

Trimming the Fringes of their World:
The British Maritime Fur Trade and the Expansion of the Western World

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Chapter One: Introduction

The British Empire in the eighteenth century had a problem. The British demand for Chinese goods, such as tea and porcelain, was increasing, but the Chinese had little interest in European goods, forcing Europeans in China to buy Chinese goods with silver. Although Europe's supply of silver, sourced primarily from South America, could meet Chinese demand, the Europeans were essentially paying cash for Chinese products, an affront to the age's mercantilist feelings.¹ The voyages of Captain Cook would offer a possible solution to this problem. Captain Cook had explored much of the Pacific over the course of his three voyages of exploration in 1768-71, 1772-75, and 1776-1780. During these voyages, he found places like Australia and New Zealand, but it was his third voyage, when he visited the Northwest coast of America, that offered a solution to Britain's China problem. During this voyage Cook visited Yuquot, in Vancouver Island and Prince William Sound and Cook's Inlet, in Alaska, regions rich in furs, especially sea otter furs. Later in the voyage, Cook's men discovered that sea otter furs were in demand in China, selling for sixty Spanish dollars a skin.² Although Cook met his end on the voyage, surviving members of his expedition reported that a profitable trade in sea otter furs could be conducted between the Northwest Coast and Canton.³ The British had found a good that the Chinese wanted, other than silver.

In response to Cook's voyage, expeditions were launched from Canton, from British possessions in India, and from Britain itself, aiming to establish a trade in furs between America and China. This was the maritime fur trade, defined in this paper as the trade in furs, especially

¹ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 1.

² Dick A. Wilson, "King George's Men: British Ships and Sailors in the Pacific Northwest-China Trade, 1785-1821" (PhD Diss., University of Idaho, 2004), 7.

³ James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 23.

sea otter furs, from the Northwest Coast to Canton. The maritime fur trade lasted from 1785, when the first British ship arrived off the Northwest Coast, to the mid 1820s, when the maritime fur trade was replaced by the terrestrial fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company. The British sought a solution to low Chinese demand for their goods and hoped to create a profitable trade. They failed. The British portion of the maritime fur trade was only marginally profitable and, through the 1790s, the British presence on the Northwest Coast dwindled, as American merchants, sailing from Boston, supplanted them. By 1800, the British had largely withdrawn from the trade.

But though maritime fur trade did not solve Britain's problems in China, it accomplished something else. Between 1785, when the first trading vessel appeared off the Northwest Coast, and 1789, the year of the Nootka Crisis, British merchants played a pivotal role in incorporating the Northern Pacific into the global imperial system. They explored much of both the Northwest Coast and Hawaii, observing and charting the region as they went. They did not "discover" these places, which had been inhabited by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Nor were they first Europeans to intrude on the North Pacific, as both the Spanish and the Russians were already present in the region, and the traders were explicitly following in Cook's wake. But although they were not the first Europeans to arrive in the region, they were among the first, and their presence was both sustained and distributed. They travelled to corners of the Northwest Coast that other Europeans had overlooked, and they returned to those corners repeatedly. The maritime fur traders failed to satiate the Chinese market. But they played a pivotal role in integrating the North Pacific into an expanding European world system, serving as harbingers of empire. In this role, they have been underappreciated.

Historiography

Much work has already been done on the maritime fur trade. The grand old man of this research is F.W. Howay, an early twentieth-century British Columbian judge and amateur historian whose work is the foundation of subsequent research into the fur trade. His *A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785-1825* is a comprehensive survey of the vessels involved in the maritime fur trade, one that this paper has used extensively.⁴ Howay also produced smaller articles on the fur trade.⁵ Howay's work is the bedrock of subsequent research into the trade, but it is not without its flaws, as it is short of analysis, and it was written at a time when history was plagued by racism and paternalism, twin ills that Howay does not avoid.

James R. Gibson's *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785–1841* is another key work on the maritime fur trade, providing a comprehensive overview of the trade from its inception to the Hudson Bay Company's takeover.⁶ Although Gibson's work is less all-encompassing than Howay's, it includes more analysis than Howay provided. Gibson is especially strong when discussing the American traders, his focus. However, Gibson is weaker when discussing the initial British side of the trade, an unfortunate gap that means that Gibson neglects the earliest period of the trade.

In addition to Howay and Gibson's work, there are many journal articles, theses, and works that touch on the maritime fur trade. Among these are Dick Wilson's "King George's Men: British Ships and Sailors in the Pacific Northwest- China Trade, 1785–1821," a doctoral thesis

⁴ F.W. Howay, *A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785-1825*, ed. Richard Pierce (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1973).

⁵ See F.W. Howay and T.C. Elliot "Voyages of the 'Jenny' to Oregon, 1792-1794," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (September 1929): 197-206, F.W. Howay "Indian Attacks Upon Maritime Traders of the North West Coast, 1785-1805," *The Canadian Historical Review* 6, no. 4 (December 1925): 287-305, F.W. Howay "A Ballad of the North West Fur Trade," *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 71-79, and F.W. Howay "Early Days of the Maritime Fur Trade on the North West Coast," *The Canadian Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (March 1923): 26-44.

⁶ James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*.

that serves as a useful counterpart to Gibson's work, focusing on the British traders that Gibson neglected and providing an alternate reading of the eventual American dominance of the trade, one that focuses on the British traders switching to the opium trade rather than being outcompeted by the Americans.⁷ Beth Hill's *The Remarkable Life of Frances Barkley* and J. Richard Nokes's *Almost a Hero* provide more detailed analysis of two of the fur trade's more interesting voyages.⁸ Barry Gough's work on the early European presence off the Northwest Coast of America highlights the broader context of the fur trade. Journal articles about the maritime fur trade, such as John Price's "Relocating Yuquot: The Indigenous Pacific and Transpacific Migrations" and W. Lamb's "James Hanna and John Henry Cox: the first maritime fur trader and his sponsor," both illuminate in greater detail small aspects of the fur trade.⁹ I am also in debt to historians of many other topics, such as the Canton trade, northwest Indigenous societies, and the voyages of Captain Cook and George Vancouver.

Methodology and an Explanation of Terms

This paper relies on a variety of primary sources, such as pamphlets, East India Company records, newspapers, and ships' logs. But its core rests on the journals of the trade's participants, which were often published or written with an eye towards publication. These journals have much to recommend them. Many have been digitized or edited by other scholars, meaning they are accessible, a not-insignificant boon during a pandemic. Moreover, unlike ships' logs, which read like a weather report with a sprinkling of geography, they focus on what the writers found

⁷ Dick A. Wilson "King George's Men: British Ships and Sailors in the Pacific Northwest- China Trade, 1785–1821" (PhD diss., University of Idaho, 2004).

⁸ Beth Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley: 1769-1845*, expanded edition, (Victoria, Touch Wood Editions, 2003) and Richard Nokes, *Almost a Hero: The Voyages of John Meares, RN, to China, Hawaii, and the Northwest Coast* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1998).

⁹ John Price "Relocation Yuquot: The Indigenous Pacific and Transpacific Migrations," *BC Studies*, no. 204 (Winter 2020): 21-44 and W. K. Lamb and Tomas Bartroli "James Hanna and John Henry Cox: The First maritime Fur Trader and his Sponsor," *BC Studies*, no. 89 (Winter 1989): 3-36.

interesting, meaning that they are a better reflection of the writers' mindset than many other sources. Finally, because the writers were aware of each other, their work refers to that of their compatriots, which means the journals can, to an extent, fact check each other. This is most evident, during the Meares-Dixon Controversy, when two captains engaged in a pamphlet war with one another, but it is a consistent throughout the journals.

But these journals are also problematic sources. Their most obvious defect is the fact that they downplay Indigenous voices. This is unsurprising, as a combination of eighteenth-century British racism, the vagaries of authorship, and linguistic difficulties meant that the authors would have had to surmount a series of hurdles to give Indigenous voices their due. But it does mean these journals cannot give a full accounting of the trade, a task that must be left to subsequent work that is able to incorporate Indigenous knowledge. This is compounded by the classicism of the journals. When Indigenous people do appear in the journals, they are primarily elites, rather than average people. Similarly, on the British side, we hear from the journal's gentlemen authors, but the voice of the common sailor is, with a few exceptions, absent. The journals are also, except for Frances Barkley's journal, all from a male perspective. Finally, as these journals were intended for publication, they have been edited for mass appeal, and should be read in that light. For instance, John Meares, one of the traders, may have had a scandalous relationship with a Hawaiian ali'i named Kianna, but that relationship does not appear in his *Voyages*.¹⁰

The use of the term exploration in this paper should also be explained, as the exploratory role of the early maritime traders is central to my argument. There is a distinction between discovery and exploration. Discovery is finding something for the first time. Exploration,

¹⁰ David A. Chang, *The World and All Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 44.

meanwhile, is about expanding knowledge systems. Explorers may discover things, but they are not explorers by virtue of their discoveries, they are explorers by virtue of their contributions to their culture's body of knowledge. Although things can only be discovered once, they can be explored multiple times, as successive cultures explore a region and incorporate it into their knowledge systems. The maritime fur traders, as a rule, did not discover anything. The North Pacific was a vibrant, populated region well before they arrived. Even if discovery is artificially limited to being the first Europeans to find something, the maritime fur traders' discoveries were limited, given the pre-existing Spanish and Russian presence in the region. But, although they did not discover the North Pacific, they did explore it. The British had intruded into the North Pacific before, in the form of Captain Cook. But Cook's sojourn in much of the region, especially off the Northwest Coast of America, had been brief and geographically limited. The traders were among the first representatives of their culture in the region and, consequentially, had an opportunity to shape their cultures perception of the region.

The World Prior to the Trade

The world in which maritime fur trade was born was a vibrant one, and the Pacific region was no exception. In China, the Manchu Qing dynasty, which had come to power in 1644, was at its zenith during the 1780s, with the Qianlong emperor on the throne. The dynasty ruled one of most powerful and prosperous regions in the world and had little need to trade with the rest of the world, something that frustrated European traders. For the Qing, foreign powers were something to be kept at arms' length, leading to the development of the "Canton System," in which trade with most with which China had maritime contact, including Britain, was confined to the port of Guangzhou, known as Canton to the Europeans of the time. The only European power that did not participate in the Canton System was Russia, which had a separate treaty port in Mongolia, Kyakhta. As historian Paul Van Dyke has argued, the purpose of these restrictions

was less to restrict trade and more to satisfy the Qing Dynasty's desire to control China's interactions with the outside world.¹¹

Indeed, Qing Dynasty China remained deeply intertwined with the rest of the world, and the Pacific especially. It was the principal producer of porcelain and tea in the world. Moreover, the Qing were committed to promoting foreign trade, provided it stayed within acceptable limits. For example, the official in charge of administering the trade, the Hoppo, would send gifts to foreign traders, and give additional gifts to vessels that had suffered misfortune.¹² China was prosperous enough to satisfy most needs domestically, but it did benefit from foreign trade, and some foreign goods were in demand in China. Fortunately for the maritime fur traders, furs were one of these goods. As historian Jonathan Schlesinger has shown, China was an active participant in the international fur trade.¹³ The Qing had a particular interest in furs, as the dynasty attempted to maintain their Manchurian identity through material goods related to Manchu culture, a category that included furs.¹⁴ Although sable was the most valuable fur in China, sea otter pelts were also in demand.

As for the suppliers of the furs, the eighteenth-century Northwest Coast of America was a diverse, vibrant place. Although definitions of the Northwest Coast differ, in this paper it stretches from the mouth of the Columbia river north to Cook Inlet in Alaska, encompassing the principal range of the maritime fur traders. The Indigenous nations of this region have much in common. As historian Ryan Tucker Jones has said, the entire North Pacific shared a "common

¹¹ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 1.

¹² Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 26.

¹³ Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 132.

¹⁴ Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur*, 8.

richness of the maritime environment” that produced cultural similarities across the region.¹⁵ These similarities were further reinforced by Indigenous trade networks that crisscrossed the region, networks that had existed before Europeans intruded on the region.

But, although the peoples of the North Pacific have many similarities, they are a diverse collection of nations, each with its own history and culture. A full accounting of each nation is impossible in this paper. The maritime fur trade spanned the territories of the Haida, Tlingit, Makah, Alutiiq, and others. Perhaps the most important of these nations to the maritime fur trade were the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people of western Vancouver Island, as they were some of the earliest participants in the trade, having been visited by Cook during his third voyage. Two Nuu-Chah-Nulth nations, the Ahousaht and the Mowachaht, were particularly important. The Mowachaht are the denizens of the Yuquot, and they and their chief, Maquinna, were intimately involved in the trade. Further south, the Ahousaht, and their chief Wickaninnish, were based around Clayoquot sound and were the most populous Nuu-Chah-Nulth group.¹⁶

Another Indigenous group that is crucial to understanding the maritime fur trade are the Polynesians, and particularly the Kānaka Maoli, the Indigenous inhabitants of Hawai’i. The Polynesians, as the inhabitants of the various island groups strewn across the Pacific, played a key role in the early stages of the European incursion into the Pacific, with their lands serving as a place to resupply and provide crews with shore leave. The Hawaiian Islands, simultaneously among the largest islands in Polynesia and uniquely positioned astride Pacific trade routes, played an outsized role in the maritime fur trade. Moreover, as the Hawaiian Islands were

¹⁵ Ryan Tucker Jones, “Running Into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from Below the Waves,” *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (April 2013): 353.

¹⁶ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 4-5.

entering a turbulent political period, there were incentives for various Kānaka Maoli groups to trade with Europeans, who offered the possibility of advantage over rival polities.¹⁷

As for European involvement in the North Pacific, the earliest sustained European presence in the region was that of the Spanish, who had settlements along the Pacific seaboard of South and Central America and had established mission settlements in California. They had also colonized the Philippines, and Spanish Manila galleons had long crossed the Pacific. The Spanish had also sent expeditions north, into the region of the Northwest Coast, first in the late sixteenth century and continuing with the Perez expedition of 1775 and the Hezeta-Bodega expedition of 1775.¹⁸ By virtue of “discovery,” the Spanish claimed the whole region for themselves, something that would lead to tensions later down the line. However, despite the early Spanish presence in the region, Spain did not maintain a permanent presence in the Northwest Coast. Moreover, the Spanish government was secretive about its exploratory activities, in the hopes that secrecy would discourage competition from rival European powers, suppressing the transfer of news about their exploration in the region.¹⁹ Their claim to the region was thus tenuous.

The Russians, too, had a presence in the region, having established themselves on the Kamchatka peninsula across the Bering sea, where they built the port of Petropavlovsk. Since the mid-eighteenth century, Russian fur traders had been crossing the Bering sea, and they had established themselves in the Aleutian Islands and on the Alaska Peninsula. However, their presence in the region was still light, and their distance from the centres of Russian power

¹⁷ Paul D’Archy, *Transforming Hawai’i: Balancing Coercion and Consent in Eighteenth-Century Kanaka Maoli Statecraft* (Acton, Australia: ANU Press, 2018), 160.

¹⁸ Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 57 and 69.

¹⁹ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 20.

impeded their access to the resources of the Russian state.²⁰ Moreover, although the Russian presence was composed largely of fur traders, they gathered their furs through hunting and did not trade through Canton, so their activity in the region was different from the maritime fur trade of the British and Americans.

