

DOCUMENTS

DIARY OF WILKES IN THE NORTHWEST

[Continued from Volume XVI., Page 223]

[May, 1841.]

This is also the case with those who desire to remain in this country and settle after the expiration of their terms they take a portion selected by themselves though doubtless by the Company's counsel & incur debt to them by advances, still holding them under their subjection, for without the Company's aid and advances they must be ruined all their supplies and whereat to sell their crops is at the Fort, from this results much good for the welfare & condition of the settlement viz those men only who are industrious get along well, they are not allowed to be intemperate no grog is sold them and a watchful eye is kept over them & circumspection maintained of their habits and moral conduct.

Too much cannot be said in praise of the Company in their having done away with the trade in spirits. It is now entirely stopt, and they have very large quantities of it in store at Vancouver sustaining a great loss upon it. Nothing could have been done so well calculated to maintain their ascendancy over their People the Natives and the other settlers as this; and I have been informed since its disuse the settlers have been prosperous and the Natives less quarrelsome.

Dr. McLaughlin gave me the Thermometrical observation for heighths throughout the route to Canada crossing the rocky Mountains. They also stated that [Ms. P. 79] little dependence was to be placed in the veracity of David Douglass the botanist.⁷³ Mr. Douglass the Chief factor stated to me that he believes the observations of Mr. Thompson quoted by Irving in the appendix to *Astoria* in relation to the heights of the Rocky Mountains may be relied on.

I have passed a pleasant day and had agreeable conversation at the mess table after meals it is the custom to introduce pipes & tobacco it is said the practice is getting [illegible] but I should have concluded it was at its heighth.
30th [May]

⁷³ This entry is disconcerting as the memory of David Douglas is most cordially cherished, especially by those who know about his remarkable work in the field of botany. The context of the Diary may indicate that reference was made to rather exaggerated estimates made by the botanist as to the heights of mountains.

This day was beautiful being Sunday I attended divine Service in the Dining Hall Mr. Douglass read prayers and Mr. Griffith one of the Missionaries gave us a Sermon—stupid man & bad preacher.⁷⁴

The orphans and $\frac{1}{2}$ breed boys who attended the school under [blank] chanted & sang. They have a chapel in which the Catholic Priest officiates. Dr. McL. and most of the servants of the Company attend it quite a large congregation there does not appear to be any jarring among the different creeds, and the utmost liberality of Spirit exists.

Casenove the Indian chief of the tribe who formerly possessed this portion of the country Calipooyas is still living he is a dependent of the fort's and has his meals at a side table whenever he chooses to partake of them his usual business is to provide Indians & canoes to dispatch passengers & letters up and down the river. He is represented as a well disposed person, seems to possess little or no influence with his tribe & it is said with what truth I know not—that the Company have purchased all his lands from him for what consideration I am not informed. [Ms. P. 79a]

Mr. Douglass gave me information relative to the Geological formation of the country in a N.E. line as far as Hudson Bay & promised me specimens, viz.,—

Trap formation in the lower or western section to the Cascades, then Bulsallic [basalt?] then Sandstone, quartz, lime stone, granite here & there cropping out of which the central range or Peaks of the Rocky Mountains are composed—thence in a reversed order to Hudson's Bay.

From all the information he has been able to gather no copper is found south of 59° N. in this territory where the pure copper is found in abundance and which the natives beat in large sheets that are articles of trade on the coast & are there sometimes met with by the traders.

Coal is said to be found near the foot of the Rocky Mountains, on the Cowlitz and at Vancouver Island specimens of the two latter I have seen and obtained that of the Cowlitz Lignite, but from Vancouver Island it is a good quality of bituminous coal.⁷⁵

The tumuli found on the prairies are ascribed by the Indians

⁷⁴ In most cases, the frank judgments in the Diary were omitted or toned down in the published *Narrative*.

