

LETTERS ON THE NORTHWEST FUR TRADE

Captain Eliah Grimes was master of the American brig *Owhyhee*, owned by Marshall & Wildes of Boston. He wrote the letters here reproduced to the owners giving information which was important for business reasons then and which is now of value to history after the lapse of ninety-eight years.

The originals of the letters are lost. These copies are from the letter-book of Josiah Marshall. That letter-book belongs to my mother, who is a descendant of Josiah Marshall. It is a pleasure to send these letters out to the Pacific Northwest where they originated.

Josiah Marshall was born in Bellerica, Massachusetts, in 1771. His father was a lieutenant in the Revolutionary army, and he was ninth in descent from a captain in Oliver Cromwell's army. Josiah Marshall, as a youth, went to Boston where he developed into a wealthy merchant. He engaged largely in the East India trade and is credited with having conceived great commercial plans for the northwest coast of America, which John Jacob Astor later developed in part. Mr. Marshall died in Providence, Rhode Island, in November, 1848.

It may be of interest to add that William Isaac Marshall, 1840-1906, was of the same family.

SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON.

Copies of Letters on the Fur Trade

Tungass, July 8th 1822

Gentlemen,

I have shipped on board the Ship *Hamilton* Capt. Martin, the furs that I have as pr bill of Lading however small in number, it is as many as I expected to get in the length of time I have been on, considering the number of vessels here, skins has become very scarce and dear, five will remain on after Captns Meek & Martin leaves, I have thought best for your interest to divide with the vessels that remain on the Coast notwithstanding my cargo is better than the rest except Capt Cross which I find is about the same in fact I could not have done otherways without the Skins costing 20\$ or more as the rest could give two fathoms and buy cheaper Skins than I can; even giving one more will always turn the scale with

these people. Should you think of sending more cargo for the Brig, I should advise that the blankets should be from \$4. to 4½ and some 3.60 cent in order there may be an assortment have them nearly the size of those on board none with a double wale which makes them more valuable than those that has cost \$6 per pair the blue stripe indigo dyed.

Duffil say pr yard from 1\$ to 1¼ indigo dye which gives a bright colour and more saleable, what I have seen out here that has been coloured with logwood find a great deal of it rotten which is owing to the colouring. The blue cloth is to dear by one dollar per yard however that I shall not want this four years to come unless I meet with success, red cloth is wanted as it is twice the value of Blue, say two Bales, Gurrah one half gone and shall lose near one hundred skins the remainder of this season and next for the want there of should you send let the number of Bales be not less than 21 or 14—Kendrick muskets are of no more value than the French in fact they are not so saleable the Speak musket is of more value, one or two bales of India chintz will do well to purchase land furs & Tails 30 or 40 lb. red lead to mix with vermilion—send buck shot instead of lead except what is wanted for balls I have tried in the most compact way and find there is from 25 to 30 pr cent loss in running lead into shot, the greatest proportion wants to be of the largest kind, as it is used altogether for hunting otter, more than one half the lead is already gone I shall not have enough to last half next sea-son, I should say it would take 20 or 21 Cwt for the year and two thirds or more of it buck shot. Powder with what I have on board will last this two years if that is not sold at the Islands, whenever you send it let it be in kegs as there is a loss in the barrels the price of a skin is two kegs and emptying them into kegs we shall have to fill them all, whereas none of the kegs are full by an inch or more and some two inches. I shall want 20 or 25 M pearl buttons without brass eyes which I intend going alone this season so that you may send them out the first opportunity, The rum does well should you send more be sure and have it coloured. on a consultation of all the masters on the coast that is Capts Clark, Cross, Harris, Stetson. we have thought it for the interest of our owners to purchase the remains of Capt. Martins cargo as he was determined to give 9 & 10 fathoms for a skin with all the presents in that case we should not have been able to have got a skin, we know for a fact that the natives have kept them back for that purpose what we bought is the best of his cargo for which we have paid 16 prime skins, 16 cubs—30 beaver—30 land otter each—

