FORT HALL

ON

THE OREGON TRAIL

by

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L.S.G.
FORT HALL ON THE OREGON TRAIL

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Chapter I.

THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE

In the period preceding the final settlement of the ownership of the Oregon Territory, the "Star Spangled Banner" made its appearance very seldom until the wave of immigration of the early 1840's immediately before the final disposition of the region in 1846. The first recorded visit of an American to the northwest coast was that of Captain Gray when he entered the Columbia River in the year 1792, and named it after his vessel. Other mariners followed, attracted by the rich possibilities of the fur trade with China.

By land, too, it was the lure of the furry wealth of the seashore, the wooded streams, and the silent forests that attracted the energetic and daring American traders. With the exception of the government-inspired expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1804, all the "Boston men" who visited the area, until the missionaries came in the 1830's, came to garner its furry wealth. Incidentally, the Lewis and Clark party comprised the first white men to visit the present state of Idaho.

One reason for the apathy of American traders was the regulation which, for many years, restricted fur trade

\[\text{1 - The name applied to early American traders on the Pacific coast by the Indians of that region. It was a familiar term in the Chinook jargon as was "King George man" referring to Englishmen.}\]
with the Indians to government controlled posts. Such restrictions were gradually withdrawn so that after the Lewis and Clark expedition, many traders planned to ascend the Missouri River and establish a trade in the area adjacent to its headwaters.

Among the first of these trading expeditions was that of Manuel Lisa, a Spaniard, who carried on an active fur trade from his headquarters in St. Louis. In 1807, this trader, an excellent leader, organized a party to proceed up the Missouri River to establish trade with the Indians in the untouched area. He ascended the river as far as the Yellowstone, then travelled up that stream to its junction with the Bighorn. At this point, he built a post which has come to be known as Fort Lisa or Fort Manuel. Though the trade was excellent, the choice of this site was unfortunate, for it brought Lisa into trade with the Crow Indians who were bitter enemies of the Blackfeet. This inaugurated an enmity which was to endure for many years and cause a heavy toll of lives among the white traders. On Lisa's return to St. Louis, he had little difficulty in organizing a company to elaborate trade in the new field; this firm came into being during the winter of 1808-09. It was first called the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, and later the Missouri Fur Company. Its traders penetrated as far as the "three forks" of the Missouri River.

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2 - Manuel Lisa was born of Spanish parents in New Orleans, in 1772. Details of his early life are obscure but it is probable he came to St. Louis about 1790. By 1800 he had a monopoly of trade with the Osage Indians, granted to him by the Spanish government. The first definite information of his life appears with his ascension of the Missouri in 1807.
near the present city of Butte, Montana, where they built a post. This firm, reorganized frequently during the next decade, was prominent in the trade west of St. Louis until 1822, first under Lisa's leadership until his death in 1820, and then under Joshua Pilcher, his successor. It was during the latter's regime that the company was dealt a telling blow by the Blackfeet in an attack which killed seven traders and caused the loss of some $15,000 in pelts. This same leader was in charge, however, when Fort Benton was built at the mouth of the Bighorn River in 1821. The failure of this company was caused largely by the fact that there were too many partners, all of whom had to secure a share in the profits. A further defect was its failure to secure the co-operation of a new and powerful figure of the American fur trade, John Jacob Astor.

In 1822, the Missouri Fur Company was succeeded by the Rocky Mountain Fur Company under the leadership of William Ashley and Andrew Henry. The former was the business partner in St. Louis, while Henry carried on the work in the field. The first expedition of this company was led by Jedediah Smith and Jim Bridger, two of the best known "mountain men". This party built a fort at the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers and traded extensively in the upper Missouri valley and southern Idaho. In 1826, Ashley sold out his interests to Smith, Sublette, and Jackson, who turned the company over to Fitzgerald and Bridger four years later.
The Rocky Mountain Fur Company remained in existence until 1834 when, by mutual agreement, the partnership was dissolved. In the 12 years following its succession of the Missouri Fur Company, the hardy traders in the field for this firm succeeded in opening one of the wealthiest fur sections of the West. They made notable contributions to the geographical knowledge of the mysterious western regions, among their discoveries being Great Salt Lake, South Pass, and the country around the sources of the Platte, Green, Yellowstone, and Snake Rivers.

"They were indefatigable explorers and considering the fact that most of them made no records of what they did, the impress which they have left upon the geography of the west is surprisingly great." (3)

The most powerful figure in the American fur trade, however, at this time was John Jacob Astor, a German immigrant, who, through fortunate ventures, was a major


4 - John Jacob Astor, founder of the great Astor fortune, was born the son of a butcher in Waldorf, Germany in 1763. At the age of 18 he went to London and, two years later, emigrated to America. Soon after his arrival he secured a position as assistant in a fur store in New York, at two dollars a week and board. By 1786, he launched into the fur business for himself and within ten years, had established a considerable trade. By 1800, his wealth was estimated at approximately a quarter of a million dollars. At his death in 1848, he left an estate of $20,000,000.
factor in financial circles of the United States by 1800. In 1808, he conferred with officers of the Northwest Company in Montreal in an unsuccessful attempt to secure their participation in a fur-trading venture in Oregon. Though he failed to obtain definite support from the Canadian company, many of its shrewd members risked their private wealth in Astor's ambitious project. Astor organized the American Fur Company in 1808, as a general trading organization. He had envisioned the establishment of a chain of posts on the Columbia River from its mouth to its headwaters; these posts would, in turn, be linked with other trading posts on the Missouri River and thus a direct line of overland communication would be provided from the mouth of the Columbia to New York City via St. Louis and the Great Lakes. This commercial genius planned carrying furs by ship to China and there securing Oriental goods for the American market; he also secured the permission of the Russian government to trade with their posts in Alaska. Astor's own government at Washington gave fullest approval to his plans. With such hearty cooperation from official sources, Astor founded the Pacific Fur Company in 1810.

In the same year two expeditions sponsored by this company set out from New York for the mouth of the Columbia, where it was planned to build the first post. One of these parties sailed from New York in September in the "Tonquin", to proceed via Cape Horn. The other, under the leadership of Wilson Price Hunt, went overland. The "Tonquin" arrived off
the mouth of the Columbia in March of the following year. Within two months, a trading establishment named Astoria, had been built on the south shore of the river. After unloading supplies, the "Tonquin" sailed northward to trade with the Indians along the coast. It was her last voyage. At Nootka Sound the ship was completely destroyed by an explosion after a clash with the Indians. In July, 1811, the Astorians were surprised to see a large canoe, bearing the British flag at its prow, proceeding down the Columbia. It was a party of Northwest Company men, under the leadership of David Thompson, who had descended the river from its mouth.

Meanwhile Hunt and his men were slowly making their way westward by land. This leader had gone from New York to Montreal to confer with Northwest Company officials; thence he had travelled via the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River to St. Louis. Having gathered his forces at this latter point, Hunt proceeded to St. Joseph, Missouri, where the party wintered. In the spring and summer of 1811, they travelled via the usual Missouri River route to Fort Henry on the Snake River, reaching that point in September. Here Hunt made an unfortunate error of judgment when he abandoned his horses and embarked his party in canoes for the rest of the journey to the mouth of the Columbia. The worst hardships of the voyage began when rapids on the Snake compelled them to leave their boats and proceed on foot. Presently the party split into three groups, each one to find its own route. After untold hardships, the leader's band finally arrived at the mouth of
the Columbia on February 15, 1812.

In October, 1813, Astoria was sold to the Northwest Company, chiefly because of the difficulty of the Pacific Fur Company keeping its lines of communication open on sea and land during the War of 1812. Thus ended the first attempt of American traders to establish a large scale trading operation on the Pacific Coast.

After purchase of Astoria by the Northwest Company, it was renamed Fort George. As such it remained the western headquarters of the Canadian firm, even after the merger with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. In 1825, however, a new base was established at Fort Vancouver, and it superseded the post at the mouth of the river. From 1824 until his retirement in 1845, all of the trade which centred at this headquarters was under the direction of Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. In the interior, a few forts had been built in the upper Columbia basin, including Fort Walla Walla and Spokane House. In the mountainous area of the headwaters of the Snake and other tributaries of the Columbia, where tribes of hostile Blackfeet constantly roamed, the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company was to send out trapping expeditions of white men, half-breeds, or friendly Indians. These nomadic groups had no permanent base in the region. Frequently these trapping parties of the British company met American traders and trappers who came west from the Missouri River as far as the Rockies.
It is necessary at this point, to turn to a brief examination of the men and the methods of the American fur trade in the west during this period. Unlike the system in Canada, which placed control in the hands of two mighty companies, which eventually merged, the American trade was carried on by individual traders and by various firms which were characterized by frequent reorganizations.

The individual traders were called "mountain men", who lived lives typically nomadic and rough. They were hardy pioneer spirits who were worthy successors of Daniel Boone of an earlier period. Their homes were temporary camps pitched wherever trapping or trading might lead them. Sometimes they chose mates among their red-skinned customers, for no white woman could endure the hardships of such a life. Frequently, as age made their nomadic life impossible, they retired to Taos or Santa Fé and married pretty Mexican senoritas who could assist them in establishing a home for their declining years. On the march, however, their essential equipment consisted merely of a rifle, a pistol, a long-bladed knife, half a dozen traps, a buffalo robe to lie upon, and a blanket to cover their weary bodies at night.

The companies had various systems of organization, but usually there were several classes of employees: the leaders in the posts and at St. Louis were known as "bourgeois", these
hired the men and supervised the tariffs and the ordering. The leaders in the field were usually called "partisans". The second in command at the posts had the title of "clerk". Among those who worked from the bases there were two classes of white trappers, one class being regularly employed by the company at an annual salary, usually about $400, the others, being free trappers, earned whatever they could from the sale of their catch. Other classes of workers were the "camp-keepers", who had all the camp duties to tend, the voyageurs, artisans, such as blacksmiths and carpenters at the posts, and unskilled labourers. Incidentally, practically all of these employees at the posts were almost permanently in debt to their employers because of purchases at the commissaries.

