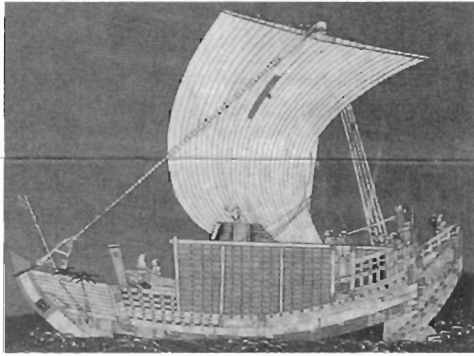


Fort Vancouver

National Historic Site
National Park Service
Vancouver National Historic Reserve

Japanese Castaways



As one of the first permanent European settlements in the Pacific Northwest and the western headquarters for the British Hudson's Bay Company for more than 20 years, Fort Vancouver hosted many important guests. Few were more extraordinary than three Japanese sailors, survivors of the *Hojun-maru*. The fifteen-meter *Hojun-maru* left the port of Nagoya in October of 1832, carrying rice and other gifts for the

Shogun's annual tribute. The journey to Tokyo was less than four hundred miles, but the ship and its cargo would never arrive. Caught in a typhoon, her large rudder snapped and her mast and rigging were rendered useless. At the mercy of the currents, the fourteen-member crew drifted out of control for months, surviving on rice and rainwater. One by one, all but three of the sailors perished.

The Fort's Visitors



The castaways, Otokichi, Kyukichi and Iwakichi

After fourteen months adrift, the *Hojun-maru* finally washed ashore near what is now Cape Flattery, Washington. Three surviving sailors, Otokichi, Kyukichi, and Iwakichi were "rescued" by Makah Indians. Cold, sick, and malnourished, they spent the winter as slaves tied together with leather thongs. The Makah frequently traded with the Hudson's Bay Company, and soon news of the sailor's captivity reached John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of Fort Vancouver. He sent rescue parties by land and sea to "make an investigation and release the

captives." Captain William McNeil, of the *Llama*, found the castaways, ransomed them, and brought them to Fort Vancouver. In his typically hospitable fashion, Dr. McLoughlin gave the sailors medicine, food, and instruction in English. He then secured their passage on a ship to London. McLoughlin hoped the castaways might be returned home and used "as a wedge in opening trade negotiations with the Japanese government." Since 1603, Japan had closed its ports to the outside world.

Adrift in a Sea of Diplomacy

Britain's King William IV financed the sailors' passage to Macao, China. From there the three attempted several times to return to Japan. Only Otokichi met with success. In 1854, serving as translator for *HMS Winchester*, he related his story to Japanese

officials, who offered him repatriation. Having married an English wife and achieved a successful position with the British Navy, Otokichi declined. Thus the status of the sailors as castaways would never truly end.