

Douglas' Report to Pakington

This document is a Colonial Despatch sent in 1852 by James Douglas, Governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island, to Sir John Pakington, his superior at the British Colonial Office in London, England.

Our relations with the Native Tribes, continued in the most satisfactory state up to the 5th Inst., [the 5th day of this month] when an event occurred which I fear may lead to serious difficulties with the Cowegin [Cowichan] Tribe. The event of which I have reference is the foul and wanton murder of Peter Brown a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company, by some Cowegin Indians, at one of the Company's [HBC] sheep stations, about 5 miles distant from this place, under circumstances of great atrocity. In such cases we are naturally led to suspect the existence of some exciting cause, of some previous injury or provocation, that has tempted the untutored mind of the Savage to commit a fearful crime, but after the closest investigation of that case I have not been able to discover any mitigating circumstance whatever, which can be urged in extenuation of its guilt [provide a reason to excuse his actions]. The murder of Peter Brown may be therefore regarded in the light of a mere wanton outrage, as this unfortunate victim, of savage treachery was known to be a remarkably quiet and inoffensive young man, the only son of a respectable widow in Orkney.

The circumstances attending the murder are detailed in my correspondence with Captain Kuper of Her Majesty's Ship "Thetis" now fortunately stationed in the neighbouring Port of Esquimalt, of which I herewith transmit a copy, and I feel gratified in reporting, for your information, that he has promised to cooperate with this Government, by means of the force under his command in the measures that may be adopted for bringing the criminals to justice. It is reported that they have fled towards the Nanaimo Country, with the intention of taking refuge among their friends in that quarter, and a force will be sent as soon as we collect the means of transporting it, to that part of the coast, to apprehend them wherever they may be found, as the peace and quiet of the Colony will be best preserved by bringing them to justice with as little delay as possible.

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Pakington, 933, CO 305/3, p. 147; received 29 January 1853, [No. 8], Vancouver's Island, Fort Victoria, 11th November 1852.