



Torches to Guide Us: A Victorian Woman Braves the Pacific Northwest

Columbia Magazine, Spring 1989: Vol. 3, No. 1

By Harriet Kofalk

Introduction by Harriet Kofalk

Just a hundred years ago, Florence Merriam, a young Victorian from New York, let her love for nature overcome her qualms about the unknown West. After a winter in California to improve her health, she joined her brother, Dr. C. Hart Merriam, for a trip by tugboat to the farthest northwest corner of the continental United States. He wanted to study the small mammals at Neah Bay, at the tip of the Olympic Peninsula. Hart was already a well-known naturalist, and the next year he was named the first chief of the U.S. Biological Survey, the federal government's first natural sciences agency.

Florence (1863-1948), eight years younger than Hart, had just completed college and would soon publish her first book on birds, no small task for a young woman of 26 in 1889. With her brother's encouragement, she became one of the foremost women writers of her era, and traveled for the next 50 years studying the birds-live. Until then, most had studied birds only as "skins" in private or the few public collections. After Florence married Vernon Bailey, chief naturalist for the Biological Survey, they traveled the American West together. Little was yet known about its flora and fauna; he focused on the mammals, she on the birds. She published about 100 articles, primarily for ornithological magazines, and 10 books. Among them were the first *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States and Birds of New Mexico*.

This was to be Florence's only trip to Washington. She left no description of the area except for a few brief notes, which she fashioned into a manuscript that was never printed. Seattle had "saloons by the dozen. Those and real estate seem to be the main business. Fruit brought from Oregon and California is dear." On August 27, 1888, she and her brother took *The Dispatch* from Seattle to Neah Bay, stopping en route at Port Townsend, where the Indians came ashore just ahead of their boat. This was in stark contrast, she noted, to arriving at the Central Hotel and finding electric lights in the bedrooms. There were "negro and Chinese servants, and Durkee's salad dressing!... After dinner went up town, saloons, beer halls, etc. abound below, up on plateau from cliffs old fashioned country village, roads through grass, close cropped by cows that graze at pleasure in streets."

Accompanying them was their mother, even more Victorian and with even more qualms than Florence. Her health was precarious, though its consumptive base was unspoken. (She died of consumption within five years.) At Neah Bay, after their first breakfast of "omelette of brains," the mother rose from her bed but once-and that only briefly. Florence, however, determined to continue her lifelong habit of following her brother through the woods, curious about what-ever he would find there and identify for her.

Fresh from college, Florence drank in all the stories of her contacts. The truth of any of them must lie with history. Where other views do not exist, her truth can fill some blanks to help us understand more of the thinking of her day. She was an honest writer and forthright, and she told it as she saw it, imbued with the idealism of her youth and all the virtues that her strong family and Smith College education had instilled in her. Despite the occasionally patronizing tone of Florence's remarks about native people-her sympathy toward them notwithstanding, she exemplified the 19th-century white intelligentsia's thinking on the subject-her memoir is valuable for its description of native life at the time.

She jotted her impressions in a small, gold-covered notebook and later developed them into a manuscript, but it was never published. The manuscript appears below, slightly edited for length and modern readability. Footnotes add embellishments from her note-book that are of interest today but which she chose to omit from her manuscript. Both the manuscript and the notebook, still with wildflowers and bird feathers pressed in its pages, are in the Florence Merriam Bailey Papers (82/46) at the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

A Tugboat Trip to the Northwest Corner

By Florence A. Merriam

We were a party of three, a naturalist,(1) his mother and his sister-myself-bound for an Indian reservation on the extreme northwest corner of the United States-barring Alaska-a region of great fame in small but biological circles. We were to go a hundred miles by tugboat and down straits reputed to be more turbulent than the English Channel. We would arrive at our port in the middle of the night, and as there was no wharf; would be taken ashore by Indians in their canoes. Landing the canoes through the surf was often dangerous-by daylight. Even if it were a case of life and death, we could not leave the reservation until the next trip of the tugboat. These were mere details of the itinerary to the naturalist. Mother looked grave but said little, for she would have followed her son through the smoke of battle.

