

By Steve A. Anderson

# McLoughlin's Grand Jury

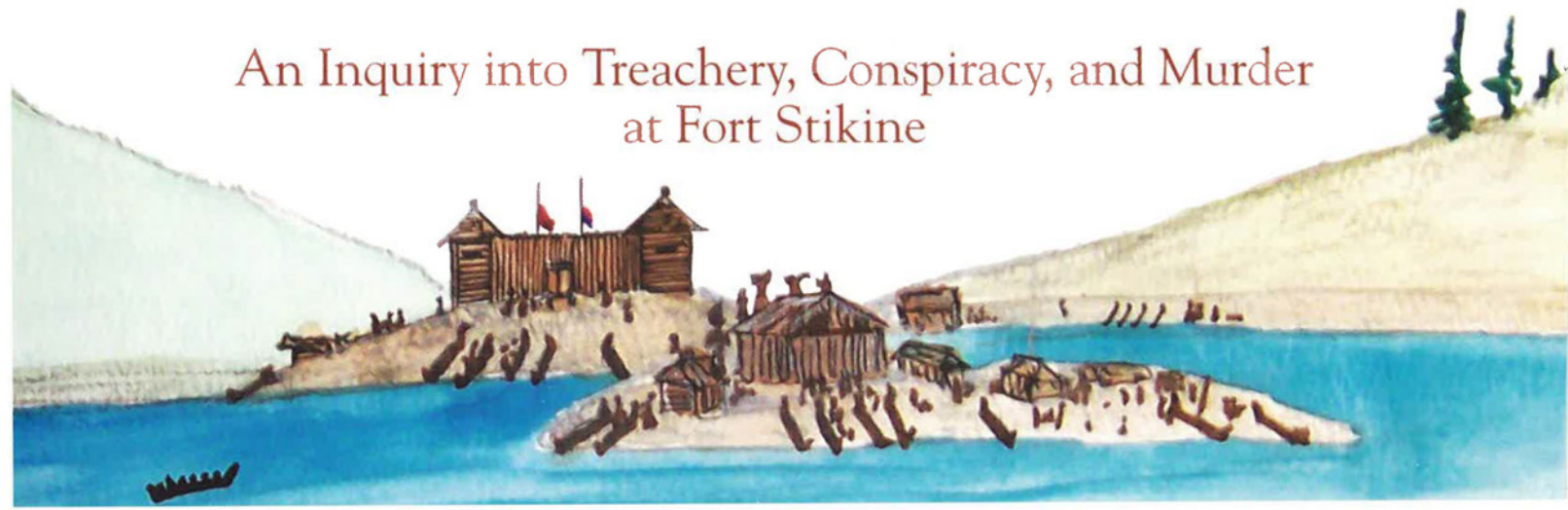
The lawless Pacific Northwest Coast provided the setting for a brutal murder in what is today called Wrangell, Alaska. It occurred in spring 1842 at the Hudson Bay Company's (HBC) Fort Stikine, an isolated fur trading post as far from western civilization as one could get.

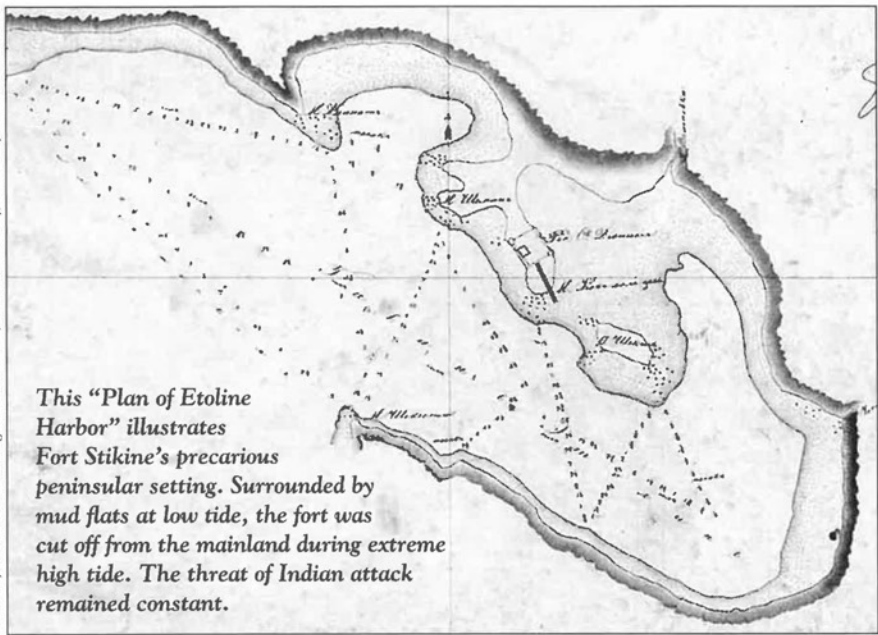
This dark episode in the annals of fur trade history has a unique connection to Fort Nisqually, which was situated in present-day DuPont, Washington. Over the course of several hot summer days in 1842, this small trading and farming site became the setting for a murder investigation. The victim was John McLoughlin Jr., eldest son of the HBC's Fort Vancouver chief factor, Dr. John McLoughlin, who convened the jury. Pierre Kanaquassé, as murder suspect, delivered the testimony.