The success of the American fur trading companies was retarded by many handicaps. One of these was the fact that the Blackfeet controlled, for many years, two of the best known passes through the Rockies. Again, on the western slopes of the mountains, the experienced traders of the Hudson's Bay Company thwarted any attempt at opposition. Another very serious handicap was that of credit.

"The fur-trade was also characterized by the large amount of credit that was involved in most transactions and by the considerable amount of hazard which produced either large gains or large losses. A period of approximately four years elapsed from the time that the manufactured goods were shipped from Europe until the furs were returned and sold and almost every operation occurring in the interior was based on credit...."
The sale of the manufactured goods, the transactions of the middlemen, the trading with the trappers, and Indians, the transportation, manufacture, and sale of the furs were all normally credit operations. This emphasis on credit, added to the difficulties and dangers, inherent in the business, produced a highly speculative industry. An annual profit of 50% was not unusual and frequently the figure was much higher. On the other hand, the operations of any single year might result in a total loss, often including the sacrifice of many human lives." (5)

Then, too, with the extensive hunting that was carried on, the source of the companies' revenues declined rapidly:

"The fur-trade reached the peak of its importance in the United States during the '30's. In the next decade it declined in relative importance. The cream of the fur supply had been skimmed, and advancing settlement was driving the trapper to newer and more virgin fields." (6)

Even the Hudson's Bay Company noticed the decline in the heavily exploited mountain area by the early 1830's. John Work, one of their traders, reported in 1831:

"My last campaign in the Snake country was not as successful as I had anticipated: the returns and profits were pretty fair considering the exhausted state of the country." (7)

The decline in successful hunting and trapping


6 - Riegel. 189.

was followed by a falling off in the demand for beaver fur. This decline was caused largely by the adoption of the silk hat to replace the traditional beaver hat.

"Prior to 1832, as already noted, all the finest hats were made of beaver. In that year the silk hat was invented, and slowly yet surely caught and held the fancy of smart dressers on both sides of the sea. As a result the price of beaver fell steadily from year to year; in 1838 the skin that in an earlier time had sold for $6 commanded only a fraction of that sum."

With this brief survey of the early American fur trade in the west, we turn now to the establishment whose short, but intensely interesting history forms the theme of this thesis.

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Chapter II.

WYETH'S FIRST EXPEDITION

Having surveyed the story of events in their centre, the Pacific Northwest, it is necessary now to turn to the eastern United States, where other events of importance were taking place. In 1818, an agreement for joint occupation of the disputed territory for ten years was signed by Great Britain and the United States. This convention was renewed in 1826, but the expansionist movement was already making its influence felt in Washington. Visionary politicians were regaling their constituents with the possibility of extending the frontier to the Pacific. Thus the nucleus of what was later to become the "On to Oregon" movement sprang up.

One of the most energetic propagandists for American sovereignty over the northwest was a Boston schoolmaster and Harvard graduate, named Hall J. Kelley. A progressive educationist, founder of United States' first Sunday school movement, he retired from his chosen profession to promote the cause of Oregon settlement. Speeches and newspaper articles showing the potentialities of Oregon poured endlessly from his pen.

Among those who became intrigued by Kelley's energetic propaganda was a young man of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was engaged in the ice business. His
name was Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth. Born in January 29, 1802, he had entered the ice business of Fred Tudor in his native town, married in 1824, and, since he was successful, apparently was well situated for life. However, he was interested in the far west and read all the available literature on the subject.

"A man of great energy, sound judgment, and unquestioned integrity, a good organizer, fearless of obstacles, singularly free from visionary projects, and, on the whole, one of the ablest men whom the fur trade brought to public notice." (1)

He expressed his own adventurous feelings thus:

"I cannot divest myself of the opinion that I shall compete better with my fellow men in new and untried paths than in those to pursue which requires only patience and attention." (2)

In 1829, Wyeth approached Hall Kelley, probably with the intention of joining a party to go west. It occasions little surprise then that the meeting of this adventurous spirit with the energetic apostle of the west resulted in the young iceman's determination to visit Oregon. His cousin, J.J. Wyeth, wrote with obvious truth:

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"Mr. H.J. Kelley's writings operated like a match applied to
the combustible matter accumulated
in the mind of the energetic Nathaniel
J. Wyeth, which reflected and
multiplied the flattering glass held
up by the ingenious and well-disposed
schoolmaster." (3)

There is no doubt that Wyeth did receive from Hall J.
Kelley the impulse that sent him to Oregon. Therefore
whatever doubts may be cast on the other work of Kelley,
this achievement certainly stands to his credit.

The Boston schoolmaster proceeded to
organize the Oregon Colonization Society in 1830 and
1831, and Wyeth determined to join them:

"If the Colonial Society (Kelley's)
go through with their project, I shall
go out in their service, if not I shall
get up a Joint Stock Trading Concern
(if I can) and go on with a similar plan
but on a smaller scale." (4)

Impatient at the repeated delays which prevented the
Society's expedition from getting under way and also
disgusted at Kelley's scheme of taking women and children
along, Wyeth organized his own trading company. With
his knowledge of the Oregon diplomatic riddle, Wyeth
expected that the region would become American when
the joint occupancy agreement came up for renewal in 1838.
He had little trouble, therefore, in interesting
Cambridge financiers in raising money to organize a company

3 - Overmeyer, loc. cit. 28.
4 - "Sources of Oregon History", XVII. Nathaniel Wyeth to
for trading for furs in the Columbia basin. The company was sponsored by the firm of Henry Hall and Tucker and Williams; the agreement was to last for five years; and the profits were to be divided in such a manner that:

"if the number concerned is fifty and the whole net profits were divided into that number of parts, I should get 8, the surgeon 2, and the remaining forty parts would be divided among the remaining 48." (5)

The company was to ship trading goods westward via St. Louis and to return the furs to Boston by boat around Cape Horn. The costs of the vessels were to be borne by the sale of smoked salmon, treated at a base on the Columbia River.

The first activity of the company was to charter and load a small vessel, the "Sultana", to sail to the mouth of the Columbia via Cape Horn, in order to have supplies ready for the land party. Next, Wyeth gathered a party of 20 men at Boston who were provided with crude uniforms and encamped on an island in Boston harbour for ten days as a training period. On March 12, 1832, Wyeth and his party sailed from Boston for Baltimore and the expedition was under way. From Baltimore the party proceeded to St. Louis, at which point their number grew to 24 men. At St. Louis, they boarded the steamer "Otter" for passage up the Missouri to Independence.

5 - cit. Chittenden, 437.
At this point, Wyeth abandoned his amphibious combination boats and wagons, which the Harvard wags had dubbed "Natwyethiums". The leader's discussions with experienced western travellers had convinced him of the impracticibility of using his weird contrivances designed as boats with wheels attached.

Wyeth spent two weeks at Independence where he combined forces with William Sublette, an experienced trader, who was proceeding to the Rocky Mountains. The combined party left Independence on May 12 and reached Pierre's Hole in the Grand Teton region on July 8. This was the point selected for the traders' rendezvous for that year. Pierre's Hole was located on the Pierre River which flowed northwest into Henry Fork of the Snake River. The valley lay along the northerly course of the river for about 25 miles, while its width varied from five to fifteen miles. Rising on the east side was the mighty Teton range, while the Snake River mountains, much lower, rose on the west.

"Stirring memories also attach to Pierre's Hole, where, when the beaver trade had not yet fallen on evil days, hundreds of trappers and traders and whole tribes of mountain Indians frequently assembled to barter their wares.

6 - "The rendezvous was a specified gathering place for trading and had its principal advantage in obviating the necessity for a permanent post with a large personnel."

-Riegel, R.E. "America Moves West" - Holt. New York City. 1930. 188.
Here the men of Cambridge saw the fur-trade at its best, or rather, at its worst. Indians, halfbreeds, and rough white traders met at the rendezvous annually to trade furs, to buy supplies, and to celebrate — usually with overdoses of rum — their reunion and success. This was the furthest west that W.G. Sublette was going and Wyeth joined the party of his brother, Milton Sublette. On July 17, in company with this experienced mountain trapper and his party, Wyeth led his party westward from Pierre's Hole. On the following day, however, they were attacked by a hostile tribe of Gros Ventres and a fierce battle ensued. The white traders were joined by friendly Nez Perces Indians and a number of fellow-whites from Pierre's Hole, who came to their assistance.

Judging from contemporary reports the battle was a fierce one: 20 of the hostile Indians were killed, while three of the whites and ten of the friendly redskins met a similar fate. This affair delayed the traders for several days, but by July 24, the party reached the Snake River. This river was the westerly limit of Milton Sublette's expedition, and here the two groups parted company. Wyeth and his ten men — desertions having cut into his company —

went on alone down the Portneuf River and thence to the Snake, which they reached near what is now called "American Falls". They followed this stream to the Columbia and thence to Fort Vancouver, which they reached on October 29, 1832, in a destitute condition.

In the light of later events, it is well to note their reception by the chief factor, Dr. John McLoughlin. John Ball, one of the party, wrote:

"October 29 - We arrived at Fort Vancouver............... We were hospitably received." (8)

Their treatment by the "White Eagle" was such that a lifelong friendship sprang up between him and the leader of the tiny expedition. The mutual nature of this cordiality is evidenced by both leaders:

"Wyeth, open, manly, frank, and fair - perfect gentleman and honest man - supported morality and encouraged industry." (9)

On his part, the Yankee trader gave evidence of his friendship some 18 years later when he wrote:

"Should you wish such service as I can render in this part of United States, I shall be pleased to give them in return for the many good things you did years since, and if my testimony as regards your efficient and friendly actions toward

8 - Ball, John. "Reminiscences". Oregon Historical Quarterly, III. 98

me and the other earliest Americans, who settled in Oregon will be of use in placing you before the Oregon people in the dignified position of a benefactor, it will be cheerfully rendered." (10)

Further evidence of this friendly spirit was shown by McLoughlin's request of John Ball that he organize the first school at Fort Vancouver.