⁷⁵ One of the early references to coal in the Pacific Northwest.

to the effects of water there is no tradition of them measures of one taken by Mr. Douglass was 30 ft. in diameter and 10 feet high one has been opened by the company but nothing found in it, subsequently as I have elsewhere written I opened 3 others and dug deep in the one mentioned above but was not more successful in making discoveries.⁷⁶ [Ms. P. 80]

The smaller tributaries of the Col^a. below the Cascade range of Mountains rise in early spring but the Col^a. itself rises in the beginning of Summer caused by the melting of the snows on the Rocky Mountains.

The salmon fishing is now in its most active operations at the Cascades & Willamette falls and this draws the Indian population far and near to it. the tribe in whose territory or limits they are exact a tribute to all who fish, the general average price of a salmon is 10 cents tho' this will depend very much upon the wants of the Indians. They refuse to sell any Salmon until after the first run and then always without the heart they have many superstitions in relation to them some of which I will give from the best authority I could derive them, but I am nevertheless well satisfied that there are very few who can understand these languages sufficiently to obtain them & I further believe that very few of the Indians now living are aware of or have any knowledge of their traditional stories. [Ms. P. 80]

Mr. Drayton & myself making a copy of a manuscript chart of this section of the country.

31st May.

Mr. Douglass was kind enough to carry me over the whole establishment Great system evident in all the departments & I felt well satisfied that without it little or no profits would be realized in the Fur or Indian trade at least on this side of the Mountains the supplies and incident expenses to the service & duties to be performed, the waste &c. &c. must render it now a very precarious business, the Fur trade, as far as I was enabled to gather from the happiest, those engaged in it having fallen off 50 per *ct* indeed so as to make scarcely worth while to follow it.

The granary to which we passed contains wheat flour, barley, buckwheat it is said wheat averages 63 lbs. the bushel. Barley gives 20 bushels to the acre Buckwheat yields a good crop some seasons it is by no means certain owing to early frosts oats do

⁷⁶ Geologists have mentioned eighteen possible explanations of those tumuli, the most plausible referring to glacial origin. The region now known as Mound Prairie was by Wilkes called Bute Prairies. See the *Narrative*, Volume IV., page 313, or Meany's *Origin of Washington Geographic Names*, page 173.

not thrive well Peas, Beans, Potatoes yield generally abundantly. Little or no hay is made the cattle being enabled to feed all the winter nor do they require shelter thus 2/3rds of a farmer's time is saved and the difference of labour may be fairly estimated in the wasted hours there, by this fact.

Rode with Mr. Douglass to see the Fort Dairy. the ride was a beautiful one through fine prairies with large trees (oaks, & ash) grouped over them and the quantities of cattle feeding & at repose gave a civilisation to the scene that this country along [alone] wants to add to its natural beauties. the chain of Lakes before spoken of gave an extensive water view to the scene.⁷⁷ The Dairy is removed every year, thus the manure & wear of meadows is equally divided, this is likewise the case with [Ms. P. 81] the feeding of sheep. I was told they have now about 300 brood mares, about 2500 sheep 3000 cattle, there were 70 milch cows at the dairy it seems well conducted by a Canadian his wife & 3 men They supply the milk & cream to the establishment and a large part of the butter for the Russian Company⁷⁸ is put up here, *some cheese—, the cattle all look well, (the churning is by a barrel machine—)* not killing any they rapidly increase.

To give some idea of the system of the Company and to acct. for their seeming great profits I will state here that they have all their articles classed—viz in articles of gratuity, those of trade and purchase—the first consists of knives & tobacco—2nd of blankets, gun powder & shot—clothes &c. 3rd. of sheets, handkerchiefs, beads, ribbons &c. &c. from this many persons who are told of the vast profits &c of the Company imagine that they get their valuable furs for a mere trifle—but this is seldom or never the case The Indians & settlers understand well the worth of each article and are not inclined to give it for less than its real value and a present to boot. Those who trade in this country are obliged to give or make allowances to trappers to obtain their services and to such a wreckless⁷⁹ set as they are little opportunity of getting returns is practicable unless the persons are driven by necessity to follow the same trail of life. The Company in order to avoid losses by the desertion of their men generally send them

77 Since Preston's Map of 1856 the large lake has been charted Vancouver Lake and its connecting waterway Lake River. See Meany's *Origin of Washington Geographic Names*, pages 139 and 325.

