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A YANKEE TRADER ON THE NORTHWEST COAST, 1791-1795

The ship *Jefferson*, of 152 tons burden, sailed from Boston on 29th November, 1791, for the Northwest Coast. She was owned by J. and T. Lamb and associates, and commanded by Josiah Roberts. The record of her voyage, now extant, and from which this article is prepared was kept by Bernard Magee, her first officer. The *Jefferson* rounded Cape Horn in March, 1792, and in May came to anchor in Cumberland Bay, Juan Fernandez. Solomon Kendrick, her second officer, who had been there with his father in 1788 in the *Columbia* took the vessel into harbor. The former governor, Don Blas Gonzales, having been dismissed because of his kindness to the *Columbia* on that occasion, the present incumbent would take no chances and refused permission to land. At this time Spain's monopoly of the South Seas was crumbling into ruins; but that seemed the more reason for clinging to the shadow. The Governor, however, supplied them with water, meat and vegetables, and gave them a letter to his superior at Valparaiso. Reaching that port Captain Roberts was ready with the threadbare story of a voyage in search of the North West Passage. The Governor at Valparaiso had his instructions also and could only suggest an application to Don Ambrosio Higgins, the Captain-General at St. Iago. That genial Irishman having in a lengthy and flattering letter granted the request, the *Jefferson* remained until 26th June in Valparaiso harbor. Thence she sailed to St. Ambrose Island, where in seven weeks she obtained almost 13,000 seal skins, which Magee claimed to be "superior to any that ever was brought to the China market."

Leaving St. Ambrose on 28th September, 1792, the *Jefferson* on 11th November anchored in Captain Cook's Resolution Bay, Marquesas Islands. Magee bears witness to the theiving habits of the natives, saying: "It is beyond conception there Dexterity in theft."

The main object of this visit was to build a small schooner of some twenty tons, which had been brought out in frame. The keel was laid on 19th November and the vessel launched on 8th February,

1793. Magee explains that this was a much longer time than had been anticipated, but that it was owing to the changes in her model and the necessity of preparing the extra timbers. He declares that when launched she "was a complete little vessel which we named after the bay she was built in—the Resolution." According to Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Voyage dans les États-unis d'Amérique*, vol. 3, p. 20 the *Resolution* was of 90 tons.

Sailing from Resolution Bay on 24th February, Roberts soon fell in with the New Islands which (though he knew it not and thought himself the discoverer) had been seen in June, 1791, by Marchand in *La Solide* and in the preceding April by Ingraham in the *Hope*. In March, 1793, the *Jefferson* reached the Hawaiian Islands where she stayed but a few days obtaining provisions. Thence continuing her voyage she sighted the Northwest Coast on 14th May in latitude 45° 15'.

For a week she met baffling winds. On the 20th she reached a village in latitude 44° 46', somewhat south of the Columbia River, where in 1790 Captain Simon Metcalfe had procured some skins. Though they saw smoke and landed they met no natives. Continuing their course along shore, by the 23rd they had made 75 miles; the next twenty-four hours added 60 miles; and thus slowly moving northward the *Jefferson* on 28th May reached Barkley Sound and anchored the following day in a snug and commodious harbor. The vessel's bottom having become very foul during the two years absence from Boston she was now laid on shore for cleaning whilst the longboat sought trade. The first sea-otter skin cost ten toes: i.e. the so-called chisels, bits of iron drawn to a cutting edge like a chisel. Skins seemed to be plentiful, but the Indians declared that they must all go to Wickaninish, the head chief at Clayoquot Sound. Four villages yielded only one prime skin; the ship bought seven; the prospect seemed disheartening.

By 3rd June the ship had been gravled. No sign had been discovered of the little schooner. Soon Tatoochcoosettle, a brother of Wickanannish, reported the arrival at Nootka Sound of a small vessel, with two masts, and black sides, which they thought to be the *Resolution*.

