

THE BALLAD OF THE BOLD NORTHWESTMAN: AN
INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN
JOHN KENDRICK*

The ballad of the Bold Northwestman, once a prime favorite in the forecastles of the maritime trading vessels, gives an account of an incident in the life of one of those whose name was well known in New England ships and New England homes—Captain John Kendrick. The mere fact that the ballad does not mention his name may almost be taken as evidence to support this statement; it certainly was not omitted for the sake of rhyme or metre, with both of which the balladist takes more than the usual liberties. Captain John Kendrick commanded the expedition of the *Columbia* and the *Washington*, the first vessels from Boston to engage in the maritime fur-trade. In July, 1789, (for what reason is not as yet definitely known) he handed over the ship *Columbia* to Captain Gray and for the remainder of his life sailed the little sloop, *Washington*. In her he reached China in January 1790. There he transformed her into a brig (or, more probably, a brigantine) and sailed again for the Northwest Coast in March 1791. In June 1791 the Indians of Houston Stewart Channel, in the southern part of Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, attempted to capture his little vessel. This waterway has borne many names; the maritime traders refer to it as Koyah's, Coyah's, Coyour's, after the Indian chief of the locality who figures in the ballad, though not by name. Captain Robert Gray, in June, 1789, when in command of the sloop *Washington*, had called it Barrell Sound, after his principal owner. Captain George Dixon, in 1787, had named it Ibbertson's Sound. It has borne the present designation—Houston Stewart Channel—since 1853.

There are many references to this ballad, and it is listed in Dr. Worthington C. Ford's Massachusetts Broad-sides (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll. lxxv, 401). No one, however, had seen a copy. After many years of searching Dr. S. E. Morison of Harvard University, unearthed one in the Widener Library. The ballad is said to have been the composition of one of the sailors on the *Washington*. It is not known what authority exists for the statement; but plainly it seems the production of a person present at the fight and possessing little literary training. Dr. Morison has shown that Leonard

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Deming, a "trader and barber," the publisher of the broadside containing the ballad, and who sold it according to a notice upon it at "No 62 Hanover Street, 2d door from Friend Street, Boston," was only in that city between 1831 and 1836. These dates therefore mark the limits within which it was published.

The incident had occurred in the early days of the maritime fur-trade. The ballad appears to have been composed almost on the spot. The maritime trade was at its zenith about 1800; we can readily believe that this ballad was then on every lip and helped to pass away many a weary hour in the long watches. But by 1830 that trade had become a mere shadow of its former self. Then it would appear that Leonard Deming caught the ballad from the lips of some old salt and printed it for circulation by the hawkers and pedlars.

BOLD NORTHWESTMAN

Come all ye bold Northwestmen who plough the raging main,
Come listen to my story, while I relate the same;
'Twas of the *Lady Washington*¹ decoyed as she lay,
At Queen Charlotte's Island, in North America.

On the sixteenth day of June, boys, in the year Ninety-One,
The natives in great numbers on board our ship did come,²
Then for to buy our fur of them our captain did begin,
But mark what they attempted before long time had been.

Abaft upon our quarter deck two arm chests did stand,
And in them there was left the keys by the gunner's careless hand;³
When quickly they procuring of them did make a prize,
Thinking we had no other arms for to defend our lives.⁴

Our captain spoke unto them and unto them did say,
If youll return me back those keys I for the same will pay;⁵
No sooner had he spoke these words than they drew forth their knives,
Saying the vessels ours sir, and we will have your lives.

¹ The consort of the ship *Columbia* and commonly called the *Washington*, though her full name was *Lady Washington*. These two vessels were the first in the maritime fur trade to sail from Boston. The *Lady Washington* was a sloop when she left Boston in October 1787, but in 1790 Kendrick in China changed her rig to that of a brig or a brigantine.

² Bartlett's manuscript says: "The Capt'n was in Lickqur One Day And trusted More to the Natives then his own Peple and would Suffer Great Numbers Of them to Come Onbord."

³ Bartlett's manuscript: "His Gunner went On the quarter Deack and tould him that the Natives would take the Vessel from them and it wos Dangerous to Let So Many of them Come Onbord the Capt'n Strock the Guner and Pushd him of the quarter Deack So that he had Not time to take the Keyse Out of the Arms Chest."