78 On August 11, 1799, the United American Company was reorganized under the name of Russian American Company and that name was retained under the new charter of 1802. See Bancroft's *History of Alaska*, pages 379 and 416.

79 The spelling is corrected in the *Narrative*, Volume IV., page 333.

in large parties from 30 to 40. When they take their wives & families with them and trap during the season on some favorable ground where they remain for the season, they leave in October & return again by May or June. They usually trap on shares & this is according to the skill of the trappers.

All the packages for transportation in this country are made up of 90 lbs. weight for the convenience of transportation across portages &c. & it is inconceivable the ease with which a voyageur will run off with several of them. [Ms. P. 81a]

Mr. Douglass having traveled extensively in this country being observing and having improved his opportunities of making enquiries related some customs of the northern Indians Truly remarkable among them are relating to the Telloles⁸⁰ or Carrier Indians as respects their dead. On the death of a Husband the body is laid on the funeral pile burnt and their ashes preserved by the wife if she survives the experience she is subjected to— They are not burnt with their husbands, but are required to attend his body until it is consumed and to keep constant by patting his breast until the whole is consumed which severely burns them always, and are suffered to fall into the flames if his relatives do not withdraw her in time, they remain until the body is entirely consumed gather up the ashes and are obliged to carry them about for the period of 3 years during all which time they serve as slaves to the husband's relatives.

And what appears to render this practice more remarkable is the fact that all the nations, or tribes around these bury their dead about 3 feet below the ground covering the body carefully with boards to prevent its being hurt.

The above tribe dwell in the Interior East of Fort Simpson in about Lat. 56 North.

The Calipooyas tribe residing south of the Col^a. and along the Willamette Valley bury their dead ornamenting the grave with poles, or with an affixed calabash, pots, pans &c. &c. whilst those North of and on the river place theirs in canoes above ground. [Ms. P. 82]

In connection with this river are its prairies along it in some places they are of large extent with arms of the river flowing through them in various directions which are sufficiently deep for boat navigation They are admirably adapted to grazing purposes, but for agriculture the farmer would be in continual ap-

⁸⁰ The Bureau of American Ethnology in *Handbook of American Indians*, Part 2, pages 675-676, described this tribe under the name of Takulli.

prehension of losing his crop and always will sow in uncertainty on account of the rise of the river, in the proportion to which the water rises on the wheat it perishes so that unless the Wheat should be actually overtopped a small harvest might be expected (seed wheat). It cannot but appear remarkable that a river of so great an extent should have no sediment, but the contrary. I understand as far as experience has gone it rather proves to exhaust or deteriorate the soil.

In many places in the lower prairies quicksand exists which causes occasional slips of soil carrying with them trees of huge dimensions which are finally carried to the ocean to be in time lodged on some remote or Savage Island supplying his wants for the necessary means to construct his canoe. That part of the soil which is not rock on the river is a light sandy one through which the water on its rise in the Col^a. percolates through, and overflows the low parts of the meadows adjoining. [Ms. P. 82a] June 1st, 1841.

Had today a long conversation with two of the Missionaries Messrs. Clark and Griffin, (self supporting system). They stated that they were very much disappointed with the country and the only fit place they said for settlement in the Upper Country was the Grande Ronde prairie situated between the Headwaters of the Grande Ronde and Powder Rivers. Some 20 miles in extent this is about 60 miles to the Eastward of Walla Walla. The information they gave relative to the Population was about 10,000 West of Mountains.

Dr. McLaughlin & Mr. Douglass rate it about the same south of 50° some however rate it as high as 25,000. The following I believe the most correct data, and is obtained from a variety of sources & in some cases counted from my own information estimated upon the ability of the country to afford support and its offering the necessary facility for subsistence in their mode of life.