The British presence was a newer incursion. British voyages, like those of Sir Francis Drake, had penetrated the Pacific world before, but it was Cook, who explored much of the Pacific, whose voyages cast open the doors to the world's largest ocean for the British, including the maritime fur traders. The British presence was also shaped by the British monopoly companies. Both the East India Company and the South Seas Company had royal monopolies on British trade in the region. The East India Company, or EIC, had a monopoly on all British trade east of the Cape of Good Hope and, by the 1780s, was expanding its hold over India and the Canton trade. Its monopoly over the China trade was not absolute, and "country traders," private British merchants that sailed between Asian ports, were allowed, but the EIC was a pivotal part of British imperialism in Asia.²¹ The South Seas Company, or SSC, meanwhile, had a monopoly on all trade in the Pacific, although, unlike the EIC, it was moribund by the late eighteenth century.²² The British maritime fur traders were operating in the shadow of the EIC, the SSC, and Cook's voyages.

Alongside the British, the Americans were also entering the Pacific in force. The United States of America was a new country, but it was one that was eager to begin trading with the outside world. Consequently, soon after achieving independence, American ships were sailing

²⁰ John R. Brockstoece, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: The Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 74.

²¹ Jessica Hanser, *Mr. Smith Goes to China: Three Scots in the Making of Britain's Global Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

²² Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 25.

for Canton, where they encountered the same problems that the British had faced, namely the lack of trade goods that the Chinese found appealing, which led the Americans to search for similar solutions.²³ United by cultural similarities and a shared language, the Americans were the actors in the North Pacific who were most similar to the British. They, too, were drawn to the Pacific by the voyages of Captain Cook, and they too would participate in the maritime fur trade.

²³ ²³ Eric Jay Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 151.

Chapter Two: Voyages

The first maritime fur trader was James Hanna, captain of the *Sea Otter*, who sailed to the Northwest Coast in 1785. Unfortunately, we know little about Hanna, as the only records he left are two incomplete logs, now housed at the British Columbia Provincial Archives.²⁴ Although contemporaries like Meares referred to a journal kept by Hanna, it has not survived.²⁵ Instead, the best sources of information about his activities are the writings of Alexander Walker, a contemporary maritime fur trader, and Alexander Dalrymple, an examiner of sea journals for the EIC, Royal Navy Hydrographer, and observer of the maritime fur trade. The most that can be said of Hanna is that he was an Englishman and was, as the historian W.K. Lamb put it, “well regarded” by his peers.²⁶ Walker, for instance, praises Hanna’s “enterprise and intelligence.”²⁷

More can be said of Hanna’s primary sponsor, John Henry Cox, one of the principal financiers of the British maritime fur trade. Cox was the son of a jeweler and watchmaker who received permission from the EIC to travel to China in 1781, ostensibly to conduct a trade in “singsongs,” or mechanical contraptions that saw some success in China.²⁸ Although the EIC had only given Cox permission to manage the singsong business, he expanded into the general China trade, joining a small community of private British traders in China. In 1782, he formed the trading house of Cox & Reid with two other independent British traders at Canton, Daniel Beale, and John Reid. As the EIC had the power to expel independent British traders from Canton, Cox, Beale, and Reid were in constant danger of being ejected from China. Cox managed to avoid

²⁴ Lamb and Bartoli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 10

²⁵ Meares, *Voyages, Made in the Year 1788 and 1789, from China to the N.W. Coast of America, With and Introductory Narrative of a Voyage Performed in 1786, from Bengal, in the Ship Nootka* (London: Logographic Press, 1791), vol. 2, 253.

²⁶ Lamb and Bartoli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 6.

²⁷ Alexander Walker, *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America in 1785 & 1786*, ed. Robin Fisher and J.M. Bumsted (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982), 168.

²⁸ Lamb and Bartoli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 3.

expulsion by “conduct[ing] himself with great propriety” and being “of signal utility to [the EIC],” while Reid avoided expulsion by serving as Austria’s consul in Canton, meaning that it would be “improper” for the EIC to “give him any molestation.”²⁹ Beale was in a similar position to Reid, serving as Prussian consul in Canton.³⁰ The partnership of Cox & Reid initially acted as brokers for British country traders in Canton, but expanded into the country trade itself, acquiring two Bengal-built ships to ship cotton and opium to China.³¹

It was this shipping business that would be redirected to participate in the maritime fur trade when the firm acquired the brig *Harmon*, which they renamed the *Sea Otter* and outfitted for the maritime fur trade. The *Sea Otter* was a small ship; Howay gives its tonnage as just sixty tons.³² Despite its small size, however, it was well armed and crewed for its size, with eight cannons of unspecified caliber and a crew of twenty-eight.³³ It sailed from Macao on the 15th of April 1785, the first voyage of a merchant ship from China to today’s British Columbia.³⁴

From Macao, Hanna’s journal shows that the *Sea Otter* sailed north, through the Straits of Taiwan, where it was delayed by poor winds, before sailing east, arriving at Yuquot on the 9th of August 1785.³⁵ This is, unfortunately, where Hanna’s journal cuts out, so the precise details of his activities after this point are unknown, although Walker states that Hanna “only touched at Nootka,” where he acquired as many furs as he could carry.³⁶ The *Sea Otter* returned to Macao in December of 1785 with its crew in good health and sold its furs for about \$20,500 Spanish

²⁹ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 85.

³⁰ Lamb and Bartroli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 4.

³¹ Lamb and Bartroli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 5.

³² F.W. Howay, *A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785-1825*, ed. Richard Pierce (Kingston, ON: Limestone Press, 1973), 3.

³³ Lamb and Bartroli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 7.

³⁴ Lamb and Bartroli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 10.

³⁵ James Hanna, *Log of the Sea Otter*, 1785, PR-1518, Sea Otter Fonds, British Columbia Archives, Victoria.

³⁶ Walker, *Account*, 199.

dollars, resulting in a profit of around \$3,500 Spanish dollars.³⁷ This return was enough for Cox & Reid to send Hanna on a second voyage to the Northwest Coast.

The lack of information about Hanna's sojourn at Yuquot makes analysis of his voyage difficult. Although Hanna's voyage was the first of its kind, the fact that he only visited Yuquot, which had already been visited by Cook, limited his contributions to British knowledge of the Northwest Coast. The exception to this is his route from China to the Northwest Coast. As the first British merchant to sail from Canton to Yuquot, Hanna played a role in defining future shipping lanes between the two points. It is no coincidence that Dalrymple, who corresponded with Hanna's sponsor, Cox, favored a route "without, or to the South and East, of Formosa" when sailing from China, having learned from Hanna's voyage that the Straits of Taiwan had unfavorable winds.³⁸ Hanna thus inaugurated the China-Northwest Coast route, a respectable achievement and one that would affect the course of trade in the Pacific region.

Hanna also has the dubious honor of starting the history of conflict between Indigenous people and maritime fur traders. Unfortunately, the paucity of records left by Hanna forces historians to rely on other sources on the conflict. The first mention of the confrontation appeared in the London *World*, a predecessor to the London *Times*, where a "gentleman from China" reported that "after some difference about the barter of respective commodities arose," the Mowachaht "retired for some days" before sending a herald to inform Hanna of the "reasons for war." Hanna duly prepared for combat and, when attacked the next day, his "muskets and small guns did great execution amongst [the Mowachaht], and they drew off." Following this

³⁷ Wilson, "King George's Men," 26.

³⁸ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade and Securing it to this Country by Uniting the Operations of the East India and Hudson's Bay Companys* (London: George Biggs, 1789), 29.

confrontation, the *World* reports, the Mowachaht sent an ambassador to make peace with Hanna, who helped tend to the Mowachaht wounded and resumed trading.³⁹

Walker's provides an account of the battle that differs from the *World's*, claiming that, instead of declaring war, "the evening before the engagement the inhabitants traded with Captain Hanna as usual," with Hanna only being informed of the planned attack on his vessel when "a party of strangers," probably Ahousaht visitors from Clayoquot Sound, warned him.⁴⁰ Walker also shifted the blame for the conflict onto Hanna, claiming that he fired on the Mowachaht in retaliation for petty theft, precipitating the conflict.⁴¹ Walker's claim that a dispute over a petty theft precipitated the conflict is compelling, as "thefts" often triggered violence between the British and Indigenous peoples. The claim Hanna was only warned about the attack by "strangers" is harder to square with the *World's* account, although the fact that Hanna exchanged names with Cleaskinah, an Ahousaht chief, during his 1785 voyage, an act of friendship that suggests an alliance between the two, does support this detail.⁴² The Ahousaht also promised to reserve furs for Hanna when he returned the next year, further evidence of a positive relationship between the Ahousaht and Hanna.⁴³

The final source for Hanna's conflict with the Mowachaht is Maquinna, the principal chief at Yuquot. In 1803, Maquinna captured an American merchant ship, the *Boston*, while it was anchored at Yuquot. One of the two survivors of the vessel's crew, John Jewitt, who wrote a captivity narrative of his time as a prisoner of the Mowachaht, explained that Maquinna told him

³⁹ "To those who are accustomed to compare the different stages of society," *The World*, 21 August 1787.

⁴⁰ Walker, *Account*, 199.

⁴¹ Walker, *Account*, 200.

⁴² Joshua Reid, "The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makah, an Indigenous Borderlands People" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Davis, 2009), 111.

⁴³ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*, 32.

that the *Boston* was captured in retaliation for Western offenses. Among the Offenders was a “Captain Hannah” who, in retaliation for the theft of a chisel, “killed men, women, and children to the number of twenty.”⁴⁴ Maquinna, who was on Hanna’s ship during the incident, jumped from the quarterdeck and was forced to swim ashore.⁴⁵ Historians have assumed that this is a reference to Hanna, although Jewitt’s chronology does not coincide with Hanna’s visit to Yuquot.⁴⁶ Maquinna also told Jose Estaban Martinez, commander of the Spanish forces during the Nootka Crisis of 1789, that Hanna’s crew had played a prank on him by sprinkling gunpowder underneath his seat which they lit when he sat down, in a cruel practical joke.⁴⁷

Hanna clearly came into conflict with the Mowachaht, although the details of this encounter are obscured, and the various accounts are contradictory. Historian Joshua Reid has attempted to solve those inconsistencies by melding the accounts together, creating a succession of events that starts with the theft of the chisel, transitions to Hanna’s massacre of twenty Mowachaht, and ending with the unsuccessful attack on Hanna’s vessel, with the Ahousaht taking advantage of the chaos to forge an alliance with Hanna.⁴⁸ But this solution is unsatisfactory, as it includes elements from contradictory accounts. Robert Galois, meanwhile, posits that Hanna had been “embroiled in an [Indigenous] dispute about access to trade.”⁴⁹ Although Galois’ suggestion does not remedy all inconsistencies between accounts, it is compelling, as it explains Hanna’s alliance with the Ahousaht as well as why, on his second voyage, Hanna’s reception at Yuquot was not notably hostile. If his conflict with the Mowachaht

⁴⁴ John Jewitt, *A Journal Kept at Nootka Sound* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1807), 13.

⁴⁵ Jewitt, *A Journal*, 13.

⁴⁶ Jewitt, *A Journal*, 13.

⁴⁷ Lamb and Bartoli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 16.

⁴⁸ Reid, “The Sea is My Country,” 110.

⁴⁹ Bob Galois, “The Voyages of James Hanna to the Northwest Coast: Two Documents,” *BC Studies*, no. 103 (Fall 1994): 84.

was perceived as a legitimate extension of Indigenous conflicts, it may have been more acceptable to the Mowachaht than the arbitrary massacre that Jewitt describes. Either way, Hanna's conflict with the Mowachaht shaped the Mowachaht's relationship with the British, and Europeans in general, as did his friendship with Ahousaht, evidence of the important role British merchants played in shaping early relationships between Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Coast and Westerners.

Hanna's second voyage departed Macao on the 4th of May 1786, arriving at Yuquot on the 18th.⁵⁰ Hanna had been given a new, larger ship for the voyage, a 120-ton snow that, confusingly, was also named *Sea Otter*.⁵¹ Hanna traded furs at Yuquot, and acquired the furs that the Ahousaht had reserved for him. However, other merchants had arrived at Yuquot before him, acquiring much of the furs not reserved for him. Consequently, Hanna cruised north as far as Aristazabal Island in search of furs, before quitting the coast and returning to Macao arriving, after a stopover in Hawaii, on the 8th of February 1787.⁵² This voyage was less successful than the first, due to increased competition, and did not make a profit. But the prospects for future trade was not seen as bleak enough to curtail future investment, and Hanna was planning a third expedition to the Northwest Coast, although he died before he had the chance.

Unlike during his 1785 voyage, Hanna's second voyage ranged far from Yuquot and this expedition was thus more exploratory in nature. Hanna charted the coastline and named numerous landmarks, like a mountain that he christened Cape Cox, information that he transmitted to Dalrymple.⁵³ Of these names, only three, Fitz Hugh Sound, Smith's Inlet, and the

⁵⁰ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*, 29.

⁵¹ Howay, *A List of Trading Vessels*, 15.

⁵² Lamb and Bartoli, "James Hanna and John Henry Cox," 24.

⁵³ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*, 10.

Virgin Islands, survive to the present day.⁵⁴ Hanna also thought that, from Fitz Hugh sound eastward, the land “was composed of a great number of islands.”⁵⁵ This became relevant when Hanna’s charts and place names were then sent to Dalrymple, who believed that the broken nature of the Northwest Coast suggested that there might be an entrance to the Northwest Passage hidden among the fjords of British Columbia.⁵⁶ Hanna thus entered, unintentionally, the grand pantheon of British explorers looking for the Northwest Passage.

In addition to contributing to the expanding British knowledge of the Northwest Coast, Hanna also contributed to Mowachaht exploration. While at Yuquot, Walker reports that Hanna “carried away with [him] a boy, who was brother to Maquinna, and brought him in good health to China; this they acknowledged to have done secretly, but with the lad’s own consent.”⁵⁷ Historian John Price calls this boy, Comekela, “the first known coastal person to cross the Pacific, to live in China, and return.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, no records exist his voyage with Hanna, or of his stay in China, so the exact dimensions of Comekela’s voyage are indistinct. But, in joining Hanna’s expedition, Comekela was taking a long tradition of Nuu-chah-nulth people, seafaring, and applying it to a new context. Although Comekela’s motivations, goals, and achievements remain opaque, his presence on Hanna’s ship is a reminder that, even as Europe explored Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples were engaged in exploratory activities of their own.

The second voyage to arrive at the Northwest Coast was James Strange’s 1785-1786 expedition. Strange, the principal force behind the expedition, was a merchant in the employ of the EIC who, after reading Captain Cook and James King’s *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*,

⁵⁴ Lamb and Bartoli, “James Hanna and John Henry Cox,” 22.

⁵⁵ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*, 14.

⁵⁶ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*,

⁵⁷ Walker, *Account*, 203.

