

DOCUMENTS.

It is proposed to reproduce in this department of the Quarterly rare journals, diaries, letters or other documents throwing light upon the history of the Northwest. Effort will be made to reproduce such papers faithfully, errors and all, so that every student and reader may have them at face value.

Hudson Bay Company Letters.

While writing her last book, "McDonald of Oregon," Mrs. Eva Emery Dye obtained through the help of Mr. R. E. Gosnell, then in the employ of the British Columbia government, copies of a considerable number of old letters in the Canadian archives, which today are of exceeding interest in the history of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. These letters were written by the leading men of the Hudson Bay Company here from 1829 to 1840, including John McLoughlin, James Douglas, John Work, Peter S. Ogden, Archibald McDonald, Duncan Finlayson, J. E. Harriott, Wm. Todd and George T. Allen, and were addressed chiefly to John McLeod and Edward Ermatinger, names equally familiar in the records and annals of the Hudson Bay Company. These communications were in character a combination of friendship, confidence, business and gossip, making them more readable and in some respects more valuable than would be the purely official letters sent by the same men to the head office at Fenchurch Street, London. The Washington Historical Quarterly will take pleasure in reproducing in print these old letters, copies of which have been kindly furnished by Mrs. Dye, enabling them to take their proper place in the history of the North Pacific Coast.

Trouble With the Indians.

William Todd writes from York Factory on 15 July, 1829, to Edward Ermatinger at St. Thomas, Upper Canada, giving the latest news of Fort Vancouver, then but four years old. The Americans here casually referred to have been overlooked in the histories of this time and place.

York Factory 15th July 1829

Dear Edward

You will I believe not be much surprised at my replying to your esteemed favour from this place where I arrived the 5th inst after the usual agreeable journey across the mountains. As you

will naturally be anxious to hear the news from your old quarters (Vancouver) I shall without further ceremony commerce altho aware these will be more fully detailed by Frank and our old friend Work both of whom I left in good health the latter particularly sore at the late promotions and Frank talking as loud as ever by the bye he appears a favourite with the great man.

You had hardly left Vanr. when we were put on the alert by Indian reports (of the capture of Fort Langley and massacre of Mr McMillan and party) it is needless to say without their being any foundation for them; nevertheless the Doctor took it much to heart and so far credited it that Mr Birnie was prepared to follow you express with the dismal news when it was contradicted. Nothing again of moment occurred till the arrival of the Brigade from the Interior Casualties on their way down three men drowned at the lower part of the Priests Rapids a keg of castoreum & some dressed skins lost Bostowvis was in the boat & had a narrow escape. An expedition against the Clalhins as Frank told me he had sent you his Journal which I have no doubt is a masterpiece of the kind and to which I refer you for particulars, It was a failure the effects of which has been since severely felt. Frank was talking high on the business without respect to persons, you know his way. On the 10th August Mr Smith an American & three men made their appearance being the Commissioner of a party of twenty men, I saw him in California which place he left in January with 315 horses & mules arrived at the Umpqua on the 10th July four days after his party attacked & sixteen murdered by the Indians he was himself absent with two men examining the country for grazing horses, his sensations on his return could not have been very pleasant he was fired on when he returned, but gained the woods without receiving several slight wounds. Another expedition must now be fitted out to recover this gentlemens property & this was not a very popular measure either with men or gentlemen as it was thought we would have difficulty enough to hold our own being already at war to the northward but the Dr. would have his way and Mr McLeod was again fitted out with a party to proceed there and after using his efforts, to continue his journey to the Bonaventura in California take of course all the beaver he could fall in with. He succeeded in recovering most of the furs but making considerable sacrifices and losing so much time that the winter set in before he had the business settled and was obliged to take up his quarters in his old hunting ground, he paid Vancouver a visit about Christmas time much to the astonishment of the Doctor who sanguine as usual imagined him near San Francisco. Your old friend Ouvrie had a narrow escape of leaving his scalp on one of his divisions his brother in law having killed an Indian who was accompanying him (Ouvrie) to Chicalias [Chehalis] and obliged him to return, the friends of the Indian who belong to the Fort George side took to their arms and would have soon made a finish had not the Princess^e sent him

