

**SOME ACCOUNT OF THE
TAHKAHT LANGUAGE, AS
SPOKEN BY SEVERAL TRIBES ON
THE WESTERN COAST OF
VANCOUVER ISLAND**

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Some Account of the Tahkaht Language, as Spoken by Several Tribes on the Western Coast of Vancouver Island by C. Knipe

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C. KNIPE

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THE
TAHKAHT LANGUAGE.

SOME ACCOUNT
OF
THE TAHKAHT LANGUAGE,
AS SPOKEN BY SEVERAL TRIBES ON THE
WESTERN COAST OF
VANCOUVER ISLAND.

Ἐάν οὖν μὴ εἰδῶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς φωνῆς, ἔσομαι τῷ λαοῦντι βάρβαρος.



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INTRODUCTION.

THE Tahkaht, or Nootka, is an Indian language occurring on the American coast of the North Pacific. It extends over a region at present wanting in exact definition. This region, at any rate, embraces the coast of the continent from Milbank Sound to Cape Caution, and extends probably as far as Bute Inlet. It further includes the north-east coast of Vancouver Island, as far as Cape Mudge, the north-west coast of the same island as far southward as Nitinaht, and the main land from Cape Flattery, or Classet, to a point some twenty miles further south.

The term 'Tahkaht,' here used for the whole family, as coming nearest to a genuine name, is strictly only applicable to the tribes on the exterior coast of Vancouver Island, which apply that title to themselves, and whose dialects are so similar as to be nearly identical.

In three vocabularies—one coming from the north-east of Vancouver Island, and two from Milbank Sound—I find that two have one word in ten allied to the Tahkaht proper, and the other is nearly identical with it.

Mr. George Gibbs, well known for his labours in the field of Indian language, kindly enables me to furnish the numerals from these three sources,—

Numerals.	N.E. of V. Island.	Milbank Sound.	Milbank Sound.
1	... Cha-wak Numm Mennoh
2	... At-lah Maatl Mah-loh
3	... Kat-se-chah	... Yeo-tohw Yo-toke

Numerals.	N.E. of V. Island.	Milbank Sound.	Milbank Sound.
4 ...	Moo ...	Mo ...	Moke
5 ...	So-chah ...	Sch-k'yah...	Ske-owk
6 ...	Noo-poo ...	Kahtlah ...	Kut-la-oke
7 ...	At-il-poo...	At-le-poh...	Matlowse
8 ...	At-la-quilh	Mal-kwa-nahtl	Yote-hose
9 ...	Chow-a-quilh	Naht-ne-mah	Maa-me-nee
10 ...	Hio ...	Lahs-toh ...	Ai-k'yus
20 ...	Chakiets		
30 ...	Chakiets hio		
40 ...	At-lai-uk		

The Makah and Klahusaht, near Cape Flattery, are closely allied to the Nitinaht type of the Tahkaht proper.

TAHKAHT PROPER.

THE name 'Tahkaht' is applied by the people themselves to some eighteen tribes living on the exterior coast of Vancouver Island, and ranging from Woody Point northward to Nitinaht on the south. As far as the island goes, the Tahkaht speech stops at Nitinaht, not entering the Straits of Fuca, but coming into sudden contact with the language of the Selish family at that point. It however, does not end here, but crosses to Cape Flattery, or, as some maps have it, Classet (*i. e.* Klahusaht), some distance to the south of which it terminates. The supposition that it is closely connected with the Chinook, at the mouth of the Columbia, has been proved by the exact researches of Hale, Gallatin, and Gibbs, to be an error. The mistake arose from the fact that the trade jargon used between traders and Indians on the coast, and having many Chinook words in it, was found also to contain several Tahkaht terms. It is, however, clearly shown that these latter terms were brought in early days from Nootka Sound, which was an

earlier trading station than even Astoria, and that the true vocabularies of the Tahkaht and Chinook are as widely different from each other, at any rate in sound, as any other two families of Indian language.