Commonly known as "Peter the Iroquois," Kanaquassé had a villainous reputation and was, according to the chief factor, one "whom necessity alone has obliged us to Employ." McLoughlin's "us" was the Hudson's Bay Company, a British fur-trading conglomerate founded in 1670, which maintained fur-trading posts all across present-day Canada and up the Pacific Coast from southern Oregon to what is now Alaska. Such posts brought the HBC's many employees, or "servants," into close contact and direct commerce with local indigenous peoples who sometimes became employees themselves.

Kanaquassé had joined the company's ranks in 1833. Likely born on the St. Lawrence River, about 10 miles above Montreal, Quebec, the Sault St. Louis native was a full-blooded Iroquois Indian. He was also a thief and a liar. Serving six years east of the Rockies as a laborer, the unscrupulous rogue's criminal behavior soon included murder and armed robbery. Briefly stationed at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River in 1840-41, Peter soon found himself posted at Fort Stikine. There, because

## An Inquiry into Treachery, Conspiracy, and Murder at Fort Stikine





This "Plan of Etoline Harbor" illustrates Fort Stikine's precarious peninsular setting. Surrounded by mud flats at low tide, the fort was cut off from the mainland during extreme high tide. The threat of Indian attack remained constant.

of a frail rapport with the local Tlingit tribesmen and the isolated nature of the place, any desertion from the fort was tantamount to suicide.

Here, we will witness through the eyes of "Peter the Iroquois" the occurrences that transpired in the house of John Jr., Dr. McLoughlin's eldest son—a man living under a death mark. At Fort Nisqually in July 1842, the Iroquoian revealed to Dr. McLoughlin a clandestine plan that fueled the chief factor's growing obsession to expunge his dead son's tarnished name. Seeking justice, the "Father of Oregon" empanelled the region's first "grand jury" while sowing the seeds of his own ruin. To make sense of this intersection of justice and tragedy, let us return to the murderous night of April 20, 1842, on Wrangell's harbor.

Eight men sat on the floor of the chief clerk's house drinking rum. Seated in circular fashion, their furtive glances captured the attention of 29-year-old clerk John McLoughlin Jr., whose men called him

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Fort Stikine rested slightly above the high water mark on a peninsula that today comprises the downtown core of Wrangell, Alaska. A Tlingit village had been established on nearby Shakes Island (foreground).

"Mr. John" and referred to him as "the master." McLoughlin navigated around the half empty bottles littering the floor. Outside the circle lay five Tlingit Indians either unconscious or drunk to the point of incoherence.

This was no holiday drinking party—hate-filled tension clouded the room. At about nine o'clock, Pierre Kanaquassé took his place in the circle along with

*Two men lay in ambush nearby. Three more took aim from the bastion overhead. All had a clear shot at anyone in the yard.*

the fort's other French Canadian and Iroquois employees. Handing Kanaquassé a tin pan brimming with rum, McLoughlin threatened to beat him senseless if he did not down it immediately. Incapacitation was the master's goal—threats against his life had come from these very men. For the next 15 minutes the master circled like a hawk, watching and waiting for the liquor to take effect. Outside the circle sat the young apprentice clerk Thomas McPherson, a Scotsman, and Antoine Kawenassé, who had warned his Uncle Pierre to remain sober because the master "was going to die tonight." Consequently, a large portion of Kanaquassé's rum disappeared down the front of his shirt.

Satisfied with the rum's effect, McLoughlin went upstairs to his

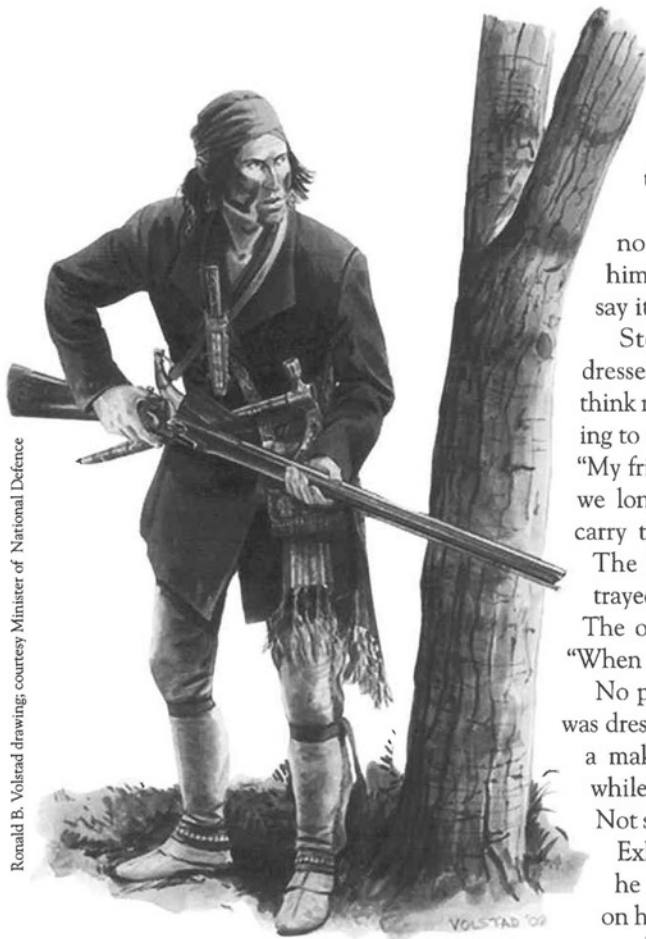
quarters. Later that night, however, he and Canadian Francois Pressé shared a heated exchange in the main room. Pressé soon found himself shackled in irons. The other French Canadians reacted by loading weapons and taking up firing positions outside the house.