out of the way till the hurry was over. The American Brig *Ouwyhee* paid us a visit in February & a schooner her consort in March both were then when we left fine picking for the mercenary Chinooks a beaver being now equal to five in days of yore. The Most melancholy part of my narrative relates to the Coy's Brig *Wm & Ann* she crossed the bar on the 10th March but from some fatality (I can call it nothing else) struck on the spit at the mouth of the River, Captain Swan & all the crew
(I write in charge of Brandon House)

26 persons embarked in the boats & landed at Clatsop point when they were butchered by the natives not a soul left to tell the melancholy tale this no doubt will cause another war excursion it is to be hoped they will acquit themselves better than the last. Having now given you the principle heads I shall conclude with my sincere wishes for your future welfare & happiness & am

Dear Ned

Yours very truly

WM. TODD.

Miles says he will write you by the ship.

Beginning of Fraser River Fisheries.

Archibald McDonald writes to a friend in the East, giving among the gossip a fine glimpse of the first attempts at using the salmon fisheries which have since grown to such vast proportions.

Fort Langley, 20th Feb'y, 1831

My dear Mc.

I have very great pleasure in acknowledging rec^t of your kind letter of July last from your old quarters, which came only to hand five days ago via Puget Sound after a march of 11 weeks thro the different tribes between Vancouver and this & when I tell you that my private letters alone furnished the whole of my news from Hudsons Bay, you can guess at the avidity with which I glanced over two & thirty of them. It is with very sincere regret I find by yours that you enjoyed but very indifferent health last season—a blessing as you say, we never sufficiently appreciate when we have it, & when decay and sickness overtake us, few mortals present a more dismal and forlorn situation than an Indian Trader, in a manner abandoned by the world & by himself. Thanks to the great Father of all blessings I have had little cause of complaint myself since I last had the pleasure to address you; yet I have had awful warnings about me. I have buried two of my men since—Jno. Kennedy who was unwell but still walked about entered our kitchen one day in the month of April and dropp'd dead on the floor. In the month of August, another of them (Therien) ran out of the Fort in sound health and was brought in a corpse in a very few minutes—his case was

*Note.—Probably King Concomly's daughter.

an accident—shot by one of the Guns of the Vancouver. I was very sorry indeed to hear of poor McKenzies death, but no one tells me how it happened. Finlayson says he died in June, and you say it was in Jan'y. When I wrote to you last I was not aware of Mr. Deases fate, poor man—it would have been much better had he not returned to the Columbia. I should now like to give you some of our West side News and you know my itching in general for writing long letters; but really if I attempted on this occasion it would be with great disadvantage, for almost the whole of the occurrences of any importance in this quarter are known to me but by mere report; there is lots of it however, & the loss of another Brig is not the least important—their Honours liberality however in that way, by sending out two others beside, has saved other distance. One of them returned to England with the Returns and the other with the two schooners is cruising about I believe at present the Brig and the Vancouver are to California & the Sandwich Islands, with Deals and salted salmon, & the whole three of them on their return, will proceed with Ogdens Expedition to Nass, which from various causes was put off last year. He succeeded in the Snake country by Work and probably McLeod will be the Bearer of this. Our friend Black is at Kamloops and our t'other friend at Colville. I take no credit for this Kind of News to you, because it is such as everyone will report—then let us back again to Ft. Langley, where I shall defy any man to speak of, unless it passes thro my hands—to be more plain (for actually I do not thoroughly comprehend myself in what I wrote then (I shall write upon Frasers River affairs, because tis only myself that knows anything about it by having the field to myself, however, do not suppose that I impose upon you when I say that in the face of two vessels our Trade is not 150 skins less the Great Returns of the year before, and that this defficincy is more than made up by 220 Barrels of Salmon, and the Establishment now to one clerk and 10 men besides 2 or 3 raw Owhyhees. If the Americans are off this year I hope things will be still better. 'Am now preparing from 2 to 300 Barrels to be at the salmon immediately in the commencement of the season—they say a cooper is come across for me but we saw nothing of him as yet. In Consequence of my Casks of last season losing the pickle, the Dr. sent none of them to market but sent his own, and kept ours for home Consumption, so the end is always assured and perhaps this ought at all times to be the arrangement as the Columbia fish is acknowledged better than ours. Curious they are caught a week or two sooner at the bridge than here—last season it was approaching the end of August before they appeared here.