On his arrival at Fort Vancouver, Wyeth learned that his company had suffered a mortal blow in the sinking of the "Sultana", which had broken up on a reef in the Society Islands. Disappointed and discouraged, yet confident of the possibilities of the trade, Wyeth wintered at Fort Vancouver. Early in February 1833, he started his return journey to Cambridge, while the men who had accompanied him the previous year remained at the fort. These people later took up land and became the first American settlers in the region. Wyeth himself accompanied Frances Ermatinger's party of Hudson's Bay Company men as far as the Snake River country. Of his departure, he later wrote:

"I parted with feelings of sorrow from the gentlemen of Fort Vancouver, their unremitting kindness to me while there much endeared them to me; more so than it would seem possible during so short time. Dr. McLoughlin, the Governor (11) of the place, is a man distinguished as much for his kind- ness and humanity as his good sense and information and to whom I am so


11 - McLoughlin was, of course, chief factor at Fort Vancouver.
much indebted as that he will never be forgotten by me." (12)

With only two Indian youths, Wyeth crossed the Rockies and made his way through regions dotted with hostile tribes. Owing to the depredations of the Aricara Indians on the plains, he determined to return by a more northerly route than that which he had followed on his westward journey. Accordingly, he had reached the Big Horn River by August 12, where he met his former companion, Milton G. Sublette, three half-breeds, and a Nez Percé Indian. Securing buffalo hides from a hunt among a nearby herd, the party constructed a bull-boat or raft on which they floated down to the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. While preparing for this voyage, Sublette and Wyeth made an agreement by which the latter was to supply the Rocky Mountain Fur Company (of which Sublette was a partner) with trading goods. Under the terms of this contract, Wyeth was to have $3000 worth of goods at the rendezvous on July 1, 1834. He was to be paid $3521 above the

12 - Overmeyer, loc. cit., 34.

13 - "The bull-boat was made of buffalo skins sewn together and stretched over a frame of willow and cottonwood poles. The size was commonly about 12' by 30' and 20 inches deep. It had the least draught of any river craft and was therefore best adapted to such shallow streams as the Platte. The cargo generally consisted of robes, and amounted to two and a half tons weight, which caused a draught of only about four inches. These boats, in one form or another, saw extensive service on Western rivers." Chittenden, I. 35

14 - In 1834, the rendezvous was to be on the Green River, a little way above the mouth of the Big Sandy. This location was approximately 350 miles west of Fort Laramie.
original price for this merchandise - payment to be made in beaver skins at four dollars per pelt. Default by either contracting party was to involve a penalty of $500.

The two men parted company on August 17 (15) at Fort Cass, which was situated on the Yellowstone River, a few miles northwest of its junction with the Big Horn, near the present town of Myers, Montana. The departure must have occasioned the usual western festivities, for on the next day, Wyeth wrote in his journal: "too much liquor to proceed, therefore stopped". However, Wyeth made excellent time down the Missouri River, passing Fort Mandan (approximately 450 miles from Fort Cass) on September 2, and reached St. Louis on October 9. One month later, on November 7, the young Yankee reached his native town.

15 - An American Fur Company post, built in 1832.
Chapter III.

THE COLUMBIA RIVER FISHING AND TRADING COMPANY

With the agreement of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company as support for his arguments, Wyeth had little trouble financing a second expedition. A visit to Boston by Milton Sublette during the winter aided the promoter's plans. He came in order to help Wyeth choose the proper trading goods.

The organization was known as the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company. Again Henry Hall was financially interested, this time holding the largest block of stock - three-sixteenths of the shares. Wyeth was to hold one-sixteenth of the stock and was to receive one-quarter of the profits. The company was drawn up on a five year contract for the purpose of securing skins, especially beaver. Other sources of income were to be found in supplying goods at exorbitant rates to American traders in the Rockies, via St. Louis, pickling salmon on the Columbia River, securing buffalo meat on the plains and canning it for the West Indies trade.

"The prominent advantages of supplying my own or the trapping parties of other concerns from the Pacific instead of St. Louis are

1 - Beaver skins could be purchased for a string of beads, an ax, or half a yard of scarlet cloth from the Indians and sold in Boston for eight or ten dollars.
safety of the country traversed, and consequent saving of men, shortness of distance, and low price and abundance of horses on the Columbia. The latter circumstances alone would enable any company doing their business by that route to make a profit equal to all expenses of transporting." (2)

Wyeth also proposed to open the area between California and the Columbia River for the fur-trade - thus avoiding Hudson's Bay Company territory - and sell beaver skins to the British company at five dollars each. It was the leader's plan to establish a base on the Pacific coast and use ships to bring in supplies, filling them on the return journey with furs and pickled salmon. During the winter, Wyeth purchased some 13,000 pounds of goods for trading, and chartered the schooner "May Dacre" to carry trading goods via Cape Horn to the Columbia. It sailed January 7, 1834.

One month later, the overland expedition left Boston under the leadership of Nathaniel Wyeth, and reached St. Louis in the first week of March. Here enough men were recruited to bring the total strength of the party to 70 men. The expedition next moved on to Independence, Missouri, which was an important taking off point for fur-traders heading west. At Independence, Wyeth met his first real opposition, when he found that the market of mules and horses had been cornered by Santa Fe traders. This forced him to move across

2 - Overmeyer, loc.cit. 39. (footnote)
3 - See Appendix I.
the river to Liberty to purchase his necessary equipment. He was compelled also to make salary advances to his men to prevent desertions.

At Independence, Wyeth was joined by two naturalists, Thomas Nuthall, of Harvard University, and John K. Townsend, a physician and ornithologist, of Philadelphia. A party of five Methodist missionaries under the leadership of Jason Lee also met the expedition here. Wyeth's cavalcade and that of Milton Sublette left Independence on April 28, 1834. Mrs. J. B. Brown gives a vivid picture of the departure:

"Wyeth and his old friend Sublette, rode at the head of the procession, the two scientists at their side, while the men followed in double file, every one leading two horses laden each with two eighty pound packages of goods. Bringing up the rear was Wyeth's assistant, Captain Joseph Thing, an eminent navigator. . . . . . Finally at the side of the cavalcade rode the missionaries with their band of horned cattle." (4)

The route followed from Independence was that which later became the Oregon Trail.

Shortly after the party was on its way from Independence two incidents occurred which profoundly affected its future. On May 8, Milton Sublette, suffering from a painfully diseased leg, turned back. Two days later, William Sublette, elder brother of Wyeth's companion and rival transporter of trading goods, passed the New England party, hurrying on to the rendezvous with a supply of goods

4 - Brown, 124.
to sell.

Wyeth's party was well organized, but owing to its size was able to make only about 20 miles a day, somewhat less than the average trappers' daily run. The leader chose the campsite every night and rations were distributed by a system of mess divisions. The journey across the plains was a pleasant one. The evenings were spent gathered around the camp-fires while one of the westerners, (Richardson), hired as a hunter, regaled the "tenderfeet" with wild anecdotes of life in the mysterious west.

On June 1, Wyeth's men crossed the Laramie River and noticed a group of William Sublette's party building a fort. This post, first named Port William, later became famous as Fort Laramie, the first station on the Oregon Trail.

On June 17, Wyeth reached the rendezvous on the Green River, and here a great disappointment awaited him. It may be best described in his own words:

"On the night of the 17th. I left camp to hunt Fitz-patrick and slept in the prairies. In the morning struck Green River and went down to the forks and finding nothing went up again and found rendezvous about 12 miles up, and much to my astonishment the goods which I had contracted to bring up to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company were refused by those honorable gentlemen. Latitude 41 degrees 30 minutes."(5)

5 - Chittenden, 450.
"So far this business looks black. The company here—not complied with their contracts with me and in consequence I am obliged to make a fort on Lewis' River" (Snake River) "to dispose of the goods I have with me." (6)

The absence of Milton G. Sublette, Wyeth's friend and the presence of his brother who was keenly opposed to the New Englander because he had secured a contract from his brother, were prime factors in the refusal. It was an unfortunate plight in which this keen hard-headed Yankee, who had crossed half a continent with many tons of goods and 70 men, found himself. Though he received the full amount of the default penalty ($500), Wyeth noted that the Rocky Mountain Fur Company refused even to pay the interest on cash advanced. Writing later to Milton Sublette, he suggested that William Sublette had bribed Fitzpatrick, Milton's partner in the company, to break the contract with Wyeth. Further indication of this is shown by the reorganization of the company on June 20, in which William Sublette became a partner. Wyeth warned the partners of the new company that he would

"yet roll a stone into their garden, which they would never be able to get out." (7)

Mrs. Jennie Brown claims that Wyeth had originally planned to build a fort in the interior:


7 - Chittenden. 450.
"His latest idea was to build two fortifications, one somewhere in the lower Columbia and one in the central interior." (8)

This is entirely unlikely, however, for the loss of his contract seems to have changed his plans. Brosnan disagrees with Mrs. Brown's view:

"The construction of a fur trading fort was not a part of Wyeth's plan but it brought him the distinction of being the only American to establish a trading post in the jointly-occupied area." (9)

On June 18th, he moved on to Ham's Fork, 23 miles west of the rendezvous. From this point he despatched several letters. One of these was sent to his backers, Messrs. Tucker and Williams, and in this, written on July 21, he reveals his plans:

"I shall proceed about 150 miles west of this and establish a fort to make sale of the goods which remain in my hands. I have sent out messengers to the Bannocks, Shoshonees, Snakes, Nez Perces, and Flatheads to make robes and come and trade them at this post... I propose to establish it on a river called Portneuf or Snake or Lewis River." (10)

Following words with action, Wyeth led the party westward along his old trail, which led him out of the Great Basin into the Pacific slope, whence he had been forced by William Sublette and Fitzpatrick. He permitted the men to

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8 - Brown, 118.