Reaching Port Cox, in Clayoquot Sound, they met Wickanannish. He refused to board the ship unless two of the officers would remain ashore as hostages. He gave as his reason that his brother and two of the chiefs had been killed in 1792 by Captain Brown of the *Butterworth*, who had fired on them because they had not

returned presents equivalent to those he had given. No one can say what the truth was; Ingraham in his *Log of the Hope*, gives under date August 8, 1792, two variants of the story. Wickananish also complained that Captain Gray had lent him a great coat and had later threatened to kill his people unless they delivered to the amount of its value. He, however, spoke well of Captain Kendrick, then lying at Nookta. Ingraham has noted under date August 4, 1792, the fondness of the natives for Kendrick. He claims that it had a monetary basis; they could dispose of their skins to Kendrick at exorbitant prices, which no other trader would give. In the end, while refusing to step on the ship, Wickananish agreed that his brother remain on board as a hostage whilst the trade went on ashore.

As Captain Roberts examined Clayoquot Sound he discovered what other people had learned; that Meares's chart was quite unlike the reality. The *Jefferson* remained until 16th June, but the trade was very light—8 or 10 skins a day. After a tedious passage of five days the ship on 22nd June entered Friendly Cove, Nootka Sound. A Spanish ship, the *San Carlos*, and the *Amelia*, an American brig from Providence, Rhode Island, lay there at anchor. The *Resolution* had arrived five weeks before and was now at Marvinas Bay (Mowinna) about four miles from Friendly Cove. There also lay the *Lady Washington*, Captain John Kendrick. We can well believe that he was overjoyed when the *Resolution* arrived with his second son Solomon as second in command. Soon after the *Jefferson* anchored in Friendly Cove, Kendrick and his supercargo, John Howel, came on a visit from Marvinas Bay. On 23rd June arrived from the northward the English brig, *Three Brothers*, Captain Alder. She had practically disposed of all her trading goods; had some 500 prime sea-otter skins in her hold; and was on the eve of departure for China. Magee says that Captain Alder very freely gave them information about the northern trade.

On 29th June the *Jefferson* sailed to the northward in company with the *Resolution*, Burling; the *Amelia*, Trotter; and the *Three Brothers*, Alder. Captain Kendrick in the *Lady Washington* remained at Friendly Cove; Kendrick was always leisurely in his movements. The next day the *Jefferson* spoke the English schooner, *Prince William Henry*, Captain Ewen, from Queen Charlotte Islands. As the *Jefferson* slowly made her way towards those islands the smith was kept at work making iron collars and large tin kettles. Doubtless the captain expected to reap a harvest similar to that

which Ingraham had obtained with iron collars, two years before. By arrangement the schooner took the easterly shore whilst the ship kept the ocean side of the islands.

On 4th July, the *Jefferson* anchored in Coyah's harbor: Houston-Stewart Channel. There Magee saw an Indian boldly wearing the jacket of one of the crew of the *Amelia* who had been recently murdered. The natives had many sea-otter skins, but would not part with them except for dressed moose skins—leather war garments, by them called Clemons. Continuing along the western side the ship found no trade and on 12th July moored in North Passage: Cunneah's Harbor. Here, as usual, there were many skins but having fixed the rate of barter at a coat and trousers, or an overcoat, for a skin they only obtained sixty. Had they been prepared to meet the Indians' demand they could easily have procured 300 skins. For two sheets of copper weighing 60 pounds each they received 12 prime skins. An Indian who had taken a fancy to the captain's sea trunk got it for one prime skin. As we shall see there was nothing on the ship that did not have its price.

On 20th July, whilst preparing to leave Cunneah's, Captain Roberts heard of a vessel at anchor outside the harbor. She proved to be the schooner *Jane*, Captain Newbury, of Boston. She had sailed from her home port on 29th November and reached Queen Charlotte Islands on 6th July. Newbury was giving two fathoms of double width cloth for a prime skin. Two years later poor Newbury was accidentally killed by the discharge of a pistol in the hands of a friendly chief; and by an irony of fate when Péron in the *Otter* reached the vicinity he found an Indian using the headboard (with the inscription still legible) as a seat for his canoe.

