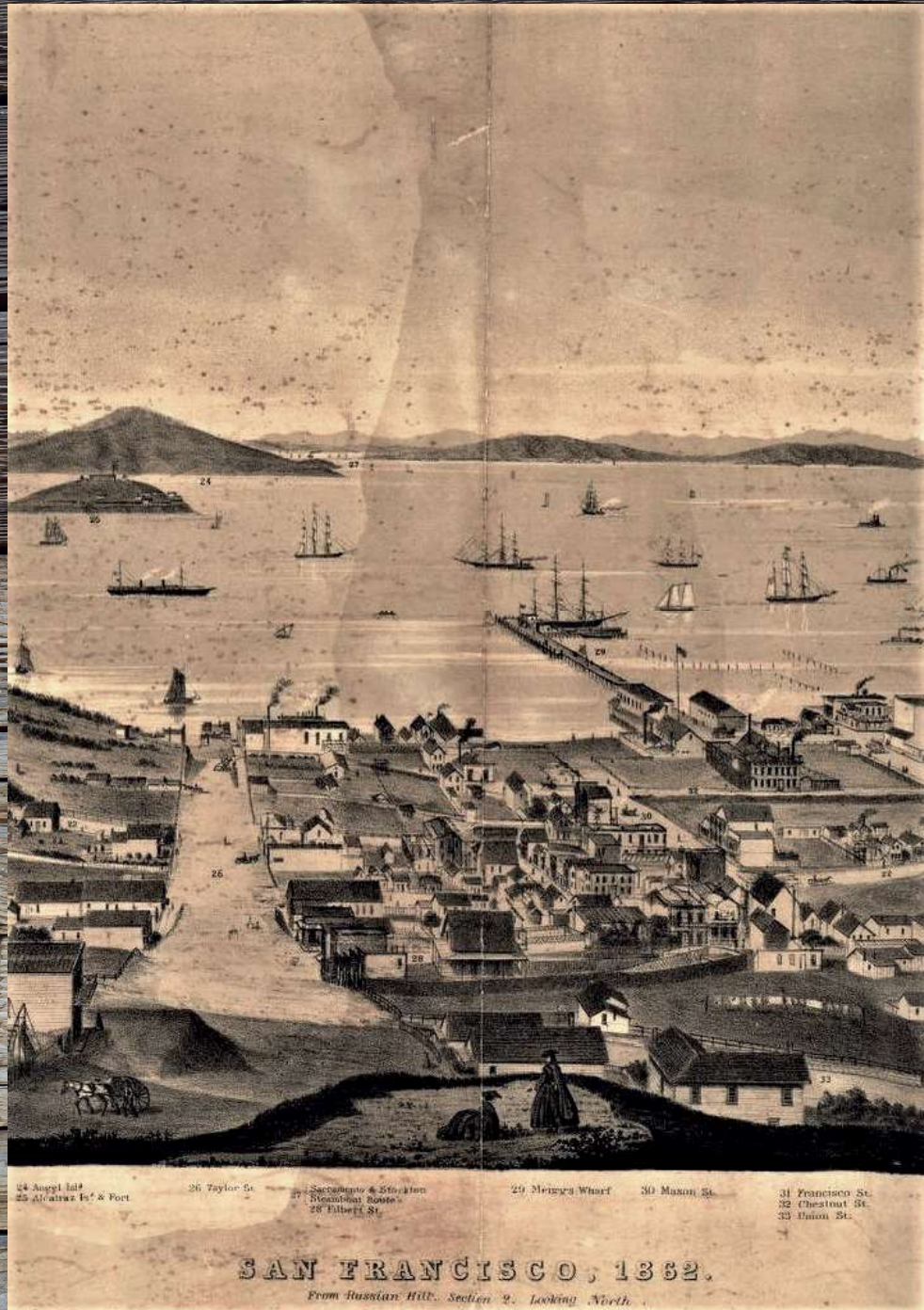


# Occurrences

The Journal of Northwest History



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Fort Nisqually and regional themes. Authors  
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#### Editor's Note:

*At their best, historians create a multidimensional sketch of a moment in time. The challenge for historians in 2020 is to be aware of individual biases, an unavoidable part of research projects, and to consider systemic biases as well. Doing "good" history means analyzing documents, material culture, oral histories and including a multitude of perspectives. What stories are not being told? How can we critically interrogate our "traditional" historic sources?*

#### Cover photo:

*Panoramic lithograph of San Francisco, 1862, cropped.  
Courtesy the Library of Congress,  
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## Foundation News

### *Greetings from the Fort Nisqually Foundation Board,*

Things have been quiet but there is still quite a lot going on at Fort Nisqually. Metro Parks has allowed a few staff members to be recalled and the museum is now open to the public Friday through Sunday. Monday through Friday the staff is holding camps; they have had a day camp every week since mid-July. The kids are loving learning Chinook Jargon, Fort Nisqually history, and 19th century crafts and games. The Foundation has provided scholarship funds to help families in need be able to send their kids to day camp.

We still don't know what the landscape will look like come fall, so we are working on virtual fundraisers for the foreseeable future. We held an online t-shirt fundraiser this summer - thanks to all of you who purchased shirts! We are planning another shirt for the fall, as well as an online auction. Keep an eye on our Fort Nisqually Foundation Facebook page to know when this is going live.

Since so much of the in-person education we are used to is limited at this time, the fort is working on online resources. They have Fort Skills on their YouTube channel <https://tinyurl.com/yb3o4hv3>, as well as Fort from Home that brings the talents and expertise of Fort Nisqually interpreters to you live through interactive online programming. You can purchase tickets here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/fort-nisqually-living-history-museum-10738467747>. The beauty of this is you can ask questions right from the comfort of your own home.

