

Nanaimo Historical Society Fonds  
Series 2 Sound Recordings

Tape 11b

William Barraclough talking about the Boundary Commission, July 26 1968

Transcribed by Glenys Wall, May/June 2004

Mr. Barraclough commences speaking with no introduction.

Barraclough: This article concerns some aspects of the Boundary Commission survey of the 49th Parallel and in particular the activities of John Keast Lord, Fellow of the Zoological Society around Nanaimo in 1858 during his participation in the Commission's objective. Quoting from Scholefield's History of British Columbia, Volume 2 Page306, published in 1914:

"In July 1858, Colonel J.S. Hawkins, Royal Engineer, the British Commissioner with the United States Forces, arrived from England on Her Majesty's Ship, Havana, with a party organized the field operations. It consisted of Captain Haigh, R.A. Astronomer, and two officers of engineers, Lieutenants Dare and Charles W. Wilson. John K. Lord, naturalist, a geologist, Dr. Lyle, botanist, and 65 non-commissioned officers and men of the Royal Engineers, including topographers, surveyors, photographers etc. and 30 axe men. The duty of ascertaining the exact point where the 49th parallel met the Gulf of Georgia fell within the scope of Captain Prevost and Captain Richard's commission. The former accordingly repaired to the vicinity on November 18th 1857. After months spent in making the necessary observations he proceeded to mark the spot. This point was also agreed to by the United States officials. The entire length of the Boundary, between Point Roberts and the Rockies, is 409 1/2 miles of which 190 were cleared and marked but the remainder was not traced, cleared or surveyed. This portion lay along almost inaccessible mountains."

[It is unclear from the tape whether the above is all a quote from Scholefield's book or just a part of it is]

Barraclough continues: Quoting in part:

"The initial point was marked by a granite obelisk bearing inscriptions relative to the survey. 43 iron pillars, each 4 feet high and about 8 inches square set about 1 1/2 miles apart bearing the words on the north side " "Treaty of Washington"" and on the south side " " June 15th 1846" " marked the line from Point Roberts to the crossing [unintelligible] Watcom trail. The remainder of the boundary line was marked by 115 pyramidal piles of stone 6 - 8 feet high and earthen mounds covering wooden posts."

An introduction to John Keast Lord's background and other items of interest concerning his activities in British Columbia. John Keast Lord, F.Z.S. was appointed Naturalist by the British Government to serve on the British North American Boundary Commission. The boundary line dividing British and American territory was established as the 49th parallel of latitude, north, in the year 1846. The course through the seas was to be the centre of the Gulf of Georgia, then southward through the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver Island, to the Straits of Juan de Fuca. The duty of the commission was to mark the boundary line from the

coast [unintelligible] of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

Lord left Southampton, England, on Good Friday 1858, in the Parana, a sail and steamship, crossed the Isthmus of Panama and left Tobago City on June 4th in Her Majesty's ship, Havannah, entering the Straits of Juan de Fuca on July 12th and arriving at Esquimault later the same day. That evening he walked to Victoria, the thriving capital of Vancouver Island, where he called on the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post. Lord writes of seeing tents in all directions and a great company of miners among whom professional gamblers were operating like "a herd of parasites". In 1866 Lord published two volumes of his experiences and observations under the title "The Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia". This work is written journal style, describing the turf he travelled on the survey for the boundary line and the many voyagers made along the coast and up the rivers to the Interior. It is from this journal, a copy of which is in the writer's possession, that information was gathered to write short articles about some of Lord's expeditions. These articles are intended to be read for their historical value. During his sojourn in the Pacific Northwest, Lord catalogued everything that came under his observation, giving both the common and the scientific names, including animals, birds, reptiles, insects, fishes, crustaceans, trees, plants and flowers, together with the minerals encountered. He wrote at length on anthropology and the customs of the Indian peoples; noted the various kinds of salmon, their seasons and runs to fresh water. He followed the fish to their spawning grounds and noted the arrival and departures periods of migratory birds. Many excellent pen-sketches by the author are included in his book. Lord was first a naturalist and scientist, but he was also an adventurer and a man of strong resolution always

