

## WASHINGTON'S WAR GOVERNOR

[The following letter is furnished by George H. Himes, Curator and Assistant Secretary of the Oregon Historical Society. We have no more successful collector of Northwest Americana than Mr. Himes. He is continually bringing to light unpublished letters and documents. This letter, while largely personal, gives an interesting account of Lincoln's appointee while making the journey from Illinois to Washington Territory.—Editor.]

Executive Office,  
Olympia, Washington Territory,  
July 26th, 1862.

CAPT. J. W. STEPHENSON,  
near Cascade City, W. T.

*Dear Sir:*

When I last parted with you when I left Edwards County, Illinois, for Washington City, D. C., I had no expectation that you and your family would have left our old neighborhood for the Columbia River, before I should reach Albion again on my return from Washington. And on finding you had come to this country, I then had no particular expectation of following you so far to the West.

Before I left Edwards County, I called at Miss Jane Taites to enquire for your address, and told Jane that if she had any letters or other thing to send to you, that I would cheerfully bring it with me when I came and I would endeavor to hunt you up, and contrive to get it safely to you. So about two weeks afterwards, she brought a letter for Mrs. Stephenson, just before I started, and I packed it carefully away with some letters of introduction I brought to persons already settled in this territory, and I have not yet been able to find the package of said letters with Jane Taites' included amongst them, and I have delayed writing to you ever since I landed here on the 16th of June, because I have not yet been able to find Jane's letter to Mrs. Stephenson, but I am determined to go immediately and examine every package of papers I placed very carefully in my trunk and I will not give up the search until I have found it, unless through some mistake, I have accidentally left the parcels of letters at home after carefully packing them up.

Afternoon, 26th of July, 1862.

Well Sir:—Nothing so good as determined perseverance; I have had a thorough overhauling, and I have found the said package of

letters very carefully put inside of another bundle of letters and papers, and herewith I enclose Jane Taites' letter to her sister Mrs. Stephenson, and I beg your good wife's pardon for my negligence in putting her sister's letter into such a very safe place, that I could not find it again when I wanted it, to forward to her as soon as I had reached this place.

I left Albion on the morning of Saturday, the 26th of April, 1862; left New York on Thursday, May 1st; reached Aspenwall on the evening of the 9th and left there next morning in the railroad cars and crossed the Isthmus of Darien to Old Panama. The Pacific Railroad Dock is entirely outside the limits of the town of Panama. The water is too shallow to allow the large steamships to come nearer than about three miles distant from Panama—so they employ small shallow-draught steamer to carry our passengers from the wharf at the end of the railroad to the large seagoing passenger steamships stationed three miles off, and while the small steamer was taking our cargo to the ship, I went into and through the old Spanish town of Panama. On the evening of the 10th we were all on board the *Orizaba* of 1,400 tons and sailed or rather weighed anchor and steamed away with about 1,500 passengers for San Francisco on the 17th, went into the harbor of Acapulco, laid there six hours taking in coal, fresh water, fruits, etc. Acapulco is one of the finest harbors in the world; there were four English ships of war at anchor in the harbor; we went in at the south entrance and when we left we went out through the north entrance, there being an island stretching across the mouth of the harbor, with wide spaces of deep water, between the island and the main land, leaving two fine outlets from the harbor into the Pacific; the shores (all around the anchorage in the harbor and along the island and main lands, adjoining both sides of the entrance), rise gradually from the edge of the water to a lofty height. The harbor and its two entrances may be said to be surrounded by very high hills. We reached San Francisco on the morning of the 26th, and I left there on the 29th of May on the *Sierra Nevada* for Victoria on Vancouver Island, reached there on the 2nd of June, left there on the 3rd and reached the mouth of the *Columbia* on the evening of the 4th, and arrived at Portland on the 5th; went that evening to Vancouver, and saw Colonel Steinberger, then commanding officer; staid that night with Major Francis, formerly editor of the *Springfield Journal*, Illinois, for many years, now a paymaster in the U. S. Army. General Benjamin Alvord of Vancouver is now commanding officer of the military of this district. Went to Portland the next morning, the 6th of June, staid there two or three days, until I could leave on board

the ocean steamer "Brother Jonathan" on the 9th for Victoria again; arrived there on the 11th and again had to wait a few days for a steamer; left Victoria on the 14th, reached Westminster, up Frazers River, that night, and touched at Port Townsend at the entrance to Puget Sound, and touched at Seattle and Steillacoom and landed here on the 16th of June.