From Cunneah's the *Jefferson* sailed northward along the Alaskan coast. On 25th July she was at Bucareli Bay, Alaska, where she found the *Amelia* and the *Resolution*. Here skins were plentiful; but the price was deemed excessive. The *Resolution* had collected 25 skins, 5 cutsarks (or robes, usually of three skins,) and 20 tails. These were transferred to the *Jefferson*. Finding that only thick copper (of which he had none) and tanned moose skins (of which, also, he had none) were current, Roberts determined to send the *Resolution* to the Columbia River to collect the latter. The crew were set to work to burn charcoal for the manufacture of iron collars, which was the only form in which iron was saleable. The seine was drawn; many salmon were caught; and a smoke house erected to cure them. Though the *Jefferson* remained for nearly a month she obtained only 24 skins, each of which cost a musket and

two pounds of powder or $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards of cloth $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards wide and two or three iron collars. Two years before Ingraham had secured five prime skins for each iron collar; but then the fashion was new.

The season being now well advanced the *Jefferson* sailed for Barkley Sound where she arrived on 7th September. There Captain Roberts was surprised to meet the *Resolution*. That speedy little schooner had been to the Columbia (or Gray's River, as they called it) and obtained 63 sea-otter skins, superior to any that had been collected, and 27 moose skins. She had expended all her copper and cloth—iron the natives did not want at any price. Solomon Kendrick, her second officer, showed Roberts a sketch of the river which differed greatly from that which he had been given at Nootka Sound.

The *Jefferson* then went into winter quarters and was laid up in ordinary. Throughout the winter trade went on in sea-otter and moose skins; 28 in one week and 21 in another; charcoal was burned for the use of the smith who busied himself in making iron swords for the Columbia River trade; mussel shells were burned to procure lime for tanning; sawyers were cutting planks, and carpenters repairing and making comfortable the ship for the winter. The *Resolution* sailed on 29th September on a trading cruise. Roberts agreed to sell her to Wickananish in the spring for 50 prime skins. Tetacus, the well known chief of Classet (Cape Flattery) visited the *Jefferson* late in September and having completed his trading took the opportunity to plunder the natives. The Indians borrowed the jolly boat and the Captain's cloak to go on a visit. So long were they absent that the ship's people thought that they had stolen the articles borrowed from them, but after an absence of about two weeks all were returned in good condition. Yet a sailor who went a-hunting was cut off and killed. The season's trade had yielded 21 cutsarks, 239 prime, and 70 small, sea-otter skins, 200 tails, exclusive of land otter and beaver, and 90 moose skins to be exchanged for sea otter.

On 23rd October the *Resolution* returned, having been unable because of bad weather to enter the Columbia. This completed her year's work. Trade in moose skins, in sea-otter skins, and in provisions went on through the winter. The moose skins were purchased at a musket each; but next year at Queen Charlotte Islands they brought three prime skins each. An effort was made to tan some of the larger seal skins from St. Ambrose Island as a substitute for moose skins; the log does not, however, throw any light on the success. The Indians, as usual, pettily pilfered but when

these pilferings became too bold the traders seized and held two of their chiefs until they paid for the stolen articles. The log complains that the rainfall was excessive, yet the December temperature, it states, was not so severe as April or May in New England.

In the winter trade Roberts gave 40 toes for a prime skin. Conditions had changed since Dixon and Gray had bought them for a toe each. To get the moose skins the Captain began now to strip his ship for materials for barter: two brass field pieces were given for two moose skins, and the jolly boat was loaned to enable the Indians to take the guns home. Even haiqua (*Dentalium Indianorum*) was not disdained—the natives on the Columbia River would gladly exchange a prime sea-otter skin for a fathom of those slender shells which could here be purchased for a pound of powder. Toes, though debased currency, were in great demand, and the smith began to manufacture them in large quantities. In the course of the winter 160 fathoms of haiqua were purchased from the different tribes at varying rates: a short jacket for a fathom, or a musket for six fathoms, or an iron sword for two fathoms. The wintering place was about six miles from the Indian village of Seshart; there a log house was built to protect the stores whilst the ship was being graved.

Anything that the Indians fancied on the *Jefferson* was for sale. Tetacus and his friends from Classet fixed their desires on the cabin carpet: it was theirs for five moose skins. By the end of February, 1794, the trade had brought 210 moose skins and some 200 otter skins, making of the latter a total of 440. But now all the cloth for barter was gone and for the season's business Roberts had only the moose skins, the haiqua, 60 sheets of copper, 400 iron swords, some iron collars, a few muskets and pistols, and a little powder. Not a large or appealing stock.