10- N.J. Wyeth to Messrs. Tucker & Williams, July 1, 1834. Ham's Fork. Sources 138-139.
celebrate July 4 in typical western style and even admits in his journal "took a pretty hearty spree myself". Two days later, they entered the present state of Idaho, and on July 9, they joined up with a party of Hudson's Bay Company men under the leadership of Thomas McKay. A few days afterwards, the combined party met Captain Bonneville and his traders and another great celebration was held. On July 14, the New England party reached the Snake River. After two days of scouting for a location, Wyeth and his men started construction of the fort. The actual location of the post is a matter of doubt, the following being some of the opinions. Wyeth stated that it was situated at latitude 43° 14', longitude 113° 55'. Ghent points out that the original fort was built on the south side of the Snake River in the valley of the Portneuf. Major Osborne

11 - Thomas McKay, was born about 1798 in the Indian country. He was a half-breed son of Alexander McKay, who was killed in the "Tonquin" massacre. Entering the service of the Pacific Fur Company at the age of 12, he accompanied his father to Astoria. On the sale of this post to the Northwest Company in 1813, he joined the Canadian firm and remained in their employ and, after the merger of 1821, in that of the Hudson's Bay Company until sometime between 1836 and 1839. He settled on a farm in Oregon after retiring from service and, after taking part in the Cayuse War of 1846, is believed to have died in the same year.

12 - Captain Benjamin Bonneville, French officer of United States army, was granted leave of absence in 1832 to carry on a trip of exploration in the west. He organized an elaborate fur trading expedition and engaged in it for three years - two years longer than his leave. Though Washington Irving wrote an exaggerated story of his work, he accomplished little in opening up the west.
Cross, who visited the site in 1849, wrote that it was 15 miles above the mouth of the Portneuf. Miles Cannon claimed that the site of the fort was six miles from the mouth of the Portneuf and defends his statement thus:

"I give it as it was given to me by an Indian scout who piloted me to the place, who was born in its vicinity at a time when the building still stood and whose father was acquainted with the Hudson's Bay Company traders who were located there......

About four miles below the place where the trail strikes the river on the left bank and within 20 feet of a slightly lower level covered with cottonwood timber is, so my guide informed me, the identical spot." (14)

Interestingly enough, the original site of the fort was lost until 1916, when it was discovered by Ezra Meeker.

As stated above, the fort was started on July 16, 1834. It was originally built of cottonwood logs; the stockade consisting of 12 foot poles, being set two feet into the ground with bastions in the opposite corners. The outlines of the walls and the location of the well inside were clearly discernible before the site was submerged in an artificial lake created by a modern power project.

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14 - Cannon, Miles: "Snake River in History", O.H.Q. XX, 11
15 - Ezra Meeker first traversed the Oregon Trail in 1852 at the age of 21. At the age of 75, he determined to remark the trail. Thus in 1906 he again drove an ox-team over the route. He subsequently made four more trips, one by wagon in 1910, others by auto in 1915 and 1928, and one by aeroplane in 1924. He died in Seattle in 1928 at the age of 97.
Some idea of the energy put forth by its builders may be gained by referring to an eye-witness.

Townsend, the naturalist, wrote in his journal on July 25:

"At the fort, affairs look prosperous; the stockade is finished; 2 bastions have been created and the work is singularly good, considering the scarcity of proper building tools." (16)

On the following day, which was Sunday, Wyeth asked Jason Lee, the Methodist missionary, to hold a meeting and he "obligingly complied". Thus it was at this point that the first Protestant sermon was preached west of the Rocky Mountains. The fort was completed on August 5, and a description of the celebrations attendant thereto is exceedingly interesting:

"Aug. 5 - At sunrise this morning the 'star-spangled banner' was raised on the flagstaff at the fort, and a salute fired by the men, who, according to orders, assembled around it. All in camp were then allowed the free and uncontrolled use of liquor, and, as usual, the consequence was a scene of rioting, noise, and fighting during the whole day. Night at last came, and cast her mantle over the besotted camp;

.............the men will bear palpable evidence of the debauch of the 5th of August." (17)

This was the occasion on which "Old Glory" was raised for the first time in Idaho over a real home of white men. Wyeth himself described the event in a letter


17 - Ibid. 110.
to Leonard Jarvis, a partner of the company, written on October 6, 1834, from the Columbia River:

"Since mine of June 21st from Ham's Fork I have, as I then proposed, built a fort on Snake or Lewis River in latitude 43° 14 min. N and longitude 113° 30 min. W. (sic) which I named Fort Hall in honor of the oldest gentleman in the concern. We manufactured a magnificent flag from some unbleached sheeting, a little red flannel, and a few blue patches; saluted it with damaged powder and wet it in villainous alcohol and after all it makes, I assure you, a very respectable appearance among the dry and desolate regions of central America. Its bastions stand a terror to the skulking Indian and a beacon of safety to the fugitive hunter. It is manned by twelve men and has constantly loaded in the bastion 100 guns and rifles. These bastions command both the inside and outside of the fort." (18)

The day after the completion of the fort, Wyeth left Mr. Evans in charge with 11 other men, 14 horses and mules, and three cows, and proceeded down to Fort Vancouver. The party now consisted of some 30 men and 116 horses. Besides his own men, Wyeth was accompanied for some distance by Thomas McKay and his party of Hudson's Bay Company men. On the first day out, the trappers, weary after the previous day's convivialities, made only about ten miles. Some difficulty was experienced from the intense heat as they crossed the shadeless barrens of the butte region before reaching the Boise River. Here the Hudson's Bay

18 - M.J. Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, Columbia River, Oct. 6, 1834. Sources of Ore. Hist. 146.
Company men left the party and Wyeth continued on to Fort Walla Walla.

This departure of McKay was an ominous one for the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company, for the keen and experienced trader determined to cut off his Yankee rival by erecting another fort. This was Snake Fort, later Fort Boise, built ten miles from the mouth of the river from which it took its permanent name. The importance of this post was noted by Farnham, who visited the territory in 1839 and 1840:

"From it (Fort Boise) the Hudson's Bay Company sent their trading parties over the country south in advance and near and around every movement of Wyeth." (19)

From Walla Walla, Wyeth and his friends, the missionaries and scientists, moved down the Columbia River to Fort Vancouver, which they reached on September 14. Once more the Yankee adventurer met the dynamic leader of the Hudson's Bay Company in that region, Dr. John McLoughlin. The day following his arrival at Vancouver, Wyeth hurried down the river to meet his ship, the "May Dacre", which had just arrived. The vessel had been delayed three months at Valparaiso after being struck by lightning. This delay, of course, meant that the ship had arrived too late to carry on any salmon fishing during that year.

Undaunted at this second great disappointment,

19 - cit. Overmeyer, loc. cit. 46
Wyeth decided to build a second post on Wapato Island, near the mouth of the Willamette. This base, situated about eight miles downstream from Fort Vancouver, was named Fort William. Having thus established the company on the lower Columbia, Wyeth dispatched Captain Thing with seven other white men and 13 Sandwich Islanders to Fort Hall to winter there. The leader wintered at Fort William and busied himself with developing a permanent base. Barrels were made for the anticipated salmon catch of the following season. Various crops were planted with the object of making this fort self-sufficient and a miniature replica of the rival company's post at Fort Vancouver.

For all his energy, however, Wyeth's company was doomed to failure. Several of his Sandwich Islanders deserted and others were drowned or frozen before they reached Fort Hall. The officials of the older company were determined not to be undersold in the fur trade and even Wyeth's own trapping expedition in the winter of 1834-35 was more trouble than it was worth. In the following season, disease and Indians struck at his force in the interior. The fur trade carried on from Fort Hall was not successful. The competition of Fort Boisé and the hostility of the Blackfeet prevented any large amount of trading. The men of the older company were trusted by the Indians, some of the Blackfeet even trading with the Hudson's Bay Company, and their methods of trading were familiar to their red-skinned clientele.
By the spring of 1835, Wyeth had decided that the opportunity for profit for his company was the salmon fishery. Here too he soon learned that his older rivals influenced the Chinook Indian fishermen. Trained to the wily ways of the salmon, the natives working for the Hudson's Bay Company were able to triple the catch of their white rivals.

"Then the nets of the New Englanders were not of the right kind; other of their appliances would not work; some quarrelled, some were murdered, eight were drowned at one time." (20)

Finally the intrepid leader became discouraged, and indicated his feelings in a letter to his brother Charles, written on September 28, 1935:

"Our salmon fishing has not succeeded. Half a cargo only obtained. Our people are sick and dying off like rotten sheep of bilious disorder. I shall be off by the first of next month to the mountains and winter at Fort Hall." (21)

What a dismal prospect for the energetic and ambitious Wyeth! How discouraging it must have been for him to see his dreams of a great Oregon company collapsing about him!

Since many of the men in service at Fort Hall did not wish to remain in his service after the expiration of their contracts in the autumn of 1835, Wyeth took with him to the post a number of Kanaka labourers who had arrived

20 - Bancroft, H.H.: "History of the North West Coast". A.L. Bancroft. San Francisco. 1884.II. 596

on the "May Dacre". These brown coloured labourers worked for much less, receiving about £20 ($100) per annum, while the whites were paid about $250 for 15 months' service. Wyeth paid off those retiring from his service when he reached the fort in December, 1835, and immediately put the Kanakas at work, enlarging and renovating the station.

