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THE LOSS OF THE TONQUIN

The *Tonquin* sailed from Astoria on the 5th of June, 1811. She never returned. Within three months rumors were current on the Columbia that a vessel had been seized and destroyed by the natives of Vancouver Island, and by degrees suspicion strengthened into conviction that this was the *Tonquin*. It was not, however, until about the 5th of August, 1812, that the fact was verified by the story told to the Astorians by the interpreter, Lamayzie. At the outset it may be remarked that we have only Lamayzie's own statement to prove that he was really there and was the interpreter; for he was not on the ship when she left Astoria, but was picked up, either at Grays Harbor or at Woody Point, near Nootka Sound. The accounts conflict, but there is little doubt that he belonged to Grays Harbor. At first blush an interpreter from Grays Harbor would seem of little value amongst the Indians of Vancouver Island; unless an accomplished linguist he would speak the Chehalis or the Chinook language, while they would speak the Coast Salish, the Aht, or the Kwakiutl language. According to Franchère (English edition, p. 179), it appears that he could not speak Chinook. To understand how great are the differences between these various languages the reader need only glance at Dawson and Tolmie's *Comparative Vocabularies of the Indies' Tribes*, Montreal, 1884. The story, having difficulties enough in itself, this initial question is passed over. It will therefore be assumed that Lamayzie was present and was the sole survivor. At the best he could only have been on the *Tonquin* about three weeks before the fatal day. The scene of the tragedy has been identified as Templar Channel, Clayquot Sound, not far from the old Indian village of Echatchet. This places it in the vicinity of Meares' Port Cox. The interpreter called the spot Newity, but it is not known when he obtained the name. Sprout,

in his *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*, London, 1868, page 314, says that the word is not known on the west coast of Vancouver Island. This identification shows that it was about fifteen or twenty miles from Adventure Cove where the *Columbia* spent the winter of 1791-2. How far Wickananish, the chief of the region, was implicated we do not know. Whether the miscreants, in view of Maquinna's experience, would have saved a Jewitt we can only surmise; for it seems that the destruction of the vessel and of the life upon her was the result of design by the remaining white men or man.

The story in all its variations, or perhaps one should rather say the various versions of the story, may be found in Franchère's *Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America*, New York, 1854, p. 179 *et seq.*, and in the original French edition, *Relation d'un à la côte de l'Amérique*, Montreal, 1820, p. 129 *et seq.*; Ross Cox, *The Columbia River*, London, 1832, vol. I, p. 88 *et seq.* Chap. V; Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Columbia River*, London, 1849, p. 159 *et seq.*; Edmund Fanning, *Voyages to the South Seas*, New York, 1838, p. 138 *et seq.*; Washington Irving, *Astoria*, London, 1832, vol. I, p. 173 *et seq.*; John Dunn, *History of Oregon Territory*, London, 1844, p. 222 *et seq.*; Peter Corney, "Early Northern Pacific Voyages" in *The London Literary Gazette*, 1821, reprinted in Honolulu, 1896, p. 8 *et seq.* All of these writers obtained their accounts more or less directly from the natives, or, at any rate, claim to have done so. References to the disaster, with flickering gleams of light on some of its phases, will be found in Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist*, London, 1859, p. 237; John Scouler, "Journal of a Voyage to North West America in 1825-6," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. VI., p. 194; *The Victoria Gazette*, Sept. 9, 1858; Sturgis, *Lecture on Oregon*, p. 11; Walbran, *British Columbia Coast Names*, Ottawa, 1909, p. 92; and Professor E. S. Meany, *Vancouver's Discovery of Puget Sound*, p. 49.

Passing from the sources to the histories, the reader becomes quite bewildered. Elwood Evans in his *History of the Pacific Northwest*, vol I, p. 78, gives the merest skeleton of the story, following in the main, Franchère. Snowden in his *History of Washington*, vol. I, p. 344 *et seq.*, simply appropriates Washington Irving's version, *verbatim*. Professor Shafer, in his *History of*

Oregon, first edition, p. 104, enters into some details, taking Franchère as his guide; but in the second edition, 1918, he wisely refrains from laying down as history any version of the event. For there is no doubt that Scouler and Paul Kane are right when the former says "We know nothing authentic concerning the loss of this vessel"; and the latter: "It was quite impossible to obtain a clear narrative of this melancholy event as no white man lived to tell the tale". An effort will nevertheless be made in this article to reach the probable story, and the first published version of the occurrence will be given.