During March, 1794, great quantities of herring gave a delightful change of diet and at the same time saved the salt provisions.

Just when the vessels were ready to leave, a canoe belonging to the *Resolution* was stolen. The captain resolved on retaliation. As the wintering place was within six miles of Seshart it was thought that those people were the delinquents. In order to punish them for this and previous thefts a boat's crew was sent to their village. The canoe was demanded and, on threats of vengeance, returned, whereupon the traders fired on the natives, killing three and wounding two others. The remainder fled for safety from civilized man to the wild woods. Then the traders rummaged and ransacked the Indian houses, took a great quantity of their dried fish,

some toes, bits of copper, a musket, and some powder, tore down a number of their houses, stole six of the best canoes, and demolished some of the other large ones. It is impossible to justify such conduct; it is recounted here just as given in the log, where it is set forth as though it were something laudable. It was incidents like this that caused the so-called unprovoked attacks by the natives.

On 3rd April, 1794, the *Resolution* sailed for the Columbia: the people on the *Jefferson* saw her no more. About the middle of April the *Jefferson* set out to trade to the northward. By the 22nd she had reached a harbor a short distance from Skincuttle Inlet on the east coast of Queen Charlotte Islands. The log calls it Port Clinton, a spot at present unidentifiable, but visited and named by Captain Simon Metcalfe in the *Eleanora* in 1789. There the moose hides were the main support of trade. They were exchanged at the rate of one for three prime sea-otter skins. The armorer was busy making tin kettles to trade for fish: one kettle, one halibut. Soon the *Jefferson* reached Atli Inlet. Many whales were noticed. Iron collars, toes, and daggers had fallen so low as mediums of trade that they would only procure halibut. Already Roberts was looking for the return of the *Resolution*; he left a letter for her captain, Burling, on 13th May, with an Indian Chief.

The *Jefferson* proceeded to Cumshewa, where she found good trade. In one day, for example, they procured 7 cutsarks, 94 sea-otter skins, and 57 tails. A swivel was traded for two skins, and soon another swivel went the same road. Gradually the *Jefferson* made her way along the coast northward to Cunneah's Harbor (North Island, Parry Passage), where she arrived on 19th May, but Cunneah and the greater part of his tribe were still at their winter village, Kaigahnee, on Dall Island. Skins were plentiful at Cunneah's in fact an embargo had to be placed on trade until fresh fish were procured for the ship's crew. The brewing of spruce beer was begun here: this seems to show fear of scurvy. Here a barrel of seal oil from St. Ambrose brought four skins; while a table cloth and sheets produced one skin each, and the cabin curtains two skins.

About the end of May, Cawe, Cunneah, Eldarge, and Skillkade the head tribal chiefs with their people arrived from Tattisco in Kaigahnee, with their canoes full of sea-otter skins: probably 800. In the six weeks since leaving Barkley Sound the sea-otter skins had increased to 1146; but now with all this wealth around them the *Jefferson* had little to offer in trade. The last moose skin brought six sea-otter skins. Now, something must be done. Something for

barter must be had. Here the Yankee genius for swapping asserted itself. The worn-out lower studding sails brought four skins; a Japanese flag went on the bargain counter for one skin. Seal oil, old sails, old clothing of officers and crew, all went into the melting pot. The cabin looking-glass and the officer's trunks followed them. The carpenter was set to work to make boxes, or trunks as they called them. A deep sea line, an old top-gallant studding sail, and ten rockets came into hand as trading goods. Seal oil seemed to be legal tender; but anything was current—more old sails and trunks were exchanged. Then Captain Roberts opened out as merchant tailor: a mizzen top-mast studding sail, a flying jib, and other sails were transformed into women's garments. Swivels and muskets helped to swell the trade. All this time Roberts each day scanned the horizon for the *Resolution* with the clamons (moose skins) so urgently needed. On 13th June, the Indians brought word of a vessel's being in sight and asked if it were the long-looked for schooner. The captain hastened to the look-out but could discern nothing. He concluded that it was merely an Indian ruse to ascertain whether any vessel were really expected. Day by day the tailor cut up any and every worn-out sail to fabricate women's garments, which sold for a prime skin each, just as fast as he could make them. And day by day the carpenter manufactured boxes, by courtesy called in the log trunks, and they found an equally hungry market.