McLoughlin reciprocated by issuing firearms to Antoine Kawenassé and the fort's Hawaiian laborers. Exiting his doorway with this group, a brief, smoke-filled, firefight took place. Outgunned and poorly positioned, McLoughlin's forces withdrew. Having watched the fracas from within the safety of the master's house, Pierre Kanaquassé cautiously ventured out with his gun. On the elevated gallery encircling the fort's inner yard, he could see the Canadians reloading their guns.

Approaching one of the Canadians—William Lasserte—Pierre heard him rationalizing: "I must kill [Mr. John] now as he has fired two shots at me." Kanaquassé now observed men running to the northwest bastion as others took cover behind a woodpile at its base. Realizing his own peril, Pierre quickly returned to the clerk's house. As he reached the doorway, young

McLoughlin stepped out once again onto the raised wooden boardwalk that fronted the building. Armed with a loaded rifle and pistol, the clerk looked right through Kanaquassé, who made it clear that he was not involved in the fight. But when pressed for the Canadians' whereabouts, Pierre feigned ignorance.

Two men lay in ambush nearby. Three more took aim from the bastion overhead. All had a clear shot at anyone in the yard. Heavy footfalls soon echoed throughout the enclosure. The Canadians held their fire as Mr. John quickly passed and entered their house. He then returned to the doorway and directed Pierre's nephew, Antoine Kawenassé, to go around the house to the right, shouting at him to "shoot any of the



This likeness of an Iroquois hunter illustrates the clothing, accoutrements, and weaponry typical of Iroquoians employed by the HBC along the Pacific Northwest Coast.

Canadians” he might meet. Proceeding left around the house, Mr. John inched toward the hidden assassins. Readying his rifle, McLoughlin called out, “Kill me if you can.... If you kill me, you will not kill a woman, you will kill a man!”

Next, Kawenassé’s voice barked out, “Fire, fire!” An erratic volley of five, maybe six lead slugs belched forth from the bastion and woodpile, striking the victim, the ground, and nearby structures. One shot slammed downward through McLoughlin’s breastbone and out his lower back, severing his spinal cord and flattening him “with such force as to break the stock of his rifle.” As smoke engulfed the scene, someone shouted “Stop, stop, stop, he is dead now.”

Another of the Canadians, Urbain Heroux, rushed out and savagely crushed the victim’s neck with his foot. McLoughlin, “weltering in his gore” was nearly dead when the others emerged.

“Who killed our master?” they asked.

Heroux declared “You have no business asking who killed him...the master is dead; do not say it was me.”

Stepping up, Kanaquassé addressed the corpse: “You will now think no more of flogging men.” Turning to the rest of the group, he yelled: “My friends, we have now done what we long intended to do, let us now carry the body back to the house.”

The Hawaiians, whose faces betrayed their remorse, offered to help. The others walked away, muttering, “When a dog is killed, there it is left.”

No prayers were said, but the body was dressed for burial and deposited in a makeshift morgue. Some visited while others retired to their houses.

Not so for Pierre’s nephew Antoine.

Exhilarated by the macabre scene, he smeared McLoughlin’s blood on his face and arms and proceeded

to get drunk.

By morning the flags were lowered to half-mast. On April 23 the body was committed to the earth as a salute of guns was fired. Though Heroux refused to touch the coffin, he seized control of the fort’s keys and imposed his own brand of law. Now in a virtual lockdown, Fort Stikine’s “new master” doubled the sentries and forbade access to the Tlingit village. He then clarified his position: “Nobody shall go out.”

The young Scottish apprentice clerk now fell under Heroux’s brutish scrutiny. “McPherson is getting as proud as [Mr. John] and will be telling tales upon us.... We will give him a sound thrashing,” commented the Canadian.

Several days later, the HBC’s North American governor, Sir George Simpson, was scanning the harbor surrounding Fort Stikine from the foredeck of the company’s barque *Cowlitz*. Simpson knew the half-masted flags spelled trouble. Once ashore, his worst fears were realized.

The governor immediately investigated the circumstances surrounding this

“most disgraceful scene.” Drunkenness, mistreatment of the local Indians, floggings, kept women, prostitution, embezzlement, and book-keeping irregularities blemished the dead master’s name. The slightest infraction, so the men stated, threw Mr. John into a psychotic, alcohol-driven rage, leavened only with a cat-o’-nine-tails across their backs.

