

1986

The Cowlitz corridor : the passage through time

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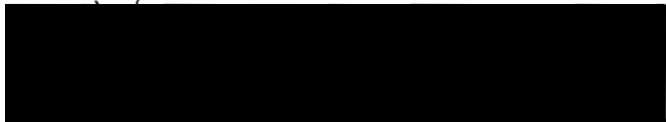
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Margot Coleman Vaughan for the
Master of Arts in History presented April 28, 1986.

Title: The Cowlitz Corridor: The Passage Through Time

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Dr. Gordon Dodds, Chairman


Dr. Basil Dmytryshyn


Mr. Terence O'Donnell


Dr. Thomas Poulsen

The purpose of this thesis is to study the earliest recorded history of the Cowlitz River corridor, focusing on early exploration and settlement. The importance of the corridor as a major transportation route linking Puget Sound to the north and the Columbia Willamette waterways to the south is emphasized with primary source observations.

The study is based on both primary and secondary source materials housed in libraries throughout the Pacific

Northwest and Canada. Among the sources include letters, journals, federal documents, periodicals, articles, drawings and monographs.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I covers eighteenth century exploration on the Cowlitz River and vicinity, focusing on British maritime personalities. Chapter II deals with nineteenth century exploration and observations from both government and privately funded expeditions. Chapter III deals exclusively with Cowlitz Farm and Hudson's Bay company interest in the Cowlitz corridor, including elements of missionary activity. Chapter IV focuses on Cowlitz Mission, its personalities and achievements. Chapter V is the thesis conclusion, comparing and contrasting observations of the Cowlitz corridor over time. The appendix includes copies of drawings of significant geographic landmarks in the corridor and material pertaining to the native population and Cowlitz farm.

The results of the findings reveal that the Cowlitz corridor served as an important trade route and settlement area for both Indian and non-native inhabitants. Technical information amassed by early explorers to the Corridor in the form of letters and journals proved to be invaluable resource material for future exploring parties. Given the hazards and unexpected dangers of both the Pacific Ocean and

the Columbia River, the Cowlitz corridor provided a vital passage route for many generations.

THE COWLITZ CORRIDOR: THE PASSAGE THROUGH TIME

by

MARGOT COLEMAN VAUGHAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

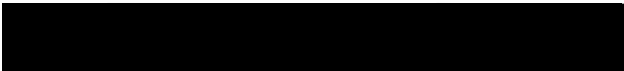
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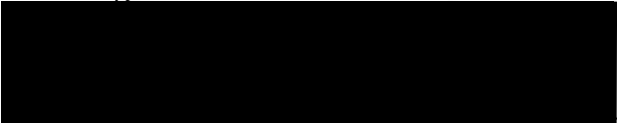
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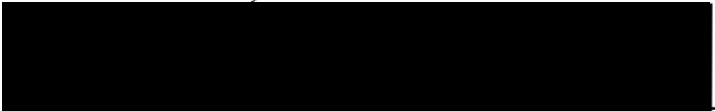
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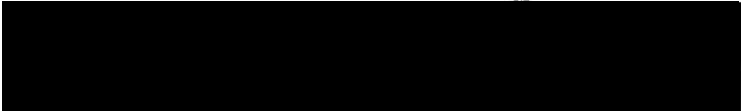

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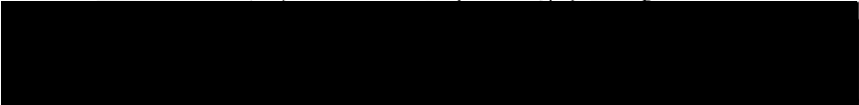

Dr. Bernard Ross, Dean of Graduate Studies & Research

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CHAPTER I

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY EXPLORATION ON THE COWLITZ RIVER AND VICINITY

The intention of this paper is to review the earliest recorded history of the Cowlitz River corridor joining two very important geographical areas, namely the great inland salt waterways to the north known as the Puget Sound and the Columbia-Willamette waterways to the south. The topography on either side of the corridor precluded any early land passage. The ocean waters bounding the present state of Washington are notoriously rough, making any salt water passage between the two areas a hazardous journey even into the age of steam.

Indispensable to any assessment is a brief recounting of the ever memorable voyage of the Discovery and Chatham under the overall command of Captain George Vancouver, R.N. It is one of the grand achievements of British naval exploration. As historian Clinton Snowden accurately states, "Vancouver was the last of the discoverers, and the first of the explorers of our (Pacific) Northwest Coast." ¹

¹Clinton A. Snowden, History of Washington: The Rise and Progress of an American State (New York: The Century History Company, 1909), Vol. I, p. 183.

The long rise to this height of complex exploration is filled with trial, vicissitude and complex turns of fate and technique. Captain Vancouver himself attributed his great age of discovery, so firmly ensconced in the Enlightenment, to "the rapid progress of improvement in the sciences and the general diffusion of knowledge since the commencement of the eighteenth century."²

Vancouver considered the teachings of nautical astronomy newly introduced to maritime instruction to be of paramount importance:

We are taught to sail in the hypotenuse, instead of traversing two sides of a triangle, which was the usage in earlier times; by this means, the circuitous course of all voyages from place [sic] is considerably shortened.³

Vancouver improved on the use of technologically advanced nautical instruments into which he had special insight. First, of course, he had, as J. C. Beaglehole points out, trained with Cook. It would be difficult to imagine a better education than three years on the Resolution. In the most recent and masterful study of Vancouver, W. Kaye Lamb notes that sailing with the Cook expedition was a master astronomer, William Wales, who was

² George Vancouver, A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World (London: John Stockdale, 1801), Vol. I, p. 1.

³ Ibid., p. 35.

one of the eminent scientists of the time. Vancouver always admired and remarked with gratitude on the special teaching astronomer Wales gave to him. Especially important was the technical grasp this instruction gave his officers as they cruised the unknown and spidery waterways of the Pacific Northwest coast.

As can be easily understood, the most complex logistical arrangements attended Vancouver's planning. The health of his crew, partly made up by press gangs, was always on his mind, and in particular the physical needs of his officers. The condition of his ships was a vexing concern, for he was naturally mindful of the shortcomings evident in the Resolution on the third voyage. As with any career-minded naval officer, he had more than a wary eye for the naval and civilian administrators of the dockyards. These personal and logistical concerns Vancouver had learned from the master:

That illustrious navigator Captain James Cook, to whose sturdy, uniform, and undefatigable attention to the several objects on which the success of his enterprises ultimately depended, the world is indebted for such eminent and important benefits.⁴

Vancouver also noted and praised the 1794 publication of Cook's third voyage which, years earlier, had accelerated exploration of the Pacific Northwest's coastal intricacies.

⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

It was of course the Cook voyage which had revealed what the Russians had long known and endeavored to hold secret, that sea otter skins were highly prized. British sailors who had somewhat casually traded for sea otter skins essentially for their own comfort as "clothing and bedding in the cold latitudes" were dazzled by the unexpected prices their even casually handled furs eventually fetched among the eager traders of Petropavlovsk and Canton.⁵

We know that the royal orders from King George III as issued by the Admiralty contained a twofold assignment. First, Vancouver was ordered to acquire knowledge concerning any maritime communications, transport routes, and any other possibilities to enhance commerce in Pacific Northwest waters. Further, the expedition was to observe and record any signs of European settlement in the region, with special reference to Spanish and Russian imperial manifestations.

It was in this latter concern that we first encounter Vancouver's association with the Cowlitz River in relationship to his Admiralty orders:

It would be of great importance if it should be found that, by means of any considerable inlets of the sea, or even larger rivers communicating with the lakes in the interior of the continent, such an intercourse . . . could be established.⁶

⁵ History of Clarke County Washington Territory (Portland: The Washington Publishing Company, 1885), p. 33.

⁶ Vancouver, op. cit., p. 61.

In every sense the Cowlitz waterway was a long established and familiar native trade route, but our formal view of it will come into focus as Vancouver's ships at last arrive on the coast.

One has to wonder who actually selected the Discovery and the Chatham for so long and arduous a voyage. As Lamb succinctly describes, they were both very poor sailors. The Discovery had been directed to the Woolwich yards on the lower Thames where every kind of thing had gone wrong. The Chatham, in disrepute as an awkward ship, was loaded with tons of roundshot which scarcely prevented her turning turtle on the way toward the Cape of Good Hope.

In command of the Chatham was a person who would figure prominently in early Cowlitz history. Lt. William R. Broughton, R.N., also served as Vancouver's second in command. It was he who first discovered and recorded the southerly flowing river rising from the glaciers of Mount Rainier (also named by Vancouver). Broughton eventually crossed the dangerous Columbia River bar at the behest of Vancouver who was vexed to think the long sought River of the West had a few days earlier been discovered by a Yankee trading captain, Robert Gray. It seemed unwise at best to risk his Discovery and its deeper keel on the dangerous bar, so Chatham was sent in to work her way through the shallows of the immense estuary. Eventually he anchored in the just-

named Gray's Bay. From there he began his upriver ascent of the river, pulling against the current in a cutter and launch. It is to this small expedition that we give credit for the first description of the Cowlitz River mouth, as it recorded the following observations:

The Northern shore, instead of being the steepest, now consisted of low, flat sandy shores, through which, nearly opposite to their dinner station, where the river was about half a mile wide, two other streams fell into it. The westernmost was named River Poole, and the easternmost Knights River; the last is the largest of the two; its entrance indicated its being extensive; and by signs of the natives, they were given to understand, the people up that river possessed an abundance of sea-otter skins.⁷

Sea otter skins would have stimulated interest among any Europeans, but one has to wonder whether these were not perhaps river or land otters. The larger river was named for British admiral Sir John Knight, K.C.B., who was a friend of Broughton's through misadventure. During the battle at Bunker Hill outside of Boston both men had been captured by colonial soldiers and imprisoned. In judging Knight's River (hereinafter described as the Cowlitz) Broughton, who might have been describing the low water at the end of summer seasons, stated:

⁷ Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 98-99.

Knights River is about an eighth of a mile in width; and from its entrance, where its depth is four fathoms, it takes a direction S. 51E. Leaving Knights river, the soundings increased from seven to twelve fathoms, until Mount Coffin (also on the Columbia north bank) was reached.⁸

He further described Mount Coffin, now gone, as "a remarkable mount, about which were placed several canoes, containing dead bodies" ⁹ This geological feature dedicated to funerary practices was reduced by road travels during the 1940's, but parties of exploration following upon Broughton's initial foray invariably referred to this interesting feature.

Continuing on his upstream journey on October 28 Broughton and his party moved against the current, soon encountering "a small rocky islet, about twenty feet above the water."¹⁰ Upon inspection, canals were again discovered, resting on the crest of the basalt rock which was known as an established Chinookan funeral site (today known as the site of the Trojan nuclear powered steam plant). Broughton went on to record that the southern banks of the river were low and lined with trees, a description that of course suggests the present day area of Willow Grove which here delineates the southern bank.

⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

Further upstream the party noted two wooded islands which they named Urry's Islands. Roughly four miles southerly by the boat compass, oak trees were seen for the first time (at least first recorded and described), and one measured thirteen feet in diameter. This impressive girth stimulated the name Oak Point at the site of present day Columbia City in Oregon. In 1825 famed botanist David Douglas recorded information about the impressive oaks but he mistakenly placed them downstream, on the north bank of the Columbia at the present day settlement of Oak Point in the rocky river ledges bordering southwestern Cowlitz County.

Along the bank of Rushleigh's River (the Lewis River of today) a large Indian village was observed whose members in a forceful manner suggested that the party be on its way. On the morning of the 29th Broughton captured a glimpse of distant Mount St. Helens which had been named that spring by Vancouver during his May exploration of Puget Sound. Well known is the fact that he named the then towering cone for the British ambassador to the Spanish court at Madrid. Later the British sailors beached their small boats in the vicinity of Reeder's Point to provision and socialize. Approximately 150 natives gathered around them in twenty-five canoes, and with them, following the London instructions given Broughton and his party, the English

exchanged cordialities and modest gifts. To this end Lord Grenville had earlier arranged that a large stock of European goods, both decorative and utilitarian in nature, be furnished each ship for trading purposes; this material had been supplied through the offices of the Secretary of State.

At this upriver point it would be useful to observe that below Reeder's Point the Columbia River of Broughton's time and our own is somewhat different due mainly to the changes caused by dams, diking and general flood control. Two hundred years ago the Columbia debouched below Reeder's Point into an increasingly grand flood plain cut through with sloughs, bayous and island-filled backwaters also filled with, among other things, fevers and malaria. The Indians fed on roots, berries and meat such as venison; but, most important, they could almost always depend upon a plentiful supply of fish. It was the members of Vancouver's party who first observed that the natives of the Columbia River region differed from the tribes in the Nootka Sound region (on the western shore of Vancouver Island) whose villages they had visited the preceding summer. As an example, the native dwellings were constructed in a different mode on the Columbia:

[the] roof having greater inclination and the planking being thatched over with the bark of trees. The entrance is through a hole, in a broad plank, covered in such a manner as to resemble the face of a man, the mouth serving the purpose of a doorway.¹¹

Certainly this description typifies the dwelling structures of the Cowlitz tribes, whose substantial subsurface structures were routinely called long houses.

Fortunately we have the official journals and also the reports of such officers as Manby and Mudge which record the scientific approach adopted by the expedition to record flora, fauna, the soil and the geological makeup of the region. When Snowden describes George Vancouver as "withal a lover of nature" he accurately describes the man and expedition which first articulated the geographical features of the Cowlitz River and its vicinity.

¹¹Inventory of the County Archives of Washington No. 8 Cowlitz County (Seattle: The Washington Historical Records Survey, 1942), pp. 2-3.

CHAPTER II

NINETEENTH CENTURY EXPLORATION ON THE COWLITZ RIVER AND VICINITY

The first documented American account we have for this same region is recorded in the Lewis and Clark Journals reporting the 1805-1806 overland round trip expedition of the renowned American party which left from and returned to the St. Louis vicinity on the Mississippi River.

During his residence in France Jefferson had become familiar with the general philosophy and the formalized thinking of scientific expeditions devoted to exploration and inquiry as exemplified by the academies of Russia, France and Spain and the Royal Society in England. In 1792 during the presidency of George Washington, Jefferson, who was then serving as Secretary of State, proposed to the American Philosophical Society that the newly formed American government sponsor an expedition from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers into the then unknown territories of the far West. After he became president the tenacious and far seeing leader, on January 18, 1803, sent:

a confidential message to Congress discussing the advisability of continuing the trading houses among the Indians and closing with a request for approval of his plan to send out an exploring expedition . . . to advance the geographical knowledge of our own continent.¹²

After Congress approved the audacious proposal and provided the modest appropriation necessary to fund the expedition and its ambitious program, Jefferson appointed his young friend and aide, Captain Meriweather Lewis, to command the expedition. Prior to serving as Jefferson's personal secretary Lewis had served with distinction in a variety of military positions. Because of an earlier acquaintanceship, he very quickly selected a westerner, Captain William Clark, to accompany him as second in command of the westering party. Clark had four years experience on the frontier, and he knew how to handle the command authority and delegation of responsibility necessary for success on an overland journey of long duration.

It would appear that Jefferson personally drew up the formal instructions for the two dozen young men who comprised the party with a specific request that they:

¹²Edmond S. Meany, History of the State of Washington (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 51.

explore the Missouri River, and such principal streams of it, as by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river named, may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across the continent, for the purposes of commerce.¹³

The President further directed that Lewis and Clark record ethnographical information concerning the Pacific Northwest. Since the young officers faithfully adhered to this command we now have daily journals filled with descriptions and informative sketches. For the purposes of this paper a brief note concerning their downriver explorations is important. On October 16, 1805, the American party reached the Columbia via its tributaries, the Clearwater and Snake rivers. They spent that day replenishing their scanty food supplies. They then floated downriver into the month of November, recording their findings and observations.

On the morning of November 6, they sighted:

(an Island in the mouth of the large river Cowe-
liskee 150 yds wide. 9 miles lower a large creek
same side between the mouths of these rivers are 3
small islands one on the L. shore one near the
middle) the other larger and nearly opposit its
lower point, and opposit a high clift of black
rocks on the Lar. Side at 14 miles (from our camp).¹⁴

¹³ Snowden, op. cit., pp. 263-264.

¹⁴ Reuben Gold Thwaites, Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition 1804-1806 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), Vol. III, p. 204.

Natives living in a village of lodges nearby approached the party to sell food and other goods. The explorers exchanged fish hooks for beaver skins, wapato bulbs and dried salmon.

They too described Mount Coffin rising in the low ground mist of the Cowlitz;

a verry [sic] remarkable knob rising [sic] from the edge of the water to above 80 feet high, and about 200 paces around at its Base and Situated on the long narrow Island above (below the mouth of the Cow e Liske riv) and nearly opposite the two Lodges we passed today.¹⁵

The internal evidence of the Journals supports the idea that the American party was familiar with Vancouver's official publication and with the discoveries recorded by Lieutenant Broughton whose name for Mount Coffin they readily adopted.

Here too Lewis and Clark obtained their first glimpse of Mt. St. Helens quaintly entered in their Journals as "Mt. Helien." This glacial wonder they further noted as "Perhaps the highest pinical in America."¹⁶

The next personage to successfully explore Cowlitz waters was Gabriel Franchere, a French-Canadian merchant-explorer. He first arrived at the Columbia River mouth in the company of the John Jacob Astor expedition (1811) which

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 205-206.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 198.

had left New York harbor in search of an American fur monopoly in the far reaches of the newly described west.¹⁷

Franchère's ever arresting narrative entitled Journal d'un Voyage à la Côte de Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique Septentrionale, Pendant Les Annees 1810, 11, 12 & 14 is a most detailed description of the exploration of the Columbia River region. First published in French in 1820, it was later translated into English (1854). Franchère's estimate agreed with that of the more renowned British explorer Alexander MacKenzie who a few years earlier published his statement that the Columbia is "The line of communication from the Pacific Ocean pointed out by nature . . . the most Northern situation fit for colonization, and suitable to the residence of civilized people."¹⁸

We find that Franchère's party was in the Cowlitz area in early May 1811. Ascending the Columbia his party camped at a village identified as "Chrelut" which Reuben Gold Thwaites identifies as a village belonging to the Krelut, a Chinookan branch. Here Franchère and his men:

¹⁷ John M. McClelland, Jr., Cowlitz Corridor (2nd ed.; Longview: Longview Publishing Co., 1984), p. 6.

