

"The Bute Inlet Massacre and Its Causes"

The Victoria Colonist, June 13, 1864



Editor British Colonist — I have so far refrained from answering the nonsense of the British Columbian with respect to myself and the Bute Inlet Trail, nor am I now going to trouble your readers or myself on the subject; but when in other quarters I see vague accusation hunted up against the dead and calumnies mysteriously circulated in order to serve a certain purpose, and throw the burden of the late massacres there where it does not belong, it becomes a duty to speak out and vindicate those who alas! can no longer speak for themselves.

Now, sir, I say at once that the real cause of the Bute Inlet massacre had nothing to do with the conduct of the victims themselves, who neither "excited the assassins by ill-usage or provoked them by injustice or improper conduct"; and I am going to prove the contrary.

The public are aware that the sole originators of the Bute Inlet massacre were Chilcoaten Indians from the Upper country who had never been down before at Bute Inlet. Several of them were from the neighborhood of Lake Nacontloon, and one of the principal murderers was well known to belong to the Chief Agrim's tribe. The Nacontloon and Be la Coula tribes are on the most friendly terms and constantly intermarry, and the real provocations which took place amongst them were what brought down the vengeance of those Indians on my innocent party. I am no magistrate sir, nor have I ever been a detective of police, but I have carefully collected the following details, which, unlike the secrecy which has been observed with respect to myself I lay fearlessly before the public and challenge contradiction.

Is it therefore true or not, that the year before last Lieutenant Palmer or his serjeant on their way through to Alexandria broke through some well known Indian usage, and that Lieutenant Palmer knocked down the son of the second Chief of the tribe, who resented it, and that Lieutenant

Palmer then threatened to shoot him, on which the young man returned with fifty armed Indians, bared his breast, and dared him to do so? The Indians were too powerful, and Lieutenant Palmer desisted; but surely that affront has never been forgiven.

Did not the whites also, about the same time, bring the small-pox to Bella-Coula where it [has?] spread to Nacoutloon, and as far as the Benshee and Chisient Lakes, when myself saw the graves of perhaps 500 Indians; and was not one-third of the population carried off by that first visitation; for there was a second one of which I shall have to speak presently?

And did not the white settlers communicate another contagion to those tribes, of which the second Chief at Bella Coula is now slowly dying?

And did not two of the upper Chilcoatens, who were foremost in the massacre at Bute Inlet (one of them with the very wide mouth), come down so diseased? and were they not furnished with medicine, and kindly taken care of in the camp, doing nothing, and at my expense for more than a month before the murder?

Whilst the small-pox was raging it is well known that the Indians could hardly muster courage to bury their dead; but they carried the bodies out into the bush, packed up the infected blankets, and deposited them by their side. Little by little, however, the contagion ceased, and the survivors again began to breathe. In the meanwhile a settler, who is still at Bella Coula, made a bargain to marry a pretty young Indian girl, according to the Indian fashion. This was willingly consented to, and the relations made their presents of blankets to the bridegroom, to the amount of several dozen all of which were to be returned in a month or so, in the proportion of two for one, Indian fashion. And there was great feasting at the expense of the Indians, and the bridegroom took his wife home. He was to receive vast quantities of blankets and rich presents from Victoria, by the first schooner, which never came! and at the end of four months the relations had to take the poor girl back again, dishonored. Was that a provocation, or not?

And did not a certain Mr. N-_____ live for a whole year at the expense of the Indians, telling them he was a great Tyhee sent out by the government, and that he would shortly receive any amount of blankets and provisions? And did he not persuade them to build him a large store, some 30 feet by 40, the Indians contributing the split boards from their own huts? For all of which he gave each of them an acknowledgment for twenty or more blankets, as the case might be, payable on arrival from Victoria, which arrival never took place, and the scrip is still in the hands of the Indians?

And did not about the same time one Angus McLeod and another named Taylor go and collect those same infested blankets in the bushes, which the Indians had deposited with the bodies of three men dead of the small-pox, and put them up carefully as new ones and sell them again to the Indians which brought on a second contagion, carrying off another third of the population, and Angus McLeod, the perpetrator into the bargain, as he well deserved.

Such are a few of the details I here collected, and is it to be supposed, even by officials that such diabolical deeds did not arouse the hatred of the Indians, and those who came down to Bute Inlet? My men and myself had been utterly guiltless of any such base action, yet the vengeance

which fell upon them and upon those at Benshee Lake, and which has now got to be punished is attributed to ourselves -- because I complain and have asked and still ask for an indemnity. The Indians who came down to Bute Inlet had been shamefully treated, unknown to ourselves, but hardly unknown to the Government, they found a party who in the innocence of their hearts and their confidence in the coast government, felt secure and were working unarmed, and those Indians were naturally tempted to take a cruel revenge and plunder where they had been plundered.