This year has had its share of bad news so I'm going to share with you some of the fabulous things our supporters are doing. When the museum wanted to start taping Fort from Home virtual programming,

they needed better quality video and sound equipment. We had a very generous supporter donate the funds for this endeavor. We have seen throughout this pandemic such generous people step up and help fill the gaps financially as well as by volunteering. We want to also acknowledge those of you who have kept your memberships current. Every bit helps us toward our goal to usher Fort Nisqually into the next year able to meet the needs of our community and region as the premier living history museum that it is.

One major project still in the works is the capital improvement plan for the Clerk's House, Sale Shop, Kitchen, Wash House, and Bastions. We are still in the early stages of the project, but the process is underway. Once we have finalized the plans, we will be starting a major fundraising campaign. We will keep you informed once we get to the next phase.

In a last word before closing, I want to thank the museum's Site Supervisor, Jim Lauderdale. When all other fort staff were laid off and furloughed, he stayed. He took on a 7 day a week schedule to care for animals and the site as well as continued to advocate for the fort. His advocacy allowed us to open the doors to the public in mid-July. Museums have been hard hit by all of this, and it means so much to have someone caring for it in this unprecedented and trying time.

As always, thank you to everyone who continues to support and stand by us. Stay safe out there; we're all eager to see you when the world resumes once more!

Sincerely,

Dana Repp, President  
Fort Nisqually Foundation

## Research Revealed

### Smallpox Epidemic of 1862 among Northwest Coast and Puget Sound Indians: Part I

By Greg Lange ~ HistoryLink.org Contributor

#### *Editor's Note: Facing Difficult Histories*

*When it comes to the Hudson's Bay Company, the "middle ground" of cultural confluence created at the fur trade posts and agricultural centers is fascinating. Yet there is a dark side that often is glossed over. The Native Americans and the primarily European fur traders forged interconnected lives at posts throughout North America, but the cultural exchange was ultimately weighted in favor of the white newcomers. Because of the presence of mercantile operations like the Hudson's Bay Company, much of the continent was opened to settlement. With explorers and settlers came waves of disease that devastated the native populations. At times, the whites tried to prevent this destruction. Other times, settlers took advantage of the impacts of disease to seize land and resources. This article explores some of the complex racial interactions of the former HBC settlement at Fort Victoria, and the balance between actions and inaction by the authorities.*

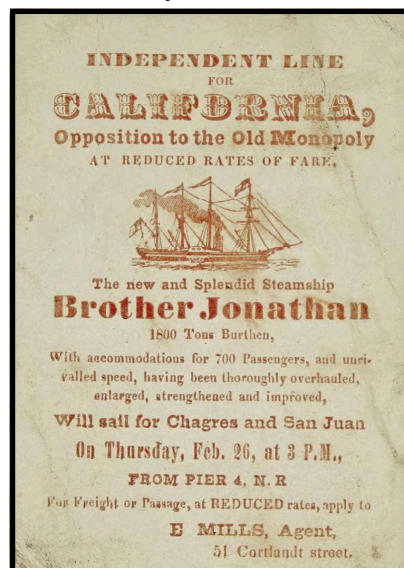
*The author of the original essay chose to use the historic period terminology such as the word "Indian" for First Nations peoples, and has excerpted quotes directly from historic newspapers. Many of these quotes are overtly racist and offensive, but it is important to allow the primary sources to speak for themselves. It is worth noting that even the 1862 local press called out the terrible treatment of the indigenous peoples. Sadly, there was not enough public pressure for a policy shift to prevent the magnitude of the tragedy which unfolded.*

*Originally Posted 2/04/2003, HistoryLink.org Essay 5171. Used under Creative Commons license.*

This essay describes the 1862 smallpox epidemic among Northwest Coast tribes. It was carried from San Francisco on the steamship *Brother Jonathan* and arrived at Victoria, British Columbia, on March 12, 1862. White officials vaccinated as many whites as possible and very few Indians. When Indians camped near Victoria began dying of smallpox, Vancouver Island authorities forced them to leave. The Indians returned to their homelands, causing the disease to spread north from Vancouver Island to southern Alaska, and south into the Puget Sound region. As Robert Boyd writes in his seminal work, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, "this [Indian] epidemic might have been avoided, and the Whites knew it." Boyd estimates that from April to December 1862, 14,000 Native Americans perished, about half the Indians living along the coast from Victoria to Alaska.

#### **The Epidemic Ship Arrives**

In the late afternoon of March 12, 1862, the *Brother Jonathan* steamed into Victoria, at the southernmost tip of Vancouver Island. She had traveled from San Francisco carrying about 350 passengers, mostly gold seekers. In the late fall or early winter of 1861-1862, news of a large gold strike along the Salmon River (in eastern Washington Territory, later Idaho) had reached the nation,



*Advertisement ("sailing card")  
for the Brother Jonathan*



but an extremely cold and snowy winter had delayed the rush until spring. The *Brother Jonathan*, commanded by Captain Samuel DeWolf, was one of the first ships to leave San Francisco carrying gold seekers for the Salmon River mines.