¹⁸ Alexander MacKenzie, Voyages From Montreal, on the River St. Lawrence, Through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans: In the Years 1789 and 1793 (London: T. Cadell, Jun. & W. Davies; etc. etc., 1801), p. 411.

camped for the night at the foot of a large rock, its base resembling a low and marshy terrain. It in no way resembled other mountains in the area. It was here that for the most part, natives from the villages where we passed, deposited their dead, and this was the same spot that Broughton gave the name of Mount Coffin.¹⁹

On the morning of May 4, the Franchere party camped at a village similar to the Krelut of the previous day, for the purpose of securing information: "On a pretty River that empties in the Columbia near this village. This river which flows from the north is called Kowilitzk."²⁰

Mackay and Montigny, members of the expedition, set out to explore the Cowlitz with two Indian guides. At the river's entrance they spotted two turkey vultures--a species of bird which had not been referred to by Lewis and Clark. Mr. Montigny returned to the party stating that they had moved up the stream but a "league and a half" when upon rounding a point they encountered some twenty canoes filled with hostile natives. Two Indians in a smaller canoe were paddling furiously in the van, evidently to escape capture by the large flotilla. Their gestures indicated that they wished the explorers to fire on their pursuers. However Mackay wisely resisted and instead indicated that they

¹⁹Gabriel Franchere, Journal d'un Voyage à la Côte du Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique Septentrionale, Pendant Les Années 1810, 11, 12 & 14 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1969), p. 235 (personal translation).

²⁰Ibid., pp. 235-236.

should go on their way while he parlayed with the fleet with pipe and tobacco. Montigny brought out the smoking paraphernalia, and the natives' wrath subsided as they returned to their temporary camp situated between two substantial villages located on the Cowlitz banks.

Franchere learned from this guide that the "hostiles" were preparing to make war on "the villages near which we were camping."²¹ Little sleep was had that evening due to the panic of the villagers who kept:

uttering dreadful shrieks and pestering us to fire a few shots--all in order to frighten their enemies and show them that they were on their guard.²²

The following day Franchere's men visited the enemy camp (May 5). It would appear that these natives had experienced no earlier contact with whites for they examined the travelers with intense curiosity. Franchere stated that they: "pulled up our trousers and opened up our shirts to see if the skin of our bodies was like that of our faces and hands."²³

For the time being at least the explorers were able to act as peacemakers between the tribes exchanging tobacco, and a mirror, all of which were accepted with satisfaction.

²¹Ibid., p. 236.

²²Ibid., pp. 236-237.

²³Ibid., p. 236.

Passing by a deserted village and several small islands, the party then observed a snow covered mountain looming to the north. One can assume that Franchere was familiar with the Vancouver reports for he attributes the right of discovery of this peak to the naval officers who had entered the Cowlitz in the fall of 1792. A last Franchere reference to the river describes his party's encampment along the river bank while they negotiated a ransom of trade goods for one of the men in the party who had been taken captive.

There is a final but disputed reference on December 5. Wessie Lipping Lamb stated in his 1969 Champlain Society translation of Franchere that it was not the Cowlitz as mentioned in the French account which states that after having procured a guide the expedition: "left to go up the Cowilitzk River to investigate whether a post in this area would be profitable."²⁴ Lamb contends that this was not the Cowlitz but rather: "in fact the Willamette River in the printed text and it was evident that the Willamette was meant."²⁵

One might concede this point since the Willamette River was earlier mentioned by name, at least a spelling close enough to justify such a claim, "the Wilomat River."

²⁴Ibid., p. 248.

²⁵Ibid., p. 96.

Among important considerations were Franchere's attempts to record ethnographic observations concerning the many villages and tribes in the Columbia estuary, noting especially the many similarities from the mouth to the upriver falls [present day Bonneville Dam] in appearance, custom and language. Certainly they were all part of the Chinookan Cathlumet-Kiksht family.

In dress, for example, females wore skirts made of cedar bark lining which with a kind of petticoat fell roughly to the knee. They rubbed their bodies with fish oil which was usually in abundant supply and then overlaid with various paints and dyes made from berries and earth pigments.

The Cowlitz tribe has long been referred to as Indians "in the round." This refers essentially to the nomadic habits of that tribe for they moved up and down the valley in search of their seasonal food sources. Franchere in particular noted their reliance on the fish runs, as did all the Columbia basin tribes, taking salmon with nets constructed of "strong nettle fibers" and spears.²⁶

Sturgeon were also taken with nets or strong, primitive hooks, the latter fashioned of iron:

²⁶Ibid., p. 252.

The nets in which sturgeon is caught are also made of fibres, shaped like a funnel, five to six feet in diameter . . . ten to twelve feet long.²⁷

Immense catches were taken by these simple traps and dragged into shore to be clubbed and dried.

The canoes were constructed of a single log. Certainly they were substantial and commodious, for Franchere describes them as five feet wide and thirty-five long, capable of carrying more than two dozen personages. He noted other construction details as well; dwelling structures 100 feet long and thirty to forty feet in width, built up in sturdy cedar planks to form commodious communal habitats: the long house earlier described. Their remarkable sturdiness depended on heavy posts which were driven into the earth and rose seven to eight feet above ground level. The aforesaid planks were individually secured to these posts. The roof of the structure was finished off with planks, which measured roughly four to five feet off the ground. They had a sloping pitch and were tied to rafters. Fireplaces were located in the center of the structure, with a hole in the roof for smoke to escape.²⁸ As was customary with Cowlitz longhouses, those observed by Franchere and his party housed a number of families,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 253.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 256-257.

separated from one another by partitions. Observing the skill and ingenuity of these local builders, Franchere remarked:

One cannot admire too highly the patience of these natives, and the time that it takes for them to gather enough wood to construct their houses. Suffice it to say that we did not find a single axe among them. They only tools they use consist of a chisel, measuring two inches in length, and usually made out of an old file. An oblong stone serves as a hammer.²⁹

Franchere's description of the implements used in food preparation resembled those used by the Cowlitz tribe. Square cauldrons constructed of steamed and bent cedar sheets were used to boil meat and fish. Hot stones were placed in the wooden vessels. As water boiled, food was added, and the top was covered with woven reed mats to lock in steam.

Alexander Henry the Younger, explorer and fur trader with the famed North West Company, further reported on activities and observations in the Cowlitz river vicinity. Henry was employed as a fur trader with the North West Company. He recorded his several observations of travel in the Pacific Northwest in a journal spanning the years 1799-1814. Historian Elliott Coues remarked of Henry:

²⁹Ibid.

[He] was no geographer, in a technical sense, and not much of an explorer, even; he traveled for health or pleasure, but always on business, and made no actual discoveries. Yet he was a great traveler, who covered an immense area both by land and water, with a good eye for topography en route; he was also well able to say where he went and how he got there.³⁰

In 1813 Alexander Henry traveled to Astoria, serving most of his time at Fort George. His journal entries during the period 1813-1814 give precise and colorful details of his voyages along the Columbia and Willamette Rivers.³¹

Henry's first observation of travel in the vicinity of the Cowlitz River occurred on January 11, 1814:

At 9:30 a.m. we put ashore to breakfast below Oak Point, opposite the village of the Shoshones, on the S. side, at the entrance of a small river.³²

Considering its proximity to the Columbia as a major tributary, Henry may have indeed been referring to the Cowlitz, although the "Shoshone" designation is puzzling. From the brief description the village seems ethnically and culturally misplaced. Henry remarked that the natives of the area survived primarily on meat and roots, which they traded with the Indians "at Oak Point for salmon, etc."³³

³⁰ Elliott Coues, ed., The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson 1799-1814 (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), Vol. I, p. xvii.

³¹ Ibid., p. xxvi.

³² Ibid., p. 794.

³³ Ibid.

At eleven o'clock that same morning, the Henry party passed a village at Oak Point, located on the south "side of the river, on a extensive stretch of low land (Fanny's bottom), several miles long and about six miles broad."³⁴ Henry remarked that the banks of the river were lined with deciduous trees such as oak and alder:

The dwellings here consist of one long range of houses, parallel with the river. The natives seated on the bank gazed at us as we passed; they appeared numerous, with an uncommon number of children. We did not stop, although invited to do so by the old chief.³⁵

Traveling down river for several miles, the explorers came in full view of Mt. St. Helens, which Henry described in all her splendor:

Mt. St. Helens presented a conspicuous and romantic prospect--an immense cone enveloped in snow, rising from a level country, the base very broad, tapering up to a point without any rugged irregularity.³⁶

Mt. Coffin was passed immediately after sighting the glacial peak, on the north side of the river. Henry further remarked that the party passed two villages which were located "at the entrance of two small rivers about half a mile apart."³⁷ Considering their proximity to the Columbia,

³⁴Ibid., p. 795.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 795-796.

³⁷Ibid., p. 796.

one may assume that he was referring to the Cowlitz and Coweeman rivers, especially since they are nearest to their north bank's neighbor, the Kalama River, Henry's next encampment. The Kalama River encampment was a site also used by the Lewis and Clark party.

Alexander Henry's final reference to the Cowlitz River and vicinity was the Coffin Rock landmark on the south bank. On January 11, 1814, Henry remarked:

We soon came to a large village at the entrance of a small (Kalama) river on the N. A long range of houses runs parallel with the river, and the natives appear numerous. Opposite this village, on the S., is a point of rocks on which their dead are deposited in wooden canoes--one apparently that of a great chief, from the manner in which he is arranged. The island is called Coffin Rock.³⁸

It was at this particular landmark (now the Trojan power site) that one of his bark canoes "ran on a rock"³⁹ at 6:00 p.m., resulting in severe damage to the vessel. The boat was put ashore for repairs, while the other party members travelled upstream to the Willamette River.

Famed explorer and fur trader Rox Cox then came on the Cowlitz scene. Born in Dublin in 1793, Cox was first employed by Astor's Pacific Fur Company in 1811 and stationed at Astoria. The value of his employment as clerk with this prominent fur trading establishment has been

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

questioned. One June 25, 1813, a resolution was signed releasing Cox and two other clerks from their posts "with full permission to engage elsewhere . . ." ⁴⁰ since "Astoria was short on supplies for the interior posts and had more clerks than were needed." ⁴¹ Though identified as redundant, Cox chose to remain with the company, but soon after joined the North West Company, upon surrender of Astoria to the Canadian fur trading establishment.

In 1813 Cox published an account entitled, The Columbia River, which provided important insights into the business, along with geography and ethnography of the Pacific Northwest region.

While Franchere's earlier mentioned publication, Journal d'un Voyage a la Cote de Nord-Ouest de l'Amerique . . . preceded Cox's account, it did not receive initial acclaim, since it was first published in French. The English translation which appeared in 1840 was given international distribution and achieved success. But it is obvious that Cox knew Franchere's original version. The editors of his account reveal that:

⁴⁰T. C. Elliott, "The Sale of Astoria, 1813," Oregon Historical Quarterly, (March 1932), Vol. XXXIII, no. 1, p. 45.

⁴¹Ibid.

Cox was familiar with Franchere's book; in fact, it may have been the appearance of the latter's work that was responsible for his decision to put his own experiences into print.⁴²

Cox's The Columbia River was published in London in 1831, and by 1832 a third edition had appeared. The narrative covers a period of six years, five of those spent in the vicinity of the Columbia River and its tributaries. Cox stated that the two most important tributaries of the Columbia below the rapids were the "Willamut, or Multnomah, and the Coweliskee."⁴³ He stated:

We know little of the Coweliskee. It enters the Comumbia about half a day's march below the Wallamut from the northward; its banks are high, and thickly wooded, and the current much interrupted by rapids. Our traders, owing to the difficulty of the navigation, did not ascend it more than thirty miles.⁴⁴

This is the first note we have of such an extensive penetration.

The party travelled by bateaux, which were lightweight canoes constructed of wood. Their supplies consisted of ammunition, trade goods and food staples. Each bateau had from six to eight men paddling the vessel. Of course they had extensive experience in such arduous shallow water

⁴²Ross Cox, The Columbia River (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), p. xxxi.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

ascents in the myriad waterways above the Great Lakes. None of it was ever very easy. Fortunately there were occasional passengers, some scientists or gentry who made notes.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century in England, the Royal Horticultural Society of London was the center of exchange for persons interested in the history of horticulture and landscape architecture, especially as it applied to their own gardens and estates. They were alert to the many new horticultural discoveries sent to Great Britain by James Cook and other scientific voyagers.

Upon learning of the Hudson's Bay Company's desire to substantially extend its trading posts in North America, the Royal Horticultural Society's secretary, Joseph Sabien, esq., requested permission for David Douglas, one of the Horticultural Society's most aggressive collectors, to travel to the new Columbia River region. The powerful trading company afforded the young inquirer a free passage to Oregon "aboard their new supply ship, the William and Ann, when she sailed around Cape Horn during the winter of 1824-25."⁴⁵

At the age of twenty, Douglas had been appointed to a post with the Glasgow Botanical Gardens. It was here that his botanical skills came to the attention of a botanist at

⁴⁵ David Douglas, The Oregon Journals of David Douglas (Ashland: The Oregon Book Society, 1972), p. 9.

the University, Professor William Hooker. Hooker generously recommended Douglas for membership in the Royal Horticultural Society of London:

The upshot was Douglas's appointment to study nursery developments in the eastern United States and Southern Ontario, and bring back choice specimens, for the Society's new gardens at Chiswick.⁴⁶

As Professor Hooker stated:

We now come to the most interesting period of Mr. Douglas' life, when he was about to undertake a long voyage and to explore remote regions untrodden by the foot of any naturalist.⁴⁷

Upon his return to England, Douglas edited his Oregon notes in 1825-1827 and presented them in the form of a journal. This comprised a lengthy description of the areas traveled, in addition to specific plant descriptions. The Royal Horticultural Society, however, did not publish the account until 1914. Douglas' arrival in the Columbia River region came at a time when the Hudson's Bay Company headquarters were being moved from Fort George to Fort Vancouver, and it could hardly have been a convenient time to entertain so inquiring and aggressive a personality as Douglas obviously was. Even so, Douglas' success in acquiring new botanical species far exceeded his

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁷John Davies, Douglas of the Forests: The North American Journals of David Douglas (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), p. 15.

expectations. In the first six months after he arrived, he gathered 499 species, obtaining between twelve and twenty-four examples of each. Each specimen was carefully dried in special paper which he had obtained in England for the purpose of plant storage, and each was given a detailed classification and description.⁴⁸ An outstanding example is the famous fir known to him as pinus taxifolia, soon recognized by Douglas as having tremendous commercial value. It is recognized throughout the construction world today beyond the local region as "Oregon pine."

Dr. John McLoughlin, now Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, was most cooperative and helpful to David Douglas, perhaps because he was the first English gentleman-scientist to visit the trading post. He gave crucial advice on itineraries and guides. In addition he generously supplied canoes, horses and men, when available. McLoughlin further gave a crucial letter of introduction to Douglas for the interior posts, placing them at his disposal. In a later recognition of his extraordinary kindness to Douglas, McLoughlin was presented with the Royal Silver Medal of the Royal Horticultural Society. Douglas wrote: "He assured me that everything in his power would be done to promote the

⁴⁸George Harvey Athelstan, Douglas of the Fir: A Biography of David Douglas, Botanist (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 55.

views of the [Horticultural] Society."⁴⁹

On November 7, 1825, Douglas left Astoria, traveling up the Columbia River accompanied by a guide. He encamped at a village in the vicinity of the Cowlitz River and proceeded to negotiate with a local Indian for the transport of baggage:

At a village where I put up I bargained with a indian to carry my baggage on his horse to the Cow-a-lidsk River, one of the northern branches of the Columbia. I had some difficulty with this fellow in accomplishing my end; he was the most mercenary rascal I have ever seen.⁵⁰

Eventually through the trade of tobacco, ammunition and flints Douglas was able to secure a porter to the Cowlitz River, but he described himself as being much fatigued upon arrival.

His journal entry for November 14, 1825, describes the physical features of the Cowlitz River in the following manner:

This is a large river 150 to 200 yards wide in many parts, very deep and rapid, the current running more than six miles an hour in parts. At mid-afternoon camped on a small woody island at its mouth, where it joins the Columbia, fifty miles from the ocean. Being high water when I put in, the boat grounded at ebttide, not having strength enough to slide her along the sand, I had to wait longer in the morning than I would have otherwise done.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Davies, op. cit., p. 38.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵¹ Douglas, op. cit., p. 58.

While exploring in the vicinity of the Cowlitz River, Douglas encountered Mt. St. Helens for the first time. He described the height as: "at least 10,000 to 12,000 ft. Two-thirds are I am informed continually enwrapped in perpetual snow."⁵² Douglas would misjudge other heights even more as he moved into the Canadian Rockies.

As a result of his travels into the Cowlitz interior and the upper Columbia, Douglas tried for a better understanding of the Indian tribes. By the middle of summer, he had developed an important working Chinook vocabulary. Douglas's biographer, William Moorwood, noted a Douglas opinion that the tribes of the lower Columbia "constituted the most stable and mature Indian society in North America."⁵³ The fact that these Indians of the lower Columbia possessed an unusually dependable food source gave rise to a more highly developed village life where leisure time spanned a variety of social and cultural tribal activities differing somewhat within each district. Among those recorded by Douglas were weaving, sculpture, painting and tribal entertainment such as potlatch ceremonies and dancing. Douglas also observed Cowlitz customs of burials,

⁵² Davies, op. cit., p. 39

⁵³ William Moorwood, Traveller in a Vanished Landscape: The Life and Times of David Douglas (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1973), p. 67.

dwelling construction, cooking and bathing.

When Lieutenant William A. Slacum of the United States Navy arrived on the river in the mid-1830's he also enriched our record of specific geographic observations. His somewhat confidential report entitled Memorial of William A. Slacum was commissioned by President Andrew Jackson and was later widely referred to during the thorny Oregon Question controversy with Great Britain. The Slacum memorial was presented to the 25th Congress, 2nd session, in 1837. Slacum introduced the document by stating his objective. He was commissioned by the government to:

obtain some specific and authentic information in regard to the inhabitants of the country in the neighborhood of the Oregon, or Columbia River; and, generally, endeavor to obtain all such information, political, physical, statistical, and geographical, as may prove useful or interesting to this government. ⁵⁴

Slacum's report underlined the fact that he had observed not only the Columbia River, but also its tributaries. Although brief, his reference to the Cowlitz River and vicinity is most important because it reports Cowlitz Farm activities and notes the existence of coal, the new fuel of the steam age:

⁵⁴"Slacum's Report in Oregon, 1836-7," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March 1912), Vol. XIII, no. 2, pp. 175-224.