Let the dispassionate public compare the provocations as above stated, with the vague charges that have been brought against the unfortunate victims of the massacre. I am speaking of what is generally known of those charges; for the particulars, though so well known, as it appears, and circulated in certain quarters, have been carefully hid from myself and those who alone could answer them. They are founded entirely on Indian testimony, and chiefly I believe on that of squint eye, a man whose want of veracity is so notorious that no magistrate, when aware of it, ought to believe one word he says --Such testimony, obtained by a sort of detective police procedure, is of little value, and the whole system calculated to intimidate and bewilder the mind of the poor Indian, whose easily led to say what he thinks may be agreeable to the great Government Tyhee who is questioning him. Moreover, all these charges are emphatically denied by every one of the survivors of the expedition, eight in number! one of whom, by-the-bye, was questioned and counter-questioned on Friday afternoon by certain officials at New Westminster, till, as he told me, "it revolted him." So much for the zeal of government officials, who try to prove too much, deceive both themselves and the government they wish to serve and injure the latter in the public opinion.

Alfred Waddington

Source: Alfred Waddington, "The Bute Inlet Massacre and Its Causes," *The Victoria Colonist*, June 13, 1864.

The Latest Massacre

Daily British Colonist, June 27, 1864

The accounts received on Saturday, and given in full in another part of to-day's Colonist, of the murder of McDonald and a portion of his party, however horrible, have not come upon the inhabitants of Victoria by surprise. A report had been previously published in the Victoria press, giving a description of this catastrophe, and although by the actual date of the murder it is now evident that that report was incorrect, yet it had, with a kind of premonition, if not prevision, prepared the minds of the inhabitants for the melancholy disaster. It is sad to think that however helpless we were to save Manning and his party, this last massacre might at least have been prevented by immediate action on the part of the authorities, when we received the first intelligence of the Bute outrage. That intelligence reached here on the morning of the 11th of May, just eleven days after the atrocities had been perpetrated; but no force was sent up by way of the coast until Wednesday, the 15th of June, exactly five weeks after the news had been received. Whatever obstacles might have been in the way of organising an adequate expedition for the capture of the murderers, there was certainly nothing to prevent intimation being immediately forwarded to the white population of Bella Coola. McDonald's party did not start till the 20th, and we knew of the massacre of Brewster's men on the 11th, affording ample time to have saved the former travellers.

Our own Government no doubt were to blame in keeping the intelligence two days from Governor Seymour, and we have no desire to shelter them in the matter; but when the news did at length reach New Westminster on the evening of the 13th of May, there was still a week left to take steps to save those who were living at Bella Coola, or who might have just left that place for the interior. It is nothing to the purpose to say that it was unknown at what precise date McDonald's party were to start. Common sense as well as common humanity would have dictated the necessity, under any circumstances, of immediately apprising the white settlers at Bentinck Arm of their danger. There was no probability of their receiving any information of the Bute massacre by other means, and it was natural to suppose that the Chilcoatens would continue their bloody work. It is, in fact, the greatest wonder that there was a single living white man at the arm when the Sutej arrived.

It would be unjust with, at the best, but imperfect information before us to charge any particular party with the serious responsibility of the murder of McDonald and his companions; but we have no hesitation whatever in asserting that, through some personal feeling or misunderstanding, there was a want of co-operation between the Government of British Columbia and the naval authorities at a time when every minute was precious – when the lives of a number of our fellow citizens were hanging on the promptitude of Executive action. It is one of our national characteristics to be slow, methodic, and tied down to routine, and the Government of the neighboring colony was probably laboring under this unwieldy mode of action when it could not make the first motion without the aid of Her Majesty's ships; but we hope we shall not again have to chronicle the massacre of a number of our fellow-creatures, because the authorities could not agree as to the precise method of making a "demonstration."

There were more evils in this unfortunate delay than the loss of Macdonald and his men. Time was allowed the Chilcoatens to make alliances with other tribes, and thus precipitate probably a regular Indian war. The effects of a speedy retribution, which is the only means of terrorising savages, were lost - a prestige was given to the Chilcoatens by their easy and successive victories over the whites; and an example of unrestrained savagery was set to the other tribes, which was bound, as we have previously shown, to affect them with the same disregard of the white man's law, and the same contempt for the white man's life. The blunder has now been made, and our only hope lies in the prudence as well as energy of the volunteers. That the Governor himself, with a praiseworthy earnestness and determination, has accompanied the party, gives us the assurance, at all events, that justice shall be done strictly and in an unimpassioned manner; and that nothing tending to inflame the minds of innocent Indians or friendly tribes will be perpetrated.

There is, however, grave matter for anxiety in this expedition. Forty men is but a small force to penetrate an enemy's country - an enemy full of wiles and treachery, and a country in which every hundred yards affords facilities for ambush. The forty Bella Coola Indians who have been taken as auxiliaries, however serviceable they are expected to prove, may require ultimately as much watching as the murderers themselves, and as a climax to the dangers the foe may be much larger, on account of the junction with other tribes, than the volunteers possibly conceive.