TAPE BECOMES UNINTELLIGIBLE FOR A PERIOD, THEN CONTINUES:

Barraclough: Now "Adventures in and around Nanaimo area in and around 1858", by J.K. Lord, F.Z.S. The material for this article was taken from Volume I of the "The Naturalist in British Columbia and Vancouver Island" by J.K. Lord, F.Z.S, who served as naturalist on the British North American Boundary Commission. The book was published in London in 1866. Acknowledgement is made to Mr. Willard E. Ireland, Provincial Librarian and Archivist in Victoria, B.C. for information contained in his letter of March 2nd 1954 concerning the manuscript journal kept by [unintelligible], William Wilson, R.E. who served on the Boundary Commission survey covering the period April 20th, 1858 to June 11th, 1860. Wilson's journal, under July 29th, 1858 reads, quote:

" Lord and Bannerman left today, the former for Nanaimo, to explore some parts of the Island and collect specimens."

From the same journal from October 4th, 1858, quote:

" Arrived at Tsainaimo at 8.30 am, notwithstanding the rain, Lord and I went on shore to see the mines. Lord having spent some time here on a previous occasion, introduced me to Dr. Benson and Captain Stewart the two Hudson's Bay Company officers."

On J.K. Lord's first visit to the Nanaimo area in July 1858, he entered the Nanaimo River and saw a clever arrangement the Indians used to take salmon. One can locate several sites from the estuary that would serve admirably for the purpose and here is his description:

" On the Tsainaimo [Nanaimo] River, the Indians have a very ingenious contrivance for taking salmon by constructing a weir but instead of putting baskets, they pave a square place about 6 feet wide and about 14 feet long with white or light coloured stones, and this pavement is always on the lower side of the weir leading to an opening. A stage is erected between two of these paved ways where Indians, lying on their stomachs, can in an instant see if is a salmon is traversing the white, paved way. Along spear, barbed at the end, is held in readiness and woe betide the adventurous fish that runs the gauntlet of this perilous passage".

How far Lord ascended the river to make observations is not recorded in his journal. He was back in Victoria on August 7th, 1858. Lord's next visit to Nanaimo was on October 14th that year. He secured passage on the Hudson's Bay Company steamer, Otter, which was engaged in taking supplies from Victoria to Fort Rupert and bringing back furs traded during the year. The Otter made a delightful run along the coast amidst islands, and anchored in the evening near the narrows, that would be Dodd Narrows. Lord remarks on the channel about a quarter of a mile long by seventy yards wide where the tide rushes through with fearful velocity. Passing through the narrows in the morning, they were soon in Nanaimo arriving at 8.30 am. The Fort Rupert Indians had been recently ... made a raid on the Nanaimo Indians. In the foray, the old chief had been killed, several braves seriously injured and the favourite wife of the deceased dignitary carried off as a slave. The Nanaimo Indians came aboard, squatting in a circle on the deck, disclosed the object of their visit, and after a long talk the Captain consented to ransom the lady, if possible, and bring her back on his return to Nanaimo. The Otter left Nanaimo at 12 noon, and after a pleasant run across the Gulf of Georgia, they anchored at 10 p.m in Billings' Harbour in Faveda Island, that is known now as Texada Island. The next morning they were underway at 6 a.m., crossing the Gulf to Point Mudge on the south east point of Valdes Island now known as Quadra Island where they anchored for the night. About one mile from the entrance to Discovery Passage they passed a large Indian village, the home of the Tah-cul-tas, a powerful band of most predatory habits and generally at war with the tribes north and south of them.

Steaming through Discovery Passage to Menzies Bay, then safely through the narrows, that's Seymour Narrows, Lord writes:

"The tide rushes down the narrow passage at the rate of 10 knots an hour. I could not help wondering how Captain Vancouver every managed to get his ship up this terrible place, so difficult even when aided by the power of steam."