But we were favored by the gods. Leaving Port Townsend, we sailed down the straits of Juan de Fuca, overlooked by the snowcapped peaks of the Olympic range, as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean." In our path, sea fowl sat on the smooth surface, turning their heads like weathervanes at our approach. Mirrored in the still water beside us lay the passing shore-a dark band of forest, above which the mountains, rising ridge behind ridge, faded into haze, a golden glow crowning their summits. Reflected from one of the many curious sandspits that stretched out from shore was the image of a trim, banded, red, white and black lighthouse, its colors sharply defined in the water.(2)

Watching the shore and its semblances, we could have dreamed the hours away, but the naturalist roused us from our reveries by calling us to the railing. We were passing through a sea of the giant kelp which the Cape Indians, whose reservation we were going to visit, have used for ages in their industries. It was so remarkable that the captain lingered to give us its statistics. Attached at sea bottom, the largest of the great brown hoselike tubes slanted up through the water 300 feet before reaching the top. There they were held by round air bulbs that floated their leaves, perhaps 50 splendid streamers, 30 or 40 feet long, washing idly near the surface.

The Indians have found various uses for the kelp stems, from fish lines to wagon wheels for their children's carts. The bulbs have served them as water bottles and bait holders; the tubular part of the stem has taken the place of barrels for holding the family supplies of seal and whale oil; and the cordlike portion is used in making their famous fishing lines. They cut sections of stem 10 to 15 fathoms long, soak them in fresh water, stretch and rub them, then dry them in the smoke of the lodge, afterwards knotting them together till they have lines 200 fathoms long, fit for the deep-sea cod fishing. They are said to equal the best hemp fishing lines.

From the novel sights along the way, we turned with curiosity to our fellow passengers, seated like ourselves upon their luggage or the grocery boxes that strewed the deck. The captain had succeeded in finding a chair for Mother. Of course it was only natural that we should be making a trip, but to find anyone else bound for far Cape Flattery seemed passing strange. Nevertheless, the subsiding swells of the big waves of the "boom" from Tacoma and Seattle had spent themselves along these straits leading to the ocean; and all the talk was of land, "pre-emption" and "claims to be proved up."

The speculators and settlers who were attracted to this forest country seemed to have a hardy character of their own. There was a party of jolly old white-bearded Scotchmen who discussed investments with courage and whose hearty laughter was good to hear. A fresh-faced country girl with a French patois also looked ready to meet what frontier life had for her to bear. In one old man who sat apart I thought I recognized a Gloucester fisherman I had known. I wondered to find him so far from home, but understood how the narrow patch of land between the wide straits and the great ocean might attract the weatherbeaten old sailor, for his mild blue eyes had the fixed, distant look of one who scans the seas, but when recalled rested tenderly upon the little girl who looked up at him in her play.(3)

The semiweekly visit of the tugboat was evidently the event of the hamlets along the straits. Even the schoolchildren came to see it, with their dinner pails on their arms. At one port,(4) as the captain bustled about with his hand full of papers, a boy with a crutch came forward to help the meager crew unload the freight. It was touching to see how his sad, brave face lit up as he swung a great loop of boxes from the boat, for once forceful as other lads.

We watched from the pilothouse as the sun went down like a red Japanese lantern between distant snow-covered mountains. As we looked at the changing sky, the captain at the wheel told of his life in the army and then of the fierce storms he had fought in the turbulent straits, scoffing at those who talked of his "luck" at sea, for the old soldier guided his boat with the keen watchfulness and ready courage that had made him a successful leader in the war. As the travelers watched the rich colors mellow in the sky, he told us of his home; and when the sunset glow had faded, a tender light still rested in the eyes of the old captain, thinking of the little daughter he had left in port.

