

“THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE  
NOOTKA SOUND AREA: 1774-1974”

An Encapsulated View

Paper presented at the Canadian Archaeological Association Annual Meeting  
held in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories, March 7-10, 1974.

W. J. Folan

Assistant Professor - Anthro.  
University of Wisconsin-Parkside

(Rough Draft)

Since 1774, the Nootkans living on the shores of Nootka Sound have experienced various types and degrees of contact with the explorers, traders, military personnel, missionaries, teachers, travelers, government officials and anthropologists that have sailed or more recently, motor or flown. into their lives Although early visitors to Nootka Sound were dependent on its inhabitants for the sea otter pelts that attracted the European and American traders to the coast and for the foods necessary to sustain them while bargaining for the furs and during their subsequent voyage to China where the furs were sold or traded, the Nootkans soon became more and more dependent on the traders. Those who had accepted Nootkan hospitality became the source for most of the wealth goods that came to play so important a role in Nootkan culture. But in order to better understand Nootkan-European relationship through time, it is also essential to remember that it not only became important for the Nootkan to acquire these items from the Europeans but it also became imperative for the Nootkans to learn something of the English and Spanish languages and cultures so that they could better understand and, therefore, better deal with their foreign visitors. Although the latter people also had to learn a bit of Nootkan language and culture, they, in contrast to the Nootkans, were in contact with only a few Nootkans for short periods of time while the Nootkans were in contact with several visitors for periods spanning many years.

When the ancestors of what are now referred to as the Hesquiat Nootkans paddled out to Juan Pérez' ship, *Santiago*, in 1774, the ephemeral contact between the Nootkans and the Spanish can only be considered as a chance encounter characterized by a casual exchange of goods. But, when Captain Cook sailed into Nootka Sound in 1778 and once the understandable novelty of the huge ships and strange people began to wear off, reciprocity switched from a casual, general exchange of goods and foods between the Nootkans and Europeans to a more calculated, balanced and, finally, a negative form based on the scarce resources available to and controlled by each of them (Sahlins 1972: 193-196). Although the British could be said to have been in control of scarce resources unavailable to the Nootkans, the Nootkans were also in control of resources scarce to the Europeans. Furthermore, a group of Nootkans successfully acted as incipient brokers between several Nootkan groups and Europeans in regulating the exchange of goods between the two parties. Here their position as developing brokers was due most probably to the exchanges taking place between outside groups while in their territorial waters. Nootkans of high rank were not only encouraged to trade in European style but to a certain extent, they were expected to act like Europeans in, for example, such things as table manners. But on the other side of the coin the Nootkans continuously invited the Spanish to feasts and potlatches expecting the Spanish to reciprocate in kind. The Nootkans had accepted the Spaniards, especially Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra and José Manuel de Aláva as potlatch partners and allies expected to witness and recognize their claim to inherited rank and privileges, the associated access to scarce resources and to defend each other during times of conflict. Although the Nootkans also attempted to involve Captain George Vancouver in the same kind of relationship, he did not, however, seem to understand and was therefore unable to pull it off with the same high style as did his Spanish counterparts. The Nootkans still acted as developing brokers between the Spaniards and other groups of people such as their kin the "Nuchimanes" (better known as the Nimkish Kwakiutl from the Northeast coast of Vancouver Island). One may also argue that the chiefs acted as full brokers between the Nootkans and the Europeans especially regarding the exchange of goods and foods beside passing on a few of the values offered them by their Spanish mentors.

One indignity not experienced by the Nootkans was the kind and degree of missionization imposed upon Mexican Indians by Spanish religious authorities. Although the priests accompanying the military authorities to the Nootka Sound area thought that the Nootkans lived under conditions of savagery, the missionaries did not try to persuade the Nootkans to concentrate into villages or to construct some type of building to serve as a church designed to become the focus of community activities as was so often done in Northern Mexico during the 17th and 18th centuries (Spicer 1967: 288). What the Spanish did at Yuquot in contrast to what was usually done in Northern Mexico was to form a Spanish military post on the site of the Nootkan village of Yuquot and to generally prohibit rather than encourage Nootkan habitation within the confines of the post. Furthermore, no more than ephemeral attempts were made to convert the Indians to Catholicism.