On the Cowility, which falls into the Columbia, there are a few Indians of the Klackutuck tribe. Coal has been found here. Dr. McLaughlin now compels the Canadians, to settle on this river, as it lies north of the Columbia.⁵⁵

Of course we know that McLoughlin's orders would soon be circumvented by his ex-employees. But even more important American inquiries were afoot of which Slacum was a significant harbinger. On May 18, 1836, the United States Congress passed an act authorizing further Pacific explorations:

An Expedition to be fitted out for the purpose of exploring and surveying that sea, as well to determine the existence of all doubtful islands and shoals, as to discover and accurately fix the position of those which lie in or near the track of our vessels in that quarter, and may have escaped the observation of scientific navigators.⁵⁶

These vessels involved were the sloops of war Vincennes and Peacock, the ship Relief, the brig Porpoise, and the tenders Sea-Gull and Flying Fish.

The official title of this notable scientific undertaking was The United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838-1842. Able but irascible Charles Wilkes, a native of New York, was assigned to command the expedition. Wilkes' career with the navy began in 1818,

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁶ Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the Years 1838, 1839, 1841, 1842 (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), Vol. 1, p. xxv.

when he entered as midshipman. In 1830 he was advanced to the rank of lieutenant and worked primarily in the department of instruments and charts. His special interest and proficiency lay in the use of astronomical instruments. It is supposed that this special skill accelerated his promotion. Within a few years he was chosen to head the Pacific exploring expedition, promoted over men of greater age and rank.

The usual important and official instructions ordered Wilkes to survey and examine the land in the vicinity of the Columbia River and down the California coast. The main thrust of the expedition was to promote increased awareness in the fields of navigation and commerce, while at the same time promoting scientific learning and acquiring important knowledge about the Pacific littoral. To accomplish this goal, he was supplied with a group of civilian scientists placed under his command for the voyage. This group consisted of nine men: a philologist, two naturalists, one conchologist, one mineralogist, one botanist, two draughtsmen and one horticulturist. There was no easy assignment.

Explicit instructions were given to study the geography and hydrography of the bodies of water and countries visited. Special attention was to be focused on meteorology, astronomy, and terrestrial magnetism. These instructions

were carried out, to the best of the several abilities of the young American scientists beset as they were with many misadventures. On the 28th of April in the year 1841, several members of the party arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River. Adhering to their official instructions, individual parties observed longitude, latitude and made astronomical observations. In addition, both geological observations on the Columbia River area were recorded, along with botanical, ethnographical and zoological findings.

While there had been many great European expeditions throughout the 18th century, in an introduction to his narrative, Wilkes remarked that the American scientific expedition was the first of its kind to be commissioned at the national level:

Theirs was the first great American naval exploring expedition, the first to blend science and exploration with maritime commerce, and the first signal to the Old World that a new naval power had arrived in this twilight of the age of sail.⁵⁷

Prior to departure, Wilkes' time was devoted to studying official charts and instruments then possessed by the American government plus all other findings of European explorers to the Pacific. This battery of knowledge accompanied him to the Columbia River drainage.

⁵⁷ Donald Dale Jackson, "Around the World in 1,392 Days with the Navy's Wilkes and his 'Scientifics'" Smithsonian (November 1985), Vol. 16, no. 8, p. 49.

The Wilkes party departed from Astoria on August 18 and reached the Cathlamet area two days later. They anchored at Puget Island. During this journey Wilkes reached Oak Point (north bank) and then Mt. Coffin. He remarked on the use of the mountain as a Cowlitz Indian burial site:

The canoes used by the Indians as coffins are seen upon it in every direction, in all stages of decay. They are supported between trees, at the height of four or five feet above the ground, and about them are hung utensils that had belonged to the deceased, or that had been offered as tokens of respect.⁵⁸

The weather was clear, and Wilkes remained on the rocky mount for the entire day taking astronomical observations. His men then built a fire to cook their dinner but carelessly failed to keep it under control. Wilkes described the resulting conflagration:

. . . as we were pulling off to the brig, I regretted to see that the fire had spread, and was enveloping the whole area of the mount; but there was no help for it. The fire continued to rage throughout the night until all was burnt.⁵⁹

Wilkes passed Coffin Rock (south shore) and noted that it was located seven miles above Mt. Coffin and smaller in size. He too identified it as being a burial site, perhaps exclusively for tribal chiefs. The manner in which the dead were buried on the Cowlitz differed from that on the south

⁵⁸ Wilkes, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 121.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

side of the Columbia. On the Cowlitz Wilkes observed that the funerary canoes were placed near the banks of the river between four trees. These canoes contained the bodies of the dead. They were painted with an array of figures. Gifts from friends and family members were placed outside the canoes.

He then went on to explore the Cowlitz River, noting that it was unlike the Columbia in character. He wrongly decided that the Cowlitz River had its source in the Cascade Range below Mt. Rainier. We know today that the Cowlitz has its headwaters in the large Cowlitz Glacier on Mt. Rainier. Wilkes went on to describe the Cowlitz as having extremely high banks and being navigable only in high water. He reported that the soil was of good quality, consisting of "a clay . . . with vegetable mould, over trap rock and sandstone."⁶⁰ The trees lining the river were described as ash, maple, fir, pine, poplar and laurel. The fields in the vicinity were very low and flooded during May. He observed the existence of coal veins along the river but felt that it occurred in large quantities only above the East Fork:

⁶⁰Wilkes, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 318.

It was Wilkes who first charted the Toutle River under its present name. In 1853 the railroad surveyors showed the river as the 'Seh-quu' but the present name was restored in 1856. The name used locally by old settlers, however, is the 'East Fork of the Cowlitz River' and the river is mentioned by that name in the first entry in the Commissioner's Journal of Cowlitz County.⁶¹

In the month of September Wilkes reported very little water above the mouth of the Cowlitz, which rendered travel difficult. In fact, Wilkes calculated, the river was navigable only three months of the year. Most important he concluded that all future travel to Puget Sound and beyond would be via the Cowlitz River. To further this estimate, the morning of September 21, Wilkes was rowed up the Cowlitz in a gig to enlarge his survey work on the river and to check on the presence of coal. After traveling up river for a few miles, the party encountered rapids, which forced them to cordel the boat upriver with a line, always an exhausting and hazardous procedure:

I found, after great exertion and fatigue, we could not ascend beyond thirteen miles; for it had become so shallow that the boat would not float, and we had not strength to force her over the wide bar of gravel and sand, that had apparently accumulated during the last spring.⁶²

In fact he had scarcely recognized the river in its low water phase.

⁶¹ The Washington Historical Records Survey, op. cit., p. 8.

⁶² Wilkes, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 142.

Wilkes collected lignite specimens and then turned back, hoping to reach his brig before dark. In an attempt to thread one of the rapids, the crew almost lost their lives and sustained severe damage to their boat. It was this particular incident which prompted Wilkes to remark that the Cowlitz was navigable only at high water and that the strong current made it very dangerous.

Wilkes and his party made several trips to Cowlitz Farm, traveling both by bateau and by horseback. Wilkes was amused and delighted by the voyageurs; he remarked on their joie de vivre and merriment. He particularly noted their consistent politeness towards one another and their attire:

On reaching the river, we found one of Mr. [Peter Skene] Ogden's boats manned by fourteen voyageurs, all gaily dressed in their ribands and plumes; the former tied in large bunches of divers colours, with numerous ends floating in the breeze.⁶³

The bateaux resembled whaling vessels, although of larger dimension. They were built specifically to transport trade goods. Construction took only a few days. Wilkes described them as "clinker-built," that is built up on the sides with flat-shaped timbers. They were reasonably light in weight, to enable the crew to carry them over the portages and shallow drafted. But the crew always suffered from these lifts and portages, especially from twisted

⁶³ Wilkes, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 371.

ankles, smashed bones and hernias.

The expedition carried various goods and provisions such as cloth, blankets, guns, powder, shot, buckets, pails and chests, as well as shirts, beads, handkerchiefs and ribbons to be used for trade. The group then traveled on foot as far up the Cowlitz as they could go and then used pack animals once they left the sites of Cowlitz or Plomondon landings. Packs weighing ninety pounds were thought to be most economical and were carried on the shoulders of each man. Some men were expected to carry two such packs, thus the strangulated hernias.

Upon arrival at Cowlitz Farm, the recently established Hudson's Bay supply farm, Wilkes described what he saw:

After passing extensive cammass plains we reached the Company's farm on the Cowlitz, which occupies an extensive prairie on the banks of that river. They have here six or seven hundred acres enclosed, and under cultivation, with several large grainaries, a large farmhouse, and numerous out-buildings to accomodate the dairy, workmen cattle &c. The grounds appear well prepared, and were covered with a luxuriant crop of wheat. At the farther end of the prairie was to be seen a settlement, with its orchards &c., and between the trees, the chapel and parsonage of the Catholic Mission gave an air of civilization to the whole.⁶⁴

Wilkes described the Indians as belonging to the Klackatack tribe, though they were called Cowlitz. He emphasized that the mortality rate among tribal members was

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 316-317.

very high due to disease. In his census Wilkes put the Cowlitz population at 330, but it is difficult to accept this as definite (see Appendix). Considering the local fevers and epidemics his count seems too high. In praise of the Cowlitz tribe he stated:

If I were to judge of the whole Cowlitz tribe from the specimens we had with us, I should say they were the merriest set of fellows I ever saw, full of fun, and laughing all day long; I became wearied with their incessant gaiety.⁶⁵

The winter of 1844-1845 witnessed increasingly strained relations between Great Britain and the United States. The issue confronting the two was the controversy over the Oregon country, which had been occupied by both countries under an unusual Joint Occupation Agreement of 1818 that had been renewed in 1827. The dispute over a boundary settlement became ever more hectic as American migration to Oregon not only continued but sharply increased:

When American settlers began moving into Oregon, the question became acute. A small trickle in the 1830's, American migration became a sizeable stream in the 1840's. More than one thousand made the long journey in 1843, and the immigration in 1844 was even larger.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 319.

⁶⁶ Captain H. Warre, Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory (Barre: Imprint Society, 1970), intro. p. 7.

In a letter of May 3, 1845, from the Governor General, the Rt. Honorable Lord Metcalf, K. G. C. G. to His Excellency, Sir R.[ichard] D. Jackson, Commander of the Forces, Govt. House, Montreal, Jackson was instructed to "select two officers to accompany Sir George Simpson, Gov. of the Hudson's Bay Establishments in British North America, upon a particular service of an important description."⁶⁷ The two persons selected for the secret assignment were Lieutenant Henry J. Warre, aide-de-camp to his uncle Sir Richard, and Lieutenant Mervin Vavasour, officer in the Royal Engineers. They were instructed by the British government to report to Sir George Simpson and travel with him to the west. It was imperative that they carry out his instructions, since he nominally at least represented the British government.

A May 3 memorandum to young Warre from Jackson included ten important confidential instructions. Warre was to proceed with Sir George Simpson to the West and make a secret military reconnaissance, to be used in case of upheavals in British-owned territory. Warre was to travel as a vacationing civilian in order to avoid suspicion. He

⁶⁷ Letter from the Governor General, the Rt. Honorable Lord Metcalfe, K. G. C. G. to His Excellency, Sir R. D. Jackson, Commander of the Forces Govt. House, Montreal, May 3d, 1845. "Documents Relative to Warre and Vavasour's Military Reconnaissance in Oregon, 1845-6," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March 1909), Vol. X, no. 1, p. 19.

was to follow Simpson's advice on matters pertaining to the mission. It was imperative that his mission be kept secret. Warre was to make sketches of strategic sites to illustrate his reports. He was to transmit all his communications through Sir George Simpson. He was further ordered to report on all British posts to determine whether they could resist a sudden attack, estimate the probable cost of reinforcing the posts, and the time required. The government would pay all expenses of Warre's travel, for which he must submit a detailed accounting.

Vavasour was likewise ordered to keep his true purpose secret. He was to submit all his reports to the Commanding Royal Engineer in Canada, for forwarding to Britain.

In the spring of 1845, Warre and Vavasour departed from Montreal with Sir George Simpson, their mission disguised as a sporting vacation to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Warre reported the following observation on May 5, 1845:

We embarked in two large canoes, made of the bark of the white birch tree, and paddled by fifteen Canadian and Indian voyageurs, whose voices made the forests re-echo with their chansons.⁶⁸

After many cross country hardships, including an astonishing loss in horses alone, they arrived on the banks of the Cowlitz River and observed:

⁶⁸Warre, op. cit., p. 13.

The course of the Cowlitz is rapid, and in high water dangerous, but presenting no obstacles that are not overcome by the energy and perseverance of the Canadian boatmen.⁶⁹

This report noted that the Cowlitz River entered the Columbia from the north and was one of its most important tributaries. Warre and Vavasour mentioned that coal was to be found in the vicinity of Puget's Sound and on the Cowlitz. They collected specimens of good quality.

In referring to the activities of their hosts, the Warre and Vavasour report noted that agricultural operations were being carried out at both Fort Vancouver and Cowlitz Farm. The cattle, sheep and general harvest production could supply any military or naval force, should they deem it necessary. They further remarked the abundance of salmon, sturgeon and other fish. From a strategic standpoint they revealed:

From the Cowlitz farm the troops, etc. can descend the river in boats, to the Columbia and proceed to any required position on it, by the same means.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Report of Lieuts. Warre and Vavasour, dated 26, October, 1845, directed to "The Rt. Hon. The Secretary of State for the Colonies." Received July 6, 1846. Documents, op. cit., p. 56.

⁷⁰ Lieut. Vavasour's (Engineering) Report, Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, Oregon Territory, 1st March, 1846. Documents, op. cit., p. 92.

The Warre and Vavasour report revealed that the population of native Americans west of the Rockies had been drastically reduced over the years, due to the civil wars and disease. The report classed the natives in two distinct categories: 1) coastal tribes, and (2) interior tribes. Those on the coast far outnumbered the interior dwellers. A common physical feature of the Cowlitz tribe was flattened forehead, a procedure which was performed on infants. Warre was much interested in the custom of entombing the body of a dead chief in his canoe. He observed a burial site on the Cowlitz River and noted:

The tomb from which I have taken the sketch, was most picturesquely situated on the banks of the river Cowelitz. The Indian died in the prime of life, and on his death bed declared, in obedience to the frightful superstitions of his ignorant race, that a chief of a neighboring tribe had caused his death, and desired his relatives to be revenged! His two brothers, immediately burnt his body, brought the ashes and deposited them in the tomb; they then slaughtered their brother's favorite horse, destroyed his blankets, &c., which are hung in tatters over the grave, and nailed the tin pans &c. to the sides of the canoe, which had been perforated in several places to prevent the possibility of its being again made use of. These marks of ceremony are to do honor to the deceased, and to ensure his comfort in the world to come.⁷¹

The Warre and Vavasour party wintered in Oregon Territory through early 1846, reconnoitring the countryside. They obtained horses from the Hudson's Bay Company and hired

⁷¹Warre, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

canoes from the local natives for travel along the waterways.

On the 8th of December, 1845, Warre and Vavasour wrote to The Right Honorable Lord Metcalfe, with the following message:

My Lord,

We have the honour of forwarding by the Hon'ble The Hudson's Bay Company's ship "Cowlitz," a report dated November 12, 1845, under cover to your Lordship addressed to the Secretary for the Colonies, containing such information as we have been able to collect up to that period.⁷²

The Warre and Vavasour reports were filed in the War Department archives and included a series of sketches by Warre. Two years after he returned to London, a folio of 20 colored lithographs was published, entitled: Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory.

Among the thousands of American emigrants moving west along the great Oregon and other legendary trails, specific attention should here be paid to the special travelers, Overton Johnson and William H. Winter. They came to Oregon Country in the "Great Immigration of 1843." Winter, a native of Indiana, had earlier ventured to California in an unsuccessful search for gold. Johnson, also a native of Indiana, was a teacher. Together they produced an important

⁷² Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Metcalfe, G. C. B. &c. &c. &c. Gov. Gen. B. N. America H. B. Company's Post, Fort Vancouver, Dec. 8, 1845. Documents. op. cit.

account of the 1843 immigration entitled: Route Across the Rocky Mountains with a Description of Oregon and California: Their Geographical Features, Their Soil, Climate, Productions, &c, &c. With his pedagogical background, Johnson is believed to have authored the entire narrative, except for the section pertaining to California.

In their account, the Americans described streams and tributaries of the Columbia of which the "Cowlitz" was the largest flowing from the north. Their account of Cowlitz Farm activities is to be analyzed in Chapter III. The travelers were impressed with the agricultural potential of the Cowlitz valley, nestled between the ocean and the Cascades, its rich soil and general suitability for cultivation.

The narrative gives a vivid account of the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, which Warre had also described:

. . . Mount St. Helens, a lofty snow capped Volcano rises from the plain, and is now burning. Frequently, the huge columns of black smoke may be seen, suddenly bursting from its crater, at the distance of thirty or forty miles.--The crater is on the South side, below the summit. The Cowlitz River has its source in Mount St. Helens.⁷³

Johnson and Winter correctly identified the erupting volcano, but erred in believing the headwaters of the

⁷³Overton Johnson and Wm. H. Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains, with a Description of Oregon and California (Lafayette: John B. Seamans, 1846), p. 52.

Cowlitz River to be Mt. St. Helens, for as we know it rises on Mt. Rainier but the Toutle and Coweeman rivers do flow from the volcanic peak just described.

Another more famous observer is James Gilchrist Swan, a Boston native who ventured out to the wilds of the Pacific Northwest. Well educated in history, geography and admiralty law, Swan had been prominent in Boston society and successful in his ship building business there. But he also had the spirit of adventure, for in 1849 he left New England. His purpose, as he later (1857) remarked in his account, The Northwest Coast, was:

to give a general and concise account of that portion of the Northwest Coast lying between the Straits of Fuca and the Columbia River--a region which has never attracted the explorers and Navigators of the Northwest, since the times of Meares and Vancouver, sufficiently for them to give it more than a passing remark.⁷⁴

Swan remarked in his narrative that he had long had a desire to see the Columbia River and study the tribes of the region. His opportunity came with an invitation from Charles J. W. Russell, of Shoalwater Bay to visit the area in the autumn of 1852. He remained at Shoalwater for several months and finally set out by sailboat on the third of June to see the Columbia. On the morning of the fourth, Swan viewed our now familiar Mt. St. Helens for the first

⁷⁴James G. Swan, The Northwest Coast (Philadelphia: Harper & Brothers, 1857), Intro.

time. He wrote:

Mount St. Helens reared its snowy head high in the region of the clouds. The rapidly increasing morning rendered it distinctly visible, although a hundred miles in the interior.⁷⁵

Swan reported that Chinook salmon, one of the staples of the diet of the Cowlitz Indian tribe, entered the river around the end of May and spawned in mid-June. It was in his mind the most flavorful salmon in the world, due to the fact that it was caught so near the ocean.