After passing Thurlow Island they anchored in Blenkinsop's Anchorage. Away again at sun-up, the fifth morning since leaving Victoria, traveling along Johnson's Straits, Lord is filled with rapture at the view of the country unfolding before them:

" The coastline of Vancouver Island presents a series of small projecting headlands; the bays and creeks between,... they are Edens for wildfowl and in the distance, Hardwicke Island, like a floating emerald, hid the water beyond it. To the right, islands of all sizes and shapes, so thick that one might suppose it had rained islands at some time or other: on the least of them grew pine-trees, any of which would have made a mainmast for the largest ship ever built. I have again and again threaded the intricate passages through the "Lake of a Thousand Islands" in the Great St. Lawrence,... but the scenery from Chatham Point to the mouth of the Nimpkish river is wilder, bolder, and in every respect more beautiful, lovely as I admit the Canadian scenery to be."

Well, passages of description occur frequently in Lord's writing. In one such passage on a different subject, he seems to reveal his inner self. While camping on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains he was making a study of hummingbirds and collecting specimens. His observations are given in great detail. After noting the arrival of the hummingbirds in Spring coincided with the Ribes, that is the flowering currant, Lord writes:

" It seems to me vastly like design and foreseeing wisdom, that a shrub indigenous and widely distributed should be so fashioned as to produce its blossoms long before its leaves; and that this very plant alone blooms ere the snow has melted off the land, and that too at the exact period when the hummingbirds arrive. It cannot be chance, but the work of the Almighty Architect - who shaped them both, whose handiwork we discover at every step, and of whose sublime conceptions we everywhere observe the manifestations in the admirably-balanced system of creation!"

At the mouth of the Nimpkish River, Lord found a village of Nimpkish Indians, situated on a tableland overhanging the sea, inaccessible save for ascending a vertical cliff of smooth rock. He noted that the redskins had a ladder made of cedar bark rope, which they could haul up and lower at will. A good place to sink canoes of the enemy. The Nimpkish River was used by Hudson's' Bay traders to reach the western side of Vancouver Island. Ascending it in canoes as far as practicable, about two days walking, brought them to Nootka Sound. The Otter must have anchored for the night near the Nimpkish, for Lord states they arrived at 10 a.m. at Beaver Harbour where Fort Rupert was situated. This would indicate the date to be October 20th 1858. A heavy sea was rolling in, dashing in foamy breakers. They anchored about one mile from shore then fired a gun to announce their arrival.

" The report was still echoing through the distant hills, when countless tiny specks were discernible, dancing over the waves like birds. On they came, a perfect shoal of them.....these specks were canoes filled with Indians.....giving utterance to the most wild and fiendish yells.....Their faces and bodies were painted in most fantastic patterns, with red and white.....nude except for some bits of skin or an old blanket tied around their waist.....The boat was lowered into the rough water and .....with four sturdy rowers surrounded by the canoe flotilla....they grated on the shingle some distance from the beach, white with spray".

Lord handed in his letters of introduction from His Excellency, the Governor, to the chief trader, Mr. Moffat, after which he was presented to the chiefs as a Hyas tyee [great chief], one of King George's men.

"So we shook hands and I attempted to move towards the fort; it was not to be done....I was mobbed; old savages and young savages....rushed and scrambled to shake hands with me. ....Being rescued at last by the combined efforts of trader and captain, I was marched into the fort, the gates shut with a heavy clang, and most thankful was I to be safe from any further demonstrations of friendship."