When the sources are examined all of them except four may be at once dismissed from our consideration; these four claim to have received their accounts from the interpreter himself. In the order of the date of the appearance of their writings, they are: Franchère, 1820; Ross Cox, 1831; Edmund Fanning, 1838; and Alexander Ross, 1849. Washington Irving is not included in this list from the very nature of things. Taking then these four synoptic writers, we find that Franchère is not only the first in date, but was, also, at Astoria when the interpreter arrived. Having been at that time about a year and a half in the region we can believe that he was, as he claims, able to talk with and understand Lamayzie. The Rev. A. G. Mosier in his *Dictionnaire Historique des Canadiens de l'ouest*, Kamloops, 1908, p. 115, says: "Franchère fit preuve d'aptitudes peu communes poude les langues sauvages." Ross Cox, though out of time so far as the actual occurrence and the vague rumors were concerned, had reached Astoria only about three months before the alleged interpreter was brought in. His recent arrival makes it plain that he could not converse with the savage himself, while certain allusions, as for instance, the reference to the dress of Weeks and Anderson, whom he had never seen, show that he is giving, as his own, the opinions of other people. Alexander Ross, who at the time was stationed at Fort Okanogan, did not, of course, meet the interpreter and is manifestly merely repeating the story that had reached him through—who knows how many lips. And as to Captain Fanning's version we must remember that it was obtained in 1823 or 1824—some twelve or thirteen years after the incident—by Captain Sheffield of the brig *Horsilia* from "an Indian fellow by the name of Lamayzie, who told Captain Sheffield that he was interpreter and pilot of the ship *Tonquin*". To arrive then at the probable story we must eliminate Ross because his account is

clearly hearsay, and we must drop Fanning also because of, amongst other things, the magnifying and altering effect of the long interval of time. The correct version of what the interpreter told must therefore be sought in Cox and Franchère. As between these two witnesses the narrative of the latter should be preferred for the reason already mentioned.

While these two reports agree in the main, they do not coincide as closely as one would expect, considering that both writers purport to repeat a story in which intense interest was centered and which both allege that they heard from the same person and at the same time. In many respects Cox's version is the fuller. The principal variances will be found on the question whether the survivors in the cabin were part of the crew from on deck or of those who were aloft when the massacre commenced; in the circumstances of McKay's death; and as to the time when the explosion occurred—whether on the dreadful day of slaughter or on the following day. Hereunder on the dreadful day of slaughter or on the following day being pages 88 to 96 in Cox and 180 to 186 in Franchère; in it the similarities indicating a common origin will appear, while at the same time the differences are shown. It will be noted that Franchère is the shorter, the plainer, and the more likely story.

Cox

The conspiracy was formed in revenge, because the captain having caught one of the principal men in a petty theft had struck him.

The interpreter discovered the conspiracy and notified Mr. McKay who immediately went on board the ship and informed the captain.

Two canoes each containing about twenty men came alongside. Other canoes followed. All were allowed on board.

They all brought furs to trade.

The officer of the watch, seeing other canoes approaching, became suspicious and warned the captain.

As all the men wore short cloaks the interpreter knew their designs were hostile.

Franchère

The conspiracy was formed in revenge, because the captain, having had a difficulty with one of the principal chiefs over the price of some goods, put him off the ship and struck him with a roll of furs.

* * *

One canoe containing twenty men came alongside. Later came another. Other canoes followed. All were allowed on board.

The first canoe brought furs to trade. It is not certain that the others did.

The multitude of savages on deck alarmed the crew who went to warn the captain and Mr. McKay.

Because of the multitude, their hurried movements, and the absence of women the interpreter became suspicious.

He notified McKay.

McKay at once apprised the captain and begged him to clear the ship immediately.

The captain treated the caution with contempt, saying "that with the arms they had on board they would be more than a match for three times the number."

The crowd of Indians blocked the passages and obstructed the crew. Having unsuccessfully ordered them to retire the captain said that he was going to sea and had given orders to raise the anchor.