Life under McLoughlin, Simpson surmised, had been a living hell. Relying on memory, he turned his interviews, “not fit to appear on a public dispatch,” into written depositions that were forwarded



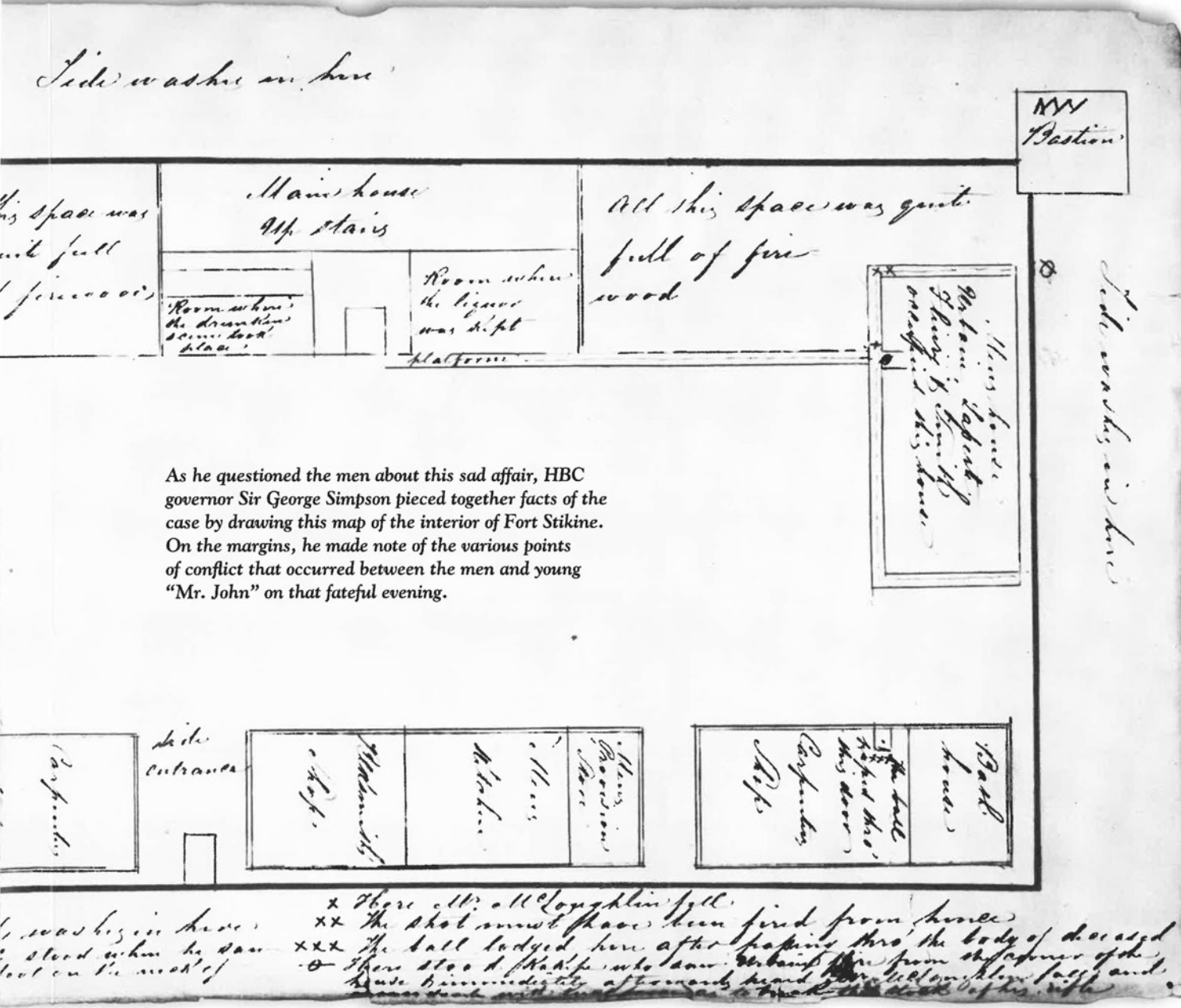
to the HBC's London offices under private cover. Sensing restlessness within the nearby Tlingit village, Simpson met with Kaw-ish-te, the local headman who openly admitted planning an attack on the fort. Apparently, Simpson's arrival and the presence of a heavily armed Russian steamship invalidated such plans. With peace restored, Charles Dodd, first mate of the *Cowlitz*, was installed as Fort Stikine's acting clerk, with George Blenkinsop, a seaman, left ashore as his assistant.

While justice was important to Simpson, keeping this "most embarrassing"

affair hidden from world opinion was critical. Citing the young clerk's intemperance and unbridled fury, Simpson made three declarations: 1) McLoughlin's death was his own fault; 2) the fort's men were absolved of all guilt; and 3) the affair was closed. Two exceptions to this decree included the shooter, Urbain Heroux, and Pierre Kanaquassé, who had previously made attempts on McLoughlin's life. While Heroux was sent to a Russian prison in Sitka, Pierre was delivered in shackles to the *Cowlitz's* Captain William Brotchie

along with related documents. These were to be forwarded to the dead clerk's father at Fort Vancouver.