The Tahkahts proper, extending from Nitinaht to Woody Point, are not in any way connected among themselves by government, each tribe having its own chiefs, settlements, territory for hunting, and fishing grounds. But a common language gives rise to a good deal of mutual intercourse, as it no doubt points to a common origin. They have no single national term embracing all the tribes. The word 'Tahkaht' is linguistic, and means straight or correct (*i. e.* correctly speaking) people, in contradistinction to 'Owsuppaht,' by which they designate all those whose speech they do not understand. 'Tahkaht' is a term of honour, and 'Owsuppaht' of reproach, like Greek and Barbarian in ancient times.

The whole people is flat-headed, altering the shape of the head by pressure commenced at birth, and continued for many months. They have a peculiar custom—not usually practised by the Indians of the Selish family—of tying their hair in a knot behind. Some of these habits, apparently trivial, are less changeable than language, and may tend to exhibit a common origin or particular affinity, where lingual agreements are obliterated.

The following are the names of the Tahkaht tribes, in their order, from south to north:—Pacheenaht, Nitinaht, Ohyaht, Opechisaht, Howchuklisaht, Toquaht, Sesaht, Ewkloolaht, Kiltmaht, Klahoquaht, Ahousaht, Manosaht, Hishquayaht, Moouchaht, Noochahlaht, Ayhuttisaht, Ky-yooquaht, Chayklisaht.

The common terminal, *aht*, means house or settlement, and thence people, and is the root of *mahte* and *makkahte*, a house. The same termination with the meaning of people may be noticed in Tahkaht and Owsuppaht. In speaking of the English people, whom they have been taught to call 'King George-men,' they use the term 'King Georgeaht.' Their territories do not always go by similar names with their settlements, and never end in *aht*,

a termination implying house or population, but not land. Thus the territory of the Pacheenahts is called 'Pacheenah,' that of the Sessahts, 'Seshah.' The uniformity of the terminal *ah* has been overlooked by surveyors and travellers, Jewitt included, so that we find the greatest variety in spelling this final syllable. For Klahusaht, the Cape Flattery tribe, I find 'Classet' in the Charts, and 'Klaizzart' in Jewitt; for Howchuklisaht, 'Uchuklesit;' for Sessaht and Toquaht, 'Seshart' and 'Toquart;' for Ewkloolaht, 'Ucluelet;' for Klahoquaht, 'Klayoquot' in the Charts, and 'Klaooquate' in Jewitt; for Kiltmaht, 'Kelsemart;' for Manosaht, 'Manawussit;' for Hishquayaht, Ayhuttisaht, Kyoquaht, 'Eshquate,' 'Aitizzart,' 'Cayuquet.'

Jewitt's little book is most interesting and trustworthy, and his knowledge of the language, colloquially, no doubt very perfect, but he seems to have missed the fact that the names of all the tribes have the same termination. It may be mentioned here that he speaks of one tribe in his day (1803) which formed an exception to the above rule, and went by the name of Wikinnish. There is little doubt, from his description, that this was the Nitinaht tribe of the present day. The term 'Wikinnish,' which has died out as a tribal name; was found as a personal name, held by a chief at the time of the destruction of the *Tonguin*, 1811, and by a Sessaht chief, who died at middle age in 1864.

The religion of the people is, like that of all the North American Indians, not idolatrous, but pantheistic. Everything animate and inanimate has its spiritual counterpart, and spirit influences spirit, and often changes its habitation regardless of its material representative. Their word for shadow and reflexion is the same as that for soul; and a tree, a blanket, a musket, has as much a soul, or spiritual being, as a man. This principle underlies all their superstitions and beliefs. When a person is sick the soul is supposed to be weak, and the medicine-man performs a cure by bringing his own soul into conjunction with the sick man's, and so giving it renewed strength. In case of great sickness, the soul is supposed