Immediately a signal was given and the savages with a loud yell attacked the crew with knives, bludgeons, and short sabres.

McKay was one of the first to be attacked. He was stunned and thrown overboard into a canoe where he remained for some time uninjured.

The captain strove to reach the cabin. His only weapon was a jack-knife with which he killed four and wounded others; exhausted with loss of blood he rested a minute on the tiller and was clubbed to death.

The interpreter then, uninjured, leaped overboard and was taken into a canoe by some women and covered with mats.

McKay at this time was alive, the Indians intending to hold him for ransom, but in revenge for a chief's death the interpreter saw three savages beating out his brains as his head hung over the edge of a canoe.

Three of the crew fought their way to the cabin. The Indians seem at this time to have left the ship and taken to their canoes.

The three survivors, having laid a train to the powder magazine, bar-

He notified McKay.

McKay spoke to the captain.

"The latter affected an air of security, and said that with the firearms on board there was no reason to fear even a greater number of Indians."

The Indians pressed around the captain, McKay, and Lewis with their furs, crying "Trade! Trade!" At the urgent request of his officers the captain ordered the anchor to be raised and the sails unfurled, and the natives to depart.

Immediately, at a preconcerted signal, the Indians rushed upon the crew with knives and bludgeons that had been concealed in the bundles of furs.

Lewis was struck down, but McKay was the first victim. He was felled by two savages who flung him into the sea where the women dispatched him *with their paddles*.¹

The captain defended himself for a long time with his pocket knife, but, overpowered by numbers, he perished under the blows of the murderers.

The interpreter, after seeing the five men who were aloft slip down into the steerage hatchway, jumped overboard and surrendered as a slave to the women who hid him in a canoe under some mats.

* * *

Soon there was a sound of firearms and the Indians fled from the ship to the shore. They did not venture to return again that day.

The next day, having seen four men lower a boat, the Indians sent canoes

(1). The italicised words would appear to have been inserted by the translator; they are not to be found in the original French edition which runs thus: "Deux sauvages, que j'avis vus, du couronnement du tillac, ou j'etais assis, suivre pas a pas ce monsieur, se jetterent sur lui, et lui ayant donne un grandcoup de *potumagane* (espece de sabre dont il sera parle plus bas) sur le derriere de la tete; ils le renverserent sur le pont, le prirent ensuite, et le jetterent a la mer, ou les femmes, qui etaient restees dans les pirogues, l'acheverent." (p. 138).

gained with the natives that, if permitted to leave in peace, the latter should have quiet possession. After they had left the natives swarmed aboard and a great explosion occurred. The interpreter had reached the land before the explosion.

The fleeing white men could not reach the ocean because of a head wind; the Indians started in pursuit and overtook and murdered them while sleeping.

* * *

in pursuit, but with what result the interpreter did not know.² Seeing no life on the *Tonquin* the Indians went on board in great numbers (400 or 500), and then without any warning the ship blew up. The interpreter was on shore at the time of the explosion.

* * *

The interpreter had been held as a slave for two years, hence the long delay in bringing the news.

It will be observed that according to Cox, McKay was clubbed into insensibility and thrown overboard just to save him, but later was killed by three men in a spirit of revenge; while Franchère says he was at once dispatched by the women, and his editor adds, with their paddles. Cox leaves the impression that the whole crew was on deck when the attack began; but Franchère states that five men at least were aloft unfurling the sails. Again, Cox says the explosion took place on the very day of the massacre; but Franchère tells us that it occurred on the following day. According to Cox the *three* men (who were completely in the Indian's power anyhow) bartered for their freedom, but slipped away unobserved just the same, towards the close of the terrible day; according to Franchère the *four* men were seen by the natives to leave the ship on *the next day*. And, finally, Cox's story is that no one was left upon the vessel and that the explosion was perhaps merely a deferred one; while Franchère's is that the four men left their fatally wounded comrade to wreak a terrible vengeance. It should be added here that the note in the English edition of Franchère (New York, 1854), page 189, appears to have been made by the editor. It is not to be found in the original French edition (Montreal, 1820).

