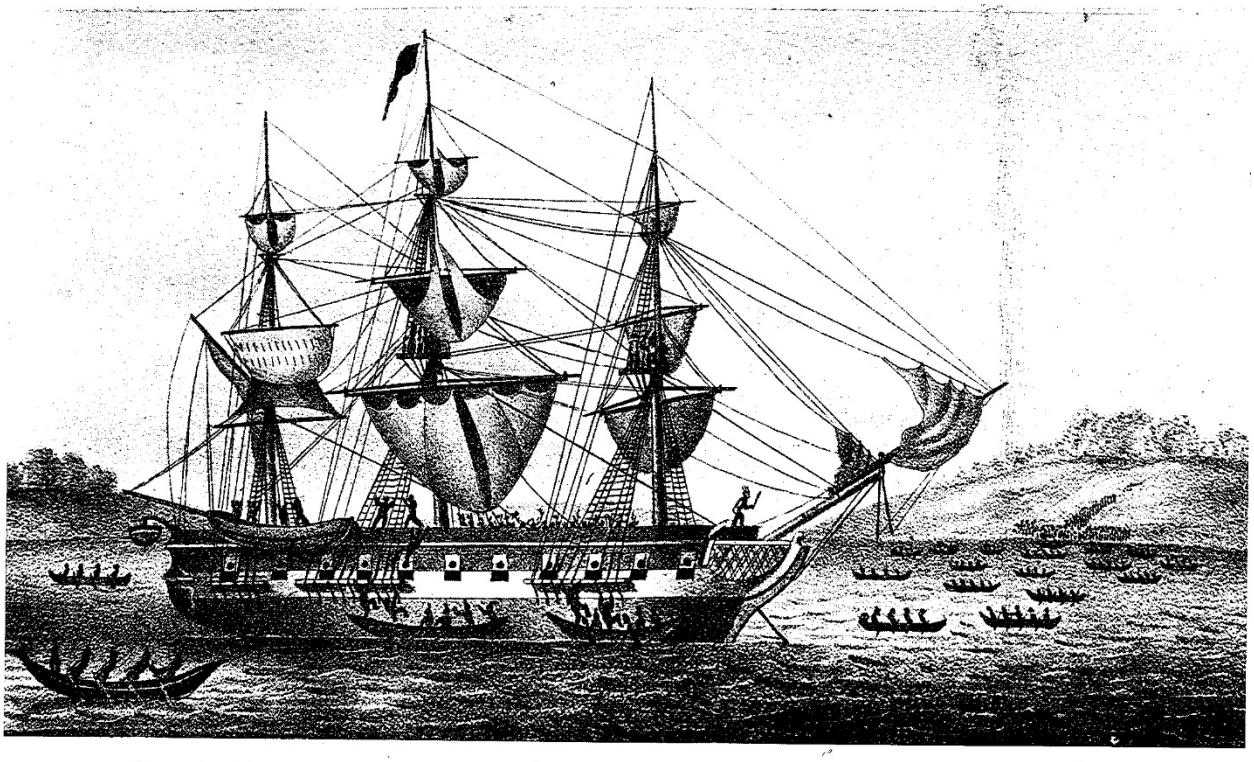
Ransom and Revenge

On September 6th, 1810, the American ship, Tonquin, sailed out of New York with Johnathan Thorn, a 32-year-old veteran of the US Navy as captain. It would never return. Although the passengers and crew on board were not directly involved in the establishment of Hudson's Bay Fort Colvile near present-day Kettle Falls 15 years later, their mission and its history play into the evolution of the fur trade that had arrived in what is now Washington State in that same year, 1810.



