

Excerpts from Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, *The Nootka: Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*. Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1987. (Original work published in 1868.)

*They worked occasionally as labourers, and with their wages bought new blankets and planks for their houses ... They acquired a taste for flour, rice, potatoes, and other articles of food that were sold to them at low prices, and thus, on the whole, probably spent the first winter after the arrival of the colonists more comfortably than usual. It was only after a considerable time that symptoms of a change, amongst the Indians living nearest to the white settlement, could be noticed ... that a few sharp-witted young natives had become what I can only call offensively European, and that the mass of the Indians no longer visited the settlement in their former free independent way, but live listlessly in the villages, brooding seemingly over heavy thoughts ...*

*The natives are as careful of their crab-apples as we are of our orchards, and it is a sure sign of their losing heart before intruding whites when, in the neighbourhood of settlements, they sullenly cut down their crab-apple trees, in order to gather the fruit for the last time without trouble, as the tree lies on the ground.*

These excerpts describe the decline of the Tseshaht people on the west coast of Vancouver Island after their village was turned into a sawmill settlement and their waterways became controlled by the British Navy. One might assume these excerpts illustrate commonly held beliefs about the role alcohol has played in unravelling Aboriginal cultures since first contact with European explorers and settlers.

However, Sproat ruled the settlement like an industrial tyrant and would not allow the importing of "intoxicating liquors." Moreover, even though the Aboriginal peoples of North America, like Polynesians, were unique in not having alcohol in their diets, many native societies exposed to alcohol managed to control its use without great difficulty, or alcohol use became problematic only after their culture had disintegrated.