If, now, Ross's account be compared with Cox's and Franchère's, it will be seen that it has many variances, as might be expected, for it was written in 1846—thirty-five years after the event,

(2) The English translation does not reproduce exactly the meaning of the French original in this instance, at any rate, as will be readily seen by the following comparison. "Le lendemain, ayant vu quatre hommes s'éloigner du navire, dans une chaloupe, ils envoyèrent quelques pirogues à leur poursuite; et j'ai tout lieu de croire que ces quatre hommes furent rattrappés et massacrés; car je n'ai vu aucun d'eux ensuite." (Montreal, 1820, ed. p. 159) "The next day, having seen four men lower a boat, and pull away from the ship, they sent some pirogues in chase: but whether those men were overtaken and murdered, or gained the open sea and perished there, I could never learn." (New York ed. 1854, p. 185)

by a man who was then in his sixty-fifth year. He even purports to give *verbatim* conversations between the interpreter, the captain, and McKay. Lamayzie, the interpreter is, he says, a member of the "Wick-a-nook" (i. e. the Wickananish or Clayoquot) tribe; he is picked up at Woody Point, not at or near Grays Harbor; the fundamental trouble does not arise from either theft or differences in trade, as the others have stated, but from an Indian's having cut the boarding nettings—none of the other sources suggest that the *Tonquin* ever had up her boarding netting, and moreover the ease with which men were thrown from her deck makes such a thing very doubtful³; the ship is blown up while the carnage is in progress; and the interpreter has not been kept in slavery for two years, but has been detained for that interval by sickness. He adds that Lamayzie, whom he calls Kasiascall, had acted a treacherous part in the tragedy, was not on board at the time, and was himself privy to the whole plot.

But what shall be said of Fanning's account? It is indeed a strange one. It is alleged to have been received from Lamayzie some twelve or thirteen years later. It has increased greatly in its details—it now covers thirteen pages. It contains many things, of which not the slightest hint is to be found in any of the above three versions. All of them, for instance, unite in stating that Captain Thorn was killed; but here we find the captain alive and setting a light to the slow-match that is to destroy the treacherous savages and making quite a speech over it, too. Franchère does not say who set off the explosion; Cox leaves us free to infer that Weeks may have done it; Ross states definitely that Weeks did do it; but now comes Fanning who says it was Captain Thorn who really did it; and, to add to our astonishment, all these conflicting accounts are alleged to have been received from the same source—the interpreter, Lamayzie. Equally strange is the change which has occurred in regard to the men in the cabin. According to Franchère the fate of the *four* men was unknown to Lamayzie in 1812; according to Cox the *three* men were murdered by the natives who pursued them; according to Ross no one ever left the ship after the slaughter began; but now according to Fanning the *four* men were pursued and brought back to the village, where the interpreter talked to them

(3) Franchère states that Captain Thorn did not have his boarding netting rigged up, but whether his information on the point came from the interpreter is not quite clear. He says: "Ce qui paraît du moins certain, c'est qu'il se rendit coupable d'une négligence et d'une imprudence impardonnables, en ne bastignant pas ses haubans, comme font tous les navigateurs qui fréquentent cette cote, et en laissant monter à la fois sur son vaisseau, un trop grand nombre de sauvages." (Montreal, ed., 1820, p. 140)

and learned their plans on quitting the ship, and "they were all put to death by cruel, lingering torture, in the usual horrid manner of savages." How the same man, Lamayzie, could possibly have told all these different versions it is difficult to conceive.

We thus find that the later accounts are the most embellished; the earlier the story, the simpler, and, as we suggest, the nearer to the truth. It is for this reason that after expressing a preference for Franchère's report, it is proposed to reproduce here the first version of the catastrophe as published in England. The original can be found in the Annual Register (London) 1813, vol. 55, p. 83. Investigation has shown that it is almost a *verbatim* copy of the story as it appeared in the *Missouri Gazette* of 15th May, 1813. It has been already reprinted in Chittenden's History of the Fur Trade, vol. 3, page 909, but, inasmuch as that book is an expensive one and even now quite scarce, the republican seems justifiable. This account has the appearance of having been adapted from one written by some person who had come out to Astoria on the *Beaver*. That vessel had arrived on 9th May 1812 and is manifestly the ship referred to therein. The suggestion is made that this story was brought overland by Robert Stuart's party, which set out on 29th June 1812 to carry dispatches to Mr. Astor in New York. That party reached St. Louis on 30th April, just two weeks before the item appeared. This would explain its publication in Missouri instead of in New York—which would be the natural place if it had come by the usual route. Lamayzie did not arrive with his farrago until August 1812, so that this version is, as it states, the current rumor. It will be observed that where it touches any point upon which Cox and Franchère disagree it is closer to the latter's account than to the former's.