Still there were furs to the right of him and furs to the left of him, but the purchasing power was gradually reaching the zero point. Then came a lucky thought—such of the ship's crockery as could be spared was changed into fur. To ingratiate themselves and to aid the trade the captain with the carpenter and some of the crew went to the village to plane and smooth a totem pole. The next day they returned with two spare top-masts and the necessary tackle to raise the pole and set it in position. The chief Cunneah was so delighted that he invited the captain and his officers to a feast. There he publicly thanked them and in token of his appreciation gave them each a prime sea-otter skin—which probably found their way into the *Jefferson's* capacious maw. Later Cunneah asked Captain Roberts to have the pole painted, which he did. The ship's doctor too, was called in to treat a patient; but the log throws no light on the disease. It is assumed that the treatment was successful, nothing to the contrary being stated.

Old sails being almost exhausted, Roberts now hit upon the idea of using some of the ship's light duck. He made it into a sail for a canoe and disposed of it for three prime skins. Oddly enough the

Indians had not evolved the use of sails when Captain Cook arrived. The log is interesting it reads:

“Purchased from them 9 skins being mostly for the middle stay sail made into women’s garments—being the last of the light sails that we could possibly spare—having disposed in the same manner of 3 top-gallant steering sails, one top mast and two lower Ditto, the flying jibb & mizzen top mast Stay sail—the whole of which procured about 40 prime skins—in short every thing that could be spared on board were purchas’d up by the natives with the greatest Evidity—seemed in want of Every thing the got thire Eye on Excepting Iron which was in little or no Demand which we Could no more than purchass fish with & then was obliged to work it up into different trinkets to thire fancy—& I have no dount if we had a sufficiency of trade—Cloth thick copper &c—that there might be percured at this place between 1000 & 1500 Skins—of the best quality—as we have already procured upwards of 400 Skins—& that only with the drags—of all our trade—which we had no right to suppose according to the prices given the last season—to Command more then 150 Skins we have disposed of articles in this port this year that would not even Draw there attention the last season—& at a very advantageous rate—and no End to the quantity of Skins brought on board and alongside Every Day for sale—of which we purchass dayly a few with some article or other.” (June 23, 1794)

Still the skins abounded; and something must be found for barter: a small setting seine, a small boat anchor, a powder horn and some of the Captain’s old clothes became currency. While this trade was going on there were rumors of a ship in the offing. One can readily imagine Captain Roberts’ anxiety, knowing that on the appearance of a vessel with proper goods not another skin would come to the *Jefferson*. His bar iron was unsaleable, but he bethought himself of transforming it into bangles for the adornment of the women. Twenty such bangles he exchanged for one prime skin. So engrossed were they in the trade that the *Glorious Fourth* passed by practically unnoticed.

On 8th July, at Cunneah’s request men were sent to raise and place a carved figure on the top of the totem pole lately erected. This figure was “cut and carved with a great deal of art, being the representation of some wild animal unknown to us, somewhat the resemblance of a toad.” The following day the captain, doctor, and purser went to the village to attend to a potlatch. As it is believed that this is the earliest description of such an event amongst the Haidas no apology is offered for its reproduction:

"The house was thronged with guests and spectators. The scene was then opened by the ceremony of introducing the wives of Enow and Cunneah (two of the chiefs) and the candidates for incision or boring, each coming in separately and backwards from behind the scenes—being saluted by a regular vocal music of all present and which had no unpleasant effect. In the same manner the presents were ushered in and displayed to the view of all present and thrown together in a heap being a profuse collection of Clamons (war garments), racoons and other cutsarks, comstagas both iron and copper and a variety of ornaments. This being done the spectators were dismissed and the guests placed in order round the house. The incision was then performed on the lips and noses of two grown and two small girls which ended the distribution was then begun of the above articles, the Captain receiving 5 otter skins the other articles were distributed among the different chiefs according to their distinction, after which the Capt. took his leave and returned onboard."