I must now congratulate you all on the great acquisition to your society of late. The Governor's residence at Red River must give a wonderful luster of the state of affairs there—and it is to be hoped that his own health will also improve there. I see our grand Joint Stock Company has fallen to the ground and an Experimental Farm substituted in its stead under the super-

intendance of my predecessor here. So you see our rank N'Westers give a hand to promote the interest of poor Red River—by the by I hand a letter from Mr. Halkett by the last conveyance—he has returned from the continent with Lady and family and were then living near London with Lady Isabella Douglas—Countess Selkirk was daily expected there with her two daughters from Scotland and Lord Selkirk was at Oxford—grown tall like his father—stout and in good health—what nonsense I do write to a man just returning from England—never mind I did not give it a thought at the moment that you was across the big water and I knew it would give you pleasure to hear of the family. Jenny and the Boys are well—I think I forgot to tell you that her 3'd came to the world last Oct'r—quite enough to transport out of this rascally country. You see I must conclude and it will be with fresh assurances of my sincere good wishes for your better health and prosperity—Yours

ARCH'D
McDONALD.

Heavy Losses Reported.

J. F. Harriott, writing from Fort Vancouver, gives a gloomy picture of losses by wrecks and fever, and claims that men who had once served in this Northwest should not be compelled to return. This comports ill with the record of the many who came back to die in the land they had learned to love, even in its days of wildness.

To

John McLeod, Esq'r,
Hon'ble H. B. Co.

Fort Vancouver, 25th Feb. 1831

Dear Sir,

As the express is preparing to part somewhat earlier than usual and as I have given up long since all hopes of accompanying it, I take my pen to address you a few lines to let you know that I am still living and enjoying good health though not so comfortably situated as I could wish, however I must put up with that part as well as I can and live in hopes of at any rate going out next spring. I am sorry to inform you that the Columbia has again been prolific in misfortunes, in fact more so than ever, in the first place the loss of the Isabella which although not attended with such melancholy circumstances as the wreck of the William & Ann caused a great commotion in the lower part of the Columbia and had not Dr. McLoughlin gone down himself I do not doubt that something very disagreeable would have taken place, even as it was he had some difficulty in keeping things together, the next on the list of misfortunes was Mr. Ogdens loss at the Dalles, one of his Boats was swallowed up in a whirlpool and nine men and a woman and two children perished and I am sorry to say what I met with a similar accident in a Rapid

a little above Okanagan one of my Boats struck upon a stone and upset and seven of the crew perished, add to all this misfortune the Intermitting Fever which broke out here in August and was still (when I reached this on the 1st Nov'r and for some time after) raging with great violence most of the inhabitants of the villages in this vicinity were carried off by it and a number of the women and children of the Establishment also some of our men Mr. Anderson died in December in fact that has no less
ture in some shape or other. It is really alarming to think of the number of deaths that have taken place in so short a time. I am afraid it will prevent people from volunteering for this side of the mountains. I am not however aware that many were ever over-anxious on that score but on the reverse rather desirous of keeping from it as long as they could. I know it was the case with me, though now was it not for my private misfortune I should be very well satisfied with my situation, but at all events would by far prefer going and coming from F F yearly—this arises from an unsold [unsettled] disposition for I am never contented long in the same place.