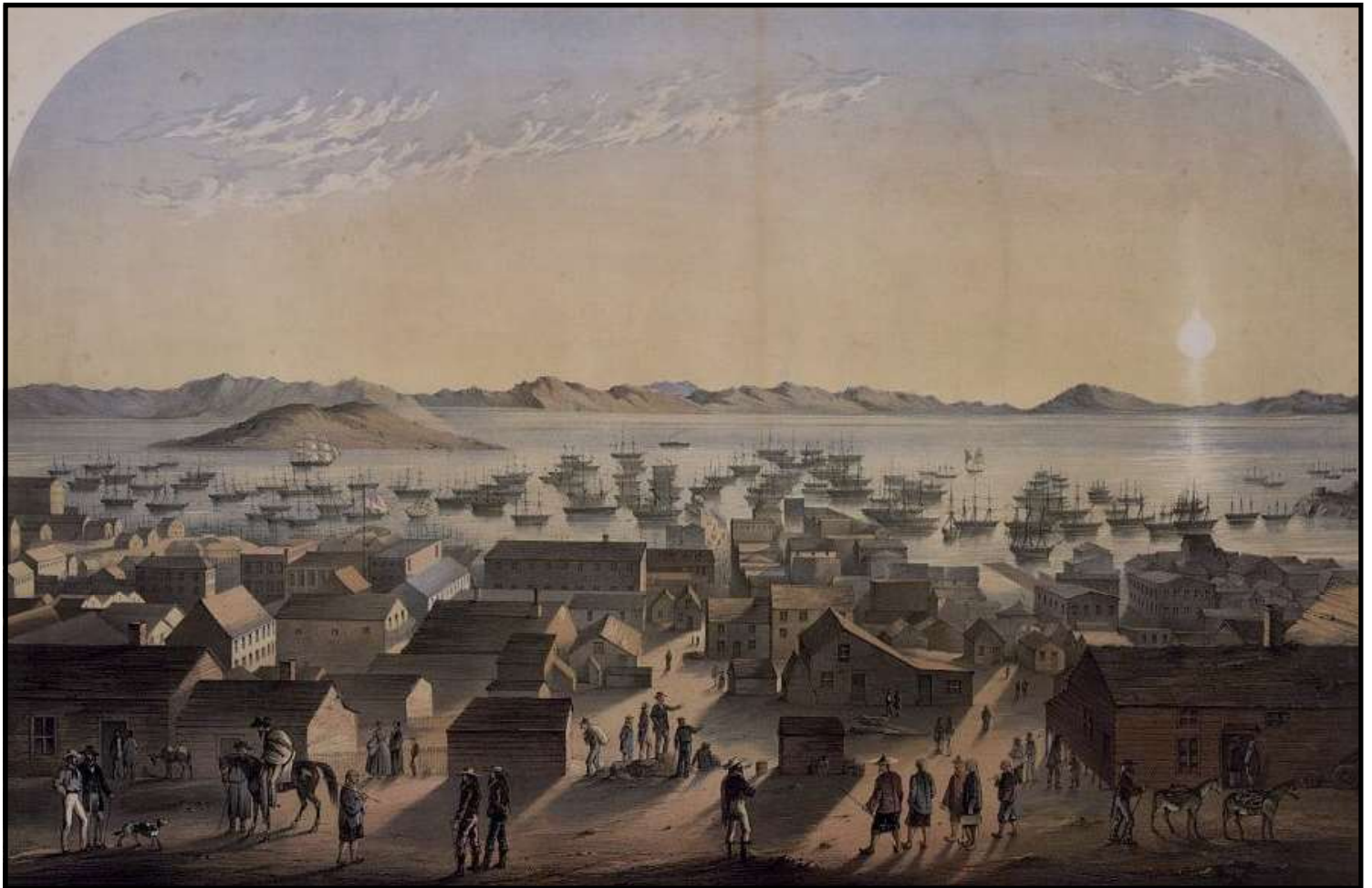
The *Brother Jonathan* brought mail and the latest news published in the San Francisco papers. Included were February 25th to March 3rd 1862 dispatches from the East, dominated by news of the Civil War (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 13, 1862).

In addition to 100 to 125 passengers bound for Victoria, the *Brother Jonathan* carried 60 tons of freight for the town, including hats, cigars, butter, saws, books, glassware, furniture, "oil suits," fry pans, vegetables, hops, boots and shoes, plus 75 sheep and 21 mules (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 13, 1862).

During the one night layover, prospectors filled

every lodging house and hotel in town. It was reported that they saw the sights, which likely included the insides of grog houses and brothels with their Native American prostitutes.

The steamship stayed at Victoria for 24 hours. On March 13, at 4 p.m., Captain DeWolf blew the whistle and the *Brother Jonathan*, "[h]er decks alive" with now 400 passengers, made a boisterous departure for the Columbia River. For three more years the steamer would ply the coast, carrying freight and passengers. During an 1865 mid-summer storm, the *Brother Jonathan*, still commanded by Captain DeWolf, foundered while seeking refuge near Crescent City. All but 19 of the 200 passengers and crew perished. This is considered one of the Pacific Coast's greatest ship disasters, but it pales in comparison to the death that the *Brother Jonathan* carried to the Northwest Coast during the last days of winter in the year 1862.



Chromolithograph print of San Francisco, c. 1854. Courtesy the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/92522389/](http://www.loc.gov/item/92522389/)>. M. & N. Hanhart, and Frank Marryat. *San Francisco* / S.F. Marryat, delt. [London: M. & N. Hanhart Chromo Lith. impt.]

## The Outbreak

A day or two following the steamship's departure, rumors swept across Victoria of another "cargo" the *Brother Jonathan* had left behind -- smallpox (Variola Major). On March 18, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* confirmed that one of the passengers from the steamer had "varioid" (smallpox). Two days later the paper reported on another passenger with the disease. On March 24, another steamer from San Francisco, the *Oregon*, arrived at Victoria carrying at least one passenger infected with smallpox. Thus began the catastrophic 1862 epidemic (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 1862).