The principal object I had in view was to have some of the brigs cargo to meet others of the same value as the Skins I buy at the cheapest rate are very dear, Those moreens will not sell to any advantage on this coast, however they may on California. At the Islands I wrote you respecting goods for that coast to the amount of 10 or 15 thousand dollars should I get those by Capt Meek or should not I would advise the amount not to be more than 8. or 9 thousand including the memorandum for Capt Meek, since have understood the Brig *Quill* is intended for that coast however those goods that was intended to be brought out by Capt Meek for *Quill* will not injure the sale of as they are intended for the missions where there is the principal part of the money, I am in want of flour as I had but four barrels when I left the Islands we find three $\frac{1}{2}$ was used on the passage to the Island by the log book, as it comes much cheaper out here deducting the freight of bread casks the Sultan has 70 or 80 bbls, of which I can get some.

The Brig has been very unfortunate in sickness & death John Winneberger a young man I shipped at the Islands died on 19th of April of a consumption, Mr. Hawkshurst (the clerk) on the 16th of May we have had from three to seven most of the time sick until within about a month, Stephen Sweat who came out in the *Tamahourelanne*, has been sick for six weeks past and grows worse so much that I shall send him to the Islands they complain of violent cold pains in the breast and head which I think is owing in a great measure to brig being so fully salted she is damp from one end to the other, also shall send a mutinous fellow by the name of John Reed who was one of the liberty's crew who shipped in Boston which Capt Wildes knows the particulars, I have had a serious proof of his conduct also two others as they resorted to pistols knives axes & clubs. I intend getting two of them to the Islands if I can obtain a passage, Capt Clark has been obliged to go to Norfolk Sound and land eight or 10 of his in fact no vessel on the coast but what has had a great deal of trouble. I wish for your own interest you would select a set of young men of good habits and send out expressly for the Brig if young and not seamen, let their agreement be after being out such a length of time, that their wages may be advanced as they become better seamen, in order that they may be better satisfied with their situation also a young man as clerk and to assist me in making up small trade. During the time I have been on the Coast I have been quite unwell and lame with rheumatism which is owing to a cold caught on California at the time of my relieving the people that was captured by the Spaniards. I wish you to inform me

whether Mr. French is your agent at Canton or who is should not Capt Wildes, or Mr Jones be in these or Canton.

Respectfully Yours
signed Eliah Grimes

Brig *Owhyhee* N. W. Coast of America

P. S. The enclosed is an invoice of merchandise bought of Capt Martin, the brig will want tobacco next season you may calculate on 1 hhd a year and 40 or 50 good French muskets with Brass pans as there is many places the Kendrick muskets will not sell. also medicines such as, Antimonial wine Burgundy pitch doven powders doses half of it gr 15 each other, flaxseed half in powder, Paragoric, Essence of peppermint, Spirits of Nitre dulcified, Syrup of Squils, Spirits of Hartshorn Tincture of myrrh, Balsam Copavia, Laudanum Gum kino in power, Opodeldock, Elixir Vitriol, Turlington Balsam, Camphor—

I have reason to believe if those medicines had been on board, the complaints might have been removed as they were occasioned by colds. The reason of my having the bills of lading made out in this way is that possibly one of your vessels might be at the Islands, in so doing it would save half the freight, should any alteration take place at the Islands Mr. Jones will inform you. I wish you to send a quantity of log paper all the old newspapers for making up small trade such as mush. log paper for shot & powder as we are entirely destitute, also dozen of good locks have got some two diqr rot[sic] on board, bills of laden are wanted.

August 11th Tungass N. W. C. America

Gentlemen,

Since shipping the furs on board the *Hamilton* of July 9th, I have been able to collect 74 black skins besides land furs as per bill of lading and sent to Canton under the same direction as heretofore—that part of the cargo I bought of Capt Martin so far has done well and believe it will not rising one hundred per cent profit, one advantage will be derived from it, it will lengthen out the other woolen and bring the skins much cheaper than those that are all bought of the Brigs. The standing price of skins is three fathoms of duffil, three blankets, 2 gals Rice 2 molasses besides the small presents or two French or two Kendrick muskets, or two kegs of powder, those Holland christal liquor cases do well, one for a prime skin, with from one to three galls, Rum, . . .

(signed) Eliah Grimes