After starlight, the boat passed a harbor whose dark, timbered hillside rose black against the sky.(5) Through its heavy shadow on the water, lines of orange light flickered from Indian bonfires on the beach. Sometimes forms could be seen feeding the flames. One Indian and his squaw paddled out to the tugboat, and as the man stood up in the canoe beside it, the squaw kept the boat in place by deft turns of the paddle that sent off waves of silvery phosphorescence through the black water. The only passenger for this port was a lad going in search of an old uncle, and as the boat steamed away, two lantern sparks filed up the lonely trail and disappeared into the dark forest.

At half-past three in the morning the signal whistle blew and, shivering with cold, the party stumbled on deck. A heavy gale was blowing, a pale moon was barely visible through the clouds, and we could hear the surf beat on the shore. We found the Indians who had come to take us to land holding up torches to guide us into the canoe. Their dark faces looked hideous in the flaring light, and for some reason their savage guttural muttering did not appeal to me.

The naturalist led the way, dropping over the side of the tugboat into the canoe. His ladies followed meekly, although we noted his remark that the boat was tottlish and paid good heed to the captain's directions to get down in the bottom, sit exactly in the middle, hold firmly to the rods in front of us, and, come what might, stir neither hand nor foot. I thought grimly of the stories he had told of capsizing in the surf and then reflected ruefully upon-my scalp-lock! When he joined us, however, we felt more cheerful, and before the waves could toss us, the wind subsided and the air grew warm. Moreover, the murderous-sounding talk of

the Indian chief, on translation, proved to be a request for lumber; he was anxious to finish his house and had plenty of money to pay for it, he said!

When the boat touched the beach, obeying a signal from the captain, the medicine man picked up the astonished mother and carried her dryshod to land.(6)

The trader came out to meet us and led us through the rows of Indian canoes drawn up on shore back to his house, where we were surprised to find the tables strewn with the latest books and magazines, stray volumes like Rossetti and Swinburne, and classics in literature and philosophy.(7) We were still more bewildered next morning when a Chinese cook served steak and mushrooms with an omelette of brains for breakfast. We had brought paper bags of crackers and fruit to ward off starvation among the savages. But our host had been a Virginia gentleman.

Once on the ground, the naturalist could not rest until he had explored the forest, and we were eager to see the wonders of which he had told us. Directed by the trader, we took the one road leading into the woods. I shrank a little at the Indians we met, but they smiled pleasantly in response to our "good morning." I also hesitated to leave my wraps hanging on the bushes by the way, but the naturalist assured me that nothing would be touched on a reservation.

We found the forest more wonderful than we had imagined. Neah Bay is in the belt of greatest rainfall in the United States, receiving nine feet of water annually. The resulting vegetation is almost tropical in luxuriance. The timber is made up of gigantic spruces and firs 150 feet in height, many of them 10 feet in diameter. The spaces are filled with undergrowth almost as dense as a jungle. The naturalist could barely see the birds and mammals of which he was in pursuit, and when he shot a squirrel, it took him nearly an hour and a half to force his way through the 40 feet of thicket between him and it. The forest reminded me of pictures of tropical scenes in the old geographies. At the base of the huge trees were great spreading clusters of giant fern. On the branches lay thick cushions of green moss from which long slender ferns swayed in the wind. Deer and elk were near, and bear were so plenty that a dozing bruin was often startled from his nap.

The Makahs, in strong contrast to the Indians of the plains, until recently had had no horses, but now it was the favorite amusement of a few of the tribe to ride up and down the narrow strip of beach that edged the forest. We met one of these equestrians on the road in the woods. Ben Butler was his name, and he stopped his horse to tell us his story. He had been at school in Oregon, learning the blacksmith's trade. His family had opposed his going, he told us, thinking that the white men would make a slave of him and put him into the army. They had not frightened him, however, for as he said to us with simple dignity, "I told them I thought they would not do that to me."(8)