Population.

Vancouver Island	5000
between 50° & 54° 40' N.....	2000
	—
	7000
Clapest, & intermediate coast.....	1250
Clalams— (Port Dis.) 150 (N. Dung.	
? 200 Port Tow ? 70).....	425
Birch Bay	300

Frazer's River	500
Penn's Cove & Whidby's Isl.....	650
Hood's Canal	500
Nisqually	200
Port Orchard & Admiralty Inlet.....	150
Chekilis & Puget Sound.....	700

 11,675

[Ms. P. 83]

brought forward	11675
Cowlitz—including the head waters of Chekalis & also the Head waters of Cowlitz. (Klakatuck tribe).....	350
Chinooks	209
Clatsops including [blank].....	220
Pillar rock oak Pt. & Col ^a . River.....	300
Canadn.	150
Dalles Mr. Lee's letter.....	250
Shutes river	125
Walla Walla including the Nez Perces [illegible] &c to the south and west of it.....	1100
Yakima River	100
Col ^a . River between Walla Walla & Okanogan	350
At and about Okanogan.....	200
The tribes about Spokane Colville & adjoining tribes. Towards the mountains—Flat Heads	650
Willamette throughout the valley.....	275
Muqua	400
Rogues	500
Clamets	300
Shasty	500
Kalapuyas	600
Killamouch, this side the Muqua river..	400
Black feet tribes that make excursions West of Mountains and who oc- cupy the Buffalo Country.....	1000

 Total west of Mountains & in
territory⁸¹ 19,644

There is a tribe called the Knikla; on the Sacramento River and adjoining the Shasty Indians supposed to be about 1500 souls.

The whole Oregon territory may therefore be set down as containing not over 20,000 inhabitants.

The whites in the country including the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company & officers 350. [Ms. P. 83a]

Mr. Smith (Miss'y.) has been 3 years in the country resided part of the time at Sopkane & with Dr. Whitman has known the temperature 30° below zero in winter and at 100 above in Summer. The country remarkably healthy grass green in Feby—& the pasturage for cattle good requires no housing they feed upon the tufts of grass that by the heat of the sun are converted if I may so express it into natural hay.⁸²

Dr. Whitman of same mission has had difficulty with the Indians as respects his water power or rights for the irrigating the soil.⁸³ The Indians after granting him the privilege and becoming aware of the use he made of it diverted it from him to their own use they are intelligent and when they see an improvement readily adopt it.

In the afternoon rode with Mr. Douglass to the Flour and Saw Mills⁸⁴ the first is about 5 miles from the Fort but has one run of stones, is well built of timber but in consequence of the height of the River causing back water it was not in action. it is amply sufficient for the wants of the country at present— The Saw Mill is 2 miles farther and likewise on the Banks of the Col^a. and owing to the same circumstance of being placed too low part of the season it is out of use it has several runs of Saws and is as fine a pile as I have seen anywhere, and in few countries could such material be procured for the framing of any building all of its frame timber is [blank] feet in height squaring [blank] feet. The description of timber used for cutting into boards is far inferior to what we should deem merchantable in the United States being of the quality or little better than our hemlock. [Ms. P. 84]

All the hardwood plank or boards that may be required is

⁸¹ The statistics are valuable, comprising one of the most complete compilations up to that time. A slight revision was made in the published *Narrative*, Volume V., pages 140-141, the total there being 19,354. Some of the names are spelled differently in the published table.

⁸² Those familiar with the later cattle days will smile over this early reference to bunch grass.

⁸³ Undoubtedly the first irrigation in the Pacific Northwest. See Meany's *History of the State of Washington*, pages 302-303.