Once the Spaniards and, practically everyone else left the Nootka Sound area in 1795 things changed considerably for the Nootkans. No longer did any type of an exchange relationship exist between the Nootkans and Americans or Europeans because the Nootkans no longer had control over sufficient quantities of scarce commodities such as the sea otter that had attracted traders to the area. This situation was due to multiple factors, but the two main ones were the depletion of the sea otters in the area as the result of the excessive hunting and Vancouver's discovery of one of the Nootkan's main sources for many of these pelts, the Nimpkish Kwakiutl. Therefore, no one sailed into Nootka Sound for more than wood and water and kept for other Indian groups of the coast those scarce commodities that had placed the Nootkans in an incipient client position. The Nootkans had also lost their European allies and potlatch partners plus a considerable amount of esteem making them more vulnerable to attack and conversely, others more vulnerable to their attack because if the Spaniards were successful in anything on the west coast of Vancouver Island affecting its inhabitants it was to maintain a fair degree of peace between the various groups lining its shores.

Thus with the Spaniards gone, the taking of the ship *Boston* in 1803 the acquisition of its rich cargo of trade goods would seem to have automatically put the Nootkan recipients of these goods into a patron-like position in contrast to other Indian groups. However, this was not the Nootkan way. Although the Nootkans may have behaved in a manner resembling this role toward distant groups associated with them through weak ties of kinship, the majority of the goods distributed went out in the form of potlatches and marriage payments involving much more than a patron-client relationship. Nor were the Nootkans brokers or middlemen any more. But after the taking of the *Boston* the Nootkans increased interest in having things European such as boats, armament (including cannons), steel-tipped hunting gear, clothing, liquor, food and other items. The stage was being further set for the type of patron-client relationship described by Paine et al. (1972).

Following the *Boston* incident, little contact was made between Nootkans and outsiders until the development of the lumber industry on the coast and the concomitant need for dogfish oil to lubricate the sawmill's machinery when the Nootkans found themselves in a position similar to what they had been in earlier. But although both the Nootkans and, the 19th-century traders possessed commodities scarce to each other, neither had to recognize the status of the other in what can best be described as a formal manner. The idea was to exchange oil for blankets or whatever else the trader had and blankets for oil while getting the most of one for the other. Gone were the days of Nootkan chiefs extolling the greatness of a particular foreigner and the foreigner returning the honor in kind with both groups exchanging one or more gifts in recognition of the value placed on their mutual respect. Or if this sort of relationship was still on

going, no one was bothering to record it, at least for the Nootka Sound area. Somehow it seems as though the entire relationship between the Nootkans and the Euro-Canadians plying the coast as the Hudson Bay Company was becoming less and less personalized even though a few gifts may or may not have been thrown into some of the bargains. The same type of relationship may be said to have existed between the Nootkans and the sealing schooner operators who took the Nootkans north and south to hunt the migrating herds of fur seal. The Nootkans had skills as seal hunters to offer plus the equipment essential to hunt fur seals successfully and the schooner operators had the means of transporting the Nootkans to distant herds and the money to exchange for the skins the seal hunters obtained. Nor were the Nootkans entirely dependent on the sealing schooners for transportation to the herds because during the time of the year that the fur seals were migrating, the Nootkans could paddle from their own villages 30 or 40 miles out to sea and hunt seal on their own, selling the pelts at nearby shops if they were successful.

Although a detailed account of the interaction between the buyers of dogfish oil and sealing schooner operators with the Nootkans has not been consulted, it may be easily imagined that the Nootkans would have had to adapt at least some of the Euro-Canadian values possessed and cherished by these men. But, it was most probably still a give and take situation, because the Nootkans, the traders, and the schooner owners were each in control of relatively scarce commodities so neither group fell completely into a patron-client role. Nootkans were, however, through increased monetization becoming more and more inclined toward the acquisition of Euro-Canadian money, clothing, food, household goods, firearms and other similar items, thus drawing themselves deeper into the patron-client trap.

Following the arrival of missionaries on the coast in 1874, 100 years after Pérez sailed into Nootka Sound, roles began to change rapidly. Almost all the sea otters were gone, the supply of fur seals began to diminish as did the demand for dogfish oil due to the availability of petroleum products as lubricants. Coeval with these conditions was the continued and increased desire by the Nootkans for the European goods that had played a fairly marginal role in their life style up to this time coupled with the need for the money necessary to purchase these items. Potlatching was also going through a period of considerable popularity so funds were also needed for this ceremonial activity underscoring the validity of hereditary access to the Nootkan concept of scarce resources including rights to subsistence resource areas and ceremonial prerogatives. One of the ways of financially coping with these needs was for Nootkans to obtain jobs as wage earners as well as continuing their efforts as dogfish oil producers and sealers when the demand for oil existed and the seals' available. Although jobs for Indians were scarce in Nootka Sound around the turn of the century, the formation of a nearby fish saltry began to open new possibilities for the Indian inhabitants of Yuquot although virtually no Nootkans were hired at first. To qualify for jobs in any fish saltry, cannery, or hop fields down south the Nootkans not only had to adopt Euro-Canadian dress, but they also had to adopt Euro-Canadian work values and the skills essential to carry out the jobs available to them. What better way was there to learn of Euro-Canadian values and thus put oneself in the position to pick up the more demanding of the essential skills including speaking and understanding English than to place oneself under the care and direction of the local missionary who was also in contact with job offering whites up and down the coast. Nootkan desire to adopt Euro-Canadian values and skills increased when stores were opened in Yuquot and at the nearby cannery, both stocked with many of the relatively scarce items near and dear to the Nootkan Soul. These were obtainable only with Euro-Canadian money or its equivalent thus forcing the Nootkans to further conform to Euro-Canadian values if they planned on surviving as individuals and as a group although it be a group