The naturalist tried to get Ben Butler and other Indian boys to trap for him, but without success, so he had to set to work himself. One day when he was putting out his traps I went with him, watching birds. Happening to turn around, I started to find a great Indian standing motionless a few feet behind me, an ax on his shoulder and a charred brand in his hand. He was barefoot and had come up behind us without a sound. It was somewhat surprising, but one look in his kindly old face reassured me. His parted black hair hung straight to his shoulders, but was kept in place by a red bandana bound across his forehead. He was watching the naturalist with perplexed interest and smiled broadly when he realized that a full-grown man was actually setting mousetraps in the woods. We did not explain to him that we were looking for undescribed species and were getting data on the relation of moisture to coloration. But while our work amused him, his occupation afforded us food for thought. He was clearing land, barefoot, walking logs with slow noiseless steps, his charred brand held aloft as if he were performing some solemn ceremony. We compared him with our American woodchopper, in view of Ruskin's theory of the beauty and dignity of labor.

While we were staying with the trader, we got many interesting glimpses of Indian life from his piazza. Sometimes a passing squaw would stop and look through the fence at us, smiling in response to our greeting. Sometimes a tall dignified Indian robed in a long scarlet blanket, a red band around his forehead, would pass with stately tread on the way for his morning plunge in the river. Most of the Cape Indians-men and women-wore our ordinary dress, but they all had bands around their foreheads, while their straight hair hung to the shoulders. Many of them pierced their noses, often hanging from them pieces of abalone shell. They paint their faces black or red, or stripe them with other colors, but do not tattoo extensively. At times, it is said, they wear a wreath of seaweed or a turban of cedar bark.(9)

The beach in front of the house was strewn with strange-looking canoes hollowed out of cedar logs, with long pointed beaklike bows like the Queen Charlotte Island boats seen in museums.(10) Flocks of tame fish crows, sometimes accompanied by gulls, walked about picking up refuse among the logs and driftwood that littered the beach.

The women and children were going back and forth loading their boats to go hop picking.(11) Most of the tribe were bound for the Puyallup hop yards. I saw one canoe put off with 11 in it-men, women, and children. It seemed a long journey for such a craft-40 miles down the rough straits and then out across the Sound. Many of the largest hop fields were back of Seattle-from the straits a trip that took the great Sound steamers a night and a day.

From our piazza we saw the squaws go by, their backs bent under heavy loads in baskets hung by broad bands across their foreheads.(12) It seemed incredible that they could support such weight in that way, but the baskets were made broader at the top to throw the weight upon the shoulders. The trader said that he had seen a squaw carrying 11 sticks of cordwood. Women do much of the hard work.(13) Before the tribe came under the influence of white men, it was considered degrading for a chief to do anything but hunt, fish or kill whales; now the men are no idlers, and are not ashamed to wash and mend, and often make their own clothes, besides carrying on their regular occupations.

The Makahs are not only a producing tribe, but a trading tribe. For a long time they acted as trading mediums between the Indians of the coast north and south of Cape Flattery. Now they exchange with the Indians of Vancouver Island, giving them whale oil and dried halibut for dogfish oil, which they in turn sell to the white traders to be used for illuminating purposes or sold as cod liver oil! They had been so accustomed to bargaining for everything that at one time they demanded pay for letting their children attend the reservation school. Although they hunt the fur seal and sell its pelts to the white men, their principal source of wealth is oil and dried fish.

Unlike the wigwam-dwelling tribes of the interior, the Makahs do not hunt and make little attempt to cultivate the ground, but live almost exclusively upon the sea, whale and halibut being their staple food. Agriculturists they could never be. Both soil and climate are against it. The reservation is rocky, mountainous and heavily timbered, while the air is so saturated that it is impossible to cure hay. Indeed, in this tribe as with others, the wisest policy seems to be to encourage them to do that for which they are best fitted. Their best development will be along the lines of life natural to them, not by forcing them arbitrarily to adopt the trades of white men. Here it would be a matter of teaching them to carry on their own industries more intelligently, with the possible addition suggested by Judge Swan,(14) the authority upon the tribe, to raise osier willows for baskets and manufacture kelp into food production Judge Swan says that they could easily become not only a self-supporting but wealthy community is so easy for them to get their living from the sea that, like tropical races who have but to stretch out their hands for food, they have little desire to accumulate. It is true that they dry halibut and smoke whale meat to use during the winter, but otherwise they are careless, indolent and improvident.