⁸⁴ Here reference is made to the beginning of two great industries of the Pacific Northwest.

yet cut by hand. Brig Wave was here taking on lumber for Sandwich Islands. The boards sell at Oahu for 80\$ the thousand could not ascertain their costs about 20 men are employed at this moment at the Mill some Sandwich Islanders & Canadians. They have a large blacksmith shop here whereat all the axes or hatchets for the trappers are made. the Iron & steel being imported. They are manufactured at a much less price and such as they can depend upon. it may appear somewhat surprising to some that a trapper's axe is his support and in it his success depends, for on its loss or breaking the trapper relinquishes his labours & returns without furs. One man can manufacture 50 of these daily 25 is said to be his labour. They are eagerly sought after by the Indians who are extremely particular that it should be of a particular shape.⁸⁵

From the mills we passed through the forest to the High Prairie and rode over it to one of the sheep walks—the soil is rather light but with manure will yield a good crop. These prairies are indeed beautiful covered with fine pines of gigantic heights, some whose branches are nearly touching the green sward, with oaks, maples, fir, & cedar, with intervening spaces of prairie covered with Columbines.

Lupines & Kamass flowers all seeming in the utmost order as if man had been ever watchful of its beauty and cultivation. We returned to the Fort by the High lands through the woods, saw the herds which had been driven from the low prairie or meadows on account of the rise of the water they add much to the interest & beauty of the scene. A certain number of brood-mares are assigned to each horse who is ever mindful of his flock keeping them from straying and ever jealous of them, most of the mares with young colts or with fold [foal]. We returned to the fort just at [Ms. P. 84a] sunset, and it was such a sunset as reminded one of home the air mild and a pleasant breeze from the West Mount Hood showed in all its glory overtopping the purple haze of the coming night. A long ride of some 20 miles good horses and little fatigue. Had some pleasant conversation with the Dr. & Mr. D.⁸⁶ at their hospitable board.

A small manual labour school is kept here for the education of the orphans & ½ breeds of the Company's servants and will

⁸⁵ In the *Narrative*, Volume IV., page 336, Wilkes says about the particular shape, "somewhat like a tomahawk."

⁸⁶ The diarist frequently uses such abbreviations. In this case he refers to Dr. John McLoughlin and James Douglas.

be of much service to the rising flock. There are at present 23 boys. An examination of them was had altho they did not prove very expert at their exercises in reading & writing yet it gave sufficient evidence of their improvement to show that they were in a fair way to acquire the rudiments & some allowance was to be made as they had been for some weeks constantly employed in the field under their teachers. Dr. McL. estimated the work of 4 boys equal to that of a man. it was an interesting sight to see these little fellows side by side of all shades of color from the pure Indian to that of the white they all speak English and french, they are duly interested in the religious exercises in which I thought they were more proficient than in the other branches. These they are instructed in on Sundays and attend divine service in the Hall twice.

It was pleasing to see the interest that Dr. McL. & Mr. Douglass took in them and much credit is due to them for their snatching as it were these castaway boys from the vices & idleness of the savage life. much has been said about the disregard to morals & vices of this Company and I feel myself in justice to them to say that as far as my observation went to bear testimony to this and many other acts that will prove to the contrary—I must first [Ms. P. 85] bear testimony that the officers of the Hon. Compy. service have not only quieted the country but their operations have been so admirably conducted that they have opened the country to safe and secure emigration, and provided it with the means necessary to the success of emigrants, and rendered the task an easy one to its peaceful possession and at a very moderate expense. a small force at any central point would in my opinion be sufficient to insure its tranquility and due protection to its settlers in any part of it.

2 & 3rd June.

I had a visit from one of a party of 8 young Americans who after a years stay in the territory are discontented and intend to leave for California. They are building a boat on the Willamette but find themselves without nails canvass rigging &c. I advised them to take passage to the Islands but this not suiting their views they declined to take. I promised however to visit their place on may way up the Willamette.

We intended to have left today (3d) but it proved stormy and we deferred our departure. The storm was from S. E. and quite violent and went around by South to N.W. when it cleared

this storm was felt at the Ship at Nisqually⁸⁷ it was rather unusual this time of year.