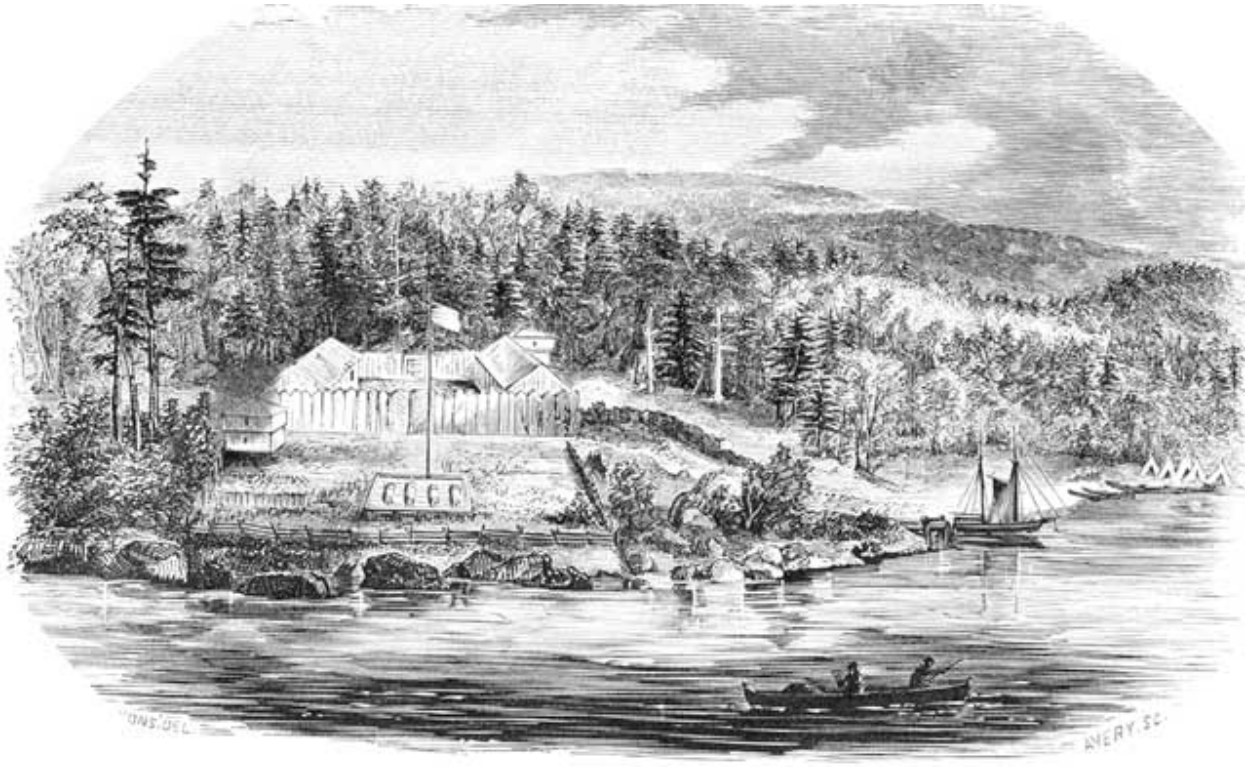
From the lithograph by Nathaniel Currier entitled "Attack and Massacre of the Crew of the *Tonquin* by the Savages". This is the frontispiece of *Voyages to the South Sea, the Pacific Ocean and the Northwest Coast*, by Edmund Fanning, New York, 1838. Fanning was the first owner and captain of the *Tonquin*.

The Tonquin was a merchant ship 94 ft. long and weighing 269 tons with 10 guns, 34 crew members, at least three smaller boats parts and for building a schooner. 30 of the men on board were experienced fur traders and British citizens employed by fur baron John Jacob Astor to establish a fur trade post at the mouth of the Columbia. The 1812 War between the British and Americans would soon break out and tensions were high.

Captain Thorn hated and was in turn despised by the majority of those on board. He marooned 8 men on the Falkland Islands while stopped there for water. They included David Stuart, Gabriel Franchére and Alexander Ross (both of whom would later write about

the Tonquin). Thorn only turned the ship around after David Stuart's nephew, Robert Stuart held a gun to Thorn's head and threatened to blow his brains out if he didn't.

This enmity continued when the Tonquin arrived at the mouth of the Columbia, a notoriously dangerous passage from ocean to river. In March, 1811, Thorn sent 8 men in two separate incidents to their deaths with ill-timed and heartless orders to sound the depth of the passage.



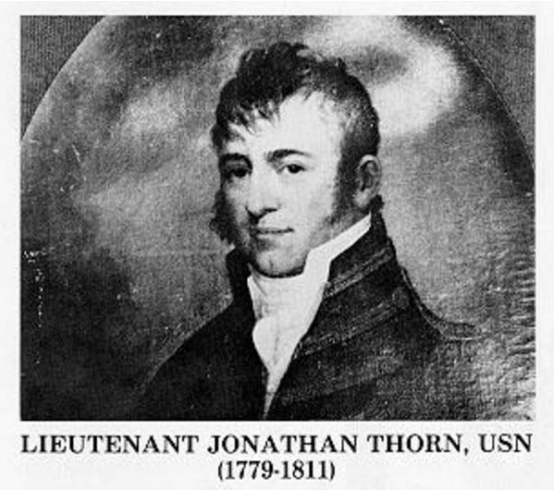
ASTORIA, AS IT WAS IN 1813.