When the fur trade failed again at Fort Hall during the winter of 1835-36 and the salmon catch was very small in the following spring, Wyeth realized that his company held no hope of success. So, on

"June 25, 1836, the now completely disillusioned Wyeth left Fort Hall and started overland for Boston to consult with the members of his firm as to the ultimate disposition of their holdings in the west." (22)

At this consultation it was decided to sell out to the Hudson's Bay Company and this transaction is best described in the words of the purchaser:

"In 1836, Mr. Wyeth broke up his establishment on Wapatoo Island. He returned to the States and offered the remains of his property in the country for sale to the Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, but they referred him to their officers in the country at Vancouver, who bought

Mr. Wyeth's property and his establishment at Fort Hall in 1837 from Mr. Wyeth's agent." (23)

The Hudson's Bay Company paid the sum of $8179.94 to Wyeth's company for the fort, including the furs and goods in hand, the horses, tools and furniture, and debts due the company from trappers and employees.

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cf. Appendix VII, infra
Chapter IV.
LIFE IN FORT HALL UNDER WYETH

There are few contemporary descriptions of the interior headquarters of Wyeth's company since, during his regime, travellers seldom traversed the trail which was destined to become important in the history of the country. One description which has remained, however, is that of (1) Osborne Russell, a free-lance trapper, who aided in the construction of the post. In his journal, he writes:

"On the 15th (of July, 1834), we commenced the actual construction of the fort which has a stockade 80' square, built of cottonwood trees set on end, sunk 2½' in the ground and standing about 15' above with 2 bastions 8' square at opposite angles." (2)

Those travellers who did occasionally pass the post were usually missionaries. It is from the pen of the wife of one of these, Mrs. Marcus Whitman, that we have the best description of the old fort. She wrote in her carefully-kept diary on August 3, 1836:

"Came to Fort Hall this morning...
..........Called and were hospitably entertained by Captain Thing who keeps the fort." (3)

Having spent the night at the post, on the following day,

1 - A western trapper and hunter who had joined Wyeth's party to aid them in securing a meat supply.


she had an excellent opportunity to observe the structure, which must have seemed very substantial to her after the temporary camps which had been her resting places during the tedious journey across the plains. On August 4, she wrote:

"The buildings of the fort are made of hewed logs, roof covered with mud bricks, chimney and fireplaces also the same. No windows except a square hole in the roof and in the bastion a few port holes large enough for guns only. The buildings are all enclosed in a strong log wall." (4)

Another member of the Whitman party of 1836 was W.H. Gray, who described the fort, thus:

"Fort Hall, in 1836, was a stockade made of cottonwood logs, about 12' long set some 2' in the ground, with a piece of timber pinned near the top, running entirely around the stockade, which was about 60' square. The stores and quarters for the men were built inside with poles, brush, grass, and dirt for covering stamped down so as to partially shed rain and permit the guards to be upon the tops of the quarters and see over the top of the stockade. Situated on an extensive level plain or flat with spurs of the Rocky Mountains on the east at a distance of thirty miles, high ranges of barren sage hills on the south, eight miles distant." (5)

The location of the post is also mentioned in Mrs. Whitman's journal approximately as "on a flue of the Snake River about 10 miles above the junction of the Portneuf". This agrees generally with the position noted by contemporary writers.

4 - op. cit. 282.
6 - cf. supra 28-29.
The problem of supplies for this post was a serious one, because it was located so far inland and so far from the base on the Columbia River. There was some attempt to grow vegetables at the fort, but this was not crowned with success. Mrs. Whitman wrote, after her visit to the garden:

"The turnips in the garden appear thrifty, the tops very large and small but the roots quite round. The peas looked well but most of them had been gathered by the mice. Saw a few onions that were going to seed, these looked quite natural. This is all the garden contained. He told us his corn did extremely well until the 8th of June, when the frost of one night completely prostrated it. This is their first attempt at cultivation." (7)

Rev. H.H. Spalding, another member of the same party, reported that "turnips have been raised but too frosty for farming". (8)

Visiting the fort a few years later, Dr. White noted that, "Wheat and potatoes grow well, but are very generally cut off by the frosts". It is obvious, then, from these observations that there was little chance of the people of Fort Hall being able to provide themselves with much home grown produce. The bulk of the food supply consisted of fried mountain bread, made of coarse flour and roasted in buffalo grease, and buffalo meat.

The trade of the fort was carried on with both Indian and white trappers. Owing to the Indians' confidence in dealing with Wyeth's competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company,
and the hostility of the Blackfeet, nine-tenths of the trade at Fort Hall was with nomadic white trappers and hunters. Among the company's trading regulations was the usual one which forbade white employees carrying on any private trade. Another regulation provided that, in dealing with the Indians, liquor should be supplied to the chiefs only. Typical of the goods used in the trade is the following list of goods contained in two bales cached at the fort in 1836:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bale no. 1</th>
<th>Bale no. 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red edged blankets</td>
<td>8 doz. red handkerchiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 lbs of vermillion</td>
<td>4 doz. pocket looking glasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 packs of playing cards</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8 lb. of lead)
(yellow edged blankets)

Among the sundry packages in the same shipment were five kegs of alcohol, five large bales of tobacco, five bales of coffee. The comparative scale of prices is very interesting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Original Price</th>
<th>Sold For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>playing cards</td>
<td>15¢</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tobacco</td>
<td>10¢ lb.; 1 lb.</td>
<td>$1.50 (up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcohol</td>
<td>8¢ pt.</td>
<td>$3.00 pt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>12¢ lb.; 1 lb.</td>
<td>$1.50 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sugar</td>
<td>6¢ lb.; 1 lb.</td>
<td>$1.50 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powder</td>
<td>15-18¢ lb.;</td>
<td>$2.50 lb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the dominating factor in trade at the fort was the sale of luxuries, profits appear to have been rather high. However, transportation costs were very high:

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10 - Ibid. 12.
"The very remoteness which assured big profits assumed a fearful cost in transporting supplies." (11)

The tariff for furs for the Indians was one beaver pelt for any one of the following articles: one fathom largest cut beads, one common blanket, one shirt, one axe, one-half yard blue or scarlet cloth; one rifle for 12 muskrats or minks. For white trappers, the scale was five dollars a pound or three dollars fifty cents cash for beaver; muskrat or mink 25¢ a pound. This scale was considerably lower than the Hudson's Bay Company's rate since they required four beaver pelts from the Indians in trade for one blanket. Probably inexperience in the trade was responsible for Wyeth's paying too high a price for his furs; certainly such a tariff must have contributed to the collapse of the company.

This trade would seem to have provided a large profit especially since employees' wages were low. However, the losses through bad debts were very great; then, too, there were the losses caused when debtors of the company were slain in skirmishes with hostile Indians.

Trading and living conditions at Fort Hall were probably no more difficult than at the average fur post of the far west. However, the risks and slowness of transportation, lack of dependable lines of communication, the isolated position of the fort, inexperienced traders unaccustomed to

12 - Eaton, op cit. ill.
the wily ways of the redskins and the difficulties of obtaining long-term credit for a comparatively small firm contributed to the downfall of the company.
Chapter V.
REASONS FOR WYETH'S FAILURE

Why did the ambitious plans of the Boston iceman fail so completely? Some reasons have been indicated in the previous chapter, but it is now necessary to summarize and evaluate all the contributory factors. For many of the early pioneers whose opinions were unfortunately biased during the contentious days of the Oregon controversy, the Hudson's Bay Company was the sole cause of Wyeth's failure. Writing with venomous pens, they described the Hudson's Bay Company as a cruel oppressing monopolist crushing out the business life of an honest competitor, thus:

"Wyeth had been crushed by the competition with the Hudson's Bay Company and was compelled to sell after a few years of desperate struggle." (1)

Recent evidence indicates, however, that the commercial rivalry was entirely an honourable one. The orders under which the Hudson's Bay Company men were working were as follows:

"(to) endeavour to put him down, by steady well regulated opposition; We have however to impress upon your Mind, that violence must on no consideration be resorted to, except in defence of Lives and Property; while it is a duty we owe to our own Interests to deny them any facilities which are likely to annoy or disturb our Trade." (1)

Certainly these orders are typical of such instructions by any company under similar circumstances. Washington Irving refers to Wyeth's struggle with the British company thus:

".......who (H.B.C.) have, according to his own (Wyeth's) account, treated him throughout the whole of his enterprise with great firmness, friendship, and liberality." (2)

On comparison of the rival companies, the Hudson's Bay Company was so overwhelmingly superior that harsh methods were not necessary to secure the elimination of their Yankee competitor.

The Hudson's Bay Company had the advantages of a century and a half of experience in the fur trade, a well-organized communication system, and men and equipment capable of carrying on the trade. The value of these was pointed out in a report to the United States Congress:

"McLoughlin was required by the company to put down poor Wyeth, that is in a fair honorable, legitimate way. The bargain that did his business was something like this: He was not to oppose in the lower country and we


were not to oppose in the interior. But where we had one party, he had two, and then much better goods. Think of the Cascades, the Dalles, and the almost impassable difficulties, want of command over people, and who can be astonished at his failure." (4)

The natives were accustomed to the older company's trading methods and had confidence in them. The British firm possessed many ships which assured a steady source of supplies shipped via Cape Horn for their posts; for their Oregon trade, they also had the advantage of a well-established transcontinental canoe route. There was also strong support of the company by the British government, while Wyeth received absolutely no support from Washington.

Probably the most important point of supremacy for the older company lay in the abundance of capital with which it was supplied. This very necessary factor was lacking in Wyeth's enterprise. He had raised some $40,000 in Cambridge and Boston, not a sufficient amount of capital to carry on long without some return and was, therefore, sadly limited in financial support. This limitation inevitably made credit and communication difficult to maintain. Then the early failure of the salmon fisheries was a drastic blow to prospects of any immediate profits.

The disappointing results of the trade at


the interior post were due principally, of course, to
the rival fort, Snake Fort (later called Fort Boise),
built for the Hudson's Bay Company by Thomas McKay. The
company frankly admitted that the only reason for
establishing this post was to prevent Fort Hall from
damaging their trade. As mentioned above, many of the
Indians and whites who owed money or furs to Fort Hall
were killed in Indian skirmishes with loss to Wyeth's
company.