On June 7 the *Cowlitz* arrived at Fort Vancouver's wharf. Dr. McLoughlin and his wife Marguerite were shocked and anguished on learning of their son's death. Simpson's unsympathetic views worsened the picture: "I shall not here distress you by a detail of the occurrences of that memorable and fatal



As he questioned the men about this sad affair, HBC governor Sir George Simpson pieced together facts of the case by drawing this map of the interior of Fort Stikine. On the margins, he made note of the various points of conflict that occurred between the men and young "Mr. John" on that fateful evening.

Courtesy: Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Manitoba, Canada

night... From all I can collect, the whole conduct and management of Mr. McLoughlin were exceedingly bad, and his violence when under the influence of liquor, which was very frequently the case, amounting to insanity.”

Though Dr. McLoughlin’s grief could not be staid, his son’s checkered past brought validity to Simpson’s unsympathetic words. Initial success in a Paris college boiled down to a “mysterious and unpardonable offense” that had landed young John back in Montreal. Squandering money, time, and energy on frivolous and inane pursuits, the young man forsook further education, and, at one point, had to be rescued from a Montreal debtor’s prison. Governor Simpson finally caught up with John Jr. after he had joined a madcap expedition to oust Mexico from what is now the American Southwest.

*This bronze bust of Dr. John McLoughlin reflects a father’s sadness and concern, emotions that turned into rage when he discovered of the real reasons behind his son’s murder.*



James Wehn sculpture: WSHS

Once in the HBC’s employ, John had matured intellectually, developed virtues, and become “frank, open, firm—but kind and generous,” according to his father.

As Dr. McLoughlin poured over Simpson’s smugly presumptive investigation, holes began to show. Only six men had been interviewed. Eyewitnesses had been left unquestioned. Sworn testimonies had been taken, but voluntarily, and no one had been cross-examined. From the grieving father’s perspective, the governor’s conclusions appeared to be marred with inconsistencies.

On learning that he was supposed to send Pierre Kanaquassé back to Canada to be set free, McLoughlin balked, ordering instead that he be detained indefinitely in the Cowlitz’s brig. In the weeks that followed, Pierre badgered his jailers for a meeting with the chief factor, but McLoughlin would have none of it. In mid June, when the Cowlitz hoisted anchor, Kanaquassé was moved to the fort’s hospital. Now less than 75 yards from the chief factor’s home, the prisoner’s requests still went unheeded. Knowledgeable in legal precedent, Dr. McLoughlin knew that information gathered in a one-on-one meeting would be inadmissible in a court of law.

“By the first opportunity, I sent him across to Nisqually to embark in the *Cadboro*,” related McLoughlin. Kanaquassé was headed back to Sitka to face the Russian courts with Heroux. Records suggest that he was sent north with an overland party within days of the Cowlitz’s departure. By now, details of the murder were circulating along the coast. At Cowlitz Farm the prisoner was heard to boast, “This [murdering of a gentleman] is the way we break these fellows in. I am going to the coast again, and if any of them does any thing to me, I will shoot him [as well].” Once in Chief Factor James Douglas’s custody aboard the *Cadboro* on Puget Sound, the prisoner found himself locked up again and alone in the brig.

Chief Factor Peter Skeen Ogden and Chief Trader Donald Manson had arrived at Fort Vancouver with the Snake Country Brigade in early June 1842. Both were hungry for

news; Stikine’s troubles and McLoughlin’s grief is what they got. In Douglas’s absence, Ogden and Manson provided the inconsolable couple with support and sympathy while the brigade’s arrival provided the doctor with numerous distractions. As the days passed, Fort Stikine dominated their conversations. Simpson provided this description of the place:

*The establishment...was situated on a peninsula barely large enough for the necessary buildings, while the tide, by overflowing the isthmus at high water, rendered any artificial extension of the premises almost impracticable; and the slime, that was periodically deposited by the receding sea, was aided by the putridity and filth of the native villages in the neighbourhood, in oppressing the atmosphere with a most nauseous perfume... and the supply of fresh water was brought by a wooden aqueduct, which the savages might at any time destroy, from a stream about two hundred yards distant.*

Furthermore, Fort Stikine was a dangerous place. During the Russian American Fur Company’s occupation, the local Tlingit tribesmen had attacked a number of times. Chief Trader Donald Manson, familiar with the region’s first people, concurred that they had always been traded with at arm’s length. Matters had been made worse when, in the fall of 1841, Simpson had deprived Fort Stikine of its second officer. This troubled all the gentlemen. With warlike tribes so near, and “where the most liquor is Expended in the trade and where the men can obtain it from the natives—unless strictly watched by their officers—no person the least Versant in the Business of the N.W. Coast, Even with Good men, would think of leaving only one officer...,” Dr. McLoughlin criticized.

Compounding such problems was Dr. McLoughlin’s reluctant decision to populate Stikine with “Canadians and Iroquois [who] were the Greatest Blackguards in the department and were sent to Stikine to prevent their giving trouble in other places as I knew these men would only be kept to their duty by the dread of

punishment....” With Mr. John’s murder, Stikine’s descent into a “hell upon Earth, a Sink of pollution and profligacy,” had finally hit rock bottom.

