

John Mears was an Irish navigator, explorer and fur trader. He documented his travels by writing. In his personal journal "*Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Northwest Coast*", Mears dedicates a chapter to Chief Wickaninnish and his people of the Clayoquot Sound. Chief Wickaninnish was a leader of the Tla-o-qui-aht people of Clayoquot Sound, which is now our present day Vancouver Island. He was a well respected Chief who had a big influence in the fur trade in the Pacific Northwest. Mears speaks very highly of Wickaninnish in *Voyages* and it is interesting to see a positive perspective on the Aboriginal peoples at this time in history.

"*Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Northwest Coast*" is about many adventures had by Mears. In this chapter, dedicated to Wickaninnish, Mears opens with him and his men being stuck in a storm and the Chief coming and rescuing them. It continues, speaking about a feast that was had, gifts and pleasantries that were exchanged and ends with them shaking hands in trade. Throughout the chapter, Mears speaks with nothing but respect for Wickaninnish and his people. He was continually amazed by his generosity and how genuine he was, along with how well respected he was by his people.

This journal entry (dated June of 1788) begins with Mears and his men being blown astray in rough waters. They ended up stuck on a different island. When they try to battle the winds and make their way to Wickaninnish's village, they struggle again. Wickaninnish and his men see this and move forward to help them come safely to their village. Upon first interactions with Wickaninnish and his people, Mears notes, "Wickaninnish proved an excellent pilot and was not only indefatigable in his own exertions, but equally attentive to the conduct of his canoes in their attendance upon us." (J. Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. London: Logographic Press, 1791, P. 220.). This shows that Wickaninnish was ready and willing to treat these strangers as his own people and wanted to build a relationship with them. Mears seems impressed by the village and what he sees between the canoes, wild berries and onions to the cliff that the village resides on.

Mears and his crew are quickly invited to a feast, to which they accepted the invitation. While it is unclear whose home the entertainment is being held in, the men are "...absolutely astonished at the vast area it enclosed- it contained large square, boarded up close on all sides to the height of twenty feet, with planks of uncommon breadth and length. Three enormous trees, rudely carved and painted, formed the rafters, which were supported at the ends and in the middle by gigantic images, caved by huge blocks of timber. The frame kind of broad to keep out the rain; but they were so placed as to be removed at pleasure, either to retrieve the air and light or let out the smoke. In the middle of this spacious room, were several fires..." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.222). Mears was clearly impressed by the home and all their culture which lay inside of it. He mentions a few paragraphs later that he was so astonished by the fact that these men did this work without any mechanics. The strength it would take to build this home is unmeasurable and Mears seems to have such a respect for these people. Mears continues to write about the meal they had, which he also seemed fascinated by. He even states "...we must consider it as the most luxurious feast we had ever beheld." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.225).

The feast ends in an exchange of gifts. Mears and his men deliver blankets and two copper tea kettles. The people of the village seem most intrigued by the tea kettles. In return, they received sea otter skins and Wickaninnish made a speech about "...giving his hand in token of friendship..." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.226). This is an important part of the passage because it shows that the Chief and his village have accepted them into their lives.

The journal continues on about them staying on the shores for several days and starting trades with the aboriginals. Mears states that "The Chief generally paid us a visit every day and we lived on the most friendly terms with him and the whole village." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.227). This shows how genuine and happy Chief Wickaninnish and

the Tla-o-qui-aht people were to have these foreigners there. There seems to be a mutual respect. Mears and his men lived their lives, didn't disrupt the aboriginals' way of living and traded fairly. Wickaninnish and the Tla-o-qui-aht people did the same. There seemed to be harmony between the two groups.

Near the end of the chapter, there seems as if there was an encounter with people who were not wanted on the land. They would not respect that the Chief asked them to leave "...the Chief had ordered his people to fall upon the intruders, one of whom they had now seized..." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.229) and it ended drastically; "We are sorry to add that this unfortunate man was immediately hurried to the woods where we have every reason to apprehend that he was quickly murdered." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.229). Mears goes on to say that "This event strengthened our opinion, that however mild and friendly the behavior of these people might be to us, perhaps under the influence of fear, they were fierce and cruel to each other." (Mears, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*. P.230). While Mears didn't seem to have lost any respect for the Chief and his men, this incident seems to have put it into perspective for him that not only were the Chief's people loyal to him and his requests, he (the Chief) wasn't afraid to put his foot down when a situation arises.

Due to the time this journal was written, the writing proved difficult to read as s's were written as f's. This journal entry didn't have the stereotypical outlook about the aboriginal peoples. John Mears prides the aboriginals in how loyal, helpful and honest they are. Mears was clearly a man with an open mind. This could have something to do with the fact that Mears was Irish. He was coming from a country that was having a hard time and trying to stay on their feet. Coming from that, he understood fear and how quickly things could change if you didn't hold your ground for what you and your peoples believed was right. Mears seems that he realized that respect is give and take. If you don't have any to give, you

won't receive any in return. This could be why he was so successful building relationships with people and why he succeeded as a tradesman in the late 1700's/early 1800's.

## Works Cited

Mears, John. *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*.  
London, Logographic Press, 1791.

Document Analysis - *Voyages Made in the Years 1788-1789 from China to the Pacific Northwest*

Ashley Wanner

T00222712

History 1120-02

Due October 19, 2016