⁴ Bartlett's manuscript: "When the Natives Saw this they tuck Possition of the Arm Chest Emedtly and begin to flock Onbord from the Shore in Great Numbrs and made a Tarible Norse whith their war Songs."

⁵ Bartlett's manuscript: "All this time Capt'n Kendrick wos On the Quarter Deack with a Peace of bar Iron in his hand treading with them."

Our captain then perceiving the ship was in their power,
 He spoke unto his people, likewise his officers,
 Go down into the cabin and there some arms prepare,⁶
 See that they are well loaded, be sure and dont miss fire.⁷

Then down into the cabin straightway we did repair,
 And to our sad misfortune few guns could we find there;
 We only found six pistols, a gun and two small swords,⁸
 And in short time we did agree "blow her up" was the word.

Our powder we got ready and gun room open lay,
 Our soul's we did commit to God prepar'd for a wat'ry grave!⁹
 We then informed our captain, saying ready now are we,
 He says a signal I will give, it shall be "follow me."¹⁰

All this time upon the quarter deck poor man was forced to stand,
 With twelve of those curst savages with knives all in their hands;¹¹
 Till one of those blood-thirsty hounds he made a spring below,
 And then he sung out "follow me!" and after him did go.¹²

Then with what few fire arms we had we rush'd on deck amain,
 And by our being resolute, our quarter deck we gain'd;
 Soon as we gain'd our arm chest such slaughter then made we,
 That in less than ten minutes our ship of them was free.¹³

Then we threw overboard the dead that on our deck there lay;
 And found we had nobody hurt, to work we went straightway;
 The number kill'd upon our deck that day was sixty good,
 And full as many wounded as soon we understood.¹⁴

'Twas early the next morning at the hour of break of day,
 We sail'd along abreast the town which we came to straightway;
 We call'd on hands to quarters and at the town did play,
 We made them to return what things they'd stolen that day.¹⁵

⁶ Here the ballad differs from Bartlett's manuscript. He says that the Indians "thratte'd to kill them if they made the Least Resistance and Drove them all into the hole."

⁷ Bartlett's manuscript: "All this time the Capn was Conversing with his men be Low telling them to Muster up all the Arms that thay find."

⁸ Bartlett's manuscript: "Only two Pistols One Musket and two Cutlashes."

⁹ None of the other accounts mention this purpose.

¹⁰ Bartlett's manuscript: "and to be in Redyness to make a Salley uppon Deack when that he Should Give the watch word which was to Follow me."

¹¹ Bartlett's manuscript: "twelve of these Savages Stood with knives Pointing at the Captn Body to Parvent him from Going below."

¹² Bartlett's manuscript: "Corour [Koyah] the Chife of the Natives knowing that he had Suffisient Command of Deack Made a Spring be Low to Sea what force thay was be low. Capt kendrick jump't Down the hatch uppon the Chifes Back and Coll out Follow Me."

¹³ Bartlett's manuscript: "by that the Men all made a Salley uppon them the Chife Seaing of this was for Makeing of with all his Tribe but in Less than five minnit the Ship Compeny Gain the Deack from them and Brock Oppen the Arm Chest and killd forty of Dead Oppon the Spot with out Luseing One Man." Compare Hoskins statement about the arm chest.

¹⁴ The usual differences as to number of casualties.

¹⁵ Bartlett's manuscript mentions that the Indians "tucke the mens hats from of their heads." Later he says that, the crew being below, the natives "then went to worck and Devided the Copper that Lay uppon Deack Among them." Compare Hoskins as to the revenge that was taken by the vessel's crew and when.

I'd have you all take warning and always ready be,
For to suppress those savages of Northwest America;
For they are so desirous some vessel for to gain,
That they will never leave it off, till most of them are slain.

And now unto old China we're fastly rolling on,
Where we shall drink good punch for which we've suffered long;
And when the sixteenth day of June around does yearly come,
We'll drink in commemoration what on that day was done.

And now for to conclude, and make an end unto my song,
Success to the commander of the Lady Washington.¹⁶
Success unto his voyages wherever he may go,
And may death and destruction always attend his foe.