This problem of Indian wars was another
great drawback to the success of Wyeth's interior fort.
The location was on the crossroads of many trails:

".....this region was not a
good rendezvous for the mountain
Indians.....it was too near the
plains raiders, North and South
Crows, Utes, Sioux, and Blackfeet,
raiding south for horses." (6)

The constant menace of the murderous Blackfeet was an
ever-present threat to the white traders in the fort
and the red-skinned customers who brought their silky
beaver and muskrat pelts to the post. The following
story is typical of the treachery of the Blackfeet tribe:

"At some time between September
1834 and September 1835, the exact date
unknown, a party of Blackfeet appeared
on the opposite bank of the Snake from
Fort Hall. They were led by a desper­
ado named Bird, a former employee of
the Hudson's Bay Company, who, having
been made a prisoner by the Blackfeet,

6 - Laut, 130.
in a skirmish with some of that tribe had remained with them and had become an influential chieftain. From the opposite side of the river, Bird requested Godin to come across and buy their furs. Godin complied, not suspecting treachery. He sat down to smoke with the company, when Bird signalled to some Indians, who shot him in the back. While he was yet alive, Bird tore his scalp off and cut the letters "N.J.W." Wyeth's initials, on his forehead." (7).

In referring to the danger of Indian attack at Fort Hall, Mrs. Whitman wrote:

"The buildings are all enclosed in a strong log wall. This affords them a place of safety when attacked by hostile Indians, as they frequently are, the Fort being in the Black Feet country." (8).

Spalding, another member of the same party, wrote:

"This is a dangerous situation in the vicinity of the Black Feet, a bloodthirsty Indian tribe, frequently at the gates of the fort, have destroyed many lives and stolen hundreds of horses." (9).

Besides all these handicaps, Fort Hall laboured under the difficulty of a manager who was very fond of liquor. Frequently, he was unfit for duty owing to the fact that he had overindulged in intoxicants.

One fact on which all writers agree, however, is that Wyeth's failure was certainly not due to his own lack of enterprise. Thus Farnham, who visited

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7 - Chittenden, II, 663.
8 - Elliott, O.H.Q., XXXVII, 282.
the fort in 1837, wrote:

"From what I saw and heard of Wyeth's management in Oregon, I was impressed with the belief that he was without comparison, the most talented business man from the States that ever established himself in the Territory." (10).

Townsend, who witnessed the erection of Fort Hall, wrote:

"Captain Wyeth has pursued the means which to him seemed best adapted for securing success with great perseverance and industry and has endured hardships without murmuring which would have prostrated many a more robust man." (11).

Washington Irving, who personally interviewed Wyeth regarding his Oregon activity, wrote of him thus:

"His enterprise was prosecuted with a spirit, intelligence, and perseverance that merited success. All the details that we have met with proves him to be no ordinary man. He appears to have the mind to conceive and the energy to execute extensive and striking plans." (12)

Further evidence of Wyeth's energy and honesty is shown by the fact that after his return to Cambridge in 1837, he was able to recoup his losses in the Oregon expedition, which had amounted to approximately $20,000.

It was an uphill fight and a losing one that Wyeth fought during those hard years in Oregon, but the difficulties mentioned above would have proven too great for anyone.


11 - Townsend, J.K.: "Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River". 224

12 - Irving, op. cit. 520
The collapse of his company was inevitable, but his defeat was one for which he could in no way be blamed.
Chapter VI.

FORT HALL UNDER THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

After the purchase of Fort Hall by the Hudson's Bay Company, the experience and organization of the British firm soon evidenced itself in many changes at the post. Some of the structural improvements are described by Dr. F.A. Wislizenus who visited the post in 1839:

"The fort lies hard by the river and is built in a square about 80' by 80' suggestive of barracks. The style is essentially that of Fort Laramie, except that the outer walls, 10' to 12' high, are constructed in this case of wood. A small cannon is in the courtyard. The fort owns many horses and six cows., The whole garrison consists of 8 men; among them 2 Sandwich Islanders and a German." (1)

Sometime during the next three years, the walls and the stockade were covered with adobe and the whole fort was enlarged. The dwelling house provided for the use of the chief trader inside the walls was a two-storied building of adobe measuring 42 feet by 15 feet. Its floors were of wood, while the doors and windows were narrow, the latter covered with a kind of parchment, since there was no glass available at the fort. Open hearths, of course, provided heat and cooking facilities.

1 - Brown, cit. 267.
The improvements in the building, however, were unimportant in comparison with the drastic changes following application of the company's policy of trading at the post. With typical thoroughness, the situation was carefully studied before any new system was adopted. James Douglas, who visited the fort in 1838, made the following report on the Indians of that region:

"...a numerous assemblage of Panaka, Shoshones, Shoshokos, cognate Tribes, living with each other, on terms of amity. They were for a long period a poor and greatly oppressed race but since becoming generally possessed of fire arms, they have bravely maintained their independence, and now occupy a respectable position among their former oppressors. Tho' an equestrian and exceedingly erratic people we have hopes of introducing among them more settled habits of life and leading them to devote more of their time to Fur hunting; an object worthy of our attention, as we are likely to derive from their exertions, more certain and extensive benefit, than we have reason to anticipate from the lawless and turbulent free white Trappers, now employed as Beaver Hunters...." (2)

Generally speaking, there were three types of white trading and trapping expeditions which made their headquarters at Fort Hall, and worked in the surrounding mountain territory. The first of these were "the lawless and turbulent free white Trappers" mentioned by Douglas. They were free-lance hunters who secured their horses, traps, and provisions at Fort Hall and returned to that
point with the results of their hunts. Secondly, there were mixed parties of Hudson's Bay Company men and free trappers who were equipped at the fort for hunting expeditions to the Colorado River, to Great Salt Lake, to the Flathead country, or along the streams which fed the Snake River. One such party, consisting of 26 men, led by Narcisse Raymond, was sent by Chief Trader Richard Grant in the summer of 1844 to the Queaterra country near the Great Salt Lake. This expedition was a commercial failure, chiefly as a result of an encounter with hostile Indians. Such parties were often composed of more American traders than British. Farnham reported:

"Even the American trappers are fast leaving the service of their countrymen for the larger profits and better treatment of British employment." (4)

The third group of white men trading at Fort Hall were the rival American trappers who, wandering far from their bases on the lower Missouri River, occasionally purchased supplies at Fort Boise or Fort Hall and paid for them in furs. Besides this trade with the white trappers and hunters, the Hudson's Bay Company, for the reasons mentioned above, had a much larger share of Indian trade than their former rival had been able to secure.


4 - Farnham, Thos. J.:"Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory". Thwaites, R.G."Early Western Travels". Cleveland, O. 1906. XXVIII. 373.
Another extremely important improvement that aided Fort Hall during the British regime was a stabilized system of communications. No longer was the little outpost an isolated self-dependent trading centre, but it was now a unit in a well-knit, well-organized system, by which it was protected and supplied and to which it was responsible for profitable trading. The pack trail between Fort Vancouver and Fort Hall was now well-trodden twice a year by the stream of ponies bringing trading goods and provisions to the interior post or by the returning loads of furs secured there. In fact, the company had these routes well planned even before Wyeth's enterprise, since it was with a "mountain outfit" from Fort Vancouver under Frances Ermetinger that Wyeth travelled through the Columbia basin on his return journey in 1834. The power and prestige of the great company made its wagon and pack trains immune from the Indian raids which had harassed the thin line of transport which Wyeth had striven to maintain. McLoughlin himself testified to this safety when he wrote:

"From Fort Hall to the States, twenty men have repeatedly passed and repassed and frequently fewer, from Fort Hall to Vancouver, two men can travel in perfect safety." (5)

The success in the establishment of pack trails between Fort Hall led to an interesting experiment by Frances

Ermatinger in 1840. With three others, he attempted to take a wagon through to the Columbia. Owing to the height of the sage and the narrowness of the trail, they were obliged to lighten their loads to such an extent that they finally reached Fort Walla Walla with only the frames and running gears of their wagons. This journey is an important one in the history of the region, however, for it was the first attempt to take wagons through the difficult mountain road and did much to shape the advice given by the men of the company to the immigrants during the years that followed.

"The simple fact that these, the first wagons to go through to the Columbia, were not only outfitted at Fort Hall, but that one of them was owned, outfitted, and driven by Frederic (sic) Ermatinger, the Hudson's Bay Company chief trader in charge of Ft. Hall in 1838, 1839, 1840 and 1841, of itself reduces to senseless drivel all the scores of pages in Barrows, Nixon, Craighead, Mowry and the other advocates of the Whitman Saved Oregon story, which accuse the Hudson's Bay Company of opposing the passage of wagons beyond Fort Hall.... The experience of these men fully justified the advice given at Ft. Hall to the parties of '39, '40, '41, and '42, to leave their wagons, and go from there with pack animals...." (7)

Even the improved communication system did little to lower the cost of supplies for this interior fort, so difficult of access. It was decided, however, to continue

6 - Dr. Newell, Col. J.L. Meek, and Caleb Wilkins.

experiments in agriculture. Accordingly, two ploughs were sent from Fort Vancouver in 1839, one for Fort Hall and the other for Fort Boise. However, drought conditions throughout the region in that year ruined any hope of successfully growing the intended grain.

