



The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe

31912 Little Boston Road NE • Kingston, Washington 98346

Cultural History

Before European exploration and settlement forever changed their lifeways, the S'Klallam people exercised a socially complex way of life with each other, other tribes, and the landscape. They had their own territory, which sometimes overlapped with that of others. The people respected the land and the rich resources it provided, as well as the specific places used by individual tribes. Their relationship was one of sharing the land with the animals, rather than claiming ownership of the animals. The balance between people, land, and animals was disrupted in 1850 with the passage of the Oregon Donation Land Act, which offered free land to settlers in the territory that would become the states of Washington and Oregon. The United States was offering land to settlers without first obtaining ownership from the tribes. The transfer of ownership from the S'Klallam to the federal government did not occur until the Treaty of Point No Point was ratified by Congress in 1859 (Lane and Lane 1977:1). Settlers readily took advantage of the opportunity to make land claims under the act.

One of these settlers, Captain Josiah P. Keller, arrived in Port Gamble with his family and the necessary machinery to start the Puget Sound Mill Company in 1853. Keller was part of a San Francisco firm consisting of W.C. Talbot, A.J. Pope, and Charles Foster. Keller found Port Gamble to be the ideal location for the mill site, with its *"large bay, deep water and excellent timber handy to the water's edge"* (Bremerton Sun 1957:3). On October 6, 1853, Keller filed a Donation Land Claim for three sections of land including the Point Julia area, the current town of Port Gamble, and the spit at Teekalet Bluff (on the Northwest side of Port Gamble).

Keller had at least two obstacles to starting his mill at an otherwise ideal location. First, S'Klallam occupants lived at the site and their title had not been transferred to the federal government. Port Gamble S'Klallam elder Sammy Charles (born 1869) described what happened then:

Boston [white people] are located just about on the edge of what was once the Nooksclime's [S'Klallam] grounds.... It just happened that the Nooksclime were camped and fishing on the Gamble spit when the Bostons came. There was talk, talk, talk. The Bostons said that they wanted to put a sawmill there, and would the Indians please move to the other side. There were inducements. There would be lumber, free lumber, and all that the Nooksclime needed to build big houses. They could have the trimmings for firewood, fine firewood, and all they wanted. The clincher was the Christmas treat.... The Nooksclime didn't know what Christmas was, but it sounded good. (Seattle P.I. 1947)

Martha John, who was born in 1891, also spoke of the move:

The Klallams used to live in Port Gamble, where the general store is now, and all around where the Cemetery is located. The Mill people came along and sent the Indian over across the



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Bay, on the Spit. They promised to always have jobs for the men and also gave them enough lumber to build a small house for each family. Every winter the spit would be flooded. A lot of the people died. (John 1975)

Louise Butler (born 1860), Emily Webster (born 1883), and Cyrus Webster (born 1890), described the spit at Point Julia in interviews with John Peabody Harrington in 1942:

The spit downslope of us was the ancient cemetery.... [When] the Port Gamble mill was 1st [sic] established, a whiteman gathered the bones of the cemetery, piled them and poured coal-oil on. Joe Tom's [mother] used to tell about this. That whiteman plowed part of the flat downslope of us here, planting spuds. (Harrington 1981)

The Point No Point Treaty was signed by representatives of the S'Klallam, Skokomish, and Chemakum tribes on January 26, 1855. Issac Stevens signed the treaty on behalf of the United States.

The S'Klallam, Skokomish, and Chemakum ceded or surrendered approximately 750,000 acres of land to the federal government under the treaty, but reserved their aboriginal right to fish, hunt, and gather. The federal government promised the services of a physician, blacksmith, carpenter, and farmer to teach necessary skills, and a school was also to be provided.

There was no money paid for the land, but the treaty stated that \$60,000 would be expended over a twenty year period and “*applied to the use and benefit of said Indians under the direction of the President of the United States, who may from time to time determine at his discretion upon what beneficial object to expend the same*” [Point No Point Treaty 1855]. The tribes also reserved a tract of land at the bend of Hood Canal for their exclusive use. This became the Skokomish Reservation. The S'Klallam did not want to leave their homeland, their fishing sites and hunting territory; unfortunately, they were forcibly moved to the reservation anyway. With their canoes in tow, rounding “*Marrowstone Point, the canoes' occupants, looking back at their ancestral homes, could see their village in flames, burning rapidly to the ground—by order of the Great White Father in Washington, D.C.*” (Lambert 1992:67).