Though on the face of this ballad the attack upon the *Washington* appears to have been unprovoked, a little examination into the contemporary accounts shows that, like a great many more so-called unprovoked attacks, it was in reality an effort on the part of the Indians to take revenge. The story is told, or mentioned, in five different journals: Haswell's manuscript *Second Log*, 1791; Hoskins's manuscript *Narrative*, 1791; Ingraham's manuscript *Journal of the Hope*, 1791; Boit's *Log of the Columbia's second voyage*; ¹⁷ and Bartlett's manuscript *Journal*, 1791.¹⁸ The first four received their information from Captain Kendrick himself; but it may be surmised that Bartlett obtained his version from the author of the ballad itself.

All that Boit has to say upon the subject is as follows:

"Captain Kendrick inform'd us that he had had a skirmish, with the Natives at *Barrell's* sound in Queen Charlotte Isles, and was oblig'd to kill upwards of 50 of them before they wou'd desist from the attack. It appear'd to me, from what I cou'd collect that the Indians was the aggressors."¹⁹

Haswell, under date, August 29, 1791, is even more brief. He merely says:

"The first port he arrived in was *Barrel's Sound*, where the natives attempted to capture him. In this, however, they were mistaken, and a great slaughter was made among them without shedding blood from any of Capt. Kendrick's crew."

¹⁶ See a sketch of John Kendrick's life in the *Quarterly of Oregon Historical Society*, vol. xxiii, 277 ff. Delano, in his *Voyages*, Boston, 1817, p. 400, gives a fulsome laudation of his friend, Captain Kendrick.

¹⁷ Published in *Massachusetts Historical Quarterly, Proceedings*, 1919-1920, vol. 53, pp. 217 ff.; *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, vol. xii, pp. 3 ff.; *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, vol. xxii, pp. 256 ff.

¹⁸ Published in narrative form in *The Sea, The Ship, and The Sailor*, Salem, Mass. 1925, pp. 287 ff.

¹⁹ *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings*, vol. 53, p. 234; *Washington Historical Quarterly*, vol. xii, 17; *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, vol. xxii, pp. 289 ff.

Haswell, Boit, and Hoskins were chief mate, fifth mate, and clerk respectively of the ship *Columbia* on her second voyage, 1790-93. In August 1791 when the *Columbia* entered Clayoquot Sound, Vancouver Island, the brig, *Washington*, under Kendrick was lying there at anchor, preparing for the return voyage to China. These three men were, therefore, the first Europeans to record the story. Bartlett and Ingraham both heard their accounts in the following December after the *Washington* reached Macao. Bartlett's version²⁰ agrees so closely with the ballad that the parallel passages have been already set out in the notes.

Ingraham's account, under date, December 25, 1791, is quite lengthy. It runs thus:

"He had been engaged in a very disagreeable skirmish with the Natives on the southern part of Washingtons Isles²¹ were Koyah is the chief it seems Cap Kendrick on his last voyage had for some misdemeanor put this chief in Irons which however seem'd now quite forgot but savages seldom forget insults or injuries It is said of those among us on the East side of the continent that they will never fail to revenge even an affront of any kind for years after the transaction has happen'd yet till opportunity presents itself they are apparently on good terms with their adversary. It seems Koyah was not wanting in this kind of duplicity—It happen'd nearly in the following manner While Capn Kendrick was trading he suffer'd about 50 of the natives get on board his vessell while there remain'd above twice that number was alongside. Capn Kendrick placing too much confidence in them it seems had no men under arms (a very necessary precaution among savages of any kind) neither did Capn Kendrick wish to affront them by turning them out of his vessell as he thought it might be a hindrance to him in purchasing furr's which he was very anxious to procure as he was late in the season²² while the above number of Indians were on board the keys of the arm chest which stood on the quarter were missing on which Cap Kendrick challenged the natives with the theft and applied to Koyah that they might be restor'd but instead of complying Koyah with severall others leap'd on the top of the arm chest the better to secure it Koyah exulting in his success telling Cap Kendrick he could not get at his arms to kill them then at the same time holding out his leg saying now put me in Irons—Yuch and Saulkinnats two other chiefs were on board who tried to

²⁰ Manuscript Journal under date, December 25, 1791; Narrative in *The Sea, The Ship, and The Sailor*, pp. 320 ff.

