

THE HISTORY OF TATOOSH ISLAND

Tatoosh Island is a small bean-shaped island that lies just off the extreme northwestern point of the Olympic Peninsula of the State of Washington, and is so close to the point, officially known as Cape Flattery, that its mention in history as a distinct geographical location is made only at rare intervals. For decades it was the site of a summer fishing village of the Indians, yet as far as we have been able to discover, they had no name for it until "Tatoosh" was applied to it by an Englishman. Navigators over a long period of years must have seen the island upon every visit to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, yet its recognition was always coincident with the Cape to which it belonged. Apparently it was too small to receive mention, and there is some justification for this attitude for it is not more than half a mile across its widest part, and it is so closely connected to the mainland by the rocks that are scarcely below sea level in places, that without doubt it must at one time have been a part of the continent.

The discovery of Tatoosh Island began with the famous second Pacific voyage of John Meares, an explorer of some small renown who had made a trip to Alaska, and had published a more or less accurate account of his findings.

On this second expedition,¹ he, in command of the *Felice Adventurer*, and William Douglas in command of the *Iphiginia Nubiana*, had been fitted out by a company of English merchants in India, and were sailing openly under British colors. However they had procured Portuguese papers and a Portuguese mate was to be named captain of the expedition, if at any time it seemed desirable, and particularly on the return of the ships to Chinese ports with a cargo of furs, when they would otherwise be subject to heavy port charges. The precaution proved unnecessary, but it was used at one time, and Meares was later tried and convicted on a charge of piracy.

Upon their arrival at Nootka Sound in the spring of 1788, they established friendly trade with the Indians, and erected the necessary buildings for living quarters and the construction of a ship, all of which they were careful to fortify with cannon.

On the 14th of June, 1788, Meares left a crew at work and sailed South,² stopping at Clayoquot Sound long enough to add a

¹ Bancroft's *History of the Northwest Coast*, Vol. I., p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

considerable number of furs to his cargo. On the 28th he sighted an inlet, Latitude $48^{\circ} 39'$, landed on "the" island, and was visited by the Indian chief, Tatoоче. The indication by the use of the article "the," is that the island was commonly recognized as such, and had been observed by explorers both before and after Meares, but that heretofore it had not seemed worthy of special mention. Meares own account is a trifle different. "About five o'clock we hove to off a small island about two miles from the Southern shore that formed the entrance of this strait, near which we saw a very remarkable rock that wore the form of an obelisk and stood at some distance from the island. In a short time we were surrounded by canoes filled with people of much more savage aspect than any we had hitherto seen. They were principally clothed with otter skins and had their faces brimly bedaubed with oil and black and red ochre. Their canoes were large and held from twenty to thirty men, who were armed with bows, and arrows barbed with bone that was ragged at the points, and with large spears pointed with mussle shells.

"We now made sail to close in with this island, when we again hove to about two miles from the shore. The island itself appeared to be barren rock, almost inaccessible, and of no great extent, but the surface of it as far as we could see was covered with inhabitants who were gazing at the ship. We could by no means reconcile the wild and uncultivated appearance of the place with such a flourishing state of population.

"The chief of this place, Tatoоче, did us the favor of a visit, and so surly and forbidding a character we had not yet seen. His face had no variety of color on it like the rest of the people but was entirely black and covered with glittering sand, which added to the savage fierceness of his appearance.—We made him a small present, but he did not make us the least return, nor could he be persuaded to let his people trade with us."³

A further quotation from the same account describes a second visit on Meares return from exploring the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in which he claims to have obtained from chiefs of neighboring tribes "in consequence of considerable presents, the promise of free and exclusive trade with the natives of the district, and also permission to build any storehouse or edifice which we might judge necessary. We acquired the same privilege of exclusive trade from Tatoоче, the chief of the country bordering on the Strait of Fuca,

³ Meares *Voyages*, Vol. I., p. 246.

and purchased from him a tract of land within the Strait, which one of the officers took possession of in the King's name, and called the same Tatoonche in honor of the chief."⁴ This would seem to indicate that more than the island was included in the territory called Tatoonche by Meares, but in no other case is the name so used.

The "remarkable rock that wore the form of an obelisk" mentioned in this account, seems to have been the one called "Duncan Rock," one mile west, that was named by Duncan on his trip in August of the same year, when he mentioned sighting Tatoosh Island, so named by John Meares.

Cape Flattery is described by J. G. Kohl as being "five or six hundred feet high and falling off to the water by steep rocky bluffs. The extremity of the Cape is—broken up into a series of rocky islets which stretch three miles out into the Pacific, Tatoosh island being the nearest and largest. The Island is a small rocky table land of oblong shape with steep shores and a flat top. It is half a league in surface and has a verdant appearance, without, however, bearing trees. A cove divides it nearly into two parts,—and it is united to the promontory by a series of sunken rocks over which the sea often breaks with great violence."⁵ The rocks, says Vancouver,⁶ "are conglomerate and are one part basalt."⁶ The distance from the mainland is given by the Pacific Coast Pilot as one half mile.⁷ The island is 108 feet above high water, with sides nearly vertical. Two or three feet of soil on the surface afford a fertility of which the Indians took advantage as late as 1852, coming over one hundred and fifty strong in the summer.