Still the trade went along. Skins were being offered and anything on board was currency: a large pitch pot and sixty pounds of two-inch rope brought two prime skins each: twenty-nine trunks made by the carpenter sold as fast as they were completed. On the 17th arrived the bark, *Phoenix* of Bengal, Captain Hugh Moore. He had left Bengal seven months before and had since his arrival on the coast been trading to the northward. He reported that Captain Kendrick in the *Lady Washington* had secured a large number of skins and disposed of all his goods, but was still at Norfolk Sound (Sitka). From Captain Moore they learned of the execution of Louis XVI in January, 1793. This ship remained until the 28th and, of course in that interval the *Jefferson* obtained not a skin.

The log then contains a lengthy account of a difference between its writer, Bernard Magee, and Captain Roberts. It appears that Captain Moore of the *Phoenix* discharged at this place his second officer, a Mr. Dumarez. Magee later entered into some arrangement with the dismissed officer for his influence in inducing Cunneah to purchase the *Jefferson's* long boat for 35 skins. In this effort Magee took Dumarez below to treat him to a glass of grog. This intimacy aroused the anger of Captain Roberts and hot words followed; however, in the end the long boat was sold for the 35 skins. On 1st August the *Jenny* of Bristol, now a ship, under Captain Adamson, anchored in Cloak Bay, just outside Cunneah's harbor where the *Jefferson* lay. From her Captain Roberts learned the

supposed fate of his little schooner, the *Resolution*, but that is a story to be told separately.

On 4th August, Joseph Cain, carpenter, and Thomas Kilby, seaman, and on 15th a Chinese who had been taken aboard at Nookta in 1793, all deserted the *Jefferson* at Kaigahnee. That port was a great meeting place of the trading vessels and, consequently, a great clearing house for sailors. Whilst the *Phoenix* and the *Jenny* were in the vicinity the *Jefferson*, as was to be expected, did not trade, for she had nothing but her equipment to offer in exchange for furs—all her trading goods having been, long since, exhausted. The ship had now, besides the 13,000 seal skins obtained at St. Ambrose Island, more than 1,400 sea-otter skins on board, over and above sea-otter tails and the skins of land animals.

All efforts were now directed towards preparation for the departure for China, by way of the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. The skins were all got out, cleaned, aired, and carefully repacked; the hold was restowed; the masts and yards all examined carefully; the running rigging all rebent; the ship was laid on shore and graved; water was put on board and fifteen cords of fine alder for the galley stove. During this time, nevertheless, a sporadic barter went on, which in the end brought the sea-otter skins to a grand total of 1,475. Finally on 16th August, 1794, all was ready for sea and at eight o'clock on the morning of 17th the *Jefferson* unmoored in company with the *Jenny*. At 11 o'clock, when clear of Kaigahnee Harbor, with three cheers to the *Jenny*, she spread her sails to a light easterly breeze and stretched away towards the "Paradise of the Pacific" on the first section of her long homeward voyage.

The *Jefferson* was a slow sailer, for it was not until the 20th September that the land of Hawaii appeared above the horizon at the distance of five leagues. Thirty-three days was certainly a long voyage from the coast to the "islands." The usual time was about twenty-one days. During the night of 24th September the *Jefferson* ran upon a reef in Kawaihae Bay, Hawaii, but into the details of that story we will not enter. Those who would do so will find them fully set forth in my address at the Sesquicentennial celebration of Captain Cook in Honolulu in 1928. On October 13, 1794, the *Jefferson* sailed from Kealakekua Bay for China.

In La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's *Voyage dans les Etats-Unis*, tome 3, pp. 19-38 (Paris, An vii) is a short account of this voyage. It is there stated that the *Jefferson* reached Canton, November 25, 1794, where she remained exchanging her furs and skins for teas,

nankeens, etc., until February 12, 1795. On that date she sailed direct for Boston by way of the Cape of Good Hope and arrived at her home port on July 28, 1795, after an absence of about three years and nine months. The materials presently available throw no light upon the financial result of the voyage, further than to show that it was a profitable one, but not equal to that made by the *Margaret*, which, it is believed, had returned about \$10,000 for each one-eighth share.

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