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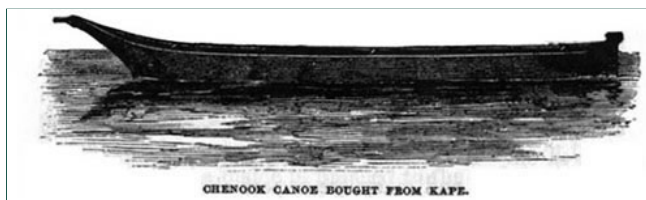
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Document 3: James Swan Describes Northwest Indians' Methods of Building Canoes

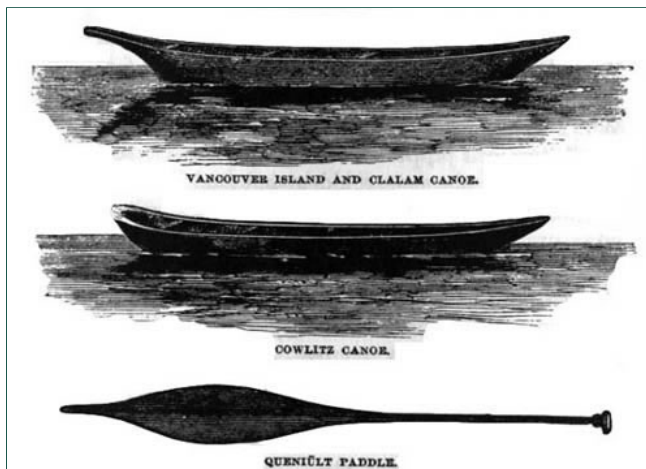
James Swan, *The Northwest Coast; or Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), p. 78-82.

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Among the Indians who came to the Bay [Willapa Bay] to work was a chief of the Queniult [Quinault] Indians, a tribe who live on the banks of a river of the same, which empties into the Pacific five miles north of Point Grenville, or about sixty miles north of Shoal-water Bay [Shoal-water Bay is now called Willapa Bay]. This tribe is considered a very hostile race by other Indians. . . . The chief, whose name is Kape, was accompanied by two of his sons and a large party of his people. He came in a large canoe, which he wished to sell me, and as I wanted one of that description, I purchased his. The old fellow remained with me a couple of weeks, and we formed a great friendship for each other. . . . This visit was the foundation of a friendship with Kape and his tribe, which lasted unbroken during my residence in the Territory. The canoe which I had purchased was a beauty. She was *forty-six feet long and six feet wide*, and had thirty Indians in her when she crossed the bar at the mouth of the Bay. She was the largest canoe that had been brought from up the coast, although the Indians round Vancouver's and Queen Charlotte's Islands have canoes capable of carrying one hundred warriors. These canoes are beautiful specimens of naval architecture. Formed of a single log of cedar, they present a model of which a white mechanic might well be proud.



The other canoes are the forms used by the Indians about Fuca Straits and farther north, as being best adapted for rough water, and the Cowlitz canoe, which is mostly used on the rivers of the interior. The broad bow of the latter form is to enable the Indian to have a firm footing while he uses his pole to force the canoe over the rapids. The paddle is the shape used by the Indians in deep water, and is different from the Chenook paddle, which is notched at the end.



The manufacture of a canoe is a work of great moment [importance] with these Indians. It is not every man among them that can make a canoe, but some are, like our white mechanics, more expert than their neighbors. A suitable tree is first selected, which in all cases is the cedar, and then cut down. This job was formerly a formidable one, as the tree was chipped around with stone chisels, after the fashion adopted by beavers, and looks as if gnawed off. At present, however, they understand the use of the axe, and many are expert choppers. When the tree is down, it is first stripped of its bark, then cut off into the desired length, and the upper part split off with little wedges, till it is reduced to about two thirds the original height of the log. The bows and stern are then chopped into a rough shape, and enough cut out of the inside to lighten it so that it can be easily turned. When all is ready, the log is turned bottom up, and the Indian goes to work to fashion it out. This he does with no instrument of measurement but his eye, and so correct is that, that when he has done his hewing no one could detect the least defect. When the outside is formed and rough-hewn, the log is again turned, and the inside cut out with the axe. This operation was formerly done by fire, but the process was slow and tedious. During the chopping the Indian frequently ascertains the thickness of the sides by placing one hand on the outside and the other on the inside. The canoe is now again turned bottom up, and the whole smoothed off with a peculiar-shaped chisel, used something after the manner of a cooper's adze. This is a very tiresome job, and takes a long time. Then the inside is finished, and the canoe now has to be stretched into shape. It is first nearly filled with water, into which hot stones are thrown, and a fire at the same time of bark is built outside. This in a short time renders the wood so supple that the centre can be spread open at the top from six inches to a foot. This is kept in place by sticks or stretchers, similar to the method of a boat's thwarts. The ends of these stretchers are fastened by means of withes [twigs] made from the taper ends of cedar limbs, twisted and used instead of cords. When all is finished, the water is emptied out, and then the stem and head-pieces are put on. These are carved from separate sticks, and are fastened on by means of withes and wooden pegs or tree-nails. After the inside is finished to the satisfaction of the maker, the canoe is again turned, and the charred part, occasioned by the bark fire, is rubbed with stones to make the bottom as smooth as possible, when the whole outside is painted over with a black mixture made of burned rushes and whale oil. The inside is also painted red with a mixture of red ochre and oil. The edges all round are studded with little shells, which are the valve joint of the common snail, and, when brass-headed nails can be obtained, they are used in profusion. This description I give is of the making of a canoe near my house, and I saw the progress every day, from the time the tree was cut down till the canoe was finished. This was a medium sized canoe, and took three months to finish it.