Our vessels sailed in Nov'r, The Dryad Captain Simpson for Monterey laden with salted salmon and Deals and with the same commodities we are now daily looking out for them and when they arrive the famous Nass expedition will soon be set on foot, this Expedition was to have started last Fall but so many of our people were laid up with the Fever that rendered it altogether impossible to budge in fact when I reached this there was only one man on board the Dryad able to do duty all the rest were under the Hatches.

Mr. Simon McGillivray reached this on the 6th Jan'y and after regalling himself a few days at this place took his departure for Walla Walla to replace Mr. Barnston who intends to return at least to the East side of the Rocky Mountains Messrs. McLeod, Kittson, Pamburn Annance and Douglas are by the present arrangements to accompany the Express besides Messrs Connolly and McDonald who passed via Peace River this makes a great hole in our complement of Gentlemen a number of recruits will be wanted but really I do not see where they will come from, there are now very few who have not tasted the sweets of the Columbia and New Caledonia and it would certainly be considered hard to send those back who have already passed three or four years and have had the satisfaction of getting safe out of it.

I am sorry to inform you that our Returns have this year fallen off at least at this place and what renders it more disagreeable our expenditure is greater but I hope the ensuing campaign will turn out something handsome.

Wishing you a pleasant meeting with your family I remain

Dear Sir,

Yours truly,

J. E. HARRIOTT.

Beaver Growing Scarce.

Peter Skeen Ogden, who later became Chief Factor of New Caledonia, continued on the West Coast until, at the age of sixty, he died in Oregon City at the home of his son-in-law, Archibald McKinlay, in 1854. In this chatty letter he gives some quaint views of life as well as news of the day.

John McLeod, Esq'r
&c. &c. &c.

Col. River.

Vancouver 10 March, 1831

My dear Sir,

On my arrival last Feb'y from my Trapping Excursion I received your friendly favor from Norway House dated August 1829 and was glad to find from it that you did not include me amongst the evil disposed towards you—pray what motive could I have to injure any man even granting he had injured me it would in my opinion be a miserable retaliation. On the arrival of Mr. Harriott in the Fall I was dissapointed in not hearing from you but as he informed me you were making preparations for a voyage across the Atlantic on the plea of ill health this I trust you are again in the enjoyment of and I am fully convinced a visit to their Honors occasionally in Fenchurch Street with some well tim'd remark is of more service than 10 years hard labour in this Country and will eventually well repay you the money you have expended while in London. Our friend Lewis has succeeded and I consider him a fortunate man but still more so old Capt. McKenzie who long since I had consigned to his grave and who really is not in want, but no doubt all these things are wisely ordain'd and every man's time will come in the course of time. I am so much harrassed here that I shall not enter into particulars but refer you to Mr. Harriott who intends writing you a long letter we have spent the winter in the same room. Bachelors and have both behaved uncommonly well a good change in me, since you left the Columbia I have increased the number of my children by ten and although I should remain Fifty years longer in the Country not one more will add to the number the Bachelors Flag I have hoisted and if ever I leave it, it will not be in the H. B. Coys territories. I was not so successful in my last years Trapping as the year preceding although I extended my trails by far greater distance to the Gulph of California but found Beaver very scarce and unfortunately below the main Dalls of the Col. my own Boat was engulfed in a Whirlpool and 9 men drowned. I had a most narrow escape—on my arrival here I found from the Committee Letter I was appointed to form an Establishment at a place called Nass about 10 degrees to the Northward of this and was to have sail'd last Fall but an infectious fever made its appearance amongst the Natives carried off upwards of two hundred and our servants unfortunately took it and for three Months

we had no one at our command. We are now again making preparations for this same place. I know not what success I may meet with there but I am not of the opinion our wealth will be increased.

Our friend Work has succeeded me in the Snake country I accompanied him as far as Nez Perces and gave him a fair starting—surely this man deserves a most substantial reward than he now enjoys it is an unpleasant situation he fills I wish him every success but it is all a lottery.

Believe me to be

Yours truly

PETER SKEIN OGDEN.