Swan, too, noted the fishing nets made of twine, spun from the fibres of spruce roots. Round flat stones with holes in the center were used as weights, tied to the fibres on the bottom of the nets. Flat pieces of cedar were used as floats to identify designated fishing areas in the traditional water courses.

Swan observed a marked similarity of lodge construction among the various Northwest coast tribes. The Indians used wedges to split cedar boards for the exterior; again these attached to corner posts, and the lodge was finished with rafters and roof boards. The interior perimeter of the lodge was divided into raised sleeping compartments along the walls with woven sleeping cedar bark mats. As so many early illustrations reveal, the center of the lodge was used for cooking; fish berries and roots hung from the rafters to

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 103.

dry. Swan noted that each lodge of the Columbia River natives was used by several families, as was true of the Cowlitz River lodges. The habitation was made accessible by an easily defended hole in the side of the dwelling designed for single entry.

The role of the women was primarily cooking and weaving, according to Swan; and with the Cowlitz, the usual methods of cooking were boiling or roasting. Again the process of boiling was ingeniously carried out by placing red hot stones in a tightly woven cooking basket filled with water. The skillful women wove from the fibers of flags, rushes, bear grass and cedar bark and occasionally dog and goat hair.

Swan noted that the custom of flattening the head was prevalent among the tribes but his notes are more specific than Warre's:

This flattening of the head appears to be a sort of mark of royalty or badge of aristocracy, for their slaves are not permitted to treat their children thus; but, although I have seen persons with and others without this deformity, I never could discover any superiority of intellect of one over the other.⁷⁶

Swan also gave a detailed account of an Indian burial, which was very similar to the Cowlitz sepulchre custom. To prepare the canoe for burial, holes were made in the bow and

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

the stern to prevent the vessel from being used again and to allow rain water to drain. The corpse was wrapped in blankets and laid on mats in the canoe. Then the apparel and prized possessions of the deceased were placed with his body. A smaller canoe was then reversed over the corpse, and the whole was covered with mats and raised above the ground four to five feet where it rested on two supports. Cooking utensils and blankets were then placed around the canoe. The body was left to decompose for roughly one year, then the bones were placed in a box and buried beneath the canoe.

Swan commented at length on the range of Chinook dialects of the some 25 tribes in the territory. He noted that to an untrained ear the languages sounded the same but were actually quite different from one another. The jargon used English, French and Chinook words and may have originated through trade with the Hudson's Bay Company according to some persons. Swan, however, disputed this, stating that a form of trade jargon had been in use for many years among the coastal tribes. He saw an early reference to this jargon in the 1788 publication of Meare's voyages which certainly preceded the Bay Company contracts.

Swan, too, traveled on the Cowlitz River, and he accurately fixed it in the following manner:

Descending the Columbia forty miles from the lower mouth of the Willamet, we find a small stream, called the Cowlitz, entering it from the north; and thirty miles lower down, the great river, which is nowhere above more than a mile wide, expands to the breadth of four, and in some places of seven miles, before mingling its waters with those of the Pacific. It however, preserves its character as a river, being rapid in its current, and perfectly fresh and potable to within a league of the ocean, except during the very dry seasons and the prevalence of violent westerly winds.⁷⁷

Swan is one of a series of exceptional observers who continues to hold our interest today. But from the second decade into the middle of the nineteenth century, the wilderness of the Far West drew an ever broader range of American explorers and travelers. George Gibbs is another individual, somewhat akin to Swan, who would venture out West to make his personal ethnological observations.

A native of the eastern seaboard, Gibbs was an attorney, who also had a keen interest in the relatively new fields of geology and natural history. As with so many thousands it was the California gold rush which sparked his enthusiasm and curiosity to go venturing into the Far West. In company with others in the Mounted Rifle Regiment, he arrived in Oregon during the fall of 1849. Soon after, he was employed in the federal customs office located at Astoria and became involved with the important Indian

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 124.

Commission in Oregon. He later established residence in the vicinity of Fort Steilacoom, Washington, where he immersed himself in the study of tribal linguistics. The result of his efforts was the preparation of numerous vocabularies which were sent to the newly founded Smithsonian Institution, along with a substantial number of theological artifacts for the National Museum. In every sense he was among the most significant of the early American observers.

Gibbs was a colleague of the first Territorial Governor of Washington, Isaac Stevens. While undertaking the Northern Pacific Railroad Survey, Stevens hired Gibbs as a cartographer. Gibbs returned east to New York for what was to be just a temporary stay, but was caught in the turmoil of the Civil War and, unfortunately for us, he never returned to the Pacific Northwest. He settled near Washington, D.C. and continued to pursue his studies on Northwest Indian tribes, which were later published by the Smithsonian in a monograph entitled: Drawings by George Gibbs in the Far Northwest, 1849-1851. J. W. Powell of the Department of the Interior explained, with a reference to the increasingly important Gibbs visual record:

The materials collected by the Smithsonian Institution, together with a part collected by myself, were placed in the hands of Mr. George Gibbs, that eminent ethnologist and linguist, to be published in the Smithsonian contributions under his editorial management. By his death this plan of publication was necessarily delayed. By this time the materials in my hands had increased to such an extent that it seemed but justice to my assistants and myself that it should be published with as little delay as possible.⁷⁸

Joseph Henry, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, also emphasized a desire to credit the invaluable work of George Gibbs.

Of particular interest to the scheme of this paper, however, is the fact that Gibbs, in his Tribes of Western Washington and North Western Oregon, focussed on the geographical distribution of Native Americans in Washington Territory. He defined four distinct geographical districts: the Columbia River, Coast, Puget Sound and the "prairie country between the Kowlitz River and the Puyallup."⁷⁹ Gibbs remarked that the Cowlitz were "once numerous, but now almost extinct . . ."⁸⁰ This tribe he identified with the Salish or more common Flathead division. A twentieth

⁷⁸ Department of the Interior, U. S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, Contributions to North American Ethnology, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), preface, p. vi.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 164

⁸⁰ Ibid.

century biographer offers his opinion on Gibbs' scholarship, saying:

That he had not neglected his interest in ethnology was readily evident. He liberally dosed his letters with Skookums, Hyas tyee, and other Chinook jargon terms, revealing his mastery of that trade language. To his sketchbooks of the overland journey, he added pencil drawings of Clatsop and Chinook wooden bowls, dwellings, and graves.⁸¹

He certainly had plenty of those to observe, for smallpox, malaria, scarlet fever, syphilis and a host of other wasting diseases had dramatically reduced the tribal population along every Columbia tributary. When Gibbs recorded that the "Kowlitz" population was at its height during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, he was just about right, although the problems had manifested themselves as soon as Broughton entered the lower river.

In reference to the often discussed Indian slavery issue, Gibbs reported that Dr. William Fraser Tolmie, Chief Factor of Fort Nisqually, believed that the slave trade always moved from north to south:

the only exception in his knowledge being that the Kowlitz Indians, formerly a very strong tribe, used to make forays on the Sound and carry their prisoners to the Columbia River.⁸²

⁸¹ Stephen Dow Beckham, "George Gibbs, 1815-1873: Historian and Ethnologist," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Dept. of History, University of California, Los Angeles: 1973), p. 74.

⁸² U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey, op. cit., p. 189.

Gibbs noted that until the arrival of the white man, warfare prevailed among many of the tribes; and this was nourished, among other reasons, by a desire for more slaves.

Of particular interest in regard to Cowlitz customs is Gibbs' description of sepulture; the usual means of disposing of the dead was to place them in canoes. These vessels were taken into the woods and placed on posts high above the ground. He too mentioned both Mt. Coffin and Coffin Rock as primary burial sites for the Cowlitz River area. He added Captain Sir Edward Belcher, the temperamental sea surveyor, who looked into the river and estimated the total burials in these two sites at 3,000:

Captain Belcher of the British ship Sulphur, who visited the river in 1839, remarks, 'In the year 1836, the smallpox made great ravages, and it was followed a few years since by the ague; consequently Corpse Island and Coffin Mount, as well as the adjacent shores, were studded not only with canoes, but, at the period of our visit, the skulls and skeletons were strewed about in all directions.'⁸³

Gibbs described other manners and customs indigenous to the Cowlitz and other tribes, especially the potlatch. This great ceremonial event, usually held to honor a chief or other individual of substantial wealth, was always a source of interest to foreigners. In many cases, both property and articles of great value were acquired over a period of many

⁸³ Ibid., p. 200.

years for the purpose of an elaborate, sometimes economically ruinous, display at the potlatch. At this time members of the host's own and neighboring tribes would be invited to view the objects. A large structure was erected for this purpose for both exhibition and protection, and food was prepared for feasting sometimes planned to last many days. It was the custom to present certain individuals with especially prized objects, and the rest were tossed to the eager crowd. As a tribute to the owner, and in recognition of their own wealth and power, tribal members would cut their valued articles of personal clothing in pieces and retain a single piece as a token. It was a kind of conspicuous consumption that could cause every kind of hardship among competitive clans.

Gibbs' description of the lodge structures notes:

An excavation of a foot or more in depth is made through the center of the house, in which the fires are built, and where the cooking is done; the raised portion left on either side being covered with boards or mats to serve as a seat, and the bunks for sleeping placed against the sides, sometimes in two tiers. At one end of the house, there is frequently a platform for dances. . .⁸⁴

Gibbs described the design of canoes used on the "Kowlitz" as having a straight gunwale and carved at the bow with a zoomorphic figure.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

On more than one occasion Gibbs refers in his field notes to the diminishing population of the Cowlitz. He realized that the tribe had once been very powerful and vast, but now faced rapid diminution in population through a series of catastrophic epidemics, fevers and plagues:

The few bands remaining are intermingled with those of the Upper Chihalis [sic]. According to the best estimates obtained, the two united are not over one hundred and sixty-five in number, and are scattered in seven parties between the mouth of the Cowlitz and the Satsop.⁸⁵

In writing of the Cowlitz's demeanor and behavior, he did not echo Wilkes' agreeable sentiments. On the contrary, he, not indifferently but alas all too accurately, recorded the following:

They are all intemperate, and can get liquor whenever they choose. They are, besides, diseased beyond remedy . . . The speedy extinction of the race seems rather to be hoped for than regretted, and they look forward to it themselves with a sort of indifference.⁸⁶

In closing, Gibbs wrote about the existence of a demonic creature who lived near the base of Mt. St. Helens. The Indians reported that its footprints had been seen during their nocturnal ceremonial dances. Since the 1842 volcanic eruption on the mountain, they had refused to ascend its slopes. This is an interesting note with reference to

⁸⁵George Gibbs, Indian Tribes of the Washington Territory (Fairfield: Ye Gallen Press, 1967), p. 34.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 34-35.

modern myths, but the fact is that Indians among all the tribes were not attracted to the higher slopes of any of the mountains. There was no reason for them to journey there.

A study of early exploration in the vicinity of the Cowlitz River would not be complete without brief mention of the travels by the explorer, the Reverend Samuel Parker. During the years 1835-1837, he traveled in the West, recording minute observations. In 1842 his journal was published, entitled Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains, Under the Direction of the A.B.C.F.M. in the Years 1835, 36 and 37. On Monday, October 19, 1835, he sighted Coffin Rock for the first time, remarking that it was located in the middle of the Columbia River, some 23 miles downriver from Deer Island; its height was ten to fifteen feet. It was almost covered with canoes containing corpses. He described the Cowlitz River and its valley this way:

A few miles below Coffin island, the Cowalitz, a river coming from the north-east, flows into the Columbia, which is about thirty rods wide, deep, and navigable for boats a very considerable distance. The country up river is said to equal, in richness of soil, any part of the Oregon Territory, and to be so diversified with woods and prairies, that the farmer could at once reap the fruits of his labor.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Reverend Samuel Parker, A. M. Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains, Under the Direction of the A.B.C.F.M. in the Years 1835, 36, and 37 Third Ed. (Ithaca: Mack, Andrus & Woodruff, 1842), p. 153.

Although Parker seemed to think that there was more water in the Cowlitz than other observers, when he and his party dropped anchor for the evening, they had camped early because of numerous sandbars in the river. He reported that a storm was fast approaching, but that his party considered themselves protected by the surrounding high hills. Parker did recognize the river valley as the main north-to-south travel route.

The explorer Peter Crawford, a native of Kelso, Scotland, first learned of the wealth of the Cowlitz Valley from Marcus Whitman. Following the advice of the well-known missionary, he traveled up the Cowlitz River to explore the interior country. On Christmas Day, 1847, he settled on a river bottom property which is now the general vicinity of North Kelso, Washington. Crawford was an experienced surveyor and later platted the town of Kelso, naming it after his birthplace. In 1879 and 1880 he completed his travel journal, which he sent in installments to the historian H. H. Bancroft. Bancroft was doing research for a voluminous history of the west and asked Crawford to write an account of his experiences. Happily, the 400-page manuscript of Crawford's journal was placed in Bancroft's private archives and later in the Bancroft Library. The journal was turned up there years later by John M. McClelland, Jr., former editor and publisher of The Daily

News in Longview, a distinguished historian of the Cowlitz district. He transcribed the journal and reprinted it in the newspaper throughout 1953.

The journal relates how Crawford and his party set out to stake their claims on the Cowlitz River, mistook a smaller body of water for it (probably a slough or perhaps the Coweeman) and sought direction:

Turning back on arriving at its mouth we hailed a canoe carrying Canadian Frenchmen. Interrogated about the whereabouts of the mouth of the Cowlitz River, they probably having come from that stream, pointed out nearly to its exact locality. So off we put with good glee thinking soon to reach the place. After traveling downstream in the same right bank of the Columbia we entered the supposed upper mouth of the Cowlitz River which was a rather narrow passage for so large a stream and after entering and pulling very hard for a while we got into the main stream, a bold mountain stream about 175 yards wide, with a tortuous winding channel at least in some places. This water being rather muddy, we judged the river must be above its natural height.⁸⁸

Crawford remarked that the Cowlitz River was lined with the fir trees and that they contrasted with the "picturesque scenery of this winding river."⁸⁹ Behind the firs was a completely different landscape, comprised of deciduous trees such as crabapple, boxwood, maple and ash. He was astonished at the abundance of moss in the area: "A stick

⁸⁸Peter Crawford, "Exploring Up the Cowlitz," The Daily News, 27 August 1952, p. 15.

⁸⁹Ibid.

as thick as one's arm would be as large around as a lady's waist so much covered with moss." ⁹⁰

Roughly three miles down from the Cowlitz River, the Crawford party reached Mount Coffin:

Here we halt as the afternoon is very fine, a lovely December day, putting me to mind of Christmas Day in Southampton, England in 1843. Having made fast the little boat we ascend, taking the instruments with me thinking this to be a good observatory. Ascending up its south side, which is composed of stairway looking terraces, to the very summit and then we behold the view. Away to the northeast a large prairie, beyond, flat woods. Still beyond is mountains or hills of burnt timber. It is magnificent in December and the view is grand, surrounding country giving to this spot quite a picturesque appearance.⁹¹

The final account of travel and exploration in the vicinity of the Cowlitz River comes from the earliest published account of the first ascent of Mt. St. Helens. Gold Hunting in the Cascade Mountains was published by L. E. V. Coon in the Chronicle office, Vancouver, W. T. in 1861. The only known copy of this very early Washington imprint is in the collections of Yale University. The narrator is not identified at first, nor are members of the climbing party.

Their journey to Mt. St. Helens began on the morning of September 19, 1860, at approximately 10:00. Supplies included horses with packs and guns. The party traveled for

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Peter Crawford, "The First White Inhabitants," The Daily News, 30 August 1952, p. 21.

several miles along the banks of the Lewis River until they came to an open valley covered completely with volcanic rock. No grass was seen for miles. It is apparent that this was a lava flow from the volcanic eruptions of the mountain in the early 1840's. Mt. St. Helens itself was described as "standing like a hoary-headed giant amongst an army of dwarfs."⁹² The following additional observation was made from a distance of three miles:

The volcanic covering grew rougher and more difficult to traverse. Large chasms and deep holes intercepted our track, many of which, our horses could hardly be forced to leap. A high mountain towered above us to the north, and on the south a precipice of two hundred feet cut off all communication with the valley. Immense piles of smoke discolored rock obstructed our pathway . . . The few firs which had grown in the crevices of the rocks, had all been blasted and killed nothing like life appeared over the entire extent of this vast bed of lava.⁹³

The party was particularly interested in the various species of trees they observed during their ascent. They found red fir to be in abundance in the valleys, with balsam, Norway-pine and hemlock appearing at higher elevations. The ascent became increasingly difficult when the party encountered volcanic rock and lava. At one point there were narrow volcanic ledges barely wide enough for the

⁹²Gold Hunting in the Cascade Mountains (Vancouver: L. E. V. Coon, 1861), p. 12.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 12-13.

horses to cross. Thick clouds surrounded the summit of the mountain, rendering it invisible. Throughout the entire expedition, the party was assisted by the Indian guide John Staps, whom they had encountered in the volcanic valley. Staps warned them that neither Indian nor white man had ever climbed to the summit.