²¹ The name applied by Captain Gray in June, 1789, to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

²² The traders usually strove to be on the Northwest Coast by the beginning of May. Kendrick arrived at Houston Stewart Channel on 13th June; that would not be late.

allure Capn Kendrick to thade and thereby put him of his guard but it seems he was aware of their scheme and stood on his guard with the best weapon he could get which was a bar of Iron—It was evident that the natives soon ment to put their plot into execution by hailing on Shore for more canoes to come off—not letting any of the seamen go before the main Hatchway and insulting them by taking their hats and their handkerchiefs of their necks likewise all of them prepairing their daggers (a weapon which these people are never without) In this very criticle situation Capn Kendrick desir'd his officers and men to drop of the deck one by one as well as they could and prepare what arms there was in the Cabben this was fortunately effected and they got 4 musketts a blunderbuss and a pair of pistolls loaded—by this time Koyah (perhaps suspecting what they were about) sprang down into the Cabben which Capn Kendrick seeing jump'd instantly on his back Koyah seeing the muskets made a precipitate retreat Capn Kendrick and those with him follow'd shouting and firing by which the decks were soon clear'd having again possession of their arms they made good use of them and kill'd about 30 of the natives leaving others to lament their folly—happily no person was hurt on board the Washington. It is sincerely to be hoped the termination of this affair will be of generall service to vessells trading as by convincing them that they have little less than enevitable destruction to expect from attacking people who's Instruments of death are so far superior to their own it may render them peaceable & content to enjoy what they possess by fair means only.”

Hoskins's Narrative, under date, August 29, 1791, gives the story at great length. He was a friend of Captain Kendrick and it is fair to assume that he puts forward the most favorable side for him. Inasmuch as Hoskins's Narrative still remains in manuscript the whole account is reproduced, even at the risk of wearying the reader.

“Captain Kendrick arrived on the 13th of June in latitude 53° 58' north he went into Barrell's Sound where his vessel a few days after his arrival was attacked and actually in possession of the natives nearly an hour when he again recovered his vessel killed and wounded a great many amongst the rest a woman who was a proper amazon This he attributes to the following cause soon after he sent the Columbia on to China²³ he sailed from Cliquot²⁴

²³ When the *Columbia* and the *Washington* left Boston, Captain Kendrick, the commander of the expedition, was on the former, while the latter was in charge of Captain Gray; but in July 1789 they exchanged commands: Gray sailing to China on the *Columbia* and Kendrick remaining for a time on the Northwest Coast in the *Washington*.

²⁴ A sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island, quite favoured as a resort by the Boston traders. The name is now spelled Clayoquot.

for Washington's Islands and went into Barrell's Sound having been there a short time the natives found means to steal his linnen etc that had that day been washed this with some other things they had at times robbed him of induced him to take the two chiefs Coyah and Schulkinanse he dismounted one of his cannon and put one leg of each into the carriage where the arms of the cannon rest and fastened down the clamps threatening at the same time if they did not restore the stolen goods to kill them nearly all the goods were soon returned what was not he made them pay for in skins as this was a means though contrary to his wishes of breaking friendship with them and well knowing if he let those Chiefs go they would sell him no more skins he therefore made them fetch him all their skins and paid them the same price he had done for those before purchased when they had no more the two Chiefs were set at liberty when he went into the Sound this time the natives appeared to be quite friendly and brought skins for sale as usual the day of the attack there was an extraordinary number of visitors several Chiefs being aboard the arm chests were on the quarter deck with the keys in them the gunners having been overhauling the arms the Chiefs got on these chests and took the keys out when Coyah tauntingly said to Captain Kendrick pointing to his legs at the same time now put me into your gun carriage the vessel was immediately thronged with natives a woman standing in the main chains urging them on the officers and people all retired below having no arms but what was in possession of the natives save the officers private ones Captain Kendrick tarried on deck endeavouring to pacify the natives and bring them to some terms at the same time edging towards the companion way to secure his retreat to the cabbin a fellow all the time holding a huge marling spike he had stolen fixed into a stick over his head ready to strike the deadly blow whenever orders should be given the other natives with their daggers grasped and only waiting for the word to be given to begin a most savage massacre just as Captain Kendrick had reached the companion way Coyah jumpt down and he immediately jumpt on top of his Coyah then made a pass at him with his dagger but it luckily only went through his jacket and scratched his belly the officers by this time had their arms in readiness and would have ventured on deck with them before but for fear of killing their captain Captain Kendrick now fired a musket from the cabbin then took a pair of pistols and another musket and went on deck being followed by his officers with the remainder of the arms they had collected the natives on seeing this made a precipitate