P. S. My regards to Charlotte and the children
Mr. Black, Thompson River
Mr. Simon Nez Perce
Mr. Ermatinger here
Mr. Heron Colville a snug birth [berth]

Reference to Americans.

John Work here gives just a tantalizing reference to a meeting with Americans at that early date. He also pictures the dangers these daring men continually encountered.

Fort Nez Perces 6th September 1831

Dear Sir,

It is with much pleasure I have to acknowledge the receipt of your kind favour of 30th July 1830, which was handed me on my arrival from Snake country about a month and a half ago. I was sorry to hear of your ill health, but hope that ere now your visit to the civilized world has completely renewed you indeed I had the pleasure to hear from Capt. Kipling that you were all well before the *Ganymede* sailed from London. I envy you the pleasure you have enjoyed of civilized life, which I have so long deprived myself of. I fear the seclusion of an Indian life with its want of comfort or anything like enjoyment will be very irksome to you. My last campaign in the Snake country was not so successful as I had anticipated, the return and profits were nevertheless pretty fair considering the exhausted state of the country and the great severity and unusual length of the winter, which was greatly against our trapping operations. Moreover we met some parties of Americans who had hunted some portions of the country through which we meant to pass. I escaped with a scalp last year. I much doubt whether I shall be so fortunate this trip. I am now just starting for the borders of the Black-foot and F Head lands a much more dangerous part of the country than which I passed last year. My party is too weak for the undertaking, but from the sickness prevailing at Vancouver no more men could be spared but as this is the only quarter now where there is a likelihood of making anything we must try. The country to the southward is ruined so much

that little or nothing is to be done in it. An intermittent fever was raging at Vancouver when I left, this scourge was carrying off the few wretched natives who escaped last year, it had also attacked several of the people about the establishment. My people did not escape it several of them were taken ill, and some of them remained so badly that I am obliged to leave them here as they are not able to proceed, this I much regret as my numbers at first were too weak. Before this reaches you you will have had all the Columbian news. I need therefore not trouble you on the subject. Wishing you every manner of happiness I remain my dear sir

Yours sincerely & truly

JOHN WORK.

Beginning of Fort Simpson.

Archibald McDonald tells of the successful establishment of Fort Simpson and at the same time chats along about Fort Langley and his pleasant surroundings there.

John McLeod, Esq'r.

Fort Langley 15th Jan'y 1832

My dear Sir,

Your very usual kind token of remembrance for me, duly came to hand last fall, & I congratulate you most sincerely on the happy change in your own health within the last twelve months, this, as you say, is of all others the most valuable promotion we can enjoy & to appearance thos who have the state of us in that respect, seem to make up their minds to sacrifice everything to a constant adherence to their state of commotion. There may be some policy in begging their continuance in the service, but I cannot see into it, unless tis that of making the Bench of Counsellors more respectable by being gray and venerable. I have no doubt you will find your situation in the Labrador more cheerful and comfortable than at Jack river and it may perhaps after all lead to greater renown. I am glad to hear you had so favourable an interview with the great Folk of the concern at home, & one thing certain those occasional visits to England can do a man no harm, especially when he can do it at his own expense, and with becoming respectability. Our friend Clark did not write me on his return. I wish you had given me more of his adventures. Were you and he always of the same opinion? I hear not. Mr. Stewart you must have found a most amiable man and I conceive you are very fortunate in your choice of a traveling companion—he wrote me a long letter from York and gave me some interesting news from Glencoe, Appin and Fasnacloch. From this part of the world I should now like to be doubly particular with you, and I shall expect in return the same compliment—it is but fair that we should be so, from the two extremes of America, & everybody else in the intermediate space. To begin with then, in the first