Their great desire seems to be to get a little surplus on hand, make a "potlatch" party, and give it all away. The more an Indian gives away the better is his standing with the tribe and the greater his chance of being made chief. Sometimes on returning from hop picking one of them will give a potlatch and spend two or three thousand dollars-all he has in the world-on presents for his guests. The presents range from a tin pan, a brass kettle or a yard of calico up to a plush dress, so it is no wonder that the money mounts up.

This generosity is not all for selfish ends; the Makahs are preeminently a freehanded social people. They will share their last morsel, and they consider it a favor to dine with them. Sometimes they give three or four feasts a day to a stranger.

I did not care to dine with the Indians, but was sorry not to be able to talk with them.(15) Many of them understood English, but are diffident about speaking it, so conversation often flags. The traders and agents talk to them in Chinook-a jargon of English, French and Indian adopted by the Hudson Bay Company as a means of communication with the Indians of the Pacific Coast region. It covers only the necessary words, and the trader told me that he learned it in a few days.

In going about among the Makahs, I was attracted by their friendliness. One day when looking for birds, I found two squaws washing in a stream. With the usual mixture of Indian and American customs, though washing in a brook they were rubbing their clothes on a washboard. They were decorated with silver rings, earrings and bracelets that had been hammered out of silver dollars. As I came up, they smiled and began talking to me, seeming disappointed when I could not understand. They looked eagerly at my opera glass, and when I held it out, one of them took her hands out of the water and dried them vigorously on her dress, smiling with the delight of a child.(16)

I was anxious to visit the Indian "Siwash" houses, and the agent's wife kindly offered to go with me. The rickety-looking unpainted buildings were huddled together at all angles. There were a few two-story houses, but most of them were one story, with nearly flat roofs for drying fish. Few had more than one door; those with a window were distinguished as "Boston houses." Some of the lodges were as much as 60 feet long by 30 feet wide, but without floors or partitions. Several families lived in a house, the owner housing his relatives and friends who then might, if they chose, bear a part of the family care and support.

One of the most interesting lodges that we visited was a rain-blackened, long, barn-like building, decorated along the whole front length with bright parallel scalloped lines representing a snake, though its size suggested a sea serpent. After we stepped through the low doorway and my eyes got accustomed to the darkness, I felt a thrill of surprise and pleasure; it was like a Rembrandt interior. The blackness of the great windowless room was softened by slanting rays of pale yellow light coming from the roof where an occasional board was wanting. Little by little I made out the details of the house. A family occupied each corner, having a fire out in the middle of the hard earth floor and letting the smoke curl up to seek an escape through the roof-only a few of the more modern houses had stoves and chimneys. Above the floor around the walls ran a divanlike shelf that served as clothes-press and bed. Above this, a dado of straw-colored matting made by the squaws of bullrushes and flags(17) gave a pleasing color to the room. As three yards of rain fall during the year, it is sometimes inconvenient to have boards off the roof, so the Indians hang up boats and whale bladders to catch the water. Strips of fish and whale meat also hang from the ceiling, in process of smoking.(18)

The Makahs keep all their possessions in their houses, from hens to barrels of whale oil. In one lodge, near the door, a barefoot squaw was walking up and down a boat treading out dogfish oil.(19) On the dirt floor beside her, a woman was making bread with baking powder. A few feet away, grouped around a corner fire, a family were breakfasting on the ground, some sitting, others reclining on mats. The women looked up

pleasantly, and the agent's wife, pointing to an old squaw in a white dress, explained, "That is Queen Annie; the queens always dress in white. She has a quantity of basket work to sell."

In the back of the room, on the ground beside a smoking fire, a young girl sat with her baby in her arms. A wrinkled old squaw crouched beside her-her mother, my friend said.