⁵⁸ Price, “Relocating Yuquot: The Indigenous Pacific and Transpacific Migrations,” 21.

decided to enter the fur trade.⁵⁹ He was, as historian Barry Gough explains, a scion of a prominent English family, the son of the “distinguished engraver Sir Robert Strange and brother of Sir Thomas Andrew Lumisden Strange, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Madras.”⁶⁰ Leveraging those connections, Strange gathered support for a voyage to the Northwest Coast, convincing David Scott, a future Chairman of the Court of Directors of the EIC, to bankroll the expedition, while convincing the EIC to both support his endeavor and grant him a leave of absence from his duties.⁶¹ Strange is also one of the main sources about his voyage, as his journal survives and has been published.

Strange’s expedition consisted of two vessels, the *Captain Cook* and the *Experiment*.⁶² The 350-ton *Captain Cook*’s captain was Henry Laurie while the 150-ton *Experiment* was under John Guise.⁶³ James Strange reported that the expedition’s first five ranks “had the honour to serve as lieutenants in the British Navy during the last war.”⁶⁴ Many others were, in Strange’s words, “men of science.”⁶⁵ In total, the expedition consisted of ninety-seven men split between both ships, a complement that was “entirely composed of Europeans.”⁶⁶ This was unusual for country ships in India at the time, which often had a very diverse crew. The expedition also included fifteen soldiers provided by the Bombay government, who, according to Alexander Walker, were to serve “less as mariners than as artificers,” and were also expected to “form a settlement and military post on the Coast of America” should the expedition meet with success.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Gough, “India Based Expeditions,” 218.

⁶⁰ Gough, “India Based Expeditions,” 218.

⁶¹ Wilson, *King George’s Men*, 15.

⁶² Howay, *List of Vessels*, 4.

⁶³ Gough, “India Based Expeditions,” 218.

⁶⁴ James Strange, *James Strange’s Journal and Narrative of the Commercial Expedition from Bombay to the Northwest Coast of America*. ed. A.V. Vankatarama Ayyar, John Hosie, and F.W. Howay (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1982), 44.

⁶⁵ Strange, *Journal*, 44.

⁶⁶ Strange, *Journal*, 46-47.

⁶⁷ Walker, *Account*, 35.

It is unclear if these men were included in the ninety-seven crewmembers that Strange listed. Walker, then a twenty-one-year-old ensign in the Bombay army, was the Bombay detachment's commander, as well as one of the two principal sources on the expedition.⁶⁸ This was an early act in Walker's career, which would culminate with governorship of St. Helena from 1822 to 1828.⁶⁹

The voyage departed Bombay on the 8th of December 1785, the day after Strange received his sailing orders.⁷⁰ From Bombay they sailed to Yuquot by way of Goa, the Malabar Coast and Indonesia.⁷¹ They spotted the Coast of America on the 25th of June 1786 and anchored off Yuquot on the 27th.⁷² The expedition stayed at Yuquot until the 27th of July, whereupon they cruised northwards along the coast, leaving their surgeon, Mackay, behind to learn Mowachaht customs. They arrived at Prince Williams Sound on the 30th of August, where they had a brief encounter with another maritime fur trading vessel, William Tipping's *Sea Otter*, on September 5th. The expedition left Prince Williams Sound on the 14th of September and arrived at Macao on the 15th of November 1786.⁷³ Their commercial returns were probably disappointing.⁷⁴

Exploration was a key goal of Strange's expedition, and his sailing directions stated that "the principal purposes for which we mean this expedition are in the first instance discovery," with "establishing a new channel of commerce" the second objective.⁷⁵ Strange endeavored to satisfy his orders and during his cruise north from Yuquot he charted parts of the coast and, in line with the practices of the time, named an island Scott's Island after his patron, his "most

⁶⁸ Gough, "India Based Expeditions," 218.

⁶⁹ Robin Fisher and J.M. Bumsted, introduction to *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America in 1785 and 1786*, by Alexander Walker, ed. Robin Fisher and J.M. Bumsted (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982), 7.

⁷⁰ Strange, *Journal*, 46.

⁷¹ Gough, "India Based Expeditions," 219.

⁷² Walker, *Account*, 39-41.

⁷³ Strange, *Voyages*, 112 and 118.

⁷⁴ Wilson, "King George's Men," 370.

⁷⁵ Strange, *Voyages*, 32.

respected friend Mr. David Scott.”⁷⁶ He also speculated that there was “very probably the strait, said to be discovered many years ago, by Admiral DeFonte” in the area, a reference to a possible Northwest Passage.⁷⁷ Strange was thus trying to expand the British Empire’s knowledge of the Northwest coast, and to lay the groundwork for future expeditions into the North Pacific.

Strange’s exploration was explicitly imperial in nature, with territorial claims accompanying his exploration. While naming Scott’s Island, for instance, he took “possession of the country and bay in the name of his Britannic majesty.”⁷⁸ Moreover, the plan to establish a fortified location manned by Walker’s troops, although not a plan to colonize the Northwest Coast, could have escalated into a permanent British colony on the coast. Ultimately, nothing came of this plan, and Walker and his men returned to India with Strange. But it does suggest an alternate path, in which the British established a permanent presence along the Northwest Coast much earlier than they did. Between his exploratory endeavors and his more imperial ones, Strange was clearly trying to increase the British presence in the North Pacific.

Strange’s expedition also had a focus on ethnography. Both Strange and Walker’s journals include dictionaries of Mowachaht words compiled during their time at Yuquot, and Strange’s also includes a dictionary of words from the Pacific Yupik dialect. Walker provided an in-depth ethnographic analysis of the Mowachaht people, and his journal includes sections on the “manners of the people” and “religion,” staples of ethnographic research.⁷⁹ Strange also includes extensive sections discussing the peoples the expedition encountered. These observations were not always accurate, but they do point towards the important cultural learning the trade fostered.

⁷⁶ Strange, *Voyages*, 89.

⁷⁷ Strange, *Voyages*, 94.

⁷⁸ Strange, *Journal*, 89.

⁷⁹ Walker, *Account*, 28-30.

The ethnographic side of the expedition also reveals the British prejudices of the time. Both Walker and Strange referred to Indigenous peoples as savages. Strange further commented on the “beastly filth in which the natives of this part of the world pass their lives.”⁸⁰ Both men also believed that the Mowachaht were cannibals. This reflects the racism of the British at the time, which coloured the expedition’s ethnographic work. Still, the British were not incapable of viewing Indigenous peoples positively. Walker praised “the affection that the [Mowachaht] have for their children.”⁸¹ Walker also reassessed his conclusion that the Mowachaht were cannibals, as he was left “in doubt whether [the Mowachaht] are really cannibals” after a discussion with Mackay, the surgeon Strange left at Yuquot.⁸² These limitations to British prejudice are important, not because they excuse the prejudice, but because they show that the British were not wholly incapable of neutral observations and, thus, their contribution to the British corpus of knowledge about the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest coast was not entirely inaccurate.

Strange’s expedition was not the only one to leave India for the Northwest Coast that year, as the Bengal Fur Company dispatched two ships, the *Nootka* and the *Sea Otter*, from Calcutta.⁸³ The Bengal Fur Company was an association of merchants, described by their employee John Meares as “many distinguished persons,” based in and around Bengal.⁸⁴ The identities of the expedition’s backers are obscure, but they seem to have been powerful and well-connected denizens of Calcutta, with revealing in his *Memorial* that one of them was Sir John Macpherson, the Governor General of India.⁸⁵ It was also backed by the firm of Cox and Reid, Hanna’s sponsors. Meares invoked Cox’s name as a surety against debt during his first voyage.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Strange, *Journal*, 74.

⁸¹ Walker, *Account*, 87.

⁸² Walker, *Account*, 185.

⁸³ Gough, “India Based Exploration,” 220.

⁸⁴ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, ii.

⁸⁵ Meares, *Mr. Meares’s Memorial, dated April 30th 1790* (London: ?, 1790), 1.

⁸⁶ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, liv.

The larger of the two vessels, the *Nootka*, was a 200-ton snow commanded by the aforementioned John Meares.⁸⁷ John Meares was an Englishman, born around 1756, likely in the city of Bath.⁸⁸ He joined the Royal Navy at the age of fifteen and saw service on several British vessels, before fighting against the Americans on the lakes of North America during the American Revolution.⁸⁹ Put on half pay following the end of hostilities, Meares found his way to India, where he helped form the Bengal Fur Company.⁹⁰

The *Nootka* left Bengal on the 2nd of March 1786 and, by way of Malacca, travelled into the Pacific, stopping at Grafton Isle in the Bashee Islands to resupply.⁹¹ The ship then steered towards Cook Inlet, arriving at Unalaska on the 5th of August 1786.⁹² There they discovered that the Russians had already established a camp in the region and dominated the region, and so Meares directed the expedition towards Prince William Sound.⁹³ There Meares conducted some trade but, with winter and the end of the trading season fast approaching, he had to decide between wintering on the Northwest Coast or heading towards the warmer climes of Hawaii. Fearing mutiny if he left for Hawaii, Meares decided to stay on the coast. His ship was badly provisioned, and he and his crew were soon struck by scurvy. Stranded in the frozen sound, his ship mouldered in winter's oubliette, awaiting spring.

Yet the *Nootka* fared better than the smaller, 100-ton *Sea Otter*, captained by William Tipping.⁹⁴ Tipping had left Calcutta before Meares and, like Meares, headed towards Malacca, carrying a cargo of opium.⁹⁵ After leaving Malacca, where he disposed of the opium, Tipping

⁸⁷ Howay, *List of Trading Vessels*, 4.

⁸⁸ J. Richard Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 2.

⁸⁹ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 2.

⁹⁰ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 3.

⁹¹ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 11.

⁹² Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 11.

⁹³ Gough, "India Based Voyages," 220.

⁹⁴ Howay, *List of Trading Vessels*, 5.

⁹⁵ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, ii.

sailed for Prince William Sound, where Strange encountered him. After meeting Strange, Tipping sailed south. Thereafter, Tipping's whereabouts are unknown. His ship never arrived at Canton, and Meares listed the *Sea Otter* as lost beneath the waves.⁹⁶ The fate of his ship is unknown.

The *Sea Otter* was not alone in meeting a tragic fate that year, as the snow *Lark* was also lost. It had sailed from Bengal in March of 1786 and, after stopovers in Canton and Petropavlovsk, headed towards the Aleutian Islands, where the ship was wrecked on Bering Island, with only two members of the crew surviving.⁹⁷ Unlike other vessels involved in the trade, the *Lark* was operated by the EIC itself.⁹⁸ As the *Lark* was wrecked before engaging in the fur trade, or venturing into uncharted waters, the ship's largest contribution to the development of the fur trade was its stopover in Petropavlovsk, where it alerted the Russians to the increased British presence in the North Pacific.⁹⁹

1786 also marked the entry of ships from Britain to the maritime fur trade, as the King George's Sound Company, or KGSC, founded by Richard Cadmon Etches, dispatched two vessels from Britain to the Northwest Coast. The company had a broad collection of investors, including Royal Society President Sir Joseph Banks and the Secretary of the Treasury.¹⁰⁰ It was also unique among British companies operating at the time, in that it obtained a license from both the SSC and the EIC to trade conduct its trade.¹⁰¹ These licenses meant that the KGSC was the first British concern legally allowed to trade off the Northwest Coast, as the region was within the SSC monopoly. Its agreement with the EIC, meanwhile, ensured that the KGSC

⁹⁶ Meares, *Voyages*, vol.1, lxxii.

⁹⁷ Howay, *List of Vessels*, 4.

⁹⁸ Howay, "Early Days of the Maritime Fur Trade," 28.

⁹⁹ Wilson, "King George's Men," 29.

¹⁰⁰ Nathaniel Portlock, *An Abridgment of Portlock and Dixon's Voyage around the World* (London: John Stockdale and George Goulding), 8.

¹⁰¹ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston ships, and China Goods*, 25.

would be able to ship goods from Canton to Britain, helping maintain the trade's profitability. The agreement also meant that the company would be able to enjoy at least some support from the EIC. For instance, Etches petitioned the EIC for help paying his sailors.¹⁰²

The first ships the KGSC dispatched to the Northwest Coast were the *King George* and the *Queen Charlotte*, commanded by Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon, respectively. Both Portlock and Dixon were veterans of Cook's voyages, on which Portlock was a master's mate and Dixon an armourer.¹⁰³ Portlock's *King George* was a ship of 320 tons, while the *Queen Charlotte* was a 200-ton vessel.¹⁰⁴ Neither vessel was coppered, a process in which a ship's hull is sheathed in copper in order to impede its fouling by barnacles and other pests, but otherwise both were well equipped for the long journey ahead of them, and the pair left England on September 16, 1785.¹⁰⁵

After leaving Britain, Portlock and Dixon touched at Guernsey, Madera, Cape Verde, and the Falkland Islands to resupply, before rounding Cape Horn.¹⁰⁶ Once into the Pacific Ocean, the ships steered for the islands of Los Majos and Rocca Partida, which appeared on admiralty charts copied from the Spanish, only to discover that the islands were nonexistent.¹⁰⁷ The ships were then forced to sail to Hawai'i for fresh provisions, as scurvy was appearing amongst the crew, before once again sailing for the Northwest Coast, arriving first at Cook's Inlet on the 17th of July 1786.¹⁰⁸ They then attempted to sail for Yuquot, although the weather forced them to quit

¹⁰² Etches to the East India Company Court of Directors, Letter, 17 September 1788, India Office Correspondence and Other Records, British Columbia Archives, GR-0333.

¹⁰³ Wilson, "King George's Men," 42.

¹⁰⁴ Howay, *List of Ships*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, "King George's Men," 48.

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, "King George's Men," 48.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, "King George's Men," 50.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, "King George's Men," 52.

the Northwest Coast and head for Hawaii, arriving on the 14th of November 1786.¹⁰⁹ Their first season on the coast had been unsuccessful.

Determined to recoup their sponsors' expenditure, Portlock and Dixon, after wintering and resupplying in Hawaii, sailed for the Northwest Coast on the 16th of March 1787.¹¹⁰ On the 24th of April 1787, they arrived off the entrance to Prince William sound.¹¹¹ After cruising in the area for some time, Dixon found Meares' *Nootka*, in a pitiful state.¹¹² Portlock and Dixon saved *Nootka*, an event that will be discussed in more detail when we rejoin Meares. Portlock then lingered in the vicinity of Prince William sound, while Dixon worked his way south, hugging the coast as he went.¹¹³ During this time, Dixon was the first British captain to confirm that Haida Gwaii was an archipelago.¹¹⁴ In celebration of this discovery, he named the area the Queen Charlotte Islands after his ship, the name the archipelago would bear on British charts for over two hundred years.¹¹⁵ After concluding their respective trading enterprises, both captains sailed independently for Hawai'i where, after resupplying, they sailed for Macao, where they reunited. Between Portlock and Dixon, the pair had gathered 2552 skins during their voyage, almost half of the 5033 skins that, according to Dixon, had been brought to Canton by that point in the fur trade.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, they acquired so many furs that they oversaturated the market in Canton, resulting in a commercial failure for their expedition.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, "King George's Men," 52.

¹¹⁰ Wilson, "King George's Men," 56.

¹¹¹ Wilson, "King George's Men," 56.

¹¹² Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 120.

¹¹³ Wilson, "King George's Men," 60.

¹¹⁴ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 216.

¹¹⁵ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 223.