McLoughlin, Ogden, and Manson had one final concern. The life of an HBC officer had been taken with impunity by a group of subordinates. Simpson’s blithe consideration of this fact set a dangerous precedent. Dr. McLoughlin prophesied that, “without doubt, if this melancholy affair is passed over and not thoroughly examined, [and] unless the Officers allow the men to do as they please, [more officers will be killed by their men]....”

Given his experience on the coast, Manson was instructed to relieve Dodd as Stikine’s new senior officer. Then, around the first of July 1842, a courier delivered a note that brought Dr. McLoughlin to his feet. It stated that while skirting the waters off southern Vancouver Island, James Douglas had interviewed Kanaquassé, who seemed “to have viewed the murder with curiously little emotion or fear of consequences, and neither delicacy nor apprehension appear to have made him hesitate to answer questions.” On writing these words, McLoughlin biographer W. Kaye Lamb of the University of British Columbia attributes Kanaquassé’s sudden shift in attitude to his being “such a villain.” Others have suggested that he may have felt immune to prosecution because he was beyond Russian jurisdiction.

Motivations aside, the Iroquoian told of a murder conspiracy fueled by liaisons with local Indian women. Kanaquassé revealed that the men’s sexual encounters had been paid for with stolen company property. As McLoughlin sat down in disbelief, the whole sordid mess came into focus. Justice would now be served. Kanaquassé’s testimony would now be taken in a manner admissible in any civilized court of law.

Having bolstered Manson’s party to 11 men, McLoughlin likely felt compelled to join them. However, pressing concerns required his presence at Vancouver for the moment. As Manson departed he was told to detain everyone at Fort Nisqually. Several days passed before McLoughlin headed north. On

July 10 he reached Cowlitz Farm only to hear of Kanaquassé’s brazen threats to kill more officers. After collecting several statements, his party pushed on, arriving at Fort Nisqually late on July 12.

The following morning Dr. McLoughlin assembled his colleagues to prepare for an official inquiry. Clearing out a space, sweeping it, and gathering furniture fell to the fort’s postmaster, Angus McDonald. Following breakfast on Friday morning, the gentleman jurists assembled.

Chief Factor McLoughlin, a 40-year veteran of the fur trade, presided.

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Historian John Hussey describes him thus: “Standing six feet four inches in height, his powerful, well-knit frame gave an impression of physical strength which was almost overwhelming. His blue-gray eyes flashed out beneath ‘huge brows,’ and crowning his rosy-cheeked face was a magnificent head of prematurely white hair which he allowed to flow down onto his broad shoulders.” Known to be fair but despotic at times, “he was a King...and much feared” by the French Canadians under his charge. No one carried more influence than he.

Chief Factor James Douglas, a 23-year veteran, and McLoughlin’s right-hand man, was once described as “a fine man, distant in manner, and inclined to be pompous.... A large fine looking man, in contradiction to Simpson, who was a small man.” The future governor of Vancouver Island could assess a man’s talents and abilities simply by speaking with him. His knowledge of the operations and Indians along the coast would prove an asset to the investigation.

Chief Trader Donald Manson, a 24-year fur-trade veteran and trusted colleague, was “a fine looking fellow, upwards of 6 feet high and stout in proportion. He had always been in the interior and to the Indians was a sort of a terror,

and they feared, and at the same time obeyed him.” No stranger to abrasive situations or the coastal fur trade, Manson was McLoughlin’s enforcer. He would use this circumstance to further his reputation as an overly harsh disciplinarian.

Chief Trader Captain William McNeill of the steamer *Beaver*, though an American, was as staunch an HBC servant as one could find. In 1832, shortly after his hiring, one colleague stated: “The experience [McNeill] has acquired of the natives and his intimate acquaintance with the different Harbors, Bays and Inlets of the Coast...render him eminently qualified to give affairs in that quarter a favorable turn.” In his time with

the company, McNeill had acquired a reputation as a no-nonsense skipper who was known to flog mutineers and confront angry Indians without hesitation.

Captain James Scarborough of the schooner *Cadboro* had been in the HBC’s sea service for 12 years prior to this gathering. Familiar with the company’s operations and the Indians along the Northwest Coast, Scarborough would soon be sharing Manson’s fate, sailing that party into dangerous and unknown waters.

Four clerks, junior in rank to the others, were also in attendance—Angus McDonald, James Steel, Paul Fraser, and John O’Brien. McDonald had previously spent time at Fort Simpson, up in the Northwest Territories, and was familiar with the men. O’Brien had witnessed the depositions taken by Simpson, so his presence was critical. Steel was an agriculturalist assigned to Nisqually’s farms and knew what it meant to have command of one’s men. Fraser likely acted as court clerk and transcribed the proceedings.

Invited as unbiased observers were two American missionaries who possessed influence and reputations beyond reproach—Dr. John Richmond of the Nisqually Methodist Mission and the

Reverend Jason Lee, who oversaw all Methodist missionary activities within Oregon. In terms of American religious leaders residing in the region at that time, there were none more respected.

As he entered the room, the Iroquois man likely took pause, for he was met with hushed whispers and a steely-eyed phalanx of disapproving faces. Following Kanaquassé's sworn oath, Dr. McLoughlin began questioning him in French, as an English translation was committed to paper by Fraser. Since James Douglas had already obtained details of the murder, Dr. McLoughlin launched into Simpson's allegations about his son's conduct.