Our main hope, however, lies in the probability of the Indians taking to their entrenched or roughly fortified position, alluded to by our special correspondent, in which case they are pretty certain to be captured. The Admiral's reserve of fifty or sixty marines, with the junction of Cox's party from Alexandria, will make a force altogether, including the forty Bella Coolas, of about one hundred and eighty men. If the Chilcoatens and their companions number no more than forty, we may indulge in the satisfaction that every rascal who escapes the bullet will dangle from the pine. At all events, we hope that the difficulties of the route will be overcome, that promptitude and vigor will take the place of the past inaction, and that an example will be made of these red-skin assassins, that will crush effectually in the bud what would, by maudlin treatment, spring up in a little time into a wholesale Indian war.

Source: "The Latest Massacre," Daily British Colonist, June 27, 1864.

Waddington and Bute Inlet

The British Columbian, June 18, 1864

“Poor Waddy.” If any further proof were needed of the diseased state of the old gentleman’s mind, so far as applied to the scheme of which he appears to be the unfortunate victim, we have it in his last attempt to explain the circumstances which led to the massacre of a number of his men near Bute Inlet. In a letter published in the British Colonist of Monday last, after the opening flourish, he starts with the broad assertion that, “I say at once that the real cause of the Bute Inlet massacre had nothing to do with the conduct of the victims themselves, who neither excited the assassins by ill usage or provoked them by injustice or improper conduct; and I am going to prove the contrary.” Then, after asserting — what we flatly deny, and what the public are by no means aware of — “that the sole originators of the massacre were Chilicooten Indians from the upper country who had never before been down at Bute Inlet,” he advances, as proof No. 1, a scene said to have happened between Lieutenant Palmer, R.E., and the Indians at Bentinck Arm in 1862. Unfortunately for Mr. Waddington what he describes really never did take place! It is a pure fabrication. We have neither time nor patience to deal with all his “proofs,” but merely give the first as a specimen. But surely it betrays very great presumption, if not weakness, on the part of Mr. Waddington to suppose that the public will place more reliance in the ex parte statements of a man who is deeply and directly interested in the subject upon which he treats than in the result of a judicial investigation by an officer placed entirely above the influences of self interest. That investigation led to the conviction that the chief, if not the sole, cause of the massacre was the treatment the Indians experienced at the hands of those who became the victims of their vengeance.

Mr. Waddington assigns as one cause of the massacre that the whites communicated a certain contagion to the Indians at Bella Coola, leaving it to be inferred that upon his workmen was visited the penalty due to others. Unfortunately for his object, however, it would not appear necessary to travel to Bella Coola for a provocation which he admits had to do with the massacre, as there was abundance of evidence to show that his own men had indulged largely in the same vice, and that that indulgence was followed with the usual consequences. But why has Mr. Waddington shifted his ground? A few weeks ago he assigned as the cause of the massacre the fact that the Chilicooten Indians were opposed to the construction of the road through their territory. Now he trumps up a list of groundless stories as the cause. But why multiply words in exposing the disingenuousness of the course adopted by the advocates of Bute Inlet. The following, which we copy from “Good Words,” exactly describes their present position, and we respectfully recommend it to their careful perusal:-

“The Turkey is a silly bird; and the French call a person Dindon whom we, with less propriety, call a goose; that being very far from a silly bird. In America they are said to entrap the wild turkeys through their silliness. On a slight slope, just at the edge, a kind of pen is made of sticks, and covered over. At the lowest part an open is left, sufficient to admit a turkey, and corn is strewn within and without the pen, to entice them in. When they have entered they might escape by simply descending to the entrance and walking out the way they walked in. But, instead of this, they vainly beat against the sides of the pen, till the trapper comes and despatches them.

Many featherless bipeds are like these turkeys. When it is plainly proved that you have formed a rash judgement or taken an unwise step, the right course manifestly is to confess this and retract, and retrace your steps. But most men are too much of turkeys to do this. Usually, when a man finds himself in a pen], and that there is no thoroughfare, rather than descend so far as to own a mistake, and walk out of the error the same way he had walked into it, he will resort to every kind of shuffle. He will insist on it that he was quite right all along, but that there has been a change in some of the people, or in the circumstances. Or perhaps he will flatly deny that he ever said so and so; or maintain that he was misunderstood. Anything rather than retract and acknowledge an error.

And yet a man who does this frankly will usually obtain great applause for his candor and good sense; even more perhaps than he would have had if he had avoided the error from the first. Yet even this will not tempt most men to take this ingenious and wise course. They are too much of Turkeys.”

Source: "Waddington and Bute Inlet," *The British Columbian*, June 18, 1864.