Dr. McL. related to me the curious manner in which the wreck of a Japanese Junk was discovered a year since on the coast near cape Flattery. a small piece of rice paper was brought by an Indian on which was sketched a Junk crushed on the land and three figures standing near enquiry was set on foot, the fact proved true and subsequently an expedition was sent out the three Japanese removed who had been held in slavery by the Indians and to whom a ransom was paid, they were sent to England and thence to Canton & Japan but were refused permission to land & are now in Canton under the Missionaries.⁸⁸ [Ms. P. 85a]

The following table was furnished me by Dr. McL. of Thermometrical Observations on a journey across the Rocky Mountains to ascertain the comparative heights of the different points or encampments in August Sep. & Oct. 1839—viz.

		Water Boils	Height
Aug. 29	Edmonton	207	2556
Sept. 22	Jaspers House	204.5	3867
Sept. 29	Campt. D'Orignal	203.5	4391
Sept. 30	Campt. De Fusil	201	5716
Sept. 30	Punch Bowl	198	7324
Sept. 30	Head of Grande Cote	202	5185
Oct. 1	Bottom of Grande Cote	204	4131
Oct. 3	Boat Encampment	205	3607
Oct. 8	Colville	208	2049
Oct. 14	Walla Walla	209.5	1286

In the Upper Country no wood is found except along the streams and in the Mountains No birch or Maple (Hard) is to be found on the West side of the Mountains.

Dr. McLaughlin stated to me that the N. West Company had offered to retransfer their trade to John J. Astor or for him to assume an interest in the trade on N. W. coast which he declined This fact I believe is not mentioned by the author of Astoria.⁸⁹ [Ms. P. 86]

4th June

⁸⁷ This entry is additional evidence that Wilkes wrote his Diary from field notes.

⁸⁸ Two years after the Diary was written, or in 1843, Washington Irving placed a record of the wreck of this Japanese junk in the appendix to his *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* in the form of a letter from Nathaniel J. Wyeth. The letter is also reproduced in Meany's *History of the State of Washington*, page 70.

⁸⁹ This significant statement may in time become more definitely documented. It holds a temptation to speculate on what changes in history might have evolved if the offer was genuine and if Astor had accepted it.

This morning the weather was fine and we had during the day only an occasional shower—At noon Mr. D. & myself took our departure for the Willamette Settlement. Dr. McL. having furnished me with a boat and 9 men with everything that could render our traveling agreeable and supply our wants. I had thought myself well supplied with camp Equipage & things necessary from their stores but his kindness suggested many things that we were ignorant of & proved of great service & convenience to us & obviating all the delays vexations we should have otherwise have met with. Our boat or batteaux was the ordinary one of the flat-bottom kind and for boating on the river capable of containing about 300 bushels of wheat and admirably adapted for the purpose being flat bottom & of little draft of water. On the present occasion it was lined with mats and secured us against the showers as well as giving us space to move about in & with so strong a crew we felt satisfied we could contend with rapids falls & Portages.

About 15 miles below the Falls we stopped at the Encampment of Rev^d. Mr. Lee the head of the Oregon Mission with his wife & mother Maj. G. W. Whitwell & wife. Mr. Lee is an ordinary looking man and from what I have subsequently seen unfit for his situation. He did well enough when he had the management of a small Set. but his mind is not sufficiently comprehensive neither has he the ability to manage as large mission as it is at present. The conversation we had was not of much import. We were going one way, they the opposite, we told all the news we had on both sides & separated⁹⁰ Mr. L. giving me a warm invitation [Ms. P. 86a] to visit the Willamette Settlement. They were encamped on the river banks annoyed with musquitoes & sandflies—being Methodists however they were used to such accommodations before they left the U. States.

⁹⁰ It has always been understood that Rev. Jason Lee and the other missionaries were not very cordial toward Wilkes. He had been enjoying the hospitality of the Hudson's Bay Company officers at the very time that the missionaries and other Americans were attempting to form the Provisional Government for Oregon. Mr. Lee certainly did not go out of his way to meet Wilkes.