When asked if Mr. John was a tyrannical drunk who beat his men for the slightest infraction, Kanaquassé acknowledged that few had escaped the master's lash, boot, pistol butts, cane, or fists. In explaining the justification behind the abuse, Pierre reeled off a laundry list of serious offenses: sentinels caught sleeping on their watch; men refusing to obey orders; physical assaults on Mr. John's person; and the illicit commerce of food, blankets, and gunpowder that the men had stolen. In addition to these infractions, the men had spread lies

anyone complain to Sir George of the deceased?" Kanaquassé's response was: "No one complained." These replies confirmed that Mr. John was no drunk. They also established that his response to the men's offenses was within HBC policy.

The murder conspiracy issue was then broached. Though he first denied any knowledge of the plot, Kanaquassé finally relented. In December 1841, he recalled, Urbain Heroux and William Lasserre began making plans to kill the master. The meetings were kept small and private because "Mr. John kept so vigilant a watch upon them, that they were afraid he might suspect their intentions if they went [to Heroux's house] in a body." Initially, the Hawaiians, or "Blue men," objected to using guns. Poison was considered a better method. Kanaquassé also noted that Thomas McPherson objected to the plan altogether, arguing, "No, do not [kill him]...let him be 'till the governor comes by and bye & then we shall have redress." The Canadians quickly dismissed the idea.

Acquiescing under pressure, the apprentice clerk drew up a murder contract that "was signed in Heroux's house, where the men [arrived] by

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*The apprentice clerk drew up a murder contract that "was signed in Heroux's house, where the men [arrived] by stealth for the purpose."*

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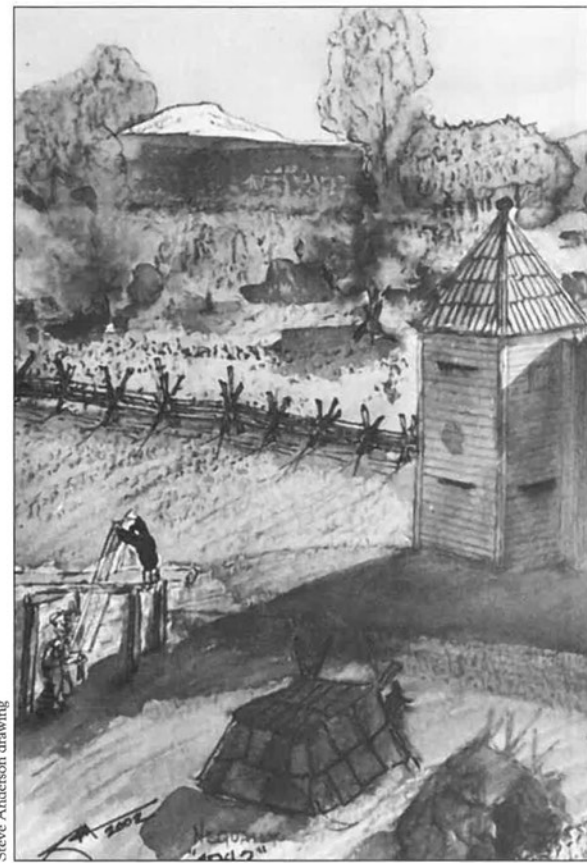
and fabricated rumors to set the Tlingit Indians against the master. Lesser infractions included: leaving work unfinished, giving away clothing to gain sexual favors, sneaking people in and out the gate after curfew, and opening the porthole to fraternize with Indian women during periods of heightened alert.

Kanaquassé then confessed to having seen his master only "drink our health on Christmas morning..." but never with the men. Asked if he was ever seen drunk and wandering about the fort incoherently, Pierre replied, "No.... He was elevated [on the day he was murdered] but knew very well what he was about."

Dr. McLoughlin then asked: "When Sir Simpson and Mr. Douglas arrived at Stikine in October preceding, did

stealth for the purpose." Binding all signatories to the crime's commission, it also addressed the "cover story," which would conceal the plot from company officials. Attempts on Mr. John's life soon commenced, including three by Kanaquassé himself. He could not explain why the Canadians chose to murder Mr. John when they did, but he was sure that the fort's steward, Benoni Fleury, served as the master's informant, and that the clerk knew what was happening among the men.

Cross-examined about the night of the murder, Pierre recounted many details. When pressed to explain the conspiracy's overwhelming support, Kanaquassé confessed that Mr. John's strict adherence to curfew was largely to blame. The men,



Pierre noted, were often allowed to leave the fort, walk on the wharf, or visit Tlingit lodges—but only if there were few Indians about. If the number of Indians increased and their intentions appeared hostile, the gates were closed and the men sequestered. No one was allowed outside the stockade at night. While snoozing sentries often left the fort vulnerable to attack, the fort's single men regularly broke curfew to visit their Tlingit "mistresses." Mr. John's punishments, if they were caught, only solidified their resolve to see him dead. Further, William Lasserre jealously suspected that Mr. John was bedding his wife, which only fanned the flames of his hatred.