undergoing rapid acculturation. To further cement this trend toward a patron-client relationship the missionaries opened an Indian boarding school on the coast in 1900. Here Indian children would be transformed into English-speaking Catholic men and women whose parents would not only receive the blessing of the missionary for sending them to the school but, quite often, the ridicule of their children for speaking the Nootkan language and practicing Nootkan traits not in accord with Church and Euro-Canadian values. Here the patron-client relationship as described by Paine et al. (1971) is complete because Euro-Canadians were not only in possession of scarce resources, but they were also in the process of disseminating their cultural values among the Nootkans and the Nootkans were making a positive effort toward incorporating them into their value system without the patrons expecting or desiring the client's reciprocity in terms of the latter's values (see also Spicer 1970: 12—19). Furthermore, the priest is not only the patron to the Indian dispensing blessings and salvation but he becomes the broker as well when acting as middleman between the Indians and, for example, their employers or the Canadian government. When a school was opened at Yuquot the teachers also became patrons and brokers while, like the missionary, acting as culture change agents and middlemen between the Indians and the government and between the Indians and the priest or vice versa. As the Indians lost more and more control over scarce resources, most of them taken from them by Government agencies, and jobs became more and more difficult to obtain, the Indians became more and more dependant on welfare for their survival. Thus, the role of missionary and teacher as a broker increased considerably because these people were constantly consulted by various government agencies to determine who should or should not receive a certain amount of money for their or their children's support and who may or may not be guilty of a particular infraction of the white man's law. The Indian now has to be a super-client to survive while the combined patrons and brokers need only be of mediocre quality to maintain their position because the Indians no longer have anything to offer their patrons except conformity to their patrons' ways. The exceptions are those few Nootkans who work in the neighboring lumber industry cutting timber from what were formerly Indian lands and who have the skills to offer, along with at least a token conformity to Euro-Canadian values, to make it possible for them to exist relatively free of patronage but within a milieu no longer theirs.

What has been happening in fairly recent times is that Indians have been deprived of most of their inherited, socially recognized control over not only all of the resources considered scarce by the Indians themselves such as salmon streams, offshore water rights to everything floating on the water, swimming in it or to be found on the bottom, plus inland areas for hunting and cutting timbers for housing and canoes. Many of these rights have, in turn, been given or leased to whites who earn sufficient monies from them as a scarce resource to indirectly maintain their Indian neighbors in a subservient client position. The Indians not only have had their scarce resources taken from them, but the profits derived from them have been turned against their former owners in the form of taxes and donations paid to state and church to be used to control those who can no longer use these resources to maintain themselves in a bargaining position as they were able to do during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Concomitant with all of this is the ongoing position of the now elected local chief acting as a broker between his people, the government, the local missionary and teacher while interpreting as best as he can the dictates and demands of each group. His reward, however, is usually scorn and failure to perform an almost impossible task, leading to his replacement by someone else. But, in the long run, the election and the subsequent failures of the elected chiefs serve to preserve the Nootkan concept of chieftainship in the person of the hereditary chief of a particular

household, community, alliance or confederacy. This is made possible because the hereditary chief remains on the sidelines while making his feelings known to the elected chief who (in some cases acting as the hereditary chief's speaker) lets them be known to the interested public both Indian and white. Even though the roles assumed by Indians and non-Indian have changed back and forth until the Indian has now become the perpetual client and the white the perpetual patron, the role of the chief as broker has remained virtually unchanged and will probably continue as such as long as Nootkans and whites both work toward the reinforcement of the status quo. The is, however, the alternative of once again recognizing the Nootkan as sole possessor of what was once his source of scarce resources so that he rather than someone else would be able to lease out his offshore rights including the right to fish or drill for oil. He could also lease rights for timber and mineral exploration so that the Nootkan would no longer have to be the client nor the white man the patron. Both could once again have the chance of being allies as they so often were in the not-too-distant past.