## Smallpox in California

Apparently California had had smallpox infections for some time. On March 18, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* reported that "small pox is very prevalent at San Francisco." Further reports stated that 150 people had died from smallpox in San Luis Obispo (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 25, 26, 1862, April 2, 1862). In Olympia, the *Washington Standard* reprinted a portion of a letter received from California that stated: "The small-pox is raging throughout the city and county [of San Francisco], and indeed I might say in all the principal towns of the State [of California].... It is reported that over two thousand cases have occurred within the last week, though proportionately but few have...proved fatal" (*Washington Standard*, April 5, 1862, p. 2).

## The Smallpox Virus

Smallpox can be transmitted through the air by coughing and the virus can live on clothes, blankets, or other objects for some time. Once a person is infected there is an incubation period that lasts about 12 days with no symptoms and minimal chance of transmitting the disease.

The first symptoms appear suddenly and include a high fever, headache, body pains, and perhaps nausea and vomiting. This continues for the duration of the illness. Two or three days later, two weeks after first exposure to the virus, a rash begins on face, hands, and feet. (With the rash comes the most contagious period.) The rash spreads over the

whole body. In about three days, the rash turns into red spots or bumps, and then into raised pus-filled lesions. The lesions look like blisters and are about the size of a dime. (In the worst cases, called confluent, there are so many lesions that they merge into one another covering whole parts of the body.) It takes about a month for the disease to run its course. The lesions on victims still alive become scabs and then slowly fall off. About six weeks after the initial infection most of the scabs are gone, leaving permanent scars or pockmarks on the body and for some, blindness in one or both eyes (Boyd, p. 174-175).

## Smallpox Prevention Well Known

Once infected, except for bed rest, nothing could be done medically to stop the smallpox infection from running its course. But in 1862 there was awareness in Victoria and along the Pacific Coast of two measures that could be taken to prevent or minimize the spread of the disease. One was to quarantine those with smallpox and anyone who came into contact with infected people. The other was to vaccinate anyone who might become exposed. Neither of these was done for the northern tribes camped near Victoria.

A week after *The Daily British Colonist* confirmed the first smallpox case, the newspaper published an editorial titled "Quarantine." Noting the danger of smallpox, the paper implored the authorities to take prompt action. The editorial stated:

"The most stringent regulations ought to be enforced, and enforced without a moment's delay. If a case occurs the parties ouaht [ought] to be placed beyond the reach of communicating the infection to others. Imagine for moment what a fearful calamity it would be, were the horde of Indians on the outskirts of the town to take the disease. Their filthy habits would perpetuate the evil; keep it alive in the community, sacrificing the lives of all classes. We ... believe there is ... great danger if the small-pox be allowed to spread through the neglect of the authorities" (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 26, 1862, p. 2).



The following day the paper stated: "The disease, we fear, will make sad havoc among the Indians unless stringent sanitary measures are adopted" (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 27, 1862, p. 3). But the "authorities" did not approve the quarantine and approved a smallpox hospital only for those who voluntarily wished to make use of it.

### The Smallpox Vaccine

The other preventive was a smallpox vaccine. It was discovered in England in 1798 and first used in the Puget Sound area in 1837. On March 18, 1862, when *The Daily British Colonist* published confirmation of smallpox in Victoria, the paper made the following statement:

"[W]e advise our citizens ... to proceed at once to a physician and undergo vaccination ... from the loathsome disease ..." (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 18, 1862, p. 3).

Between March 18 and April 1, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* reiterated to the citizens of Victoria at least five times the importance of getting vaccinated. The paper estimated that by April 1, one-half of the "resident Victorians" were vaccinated. In 1862, Victoria, the largest town north of the Columbia River, had a white population of from 2,500 to 5,000. The nearby Indian population was about the same size. There were probably at least 2,000 Northern Indians (who lived along the coast from northern Vancouver Island to Alaska) camping on the outskirts of Victoria, plus at least 1,600 local Indians who lived nearby. Initially no demands were made to vaccinate these local groups. By March 27, 1862, Dr. John Helmcken (1824-1920), Hudson's Bay Company physician, had vaccinated about 30 local resident Songhees Indians, who constituted less than 1 percent of the nearby natives.

### The Songhees Were Saved

On April 1, 1862, 18 days after the *Brother Jonathan* departed, the first reports were published of an Indian, who lived in town, with smallpox. The Victoria authorities and residents did not react. As the virus spread it would be more than two weeks before the local newspapers reported local Indians

receiving additional vaccines. On April 16, Dr. Helmcken vaccinated another 30 Indians. By April 25, *The Daily British Colonist* reported that since the outbreak Dr. Helmcken had vaccinated "over 500 natives" (April 26, 1862, p. 3).

Apparently, the doctor distributed most of his vaccine to the Songhees, a local tribe that resided near Victoria. Soon after smallpox symptoms emerged at the Northern Indian encampment, the Songhees departed their Vancouver Island village(s) en masse to a nearby island in Haro Strait. Because of the vaccinations and the tribe's self-imposed quarantine, the Songhees survived the epidemic with few deaths (Boyd, 176, 177, 183).

### Was There a Shortage of Vaccine?

It is unknown how large a supply of the smallpox vaccine was kept at Victoria. Boyd states that the vaccine was "available, though in short supply" (Boyd, p. 172). Possibly there was a shortage of vaccine when the smallpox epidemic started. According to Boyd, Anglican missionary Alexander Garrett stated in his *Reminiscences* that there was not enough vaccine "within seven hundred miles to go around" (Boyd p 178-9).