On the morning of September 28 at 7:00 they began the true ascent, a grueling physical task:

Our Indian guides continued with us until we passed the timber line, and traversed a small part of the belt of magnificent grass which girdles the mountain, and extends from the timber to the base of the snow line, probably a mile and a half in width. Nothing, however, would induce them to cross it, nor would they agree to go with us. They shuddered at the idea, and strongly protested that it was impossible to ascend the peak; and further intimated that our persistence in this, to them, mad attempt, would inevitably bring upon us the sore displeasure of the Sah-hah-ly Ty-ee of the mountain, who would inflict upon us a severe penalty for our temerity.⁹⁴

A path of sorts seemed to lead from timber line to the summit, but it appeared impassible because of a volcanic ledge; thus the party chose a more easterly route. As the fog began to lift, Mt. Hood was visible to the southeast. At this higher altitude, the climbers complained of altitude sickness, which brought on chest pains and a stinging sensation in the lungs. All were reinvigorated, however, by viewing the summit of Mt. St. Helens less than a quarter of

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

a mile away:

The valleys of the Columbia and Willamette stretched away to the South, while these majestic streams looked like streaks of silver on a groundwork of velvet, as they pursued their tortuous course through the beautiful evergreens that bordered them. To the West, apparently, not far below us, laid the broad Pacific, as placid as an infant's slumbers as it reflected the golden rays of the noon-day sun.⁹⁵

It took them nearly two hours to cross several ledges on the approach to the summit. An important decision was who would have the honor of being the first to reach the summit. The choice was Jesse Failing of the pioneering Portland family. "At the moment--at half past two P.M. on the 28th day of Sept. AD. 1860--the top of Mt. St. Helens ceased to be a Terra Incognita."⁹⁶

At the summit, the party erected a flag on a pole which one of the members had used as a walking stick during the ascent. Large stones secured the pole against the fierce winds. The members of the climbing party inscribed their names on the flagstaff: Amos E. Russell, James A. Burk, Lyman Merrill, Jesse Failing, Squire J. Bozarth and Indian guide John Staps. In describing the summit, the author wrote:

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

Unlike any mountain of equal height I had ever seen, the highest point of this was without snow, though to the north, east and west, but a few feet below, the snow of ages probably covered the stones and lava for many, many feet. Equally peculiar and remarkable was its physical formation. Instead of an immense pile of stones to crown its lofty head, its coronet is comprised of hematite, pumice, sand and ashes . . . In view of this peculiarity there is no doubt in my mind that the Indian's assertion that 'the mountain is not as high as it once was' is not only well founded, but strictly true.⁹⁷

The writer extolled the view of the mountains Hood, Rainier, Jefferson and Adams from the summit of Mt. St. Helens:

As a propitious gale drove away the clouds and revealed the sublime works of nature, which were spread out to our admiring gaze, we felt that nothing could transcend the grandeur of the scene or surpass in interest and incident the magnificent panorama then presented to an enraptured vision. Words are inadequate to a portrayal of its beauties. Pen and pencil must unite their utmost powers to convey an idea of a moiety even of its loveliness.⁹⁸

The foregoing descriptions of the first sightings and descriptions of the Cowlitz River by non-natives suggest the difficulties and the opportunities surrounding the Pacific Northwest coast between the Columbia River, Puget Sound, the coast line and the Cascade Mountains.

The topography was rough and broken, and the seas off the coast were equally so. As wary British officers and all others soon observed, the Columbia River bar was almost a

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

predictable place to lose one's reputation and chance for promotion, especially in the years of slow advancement before the British fleet buildup to destroy Napoleon's colonial-imperial ambitions. Deep draft vessels, which would include most frigates and any two-deckers, waited uneasily off the bar or were ordered through Juan de Fuca strait and down into Puget Sound, penetrating to its near head off Nisqually and eventually to Victoria on Vancouver Island. The interior route was of necessity formally identified as the Cowlitz corridor by all persons concerned, for anything east of the corridor must take into account the Cascade range and its high mountain passes.

This geographical containment and channeling becomes a historical fact of life affecting all future developments. It is this determination by all parties that concludes this chapter. The further exploration and early settlement of the increasingly important north-south route will occupy our interests and attention in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

COWLITZ FARM

As noted by a local historian in 1855:

The Hudson's Bay Company was really and almost exclusively, under its charters, a fur trading company, with collateral rights and such powers as were necessary to govern and control the country and its widely scattered inhabitants.⁹⁹

The Royal charter given by Charles II to his continental cousin Prince Rupert and other loyal friends styles them "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay."

The charter was given in 1670 for that wild and desolate, thinly populated, but fur-rich area. But now more time and space were involved. The Company had spanned the vast continent finding its way through myriad streams and portages across vast mountain barriers and finally down the Columbia River and to the strategic Cowlitz.

Among other changes and considerations affecting the Company were the demands of security and of a dependable food supply and available work force. In the last analysis what the Board of Governors looked at in their London

⁹⁹ History of Clarke County Washington Territory
(Portland: The Washington Publishing Company, 1885), p. 33.

meetings was the bottom line--profit. That drove the system from beginning to end, flogging the energies of such familiar historical figures as Pelly, Simpson, McLoughlin, Ogden, Douglas and Roberts. From top to bottom the guinea was king.

When the Company reached the lower Columbia River, it was (the early sites of Fort Clatsop, Spanish Neah Bay and Fort George quite aside) possessor of the land. Whatever the forms and ceremonials of discovery as informally noted by American Robert Gray or with some ritual by British naval commander William Broughton at the mouth of the Columbia River's gorge through the Cascades, the Bay men were now on the scene in force. Their voyageurs and engagés had brought the factors, the traders and clerks thousands of miles from their Churchill, Montreal and Winnipeg headquarters. They were in fact the British presence. They liked what they saw--and they intended to stay.

But the regular employees of the Company were not, in effect, manufacturers or farmers. Theirs had been the life of the trapper, the voyageur in some cases, the true coureur des bois. An occasional trip to the old home place such as Trois Rivieres, yes, but they were essentially nomads. And those who had grown old in the service, rather than dying of a strangulated hernia on some remote portage, or of fever in a lonely snowbound shelter, looked with interest on the new

and obviously more temperate landscape.

But there is a matter of preceding events which must be taken into account here. As recorded, Hudson's Bay Company held no western post (that is, beyond the Rocky Mountain barrier) until it effected its merger-reconciliation with the North West Company in 1821.¹⁰⁰ With the submergence of their robust young rival, Bay men took over the western establishment under the able direction of energetic John McLoughlin, a former North West Company man. He had arrived to take up his work at Fort George (Astoria) but it soon became obvious to him that the company's principal post must be established upstream. The final Vancouver post was decided upon in 1825. Here the ocean ships upon which the Company now depended for its British-made goods could be offloaded to the depots constructed for interior trade up the Columbia, the Willamette system and the Cowlitz, running downstream, and most important, turning north toward Puget Sound and all that lay above.

Agriculture became an immediate and prime concern at the Vancouver establishment, in such places as Champoeg on the Willamette, in the Tuality District, the rich valley draining to the Willamette just above the famous falls and

¹⁰⁰ Inventory of the County Archives of Washington No. 8 Cowlitz County (Seattle: The Washington Historical Records Survey, 1942), pp. 2-3.

on Sauvie Island, where dairy cattle were eventually introduced. There was even cultivation in the interior, as George Roberts reports to the wondrously curious Mrs. F. F. Victor in 1879.

With reference to proximities one might introduce a fact later recorded concerning the boatmen who made the whole system go. In regard to the Columbia boats Roberts states:

They were always built at Colville, were clinker built, over lapped not flush & carried 45 pieces of 90 lbs each & were carried over the portages at the Cascades & Dalles--a voyageur was expected to carry two of these pieces at a time ie [sic] 180 lbs--the boats were not caulked but pitched only with the Colville raw pitch mixed with Tallow.¹⁰¹

This is a droll little note, but it does tell us something about the weights and distances.

We do know more precisely that the first white male to live on the Cowlitz River in present Cowlitz County, according to both record and legend was Anton Gobar, a French Canadian sent by Chief Factor McLoughlin to be herdsman to the cattle loosed in the meadows where Kelso and Longview now rise. He lived in a hut or small Indian lodge on the Coweeman River, then identified as Gobar's River. Soon after, as will be shortly described, another French Canadian, Joachim Thibeault, came to operate a newly

¹⁰¹ Letter from George Roberts to Mrs. F. F. Victor, Cathlamet W. T. March 25, 1879. OHS MSS.

constructed granary built across from Gobar's operations on the west bank.

When Peter Crawford, recognized as the founder of Kelso, arrived on the scene with his companions, E. West and James O. Rayner in December 1847, he described Teebough (Joachim Thibeault) and Bagough (Antoine Petit dit Gobin), both of whom had solid attachments to Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁰²

Crawford, from Kelso, Scotland, well describes his first Cowlitz camp:

Landing our little boat on the west bank at those two houses we found that they were Hudson's Bay structures as they look just like some of their buildings at Fort Vancouver. Going up to a dwelling house, we found that the tenant of the dwelling house was a Canadian Frenchman living with a native woman of one of the lower Columbia tribes. Interrogating the inmates about stopping all night, we were permitted to cook on the fire in the middle of the house and slept on the floor on our own blankets. The native woman kindly gave us some mats of Indian construction to keep our blankets from the hard boards. In the morning we looked around and were rather pleased with the looks of the place, but could see but a little distance as the woods--brush--and tall timber obstructed the view. Packing up we determined to ascend the stream and explore for land.¹⁰³

Essentially, it was reported that, even ten years after the upper settlement was established on the Cowlitz, that

¹⁰² The Washington Historical Records Survey, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰³ "Peter Crawford Diary," Cowlitz County Historical Quarterly (May 1960), Vol. II, no. 1, p. 6.

everything between the Cowlitz-Monticello settlement and Cowlitz Farm-Plomondon's Landing, was an unbroken wilderness. There were of course bare and burned areas, but there was also lots of "brush" as reported by Crawford and his group. It is to the upper settlements that we must now ascend.

When John McLoughlin was establishing an agricultural settlement policy for his Company and retiring employees, neither he nor any other Company man could have foreseen the rise, the astonishing ferment which would excite and sweep Americans across their more easily traveled routes to the western lands.

This attention had been focused, perhaps, by the specific report of his corporate superior George Simpson, then the factor of Hudson's Bay prior to his appointment as governor of North American undertakings. Perhaps the earliest to make the crossing, Simpson and his party ascended the Cowlitz in 1828 during his general inspection of HBC posts. He noted the presence of several thousands of Indians along the river, just before the advent of raging fevers, measles, typhoid and so many other killers.

It was to the portage-landing site that Simon Plomondon was eventually sent in 1837 with instructions from McLoughlin to look over and occupy the most promising land. Plomondon was trustworthy and well regarded, having served

sixteen years with the Company. Two years later, a 4,000-acre farm would be measured off on the ground which Plomondon had evaluated.

The prospects seemed good. McLoughlin had started with less than 20 head of cattle, but he had increased that number to 200 by 1828, and to 700 in 1836, not including those sent to other stations. There were sawmills established near Fort Vancouver; vast crops of wheat, oats, peas and potatoes were raised at the farm; and flour was ground in the mills at Vancouver.¹⁰⁴ There was good reason to suppose that plenitude could be achieved at Cowlitz (Landing) Prairie.

The men working on the Cowlitz farm missed, among other comforts, their religion and their priests. To satisfy this longing, McLoughlin and the Company negotiated with the Bishop of Quebec, who appointed the great proselytizer Abbe Francois Norbet Blanchet as Vicar General in the Oregon Country. Accompanied by Modest Demers, his assistant, Blanchet and the rest of his party traveled overland, reaching Vancouver on November 24, 1838:

¹⁰⁴Mary Clanfield, "Hudson's Bay Company on the Lower Cowlitz," Cowlitz Historical Quarterly (May 1979), Vol. XXI, no. 1, p. 25

Leaving Fort Vancouver on December 12th in a canoe paddled by Indians, Blanchet went up the Cowlitz River and arrived at the settlement on Sunday, December 16th. After celebrating mass in the Plomondon home, he selected 640 acres of prairie land as the site of the mission. He then returned to Vancouver, but after a few weeks he set out again for the Cowlitz Prairie, where he opened the mission in Plomondon's home on Passion Sunday, March 17, 1839.¹⁰⁵

The Plomondon group had measured the appropriate ground for the church fathers, and that site is occupied today by the Cowlitz Prairie mission, appropriately operated by the Franciscan order of Catholic priests and nuns. Of special interest to this paper is the relatively short life of the Cowlitz Farm as a Hudson's Bay entity. In the final estimates for property inventory and evaluation of Cowlitz as a part of the "Puget's Sound Agricultural Company" in the negotiations between Great Britain and the United States, no picture of success is drawn:

¹⁰⁵ The Washington Historical Records Survey, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

The land and farm at the Cowelitz river known as the Cowelitz farm, consisting of three thousand five hundred and seventy-two acres, more or less, of which upwards of fifteen hundred acres are improved and under cultivation for farming and agricultural purposes, and the remaining portion is used for cattle and sheep ranges and pasturage, and for other purposes connected with the business of the said company; the said last-mentioned land being of the value of twenty thousand pounds sterling, (£20,000;) the establishment and buildings of the Cowelitz farm, consisting of dwelling houses, saw-mills, stores, grainaries, barns, stables, sheds, and piggeries, and of a great extent of fencing and enclosures of the value of six thousand pounds sterling (£6,000;) the said two last-mentioned sums making together the entire sum of twenty-six thousand pounds sterling, (£26,000;) equal to one hundred and twenty-six thousand five hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents. (\$126,533.33.)¹⁰⁶

During his memorable journey of 1824 Simpson was drawn to the Columbia District, as it was so identified: "I can scarcely account for the extraordinary interest I have taken in its affairs, the subject engrosses my attention almost to the exclusion of every other."¹⁰⁷ Simpson was an ever-increasing nag and goad to McLoughlin that he emphasize farming and produce. As Williams notes, he was "Pursuing with even more fervor than usual his policy of replacing

¹⁰⁶Memorials Between Great Britain and the United States, for the Final Settlement of the Claims of the Hudson's Bay and Puget's Sound Agricultural Companies (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), p. 27.

¹⁰⁷Glyndwr Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years of the Hudson's Bay Company," The Beaver (Autumn 1970), p. 51.

expensive European provisions with local produce."¹⁰⁸

Simpson referred to some of his fur traders as "gold eaters," so expensive did he consider their food. "It has been said that Farming is no branch of the Fur Trade but I consider every pursuit tending to leighten the Expence of the Trade is a branch thereof."¹⁰⁹

At the same time Simpson could perceive that all the area south of the Columbia might eventually be lost to him, though for the time he wished to settle the Willamette area with his retired employees. It was also at this time that he was negotiating with his Russian competitors to the north with whom he reached agreement in 1825. The Company would trade as far north as 54 40'N (which would 20 years later become famous). At the same time HBC could become a dependable grain source for the Russians.

At first everything had seemed to work well. Simpson's report concerning the District in 1828-29 is flattering:

Never did such a change of system, and a change of management, produce such obvious advantages in any part of the Indian country, as those which the present state of this Establishment in particular, and of the Columbia Department [sic] as a whole, at this moment exhibits.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

But such estimates were not to last.

The produce of the farms and mills at Cowlitz were early designated by Simpson for the Russian trade through the agreement the far-reaching Governor had signed with the Russian Company at Hamburg in 1839. The ten-year agreement (1840-1850) would supply produce at fixed prices and would include wheat, flour and beef:

The produce of the farms had to be transported to the mouth of the Cowlitz where it could be loaded aboard ship for delivery to the Russians. Bateaux were used on these runs. A bateau was a large flat bottomed boat pointed at both ends, 30 to 32 feet long with a beam of 5-1/2 to 6-1/2 feet. The craft was built of quarter-inch pine or cedar boards, light enough to be carried across portages by a crew of eight men. Hudson's Bay operated several sailing ships to haul its goods in the coast and oriental trade, among them the Cowelitz.¹¹¹

It is during this period that "Tebo" (an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company) and his warehouse came into play. The ships of the Hudson's Bay Company had all the while been vexatious. There were many delays, sinkings, losses on the bar of the Columbia River and other setbacks. The bateau transport down the rambunctious Cowlitz was hardly the end of the problem. On June 6, 1845 Simpson wrote:

¹¹¹ John M. McClelland, Jr., Cowlitz Corridor 2nd Ed. (Longview: Longview Publishing Co., 1984), p. 8.

The operation of the Cowelitz partake . . . of a ruinous character, as . . . that vessel only performed a single voyage to Sitka between 6 June 1844 and 11 March 1845 . . . We learn that this vessel was detained at the mouth of the Cowelitz River for 6 weeks, while the wheat from the Farm was being lightered down the river. We think this loss of time might have been avoided . . . by having a small Granary at the mouth of the Cowelitz River for the reception of the grain as it might be brought down gradually from the farm, instead of making a granary of the ship.¹¹²

It would appear that McLoughlin was disturbed by Simpson's criticism. On November 20, 1845 he replied to the home office in the following manner:

It is true the Cowelitz was detained at the entrance of the Cowelitz River to receive wheat as an unexpected call was made on us by the Russian American Company for an additional quantity of two thousand bushels, as it would not have been worth while to send a vessel with that small quantity, and as the Cowelitz had to proceed to the Coast with the Coast outfit, we considered it advisable to fill her up with wheat. For this purpose as we had not wheat here, I sent her to the entrance of the Cowelitz River to receive it as it was brought down in the boats, by which she may have been detained fifteen days longer than if she had loaded at this place, but which I could not avoid as it has been from the number of calls upon us impossible to build a store at the entrance of the Cowelitz River to receive the wheat from the Cowelitz Settlement till this year, and Sir George Simpson ought to have known that there must have been some good reason why we had not a store built at the entrance of the Cowelitz or if he had asked Mr. MacTavish he could have told him the reason.¹¹³

The Company archives reveal that:

¹¹²Clanfield, op. cit., p. 26.

¹¹³Ibid.

cattle raised at Cowlitz Farm and at Caweeman were also meant to fulfill this contract with the Russian American Company by providing both beef and butter. Some of the cattle may also have been shipped to Company posts as well as the Sandwich Islands (now called, Hawaiian Islands).¹¹⁴

Of architectural interest is the report of Peter Crawford and his waterborne party, which stated that they immediately recognized the buildings as HBC structures because they resembled buildings at Fort Vancouver. Thomas Lowe testified concerning the "post-in-sill" method (during the British and American joint commission for the final settlement of the claims of the Hudson's Bay and Puget's Sound Agricultural Companies):

Most of them were built of sawed timber about 6 inches thick, let into [set into] grooved upright posts forming very solid walls, nearly all were weather boarded on the outside, and the dwelling houses and some of the other buildings were besides ceiled with tongued and grooved dressed boards, shingled roofs.¹¹⁵

Thibault also invited the Crawford party to stay the night in the Company dwelling:

¹¹⁴Clanfield, op. cit., p. 27.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 29.

Crawford described the interior of the house as having a fire in the middle of the floor. A part of the floor was apparently finished for he said that the native woman, wife of the caretaker, kindly gave them some mats of Indian construction to keep their blankets from the hard floor. The Nathaniel Stone and H. D. Huntington families spent most of the winter of 1849 camping in one of the HBC wheat warehouses. Olive Stone Bowman described the warehouse as 'a huge frame, weatherboarded building, no windows, no ceiling inside. One big warehouse door and a primitive fireplace, an opening left in the floor--a six foot square filled with sand on which the fires were built--and another smaller opening directly over it in the roof for the smoke to escape.'¹¹⁶

But by official description during the hearings:

The post at the mouth of the Cowlitz River, consisting of dwelling house, granaries, and outbuildings erected by the company of the value of 400 pounds sterling; and the land occupied and used by them of the value of 100 pounds sterling; making together the entire sum of 500 pounds sterling equal to \$2,433.33.