¹¹⁶ George Dixon, *Remarks on the Voyage of John Meares, Esq.: In a Letter to that Gentleman* (London: John Stockdale and George Goulding, 1790), 12.

¹¹⁷ Wilson, "King George's Men," 370.

Exploration was an important component of Portlock and Dixon's voyage. *An Abridgment of Portlock and Dixon's Voyage around the World* begins with a meditation on exploration, including a passage that claims that "if Great Britain owes something to France, for her discoveries in former times, the French are much indebted in the present, to laying open the whole globe to human eyes, and to human industry."¹¹⁸ Putting aside the suggestively restrictive framing of "human eyes," Portlock and Dixon were framing their voyages as voyages of discovery. This framing may have been self-promotion. But exploration was a goal of the expedition. Portlock and Dixon's presence reflected this as, thanks to their experience sailing with Cook, both men were as familiar with contemporary British exploration as could be expected. Moreover, Royal Society president Sir Joseph Banks' presence on the KGSC's list of backers suggests scientific interest in their voyage. The company also "engaged William Philpot Evans and Joseph Woodcock, two of the pupils of Mr. Wales, the Master of the Mathematical School in Christ's hospital, who were able to assist in teaching the boys the rudiments of navigation and might be usefully employed in taking views of remarkable lands, and in constructing charts of commodious harbours."¹¹⁹ Portlock and Dixon were thus from the outset prepared to engage in exploration and expand the British knowledge of the North Pacific.

These preparations were put to good use during their voyage. Portlock and Dixon proved that the islands of Los Majos did not exist.¹²⁰ They visited and named several points among the Hawaiian Islands, including one bay that they christened "Yam Bay."¹²¹ They also charted and explored several points along the Northwest Coast, such as a bay in Prince William Sound that

¹¹⁸ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 8-9.

¹²⁰ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 16-17.

¹²¹ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 44.

was christened “Port Etches.”¹²² More narcissistically, Portlock named a sound south of the area “Portlock’s Harbor.”¹²³ This was in addition to their most significant accomplishment, the realization that Haida Gwaii was separate from the mainland. As Dixon himself admitted, other Europeans had sighted Haida Gwaii before, but Dixon was the first to make a real effort to chart the archipelago.¹²⁴ In addition to charting these areas, the pair ensured that their charts and reports made it into the hands of interested parties. Dalrymple, the hydrographer, references their voyage extensively.¹²⁵

Portlock and Dixon’s exploration was coupled with imperialistic intentions, even if those intentions did not lead to concrete actions. There were plans to build a factory at Nootka, and a KGSC captain who followed Portlock and Dixon, James Colnett, mentioned he was expecting a factory, but the plans came to nought.¹²⁶ Still, although the factory was never built, the expedition did assess the areas they journeyed through for the feasibility of colonization. Portlock discussed the possibility of creating a colony in the Prince William Sound area.¹²⁷ He did the same at Oahu, observing that, of the Hawaiian Islands, it was “the most likely to be turned to advantage, were it settled by Europeans.”¹²⁸ Portlock and Dixon served as advanced scouts for possible subsequent colonial ventures. This is further evidence of the role British maritime fur traders played in preparing the way for imperial expansion into the region.

Portlock and Dixon also saved Meares who, stranded in the ice, had been unprepared for the Alaskan winter and lacked the supplies to endure a winter in the sound. Over the winter, half

¹²² Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 143.

¹²³ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 176.

¹²⁴ Dixon, *Remarks*, 15.

¹²⁵ Dalrymple, *Plan for Promoting the Fur Trade*, 7.

¹²⁶ James Colnett, *A Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America: The Journals of James Colnett, 1786-1789*, ed. Robert Galois (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 101.

¹²⁷ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 149.

¹²⁸ Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 31.

of Meares' crew died of scurvy and malnutrition, with the survivors resorting to chewing pine needles for nutrients.¹²⁹ Twenty-three members of Meares' crew of forty-seven died over the winter, with another perishing soon after.¹³⁰ Meares himself survived, but he was left with a mere suggestion of a crew as the surviving crewmen were in no condition to work. If not for the arrival of Portlock and Dixon, Meares' expedition would have been doomed. In the event, however, the pair were able to provide Meares with replacement supplies and sailors and were "welcomed as a guardian angel" by Meares."¹³¹ But Meares lacked the appropriate licences to trade on the coast, and so Portlock ordered him to leave, souring their relationship.¹³² Meares did not fully comply, as he sailed into Tlingit territory after leaving Portlock, and he may have conducted some trade during this time, but he soon quit the coast. He sailed for Hawai'i, where he acquired a passenger, a Kānaka Maoli ali'i named Ka'iana, before putting into Canton.¹³³ Despite his misfortunes, he would return to the Northwest Coast.

The British monopoly's power would also play an outsized role in the voyage of the *Imperial Eagle*, or *Loudoun*, a 400-ton ship that was one of the largest ships involved in the trade.¹³⁴ The ship was financed by the same Bengal Fur Company that had backed Meares though, unlike Meares' expedition, the vessel was outfitted on the Thames in England, instead of at Calcutta.¹³⁵ Despite the distance from Calcutta, though, the Bengal Fur Company was involved in the ship's outfitting, and the firm of Cox & Reid was particularly involved, according to the historian Beth Hill, as she describes Cox as heading the operation.¹³⁶ The ship's

¹²⁹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, xl.

¹³⁰ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, lxxviii.

¹³¹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, xlvi

¹³² Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 24.

¹³³ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, lxx.

¹³⁴ Howay, *List of Vessels*, 5.

¹³⁵ Wilson, "King George's Men," 75.

¹³⁶ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 26.

captain, Charles William Barkley, was of Scottish descent, the son of a noble whose family had been displaced after backing Bonnie Prince Charles. Barkley had entered EIC service.¹³⁷ As the *Loudoun* did not have the appropriate permissions from the EIC or the SSC to enter the maritime fur trade, the vessel, after leaving England on the 6th of September 1786, sailed for Ostend in the Spanish Netherlands, where the ship acquired the name *Imperial Eagle* and an Austrian flag of convenience, the better to circumvent British monopolies.¹³⁸

Captain Barkley also acquired a wife in Ostend in the form of Frances Barkley, the daughter of an Anglican pastor.¹³⁹ A forceful personality, educated and strong-willed, Frances was determined to accompany Charles on his voyage, and duly departed with him when the *Imperial Eagle* left Ostend.¹⁴⁰ Although, as Hill states, the presence of women on ships during the period was not unheard of, as the admiralty and others had to pass ordinances against smuggling women aboard naval vessels, Frances' journey was remarkable.¹⁴¹ She would become possibly the first European woman to visit the Northwest Coast of America and, although she was not the first woman to circumnavigate the world - Jeanne Baret claims that honour - she was the first woman to perform a circumnavigation openly.¹⁴² Frances is also our principal source for the voyage of the *Imperial Eagle*, as she kept a journal during the voyage and recorded some of her recollection in her *Reminiscences*.

The Barkleys left Ostend on the 24th of November 1786 and sailed into the Atlantic Ocean, resupplying at Cape Verde before stopping at Bahia, Brazil, to allow Captain Barkley to

¹³⁷ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 23.

¹³⁸ W.K. Lamb, "The Mystery of Mrs. Barkley's Journal: Notes on the Voyage of the *Imperial Eagle*," *The British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1942), 39.

¹³⁹ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 21.

¹⁴⁰ Wilson, "King George's Ships," 77.

¹⁴¹ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 6.

¹⁴² Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 7.

recover from an onset of illness.¹⁴³ From Brazil the *Imperial Eagle* rounded Cape Horn before sailing to Hawaii to resupply.¹⁴⁴ While in Hawaii, the Barkleys hired a Kānaka Maoli woman, Winée, to serve as Frances's servant. Winée would accompany the *Imperial Eagle* to Macao. In May, the *Imperial Eagle* left Hawaii and sailed to Yuquot, the first ship to arrive during the season. Recruiting Mackay, the doctor Strange had left behind, the *Imperial Eagle* conducted a brisk trade until the arrival of James Colnett, a captain in the service of the KGSC, compelled Barkley to leave Yuquot. After leaving Mowachaht territory, Barkley cruised south, stopping in Clayoquot Sound and Barkley Sound, to which he gave his name, before reaching the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Strait of Juan de Fuca had been missed by Captain Cook and subsequent traders, and the Barkleys and their crew were the first British sailors to stumble upon the waterway. South of the strait, Barkley had a violent encounter with the Makah, and quit the coast, sailing for Macao. Arriving at Canton in November or December of 1787, the *Imperial Eagle* sold her furs and sailed for Calcutta, leaving Winée behind to seek passage back to Hawaii. At Calcutta, however, the Barkleys discovered that trouble with the EIC had led the Bengal Fur Company to terminate their agreement with Charles Barkley and so, although the voyage had generated a "splendid return" for its backers, the Barkleys were left in a distressed state.¹⁴⁵ Although they would return to the maritime fur trade in 1792, in the *Halcyon*, their relationship with the Bengal Fur Company was severed.¹⁴⁶

The *Imperial Eagle*, like other maritime fur trading vessels, engaged in exploration during its voyage. Charles Barkley had, according to Frances, purchased the "best and most expensive nautical instruments and charts" prior to his departure from Europe, a sign that he was

¹⁴³ Lamb, "Mrs. Barkley's Diary," 39-40.

¹⁴⁴ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 73.

¹⁴⁶ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 70.

prepared to engage in exploration.¹⁴⁷ Once on the Northwest Coast his vessel, by cruising south of Yuquot, entered areas that were seldom traversed by Europeans. His activities in Barkley Sound, to which he gave his name, are evidence of his voyage's exploratory nature, as he charted and named the area.¹⁴⁸ The Barkleys' greatest achievement was the rediscovery of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which they stumbled upon to their "great astonishment."¹⁴⁹ Barkley named the strait for Juan de Fuca, a Greek navigator in the employ of Spain who had possibly found the strait in the sixteenth century. However, Juan de Fuca's achievement was disregarded and had slipped into obscurity by the 1780s, to the extent that, even today, there are doubts about de Fuca's historicity.¹⁵⁰ For practical purposes, Barkley was the first European to find the Strait.

The *Imperial Eagle* also continued the tradition, inaugurated by Hanna, of maritime fur traders facilitating Indigenous exploration. Winée was the first known Kānaka Maoli to seek employment on a European ship and, in so doing, she was just as much, if not more, of an explorer as the Barkleys. Her initiative in seeking passage on the *Imperial Eagle* is an example of Indigenous agency, something that was repeatedly demonstrated throughout the course of the maritime fur trade. She also inaugurated the long tradition of Kānaka Maoli employment on vessels trading in the Pacific. Unfortunately, few details are known about her, and historian David Chang has suggested that Winée was not even her name, but rather a British mispronunciation of "Wahine," or woman.¹⁵¹

Following the *Imperial Eagle* was a KGSC expedition, consisting of two ships, the *Prince of Wales*, commanded by James Colnett, and the 50-ton sloop *Princess Royal*,

¹⁴⁷ Lamb, "Mrs. Barkley's Diary," 50.

¹⁴⁸ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 52.

¹⁴⁹ Hill, *The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*, 53.

¹⁵⁰ Gough, *Juan de Fuca's Strait : Voyages in the Waterway of Forgotten Dreams* (Madeira Park, British Columbia: Harbour Publishing, 2012), 218.

¹⁵¹ Chang, *The World and All Things Upon It*, 33.

commanded by Charles Duncan.¹⁵² Colnett was an Englishman, a Royal Navy lieutenant, and a veteran of Cook's second voyage.¹⁵³ Duncan was also a Royal Navy veteran and, according to Robert Galois, had served "under James Burney, a veteran of Cook's second and third expeditions."¹⁵⁴ In addition to the two captains, the expedition included other notable personnel. Andrew Taylor, a lieutenant in the navy, was third mate on the *Prince of Wales* and wrote a journal documenting the journey.¹⁵⁵ John Etches, the brother of the King George's Sound Company's founder, Richard Etches, served as the expedition's supercargo.¹⁵⁶ Archibald Menzies, an associate of Royal Society president Joseph Banks, was the expedition's surgeon and naturalist, and provided the expedition with a scientific presence.¹⁵⁷ Menzies and another member of Colnett's crew, James Johnstone, would later join Vancouver's expedition.¹⁵⁸

After some preliminary sailing to pick up the supercargo and prepare the ships for the voyage, the expedition passed the Lizard, Cornwall's southern point, on the 17th of October 1786.¹⁵⁹ From England, they sailed to Cape Verde before heading to Staten Island, off the coast Tierra del Fuego, where they left a detachment to prosecute a fishery.¹⁶⁰ From Staten Island, the expedition sailed to Yuquot, where they encountered the Barkleys, who had already acquired most of the area's furs. After quitting Yuquot, Colnett encountered Dixon, who suggested he sail to Haida Gwaii.¹⁶¹ From Haida Gwaii, Colnett sailed to the mainland, visiting Tsimshian territory, before heading to Hawai'i.

¹⁵² Howay, *List of Vessels*, 6.

¹⁵³ Robert Galois, Introduction to *A Voyage to the North West Side of America: The Journals of James Colnett, 1786-89*, by James Colnett, ed. Robert Galois (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 2-3.

¹⁵⁴ Galois, Introduction to *A Voyage*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Galois, Introduction to *A Voyage*, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Galois, Introduction to *A Voyage*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Galois, Introduction to *A Voyage*, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, "King George's Men," 66.

¹⁵⁹ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 79.

¹⁶⁰ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 86.

¹⁶¹ Wilson, "King George's Men," 69.

At Hawai'i, in addition to resupplying, Colnett recruited some Kānaka Maoli as sailors.¹⁶² After leaving the archipelago, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Princess Royal* parted company, with the *Princess Royal* sailing for Yuquot, while the *Prince of Wales* sailed for Prince William Sound. The *Princess Royal* traded at Yuquot, where it encountered Meares on his second voyage, before sailing north, trading in a circuit around Queen Charlotte Sound.¹⁶³ The *Prince of Wales* would trade at Prince William Sound, before working its way south, through Tlingit territory, to Haida Gwaii. After leaving Haida Gwaii, Colnett touched briefly on the mainland, before sailing for Hawai'i. Both vessels would rendezvous at Hawai'i before sailing for Canton. At Canton, the vessels had profitable returns.¹⁶⁴ The *Prince of Wales* was dispatched for England, with Johnstone in command and Duncan as a passenger, while Colnett and the *Princess Royal* prepared for a second journey to the coast.

During the voyage, Colnett's expedition conducted some exploratory work, exploring areas that had been neglected by previous British expeditions, such as Tsimshian territory. Duncan, in a letter to Dixon, explicitly took credit for exploring the east side of Haida Gwaii and the area around the Princess Royal's Islands which, in a reference to the Northwest Passage, he noted had the "greatest prospect of a passage eastwards."¹⁶⁵ Duncan made sure to communicate these discoveries to the broader British world, and his journal was sent to Alexander Dalrymple, the hydrographer.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Colnett, *A Voyage*, 200.

¹⁶³ Charles Duncan to George Dixon, 17 January 1791, quoted in George Dixon, *Further Remarks on the Voyages of John Meares, esq., in Which Several Facts, Misrepresented in Said Voyages, are Fully Substantiated* (London: John Stockdale and George Goulding, 1791), 26-28.