Ultimately, "the strictness with which [Mr. John] prevented [the men from] sallying from the fort in quest of women" was exposed as their motive for murder. These answers dovetailed tightly with earlier statements. But the interview ran long, and those present needed to digest the findings, so Kanaquassé was excused.

When the grand jury reconvened Saturday morning, its members were shocked to learn from Kanaquassé that Stikine's men planned to kill anyone who struck or punished them for any reason. Dr.



Fort Nisqually was erected near present-day DuPont in 1833. This view depicts the north palisade and northeast bastion in the spring of 1842. It was here that Dr. John McLoughlin convened his grand jury to get to the bottom of the murder conspiracy.

McLoughlin then asked if his son-in-law William Glen Rae, also a clerk, had quarreled with Mr. John while in a drunken rage. No, answered Kanaquassé, but Rae had interceded when McLoughlin caned one of the men, and had been able to remove him with little difficulty.

The verdict was clear: Simpson had been deceived. Dr. McLoughlin concluded: "When these men do not say what it is they are accused of, when they are ill treated as they say, it is because they are aware if they tell the truth, people will know their bad conduct." With copies of the testimony freshly inked, Dr. McLoughlin signed each one, stating: "The short and the long of the affair is this: These fellows wanted to impose on my son, to which he would not submit. They, finding they could not make him bend, conspired and murdered him."

Unfortunately, the jurists had no legal authority to hand down indictments.

Their business concluded, each member packed up and left Fort Nisqually. At Stikine, Douglas and Manson threw themselves into the murky business of identifying the conspirators. Fort Colville's chief trader, Archibald McDonald, said it best: "The Worshipful Bench [McLoughlin] furnished [Manson] with a commission to inquire, or rather re-inquire, into the unfortunate affair of young McLoughlin at Stikine.... Our learned deputy has made a sweeping business of it—upon very slight evidence made every white man at the establishment, 13 in number, prisoners."


With over half of Stikine's men so charged, Dr. McLoughlin ordered them sent to the Russian authorities in Sitka. However, safely transporting all prisoners aboard a small vessel like the *Cadboro* was impossible. For their part, the Russians wanted nothing more to do with the affair and, following the return of three prisoners, made it clear that no prosecution would take place within their jurisdiction. Eventually, 14 men were dispersed to other HBC establishments along the coast until the late fall of 1843, when Dr. McLoughlin had them placed in Fort Vancouver's jail—which had been built specifically for that purpose.

The grand jury's questioning of Pierre Kanaquassé at Fort Nisqually marked a turning point in Dr. McLoughlin's private and professional life. As his personal vendetta became increasingly tangled up in HBC business, one colleague observed: "I fear we have got ourselves into a bobble and that it will turn out we are more au fait in our humble occupation of Indian traders than as the dispensary of her Majesty's criminal law." Evidence collected by McLoughlin's grand jury went straight to the top. In 1843 Archibald Barclay, secretary to the governor and committee, wrote to George Simpson:

*I need not say any thing about the new light thrown on the murder of Young McLoughlin at Stikine since you were there, as you will have seen the depositions taken in the case. The crime was clearly long premeditated and if ever men deserved hanging, Heroux, Kanaquasse, and the scoundrel McPherson ought*

*to be strung up. It is evident that the [men's] charges of habitual intoxication and excessive severity were trumped up after the deed was committed as a screen to the villany [sic] of the culprits.*

Simpson never conceded that point. Conducting what only now can be described as a corporate cover up, the knight would (in today's courts) likely be charged with slander, aiding or abetting after the fact, or obstruction of justice. Moreover, the jurisdictional "hot potato" remains unanswered to this day.

In retrospect, Stikine's tragedy claimed two McLoughlins. The son's body was moved to Fort Vancouver in 1843. The father's obsessive behavior clouded his judgment and foreshadowed an end to his career as a fur trader. Dr. McLoughlin's biggest faux pas came in 1844 and involved the conveyance of the alleged conspirators overland to Montreal to stand trial. This action paved the way for a censuring by his superiors in London. Eventually the costs exceeded even Dr. McLoughlin's deep pockets. With a conviction unlikely (even for the most guilty), the London directors distanced themselves from the affair. Those accused were eventually freed and paid for time spent "under watch and ward." To Dr. McLoughlin's disgust, several were even rehired and sent back to the Columbia Department. Forced to take a leave of absence in 1846, Dr. McLoughlin moved to his home in Oregon City, parting ways with the HBC. In 1857, after a period of declining health, he died, embittered with Simpson and the HBC for the losses he sustained in the spring and summer of 1842. 

*A Washington native, author, and historian, Steve A. Anderson has been writing local history, particularly on Puget Sound's fur-trade era, for the past quarter century. He gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance and support provided by Dennis Chapman, director of the Wrangell Museum; Heather Beattie of the Hudson Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba; HBC biographer and author Bruce Watson; and retired Fort Vancouver curator/historian David Hansen.*



# COLUMBIA

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This hand-tinted photographic postcard depicts a somewhat romanticized view of Tacoma's Point Defiance Park overlooking Puget Sound. The park is still the city's most popular recreational attraction, and many of its most beloved features were given birth under the expert guidance of horticulturist E. R. Roberts over a century ago. See story beginning on page 15. (Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society)