The first officer in charge of Fort Hall after its purchase was Thomas McKay, who had earlier built Snake Fort (Fort Boise), and who was familiar with trading conditions in that area. The next official to rule the destinies of the post was Frances Ermatinger, who was in charge from 1838 to 1842. Owing to the increased importance of the fort, the latter's position was raised from that of clerk to Chief Trader in 1841. He was succeeded in the following year by Richard Grant, who managed the post until his retirement in 1851 - during the hectic days of the Oregon immigration. The decline in importance of the fort is indicated by the fact that during the remainder of its active period, it was under the control of clerks; Neil McArthur from 1851 to 1854 and William Sinclair from 1854 to its final abandonment in 1856. It was the duty of all these leaders, working under the instructions of both Dr. McLoughlin - in whose department the fort was situated - and of Governor Simpson, his superior,

9 - supra. 28.
10- Great-great-grandfather of the author. Frequently known as "Captain Johnny" Grant among the immigrants.
to secure a maximum of trade at a minimum of expense. There were, however, three handicaps to commercial success in this area. These were, first, high cost of transport; secondly, the competition of American trappers and traders; finally, the fact that the Snake River region was a producer, almost exclusively, of only one fur, beaver. This latter fact made profitable operation of Fort Hall dependent on the existence of a steady demand and a high price for beaver pelts.

In 1842-43, the Snake district, including Fort Boise and a trading party as well as Fort Hall, traded nearly 2,500 beaver skins from American trappers and Indians. The importance of this large production is proven in a letter of Dr. McLoughlin:

"As to Mr. Grant's good returns from the Snake River country, they help to make up for losses elsewhere." (11)

During the season 1845-46 the returns amounted to nearly 1600 beaver besides other small furs, the whole trade being valued at £3000.

A few years later two factors were moving simultaneously in opposite sides of the world, however, to make the beaver trade in the Snake River region extremely

11 - Dr. John McLoughlin to Governor Simpson, March 20, 1842. O.H.Q. XVII. 223.

12 - Chief Trader Richard Grant to Governor Simpson, Jan. 2, 1846. H.B.C. Arch. D.5/16.
difficult and, ultimately, impossible. These widely separated handicaps were: the decline in the supply of beaver in the area and the decline in value of the pelts in the London market. This latter fact was a result of the adoption of the silk hat to replace the beaver hat. So rapid was the collapse of the trade that Simpson advised Grant in a letter of June 30, 1849 that the price of one blanket for four beavers was too high and further stated:

"......as you get neither martens, foxes, otters, nor other small furs, the fur trade of the Snake Country is more than unprofitable." (13)

The tariff increase thus ordered naturally did not improve trade and the chief trader was compelled to report in the following year:

"The news of this quarter regarding Trade is anything but flattering, I have done I may almost say nothing. The cause can only be attributed to the Indians and few freemen still remaining in our Neighbourhood and elsewhere, being now so amply supplied with all their wants by the passing Emigrants, for horses and Leather sold and bartered between both parties. The Indians have become Careless, and still more indolent than they ever were in hunting furs- some of the Old Ones no doubt might yet be enticed to hunt Beaver, but that once valuable Animal having (sic) now valueless, they are not encouraged, And our Tariff, from Instructions received being made much higher than they formerly had to pay, the Indians find it to their advantage, to hunt large Animals, which supply them and their families more food, and the skins much more valuable in procuring their Wants from the Emigrants." (14)


14 - Chief Trader Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, Fort Hall, February 22, 1850. H.B.C. Arch. D.5/27
The tide of immigration on the Oregon Trail which had reached its flood about 1849 began to ebb rapidly after 1850, owing to Indian wars and the opening of new routes to the glamorous gold fields of California. Therefore the profits of trading with the travellers also diminished. The hostility of the Indians to the large numbers of white settlers began after the Oregon Treaty of 1846 and climaxed in the Yakima wars ten years later. With such a decline in trade, with Indian hostility, and with the transfer of the major activities of the company north of the 49th parallel, the fate of Fort Hall was sealed and it was finally abandoned in 1856.
The "On to Oregon" movement in eastern United States, inspired by the work of Hall J. Kelley, grew rapidly in the late 1830's. This growth was largely a result of interest aroused through Wyeth's exploits and the agitations of restless expansionist politicians in the national capitol. It was one of those recurring periods of the westward movement which punctuated American political life so frequently during the 19th century. Dissatisfaction over the Oregon joint occupancy agreement was evident among the American delegates when the document was renewed in 1828. Certainly both parties must have realized that a permanent settlement could not be much longer postponed. Under the aegis of Kelley's Oregon Colonization Society, a strong movement grew in New England, especially, to add the territory to the Union. The fact that it would be a non-slave region was a major factor in securing the support of the northerners for the annexation agitation. The story of Wyeth's enterprise, widely told throughout the east, aroused much popular interest in the land of the Far West.

"His influence in Oregon occupation

1 - supra, 12
and settlement was second to none. He it was who more directly than any other marked the way for the oxteams which were so shortly to bring the Americanized civilization of Europe across the roadless continent." (2)

By 1837, a severe business depression had struck United States and the more adventurous settlers were once more seeking the boon of free land, in spite of frontier hardships, to recoup their fortunes.

The first of these hardy immigrants to reach Fort Hall on his way to Oregon was Joel Walker, who arrived there in 1837. Riding in his wagon were his wife and five children, while Robert Newell accompanied him as guide. This was the beginning of the great stream of settlers who were to cross the continent on the famous Oregon Trail and to establish a colony large enough to substantiate the claim of their nation to its annexation.

Two years later, an interesting expedition was organized by Thomas J. Farnham; while it was, ostensibly, a party of immigrants, Farnham planned it on a semi-military basis and apparently had ambitions of capturing the Oregon Territory for United States with his "Oregon Dragoons" as he named his party. Actually, he was an employee of the Federal Government at Washington. The scheme was, of course, 


3 - Advocates of the Oregon annexation movement in Washington planned to throw the country open to free homesteading.

4 - Congressional Globe, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., Appendix, 229
a miserable failure. Instead of seizing any of the Hudson's Bay Company's forts, Farnham was glad of the opportunity of securing supplies and assistance at them.

After 1840, the arrival of groups of immigrants at Fort Hall became more frequent and the groups themselves grew in size. In 1842, a party of 137 immigrants reached the post, left their wagons there and proceeded westward to Oregon. Of this party, McLoughlin stated:

"The first Immigration of 1841 or 1842 arrived in so miserable condition that had it not been for the Hudson's Bay Company they must have starved or been cut off by the Indians." (5)

Dr. Elijah White, a member of the 1842 party, confirmed McLoughlin's statement when he wrote in his journal:

"Four days longer march..... brought them to Fort Hall......Their reception was of the kindest character and they spent a week very pleasantly with Mr. Grant and his worthy associate, McDonald, who made advantageous exchanges of commodities and afforded them every facility in their power for their further journey. Flour cost them but half what it did at Fort Laramie, although conveyed on horseback 800 miles." (6)

Lansford Hastings was also in this group of immigrants and in his "Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California", he states:

"Upon arriving at this fort we were received in the kindest manner by Mr. Grant, who was in charge; and we received every aid and attention from the gentlemen of that fort, during our

5 - "McLoughlin's Reply to the Warre Report". O.H.Q. XXXIII. 218
6 - White, Dr. Elijah: "Ten Years in Oregon". Andrus, Gauntlet Co. Ithaca, N.Y. 1850. 164.
stay in their vicinity. We were informed by Mr. Grant and other gentlemen of the company, that it would by impossible for us to take our wagons down to the Pacific; consequently a meeting of the party was called for the purpose of determining whether we should take them further. 

Mr. Grant purchased a few of our wagons for a mere trifle, which he paid in such provisions as he could dispose of without injury to himself. He could not, of course, afford to give much for them, as he did not need them, but bought them merely as an accommodation." (7)

Much controversial material has been written and still is being written regarding the relations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the immigrants. The reports above seem to give an indication of the typical attitude of the British traders. The most unusual and most persistent story in this respect is that of Dr. Marcus Whitman.

This enterprising Baptist missionary first arrived in Oregon in 1836. He was not popular at Fort Vancouver, and soon moved away and established a mission at Wailatpu. His chief claim to fame at that time was that he had brought a two-wheeled cart, remnants of a wagon, past Fort Hall to Fort Walla Walla. With the advent of American immigration in 1840-41, Whitman conceived the idea of establishing a wagon road through the mountains which would permit the travellers to rumble on in comparative ease to the Columbia River. After a spectacular mid-winter dash across the continent in 1842, Whitman presented his

scheme to President Tyler. From this point in the story, historical opinions differ. Some contend that Tyler privately promised government support to the missionary if he could establish a wagon route from Fort Hall to the Columbia.

In the following year, the "Great Immigration", consisting of about 1000 people and 200 wagons, came crashing through the sage to Fort Hall, westward bound. Captain Gantt led the party to that point, and Whitman served as their guide from there to the Grand Ronde River. The problem of proceeding with their wagons was an extremely hazardous one and the Hudson's Bay Company officials, as they had done previously, advised against it. At this point in Whitman's story, his admirers reach the climax of their adulation, for it was he who "out-witted the traders" and led the wagons onward. Rev. Myron Eells, one of his associates, wrote:

"There at Fort Hall, the final victory was won................. when, in 1846, the treaty was signed..., it was simply writing in an official way what had been written "de facto" three years previous at Fort Hall." (8)

The persistence of this story of Whitman winning Oregon has been a remarkable feature of northwest history. For instance, the Fort Hall Centennial Programme, published in 1934, states:

"When the Great Emigration of 1843 of over 1000 people reached Fort Hall, the real battle was fought for the colonization movement. Richard Grant

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was genuinely alarmed by the multitude at the gates and told them it was an impossibility to take wagons farther. In the battle of wits between Whitman and Grant, the worthy doctor won, and the immigrants went on in wagons to the Columbia." (9)

Even the most recent book on Fort Hall states:

"It was at that place (Fort Hall) that the real battle was fought for the colonization movement." (10)

Certainly this is true to a certain extent but Whitman's success in bringing wagons through was not the turning point.