¹⁶⁴ Wilson, "King George's Men," 370.

¹⁶⁵ Duncan to Dixon, in Dixon *Further Remarks*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Duncan, to Dixon in Dixon *Further Remarks*, 30.

As a consequence of this exploration, Colnett was the first European to encounter the Tsimshian, noting that “no European had ever been among them.”¹⁶⁷ Though the Tsimshian had not previously encountered any Europeans, they were not sequestered from the increased European presence in the area, and Colnett’s men discovered a Maori “patoo” with the name Joseph Banks, esq., inscribed upon it, likely brought to Tsimshian territory through Indigenous trade networks.¹⁶⁸ Fortunately, some Indigenous narratives of the contact between the Tsimshian and Colnett remain, and Galois describes them as featuring a brief period of awe, accompanied by the perception that the British were supernatural entities, followed by a rapid acclimatization to the British presence.¹⁶⁹ The local groups were quick to grasp the potential of the British presence, and soon attempted to regulate Colnett’s trade with other Indigenous groups.¹⁷⁰

Unfortunately, Colnett’s relationship with the Tsimshian soon devolved into violence. Colnett viewed the Tsimshian as thieves, while his men repeatedly violated Indigenous norms around property rights. For instance, Colnett’s men destroyed a fishing weir, a crucial community resource, out of “pity for the sickly fish.”¹⁷¹ The spiralling series of provocations led to Colnett fortifying a nearby island and engaging in skirmishes with the Tsimshian.¹⁷² The first contact was a violent one. But it is also emblematic of the crucial role that the maritime fur traders played in expanding European influence along the Northwest Coast.

Meanwhile, Meares and his backers were preparing their second expedition to the coast. Outfitting at Canton and Macao, rather than in Calcutta, Meares sailed under a Portuguese flag, having partnered with a Portuguese national, João Carvalho, to receive papers from the Macao

¹⁶⁷ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 145.

¹⁶⁸ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 145.

¹⁶⁹ Galois, Introduction to Colnett, 54.

¹⁷⁰ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 146.

¹⁷¹ Colnett, *A Voyage*, 157.

¹⁷² Colnett, *A Voyage*, 158.

governor.¹⁷³ Meares, in his memorial to parliament, claimed that this was done to circumvent the “excessively high port charges demanded by the Chinese from all other European nation, excepting the Portuguese.”¹⁷⁴ Dixon disagreed, asserting that Meares’ “principal motive was the SSC license.”¹⁷⁵ Either way, Meares was operating in a regulatory grey area. Meares was also determined to establish a factory along the Northwest Coast. To accomplish this aim, he recruited Chinese artificers to help him build his factory, as well as some Chinese sailors for the voyage.¹⁷⁶ These Chinese men were not the only non-Europeans on the voyage, as Winée, Comekela, Ka’iana, and two other Kānaka Maoli men were all heading home with Meares.¹⁷⁷

Meares’ expedition consisted of two ships, the 220-ton *Felice Adventurer*, commanded by Meares, and the 200-ton *Iphegenia Nubiana*, commanded by William Douglas.¹⁷⁸ They sailed from Macao on 20th January 1787 and, after encountering difficulties on their voyage, sailed to a Spanish port in the Philippines to resupply and repair.¹⁷⁹ Winée died around this time.¹⁸⁰ From there, the two vessels separated, with Meares heading directly for Yuquot and Douglas sailing for Hawai’i, although his voyage was redirected to Alaska. At Yuquot, Comekela left the expedition, where we lose track of him, and Meares acquired permission from Maquinna to build a small outpost and begin construction of a small vessel to aid in the coastal trade. Leaving some men behind to construct the vessel and man the post, Meares cruised south, passing through Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds before visiting the entrance to the strait of Juan de Fuca. He

¹⁷³ Wilson, “King George’s Men,” 133.

¹⁷⁴ Meares, *Memorial*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Dixon, *Further Remarks on the Voyage of John Meares, Esq.: In Which Several Facts Misrepresented in the Said Voyages, Relative to Geography and Commerce, are Fully Substantiated: To Which is Added a Letter from Captain Duncan, Containing a Decisive Refutation of Several Unfounded Assertions of Mr. Meares, and a Final Reply to his Answer* (London: John Stockdale and George Goulding, 1791), 35.

¹⁷⁶ Meares, *Voyages*, vol 1., 3.

¹⁷⁷ Price, “Relocating Yuquot,” 33.

¹⁷⁸ Howay, *List of Vessels*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 44-45.

¹⁸⁰ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 48.

dispatched a boat through the strait, commanded by Robert Duffin, but the boat was attacked by the local Indigenous people, and Meares abandoned the attempt.¹⁸¹ He then cruised further south, almost finding the Columbia estuary, before returning to Yuquot. There the *Iphegenia Nubiana* joined him, and the ship that Meares had been constructing was launched and christened the *Northwest America*. Meares and the *Felice* then sailed for Hawai'i and China. The *Iphegenia Nubiana* and the *Northwest America* were to follow Meares to Hawai'i shortly afterwards to resupply, before returning to the Northwest Coast for the 1789 season. At Hawai'i, Ka'iana parted ways with the expedition.

Meares conducted some exploratory activities during his voyage. Although he mostly confined himself to areas of the Northwest Coast that were well travelled by British traders, he did sail further south than most traders, including Barkley.¹⁸² He almost found the Columbia River estuary, which would have, as Nokes put it, given him the “mantle of great maritime hero.”¹⁸³ What discoveries he did make were communicated home. His most serious contribution to exploration was arguably not to British exploration, but to Indigenous exploration. By carrying a diverse collection of Indigenous people and Chinese laborers around the North Pacific, Meares facilitated a great deal of cultural contact, exploration, and knowledge transfer. King Kamehameha of Hawai'i, for instance, took a great interest in the shipbuilding techniques that Ka'iana observed in Meares' company.¹⁸⁴

Meares' other major contribution was the establishment of the outpost at Yuquot, which represented the first instance of a maritime fur trader establishing a factory on the Northwest

¹⁸¹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 284.

¹⁸² John Meares, *An Answer to Mr. George Dixon: late Commander of the Queen Charlotte, in the service of Messrs. Etches and Company* (London: Logographic Press, 1791), 14.

¹⁸³ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 70.

¹⁸⁴ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 179.

Coast. Details of this post are contested. Meares claimed in his *Memorial* that he had purchased land, but subsequent research disproved this assertion.¹⁸⁵ Although it is undeniable that he had an agreement with Maquinna, this agreement seems to have fallen short of a purchase and is more accurately described as a lease.¹⁸⁶ The establishment of the post was significant as, although the post was not a colony, it might have become one given time. Meares' *Voyages* includes his musings about such a colony, and he stressed that a colony of Chinese would be a "very important acquisition."¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Meares was not averse to claiming land for Britain, as he "took possession of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, in the name of the King of Britain" during his voyage.¹⁸⁸

Meares also traded arms to Indigenous peoples, both on the Northwest Coast and in Hawai'i. At Yuquot, hearing that Maquinna was about to go to war with a group to his north, Meares furnished him with weapons and ammunition.¹⁸⁹ In Hawai'i, meanwhile, Meares admitted to "furnishing certain of the chiefs of the Sandwich Islands with arms and ammunition, in order to defend themselves against their enemies, and thereby to secure their friendship to the future interests of British commerce."¹⁹⁰ In both cases, Meares was exporting European ways of war to Indigenous societies, but he was also forging important links between Indigenous peoples and Europeans.

1788 also saw the entry of the Americans into the maritime fur trade. At least two, possibly three, American vessels were on the coast this season. The *Lady Washington* and the *Columbia Rediviva*, commanded by Robert Gray and John Kendrick, respectively, were certainly

¹⁸⁵ Meares, *Memorial*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ John Crosse, "John Meares: BC's Most Successful Real Estate Agent?," *Historical News* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 2.

¹⁸⁷ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 279.

¹⁸⁹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 316.

¹⁹⁰ Meares, *Answer*, 30.

on the coast.¹⁹¹ The *Eleanora*, commanded by Simon Metcalfe, may also have been trading.¹⁹² The entry of the Americans into the maritime fur trade was a significant milestone, discussed in detail in Gibson's *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*. For the British, who encountered the Americans, the presence of these ships represented newfound competition.

Perhaps spurred by this competition, when Meares reached Macao, he found that his company and the King George's Sound Company had come to an agreement to merge their organizations. The new company would have the benefit both of Meares' installations and ships on the Northwest Coast and the KGSC's license to trade in the region. The combined companies outfitted two ships, the *Argonaut*, to be commanded by James Colnett, and the *Princess Royal*, for a trading expedition to the coast. Between the two ships, and the *Iphegenia Nubiana* and the *Northwest America*, the future of the British fur traders looked bright. It was not to be.

¹⁹¹ Howay, *List of Vessels*, 6-7.

¹⁹² Howay, *List of Vessels*, 6-7.

Chapter Three: The Wind-down

The 1789 season, which looked promising from Macao, was disrupted by the Nootka Crisis. Until 1789, the British had operated along the coast with little competition from European traders. The Russian presence was confined to a corner of Alaska, and the Russians, though not inconsequential, did not pose a mortal threat to British interests. The Americans were newcomers to the coast, and although they were competitors, their presence was in its infancy. But there remained one European power active in the North Pacific that posed a serious threat to the British maritime fur traders: Spain. The Spanish still viewed the whole west coast of the Americas as theirs and were still capable of taking action to assert their perceived rights. To this end, amid reports of increased foreign activity on the Northwest Coast, in 1788 the viceroy of New Spain dispatched an expedition north to Alaska to ascertain the extent of the foreign threat. There, the Spanish learned that the Russians were well established, and heard rumours of activity at Yuquot.¹⁹³ Anxious to counter this threat, in 1789 the viceroy dispatched Ensign Esteban Jose Martinez to Yuquot with orders to establish a Spanish presence in the region and discourage foreign encroachment on Spain's rights.¹⁹⁴

Upon his arrival, Martinez discovered the foreign encroachment he had been ordered to prevent. Douglas' *Iphegenia Nubiana* was at anchor in the sound, as well as the American ships *Columbia Rediviva*, captained by Gray, and the *Lady Washington*, captained by Kendrick. Attempting to follow his orders, Martinez, more threatened by the British presence than the American one, detained the *Iphegenia Nubiana*'s crew, seized goods from the ship, and compelled Douglas to leave the coast and sail for China.¹⁹⁵ He then seized the *Northwest*

¹⁹³ Gough, *Juan de Fuca's Strait*, 126.

¹⁹⁴ Wilson, "King George's Men," 136-137.

¹⁹⁵ Barry Gough, *Distant Dominions: Britain and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1579-1809* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 103.

America upon the vessel's return to Yuquot, pressing the vessel into Spanish service.¹⁹⁶ The incident escalated upon Colnett's arrival at Yuquot, however. Colnett had orders to strengthen the British factory at Yuquot, which ran counter to Martinez' objectives, and Colnett's personality clashed with Martinez's.¹⁹⁷ Incensed, Martinez arrested Colnett and his men, and sent both the *Princess Royal* and the *Argonaut* to San Blas, in Mexico, as prizes. This affront, combined with the lenient treatment of the American traders at Yuquot, infuriated the British.

The Spanish presence at Yuquot was not just disastrous for the British. Martinez was leading a military expedition to establish the Spanish Empire at Yuquot, an objective which led to conflict with the Mowachaht. The Spanish killed at least one Mowachaht chief, Callicum.¹⁹⁸ Maquinna included the actions of the Spanish among the list of offenses he provided to Jewitt.¹⁹⁹ The expedition demonstrated, amongst its other effects, that a European military expedition could seize control of Indigenous territory with relative ease.

Yet arguably the biggest effect of the Spanish exploits was diplomatic. Word of Martinez's actions, conveyed through Anthony Merry, the British representative in Madrid, caused consternation in Britain.²⁰⁰ But it was the arrival of Meares in 1790, sent to London to advocate on behalf of his company, that escalated the incident into a crisis, as Meares provided the British government with a cause célèbre with which to batter the Spanish.²⁰¹ Other important players in the maritime fur trade joined Meares in inciting outrage. John Etches claimed, in a blatant lie, that Colnett had established a "flourishing and promising" colony at Yuquot, the

¹⁹⁶ Gough, *Distant Dominions*, 105.

¹⁹⁷ Gough, *Distant Dominions*, 108.

¹⁹⁸ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 188-189.

¹⁹⁹ Jewitt, *Journal*, 45.

²⁰⁰ John Norris, "The Policy of the British Cabinet During the Nootka Crisis," *The English Historical Review* 70, no. 277 (October 1955): 562.

²⁰¹ Norris, "The Policy of the British Cabinet During the Nootka Crisis," 569.

better to enflame public opinion against the Spanish.²⁰² Dalrymple, meanwhile, wrote two pamphlets presenting the case against the Spanish. In one of them, *The Spanish Memorial*, he disputed Spanish claims to sovereignty over the Americas, arguing that “without jurisdictional authority, there can be no rightful dominion.”²⁰³ In the other, *The Spanish Pretensions Fairly Discussed*, Dalrymple attacked both the scale of extent of Spanish “discoveries,” and the notion that those “discoveries” conveyed a measure of sovereignty, arguing, somewhat fancifully, that the Englishman Sir Francis Drake had completed the exploration of the Cape Horn, but that “pretensions of the English to the exclusive right of navigating on the south of Cape Horn, could they be so absurd to make it, would be laughed at.”²⁰⁴ The maritime fur traders played a key role in inciting the Nootka Crisis.

But the biggest factors driving the Nootka Crisis were not the maritime fur traders and their allies, but conditions in Europe. The British had long been willing to use military force to assert the rights of their merchants against Spanish overreach, as the War of Jenkin’s Ear demonstrated.²⁰⁵ Coupled with longstanding British interest in undermining the Spanish Empire, British interests aligned with the promotion of the Nootka Crisis.²⁰⁶ These interests dovetailed with European politics, both domestic and international, to create fertile ground for the Nootka Crisis. In Britain, the government of William Pitt the Younger was facing an election, and its members were worried that, if the government was not sufficiently hawkish during the crisis, the opposition would outflank it.²⁰⁷ Meanwhile, France, Spain’s long-time ally and a necessary

²⁰² John Etches, *An Authentic Statement of All the Facts Relative to Nootka Sound: Its Discovery, History, Settlement, Trade, and the Probable Advantages to be Derived From it, in an Address to the King* (London: Printed for J. Derbett, 1790), 14.

²⁰³ Alexander Dalrymple, *The Spanish Memorial of 4th June, Considered* (London: George Bigg, 1790), 20.

²⁰⁴ Alexander Dalrymple, *Spanish Pretensions Fairly Discussed* (London: George Bigg, 1790), 11-12.

²⁰⁵ Gough, *Distant Dominion*, 87.

²⁰⁶ Gough, *Distant Dominion*, 92-93.

²⁰⁷ Norris, “The Policy of the British Cabinet in the Nootka Crisis,” 572.

bedfellow should the Spanish wish to fight the British, was engulfed in the French Revolution, and uncertainty existed in France over who had the authority to declare a war, let alone whether or not the new government should support the Spanish.²⁰⁸ The conditions in Europe led to the British arming their fleets, and threatening war with Spain if they did not receive concessions.