retreat all but the woman before mentioned in the chains who there continued urging them to action with the greatest ardour until the last moment though her arm had been previously cut by one of the people with a hanger and she was otherways much wounded when she quitted all the natives had left the vessel and she jumped over board and attempted to swim of but she was afterwards shot though the natives had taken the keys of the arm chests yet they did not happen to be lockt they were therefore immediately opened and a constant fire was kept up as long as they could reach the natives with the cannon or small arms after which they chased them in their armed boats making the most dreadfull havock by killing all they came across."

Even though there is no version giving the Indians' side of the question enough is shown in Hoskins's and Ingraham's accounts to take this out of the category of unprovoked attacks.

The earliest accounts of the maritime trade show that it was first carried on over the ship's gunwale from canoes alongside. In those days when sea-otter skins "were as plenty as blackberries" the traders could easily obtain a cargo without taking any risks or going out of their way, literally or metaphorically. No one then was allowed on the ship's deck except the chiefs or persons high in authority. But increasing competition gradually broke down this salutary rule. To obtain furs the traders permitted to come on deck any Indian who appeared to have influence or whose goodwill it seemed advisable to gain. Soon every Indian with furs was allowed there during the trading. In the end the native came to regard as his inalienable privilege the right to be on the ship when disposing of his furs.

The results can readily be surmised. The Indian, so admitted, saw all around him articles whose possession meant so much to him in decreased labor, ease of operation, and increased production. Childlike he grasped them. Thus, instead of keeping temptation out of his way or him out of the way of temptation, the maritime trader for his own purposes and to win an advantage over his opponent, placed the savage in the midst of it. When the poor Indian yielded to the temptation and made away with (stole, if you prefer the word) goods or bits of metal, he and his associates were fired upon, or, if caught, he was triced up and flogged or otherwise punished.

In this case the Indians allowed on deck and permitted to wander about, could not resist the temptation to pilfer the clothing. Kendrick seized Coyah and his brother chief, who may or may not

have been implicated, and, by threatening them with instant death, secured the return of a large quantity of the property. Then he made the Indians pay for whatever was missing, at his own appraisal. More than that he by force compelled them to sell their remaining furs to him at his own price. Force breeds force. Kendrick was sowing the dragon's teeth. He was, nevertheless, only doing what was usual in the maritime fur-trade. An example or two may make this plain. Ingraham admits that he imprisoned Haida chiefs because their people had induced him to anchor in their harbor by saying that they had many skins for sale and then had declared that they only had a very small quantity. At another place also he imprisoned the chiefs. As he tells the story the reason was that, although he had saved the lives of the sons of one of them, the tribe refused to sell him their skins because they had promised to retain them for a rival trader. Again, the natives of Esperanza Inlet, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, told the Spaniards that another maritime trading captain had bombarded their village because they would not sell their furs to him at his price. The records contain numerous examples of similar conduct where the trader had not a fraction of the excuse or provocation that Kendrick had on this occasion.

The explanation of such actions lies on the surface. There was never any cohesion or co-operation in the maritime fur-trade. It never developed into a unification or combination of interests. It was a congeries of individual efforts. It was permeated with the spirit of keen competition. Each adventurer strove to seize the present advantage, regardless of the future. Neither ship nor trader might ever return. One could apply to it very properly the words of Horace: "*Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero,*"—Enjoy the present moment, trusting the least possible to the future. The Indian, on the other hand, did not look to individual, but to tribal or national responsibility. If a ship had done him some injury he was ready to take revenge on her, if that were possible; but if not, then his revenge was vicarious and would be taken upon the next ship that anchored near his village.

In the land trade where the same men and the same companies continued for years, the trader pursued a totally different method of dealing with the Indian. He admitted only one Indian, or at any rate only a few Indians, at a time into his trade shop. He kept temptation out of the way of the benighted savage; he strove ever to treat him as a friend, and yet as a child; he made the punishment

for wrong-doing to fall upon the guilty individual and not upon the innocent members of his tribe. This conduct produced peace and confidence; while that pursued by the maritime traders resulted in a state of fear and distrust.

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