Awaking early, Lord wandered up into the bastion of the fort. The sun was creeping from behind the ragged peaks of the Cascade Mountains and there was a wild grandeur about the scene. In his detailed description of the Fort, the main features stand out vividly:

"The trading post is a square, enclosed by immense trees, one end sunk in the ground; ...A platform, about the height of an ordinary man ran from the top of these pickets, is carried

along the sides of this square, so as to enable anyone to peep over without being in danger from an arrow or bullet. The entrance is closed by two massive gates, an inner and outer; all the houses - the chief trader's, employees', trading-house, fur-room, and stores - are within the square. The trade-room is cleverly contrived so as to prevent a sudden rush of Indians; the approach, from outside the pickets, is by a long narrow passage, bent at an acute angle near the window of the trade-room, and only of a sufficient width to admit one savage at a time.....At the angles nearest the Indian village are two bastions, octagonal in shape....four embrasures in each."

Lord was expecting to find piles of round shot, rammers, powder and many cannon, but ...

" Imagine my surprise on entering this fortress, to discover all this a pleasant fiction; two small rusty carronades....that no human power could load, were the sole occupants of the moldy old turrets".

After breakfast, the trader, captain and Lord started for the village. The way was down a rocky path, across a mountain burn. To enter the "city of the redskins", which consisted of a long row of huts, each hut nearly square, the exterior fantastically frescoed in hieroglyphic patterns, in white, red, and blue; having however a symbolic meaning or heraldic value, like the totem of the Indians east of the Rocky Mountains. Each hut was shared by several families. Five tribes lived in this village; the Qua-kars, the main group, the Qual-quilths, the Kum-cutes, the Wan-lish and Lock-qua-lillas. The party was greeted by the entire population, including dogs, a weird assemblage. On learning the purpose of the visit the Indians immediately formed a ring of chiefs and braves, with the squaws and children on the outside. Lord remarks:

"Had any charming princess, captive in an enchanted castle, been guarded by such a collection of painted ragamuffins as now surrounded us, he would have been a valorous knight that dared venture to release her."

The price of the ransom was the first question discussed and the sum asked was much larger than they felt disposed to pay. Terms were at last agreed upon. Thirty blankets and two trade-guns - equal to about 50 pounds, sterling. The meeting then adjourned to a shed near where the slave was a prisoner. Carried by the rushing human torrent, they were deposited in a dense cloud of pungent smoke and to prevent suffocation they sat on the floor. In this village, Lord observed wryly: " One lives, literally under a cloud".

He was now in a great state of expectation." Picturing to myself an Indian Hebe, limbs exquisitely molded, native grace and elegance in every movement, gorgeous in 'wampum', paint and waving feathers, such as I had read of as 'Laughing Water'....."There was a hum and a burr, as in a nest of angry hornets; a din increased by the dogs, that fought and rolled in where I sat.....The slave was coming. Alas! How fleeting are imaginary pictures....half crouching and waddling rather than walking came my ideal; her only covering a ragged, filthy old blanket, her face begrimed with the dirt and paint of a lifetime; short, fat, repulsive....a very Hecate! All my romance vanished like a dissolving-view."

Business negotiations were now transferred now to the Fort. All the chiefs assembled there in the evening to receive payment and hand over the slave. Squatting on their heels, nose and knees together, their backs against the wall, they formed a circle. The pipe produced, filled

and lighted. It passed from mouth to mouth, each took a good pull, puffing the smoke from his nostrils. The thirty blankets and two guns were piled in the centre of this strange assemblage. The slave was led in; each blanket underwent a most careful inspection. The guns, snapped and pointed, were finally approved of. A husky grunt from each of the council, denoting general approval. The guns and blankets were carried off in triumph and the emissaries became possessors of this strange purchase.

In describing the area around the Fort, Lord speaks of the trees, some of them 250 feet high, that grew down to high watermark. From there, a flat, shingly beach ran a long distance to seaward. On the branches of the trees could be seen coffins. But how they were lifted or placed there was beyond his comprehension. The coffin was usually an old canoe, lashed round and round with the inner bark of the cedar tree. Near one of these arboreal cemeteries, he observed a high pole and dangling from it a head, fresh, bloody and ghastly. The scalp had been removed and a rope, passing through the underjaw, served to support it. Never had he...