This and salmon fishing account for the large population that were assembled on the arrival of Mears in 1788. They lived in huts,⁸ the planks for which were apparently hewed out with the original historic stone axes, and which are, in some instances, still standing.

No further importance is attached to the existence of the island until in 1857, when the Federal Government built a light house there. This is built on the highest point of the island in the N.W., and is 90 yards S.E. from the extreme Western point, 25 yards in from the edge of the cliff, and 97 feet above the sea.⁹ It consists of a keeper's dwelling of sand stone, and a tower of whitewashed brick

4 Meares *Voyages*, Vol. II.

5 *Pacific Railroad Report*. "Geographic Memoirs," Serial No. 1054.

6 Vancouver, *Voyage*, Vol. I., p. 217.

7 *Pacific Coast Pilot*, p. 513.

8 Meany, *History of the State of Washington*, p. 26.

9 *Pacific Coast Pilot*, p. 513.

above it. A balustrade and an iron lantern painted black, all of which are still in use. The tower is the frustum of a cone.

The light, officially known as the Cape Flattery Lighthouse, was first exhibited on December 28, 1857, and showed every night from sundown to sunrise, a fixed white light. In October 1887, a red ray was introduced to cover the positions of Duncan Rock and Duntze Rock, and in that zone the red ray only, is visible. A report of the Lighthouse Service for 1914 says the white light is of 13,000 candle power, and red 4,000, and may be seen for a distance of nineteen miles in clear weather.¹⁰

On June 15, 1914, the fixed light was changed to Gp. Occ., appearing for intervals of four, four and sixteen seconds, with two second intervals of eclipse in between. This is repeated every thirty seconds.

The light is 64 feet above the base of the structure, and about 155 feet above the mean high water mark, with a Latitude of 48° 23' 15.5" North and a Longitude of 124° 44' 55.21" West.¹¹ About thirty yards to the Northwestward is the building containing the steam fog signal, an air siren, which was sounded in thick and foggy weather, once ever minute with a blast lasting eight seconds. Later this was changed to two unequal blasts per minute.

The need of a lighthouse had been self evident from the very beginning of commerce on Puget Sound, but further developments came slowly. A simple system of weather records was begun in 1869 and lasted for three years only.¹² But in 1883 the strategic location of the Island for measuring the force of the elements under oceanic conditions, yet near enough to be of great predictive value, caused the Department of Agriculture to build a telegraph line connecting the Island with the mainland by a low hung 800 foot cable, and on to Port Townsend via Port Angeles, and regular weather reports were sent out daily until June, 1898. There is a lapse in the records for four years, though the Island still continued to be the advance lookout station for all incoming ships whose arrival was telegraphed on to the expectant ports. In 1902, the Weather Bureau was again active, and this time established itself in buildings of its own, with full time officials in charge, and was listed in government reports as a "regular" station.¹³

In April 1915 Tatoosh Island was added to the list of Naval

¹⁰ *Lighthouse Service Report*, Department of Commerce, 1914.

¹¹ *Pacific Coast Pilot*, p. 513 (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey).

¹² Weather Bureau, Seattle.

¹³ Weather Bureau Report, Department of Agriculture, 1914.

Radio Ship stations.¹⁴ The Kilbourne and Clark system was used, and while it was a Government station it was operated and controlled by the owner of a vessel and went under the name of "The Puget Sound Tug Boat Co." The service was irregular, but was available to the general public for both sending and receiving. Radio Service Bulletin for January, 1925, calls it a Radio Compass Station, gives the wave length as 600 meters, the arc of calibration as 0° to 270°, and says it is maintained by the Navy Department.

On September 18, 1886, Tatoosh, Clallam County, Washington, became a Fourth Class Post Office,¹⁵ and Alexander Sampson was appointed as Post Master. Mail is brought over from Neeah Bay, six miles distant, in a launch that makes the trip once a week.

The Island is quite difficult of access since there are but three landing places, and none of them have wharfs of any kind. The choice of landings is always governed by the direction of the wind, and if one is safe the others are usually impossible.

The population of the Island is made up of those in charge of the various departments, and is probably less than ten families in all.

Since the Island is in the part of the country formerly occupied by the Makah Indians, the name, "Tatoosh," probably came from To-tooch, or Tu-tutsh, the Makah name for "Thunder-bird," which is of Indian mythological origin.¹⁶ Many different names have been applied to the Island. Duncan called it "Green Island." Vancouver called it Tatoosh in his report but it does not appear on his chart.¹⁷ It is called "Isla de Punto de Martinez" by some Spanish navigators, and by others, "Isla de Tutusi." British Admiralty Chart No. 1911 calls it Tatooch. However we are mostly indebted to the Makah tribe of Indians inhabiting the shores of Neeah Bay, for the perpetuation of the name, since they accepted the name Tatoosh given it by Meares in 1788, and passed it on until it became officially recognized through long use.¹⁸

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14 *Radio Service Bulletin*, Navy Department, 1915.

15 *United States Postal Guide*, 1886.

16 *American Anthropologist*, 1892.

17 Vancouver, *Voyage*, Vol. I., p. 217.

18 *Pacific Coast Pilot*, p. 513.