Americans thought this an outrageous valuation. An article in the Pacific Tribune of Aug. 12, 1865, said in part 'Many of our readers have seen these old buildings at the mouth of the Cowlitz River near the present town of Monticello. Few have seen the land, worth \$500, occupied and used by said company. We think \$1,000 would be a very large compensation for these granaries, etc., and we venture the assertion that they never cost any such money. But we assert without fear of denial that this was not a 'trading post' for carrying on Indian trade, that it was not even used as such, and that it was entirely abandoned as early as 1850 or 1851.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ McClelland, op. cit., p. 10.

We are fortunate to have the official letters of Father Modeste Demers to his bishop, J. N. Provencher, Bishop of Juliopolis, at the Red River Mission. Demers was an astute observer and perhaps less of a salesman than his superior, soon to be Bishop Blanchet and then Archbishop. Blanchet had first visited the Cowlitz mission as earlier stated, but it is Demers who gives us the fine description translated by Carl Landerholm in 1956.

Father Demers spent the winter at the mission in 1840, arriving there October 13. Ascending the Cowlitz from Vancouver, Demers noted it as being:

excessively tortuous. Its course is filled with trunks of trees, which render its navigation difficult and often dangerous, even for small craft. Numerous rapids are found there, very difficult to ascent; and its steep banks present an aspect gloomy and wild.¹¹⁸

How apt. Of course one hardship, and danger, associated with this part-water, part-land passage was the swift flowing rivers running south to the Columbia, west to Gray's Harbor (the Chehalis and others) and north to Puget Sound. All had very steep banks which made it difficult to get down to and climb up from the surging waters.

But on October 13 Demers arrived to take note of the small number of Canadian farmers freed of HBC service, plus

¹¹⁸ Carl Landerholm, ed. and trans., Notices & Voyages of the Famed Quebec Mission to the Pacific Northwest (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1956), pp. 48-49.

a number of engagés on seasonal service, i.e., men still in Company service. As he stated, two years after the enthusiastic Blanchet's visit:

They are preparing to build a chapel there, of which one part is to serve as the residence of the missionary. While waiting for that, let us imagine a rude construction thirty feet in length by twenty feet in width, covered with bark, made of round and rough tree trunks, notched and crossed at the ends to form the corners, having a paving of nothing but some pieces squared by an ax and fitted in the same way, without ceiling; such was the missionary's house during the winter of 1840, and that house was also the chapel.¹¹⁹

Plainly Demers was a staunch man of God, but he was not impressed with his effect on the natives, whom he regarded as savages, or for that matter of the Mission farmers. The fact is that, although they now had their occasional frocked visitors, those families who had been dispatched north to seemingly more permanent territories north of the Columbia River now, despite Simpson and McLoughlin, wanted to join their friends and families in what seemed a more favored location, the Willamette Valley.¹²⁰

When Blanchet returned a year later he found the farm population only thirteen in number and the chapel still unfinished. He did not feel that the farmers were providing the Indians with a good example.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 171.

In the fact of these seemingly accurate observations one may marvel at the very favorable development of agriculture. Historian Alfred Lomax commented on the substantial success, not only with cattle but also with several breeds of sheep, "particularly Cheviots, Cotswalds, Leicesters, Merinos and Southdowns whose fleeces ran as high as twelve pounds each."¹²¹

Charles Wilkes, commodore of the American exploring squadron which visited the North Pacific, is one of our finest observers of farm practices, not only at Nisqually and Vancouver, but also during his Cowlitz passage. The farm had really been in operation only three or four years when he noted its many activities. Earlier he had made note that the Indian tillage on the islands off Puget Sound and Admiralty Inlet "consists of potatoes principally, which are extremely fine and raised in great abundance, and now constitute a large portion of their food."¹²²

The American sailor, traveling in one of three reconnaissance parties, went on to praise Nisqually Farm:

¹²¹ Alfred L. Lomax, "History of Pioneer Sheep Husbandry in Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly (June 1928) Vol. XXIX, no. 2, p. 114.

¹²² "Report on the Territory of Oregon by Charles Wilkes, Commander of the United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842," Oregon Historical Quarterly (Sept. 1911), Vol. XII, p. 284.

. . . fine crops of wheat, oats, peas, potatoes and so forth. The wheat it is supposed would yield 15 bushels to the acre. The farm has been two years under cultivation, and is principally intended for grazing and dairy. They now have 70 milch cows and make butter and so forth, to supply this contract with the Russians.¹²³

The Cowelitz farm is also in the western section; the production of wheat is good, about 20 bushels to the acre; the ground, however, has just been brought under cultivation.

Wilkes was leading one of the three reconnaissance parties generally south; his was specifically directed toward Nisqually, the Cowlitz, Fort Vancouver, Astoria and "the Willamette settlements." It was just after the middle of May when the Commodore and his seven companions arrived by horseback at the Farm. It must have been one of those very special spring days, for he gave it all a pleasing description:

The company is about to erect a saw and grist mill. The farm is finely situated, and the harvest of 1841 produced 7,000 bushels of wheat. Several Canadians are also established here who told me that they succeeded well but with little work. They have erected buildings, and work small farms of 50 acres.

I was told that the stock in this farm does not thrive so well as elsewhere. There are no low prairie grounds on that side of the river in the vicinity, and it is too far for them to resort to the Kamass plains, a fine grazing country a few miles distant, where the wolves would make sad predations with the increase if not well watched.¹²⁴

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid.

Wilkes noted the deficiencies, but he also stated that some of the fine level ground was too heavily timbered ". . . as to make it in the present state of the country valueless." He added, ". . . but there are large tracts of fine prairie land suitable for cultivation and ready for the plow."¹²⁵

Wilkes was obviously pleased. The local leader, Simon Plomondon, acted as the guide in descending the Cowlitz, as demanding as ever. It is possible that McLoughlin and Douglas (later Sir James Douglas, Provincial Governor of British Columbia) decided to keep the Cowlitz as wild and inaccessible as possible for its fur bearing potential north or the ever more formalized or apparent Columbia boundary, but perhaps it was simply the river itself. On June 17, Wilkes returned to the Cowlitz from his Vancouver-Willamette Valley journeys. The snow runoff is obvious, for he reported a strong current running:

He went to the Cowlitz Farm again, this time visiting the mission and several of the settlers' houses. Plomondon's he described as 'quite comfortable.' The settlement, he said, 'though consisting of a few families, appears very happy and united. They prefer the Cowlitz to the Willamette, although the land here is not so good as in the valley of the latter; but they say that many vegetables succeed here, that will not grow on the Willamette.'¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 284-285.

¹²⁶ The Washington Historical Records Survey, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

Even so, in his final estimation the Willamette Valley farms did best. "About 60 families are settled there, the industrious of whom appear to be thriving."¹³⁰ All in all Charles Wilkes was, by comparison with his home in the United States, very much taken with the Northwest.

A few years after his crucially important travels through the corridor came another flurry of British military descriptions which yield important, accurate and fascinating information by professional observers, not all of whom were in agreement in their final estimates.

The highly placed young British officers traveling incognito, lieutenants Henry Warre and Mervin Vavasour, had come overland from Montreal, most of the distance with an increasingly impatient Peter Skene Ogden. Warre's secret observations, written October 26, 1845, state:

There is a settlement of about 90 Canadian families on the Cowlitz River, where the Puget's Sound Company have about 1000 acres of ground under cultivation . . . A small establishment has been formed at the mouth of the Cowlitz river as a store for wheat, etc., which the H. B. Company exports in large quantities to the Russian settlement at Sitka and to the Sandwich Islands.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Wilkes, op. cit., p. 285.

¹³¹ Reports of Lieuts. Warre and Vavasour, dated 26 October 1845, directed to "The Rt. Hon. The Secretary of State for the Colonies." Received July 6, 1846. "Documents Relative to Warre and Vavasour's Military Reconnoissance in Oregon, 1845-46," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March 1909), Vol. X, no. 1, p. 56.

Warre's several reports are of such consequence that other of his observations must be considered:

Neither the Roman Catholic nor the Methodist Missions have done much toward reclaiming the Indian population, who are an idle, desolute [sic] race, and very few of them can be induced to exchange their mode of life or cultivate more than will absolutely keep them from starvation.

The total abolition of the sale of intoxicating liquors has done much for the good of the whole community, white as well as Indian; and so long as this abstinence (which can hardly be called voluntary) continues the country will prosper. When this prohibition is withdrawn, and the intercourse with the world thrown open, such is the character of the dissolute and only partially reformed American and Canadian settlers, that every evil must be anticipated, and the unfortunate Indian will be the first to suffer.¹²⁹

The Indian census taken by Hudson's Bay Company officials was used by the travelers, and obviously it shows an ever decreasing native population. They also noted specifically that a number of farmers located in the Nisqually and Cowlitz plains were from the Red River settlements and not all former Bay Company employees, but rather disaffected members of Lord Selkirk's settlements:

About 150 families were induced by this means to settle on the Cowlitz River, and on the plains in the neighborhood of Nesqually, in Puget's Sound; and horses, cattle, etc., given to encourage their labor.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 57

The soil of that part of the country not yielding so great a return as anticipated, many of them removed in the following year to the valley of the Willamette.¹³⁰

Vavasour's report on the Cowlitz is useful for it represented his Woolwich training in the crack Royal Engineers. As usual the distance upstream varies since no two persons could decide on the same mileage. But Vavasour did agree that:

. . . the Cowlitz is very rapid and shallow, but like all the rivers in this country, subject to sudden rises of the water, caused by the melting of the snows or the rains in the mountains, during these floods the river is difficult of ascent, the boats being pulled up by the branches, the banks being too thickly wooded to admit of tracking with a line, it, however, is navigable at all seasons for flat bottomed boats, in which the H. B. Company transport the produce of the Cowlitz farm to Fort Vancouver.

The farm establishment is situated on a large plain about 500 yards from the river, and about one mile from the landing place; there is a small settlement of about 19 families, and a Roman Catholic church in the immediate neighborhood. There are large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, and bands of horses at this point.

¹³⁰ Reports of Lieuts. Warre and Vavasour, dated 26 October 1845, directed to "The Rt. Hon. The Secretary of State for the Colonies." Received July 6, 1846. Ibid., p. 48.

At the Cowlitz we procured horses and rode to Nesqually, a distance of about 60 miles. This route, or portage, as it is usually called, passes through small plains, traversing the intervening points of woods, crossing the Quinze Sous, Vassals, Chute and Nesqually Rivers, all of which are fordable in the summer, but become deep and rapid in the winter and spring.¹³¹

Perhaps more important is the report of the brilliant British naval lieutenant, William Peel, son of Prime Minister Robert Peel. His report, as well as that of Captain John Gordon, R. N., his superior and brother of British Foreign Minister, the Earl of Aberdeen, are telling. Furthermore, in addition to their written reports, they made oral reports in London. An astute historian, Leslie Scott, observed of Peel, who made a high speed journey home via Mazatlan and Mexico City and from Cuba by steamer:

. . . he was the latest informant from Oregon; he had left the scene some five months before; he knew the outnumbering force of the Americans then in the country, and the great migration of 1845 that doubled the American population; he foresaw the subsequent years; he realized the difficulty or the impossibility of British migration to Oregon in large force, and of British military defense against the overwhelming population of Americans.

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 90-91.

The sudden reversal of British diplomacy in accepting the boundary of the 49th parallel, which Britain had refused for more than twenty years, affords support to the opinion that Young Peel's testimony contributed to the British decision; and this view is strengthened by the reports of Warre and Vavasour, which portrayed the British control of Oregon as dwindling. It is logical to infer that Lieutenants Peel, Warre and Vavasour, who inspected Oregon at the same time in 1845 would view the British outlook in the same light, and that as Warre and Vavasour described conditions adverse to the British, likewise Peel described them orally.¹³²

Furthermore, the three young aristocrats had met on the Nisqually plains and had reviewed all matters with the Scot John Gordon aboard his frigate HMS America. They would have and obviously did reach this common conclusion, although Gordon's is more startling and, simply stated, unacceptably superficial:

An apocryphal tale that Captain Gordon reported adversely in Oregon because the salmon would not rise to his fly, is quoted lightly by E. O. S. Scholefield and T. W. Howay, Canadian authors of British Columbia.¹³³

But more formally expressive Peel described his journey from Nisqually to Cowlitz farm:

¹³² Leslie M. Scott, "Report of Lieutenant Peel on Oregon in 1845-56," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March 1928), Vol. XXIX, no. 1, p. 76.

¹³³ Leslie M. Scott, "Influence of American Settlement Upon the Oregon Boundary Treaty of 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March 1928), Vol. XXIX, no. 1, p. 7.

through a country which for the first 40 [miles] is of a poor, gravelly soil, till on turning a ridge of hill called the Muddy Mountain, the land becomes good and continues so to the river. There is no remarkable feature in the scenery except in the snowy summits of Mounts Rainier and Saint Helens on the horizon. The hills and ravines that intersect the country are covered with forests of tall pines; the level ground is generally open and clear of underwood. The farm at the Cowlitz River, belonging to the Puget Sound Association, contains 1400 acres under cultivation, the half of wheat. There are also eight French-Canadians, retired servants of the company, and a mission held by a Roman Catholic priest, who together farm about 1200 more. The export produce is wheat, which is transferred by water to Fort Vancouver, a distance of 85 miles.

The Cowlitz is a rapid winding river, always navigable for boats of small draught. The banks are thickly clothed with a forest of pine and poplar that intercepts all view. The bed of the river is sand and shingle.¹³⁴

The materials thus far evaluated do not yet suggest the 1840's, the decade of critical change. Captain the Hon. John Gordon, R. N., a son of the Earl of Aberdeen, had been "on the beach" for almost twenty years before his recent call to duty. He was rusty and ill-equipped for his assignment, which he owed to political and personal influence rather than skill. Yet his casual assessment of the strategic region to Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor Roderick Finlayson, that he would not give "one acre of the

¹³⁴ Scott, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

barren hills of Scotland for all that he saw around him"¹³⁵ bore more than a little weight at home. More realistic, however, is the series of observations from the military officers over whom he had more than nominal control. All, including Thomas Baille, had noted in the summers of 1845 and 1846 the arrival of those few "Americans," such as Crawford, M. T. Simmons, John R. Jackson, and G. W. Bush who were the harbingers of change, a relentless shift from a short term of British-Hudson's Bay control to permanent American occupancy.

We have an interesting note from the Canadian artist Paul Kane, traveling the Cowlitz as a guest of Hudson's Bay. On March 26, 1848, he had painted the now famous depiction of Mount St. Helens in eruption. "Suddenly a stream of white smoke shot up from the crater of the mountain, and hovered a short time over its summit; and then it settled down like a cap."¹³⁶ Eight miles up the Cowlitz River, Kane noted the next day, "We saw a family of immigrants winding their toilsome way in quest of a spot to make their home. Their condition appeared miserable in the extreme."¹³⁷

¹³⁵Scott, op. cit. p. 7.

¹³⁶Donald Blake Webster, "Paul Kane's Visit to Mount St. Helens," Antiques Magazine (November 1983), Vol. CXXIV, no. 5, p. 1001.

¹³⁷The Washington Historical Records Survey, op. cit., p. 10.

During this same period of evaluation, Wilkes lost the U. S. sloop Peacock on the Columbia River bar. Baille seriously damaged Modeste, and the Bay Company suffered bad losses including the second Vancouver with her entire cargo.¹³⁸ The Vancouver had been critical to Hudson's Bay transportation schemes, having been employed fifteen years earlier in the establishment of Fort Nisqually and subsequent posts. The news of these losses tipped the Bay administrators toward the idea of moving their produce north from Cowlitz by wagon and boat. Although more expensive in every way, Simpson needed a more dependable solution for his Russian-American food supply contracts. It is at this critical juncture that an import recorder comes on the scene, George B. Roberts, one of the longtime servants of Hudson's Bay Company. He first arrived at "Cowlitz" in 1839 to replace Jon Tod. He described the farm as a "high table land" about 35 miles above Monticello. In another letter to historian Victor he stated that the French Canadian settlers took:

¹³⁸Letter from George Roberts to Mrs. F. F. Victor, Cathlamet, Washington, no date. OHS MSS.

as much as they required [in land] and then ran off a claim next to them for the priests which they still occupy & have a convent. This farm was started for the H. B. Co. by Douglas by order of Dr. McLoughlin who was then on his journey to England . . . Our new relation to the Russians gave a spur to this business. 139

Roberts was a clerk in the H. B. C. hierarchy at that time, but he was in a position to observe developments such as the results of Simpson's trade agreement established with the Russian-American Company at Hamburg in 1839. It was during these years that Roberts reported a 10,000-bushel wheat crop on an annual basis. But he also notes other telling details not seen by the overnight travelers. "The farm was sadly inaccessible [sic] no roads & the river very swift & full of rapids . . . we had a large saw mill but too ill built & too ponderous to be of much use."¹⁴⁰ Although Roberts certainly seems to have been ill-used by American squatters in subsequent years, he can generally be relied on for his recollections of this critical period. Born in Aldborough, an English seaside town, in 1815, Roberts was sent to Greenwich for naval training. After three years' service he was at fourteen apprenticed to Hudson's Bay Company for seven years of service on the North American

¹³⁹ Letter from George Roberts to Mrs. F. F. Victor, Cathlamet, Washington, no date. OHS MSS.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from George Roberts to Mrs. F. F. Victor, Cathlamet, W. T., March 15, 1879. OHS MSS.

coast. He then sailed in the Gannymede, the Cadboro and the Vancouver. He served also at Vancouver Island, Queen Charlotte Island and the Stikine country, as well as at headquarters at Fort Vancouver (1836), Oregon City (1840) and Champoege (1842). He rose in the Company's service and estimation, becoming aide to James Douglas, McLoughlin's eventual successor. He left the service and returned "home" only to reconsider his decision. Upon his reappearance at Fort Vancouver (with a new wife), Roberts was appointed general factotum for his skills in Chinook, French and patois.

Late in 1846 he was sent by Peter Skene Ogden to manage Cowlitz Farm. He remained in charge until October 1851. Probably at that time production was at its peak thanks to the earlier attentions of Charles Forrest, a Farm founder.¹⁴¹ Douglas had earlier stated that the farm would be so far from "civilized countries" that men would be required to provide and repair carts, harness, lumber, houses and take care of farm machinery such as plows, harrows and the new threshing equipment. Advanced techniques and machinery were in evidence, and some reference to these procedures should be mentioned here.

¹⁴¹ "The Cowlitz Farm Journal, 1847-51," Oregon Historical Quarterly (June-September 1962), Vol. LXIII, p. 105.

The crops were sown in numbered fields with regular rotation (Appendix). Manures were systematically provided and spread from the increasing flocks and herds. An extensive and impressive drainage system was excavated. Roberts estimated this "ditching" at £8,000 in value!¹⁴² But soon this substantial installation declined. Within a few seasons Roberts' position changed (see Appendix, Cowlitz Farm buildings).