#### TAPE QUALITY DETERIORATES AND IS UNINTELLIGIBLE FOR SOME TIME

..on returning to the Fort he made inquiries about the mysterious head. It appears on the day before their arrival a war-party of the Qua-kars had returned from a raid on the mainland coast and brought back a number of slaves. A slave could be sold, whipped or killed as best befits the whim or the caprice of the owner. Among the prisoners was a chief who had been shot on the beach, scalped and beheaded and it was this chief's head he had observed on the pole. The deceased belonged to a tribe whose practice it was to elongate instead of flatten the head. Lord made several to skewer the coveted prize and after having abandoned all hope of success, fortune at last came his way. The night preceding his departure, he upset the pole, bagged the head and pushed it into his game-bag. Getting safely into the Fort, he packed it into a pork-barrel with sand and stone and then had it rolled boldly out and put on board the steamer. On departure the following morning, they marched from the Fort in grand procession headed by the dignitary who owned the head to his state canoe. "This individual, in happy ignorance of the wrong I had done him" writes Lord, " was all smiles and grins; the final handshake being accomplished, I was lifted into the canoe... and rapidly reached the steamer". The chief came on board whilst the anchor was being weighed and seated himself upon the cask wherein his property was hid. Lord admits he was somewhat frightened. The wished for moment came, the paddle wheels splashed slowly around and his friend was lowered over the side. Lord states the Indian's head is in the Osteological Room of the British Museum and well worth investigating by anyone who may wish to compare the effects of circular pressure with that of a flat-head. Other skulls, similarly flattened, were also taken by him from Vancouver Island.

While in the vicinity of Johnston's Narrows, Lord recorded how Indians fished with lures to take salmon in the following manner:

"The Indians when fishing, use two spears, one about 70 feet in length, the other shorter, having a barbed end, is about 20 feet long. In a canoe thus equipped, favourable fishing-grounds are sought, the Indian having the long spear being also provided with a small, hollow cone of wood, trimmed round its greater circumference with small feathers, much like a shuttlecock; this he places on the end of the longer spear, and presses it under water until down the full length of the handle. A skillful jerk detaches this cone like affair from the spear-haft, when it wriggles up through the water like a struggling fish. The savage with the short

spear intently watches this deceiver; a salmon runs at it, and it is speared like magic."

The Otter steaming down the Strait of Georgia on its return, calls at Nanaimo, and whilst coaling, delivered the ransomed lady, safe into the hands of her owner. During the Otter's stay in Nanaimo, while taking on coal, Lord was treated to a great spectacle. Three hundred Indians from Queen Charlotte's Island en route to Victoria landed there arriving in large canoes, each holding about 20 Indians and their baggage. He says in his chronicle " These canoes were not at all similar to any I had seen at Fort Rupert, or to those used by the Coast and Fraser River Indians. The shape was similar to the boat one sees in very old pictures, filled with sailors in armour; the bow and stern carved to represent a neck, bearing on it some hideous, grinning monster's head."

The chief of these Queen Charlotte Indians, named Edin-saw, once saved the crew of the wrecked schooner, Susan Sturges from being killed by the Islanders under his control. The crew was subsequently ransomed. As the armada of canoes reached Victoria safely, having taken four months to make the voyage. Trying to reconstruct the voyage of these Queen Charlotte Indians from the chart of the coastline, one cannot help but admire their courage and endurance; paddling loaded canoes long distances, threading all the difficult and dangerous straits; exposed to all the vicissitudes of weather, hunting and fishing for food on the way; passing hostile tribes who would attack or harass the flotilla and on the other hand maybe [unintelligible] Edin-saw making a raid on Indian villages to help out supplies. Then the business in Victoria attended to, making their way back by the same route, or worse still, if traveling by the west side of Vancouver Island.

This is William Barraclough speaking: the foregoing article was presented by me before Nanaimo Historical Society, Tuesday October 11th 1955 in the old Wallace Street Library.

END OF TAPE