Still, during the entire run of the epidemic *The Daily British Colonist* did not mention a vaccine shortage at any time. On the contrary, during the last half of March, after the first smallpox case was discovered, the paper mentioned numerous times the availability of the vaccine. In mid-June, about when the Indian epidemic along the coast reached its height, *The Daily British Colonist* (June 14, 1862) asked why "our philanthropists" and "missionaries" had not started "vaccinating the poor wretches" in mid-April?

If there was a vaccine shortage, it was just temporary. Apparently, by May 1, 1862, at the latest, there was plenty of vaccine to go around. During the first half of May 1862, Father Leon Fouquet, a Catholic Missionary, reportedly vaccinated 3,400 Indians along the lower Fraser River. At the same time, other missions along both sides of the Strait of Georgia and in Puget Sound received supplies to vaccinate nearby tribes people. The ravages of the

epidemic bypassed these vaccinated groups (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 18, 26, 27, 28, 1862, April 1, 1862, June 14, 1862; Boyd, p. 183-184).

### **The Epidemic Could Have Been Stopped**

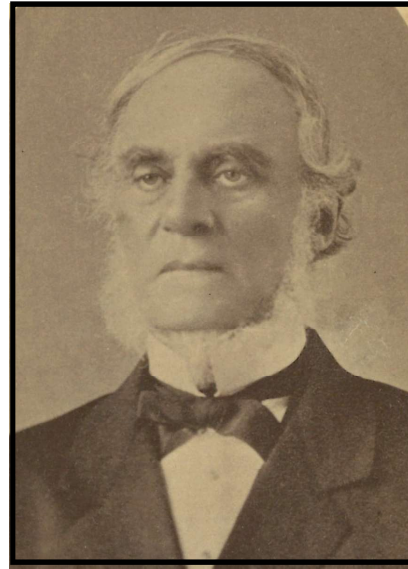
In the spring of 1862, the government body that administered authority over Victoria was the House of Assembly of the Colony of Vancouver Island (in 1866 Vancouver Island merged with the mainland colony of British Columbia). The town of Victoria had not incorporated, so had no town council and no mayor. At least two members of the House of Assembly, along with the Governor of the Colony, undoubtedly were aware of the obvious consequences of not immunizing the Indians, and not placing them under quarantine. In 1862, Dr. William Tolmie (1812-1886) and Dr. John Helmcken were both legislators in the Vancouver Island Assembly, Helmcken serving as Speaker, one of the highest elected positions in the Colony. The Hudson's Bay Co. hired William Tolmie in 1833 and John Helmcken in 1850 as physicians.

In 1837, reports reached Fort Vancouver of smallpox in northern British Columbia. Before the disease reached Puget Sound, Hudson's Bay Co. dispatched Tolmie to vaccinate the Indians near Fort Nisqually. By mid-July 1837, he had inoculated all the women and children and probably most of the men. In 1853 Tolmie again helped vaccinate "large numbers" of Indians near Fort Nisqually during a smallpox epidemic centered along Washington Territory's Pacific coast (Boyd, 170). John Helmcken also served as HBC physician for a number of years, and then continued in private practice until he retired in 1910. They were both well aware of the issues surrounding smallpox.

### **Governor James Douglas Proposes Action**

Shortly after the smallpox outbreak, James Douglas, the Governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island, submitted a proposal to the House of Assembly regarding smallpox. James Douglas had arrived on the coast in 1826 and was familiar with two previous Indian epidemics on the coast (1836-37 smallpox and 1847-48 measles). In his March 27, 1862 proposal to the Assembly he noted that

because "several cases" of smallpox had occurred it "is desirable that instant measures should be adopted to prevent the spread of the infection ..." and "strongly recommended" that the House immediately appropriate funds to build a hospital in a isolated location for all cases of smallpox (*Journal of the Colonial Legislatures ...* vol. 2, p. 350).



*Governor James Douglas, c. 1870, courtesy Fort Nisqually Living History Museum*

### **Dr. Helmcken and Others Oppose Action**

Four days later, the nine-member House of Assembly, including Speaker Helmcken and Tolmie, met and considered the Governor's proposal recommending a smallpox hospital and "compelling" all patients to be sent there. According to a newspaper account, Speaker Dr. Helmcken stated he was against a fully staffed hospital and against forcing all cases of smallpox to go there. The doctor expressed concern about the cost of establishing and operating the hospital and that it would interfere with the liberty of the patients. Helmcken went even further and chastised the Governor for being an alarmist about the disease.

The majority of the other members agreed with Mr. Helmcken. The members did vote to construct a "suitable building" near the present hospital for white smallpox patients, but did not require them to go. The Assembly also rejected the establishment of a quarantine for the same reasons -- cost and restricting liberty. Apparently only one member,



Mr. Burnaby, spoke out in favor of a fully staffed Smallpox Hospital and the quarantine. The newspaper account did not mention any discussion about what to do to prevent smallpox from infecting the Indians (*The Daily British Colonist*, March 28, 1862, April 1, 1862).

This inaction of the Assembly and other government officials sealed the fate of nearly every group of Northwest Coast Indians from Sitka to northern Vancouver Island and south into the Puget Sound area. Robert Boyd estimates that from April 1862 to about the end of year, more than 14,000 Indians died of smallpox and untold hundreds of survivors were were disfigured for life. Boyd states unequivocally: "This [Indian] epidemic might have been avoided, and the Whites knew it" (Boyd p 172).

### The Epidemic

Victoria was a rendezvous for most Northern Indian groups located along the coast from northern Vancouver Island to the Queen Charlotte Islands to Sitka, Alaska. Indians camped near Victoria seeking employment and to trade, socialize, and gamble. In mid-April 1859, a census of these Northern Indian encampments counted 2,235 Indians. The census takers determined the tribal affiliation of about two-thirds of those counted. The Indians included Tsimshian (44%), Haida (26%), Tlingit (15%), Bella Bella (renamed Heiltsuk) (8%), and Indians near Fort Rupert (Southern Kwakiutl renamed Kwakwaka'wakw) (7%).