place, you will be glad to hear that I myself happily weather over another years campaign on the N. W. coast, & thank God I can further say that I have experienced nothing very unpleasant either of a public or private nature since I last had the pleasure to address you and what is more, when I add that with these blessings everything prospered, you will own that I have reason indeed, to be satisfied, I should rather say thankful. Man's life now in the Columbia has become mere lottery—your friend Joseph Moreau and 2 or 3 others were drowned at the Cascades last summer—a couple of men also perished below Alexandria in Frasers river & 10 to 1 there will be some loss in the Snake country,—this with the natural deaths make the score melancholy enough. Among the latter we have to lament the loss of poor Lieutenant Simpson who died on board his own vessel at Mr. Ogdens new Establishment last Sept of a Liver Complaint after a few days illness. In the cruise of the season he had seen the land party picketed in and secured, and then made a very successful cruise on the coast from which he was only returned 14 days when he was a corpse. Independent of his loss to the concern I regret him very much as a private friend. I am sorry to say with you in confidence however that he was not over popular with us—the cause you know as well as I do, and poor man he has now left his command and his commission to divide among them—the latter he did not live to see—a Mr. Kipling who came out with the last English vessel is now the commanding officer, and Capt. Ryan who broke the Isabella went home in charge of the Ganymede. Sinclair [Cadbow] and Duncan [Vancouver] have the 2 schooners Nass, you see is established, & with less risk & difficulty than was originally apprehended Mason writes me he did not find the Natives by one half so bad as those of Frasers River & the Gulf of Georgia. The spot chosen is not I believe very favourable for gardening, nor does it appear that Nass is the entrance of any considerable stream. The principal river thereabouts according to recent discovery made by the deceased is more to the Northward—however an acc't of the shipping and other considerations perhaps Ft. Simpson is just as well where it is for in my opinion there is no river that will lead to an easy communication with the back settlements of N. Caledonia. There is Beaver in this quarter but the price is enormous, still the Yankees stick to it and what is more strange they say they make something by their labour. Here we get rid of our opposition—a very fortunate circumstance—we are gaining by it in many respects, but in none more substantial than in a considerable increase of Trade.

Fort Langley this year is up from 1400 to 2,500 Beaver—tariff rose from 1 to Two skins the 2½ pr. Blks—which I trust will be found a good start for one year. Our salmon, for all the contempt entertained for everything out of the routine of Beaver at York Factory, is close upon 300 Barrels and I have descended to Oil & Blubber too though not on your large scale—so that

altogether, whatever others may think of Frasers River, I am well satisfied with its proceeds myself.

Late last Fall after the Indians left the river, I ventured on a trip to see the Dr. & Mrs. Harriott—then. I had the pleasure to receive your kind letter, for Mr. Finlayson was arrived a few days before me. At that time he and Harriott were below at old Fort George previous to the sailing of the London ship. Had I arrived with them a few days sooner tis probable I would have taken a passage in her to the Islands—either the Young Factor—Harriott—or myself will go this season. I will say no more of Columbia River news. Harriott goes out this Spring with the acc'ts accompanied by Heron—your last year's laws give me 15 years of the blessed country—go who will McDonald can't budge—therefore I begin to make myself as comfortable and happy as I can where I am. Our Gardens increase our comfort in this way & I have now 4 milch cows in already killed 3 pigs this winter, and 3 more are fattening this with country resources in abundance you will own ought to keep a little establishment like mine in perfect affluence. What I regret most is the condition of the Boys—for there is nothing like early education—however I keep them at it Mother and all. My chinook now reads pretty well and has commenced cyphering. Your children must soon afford you great pleasure and happiness. Mr. James Douglas gave me a very flattering account of Flora and her education ought to be followed up. Jenny returns the kind compliment of Charlotte & sympathises with her much in the melancholy loss her family met with lately—we knew nothing of it on this side till this fall.

Now you see what an industrious correspondent I am; and within a wall of 200 ft. square to fill a whole sheet, how many would I not fill had I like you semi-traversed the Globe and back again. I flatter myself I shall this fall have something from you worthy of travel so extensive and of incidents and occurrences unquestionably interesting. Let us hear all about old friends and acquaintances in Canada. I have no letter from Edw'd Ermatinger last fall. With sincere good wishes for your good health and prosperity

I am,

My dear Sir,

With the usual regard

Yours

ARCH'D McDONALD.