A devastating epidemic of measles swept through the tribal families in 1848. In 1849 typhoid again reduced the settlers and the natives, already sadly affected. Among others, Robert' wife died of the so-called "camp fever."

The California gold rush dislocated all affairs in the Willamette Valley and certainly on the Cowlitz. In 1847 there were nineteen regular employees at Cowlitz Farm plus dozens of seasonal laborers. In 1850-51 six were listed by Superintendent Roberts.

At this same time the great reason for being, the Russian food contract, lapsed in 1850. Those requirements could not have been filled by Roberts' few hands. Almost simultaneously came news of the passage of the American legislation entitled the Donation Land Act. Roberts could not claim for his just deceased wife, but he could take 320

¹⁴² Ibid.

acres in his own name. His story appears filled with sorrow when reading the stark but revealing letter accounts; yet they are laden with drama too.

While at Champoeg in 1842 he had been present at one of the first meetings of Willamette settlers interested in forming some government structure. He thought it inconsequential. But as a new "American" in 1851, he served as Justice of the Peace for vast Lewis County, Oregon Territory. In July 1851 he attended the important precinct meeting at Jackson's prairie home together with Simon Plomondon and Michael Simmons. In August they met at the famous Cowlitz Landing meeting where Congress was petitioned to form a separate Washington Territory north of the Columbia River. Roberts was selected for the corresponding committee to inform all precincts north of the Columbia of this intention.¹⁴³ In September 1851 he formally resigned from the Farm in favor of Henry Peers, and in October his name appears as a signator on the second memorial to Congress drawn up at the Monticello Convention.

In 1852 Roberts had left the Cowlitz Farm and was unsuccessfully working his own claim at nearby Newaukum. Sir George Simpson remarked on the trading posts in a well drawn T. C. Elliott article:

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 107.

The Hudson's Bay Company's trading posts were erected many years previous to the Oregon treaty, at a time when they were the sole occupants of the country, the Sites being carefully selected as the most desirable for carrying on trade and maintaining their communications. The good judgment which was manifested in such selections is apparent from the fact that, now that the territory is becoming closely settled, those stations are considered the most desirable sites for towns, while the main highways of commerce are those which were established by the Company.¹⁴⁴

It is true enough that the "main highways of commerce" were those established by the Company. Farmer Roberts was swiftly discovering that, for the new farmers in his area without the monopolistic strength and trading arrangements of HBC, the highways were for the time being empty.

While Roberts was away from the Cowlitz corridor during the middle years of the 1850's, that assorted labor force he had managed substantially changed. The Indians, Sandwich Island Kanakas, French-Canadians, English and Scots were mostly pushed out by donation land claim seekers. These aggressive new American Frontiersmen had no interest in the accepted rule of law as provided by the monopolistic, paternalistic Company. More specifically, they had little use for what they recognized as British interests and especially British imperial designs.

¹⁴⁴ T. C. Elliott, ed., "British Values in Oregon, 1847," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March, 1932), Vol. XXXII, p. 42.

Mrs. Victor elicited an interesting observation from Roberts in 1871. Of course, he was still rankling, but probably with good reason:

. . . its like going out of the parlor into the kitchen--now in all honesty this was from my stand point. I could only elicit from him 'oh these people know nothing of our country'--a year or two ago I recalled this to his memory--he said I saw it all then as plainly as I do now, but couldn't acknowledge it to you. It may be that I am partly right as to political Judges & Indian Agents. Genl. Wool knew the difference between a cultivated military officer under control and a mere mobocrat. I remember the remark of an American Naval Officer to me in '46. Well he said pointing to a group of frontiersmen--they may be Americans but they are as much of a curiosity to us as they are to you . . .¹⁴⁵

It is startling and yet reassuring to look back at the earliest European tillage techniques in "the land of Eden." The tiny, productive gardens at Nootka, the Spanish vegetable produce from Neah Bay, the Winships of Brighton, Massachusetts, and their short-lived garden in the lower Columba River are all good examples.¹⁴⁶ In March 1811 the Tonquin brought not only fur traders to build Fort Astoria, but also hogs, potatoes, turnips and a few other seeds.

McLoughlin, the new leader of British interests, had surveyed the scene and in 1825 moved his headquarters

¹⁴⁵ Letter to Mrs. F. F. Victor from George Roberts, November 28, 1878, Cathlamet, W. T. OHS MSS.

¹⁴⁶ Leslie M. Scott, "Soil Repair in Willamette Valley," Oregon Historical Quarterly (March-December 1917), Vol. XVIII, p. 55.

upriver, taking with him some bushels of potatoes and peas plus manure-producing oxen which had been transported from California and the Sandwich Island settlements. According to the reliable findings of Leslie Scott, there arrived in the autumn of that year via overland carriage a bushel each of wheat, oats, barley and Indian corn, plus a quart of timothy seed. In a few years the Bay farmers were producing surpluses of everything but corn, which eventually flourished in areas other than the Vancouver lowlands.

Within a decade there were agricultural settlements far into the interior of the Columbia drainage, Walla Walla and Fort Colville, up the Willamette Valley to French Prairie (so accurately named) and Champoeg, and then, as we have observed, down the Columbia and up the critical south-north route to Puget Sound waters. During the decade, 1827-1837, every kind of fine cow, sheep and hog was brought by ship or overland and Ewing Young, of lasting fame, drove a herd of "Spannish cattle" across the mountains from California.

It is of special interest to the Oregon Historical Society that George Himes, their anchorman through the early years, tended cattle along the Oregon Trail as a boy of twelve. Himes recorded that the first shorthorn bull was sent north of the Columbia River in 1857. The first mowers and reapers appeared in the meadows around Puget Sound in 1856 and 1857. The first threshers and separators came the

same year. Just at the time that George Roberts returned to finish out his work at Cowlitz Farm, George Himes was working on a threshing machine operated by a farmer in the sandy loams four miles east of Olympia:

The output of this machine was five hundred bushels of wheat, or seven or eight hundred bushels of oats a day, as against fifty or seventy-five bushels when tramped out by horses and winnowed by the primitive method.¹⁴⁷

This is indeed the key to life on the early farms of the Oregon Country. The nineteenth century was unfolding swiftly, and among its great advances was the application of power to food production. An economy based on the man with his spade and mattock, his scythe cutting two acres of wheat on a good day, farmers depending on their soon physically-broken wives and (hopefully) large family or Indians who escaped the plagues, was rapidly changing. Steam and mechanical power and improved agricultural practices were in the ascendant.

It would appear that these changes are elements in the story of Cowlitz Mission which today is a strong component in the life of upper Cowlitz.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

CHAPTER IV

COWLITZ MISSION

To review briefly, the Mission was almost always an outpost. Although always a welcome sight to overland-canal travelers, it was regarded as "away from civilization." All the reports of official travelers refer to Cowlitz more or less as an interesting stop on their way to an important location. There is never any great speculation on its future except as a supplier of foodstuffs for some distant location. The inhabitants are essentially "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Father Demers describes the Indians rather intimately because of his interest in their souls. Paul Kane describes them because of their head-flattening practices. Robert describes the oncoming American settlers because of their avaricious descent on Hudson's Bay lands which we would perhaps describe as former Indian lands. From the time the first settlers were sent north in the mid-1830's to secure the area, the then large Indian population was instructed by McLoughlin through Douglas to treat them well. The early settlers, both the Hudson's Bay retirees and the Red River colonists from Lord Selkirk's enterprise, were soon restive. It was a reasonably fine place, but the preferred area, for several reasons, came to be the

Willamette Valley.

It is interesting to see that while nothing in particular is said, there is no great desire to return over the Rockies and across the endless portages, rivers and lakes to Trois Rivieres and Montreal. The Willamette, the lower Columbia and French Prairie now become "the place." Essentially life is freer and easier.

But on Cowlitz Farm Roberts reports to Victor twenty years later:

Think of the wrongs done me from 59 to 71 at the Cowlitz Farm. The old carcass [sic] of the Company brought every wolf and vulture to the banquet & the government rewarded the wrong doers by giving them the lands. The voting power did it all.¹⁴⁸

And in that same letter Roberts stated, "Indians had no right that a free born American could respect."¹⁴⁹ We are obliged to remember however that his Company had easily assumed title to that same land a generation earlier.

There was never a full commitment to agriculture, despite the many fine and advanced practices introduced. Simpson's idea and the trade in foodstuffs that he introduced were shrewd and innovative, but Hudson's Bay was first and foremost a fur gathering company. Everything else came second.

¹⁴⁸Letter to Mrs. F. F. Victor from George Roberts, op. cit.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

Despite the introduction of labor-saving machinery, there were serious labor shortages, especially those brought about by "dire maladies," as Roberts put it. He notes, "when the measles came fall of 1848 it struck down every one man woman & child--no end of deaths among the Indians."¹⁵⁰

The following year came news of the California gold strike. Every kind of person went south, including an entire order of Dominican nuns whom McLoughlin had installed in Oregon City. They saw their future in California, where they still flourish today.

Then the Russian food supply agreement concluded without renewal. As an example of personal dislocation which affected almost every individual in some way, Roberts' wife died in 1850. To be realistic, death was everywhere in the land of Eden, and took its toll of red, white and black alike. It is persuasive just how few inhabitants there were north of the Columbia River in the 1850's. The act of possession--of occupation--that truly gripped American emigrants was in fact the land south of the Columbia boundary. Those persons who met to discuss the formation of a Washington Territory in the 1850's numbered but a handful. And again, through all tumult and change the Cowlitz Mission continued to function. We should assess this strong

¹⁵⁰ Letter to Mrs. F. F. Victor from George Roberts, May 18, 1879, Cathlamet, W. T. OHS MSS.

religious tradition. As Roberts states: "Before the advent of parsons and preachers the Doctor himself read the episcopal service to the inmates of the Fort & such others as choose to attend every sunday."¹⁵¹

When ordained ministers finally arrived through the intercessions (and agreements) of both the Bishop of Montreal and of Baltimore, they necessarily had impact by the very nature of a long imbued tradition. Even if one rejected it, or found it hostile, the ancient missionary zeal of the Roman Catholic church was impressive despite the oppositions expressed by vigorous expansionist America in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

While the future archbishop Norbert Blanchet may have arrived as a zealous missionary to the Pacific Northwest frontier, he was in another guise the archetype of the American salesman. Furthermore, he was an offspring of a very strong and influential French Canadian family, who were very active in both religious and secular Canadian affairs. Some thirty members of the Blanchet family were priests or nuns, and others were engrossed in politics and medicine. Father Blanchet's early missionary assignment was to care for large numbers of Irish emigrants in the St. Lawrence basin. This task would have honed his ability toward

¹⁵¹Letter to Mrs. F. F. Victor from George Roberts, no date, OHS MSS.

evenhandedness, a tradition that existed to the end of his reign as archbishop.¹⁵²

Fathers Blanchet and Demers exemplified in every way the best qualities of men of God. The priests acted as chaplains at Fort Vancouver, Tualatin, St. Louis and Nisqually. They were well known and recognized as "founding fathers" at Cowlitz.

Even after the acerbic departure of John McLoughlin for the Willamette Falls and eventual American citizenship, the churchmen were formally recognized. Anglican Peter Skene Ogden conducted his own Anglican services in his rough and ready fashion, but he built the priests a new chapel just outside Fort Vancouver walls (1848) and continued to pay their annual stipend.

Together with the continuity at headquarters was the long line of leadership of the inspirational Simon Plomondon and the wives who sustained him through a long life. Despite the many vexations and vicissitudes which came with the arrival of American land grabbers, it was apparent at all times that Plomondon and his family were always something more than "Hudson's Bay housekeepers" of the upper Cowlitz table land. Descendants of the family reside there yet, proud of the past and the long flowering ancestral

¹⁵² Edwin V. O'Hara, Francis Norbet Blanchet, the Apostle of Oregon (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, Co., 1910), p. 737.

tradition of their mixed blood heritage. What a long tradition from the year 1818-19 when local historian Harriet Munnick believes that Plomondon ascended the river--in mid-winter, alone and unarmed. The following year he had married one of the daughters of Chief Schanewah, a Cowlitz tribal chief. The very strong family lines this union produced have been important to the well being of the Cowlitz Corridor and to the communities along its banks on either side of Plomondon's (Cowlitz) Landing.

Another important factor is the joining of church and local family. The marriage of Simon Plomondon to Bishop Blanchet's niece, Louise Henriette Pelletier, in 1847¹⁵³ further strengthened the relationships at Cowlitz Mission, relationships which are manifested today, attested to in the religious services regularly held in the mission church, including Sunday mass. Perhaps equally important is the sense of history evident in the sites and markers which now identify the principal area. There is a real sense of identifiable history running across the swells and hillocks of the mission across the table lands and down to the still swift running Cowlitz.

Important too is the fact that time has in no sense diminished the importance of the Cowlitz corridor. The

¹⁵³Judith Irwin, "The Life of Simon Plomondon," Cowlitz Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, no. 3, p. 8.

river is very seldom used except by sportsmen. The steamboat era was at best very short-lived for the basic reasons described by hard-pressed travelers over 175 years ago. Persons fly over the landscape without a thought to early times, but the express road (the super highway) and the rail tracks still find their way somewhat near the banks of the Cowlitz.

The Columbia Bar continues to pose its own danger and unexpected hazard, and the Pacific Ocean will ever present its challenge to the ocean traveler. As concluded in generations gone by, the Cowlitz corridor is still today the only way to go.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The first non-native exploration and settlement along the Cowlitz River commenced in the year 1792 and continued throughout the nineteenth century. The backgrounds of the explorers representing such countries as England, Canada and America and the purpose of their expeditions varied greatly. Two types of sponsorship existed, in the form of government and private support. Among the reasons for exploration and settlement in this area are included imperialist expansion, fur trade, opening up of the Cowlitz Corridor, agrarian interests and religious pursuits.

British exploration consisted of both private and publicly funded expeditions, comprising naval and continental overland travel. The year 1792 witnessed the arrival of William Broughton (second in command to Captain George Vancouver) and his party off the Cowlitz River. This comprehensive expedition was government sponsored with a two-fold task from the British Admiralty. First, Vancouver was ordered to acquire knowledge concerning maritime communications and transport routes. Secondly, he was to record any signs of settlement. Lieutenant Broughton recorded observations on the Cowlitz or 'Knights' River,

remarking on its sandy shores and rough current. The Vancouver party made extensive ethnographic observations, contrasting the natives in the locale with those in the northernmost parts of the region. Informative, still useful references were made to the native living patterns and tribal relations. Geographic landmarks in the vicinity of the Cowlitz were recorded for both their native ceremonial use and scientific study, including Oak Point, Mt. Coffin and Mt. St. Helens at a distance. The evidence of fur bearing animals for the purpose of trade was further gathered by these official representatives of King George III.

The arrival of Scotsman David Douglas on the Cowlitz scene introduced a dramatically different kind of British expedition. In contrast to Vancouver's government funded naval expedition, the young Douglas was a gentleman scientist modestly funded by a private institution, The Royal Horticultural Society. His was not a strategically important naval expedition, but was a simple, albeit demanding, overland journey of waterway travel in a canoe across the Canadian wilderness. Douglas was requested by the society to travel to the Columbia River region and, with the assistance of the Hudson's Bay Company, to acquire new botanical specimens and record information on the flora and fauna of the region. Like Broughton he remarked on the

rapid current and high water, rendering travel difficult. As with the British naval party, Douglas also identified major geographic landmarks and attempted to communicate with and study the local tribes. Unlike Broughton, Douglas traveled in the interior and learned rudiments of the Chinook language in order to converse with the natives. Because of this intimate contact, he was better able to observe the highly developed village life, stating that the Indians of the Columbia River region constituted the most mature Indian society in North America. This is interesting but of course something of the overstatement that Douglas was known to indulge in.

Warre and Vavasour wintered in the Columbia River region during 1844-45 and represented a third distinct category of British explorers to the Cowlitz region. Unlike Vancouver and Douglas, theirs was primarily a reconnaissance born of international tensions. Strained relations between Great Britain and the United States over the Oregon Country, which had been occupied by both powers, prompted the British government to send two army officers west from Montreal to make clandestine observations, their findings to be used in case of upheavals of British owned territory. Under the direction of Sir George Simpson, the secrecy of their mission was maintained and their detailed reports, unlike those of Vancouver and Douglas, were not made public. A

general comparison can be seen in all accounts on the character of the Cowlitz. Warre and Vavasour commented on the rapid current and difficulty in traveling through such high water. Unlike the previous accounts, they recorded activities at Cowlitz Farm, operated by the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company. Warre and Vavasour reported on the strategic positioning of troops in the area, but also recorded ethnographic observations, emphasizing the decline in Indian populations, caused by fevers and disease. In conclusion they too remarked on those geographic landmarks recorded by Vancouver and Douglas.

The first documented American account we have for the Columbia River region is extensively recorded in the Lewis and Clark Journals of 1805-1806. This too was a government sponsored expedition, with a multi-purpose goal. In comparison with Vancouver's assignment, Lewis and Clark were ordered by their commander-in-chief, President Thomas Jefferson, to advance geographical knowledge of the continent, explore the Missouri and other rivers which might provide water transportation across the continent for commerce and make ethnographic observations. Lewis and Clark recorded the Cowlitz as being 150 yards wide, which is in keeping with Broughton's observation (1/8 mile). Like Broughton, they too noted the abundance of beaver skins and traded with the Indians for these goods. Among the two

previously noted landmarks observed by the party were Mt. Coffin, with its native funerary function and Mt. St. Helens. It is obvious that Lewis and Clark were both familiar with Vancouver's journals, in that they attributed the right of discovery for these landmarks to Lieutenant Broughton. It is interesting to observe how explorers of the period zealously sought any publication references which might serve their own purposes.

The geographic observations of U. S. naval lieutenant William A. Slacum, published in the form of a Memorial to Congress, was also a government funded project. Commissioned by President Andrew Jackson, it was an important document often studied and quoted during the Oregon Question controversy with Great Britain. Slacum was commissioned to record information pertaining to the ethnography and geography of the lower Columbia area, and its tributaries, which brought him in contact with the Cowlitz River. As with Warre and Vavasour, he mentioned the desire of Dr. John McLoughlin to have Canadian settlers on the river.

The United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 was another important undertaking sponsored by the American government. Under the direction of Commodore Charles Wilkes, his party was to survey land in the Columbia River vicinity and own the California coast. This task was

similar to Vancouver's assignment, in that he was to stimulate an interest in future navigation and commerce of the area. Special emphasis on meteorology, astronomy and terrestrial magnetism gave special focus to his mission. Among his observations which were shared by others included Cowlitz Farm details, geographic landmark sightings and Indian statistics.