Depending on the season and comings and goings to and from Victoria, the total number and the percentage from any one tribe varied. In 1862, no

estimate was made of the number of Northern Indians camped near Victoria, but it is likely that there were more than 2,000 (Boyd p. 176-177).

During most of April 1862, few newspapers reported on the disease. During this month, smallpox was spreading amongst the Northern Indian encampments, unseen because of the two-week incubation period before the rash made its appearance. In his *Reminiscences*, Anglican missionary Reverend Alexander Garrett stated that he first saw smallpox at the Northern Indian Tsimshian encampment or village on a Sunday. He does not provide a date, but it is likely April 20, 1862, or perhaps the previous week (Boyd p 177).

On April 26, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist*, after interviewing Reverend Garrett, reported: "... smallpox is creating fearful ravages at the Chimsean [Tsimshian] village [encampment]. Twenty have died within the past few days; four died yesterday. ...Great alarm exists at the village, and it is thought

that nearly the whole tribe will be swept away" (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 26, 1862, 3). On April 28, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* estimated that 10 percent of the 300 members of the Chimsean [Tsimshian] tribe had already perished or were "hopelessly ill." The paper stated, "As the cases at the Chimsean [Tsimshian] village are of the most virulent type, the danger of a spread of the disease are very great, and every precaution must be taken by citizens to guard against contagion" (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 28, 1862, p. 3).

For the next 10 weeks, smallpox dominated the news of the town and



*Tsimshian longhouse, c. 1904. "Qagyuhl village at Fort Rupert." Photo by Edward Curtis. Courtesy the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/2003652781](http://www.loc.gov/item/2003652781)>.*

words such as "ravages," "scourge," and "alarm" appeared frequently in the newspapers.

### Whites Concerned About Whites

On April 28, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* published an editorial titled "The Small-Pox Among the Indians." The newspaper reminded readers of a previous warning (likely the March 26 article) "that if proper precautions were not take[n] at once to prevent that loathsome disease from spreading, the Indians ... would become infected and through them spread itself throughout the colony." The editorial continued, "We regret to say, that so far as the Indians are concerned our prediction has been verified."

The paper remarked on the consequences of the authorities' intentional refusal to act to vaccinate and quarantine the Indians:

"Were it likely that the disease would only spread among the Indians, there might be those among us like our authorities who would rest undisturbed, content that the small-pox is a fit successor to the moral ulcer that has festered at our doors. ... [But] chances are that the pestilence will spread among our white population [because] ... [t]he Indians have free access to the town day and night. They line our streets, fill the pit in our theatre, are found at nearly every open door ... in the town; and are even employed as servants in our dwellings, and in the culinary departments of our restaurants and hotels" (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 28, 1862, p. 2).

The editorial's solution was to move all of the Indians "to a place remote from communication with the whites, whilst the infected [Indian] houses with all their trumpery should be burned to ashes ..." (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 28, 1862, p. 2).

Frustrated in attempts to get the authorities to act, it implored "our citizens improvise a Board of Health. Let them meet today.... Let them take any means, no matter what, to protect their families from the pestilential scourge that is hovering among the savages on the out skirts of the town" (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 28, 1862, p. 2).

### May 1862: Catastrophe

By the end of the first week of May 1862, smallpox was "making frightful inroads" in most if not all of the Northern Indian camps near Victoria. On May 9, 1862, Reverend George Hills recorded in his journal, "I went through the Hydah [Haida] and Bella Bella [Heiltsuk] camps, and found thirteen cases and one dead body. I have never witnessed such horrible scenes of death, misery, filth, and suffering before" (Boyd, p. 179).

On May 13, 1862, referring to the Northern Indians, *The Daily British Colonist* estimated the "loathsome disease ... is now destroying the poor wretches at the rate of six each day" (May 13, 1862, p. 6). The next day the paper estimated that a total of 100 or more nearby Northern Indians had died since the disease first broke out. And the *Colonist* predicted "We should not be in the least surprised if the disease were to visit and nearly destroy every tribe of Indians between here and Sitka" (May 14, 1862, p. 5). Two weeks later the paper estimated that at least one-third of the nearby Northern Indians had died and that "At the present rate of mortality, a Northern Indian will be an object of curiosity in two years from now" (May 27, 1862, p. 3).

### Forced Evacuation

Commissioner of Police Joseph Pemberton, probably the object of the above (April 28) editorial, was spurred into action by the concern and apparent near panic of some Victoria residents. The same evening as the editorial, Pemberton, focusing on the Indian camp with smallpox symptoms, issued orders that the Chimseans [Tsimshians] had one day to leave and further ordered that the gunboat *Grappler* "assist" in their departure to make sure they left. Action was also taken to remove Indians from the town proper. By April 30, 1862, nearly all of the Tsimshians had left, torching their dwellings as they departed. Numbers of Stickeen [Tlingit] and Hydah [Haida] Indians also left. From then on the local authorities forced numerous groups of infected natives to leave the southeastern end of Vancouver Island (*The Daily British Colonist*, April 29, 30, 1862, May 1, 1862).



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Pemberton went further than just demanding that the Indians leave. On June 11, 1862, the Police Commissioner and a group of policemen forced about 300 men, women, and children camped near Victoria to return to their northern homeland. The gunboat *Forward* (Captain Lascelles), took a 15-day trip to Fort Rupert towing 26 canoes full of natives. Included were 20 canoes of Hydahs [Haida], five canoes of other Indians from the Queen Charlotte Islands, and one canoe of Stickeen [Tlingit] Indians.