The Spanish caved, leading negotiations, which resulted in the Nootka Convention, which granted the British greatly increased freedoms of navigation in Spanish waters, and which generally weakened the Spanish Empire. Spain also forfeited its claim to exclusive sovereignty over the Northwest Coast.²⁰⁹ This victory was not a total one on behalf of the British. The Spanish had blinked, but they had not unconditionally surrendered. But it was still a victory. As the historian Annick Foucrier has argued, the convention opened the Pacific to British commerce and fisheries, while the Spanish Empire was weakened.²¹⁰

The Nootka Crisis also increased the number of government-sponsored voyages of exploration in the Northwest Coast, as both Spain and Britain sent expeditions to the area. The Spanish sent Francisco de Eliza, in the words of historian Barry Gough, to “expand Spanish geographical knowledge of the Northwest Coast.”²¹¹ Eliza would be followed by the likes of Galiano.²¹² The British, meanwhile, dispatched George Vancouver to survey the Northwest Coast and assert the British position in 1791. The seeds of this expedition had been planted before the Nootka Crisis, as British interest in the Pacific increased. But the Nootka Crisis provided the definitive push that led to Vancouver’s expedition, and Vancouver and Broughton’s

²⁰⁸ Annick Foucrier, “Rivalité Européennes dans le Pacifique: l’Affaire de Nootka Sound (1789-1790),” *Annales Historique de la Révolution Française* no. 307 (1997) : 23.

²⁰⁹ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 235.

²¹⁰ Foucrier, “Rivalité Européennes dans le Pacifique,” 29.

²¹¹ Gough, *Juan de Fuca’s Strait*, 136.

²¹² Gough, *Juan de Fuca’s Strait*, 154.

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listed finding “an amicable adjustment” of the crisis among their objectives for the voyage.²¹³

The role of the Nootka Crisis in prompting the influx of Spanish and British explorers to the Northwest Coast means that said exploration was a consequence of the maritime fur trade, although the maritime fur trade was not wholly responsible for it. This was particularly true in the case of Vancouver’s voyage. Much of the existing British interest in the Pacific had been driven by the likes of Dalrymple, who had been advocating for an expedition like Vancouver’s for some time and who was linked to the trade.²¹⁴ Vancouver also had direct, material ties with the maritime fur traders. Two veterans of Colnett’s first voyage, Menzies and Johnstone, joined his expedition, of which they were important members. Moreover, Vancouver had access to at least some of the fur traders’ charts and records, as the narrative makes reference to Captain Duncan’s charts.²¹⁵ Curiously, Vancouver himself seems to have had a low opinion of the maritime fur traders, remarking that they were “highly censurable for misconduct,” despite the fact that his expedition was building on their actions.²¹⁶ The reasons for this are best left to a student of Vancouver, but it is likely that the reason was the maritime fur traders’ alignment with Dalrymple, whose ilk Vancouver disliked and called a “closet philosopher.”²¹⁷

Vancouver’s expedition, and to a lesser extent the Spanish expeditions, also affected the maritime fur trade by inaugurating a new era of European engagement with the Northwest Coast.

²¹³ George Vancouver and William Broughton, *A Narrative or Journal of a Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World in the Years 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795* (London: Printed for J. Lee, 1802), 1.

²¹⁴ Howard Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) and the Expansion of British Trade* (London: Published for the Royal Commonwealth Society by Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970), 216.

²¹⁵ Vancouver and Broughton, *Narrative*, 52.

²¹⁶ Vancouver and Broughton, *Narrative*, 54.

²¹⁷ Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, 221.

The presence of Spanish and British expeditions in the Northwest Coast represented the return of government, as opposed to private, exploration. Meanwhile, by meticulously surveying the Northwest Coast, Vancouver, in the words of Gough, gave the world “most of its knowledge respecting the Northwest Coast.”²¹⁸ Vancouver’s exploration was not exhaustive - he missed the Fraser River -but it did diminish the exploration aspect of the maritime fur trade, as the Northwest Coast increasingly became merely remote, rather than unexplored, for the British. This did not stop British maritime fur traders in the 1790s from engaging in exploratory behavior. Bishop, captain of the maritime fur trader *Ruby*, out of Bristol, penned a description of Rapa Nui in 1795 that melds seamlessly with descriptions of the Northwest Coast in the 1780s, for instance.²¹⁹ But new finds such as those of the 1780s were increasingly unlikely, as the coast’s major landmarks were steadily added to British charts.

The final divergence in the maritime fur trade that occurred during the 1790s was the increased dominance of the Americans in the maritime fur trade. By 1800, the British had largely withdrawn from the trade, leaving it in American, and more specifically Bostonian, hands. Several reasons have been proposed for this shift. Americans might simply have more adept at commerce. The historian Gibson suggests that the British “may well have been less ruthless, less resourceful, and less efficient than their free-wheeling Yankee rivals.”²²⁰ Howay, meanwhile, credits some of the Bostonian success to the “natural genius of the Yankee for trading.”²²¹ The initiative shown by British traders in establishing the maritime fur trade would seem to mitigate against this suggestion, but it is hard to say definitively.

²¹⁸ Gough, *Juan de Fuca's Strait*, 211.

²¹⁹ Charles Bishop, *Logbook of the Ruby*, 1795, PR-1517, British Columbia Archives, *Ruby Fonds*.

²²⁰ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 28.

²²¹ Howay, *A List of Ships*, 103.

The existence of the South Seas Company and the East India Company may also have hurt British maritime fur traders. The two companies imposed restrictions on the British maritime fur traders that their American rivals did not have to face. As Portlock argued, the SSC stood “in the mercantile way of more adventurous merchants.”²²² The EIC, meanwhile, while tolerant of British maritime fur traders trading in Canton, where they were perceived as an outgrowth of the “country trade,” did not allow the merchants to trade Chinese goods to Britain, barring them from what Gibson characterized as the most profitable leg of the maritime fur trade, the trading of Chinese goods to Western ports.²²³ The two companies’ monopolies seem to have been a disadvantage for the British maritime fur traders, something that Meares and Barkley’s adoption of flags of convenience would support.

But it is important not to overstate the negative impact of the SSC and the EIC. Although they were a hurdle for the British, they were not an insurmountable one. The SSC was, by the 1790s, moribund, and although its monopoly had legal power, the company itself never enforced its rights over the Northwest Coast, leaving any enforcement to the employees of the SSC’s partners, the KGSC. The EIC, meanwhile, may have stifled some of trade, but the EIC and its employees provided much of the funding for the traders, and in several cases gave the traders direct material aid. The approach of the EIC to the maritime fur trade is exemplified by the EIC opinion, expressed while granting the KGSC its license to trade within the EIC’s monopoly, that the company could “with safety to themselves” allow the company to trade, suggest that the EIC did not view the maritime fur trade as a threat to their interests.²²⁴ Wilson, meanwhile, has

²²² Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 6.

²²³ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 25-26.

²²⁴ At the Court of Directors Held Friday the 6th May 1785, India Office Correspondence and Other Records, British Columbia Archives, GR-0333.

argued that the British presence at Canton, including resident supercargoes, a presence facilitated by the EIC, allowed the British traders to sell their furs at Canton for a higher price than the Americans.²²⁵ Finally, because EIC officers were allowed to trade on their own account in Asia, it is difficult to say that profits from the maritime fur trade at Canton were not spent sending Chinese goods to Britain, even if they were sent by, ostensibly, a different commercial concern.

Changing conditions in both China and Europe may also have depressed the British participation in the maritime fur trade. In Canton, the increased supply of furs led to a gradual decline in the price of fur, decreasing the trade's attractiveness for the British.²²⁶ The increasing supply from the British and Americans corresponded with the end of a Chinese embargo on trade with Russia, which also increased the Chinese supply of furs.²²⁷ The market in China had become less profitable. Meanwhile the Revolutionary Wars were breaking out in Europe. This created risk of French privateers, though the only British maritime fur trader captured by the French, the Barkleys' *Halcyon*, was captured after, unaware of the hostilities, it put into the French colony of Mauritius.²²⁸ The wars also increased the demand for British sailors elsewhere. This may have hit the maritime fur trade particularly hard, as many of the British traders were Royal Navy officers furloughed during a time of peace, who were recalled after the onset of hostilities. Meares, for instance, returned to Royal Navy service and was injured while on impress duty in Ireland.²²⁹ The wars were not beneficial for the British trade.

Finally, the British may have withdrawn from the maritime fur trade because, over the course of the 1790s, they found a product that could bypass Chinese demand for silver: opium.

²²⁵ Wilson, "King George's Ships," 369.

²²⁶ Wilson, "King George's Ships," 357.

²²⁷ Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur*, 133.

²²⁸ Hill, *The Remarkable Life of Frances Barkley*, 158.

²²⁹ Nokes, *Almost a Hero*, 174.

Opium trading had already begun when the maritime fur trade began, and some maritime fur traders, like Tipping, participated in the trade. But opium was increasing in importance during the 1790s, and Wilson has argued that opium “came to represent a better opportunity” for the British.²³⁰ Cox’s firm, for instance, transitioned from the maritime fur trade to the opium trade and, after a series of reorganizations, became the firm of Jardine, Matheson and Company, one of the major British opium merchants.²³¹ Suggestively, the rise of the opium trade would also explain the divergent fates of the British and American maritime fur trades, as the British had access to Indian opium, while the Americans only had access to Turkish opium which was both produced farther away from China and was lower quality than the opium produced in India.²³²

Regardless of the reasons for the British withdrawal from the fur trade, however, it was caused less by weakness than by a combination of other opportunities and events far from the North Pacific. This is important, as the perceived commercial weakness of the British maritime fur traders has led to their being understudied by the likes of Gibson. It is true that the British withdrew from the trade, but it is wrong to assume that the decision was the result of a lack of energy on the part of the British.

²³⁰ Wilson, “King George’s Men,” 374.

²³¹ Lamb and Bartoli, “Hanna and Cox,” 36.

²³² Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 104.

Chapter Four: The Wake

As British traders withdrew, they left behind the question of what they accomplished. Their initial objective, to substitute furs for silver at Canton, was never realized, as the maritime fur trade did not provide enough of a consistent profit to justify continuing the trade. But the British traders were not without accomplishments, especially in the domain of exploration. Between Dixon's realization that Haida Gwaii was an archipelago, Barkley's rediscovery of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and myriad other geographic features that the traders were the first Britons to note, the traders contributed directly to British knowledge of the Northwest Coast. Sometimes, their exploration pointed in unsuccessful directions. Speculation about the existence of the Northwest Passage floundered upon the shoals of geographic reality. But the accomplishments of the traders outweigh the dead ends. These accomplishments do not belong wholly to the maritime fur traders. They were sailing in Cook's wake and, as their encounters with the Russians, Spanish, and Americans show, they were not alone among Westerners exploring the region. But the presence of other explorers contextualizes, rather than negates, their accomplishments. Captain Cook may have visited the North Pacific, but his visit was like the points of a connect-the-dots puzzle. His voyage made the rough form of the Pacific visible, but others would have to draw the lines between the dots. The maritime fur traders drew some of those lines, making a clear picture of the Pacific world more visible to the British.

The pioneering nature of the maritime fur traders' voyages alone does not elevate them to the status of exploratory ventures. Exploration, as defined in this paper, is not the accumulation of firsts, or "discoveries," but involves the expansion of knowledge systems. The early British traders were pioneers, but there are reasons to doubt their status as explorers. Meares advanced one such criticism himself, when he opined that his voyages were "voyages of commerce, not

discovery,” and that, consequently, any exploration was “an incidental part of a commercial undertaking.”²³³ Meares is correct in asserting that the main aim of the maritime fur traders was commercial gain, not exploration. Indeed, the commercial aspects of the maritime fur trade are probably underemphasized in the available source material, which consists largely of published journals, as it would be unreasonable to expect much discussion of trade secrets in such documents. This is reflected in the traders’ sailing orders, which commanded captains and supercargoes to be secretive. James Strange’s sailing directions, for instance, told him to “prevent all in [his] power every communication of whatever intelligence relative to the expedition,” as his sponsors’ “future views might otherwise be hurt by such intelligence becoming public.”²³⁴

The commercial motivations of the maritime fur traders could have adversely affected exploration in several ways. The secrecy around trading expeditions runs directly counter to the goals of exploration. Exploration’s aim is to expand knowledge systems, while the maintenance of trade secrets suppresses the spread of knowledge. Commercial aims can also interfere with exploration by creating incentives to rush back to sell goods as quickly as possible. Meares claims, for example, that although his voyage was “not without that laudable and patriot curiosity which has animated others,” it was not in his “power to spare an adequate portion of [his] time from [his] more important objects of commercial enterprise.”²³⁵ Time spent expanding his horizons was time not spent trading. This points to the final reason why commercial objectives might interfere with exploration: the fact that merchants are lashed to their purse strings. Where a voyage of pure exploration can afford to equip itself without regard for recouping its costs, a

²³³ Meares, *Voyages*, vol 1., viii.

²³⁴ Strange, *Journal*, 33.

²³⁵ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 2.

commercial expedition has no such liberty. Consequently, its leaders are likely to cut corners to keep costs down, which has a deleterious effect on exploration. Portlock and Dixon's voyage is an example of this in action, as both the *King George* and the *Queen Charlotte* had uncoppered hulls, despite coppering's utility on long voyage, due to the expense.²³⁶

The second objection to classifying the maritime fur trade voyages as exploration is the supposition that the traders' voyages lacked the investigative rigour necessary to qualify as exploration and, if the traders represented themselves as explorers, such representation was meant to entertain rather than inform. There is some support for this critique. Dixon stated that one of the purposes of published journals was to provide "agreeable entertainment," though he was quick to add that that entertainment should be accompanied by "information that may be depended upon."²³⁷ However, given that this comment appeared at the beginning of his attack on John Meares' *Voyages*, he clearly did not think that every account of the trade lived up to this standard.

There are, then, reasons to be skeptical of the exploratory aspects of the maritime fur trade. The maritime fur traders had commercial obligations that interfered with exploration. Their published accounts of their voyages were meant to be entertaining, to an extent that may have impeded information transfer. These objections mean that the maritime fur traders' exploration was less rigorous than that of a dedicated explorer like Cook or Vancouver. Both men, as naval captains, had no obligation to profit from their voyages, even if they did have some economic incentives. Moreover, although their methodology was imperfect by modern standards, they were qualified explorers by the standards of their day. But comparing Cook or

²³⁶ Wilson, "King George's Men," 47-48.

²³⁷ Dixon, *Remarks*, 6.

Vancouver's expedition to the maritime fur trading expeditions is an unjust comparison, as their expeditions were specialized in a way the maritime fur traders' were not.

Indeed, the maritime fur traders were more than capable of exploration. Portlock, Dixon, and Colnett were all veterans of Cook's voyages, and were familiar with the practices of contemporary British exploration. Many of the expeditions also brought scientific personnel. Portlock and Dixon brought mathematics pupils, Strange brought "men of science," and Colnett brought Archibald Menzies. Moreover, ships masters, especially those qualified to sail for the long distances demanded by the maritime fur trade, had to be experienced navigators, a task that required familiarity with cartography, mathematics, and meteorology. All participants in the maritime fur trade thus had the knowledge necessary to conduct basic exploration.