The first days out from New York the weather was very cool, with a pretty rough sea, most of the passengers seasick; on the fourth day the wind moderated and the sea became smoother and the seasickness abated. The weather became very warm as we proceeded southward; the 7th, 8th and 9th of May the weather was very hot—and at Aspinwall, the night we staid there, was too hot and sultry to sleep; on the 10th, at Panama, it was hot beyond endurance. The Catholic Church, with its thick walls of roughly built, unchiselled rock, was the only cool place I found in that old dilapidated old Spanish town. Both at Aspinwall, across the Isthmus, and at Panama, the cocoanuts are hanging on the trees at all stages of ripeness, and plaintains of all kinds growing wild. Oranges, lemons with pine-apples, are offered at all the states, in the streets, and at all the stores.

The weather was very hot for ten days after leaving Panama, and at Acapulco, on the 17th, it was sultry and very hot. I went on shore and walked round the old Spanish fort, tolerably strong walls, but could easily be knocked into heaps of stone rubbish with their present heavy shot and shell in use at this time by the United States gunboats and Mortar Boats.

Hot weather continued three or four days after we left Acapulco, when on the evening of the 21st (I think it was), the wind blew a gale from the north, so very cold that with two coats on, well buttoned up, I could not stay on deck, the wind was so very cold.

After that night, the days were moderately warm, and the nights quite cool, until we reached San Francisco, and ever since the nights have all been cool. It appears to be one of the peculiar characters of this climate to have cool nights throughout summer.

Well sir, I want to hear from you. Pray write back immediately and tell me how your own health is at this time, how Mrs. Stephenson's health is and all your family, and I have forgotten your daughters' names, all but Barbara's; tell me their names, beginning with the oldest and take them all in order of their ages and which is married, their husbands' names, and where they live.

Tell me what sort of winter you had last, at your place, and what sort of land you have had the luck to settle on this time, whether

prairie or timber, what sort of soil, how much you have fenced, how many acres of wheat, how many bushels of wheat, oats, barley, peas, etc., you get per acre, for each year ever since you have been on your present farm. Where is your farm located? how far from the banks of the Columbia River? where is the landing place nearest to your house, and how shall I know how to find you and that landing place? by what name or by what mark, on the bank of the Columbia River? for if I go up the river to Walla Walla this fall along with Mr. Hale, the superintendent of Indian Affairs, as I now intend to do, I shall certainly land at the nearest place to your house and come to see you all. What town is nearest to you, and how far are you from your nearest town? how far from Vancouver? how far from Cascades? It is very costly and expensive traveling in this country. If a man had a good horse and started early in the mornings, he could come from your house here in three days, I should think. If you could ride over without the cost of your journey, making it a pain of a pleasure, I should be glad to see you, but I shall be away from this place a good deal of my time this fall, and I should feel sorry if you came here while I happened to be away. Sec. Turney from Fairfield is here, Secretary of the Territory, but although he professes to be a Republican since 1856, yet he is as contrary as any Democrat can be. I think his having been the Acting Governor from the time he came here until my arrival, at least very good men here think that has spoiled him. I do not like to say anything more on that unpleasant subject, but I am very much grieved at the courses he has adopted and pursued. I am very deeply grieved at the way he has acted, and the way he is going on now, but no matter how sorry I am for it, I cannot help it. He is as obstinately self-willed as he ever was when he was a ramping, unscrupulous Democrat. But however much grieved I feel, I beg you not to mention it to any person, for I do not want to speak unkindly of him or any other person. You will see by the paper that notwithstanding the great preparations, the Rebels had for many years been making for war, and how entirely unprepared the United States Government were when the Rebellion broke out, yet how thoroughly the United States Army has driven the Rebels at almost every conflict, and although the Rebels very frequently had the greatest number. Edwards County has sent about 360 men into the Volunteer Army out of 960 voters, and I believe they can raise another company yet in Edwards, if needed.

My sincere respects to yourself and Mrs. Stephenson and to your children, for John and most of your daughters will recollect me, although I suppose I should not recognize any of them if I should

meet them, for they were all small when I saw them last, and now they have grown entirely out of the size and shape they were in when I knew them. Write to me as soon as you receive this and tell me all that you think will be news to me. Yours truly,

WILLIAM PICKERING.