"The following is an account of the singular and melancholy fate of the American ship *Tonquin*, the crew of which were destroyed by the savages, while on a trading voyage on the coast north of the River Columbia, on Vancouver's Island:—

"A native ship arrived from New York, after a passage of near seven months, with merchandize and provisions for the company. It was here we learnt with horror that the story of the *Tonquin's* having been cut off was but too true.⁴ The circumstance has been

(4) Cox, who arrived on the *Beaver* on 9th May 1812, says in his *Columbia River*, London, 1832, vol. I. p. 65: "Vague rumours had reached the Sandwich Islands from a coasting vessel, that the *Tonquin* had been cut off by the Indians, and every soul on board destroyed." Thus the people on the *Beaver* knew of these rumors before they arrived at Astoria, where they received sad confirmation.

related in different ways by the natives in the environs of the establishment, but that which carries with it the greatest appearance of truth is as follows:—

“The vessel, after landing the cargo intended for Astoria, departed on a trading voyage to the coast north of Columbia River, with a company including officers, of twenty-three men, and proceeded about 400 miles along the seaboard, when they stopped on Vancouver’s Island, at a place called Woody-point, inhabited by a powerful nation called Wake-a-ninishes. These people came on board to barter their furs for merchandize, and conducted themselves in the most friendly manner during the first day; but the same evening information was brought on board by an Indian whom the officers had as interpreter, that the tribe where they then lay were ill-disposed, and intended attacking the ship next day. Captain Jonathan Thorn affected to disbelieve this piece of news, and even when the savages came next morning in great numbers, it was only at the pressing remonstrance of Mr. McKay, that he ordered seven men aloft to loosen the sails. In the mean time about fifty Indians were permitted to come on board, who exchanged a number of sea otters for blankets and knives; the former they threw into their canoes as soon as received, but secreted the knives.

“Every one, when armed, moved from the quarter deck to a different part of the vessel, so that by the time they were ready, in such a manner were they distributed, that at least three savages were opposite every man of the ship, and at a signal given, they rushed on their prey, and notwithstanding the brave resistance of the whites, they were all butchered in a few minutes.

“The men above, in attempting to descend, lost two of their number, besides one mortally wounded, who, notwithstanding his weakened condition, made good his retreat with the four others to the cabin, where finding a quantity of loaded arms, they fired on their savage assailants, through the sky-lights and companion-way, which had the effect of clearing the ship in a short time, and long before night these five interpid sons of America were again in full possession of her.

“Whether from want of abilities or strength, supposing themselves unable to take the vessel back to the Columbia, on the following morning, the four who were unhurt, left her in the long boat, in hopes of regaining the river, wishing to take along with them the

wounded person, who refused their offer, saying that he must die before long, and as well on the vessel as elsewhere.

“Soon after sun-rise she was surrounded by an immense number of Indians in canoes, come for the express purpose of unloading her, but who from the warm reception they met with the day before, did not seem forward in boarding.

“The wounded man showed himself over the railing, made signs that he was alone, and wanted their assistance; on which some embarked, who finding what he said was true, spoke to their people, who were not any longer slow in getting on board, so that in a few seconds the deck was thronged, and they proceeded to undo the hatches without further ceremony. No sooner were they completely engaged in this, than the only survivor of the crew descended into the cabin, and set fire to the magazine, containing nearly nine thousand pounds of gun powder, which in an instant blew the vessel and every one on board to atoms.

“The nation acknowledged their having lost nearly one hundred warriors, besides a vast number of wounded, by the explosion, who were in canoes round their ship.

“The four men who set off in the long boat were, two or three days after, driven ashore in a gale and massacred by the natives.”

F. W. HOWAY.