The presence of scientific personnel on traders' vessels also mitigates Meares' distinction between voyages of commerce and discovery. Scientific personnel are skilled laborers, and they are a significant investment. Their presence shows that some voyages were planning on exploring. Recall, for instance, that Strange listed discovery as his primary objective.²³⁸ This does not invalidate Meares' point, but it does weaken it. It is also worth highlighting the fact that discovering new markets, and Indigenous groups that had not yet been exposed directly to European goods, was good business sense. Commercial objectives were not identical to exploratory objectives, but there was overlap between them. Not all maritime fur trading voyages were expected to explore the coast. Employees of the Bengal Fur Company, like Meares, were not ordered to make exploration a central part of their expedition. But enough ships prepared to explore the Pacific to elevate their exploration above the level of mere incident.

²³⁸ Strange, *Journal*, 35.

Given that the maritime fur traders could explore the areas they traversed, the last element to be established is that transmission of the information they acquired occurred. Without communicating the details of their voyages to others, any intelligence they gathered would not enter the broader body of knowledge and would be lost. Juan de Fuca's voyage, for instance, has been described by Gough as "discredited and all but forgotten" in the eighteenth century, due to a failure to communicate and corroborate de Fuca's story.²³⁹ Even today, de Fuca's account is difficult to corroborate. Given the secrecy surrounding aspects of the maritime fur trade, there was a risk that merchants would guard their discoveries too jealously, and that intelligence would not adequately disperse.

But, although some information may have been lost in the name of guarding trade secrets, the maritime fur traders' discoveries circulated widely, both amongst themselves and amongst the broader British public. Cox played a key role in circulating information between traders, as he was a partner in most of the expeditions of the 1780s and would have been privy to their charts, which he shared with subsequent expeditions that he funded. Dixon asserts, for instance, that Cox provided Meares with charts from the Dixon, Barkley, and Strange expeditions before Meares' second voyage.²⁴⁰ Navigational data thus flowed between the various traders.

Nor was information about the maritime fur trade restricted to the fur trade themselves. The makeup of the participants in the maritime fur trade ensured that the intelligence they gathered was fed into key institutions of the British Empire. The EIC and the Royal Navy were both connected to the trade. The EIC was a sponsor of many of the expeditions this paper has examined, and their participation in the maritime fur trade led to the acquisition of knowledge

²³⁹ Gough, *Juan de Fuca's Strait*, 86.

²⁴⁰ Dixon, *Remarks*, 11.

about the North Pacific. Given the centrality of the EIC to British imperialism in the Indo-Pacific in this era, this transmission was significant. This connection is bolstered when one considers that endeavors, like the Bengal Fur Company, that were not directly tied to the EIC were still backed by EIC personnel in their capacity as private traders. The maritime fur traders were also intensely connected to the Royal Navy, as most trading captains, and many officers, were furloughed naval officers. Knowledge gained from the trade would therefore have been transferred to the navy which, given the navy's pivotal role in the expansion of the British Empire, meant that the traders' knowledge would have had the opportunity to be put in service of the British empire. Colnett provides an example of this in action, as, following his trading expeditions, he commanded the sloop *Rattler* at the recommendation of the admiralty on a voyage exploring the South Pacific on behalf of whaling interests.²⁴¹ His experiences in the maritime fur trade directly contributed to his appointment to this voyage, as he was operating in waters traversed by the fur traders, and it is an example of the ways in which the maritime fur trade directly led to an expanded British presence in the Pacific.

The maritime fur traders were also in communication with scientists, and their voyages contributed to academic knowledge. Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society, was a backer of the King George's Sound Company, for instance.²⁴² Alexander Dalrymple's interest in the coast, meanwhile, ensured that the charts of the maritime fur traders were published as Dalrymple, in his role as Royal Navy hydrographer, was an influential steward of British hydrographic knowledge. Moreover, through Dalrymple, the maritime traders played an outsized

²⁴¹ James Colnett, *A Voyage to the South Atlantic and round Cape Horn for the Purpose of Extending the Spermaceti Whale Fisheries and Other Objects of Commerce, by Ascertaining the Ports, Harbours and Anchoring Births, in Certain Islands and Coasts in those Seas at Which the Ships of the British Merchants may be Refitted* (London: Printed for the Author by W. Bennet, 1798), viii.

²⁴² Portlock, *An Abridgment*, 8.

role in other exploratory ventures in the Northwest Coast of America. Dalrymple, inspired by the voyages of the maritime fur traders, advocated further British expeditions into the area, pushing for what would become Vancouver's expedition.²⁴³ Historian Howard Fry has also argued that it is "highly probable" that Alexander Mackenzie was inspired by Dalrymple to travel across America to the Pacific.²⁴⁴

The maritime fur traders, then, were explorers. This fact was recognized by the traders' contemporaries, with one commentator, William Goldson, commenting that the "geography of that part of America has received more improvement, from the research of the persons intrusted with your commercial concerns, than could have been expected."²⁴⁵ Further evidence of their role in exploration can be found by perusing a map, as many place names along the coast of BC originated with the maritime fur trade. The Dixon Entrance, between Haida Gwaii and Alaska, was named for George Dixon.²⁴⁶ Barkley Sound still bears Captain Barkley's name.²⁴⁷ Barkley is also responsible for the name applied to the Strait of Juan de Fuca.²⁴⁸ Cape Scott was named by Strange.²⁴⁹ Perhaps most significantly, until 2010 Haida Gwaii was known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, as the archipelago was named after Dixon's ship.²⁵⁰ These are not the only examples of fur traders' names persisting, and the Northwest Coast is peppered with monuments to the maritime fur trades, names that remain because it was maritime fur traders who communicated them to the British world.

²⁴³ Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, 214.

²⁴⁴ Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, 212.

²⁴⁵ William Goldson, *Observations on the Passage Between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans* (Portsea Town: ?, 1793), v.

²⁴⁶ Alan Rayburn, *The Place Names of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

²⁴⁷ Rayburn, *The Place Names of Canada*, 19.

²⁴⁸ Rayburn, *The Place Names of Canada*, 133.

²⁴⁹ Rayburn, *The Place Names of Canada*, 19.

²⁵⁰ Rayburn, *The Place Names of Canada*, 231.

The exploratory nature of the maritime fur trade has important consequences. Some of these consequences are academic, as exploration pushed the boundaries of British science outwards. But exploration is integral to navigation. By charting the coastlines of the North Pacific, the maritime fur traders were opening the region to seaborne contact. It is hard, after all, to sail to a place without knowing it exists, and it is dangerous to sail in seas which were not surveyed, as they may hold unmarked rocks and currents. Given the importance of seaborne freight to world trade, the exploration of a region thus led to further commercial penetration. Exploration was a prerequisite to participation in the broader world system. By exploring the Pacific, the maritime fur traders were playing a key role in the region's integration into the eighteenth-century world. This contribution to the expansion of the imperial system was important, it was intentional, and it has been underappreciated, especially considering the role that the maritime fur traders played in paving the way for subsequent expeditions, like Vancouver's.

It is important to note that this integration was not peaceful. Exploration is not always violent, but it is often violent. This is because exploration, the expansion of knowledge systems, often conveys a level of ownership. This is especially true in the late eighteenth century when discovery was linked to sovereignty. Strange, for instance, accompanied his voyage with claims to land, a clear link between perceived "discovery" and imperial expansion. There is also the question of names. As we have seen, the maritime fur trade left a legacy of European names peppered along the Northwest Coast. But, in addition to marking the progress of maritime fur traders, each name is an erasure of the Indigenous world. By supplanting Indigenous names with European names, the maritime fur traders were making the coast theirs. Note, for instance, the possessive connotations of Barkley Sound. This is part of the reason why reconciliation often

involves the reversion of place names to their Indigenous nations. Haida Gwaii is perhaps the most relevant example here, as agreements between the settler state and the Haida nation led to British Columbia officially acknowledging Haida Gwaii as the archipelago's name, in place of the Queen Charlotte Islands, in 2010.²⁵¹ By disregarding Indigenous place names, Europeans disregarded Indigenous peoples, and their deep connection to the land.

This disregard was not wholly the result of linguistic or cultural distance, either, as the differences between the exploration of Hawai'i and the Northwest Coast show. In general, the Kānaka Maoli had better relations with the maritime fur traders than the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest coast, with Meares commenting that the Kānaka Maoli were "the superiors" of the two.²⁵² The differences between these relationships were reflected in the naming practices of the maritime fur traders. Although along the Northwest Coast the British mostly ignored Indigenous place names, in Hawai'i Kānaka Maoli names were much more prevalent. Although the Europeans did rename some locations, like Portlock's Yam Bay, and they named the archipelago the Sandwich Islands, the individual islands were invariably known by Indigenous names, as were many of the lesser geographic features. For instance, Meares tells us that he sailed to the island of Owhyhee, where he saw the great mountain Mouna Kaah, and anchored in Toe-yah-yah Bay.²⁵³ Although the transliteration leaves something to be desired, Meares was trying to use local place names, a courtesy he did not extend to the Mowachaht. As both regions were only recently contacted by the British, this was not a function of linguistic capabilities. On the

²⁵¹ "Queen Charlotte Islands Renamed Haida Gwaii in Historic Deal," *CBC News*, December 11 2009, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/queen-charlotte-islands-renamed-haida-gwaii-in-historic-deal-1.849161>.

²⁵² Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 338.

²⁵³ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 77-78.

contrary, this was the result of an effort to respect the Kānaka Maoli and a decision, whether conscious or not, to not extend that courtesy to the Indigenous peoples of America.

Nor was the violent aspect of the maritime fur trade limited to naming conventions. The maritime fur traders, as we have seen, were also conventionally violent from the beginning, with the first trader, Hanna, firing on the Mowachaht and his successors, to varying degrees, continued that tradition. The degree of violence might have varied, but it was always present. The immediate cause of this violence was often theft, but it reflected tensions between the British and Indigenous people. The British had, by the late eighteenth century, developed a theory of racial superiority, and they viewed Indigenous peoples as inferior, something that contributed to the violence. Indeed, as Galois has pointed out, although thefts were the immediate cause of British violence, the British were more offended by perceived insolence than by the theft itself.²⁵⁴ Thefts did trigger violence, but the causes of the violence were complex, and rooted in cultural factors. Regardless of the cause of violence, however, it left a legacy of trauma that should not be ignored.

Still, the violence that accompanied the maritime fur trade does not erase the fact that Indigenous peoples were active participants in the trade. The maritime fur trade does include some instances in which Western force would seem to render Indigenous people impotent, such as the 1791 incident in which the crew of the American ship *Lady Washington* repulsed a Haida attack, incited by the *Lady Washington*'s misdeeds, inflicting over fifty casualties on the Haida for no losses of their own.²⁵⁵ But Indigenous peoples were far from helpless in the face of Western violence, and two Haida leaders, Koyah and Cumeshaw, managed to capture maritime

²⁵⁴ Galois, "Introduction to Colnett," 48.

²⁵⁵ Howay, "Ballad," 73.

trading vessels.²⁵⁶ The Mowachaht of Yuquot, meanwhile, captured the *Boston* in 1803.²⁵⁷ The Kānaka Maoli were also capable of seizing vessels, and the *Fair American*, an American vessel commanded by Thomas Metcalf, was captured at Hawai'i in 1790.²⁵⁸ Importantly, although many attacks of these attacks were a reaction to Western transgressions, many were, as Howay argues, motivated by a desire for prestige and material enrichment, highlighting the active nature of Indigenous communities' interactions with traders.²⁵⁹

This activity was not limited to the sphere of violence. In the commercial sphere, Joyce Wike argued that the “commercial acumen and interest in property” of Indigenous people created a “trade situation that the Europeans could not easily dominate.”²⁶⁰ Trade with Europeans represented an important resource, and one which Indigenous groups took an active interest in. Meanwhile, the participation of Winée, Comekela, and Ka'iana, who joined maritime fur traders on their voyages, shows Indigenous initiative in exploring alongside the Europeans, while also pointing to the importance of knowledge transfer and cultural contacts during the maritime fur trade. The Mowachaht, for instance “very much astonished” Meares by “demanding, without the least hesitation, that [he] leave a letter with Maquinna” after Meares had informed him that Douglas would pass through Yuquot, demonstrating that the Mowachaht had become well versed in the concept and utility of letters.²⁶¹ In Hawai'i, meanwhile, Ka'iana and Meares helped rouse King Kamehameha's interest in western shipbuilding.²⁶² Indeed, David Chang has also argued that Ka'iana's exploration with Meares made him a more sophisticated interlocutor between

²⁵⁶ Howay, “Indian Attacks,” 298-299.

²⁵⁷ Jewitt, *Journal*, 4.

²⁵⁸ Wilson, “King George's Men,” 178.

²⁵⁹ Howay, “Indian Attacks,” 308.

²⁶⁰ Joyce Wike, “The Effect of the Maritime Fur Trade on Northwest Coast Indian Society” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1951), 29.

²⁶¹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 211.

²⁶² Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 179.

Europeans and Kanaka.²⁶³ On the European side, most of the maritime fur traders included some ethnographic observations in their accounts of Indigenous peoples, although this was most obvious from Strange and Walker, with their dictionaries. Increased knowledge about the other side did not necessarily lead to greater understanding. Maquinna went from hosting European traders to, in 1803, capturing the *Boston* in revenge for accumulated injustices. But this increased cultural contact is an important consequence of the trade, one that helped shape interactions between North Pacific peoples and Europeans.

Alongside the expansion of knowledge systems that exploration and cultural contact represented were political and economic consequences of the maritime fur trade. The maritime fur trade had important consequences for the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast, and the broader North Pacific region. The trade introduced new diseases to the Pacific world, and historian David Igler has noted that some Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples referred to the maritime fur traders' ships as "disease boats."²⁶⁴ These diseases, in turn, wrecked havoc upon Indigenous societies. The traders also introduced firearms to Indigenous societies, and those with access to the weapons soon adopted them as weapon of war. Chief Earl Maquinna George's telling of a war among the Nuu-Chah-Nulth around the time of the maritime fur trade emphasises Maquinna's possession of firearms, for instance.²⁶⁵ The maritime fur trade also introduced new foodstuffs and material goods and disrupted traditional economies. But the negative impacts of the maritime fur trade were accompanied by the more positive opportunities offered by trade. Historian Robin Fisher has argued that Indigenous peoples "met the maritime fur trade and

²⁶³ Chang, *The World and all the Things Upon It*, 75.

²⁶⁴ David Igler, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (June 2004): 703.

²⁶⁵ Earl Maquinna George, *Living on the Edge: Nuu-Chah-Nulth History from an Ahousaht Chief's Perspective* (Winlaw, BC: Sononis Press, 2003), 44.

moulded it to serve their own ends.”²⁶⁶ These are important effects, but the extent of their impact is difficult to assess, especially as the experiences of different groups diverged. The Nuu-Chah-Nulth experience of the maritime fur trade differs substantially from the Coast Salish experience, for example. There is a hole in the historiography of the maritime fur trade that scholars of Indigenous communities must fill, one this paper is ill equipped to address.

