brains out with their paddles! As for the officers and

⁹ "Wacosh", or as Sproat gives it: "Waw-kash", was a word of salutation, though it was frequently employed to mean, "good".

crew on deck, they were dispatched in a few minutes, with knives, there being no opportunity for making resistance in the situation they were placed in, with three or four Indians to every man. JEWITT and THOMPSON were both wounded in attempting to come on deck, and the Indians immediately shut the hatches, which secured them below.—The ship being now in their possession, they gave a general shout, and sung the song of victory. They next dispatched a party to *Friendly Cove*, to kill Mr. DELOUISA and the boat's crew, who were entirely ignorant of what had happened. They were some of them killed with clubs, and some of them shot on the beach, at the head of *Friendly Cove*, just before the village of *Nootka*. The party returned to the ship bringing the heads of those they had killed:—The boy who was on shore, washing, was likewise dispatched and his head brought on board—They next proceeded to cut off the heads of all the slain; and threw the bodies overboard.—The heads being arranged in order from the Captain to the Cook they called up JEWETT from below, and ordered him to examine and count the heads, in order to ascertain if any were missing.

“Having the ship completely in their possession, without the loss of a man, MAQUINNAH ordered his men to cut the cable which the ship was riding by and loose the sails: They made shift to set the fore top sail; and having ordered JEWETT to steer the ship, in a short time they got to *Friendly Cove*, where they hauled her as far on the beach as the tide would allow them, and began to unlade the cargo. MAQUINNAH took care to secure the powder in his own house, and likewise the cloth and most valuable articles; the rest was free for all to take to themselves. On the 24th they were interrupted in their work by the arrival of two ships in the offing; these were the ships *Juno* and *Mary*,¹⁰ commanded by BOWLES and GIBBS, who, it seems had intelligence of the situation of the *Boston* and were then coming for the express purpose of taking the ship *Boston* from the Indians, by force.—Let us see how they conducted this business:—Both ships stretched up close to the entrance of *Friendly Cove*, where they each let go an anchor in very deep water, but neither ship brought up by her anchor; in much haste and confusion they fired three broad sides and one of the ships swinging on the rocks, without the Point they both cut their cables and stood out to sea again: Thus ended the expedition. It appears by the best accounts that

¹⁰ Jewitt in his *Journal* gives 26th March, not 24th as here .

the guns were fired from that side of each ship which was next the village; but whether the guns were directed towards the village or to the tops of some trees standing on a hill behind the village, is not certainly known as some double headed shot have been found on the aforementioned hill since that memorable expedition. It is very certain that none of their shot struck near the village; yet these ships were in smooth water, and about 230 yards from the village of *Nootka*. MAQUINNAH and his men fired at the ships with muskets and some blunderbusses; but he could not fire a gun at that time as the ship *Boston* was lying down on her beam ends; the weather guns had fetched away, and one of them had fallen in the main hold. The night following this adventure¹¹ the *Boston*, together with the great part of her cargo on board, was burned by the carelessness of some Indians going on board with a torch,—In the morning they beheld the ship in flames.”—From the *Columbian Centinel*, Wednesday, May 20, 1807.

Bibliographical Note on Jewitt's Narrative

The full title runs: “A narrative of the adventures and sufferings of John R. Jewitt; only survivor of the crew of the ship *Boston*, during a captivity of nearly three years among the savages of *Nootka Sound*: with an account of the manners, mode of living, and religious opinions of the natives.”

Middletown; Loomis & Richards; 1815 (March).

Middletown; 1815 (July)

New York; no date (presumably, 1815)

Middletown; Loomis & Richards; 1816.

New York; Daniel Fanshaw; 1816.

Middletown; Loomis & Richards; 1820.

Edinburgh; reprinted for Archd. Constable & Co.; 1824.

Ithaca; Andrus, Gauntlett & Co.; 1849.

With abbreviated title: “The adventures of John Jewitt only survivor of the crew of the ship *Boston* during a captivity of nearly three years among the Indians of *Nootka Sound* in *Vancouver Island*.”—

London: Clement Wilson; 1896 (with notes by Robert Brown.)

With title: “The captive of *Nootka*; or the adventures of John R. Jewett.”—

¹¹ This makes the burning of the *Boston* occur on the night of 25th March 1805, but Jewitt's *Journal* states that it happened on the night of 28th March.

Philadelphia; Henry F. Anners; 1841.

Philadelphia; Lippincott, Grambo & Co.; 1854.

Philadelphia; Claxton, Remsen, & Haffelfinger; 1869.

A much abridged account is also contained (pp. 125-162) in *Tales of Travels West of the Mississippi*, by Solomon Bell. Boston: Gray & Bowen; 1830.