In a dark house almost deserted by the hop pickers, in a far corner of the floor we could just distinguish a gray-blanketed form. "Who's that?" the agent's wife asked. Much to my surprise, an old blind man raised his gray head from his chest, asking feebly for food. An image of greater loneliness and dejection I never saw. His daughter was living at the agency, and when my friend gave him news of her he listened with pathetic interest.

She told me that the Makahs were devoted to their children. The previous year there had been an epidemic of measles in the hop yards and many of the little ones had died, causing great desolation among the people. That year, not a child could go to the yards. "See that woman?" my guide asked, pointing to a squaw whose black hair was cut short of her shoulders. "She lost a child-that is their mourning-they cut their hair." I was glad to hear of the Indians' love for their children. It was a touch of nature that dispelled the feeling that they were savages. And my heart warmed to the poor lonely mother.(20)

We found a number of sick Indian women who turned to the agent's wife for sympathy. She said there was a great deal of consumption among the people, probably due to the excessive dampness and their disregard for hygiene. "We can't get them to take any medicine. They think the doctor is going to kill them, and they throw his medicine away, dose by dose, so he won't know," she explained.

As we entered the house of the medicine man, he called out "Telacom"-friend-in a hearty tone of welcome.(21) He was chief of the tribe, and the agent had wisely made him chief of police as well to have his authority on the side of order. The chiefs, however, have little power now, they say; the important questions are submitted to councils. I was interested to hear that the women speak in the councils where they are concerned.

As we went about, we were looking for one of the babies whose foreheads were being flattened, and at last we found a lodge where there was one. A tiny canoe-shaped cradle hung from a tripod swung by a little brother. Sometimes the mother, as she works, rocks the cradle by a string attached to her great toe. The poor infant was swathed so tightly it could hardly stir, and lay like a little mummy in its case. There it would be kept for neatly a year. The babies almost never cry, I was told. Over the child's face was what looked like the cozy of a teapot, woven of the inner fiber of the cedar. I lifted up the edge of this extinguisher and there was the famous board, bound firmly across the soft bones of the poor child's forehead.

In this same house we found a young girl just home from the agency. She was the first one we had seen sitting anywhere except the floor. She was dressed in a neat blue calico and was making buttonholes. The contrast to all we had seen was so striking that it led us to talk of the agency work. My friend said that they could not let the children go home during schoolwork as it would be impossible to civilize them if they were left under the free life of the tribe. When I talked to the reservation teacher, a discouraged-looking young man, he hinted of the far-reaching trouble that made it necessary to separate the children from the home love that should surround them in their childhood. "If I let them draw or sing, they're happy; they would write all day," he said, but added sternly, "I have to keep them at their arithmetic and grammar."

The Makahs live so close to nature that they translate all its phenomena into terms of their own experience. I wished to join their evening groups around the bonfires on the beach and get a clue to their folklore.(22) Trees, birds, fish and animals to them are all Indians, imprisoned in these forms for their evil deeds. The

seal, being a thief had his arms cut off and was thrown into the sea. Comets and meteors are spirits of dead chiefs. Stars are the spirits of Indians. Sea birds crying in the cliffs before a storm are dead Indians wailing to warn their friends of danger. The aurora borealis is a light made by a tribe of dwarf Indians living many moons to the north, at the pole. On one of the pillar like rocks near the cape lives the spirit who rules the wind and waves, and the Red Men propitiate him with presents as they pass. The moon is a jellylike substance such as fish eat. When there is an eclipse, a fish is trying to devour the sun or moon, and may be driven away by shouts or the firing of guns. April is the moon of sprouts and buds; June is the month of the red huckleberry; August is the season of rest.

The legend says that the tribe originated at the cape. There the gods first created animals, and the Makahs afterwards sprang from the union of some of these with a star that fell from heaven. The Makahs have no outward religious forms. When an Indian wants to supplicate the Great Spirit, he waits for the full moon and then goes up into a mountain in the heart of the forest. First he makes himself acceptable to the god by bathing and rubbing himself with cedar twigs. Then, when the sun rises, like the prophets of old he prays alone in the silence of the mountain.