### Full Knowledge of the Consequences

In June 1862, *The Daily British Colonist*, noting the devastation of the Indians up to that time, stated the obvious inevitable consequences of these escorted canoes. Referring to a group of Haida who recently departed Victoria, the newspaper wrote:

"How have the mighty fallen! Four short years ago, numbering their braves by thousands, they were the scourge and terror of the coast; today, broken-spirited and effeminate, with scarce a corporal's guard of warriors remaining alive, they are proceeding northward, bearing with them the seeds of a loathsome disease that will take root and bring both a plentiful crop of ruin and destruction to the friends who have remained at home. At the present rate of mortality, not many months can elapse 'ere the Northern Indians of this coast will exist only in story" (*The Daily British Colonist*, June 21, 1862, p. 3; Boyd, p. 173, 229).

As the *Forward* conveyed the 26 canoes of Indians north, the disease was spreading. After the gunboats returned from Fort Rupert, a crewmember remarked that he saw a "few cases" of smallpox break out amongst the Indians under tow (*The Daily British Colonist*, June 30, 1862, July 2, 1862).

Although most Indians had left the outskirts of Victoria by mid-June, Pemberton continued to force them away. At the end of June 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* headlined a story about

30 Indians camped near Victoria: "Can't Get Rid of Them." The article went on to say "The police authorities are put to their wits' ends to know what to do with the natives. Living or dead they cause a world of trouble" (*The Daily British Colonist*, June 30, 1862, p. 3).

By early July there were few Indian survivors near Victoria. On July 7, 1862, *The Daily British Colonist* stated:

"The small pox seems to have exhausted itself, for want of material to work upon; and we have heard of no new cases [of smallpox infecting Victoria's residents] within the last few days. One or two Indians die nearly every day; but what is an Indian's life worth? Not so much as a pet dog's, to judge from the cruel apathy and stolid indifference with which they were allowed to rot under the very eyes ... of those whose

sacred duty it was to have comforted them in their hour of misery and wretchedness" (July 7, 1862, p. 3).

*Watch for Part 2 in the Fall-Winter 2020 issue of Occurrences to learn about the effects of the smallpox epidemic of 1862 on the Puget Sound region.*

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*Fort Victoria and surrounding community, Vancouver Island, c. 1859. Courtesy the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/2005680429/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2005680429/)>.*



## *Dispatch from the Past*

### Ezra Meeker's *Pioneer Reminiscences*: "Characteristics of Leschi"

**Excerpts from Chapter 27 of Ezra Meeker's *Pioneer Reminiscences of Puget Sound: The Tragedy of Leschi ...* (Lowman & Hanford Stationery and Printing Company, 1905).**

The life, achievements and fate of Leschi are so intimately connected with those of the pioneers that the history and life struggles of the one cannot well be written without that of the other.

Seven years of the life of Isaac I. Stevens, first Governor of the Territory of Washington, are almost synonymous with those of Leschi for the like period. Both were representatives of their respective races, and their names became household words in the early days of the new Territory of Washington.

Leschi was living a quiet life fifty years ago on the Nisqually plains, not far from the head waters of Puget Sound, and only a private member of the tribe of Indians known as the Nisquallies....To give the reader an insight into the character of Leschi, I will introduce the testimony of a few of my contemporaries of that period men of known character for truth and high standing in the community in which they lived, and prominent in the affairs of the commonwealth in which they cast their lot....

Old Wahoolit (Yelm Jim), one of Leschi's warriors, after a close-mouthed silence of forty years, finally, in 1896, unboresomed himself and gave out a long interview, which was printed at the time. The following extract from his talk, referring to the character of Leschi, will show in what esteem the great chief was held by his followers:

"Kul-la-wa-wutt, my wife's father was chief of the Puyallups, and Leschi, whose mother was a

Klickitat and his father a Nisqually, became chief of the Nisquallies. Leschi was tall, heavy built, and strong. He lived on the big prairie near Fort Nisqually, and was very rich. He had many horses scattered over the prairies, and had Indian boys to ride after them. He had much money in gold and hiaqua shells, and a big, good heart. He gave much to old sick men and women, and was kind to all people. Whenever there was a potlatch Leschi gave more than anybody. He was a dead shot and a great hunter. He would lead parties to the chase far into the mountains, where they would kill all the big game they could carry out. He often went by himself and returned with the skins of bear and elk. One day when he was alone in the mountains he saw some yellow dust in a little creek. Gathering it together he enclosed it in a piece of buckskin. It was gold. He said nothing about the circumstance until years after. He was close mouthed, but was wise and could speak several Indian languages. All the best Indians, King George men and Boston men liked Leschi. He was a good man.'

In describing him in battle, he said:

"Leschi had incurred more danger than any of his warriors. He often exposed himself and was senseless as a soldier in taking risks. But they could not get his head. He was too agile and strong, and killed whenever he shot. His ear was sharp and his eye keen. As the bad whites were not content to have peace, but said they would hang all the chief Indians,\* a number of us sought safety in the woods on the Nisqually.

\*Wa-hoo-lit had been under sentence of death for killing William White near Olympia, but had at the last moment been reprieved.

Sluggia, Leschi's nephew, was among the hiding Indians. He was a bad man and had quarreled with Leschi because the chief would not allow him to kill women and children during the war. But he had made friends again with his uncle."