The S'Klallam depicted what it was like shortly after the treaty, in an interview with Edmond Meany:

When all was over the people went back to their villages. The idea that they could seek food where they pleased was the theory the Clallams carried away and clung to from that time on. The present members of the tribe told me that they were not correctly understood at the treaty. This much is certain, they disdained the [Skokomish] reservation. While on that reservation, now all allotted in severalty, I asked particularly if there were any Clallams on the reservation. John Hawk named two, Charley Jones and Mrs. David Charley. He did not know of any others. As a tribe the Clallams recoiled from the agency ideas and sought to maintain



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themselves in the old way, taking up what they wished of new food, clothing and weapons brought among them by the whites. Here was independence and pride. The field of land and sea was wide and wild. (Meany 1905)

Even if the S'Klallam people had agreed to move to the Skokomish Reservation, the 3,840 acre reserve was not large enough to accommodate both tribes, and it was too far for the S'Klallam to access their usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations as guaranteed in the treaty. With the treaty signed, the S'Klallam were quickly deprived of their traditional lands with the increasing homesteads, and they had no land to call their own.

Although Keller's large donation claim was reduced to only the Port Gamble mill site, Pope and Talbot, and other company men acquired title to all of the land around Port Gamble Bay, including most of the land where the current Port Gamble S'Klallam Reservation is located. In 1863 the parcel that eventually became the Port Gamble Reservation was conveyed to Pope and Talbot by the University of Washington, which held title through a land grant selection process. Meanwhile, the S'Klallam remained on mill company land at the spit at Point Julia and worked at the mill across the bay where they were regarded as "*competent workmen*" (Coman 1949:69). The newcomers had acquired all of the land bordering on Port Gamble Bay by 1872, long before the S'Klallam could obtain land under the Indian Homestead Acts of 1875 and 1884.

Without a reservation and with the government failing to meet its treaty obligations, the Port Gamble S'Klallam began to purchase land like the white settlers. On December 8, 1886, Charley Jones, John Soloman, and Cookhouse Charley each bought eleven acres fronting the bay near Point Julia. In 1891 Joseph Anderson received the final certificate on his 80-acre parcel under the Indian Homestead Act. Other Port Gamble S'Klallam who purchased land included George Dan Howell in 1887, Jacob Jones in 1903, and Ed Purser in 1921. More S'Klallam members obtained land through purchase or gift from other S'Klallam. The process of purchasing land, and ensuring that it remained with S'Klallam families signifies the importance the S'Klallam placed on maintaining residence near Point Julia. Unfortunately, much of this land was lost to county tax foreclosures in the 1930s.

While some S'Klallam were able to obtain land and make homes for themselves, others remained landless. In 1915, Thomas G. Bishop, President of the Northwestern Federation of American Indians, initiated an effort to help landless Indians obtain homes on the Quinault Reservation. In 1919, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs requested Special Indian Agent Charles E. Roblin to investigate and report on allotment applications and unenrolled Indians in western Washington. At the end of this investigation, Roblin spoke about the S'Klallam situation: "*Their condition enlists the sympathy of every investigating official who visits them. They refused the offer of allotments of land on the Quinaielt [sic] Indian Reservation, coupled, as it was, with the requirement that they remove to the lands and live on them. They could not live on them. They*



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would starve to death.... The Clallams should be provided with homes near the waters of the Straits of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound, their ancient habitat, and near the large sawmills and logging camps where they can obtain work”(Roblin 1919).

The three S'Klallam bands decided that accepting allotments at Quinault would not benefit them. The Port Gamble S'Klallam selected Peter Jackson to represent them in retaining their homes. Jackson stated that to go to “a wilderness of stumps and begin over again would put them back 50 years” (Bishop 1915:29).

When the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) became law on June 18, 1934 [25 U.S.C. 465], the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to acquire lands for tribes and create reservations for those who remained without a landbase. Many tribes organized and adopted constitutions and by-laws, subject to ratification by vote of tribal members and approval by the Secretary of the Interior. Under the provisions of the IRA, the federal government began the process of purchasing 1,234 acres of land from the mill company near Point Julia. A purchase price of \$15,000.00 was agreed upon, and three years later, on June 16, 1938, the Secretary of the Interior issued a proclamation, setting aside the lands acquired as a reservation “*for the use and benefit of the Port Gamble Band of Clallam Indians*” [48 Stat. L. 984]. After the establishment of the reservation, new homes were built on the bluff overlooking Point Julia and the houses on the spit that had been condemned were burned down. Harry Fulton Jr., a Port Gamble S'Klallam tribal member, was interviewed around 1977 and recalled the burning of the houses on the spit:

The Health Department condemned the homes so there wasn't anything to do but move. They ordered the homes burned because it was a health hazard. The BIA built the homes that we live in now. Some of the older people didn't want to leave the Spit, because it was the only home they knew. They lived there practically all of their lives.... They had to make [Mrs. George Adams] come out of her old home. She was sitting in an old chair, while they were packing her stuff out. She was sitting there crying and talking and singing in Indian. (Fulton [1977])

I must have been about 15 or 16 when they burned down everything on the spit. I remember an old couple sitting there crying, watching their house. They had lived there all their lives, you know. (Mildred Fulton DeCoteau)

Even though the Port Gamble S'Klallam had waited for more than eighty years for a reservation, for the elders who had lived at Point Julia for so long, the change was bittersweet. However, now that their lands were firmly established, the Port Gamble S'Klallam adopted a constitution and began the process to receive compensation for their ceded lands through the Indian Claims Commission (ICC). The ICC was created in 1946 to settle disputes between tribes and the federal government regarding inadequate, or as termed in the act “unconscionable” compensation for cession of tribal lands. After years of proceedings, on May



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4, 1977, the S'Klallam received payment for their claims against the United States. After deducting the \$15,000 that the federal government had paid for the Port Gamble reservation lands, the United States compensated the S'Klallam tribes in the amount of \$327,237 for cession of 438,430 acres of land. The effect of the judgement was that the tribe paid for its own reservation and received less than one dollar per acre for some of the most valuable waterfront real estate in the country. The three S'Klallam bands (Port Gamble, Elwha, and Jamestown) agreed to divide the judgment equally and to manage each share for community purposes such as social services, community facilities, investment, and employment (ICC 1979).

The Port Gamble S'Klallam had waited for more than eighty years for a reservation and 122 years for compensation of the lands they ceded. Today, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe has a reservation with 100% tribal trust status and no individual or outside ownership. Trust status precludes state jurisdiction and has maximized tribal control over their 1,340-acre reservation.

The Port Gamble people have ensured their survival through an exceptional ability to adapt and adjust to changes imposed upon them. They have demonstrated a sheer will power and determination to remain together as a community. Knowing that they can take care of themselves, they found the necessary strength within their own culture to refuse to accept allotments on other reservations. Today, the S'Klallam maintain tribal traditions which began before the treaty period. S'Klallam people carry a deep sense of cultural pride, which will carry them forward and will continue to be a source of strength needed for the future.

Heritage Programs:

An epic 400 mile open-ocean canoe journey to Bella Bella, British Columbia, in 1993, revitalized S'Klallam participation in canoe travel to tribal gatherings throughout the Pacific Northwest. Since then, the tribe regularly participates in annual canoe journeys, such as the A-ka-lat Gathering to the Quileute Reservation, the Salmon Homecoming ceremony in Seattle, and the Power Paddle to Puyallup.

In order to sustain the diversity of plants and herbs traditionally used by the S'Klallam for healing purposes, the tribe has planted a healing garden in front of the Health Clinic. The garden is a tranquil and calm place for people to visit, sit, and meditate.

An outdoor amphitheater surrounded by the native plant garden is used for community events including the tribe's annual Environmental Day. Work continues on the construction of a magnificent traditional longhouse that will serve as a cultural and educational center and a community meeting place.



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The Port Gamble S'Klallam continue to engage in traditional fishing and hunting practices protected under their 1855 treaty. They also practice traditions and participate in ceremonies similar to those that existed prior to 1855.

The Port Gamble S'Klallam are very proud of their young adult tribal members, including Tleena Ree Ives, who was named Miss Indian USA of 1997-1998. Tleena represents not only the Port Gamble S'Klallam, but all Northwest tribes, as she is the first Miss Indian USA selected from the Northwest in the history of the pageant. Tleena takes a strong stance against alcohol and drug abuse and advocates a healthy lifestyle.

The reward of living in this beautiful place on the bay is the connection one feels with the natural world. The Port Gamble S'Klallam respect and revere their elders and delight in their children and extended families. They also take great pride in their tribe's accomplishments.

Suggested Reading:

Klallam Ethnography by Erna Gunther, 1927

Seya's Song by Ron Hirschi, 1992.

Shadows of Our Ancestors: Readings in the History of Klallam-White Relations

by Jerry Gorsline, 1992.

Published in "*Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula: Who We Are*," by Jacilee Wray.

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