Some spirits, the Makahs believe, go into the bodies of owls after death. A short time before we were at the reservation, a curious coincidence strengthened them in this belief. A child of the tribe was visiting in Vancouver when her playfellows at Neah Bay heard an owl hoot in the woods. They fled home in terror, screaming that the child had died and had spoken to them in the forest. Soon after, word came that the child had died at Vancouver at about this time.

We could have listened to the Indian legends and superstition and given ourselves to the charm of their life for an indefinite period, but our tugboat was expected and we had to select our Indian baskets and make ready to depart. The Makahs are said to do the finest basket work in the world.⁽²³⁾ A quantity of it already lay spread out when the medicine man brought his squaw with some to sell. By strange gestures and guttural ejaculations she expressed her surprise at the quantity of work she found there, and I had to pacify her by explaining that it was only there to select from. She went around the room examining it piece by piece, sometimes muttering disapproval and then crooning with admiration over what I supposed she thought a particularly good piece of work. I held up a mat and asked her how long it took to make it, and by means of signs-making a circle for the sun, pointing from east to west, and holding up a finger for a day-she quickly caught my meaning and held up fingers to tell me the time for different pieces of work. The naturalist had picked up one of the grotesque wooden masks used by the Makahs in their dances, and when she came to that, she broke into loud bursts of laughter over the hideous thing.

I was attracted by the kindly face of one old squaw, and as she left, by a singular misunderstanding, I was again shown the strong human sympathy that had brought the dusky sisters nearer to me. Mother had been ill since our arrival, and we were anxiously waiting to take her on board the tugboat before daylight the next morning, when it was necessary for us to start. In some way the Indians had learned of her illness, and when leaving, the old squaw pointed to the sick room questioningly. Thinking she meant to ask if we were to take Mother away on the boat, I nodded assent, but her moans and gestures of sympathetic distress startled me with my mistake. She walked out wailing with sorrow, and as her dark figure passed through the door, I shuddered, for her straight black hair was cut short across her neck.

The excerpts from Florence Merriam's notebook and manuscript are published through the courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

NOTES

1. 1. In the style of the day, she identifies people only obliquely. "The naturalist" is her brother Hart.
2. 2. This was at Dungeness.
3. 3. Florence's notes included other passengers: "Woman going home with sick boy-been in Port Townsend 7 weeks with sick boy, front teeth gone, just starting dairy farm. Several such families... Men and women going out to stay on claims to prove up"
4. 4. Port Angeles.
5. 5. Crescent Harbor.
6. 6. In her notebook, Florence speaks only of being carried herself. Most likely they were both carried, and she chose only to mention her mother in the manuscript. "Got to beach and water there, so Indian took me in his arms and carried to land."
7. 7."Cherry bedstead and washstand, carpet, walls painted...Mr. S[e]bastian spoke of key to front door-glass in-but said perfectly safe if not locked. Hart went out with him and did not come back. Staggered at first, house to ourselves in midst of savages but asleep and nothing more til 8 a.m. when Hart called to breakfast."
8. 8. "Indian boy...talked saying glad to be able to talk to whites, said been away in Oregon for 9 months learning shoemaker's trade, going away to earn living by it, Port Townsend or somewhere. ...Simple way the boy tells of his determination to go and learn...and that boy we found afterward had been named by agent Ben Butler! Incong[ruous]!"
9. 9. "Hart sleeps on wicker lounge with red Indian blankets same as on our bed. Soft warm light beautiful red, Reservation blankets. Indians parade around...also wear other blankets-magenta, and magenta striped turban, gray or brown blankets, old men side by side on sand, wrapped in blankets with heads along logs. Man with ear and nose ring-nose piercing done for convenient place to put needles."
10. 10. "Canoes with beaks hewed out of trees-all one piece but beak. Women smile at us but baby girl afraid. Pleased at 5c."
11. 11. "Babies with white clothes out paddling canoes, perfect fish, live on water, these coast Indians totally different from interior tribes. The Makahs live by fishing, those use mostly boats made by Vancouver Island Indians, though Indian women told us Makahs made as good as others...go hop picking to make money from that and seal fishing, fur seal \$5 pelt, and then come back and give potlatch. Vancouver Island Indians bring dogfish oil to Mr. Sebastian, trader, to sell because better price than on British side. Have to be watched, won't give full measure of oil."
12. 12. "Women with heavy baskets on back hung from band, woven or straw across flattened head, men in skirts wading in water."
13. 13. "Help load boats, paddle, do all drudgery; men kind if all goes well, but if not, beat [the women]-take quarrels to Indian Agent. In summer when plenty of work fishing, drying out dogfish oil, etc. get along very well, but in winter when nothing else to do, quarrel, Mrs. Powell says."
14. 14. James Gilchrest Swan, a pioneer in 1852, played an important role in the development of the territory. He taught on the Makah Indian Reservation, wrote about his experiences and collaborated with the Smithsonian on ethnological studies of the Makah Indians.