Gabriele Franchere, Ross Cox and Alexander Henry the Younger were essentially fur traders, which distinguished them from previously mentioned explorers. They also had an individual desire to explore the Columbia region and record personal observations of the area. All three men spent a substantial period of time trading with the local Indians and observing their customs. Reference to the treacherous current of the Cowlitz River and its inaccessibility for canoe passage during specific seasons was further echoed.

George Gibbs and James Swan represent a third category of American explorers along the Cowlitz River. Both gentlemen were employed in the private sector at one point in their careers. Gibbs was an attorney who later served as a cartographer for the Northern Pacific Railroad survey. Swan, in contrast, was prominent in the shipping business on the Eastern Seaboard. Both individuals harbored a life-long interest in geography and ethnography, as evidenced in their writings. The similarity in the two accounts is that both

men have given us lengthy observations of an ethnographic nature, more so than any previous explorer. It was later in his life that Gibbs gave his vast collection of artifacts and writings to the Smithsonian Institution, a federal museum. Swan, in contrast, had his observations privately printed and some of his notes still appear today.

Overton Johnson, William H. Winter and Peter Crawford were settlers drawn to the Columbia River region in the age old quest for rich bottom lands combined with a beneficent climate; this was the case for all western migrations. Their detailed accounts gave a clear picture of the vast opportunities which existed for a fruitful and prosperous life living on the land. Their combined observations echoed previous explorers to the area by focusing on the character of the Cowlitz River, ethnography of the region and the sighting of geographic landmarks, important in Cowlitz history.

Cowlitz farm and Cowlitz mission both served as outposts for the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company. The primary concern of farm employees was to produce dependably an annual harvest. By supplying the Russian America Company with a reliable food-short source of wheat, the Hudson's Bay Company was, albeit reluctantly, given access to Russian trade as far North as 54°40N. Since the bottom line was an

annual profit statement, the Cowlitz River was a difficult but important link to the Pacific Ocean via the Columbia River for transportation of goods.

Managers and white employees of Cowlitz Farm became ever less sympathetic to the comparatively sophisticated Cowlitz culture. They regarded the natives as a diminishing but still cheap labor force. They were often at odds with their employers, but of even greater concern to Cowlitz Farm officials was the influx of American squatters to the area in the 1850's. They quickly reflected the decline of British power manifested in Hudson's Bay Company, a desire foreshadowed by Warre and Vavasour in the mid 1840's. The major concern of the Cowlitz Mission clergy was to attend to the spiritual needs of the employees, hence their observations focused more specifically on daily activities of the farm, though they described the Cowlitz River as extremely tortuous.

The farm accounts record a strong attention to British scientific farm practices as developed in the late 18th and early 19th century. I would suggest that it was this scientific approach that gave the Farm as good a yield as it did in the early years for the fact remains the soils of this valley and Cowlitz never compared with the deep soils of the larger Willamette and its tributary valleys.

In final review, some points must be reevaluated with

reference to the corridor and the farm itself. There are indications that the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company very soon ran through the furs available to them in the region; vast as it was, the Pacific Northwest area available to the eventually dominant Hudson's Bay Company was not producing those luxuriant and exotic furs most desired by European markets. The northwest beaver traffic, at best a minimum success in the European market, was failing in the fact of changing male tastes in headgear. The beaver hat so long admired was giving way to new styles in which beaver felt played at best a minor role.

The farms of Hudson's Bay so much espoused and nourished by George Simpson and his corporate underofficers were a necessary adjunct to more northerly fur operations, but there were ever-present ominous problems; the encroaching American settlers, the Indian epidemics with their horrifying losses, the constant rumor and uproar concerning gold strikes in the northlands (such as Frazier River and Vancouver) and the unpredictable but seldom favorable reactions of the Bay Company's Russian competitors in the north. Certainly the activities that narrowly avoided bloodshed and the exasperations in the Stikine River held few promises for Simpson's agents. But the special point with reference to all activities through the 1850's and 1860's was that the Cowlitz Farm area was left in

something of a vacuum. Activity intensified among American settlers in the Columbia-Willamette Valley area as they struggled to make an agrarian based economy work for them. At the same time the interests of Hudson's Bay were drawn sharply north and reconcentrated around Vancouver Island and the new company headquarters relocated at Victoria on Vancouver Island. It was soon becoming apparent to the Company officials that with Russian needs lessening as well as their own produce needs, whatever produce they must have could probably be raised on Vancouver Island. This decision was hastened by the obvious infiltration and squatting practices of American settlers and farmers who drifted in to the farm lands of Cowlitz and the Nisqually.

Subsequently or otherwise the American farmers were taking to heart a dream of the future, now stated by political spokesmen as their manifest destiny, succinctly declared for them by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton a generation earlier. "There is but one port, and that the mouth of the Columbia, but one river and that the Columbia itself . . . " Whatever the dreams and visions of Simpson, his agents and his priests, the tributary Cowlitz River, its valley and its farm, would be permanently linked to the Columbia River and its maritime destinies politically as well as geographically.

And yet the great "river of the West" continues to pose

its hazards and unexpected dangers, as the Pacific Ocean will ever present hazards to the sea traveler. As concluded in generations gone by, the Cowlitz Corridor continues to be the passage--through time.

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APPENDICES



Watercolor depicting Mount Coffin and Mount St. Helens.

Taken from: Captain H. Warre, Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory
(Barre: Imprint Society, 1970).



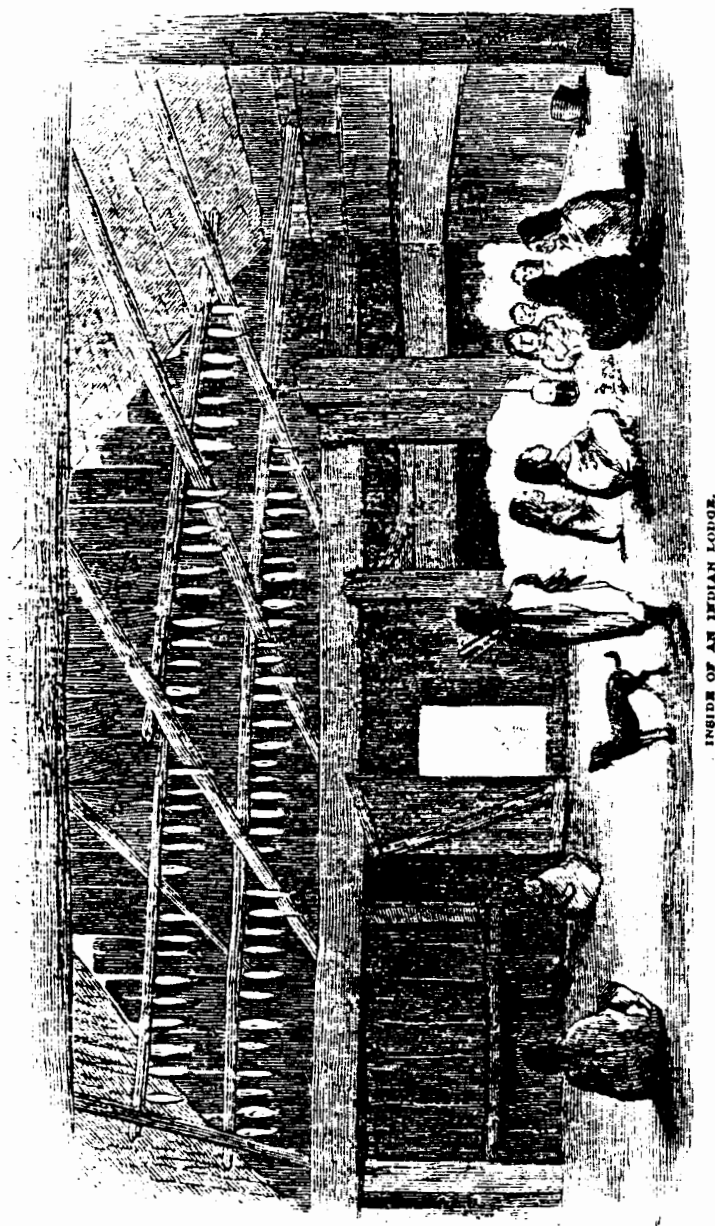
Watercolor depicting Mount St. Helens from Cowlitz Farm.

Taken from: Captain H. Warre, Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory
(Barre: Imprint Society, 1970).



Watercolor depicting Mt. St. Helens in September of 1845.

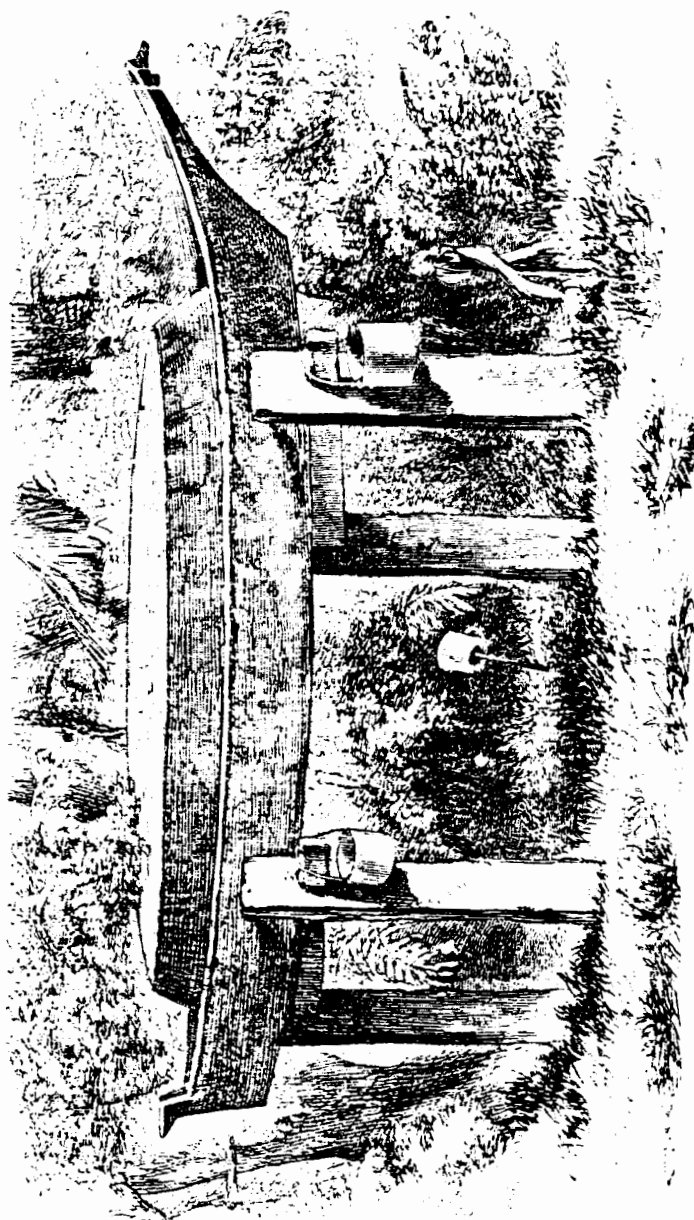
Taken from: Captain H. Warre, Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory
(Barre: Imprint Society, 1970).



INSIDE OF AN INDIAN LODGE.

Drawing illustrating the interior of an Indian lodge along the Columbia River. Similar "long house" structures were built by the Cowlitz Indians.

Taken from: James G. Swan, The Northwest Coast (Philadelphia: Harper and Brothers, 1857).



METHOD OF BURIAL

Drawing illustrating a method of Indian burial along the Columbia River. It was also a method of burial used by the Cowlitz tribe.

Taken from: James G. Swan, The Northwest Coast (Philadelphia: Harper and Brothers, 1857).

COWLITZ

Valuation of Buildings, Land &c at the Puget Sound Company's
Establishment at the Cowelitz:

1 Dwelling House	50 x 30 ft.....	£ 450. .
1 Saw Mill & improvements attached, incomplete		120. .
1 Store	100 x 40 ft.....	1,000. .
1 do.	40 x 30 ft.....	280. .
1 do.	40 x 30 ft.....	280. .
1 Granary	25 x 20 ft.....	125. .
1 do.	30 x 20 ft.....	150. .

£ 2,405.

Outbuildings

1 Close Barn	80 x 25 ft.....	£ 160. .
1 Barn No. 1	105 x 30 ft.....	157.10.
1 do. 2	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 3	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 4	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 5	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 6	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 7	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 8	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 9	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 10	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 11	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 12	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
1 do 13	105 x 20 ft.....	105. .
2 Piggeries	80. .
2 Stables	140. .
6 Men's Houses	120. .

£ 1,812.10.

11#18 yds. fencing 72000 rails	s d	
	@ pr. m. 67/6	243. .
14,12½ Acres of Land under cultivation @ 100/-.....		£ 7,162.10.

£ 7,405.10.

£11,623. .

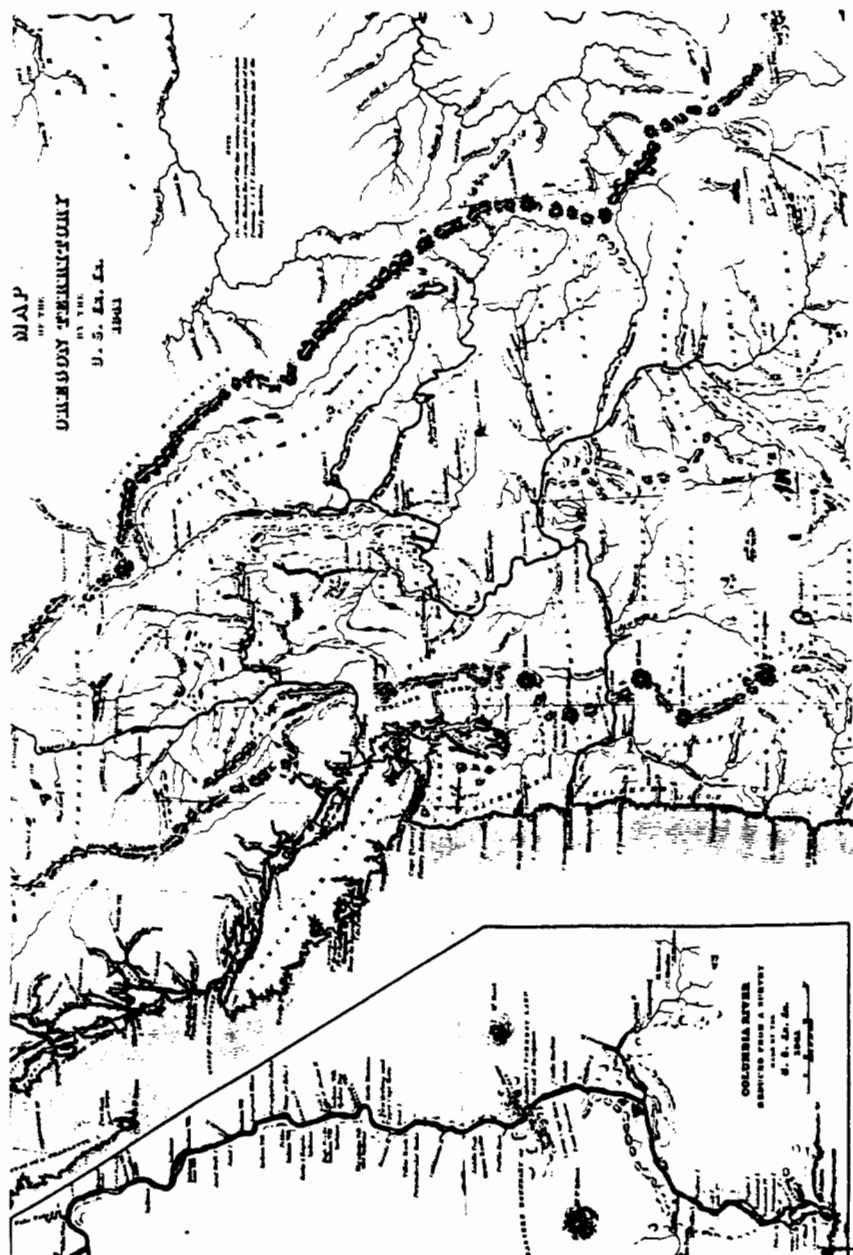
Inventory of buildings at the Cowlitz Farm 1846-47.

Taken from: "The Cowlitz Farm Journal, 1847-51,"
Oregon Historical Quarterly, (June-September 1962),
Vol. LXIII.

		Cowlitz Farm			
	Roberts	George B.	Cur B		
479	1				100
500	1	Carriere	Orizimo	Carriere	2 15 1/2
520	2	Aunts de	Louis	Tridman	11 15 1/2
197	3	Nono (L)		Labore	20
198	4	Hoolaf		P.	20
214	5	Tomano		P.	20
207	6	Johnson	Aledis	Tridman	20
245	7	Stamata		Labore	20
307	8	Seclair	Louis B	Tridman	20
394	9	Mower		Labore	20

"On Account of Puget Sound Company." Depicts wages earned by George Roberts while serving at Cowlitz Farm.

Taken from: District Statements (H.B.C. Archives Winnipeg B. 239/1/20, fo. 45).
 Columbia Outfit 1849-50.



Map of the Oregon Territory executed by the United States Exploring Expedition in 1841. Depicted are: 1) Cowlitz River, 2) Cowlitz Farm, and 3) Cowlitz Mission.

Taken from: Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the Years 1838, 1839, 1841 and 1842. (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845), Vol. IV.

COLUMBIA RIVER.

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Brought forward,	8,950
Clalams at Port Discovery, New Dungeness,	350
Port Townsend,	70
Classet tribe, Cape Flattery and Point Grenville,	1,250
Nisqually,	200
Chickeles and Puget Sound,	700
Port Orchard,	150
Cowlitz,	330
Okonagan,	300
Colville and Spokane,	450
Kilamukes,	400
Chinooks,	209
Clatsops,	220
Cascades,	150
Pillar Rock, Oak Point, and Columbia River,	300
Willamette Falls and Valley,	275
Dalles,	250
De Chute's and John Day's River,	300
Yakima,	100
Wallawalla,	1,100
Blackfeet, that dwell principally on the west side of the Rocky Mountains,	1,000
Umquias,	400
Rogues' River,	500
Klamets,	300
Shaste,	500
Callapuyas,	600
Total,	19,354

Population figures along the Columbia River, listing the Cowlitz tribe as 330.

Taken from: Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the Years 1838, 1839, 1841, 1842. (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845), Vol. V, pp. 140-141.