I am reading an account of these incidents written by another man on board, Irishman, Ross Cox, in his book *Adventures on the Columbia River*, 1832. While the Tonquin stopped in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) they enlisted several Hawaiians including one named Naukane who was in charge of the others. He was given the name John Coxe while on the Tonquin and later joined the Northwest Fur Company. The two are sometimes confused with each other. There is also some confusion as to what exactly led to the destruction of the Tonquin itself.

On June 5th, 1811, the Tonquin left Fort Astoria which was being built by Astor's men at the mouth of the Columbia. On the way out, Thorn hired a Quinault Indian, Josechal, to act as an interpreter in negotiating trade with tribes on Vancouver Island. The Tonquin still had the majority of its trade goods, overseen by Alexander McKay and James Lewis of the Pacific Fur Company. They sailed into Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island, a

location familiar to Josechal and home of the Tla-o-qui-aht tribe where Josechal's sister lived with her husband.

Alexander McKay, Josechal and others went ashore to trade for furs and were treated well. Other Indians went directly to the ship and began trading furs. Trading with Captain Thorn did not go smoothly. Thorn became enraged at the Tla-o-qui-aht Chief, Nookamis, arguing over the value of their furs and struck him in the face with one of the furs.


LIEUTENANT JONATHAN THORN, USN
(1779-1811)

On a later day, a canoe of Indians returned to the ship with some furs and an offer to trade them for less. They were welcomed on board. Another canoe arrived shortly and also sent men aboard. Back on the ship, Josechal, saw that more canoes were heading to the ship and noted that the men were wearing short cloaks that could conceal weapons. He had Alexander McKay inform the captain that this was dangerous and that the ship should leave as soon as possible. Thorn rebuffed McKay confident that the natives would not attack.

They did attack and started by knocking McKay unconscious and throwing him overboard where he was put in a canoe. By Cox's account after being insulted by Thorn, Nookamis planned to kidnap McKay, secure the ship and ransom both for guns, knives and other trade goods from Astoria. This does not make sense entirely since plenty of trade goods were already on the ship.

Accounts differ as to exactly what happened next. When Thorn came on deck, he realized that this was trouble and ordered his men to set sail. He was immediately attacked and having only a pocket knife stabbed several of his attackers before being bludgeoned and thrown overboard. Men in the rigging were killed as they came down. John Anderson, John Weeks and Stephan Weeks escaped to the cabin and locked themselves in. The Natives held off knowing that the cabin was well-stocked with weapons.

In Cox's account, the three in the cabin concocted a plan to offer the ship without further bloodshed in exchange for a chance to escape in a small boat. The tribe agreed and moved away from the ship while those in the cabin lowered themselves into a boat. But they left behind a trail of gunpowder to the powder kegs in the hold. As soon as they had cleared the boat, the natives swarmed the Tonquin and were blown to pieces as the blast went off.

In another account, natives captured the escaping boat and boarded the ship, but James Lewis was still below decks and set off the explosion that blew the ship apart along with a hundred or more Indians. In both accounts all the white men trying to escape were brutally killed.

When the fighting broke out, our informant, Josechal, jumped overboard and was hidden by women in the canoes under mats. The Tla-o-qui-aht held him as a slave for two years but his release was negotiated by Lower Chinookan Noble Comcomly and he returned to Gray's Harbor. He was reluctantly persuaded to come to Astoria and tell his story.



Alexander McKay's 13-year-old son, Thomas came to Astoria on the Tonquin with his father but was left there while Alexander went with Thorn and the Tonquin. The next year, the Pacific Fur Company men were informed that the Americans had declared war on the British and that a British war ship was on its way to blow Astoria off the map. The men at Astoria sold their assets to the North West Company and either left for the East Coast or joined the North West Company, which became part of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. Thomas McKay worked for the NWC and then for Hudson's Bay.

Gabriel Franchére continued to work for the North West Company then returned to Montreal where he wrote *Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America,* 1819*.* In French. Two of the illustrations in this article are his. Alexander Ross also wrote an account of the Tonquin in *Adventures of The First Settlers on The Oregon or Columbia River*. He founded Fort Okanogan for the Pacific Fur Company and was there alone for some time. Other authors covering this period include famous American, Washington Irving, who was hired by John Jacob Astor to write *Astoria* and Edgar Allen Poe, who wrote *Account of the Tonquin Massacre*.



Gabriel Franchére