15. 15. Florence must have learned a few words of Chinook, for her notebook mentions talking with some women. But she didn't consider herself proficient enough to mention it in her manuscript. Or she may have meant here talking with them in English.
16. 16. "...sitting on board with bare feet on it in the water bending double to scrub clothing on American scrubbing board ahead of her. Other woman sitting by her keeping her company, doing nothing, hair as usual hanging straight down, dark calico. They both smiled pleasantly as I came up and began talking to them in their language. The idle one noticed my glass the first thing and looked into it with interest. Other woman I saw was looking longingly at it and so I offered to let her take it. She greatly delighted...Fear did not get focus-not up to their image[ination] apparently. Silver bracelets 2 " wide with pretty patterns. Blacksmith apprentice takes silver dollars and hammers out. Also had on pendant-drop silver earrings and finger rings."
17. 17. Probably wild iris.
18. 18. "Gradually made out rows of horizontal poles hanging from ceiling with strips of fish whale etc. smoking, fires with line of lower berths all against wall by side and on these straw-colored mats braided or made by squaws give color."
19. 19. "In one [house], woman in small canoe treading fish oil out of bag with bare feet, oil going into end of canoe."
20. 20. "Hart asked Indian man on boat on way back to Tacoma if taking his little girl hop picking, [and he replied] Oh no, all children die hop picking."
21. 21. "Russian Jim, the medicine man, the one who took us ashore and carried Mama in, is a short thickset old fellow with grizzly hair, flat nose and high forehead. Great fisherman, calls out 'Telacom' as Mrs. Powell goes into his house. 'How d'ydo Telacom.' Has barrels of whale meat and oil in house. Keeps Mrs. Sebastian awake beating tom-tom to drive off spirits when people are sick. Works almost entirely on incantations, etc., no drugs."
22. 22. "At night they sit on the beach looking out at the sea 'til the sun has set, and then keep warm by the blaze of their fires telling who knows how many tales of their forefathers' warfare with the spirits and the legends handed down."
23. 23. "One woman braiding cane-fine stripes of different colors. Other women canes to sell, working squaw sends half-naked boy to boat to bring her canes and does not like it when we do not buy hers. Scowls while favored one smiles profusely."

Harriet Kofalk is a historical researcher, writer, poet and part-time research administrator at the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, California. Her *No Woman Tenderfoot*, a chronicle of Florence Merriam Bailey's life, is being published this spring by Texas A&M University.

MLA Citation:

Kofalk, Harriet. "Torches to Guide Us: A Victorian Woman Braves the Pacific Northwest." *Columbia Magazine*. 3.1 (Spring 1989): 28-37. Date accessed <http://columbia.washingtonhistory.org/anthology/statecalledwashington/torches.aspx>.