The effects of the maritime fur trade on Hawai’i are more certain. In part this is because Hawai’i during the 1780s and 1790s was experiencing a period of civil strife leading to the unification of the archipelago under King Kamehameha. The British traders influence the course of this unification. Meares, for instance, traded arms to Kānaka Maoli leaders to secure their friendship, arming the combatants.²⁶⁷ The maritime fur trade also led into more British involvement in Hawai’i during the 1790s. John Young, a British sailor in the service of the American fur trader Thomas Metcalfe, was recruited into Kamehameha’s service following the latter’s capture of the *Fair American*. Young would become a significant player in Hawaiian politics and ended up ascending to the rank of governor of Oahu.²⁶⁸ Vancouver, meanwhile, allied with Kamehameha, who aligned himself with Britain and adopted the British flag as his ensign.²⁶⁹ These British interventions did not unify Hawai’i for Kamehameha, but they did play an important role in Hawai’i’s political history.²⁷⁰ The British connection that the maritime fur traders introduced would also help safeguard Hawai’i’s sovereignty through much of the 19th

²⁶⁶ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 23.

²⁶⁷ Meares, *Answer*, 30.

²⁶⁸ D’Arcy, *Transforming Hawai’i*, 210.

²⁶⁹ Stephen R. Bown, *Madness and Betrayal Before the Lash: The Epic Voyage of Captain George Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2008), 191.

²⁷⁰ D’Arcy, *Transforming Hawai’i*, 249.

century, until British rapprochement with the United States finally led to an end of support for an independent Hawai'i in the later part of the century.²⁷¹

This political role was paired with an important economic role, as the maritime fur traders helped shape Hawai'i's place in the Pacific. They were the first Pacific voyagers to make consistent use of Hawai'i as a supply depot. This was a role that Hawai'i was always likely to play because of its geography, but the maritime fur traders pioneered it. They also promoted it, with Meares claiming that "British will hereafter find, in [Hawai'i], all the comfort, friendship, and protection" that the islands leaders could afford.²⁷² Hawai'i's status as a Pacific entrepôt would only increase during the 19th century. The maritime fur traders also heralded the start of the Kānaka Maoli employment on foreign vessels, with Winée being the first, but not the last, Kānaka Maoli to take paid employment upon a foreign vessel. In the 19th century many Kānaka Maoli sailors sailed on with foreign ships.²⁷³ The maritime fur traders also forged a connection between the Northwest Coast and Hawai'i that would prove long-lasting. Kamehameha would enter the maritime fur trade himself, sending to ships to the coast in 1828 and 1832.²⁷⁴ After the end of the maritime fur trade, the Hudson's Bay Company would make extensive use of Kānaka personnel in their Pacific operations.²⁷⁵ The maritime fur trade thus played a key role in shaping Hawai'i's place in the world going into the nineteenth century.

²⁷¹ Merze Tate, "Great Britain and the Sovereignty of Hawaii," *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 4 (November 1962): 345.

²⁷² Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 232.

²⁷³ David Igler, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29.

²⁷⁴ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 308.

²⁷⁵ For a fuller discussion of Kanaka Maoli laborers on the Northwest Coast, see Jean Barman and Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787-1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

The maritime fur traders had the least impact in China, the origin of the trade. The fur trade's value was small: in 1796 it amounted for two percent of the value of trade at Canton.²⁷⁶ Although this was not insignificant, and the maritime fur trade cannot be dismissed as a transient fancy, it failed to make a significant impact on the China trade. The maritime fur traders' most significant milestone in China was arguably Meares' transport of the first known Chinese people to arrive at the Northwest Coast.²⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the maritime fur trade's relationship with China is important because of what it foreshadowed. Meares' use of Chinese workers on the coast was short-lived, because of Spanish actions during the Nootka Crisis, but his plan, to build a colony on the Northwest Coast using Chinese labor, has clear parallels in the later history of Chinese migration to North America during the 19th century.²⁷⁸ The maritime fur trade also anticipated changes in the British relationship with China over the ensuing decades. The importance of private traders, as opposed to the monopoly companies, in the maritime fur trade pointed to the declining importance of monopoly companies, which would withdraw from the Canton trade during the 1830s.²⁷⁹ The transition of British firms like Cox & Reid from the maritime fur trade to the opium trade exemplified the increasing importance of opium in the China trade.²⁸⁰ Finally, the maritime fur traders had grievances with the Chinese that foreshadowed the onset of the Opium war. Although the fur traders' writing is surprisingly absent of details about the Chinese, when they do devote time to them, they are not kind. Meares, for instance, claimed that European merchants in Canton "labored under very oppressive and increasing disadvantages," and claimed he could not

²⁷⁶ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 102.

²⁷⁷ Zhongping Chen, "Vancouver Island and the Chinese Diaspora in the Transpacific World, 1788-1918," *BC Studies*, no. 204 (Winter 2019/2020): 47.

²⁷⁸ Chen, "Vancouver Island and the Chinese Diaspora," 49.

²⁷⁹ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 175.

²⁸⁰ Lamb and Bartroli, "James Hanna and John Henry Cox," 36.

understand “upon what principles of sound policy we continue to submit to the will and please of the Chinese government.”²⁸¹ Tensions between British traders, like Meares, and the Chinese government would eventually lead to the Opium war. Just as in Hawai’i, the maritime fur trade predicted the relationship between China and the wider Pacific world in the coming century.

Meanwhile, the maritime fur trade affected Western empires. The trade was a sign of declining Spanish power. The Nootka Crisis had ended in embarrassment for Spain, forcing it to concede rights to Britain that it had previously guarded jealously. It was only one of a series of blows that struck the Spanish Empire during the period, but it was, in the words of Warren Cook, “the perceptible inception of an ebb tide of [Spanish] empire,” an ebb tide that would become more precipitous in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars and the Bolivarian Revolutions.²⁸² Moreover, the maritime fur trade’s contributions to the further deterioration of the Spanish Empire did not end with the Nootka Crisis. Following the outbreak of the wars of independence in Spanish colonies, American and British maritime fur traders began smuggling arms to the rebels, further contributing to Spanish decline.²⁸³ The maritime fur trade was a small part of the end of Spanish Empire, but it was a part.

Even as the maritime fur trade helped hobble the Spanish Empire, it helped establish other European empires in the Pacific. For the Russians, the maritime fur trade helped stoke increased participation in the North Pacific world. When the *Lark* touched at Petropavlovsk on its way to Alaska in 1787, it notified the Russians that their interests in Alaska, heretofore uncontested by other European powers, were about to face increased competition. This news contributed to the creation of the Russian American Company in 1792, the company in charge of

²⁸¹ Meares, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 294.

²⁸² Cook. *Flood Tide of Empire*, 232.

²⁸³ Wilson, “King George’s Men,” 317.

Russian America which was created in part to resist British incursions into the Northwest.²⁸⁴ The actual threat the British posed to Russian interests is hard to determine. Still, the British threat was enough to spur the Russians into action. Nor was the maritime fur trade's impact on the Russian colonization of Alaska limited to providing the impetus for increased Russian activity on the Northwest Coast, as maritime fur traders, both British and American, played a key role in supplying Russian positions at Sitka, providing logistical support that the Russians did not.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, many of the Russian America Company's best ships were former maritime fur trading vessels that the Russians had purchased.²⁸⁶ Clearly, the maritime fur trade helped shape the Russian Empire in the Americas.

It also shaped the early American presence in the North Pacific. The American involvement in the maritime fur trade was long, outlasting the British and only ending in the 1820s, when the Hudson's Bay Company, newly merged with the Northwest Company, entered the Northwest Coast trade in force, displacing the Americans. This means that, for the Americans, their first presence in the Northwest Coast was in the form of maritime fur traders, like the British. Like their British counterparts, these American traders were responsible for American exploratory achievements. Captain Gray, an American trader, was the first American to find the Columbia river.²⁸⁷ Also like the British traders, the American presence paved the way for other American forays west. The Lewis and Clark expedition, for example, was inspired in

²⁸⁴ Brockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers*, 118.

²⁸⁵ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 78.

²⁸⁶ Andrei Grinev, "Foreign Ships in the Fleet of the Russian American Company (1799-1867)," *Mariner's Mirror* 100, no. 4 (2014): 408.

²⁸⁷ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, 153.

part by the successes of the maritime fur trade.²⁸⁸ Although American expansion in the region would await a later period, its genesis can be traced to the maritime fur trade.

Beyond the coast, the British traders also facilitated a greater American maritime presence in the Pacific. In part this was because the British traders recorded a lot of navigational data, making shipping more streamlined as winds and currents were found and noted. They also played a role in the previously discussed normalization of Hawai'i as a supply base for shipping, which allowed American ships to use Hawai'i as a nexus for their Pacific operations, particularly the whaling industry, which play an important role in the United State's 19th century presence in the Pacific.²⁸⁹ The British maritime fur trade has strong connections to Pacific whaling. Recall that Colnett returned to the Pacific to chart it on behalf of whaling interests. Several traders also noted the region's potential for whaling, including Meares.²⁹⁰

Finally, for the British the maritime fur trade was a milestone in their advancement into the Pacific. Much of what has been said about the effects of the maritime fur trade on American empire in the Pacific can also be said of the trade's effects on the British empire. The fur traders facilitated navigation, established ties between Britain and Indigenous peoples, and eased the entry of whalers, both British and American, into the Pacific. They also helped prepare the ground for the British imperial expansion into the Northwest Coast. Although the exploration conducted by Vancouver and the maritime fur traders did not establish an imperial presence in the Northwest Coast, it did pave the way for the British to establish a colony in the region by providing the basis of a British claim to the region. Traders repeatedly accompanied their exploration with land claims, and the Nootka Crisis prompted Meares to claim that he had

²⁸⁸ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, 169.

²⁸⁹ Iglar, *The Great Ocean*, 103.

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established a colony at Yuquot, assertions that, although exaggerated, increased British claims to the region. Meares' factory at Yuquot, and the plans by other British traders to build a trading post along the Northwest Coast, also suggest that the maritime fur trade could have been much more imperial than it was. There was never a permanent British factory at Yuquot, but if there was, the history of the British Empire provides plentiful examples of how such a factory could spiral into colonial dominion. That could have had a significant impact on the course of British colonial expansion.

Finally, although the British maritime fur traders did not establish the British Empire in the Northwest of North America, they did blaze the trail for the terrestrial fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, who would colonize what is now British Columbia on behalf of the Crown.²⁹¹ The British maritime fur traders introduced the fur trade to the region and, even if the terrestrial fur traders reoriented the trade away from Canton and towards London, they did so while interacting with Indigenous groups who were used to interacting with the maritime fur traders. The transition from the maritime fur trade to the terrestrial fur trade was also gradual, and the HBC had time to adapt to the conditions that the maritime fur trade had created along the coast. For instance, prior to its merger with the HBC, the Northwest Company employed maritime traders, both American and British, to provide logistical support for its trading posts along the Columbia River.²⁹² Even after supplanting the maritime traders, the HBC used ships,

²⁹¹ For a fuller discussion of the role of the HBC in colonizing British Columbia, see Stephen A. Royle, *Company, Crown, and Colony: The Hudson's Bay Company and Territorial Endeavor in Western Canada* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

²⁹² Keith, H. Loyd, "The 'Adventure' of the Colonel Allan," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 105, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 558.

like the *Beaver*, to trade in similar ways to the maritime fur traders.²⁹³ The maritime fur trade transitioned to HBC hands, rather than being replaced by them.

²⁹³ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 76.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

The maritime fur trade has not been ignored in studies of the North Pacific. Many historians, from Howay to Gibson, have considered it in detail. But its significance has been underrepresented. The maritime fur trade was more than an interesting prelude to the nineteenth century Pacific world: the maritime fur trade was a harbinger and architect of it, especially the early British portion of the trade. Although the participation of these early British traders in the North Pacific trade was a short-lived phenomenon, it was an important one. The traders explored much of the coast, set the tenor of relations between European powers and Indigenous nations, and altered the course of empires. Nor were these effects limited to one corner of the Pacific. In Canton, the traders' difficulties highlighted grievances that would contribute to a radical reordering of China's place in the world during the 19th century. Meares served as an early, if accidental, proponent of the use of Chinese labor in American colonies. In Hawai'i, the traders helped establish the islands' status as an important nexus of transpacific trade and shaped the islands' internal politics. On the Northwest Coast, the traders left a trail of violence and commerce along the coast, provided Indigenous groups with their first sustained contact, and at times their first initial contact, with Europeans.

For European powers, meanwhile, the maritime fur traders helped open the Pacific. Their exploration facilitated navigation and paved the way for subsequent voyages in the North Pacific. They also helped shape empires. They inadvertently contributed to the formalization of Russian dominion over Alaska. They weakened the Spanish Empire, eroding the foundations that would, during the Napoleonic Era, finally collapse. They heralded an increased British and American presence in the region and, especially in the case of Britain, helped establish an imperial claim to

parts of the British Coast. They also led into the terrestrial fur trade that would finally, permanently establish the British empire in the North Pacific.

The maritime fur trade, then, was a harbinger of the Pacific world of the nineteenth century. Its effects were many, even if, at times, they were small in magnitude. But the trade was the like a fall frost. It fell lightly across the North Pacific, but it foreshadowed the deep snows of winter, when during the 19th century the Pacific, and especially the North Pacific, saw an increasing European presence. The maritime fur trade was a rough draft of the modern Pacific world. It should be remembered as such.

Appendix: List of Trading Vessels on the Northwest Coast, 1785-1789

Year	Ship	Captain	Nationality	Flag
1785	Sea Otter/Harmon	James Hanna	British	British (?)
1786	Captain Cook	Hendry Laurie (Strange Expedition)	British	British
1786	Experiment	John Guise (Strange Expedition)	British	British
1786	King George	Nathaniel Portlock	British	British
1786	Queen Charlotte	George Dixon	British	British
1786	Nootka	John Meares	British	British
1786	Sea Otter	William Tipping	British	British
1786	Sea Otter	James Hanna	British	British
1786	Lark	William Peters	British	British
1787	Imperial Eagle/Loudoun	William Barkley	British	Austrian
1787	Nootka (Continuing)	John Meares	British	British
1787	King George (Continuing)	Nathaniel Portlock	British	British
1787	Queen Charlotte (Continuing)	George Dixon	British	British
1787	Prince of Wales	James Colnett	British	British
1787	Princess Royal	Charles Duncan	British	British
1788	Felice Adventurer	John Meares	British	Portuguese
1788	Iphigenia Nubiana	William Douglas	British	Portuguese
1788	Prince of Wales (Continuing)	James Colnett	British	British
1788	Princess Royal (Continuing)	Charles Duncan	British	British
1788	Columbia	John Kendrick	American	American
1788	Lady Washington	Robert Gray	American	American
1788	Eleanora (Apocryphal)	Simon Metcalfe	American	American
1789	Argonaut	James Colnett	British	Portuguese
1789	Northwest America	Robert Duffin	British	Portuguese
1789	Iphigenia Nubiana	William Douglas	British	Portuguese
1789	Princess Royal	Charles Duncan	British	British (?)
1789	Eleanora	Simon Metcalfe	American	American
1789	Fair American	Thomas Metcalfe	American	American

1789	Columbia	Robert Gray	American	American
1789	Lady Washington	John Kendrick	American	American
Source: F.W. Howay <i>A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785-1825.</i>				

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