Forty-seven years ago Dr. William F. Tolmie wrote:

"In 1843 the Puget Sound Agricultural Company's flocks and herds, already numbering several thousand head, had overspread the prairies lying between the Puyallup and Nisqually Rivers, and, as feeding off the pastures interfered with the root-digging operations of the natives, discontent and ill-feeling occasionally arose on this account. Another and more frequent cause of actual disturbance was the poisoning of Indian hunting dogs by wolf-baits, or their being shot by the shepherds when in the act of worrying sheep. In July, 1843, when I came to reside at Nisqually, an Indian was in irons in one of the bastions on suspicion of having wounded a Sandwich Islands shepherd, with whom a few days before he had had a squabble about killing a dog. Leschi and Quiemuth I found had aided the whites in capturing the Indian, and they were then, particularly the one known as McLean's friend, or "Shikles," and the other as the friend of Taylor, these being the names of the two white men who lived on the prairies, superintending the management of the sheep. From the early days the brothers were noted for their readiness to assist the whites on all occasions, and with the first American settlers they, I think, obtained a similar reputation. In the fall of 1855 I pointed out Leschi to Governor Mason as an Indian of superior shrewdness, who, if properly managed, might be made very useful in quieting the Indian panic and preserving peace. With this in view I suggested himself and brother as the fittest Indians to accompany Governor Mason on his visits to the natives of White and Green Rivers -which they did, acting as interpreters and guides. On his return, in order to have the power of closely observing his movements, I gave Leschi employment as horseguard on the plains, where he would have been duly under the notice of

white men, and whence, it is my opinion, he would not have stirred for the winter had he been left unmolested. By these steps, and by subsequently inquiring of Mr. Rabbeson whether he knew Leschi, as detailed in the evidence taken at the trials, I contributed to give the unfortunate man a notoriety he would not have had, and which since operated much to his prejudice. On this account, and in remembrance of important services by him rendered in early days to myself and others, I have done my best to save Leschi from his impending fate; and the inward monitor does not reproach me for any step taken in the matter."

In his paper filed with the State Historical Society, quoted elsewhere, Judge James Wickersham wrote:

"Leschi was, Colonel Benj. F. Shaw says, nearly six feet tall, and weighed about one hundred and seventy-five pounds. He was a true flathead, and had large brain room. He was an eloquent man, of strong force of character, and of great energy. He was born and lived on the Nisqually River. He had a winter home built strongly and permanently out of split cedar, and here he passed the long winter months, hunting and fishing, and frequently visiting the Hudson Bay people at Fort Nisqually. In the spring he moved out along the meadows skirting Muck creek (Whaltz), his people hunting, fishing, racing horses, digging camas, and he leading a truly patriarchal life, free from care or burdens. His people were free and happy. They owned herds of horses, and frequently on their meadows might be seen the riding horses of their friends and relatives from Yakima, Klickitat or the Muckelshoot, while around their summer mat houses they sat and talked of hunting, trapping, or even of Indian myths and religions. Of this type of independent, free and strong men was the class opposed to the treaty of Medicine Creek."

But this is enough for the present to show who this man Leschi was... for to his efforts mainly was due the granting of a place where his tribe might live and prosper, while he languished in prison and was finally led to the scaffold and judicially murdered.



## Academic Access

### Book Review: The Letters of Dr. W.F. Tolmie 1850-1853

By Claire Keller-Scholz ~ Editor

**Anderson, Steven A., ed. *William F. Tolmie at Fort Nisqually: Letters, 1850-1853*, WSU Press, 2019.**

In this work, historian Steve Anderson has created an important resource that helps raise the story of Fort Nisqually from the realm of the local history buff to a much wider audience. Within its pages is a microcosm of the forces that shaped the Pacific Northwest: an increased focus on agriculture and shipping of goods over the harvest of furs; more and more American settlers arriving and imposing their ideas of law and order on the local populace; and the discovery of gold (in California, Queen Charlotte Island, and on the Fraser River in British Columbia among other sites) luring men away from honest employment to a dream of treasure.

Covering three years of correspondence to and from William F. Tolmie, the book is broken up into chapters spanning six months, with a narrative summary preceding the transcribed letters at the beginning of each chapter. Dr. Jerry Ramsey wrote the introduction to the book, providing important historical context for the letters with background on Tolmie, Fort Nisqually, and the early history of Puget Sound. Despite this helpful orientation, the book will be most useful to an audience already familiar with the saga.

These letters are an excellent resource for learning more about the many individuals who worked for Fort Nisqually in the early 1850s. The footnotes and full bibliography are useful in directing the reader toward additional scholarly publications. The summaries of each chapter that preface the transcribed letters include contextual descriptions of the individuals that help transform the names on

the page into real historical figures in the reader's imagination.

The strength of this publication is also its greatest weakness: because it is overwhelmingly business correspondence, when read from cover to cover the impression is that of reading through a coworkers' e-mail inbox. With greater familiarity around Tolmie's concerns comes deeper interest in the minutiae of each letter's content. The narrative summaries at the start of each chapter also help establish these connections. Nevertheless, when not in pursuit of an answer to a research question, this 286-page book is best enjoyed in small doses.

Anderson includes historic photographs of many of Tolmie's correspondents at the end of the fifth chapter, and illustrates chapter seven with maps of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company's claims in Pierce County. Several of the portraits are from a private archive collection, rarely seen in publication. Despite the unexpected placement of the images two thirds of the way through the book, the historic illustrations are a welcome addition to the text.

For consideration regarding future editions or additional volumes in this series on Tolmie's letters, an e-book version could be very helpful for researchers. The ability to word search quickly within digitized text is an invaluable tool. In the meantime, the published book includes a full subject index for reference within its pages.

Anderson's footnotes and contextualization of the transcriptions make this publication extremely valuable to researchers, whether students writing essays or scholars pursuing in-depth projects.

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