

**MAKAH TRADITIONAL FISHERIES  
AT THE ENTRANCE OF JUAN DE FUCA STRAIT  
AND NORTHWESTWARD**

**HALIBUT**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**January 1993**

Barbara Lane, Ph.D.

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**Supplementary Report**

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**Introduction**

This report provides additional information regarding Makah halibut fisheries in 1880, 1890 and 1900 which were inadvertently omitted from my initial report on Makah halibut fisheries submitted in 1991.

Data were collected on Makah halibut fishing by James G. Swan for the 1880 U.S. Census and by Charles Adie for the 1890 U.S. Census. Reference to these materials is contained in the annual report of U.S. Indian Agent, John McGlinn, reporting on the Neah Bay Indian Agency to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 17 August 1891. The material in the next section below is excerpted from the annual report of Agent McGlinn. The full report as published in the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1891 is appended to this report.

In the summer of 1900, anthropologists Stewart Culin and George Dorsey made a short visit to Neah Bay. Culin reported his observations of the halibut fishery. Excerpts from his account are given in the second section below. The relevant pages are appended.

**Makah Halibut Fisheries, 1880 and 1890**

McGlinn reported in 1891 on the amount of halibut harvested by the Makah as given in the Tenth and Eleventh U.S. Census statistics. The figures reflect a dramatic reduction in the pounds of halibut taken by the Makah, even taking into account the significant decline in Makah population figures reported. McGlinn wrote:

As I stated in my former report, the Makah Indians are not dependent on agriculture for subsistence. Their wealth is in the rich products of the waters

of the Pacific Ocean and the straits of Juan de Fuca, on which shores they live. In 1880, Judge James G. Swan, custom-house inspector at Neah Bay, was employed by the United States Census Bureau for the Tenth Census to make a report on the food fishes of Cape Flattery, which report was made through Prof. Spencer F. Baird, then U.S. Fish Commissioner. Mr. Swan ascertained that the Makah Indians during the year had taken 1,586,200 pounds of fresh halibut, which, canned and dried for winter use, weighed 395,555 pounds. The Makah Indians at that time numbered 700 persons. In 1890, for the Eleventh Census, Charles W. Smiley, U.S. Fish Commission, engaged Charles Adie, post trader and Signal Service officer at Neah Bay, to report in a like manner of the food fishes of Cape Flattery. Mr. Adie placed the number of pounds at 280,000 of fresh halibut taken that year by the Makah Indians, who numbered 454 persons. This may be considered as a fair annual product of the fisheries of the Makah tribe for halibut per annum.

(McGlenn to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 17 August 1891:447)

The drop in pounds of fresh halibut harvested by the Makah from over one and a half million pounds in 1880 to less than four hundred thousand pounds reported in 1890 was due in large part to the incursion of white fishermen on the halibut grounds off Cape Flattery. McGlenn reported:

During the present season there has been a mosquito fleet of about twenty fishing boats, and four or five schooners manned by white men, engaged in halibut fishing. Those boats with their improved appliances have caught enormous quantities of fish. One of the schooners left the bay with 35,000 pounds of fresh halibut packed in ice, for up-sound ports, the fish to be shipped east by rail. Two other schooners caught recently 25,000 pounds each, the fish to be stored in a cold storage house in Seattle, and from thence to be shipped to eastern markets.

The Indians view with jealousy the encroachments of the white men on what they have always regarded as their exclusive possessions, and find for the first time in their history that white competition has overstocked, and will I am afraid eventually take from them a market of which heretofore they have had almost a monopoly.

(McGlenn to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 17 August 1891:447-448)

As noted in the 1991 report (to which this is a supplement), apart from a few earlier and abortive efforts, the entry of non-Indian fishermen to the halibut fishery off Cape Flattery began in 1888 and increased dramatically thereafter.

Culin's observations about Makah halibut fishing as he observed it at Neah Bay in the summer of 1900 provide an account of this fishery which complements the native account

given by Henry Markishtum which was published in 1905. Extracts from Markishtum's article were included in my 1991 report.

### **Makah Halibut Fisheries, 1900**

A primary purpose of the visit to Neah Bay by Culin and Dorsey was to collect native artifacts for the University of Pennsylvania Museum. The following observations of the role of halibut fishing were made incidentally to the collection of native artifacts.

Everything in the village centres around the fishing industry. Halibut is the principal source of revenue, and in every house we saw hanging the cedar-bark tackle bags filled with wooden and bone hooks, and the carved wooden club used in killing the fish. Swan describes the lines used in halibut fishing as made from the stems of the giant kelp, but now ordinary lines have been substituted. . . . .

The entire fleet of the village went out for halibut on the second day of our visit, starting at four in the morning for the fishing banks. They returned early in the afternoon, laden with fish. The majority of the canoes were manned by several men. Immediately on their arrival, the fish were placed in piles on the beach out of reach of the tide, and the women came down, cut off their heads and removed the entrails. The fish were then washed and packed in large wooden boxes for transportation by the expected steamer to the Seattle market. Sometimes, through stormy weather, the shipments are prevented, causing considerable loss. The heads are carried off for consumption.

The catch on the day of our visit was about 1,000 fish, which is the general average. They are purchased at so much per head, according to size, or are shipped to commission houses in Seattle, where they bring two and a half cents per pound. A sharp competition exists between the Indian trader, Mr. Draper and the three native representatives of the Seattle firms. Among other fishing appliances we procured specimens of a lure, made with two feather-like vanes of cedar, weighted with lead, which the fisherman presses down into the water with the point of his spear. When released it rises to the surface with a rotary motion which attracts the fish.

(Culin 1901:147-148)

### **Concluding Note**

The summary and opinion section of the original 1991 report was based on a review of relevant literature which included the materials cited in this supplementary report. The citations and discussion in this supplementary report are provided to supply inadvertently omitted sections of the original report.

## References

Culin, Stewart

A Summer Trip Among the Western Indians. Bulletin of the Free Museum of Science and Art, University of Pennsylvania, Vol. III, No. 3, May 1901 at pp. 147-148.

McGlenn, John

Letter-report to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 17 August 1891. Published in Sixtieth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. GPO:Washington. 1891 at pp. 447-450.