Marshall, in refuting the Whitman legend, writes:

"At Fort Hall, the Hudson's Bay Company men made no effort to stop the wagons nor if its men had tried would they have succeeded, since the party was fully equipped to go through. Besides three wagons had gone through in 1840. Outfitted at the British post and one of its wagons was owned by Ermatinger, chief trader at Fort Hall." (11)

Peter Burnett, a member of the 1843 party, seemed unaware of any attempt by Grant to divert the immigration, when he published his reminiscences:

"I consulted Mr. Grant as to his opinion of the practicability of taking our wagons through. He replied that while he would not say that it was impossible for us Americans to make the trip in our wagons, he could not

10 - Brown, 294.
11 - Marshall. II. 381.
himself see how it could be done. He had only travelled the pack trail and certainly no wagons could follow that route but there might be a practical road found by leaving the trail at certain points." (12)

A similar account was told by another traveller who reached Fort Hall in the following year:

"Mr. Cave then asked whether we could get to the Columbia River in wagons. Grant's reply was in substance: 'Mr. Cave, it's no use my answering your question. It's just about a year ago since a lot of people came here just as you have done and asked me the same question. I told them, 'No' that we found it very difficult to pass the narrow trails with pack ponies. They went on, just as you will; just as if I had not spoken a word and the next I heard they were at Walla Walla. You damned Yankees will do anything you like.'" (13)

Such then was the "battle of wits" as described by the chief trader himself, who, according to some writers, was supposed to be so perturbed by Whitman and his party. In confirmation of Grant's warning, the same immigrant wrote in his journal later:

"We took the mountain road which was as bad as Mr. Grant's description." (14)

Another charge frequently made is that the

12 - Burnett, P.H.,: "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer". C.H.Q. V. 77


14 - Ibid. 224.
Hudson's Bay Company wanted to prevent American settlement in order that they could settle the land with British subjects.

"The stopping of wagons at Fort Hall was a Hudson's Bay Company scheme to prevent settling of the country by Americans until they could settle it with their own subjects."(15)

The fact that only once did the company attempt such settlement during their period of occupation, and then in only a half-hearted manner, seems to disprove this argument. On that occasion a small party of settlers was brought from the Red River Valley to settle in Oregon. There was never, at any time, a determined attempt by the company to settle the area with British subjects before 1846.

The critics of the "Honourable Company" have not been content to rest their case on Whitman and his wagons, though his place in history is now being more clearly defined. (16)


16 - "He did not originate the great flow of settlers that started westward in 1843......he did lead them and their wagons to the Grand Ronde River and they were then successfully brought to Wailaptu. "The journey to Oregon made by such a large number not only stimulated interest in Oregon and insured a majority of Americans in the disputed territory; but doubtless strengthened the determination of the government to insist upon American rights, and it influenced the democrats to put the Oregon issue in their platform in 1844. " Carey, C.H.: "General History of Oregon". Metropolitan Press. 1935. I. 316.
The other charges brought against the traders at Fort Hall are that they impeded the travellers by charging high prices for supplies and by attempting to divert them to California.

The high cost of transporting supplies to Fort Hall has already been noted as also Dr. White's opinion of the prices of supplies at the post. In spite of this Dr. Whitman wrote:

"The present party is supposed to have expended no less than $2000 at Fort Hall and Fort Boise... at the enormous rate of charge called mountain prices: i.e. $50 the hundred for flour and $50 the hundred for coffee, the same for sugar." (17)

Certainly the missionary shows some prejudice in such criticism, since he must have realized the high freighting charges. He had arrived in Oregon some six years before and had had to purchase supplies for his mission station far in the interior. Surely his experience there must have shown him the high costs of transportation in the rugged mountain country. A contemporary of Whitman also complained of the prices at Fort Hall:

"Arrived at Fort Hall. Here the company had considerable trading with Mr. Grant, manager for the Hudson's Bay Company. He sells at an exorbitant price: flour - 25¢ a pint, sugar-50¢, coffee-50¢, rice-33 1/3¢ a pint." (18)

17 - Eells, op. cit. Dr. Marcus Whitman to Hon. Jas. Porter, Secretary of War. 337.

These prices do not seem exorbitant, however, when compared (19) with the prices at Fort Laramie. Further, the majority of extant journals do not agree with those quoted above. Farnham described his arrival at the post, thus:

"A friendly salutation was followed by an invitation to enter the Fort; and a 'welcome to Fort Hall', was given in a manner so kind and obliging that nothing seemed wanting to make us feel that we were at home. A generous flagon of Old Jamaica, wheaten bread, and butter newly churned, and buffalo tongues fresh from the neighboring mountain made their appearance as soon as we had rid ourselves of the equipage and dust of journeying and allayed the dreadful sense of starvation.............

.....Goods are sold at this establishment 50% lower than at the American posts." (20)

Burnett reported that "Mr. Grant was exceedingly kind and hospitable". In 1845, the rates at the fort were: flour, $20 per cwt., horses $15 to $25; surely not excessive prices in view of the monopoly and the difficulties of transportation. An immigrant of 1845, wrote:

"Fort Hall was in charge of Jas. (sic) Grant of Hudson's Bay Company. Mr. Rector found him 'a very clever and obliging gent' who gave valuable information in regard to the route." (21)

Even John Minto, who claimed the company had treated Wyeth severely, wrote:

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19 - In 1843 - coffee, $1.50 a pint; brown sugar - $1.50 a pint; flour - 25¢ lb.; powder - $1.50 a lb.; calico - $1 a yd.

20 - Farnham, 302-303.

"Mr. Grant........gave me fair
treatment in trade, however, furnishing
a strong saddle horse for my gun." (22)

Jesse Applegate, one of the most famous of the Oregon Trail pioneers, stated that in 1843, when he visited Fort Hall, "nothing but kindness" was received from "Captain Grant".

Joel Palmer, an immigrant of 1845, described his treatment at Fort Hall, thus:

"August 8 (1845)....Fort Hall.
Captain Grant is now the officer in command; he has the bearing of a gentleman. The garrison was supplied with flour, which had been procured from the settlements in Oregon, and brought here on pack horses. They sold it to the emigrants for $20 per cwt., taking cattle in exchange, and as many of the emigrants were nearly out of flour and had a few lame cattle, a brisk trade was carried on between them and the inhabitants of the fort. In the exchange of cattle for flour an allowance was made of from $5 to $12 per head. They also had horses which they readily exchanged for cattle or sold for cash. The price demanded for horses was from $15 to $25. They could not be prevailed upon to receive anything in exchange for their goods or provisions, excepting cattle or money." (23)

After reviewing similar journals of many pioneers, Mrs. Brown, stated that the aid received by the emigrants at Fort Hall made it possible for many to reach the Columbia River Valley, who would not otherwise have been able to reach


their destination. T.C. Elliott, an eminent authority on the history of the region, writes:

"It is true of course that among so many travelers during those years some others imagined themselves ill-treated and overcharged, and these have left somewhat different records, but in most of such instances, reasons of weariness, poor health, uncertain memory or prejudice were accountable." (24)

The third charge made against the officials of Fort Hall, as stated above, is that they attempted to persuade many of the immigrants to turn their course for California. This accusation, again a product of prejudice, cannot be substantiated. It is largely a survival of charges such as those of Samuel R. Thurston, who stated in the United States Congress:

"In 1845, he (McLoughlin) sent an express to Fort Hall, 800 miles, to warn the American emigrants that if they attempted to come to Willamette they would all be cut off." (26)

McLoughlin denied this charge and even secured the support of Wyeth in its contradiction:

24 - Elliott, T.C. op. cit. 12.

25 - "Thurston's letters, speeches and actions against Dr. McLoughlin are the one great blot on his career. Thurston was a man of ability, a fluent speaker, a profuse writer of letters, of untiring energy, but inclined to be vindictive, and was not careful about the truth of his statements concerning a person he opposed or disliked." Holman, F.V.: "Dr. John McLoughlin". Clark. Cleveland. 1907. 144-145.

26 - Ibid. 123.
"The suffering and distress of the early American visitors and settlers in the Columbia River were always treated by Hudson's Bay Company agents and particularly so by Dr. John McLoughlin with consideration and kindness." (27)

Had the Hudson's Bay Company been determined to keep the American settlers out of Oregon, they would, no doubt, have evolved some definite scheme to hold the area. Actually, however, they carried on a brisk trade with the immigrants and sold them the equipment necessary for their progress. One of the early immigrants wrote:

"To be frank, no more, if as much, discouragement was offered to their party of emigrants at Fort Hall than had been received at Fort Laramie, an American post." (28)

Evidence has been brought forward which proves that the major factor in the attempted diversion of settlers to California was a scheme developed by Americans in that region. By this means they hoped to fill up the territory-then Mexican-with American settlers who would aid the severance of the Mexican connection and seek annexation with United States. Actually two agents, Greenwood and McDougall, were sent from California to Fort Hall to influence the


immigrants at that point. Joel Palmer, a westbound traveller, noted in his journal in 1845:

"While we remained at this place, great efforts were made to induce the emigrants to pursue the route to California. The most extravagant tales were related respecting the dangers that awaited a trip to Oregon....... On the other hand, as an inducement to pursue the California route, we were informed of the shortness of the route when compared with that to Oregon........Mr. Greenwood, an old mountaineer, well stocked with falsehoods, had been dispatched from California to pilot the emigrants through, and assisted by a young man by the name of McDougall." (29)

It is not difficult to understand that many immigrants were of undesirable types. Chief Trader Grant wrote of one who, boasting that he was a "free-born son of America", warned the trader that he would soon have to leave the fort since it was now an American territory. When Grant asked him if his liberty permitted him to place his muddy boots upon his host's bed (upon which the American had sprawled), the young jingoist made a hurried departure, in a flurry of threats of expulsion for the British trader. Such an attitude was typical of some of the more militant immigrants.

Simpson was poorly impressed with many of the immigrants whom he saw and reported to the Governor of the Company:

"Bowie knife, revolving pistol and rifle taking place of constable's baton in bringing delinquents to justice." (30)


30 - Sir George Simpson to Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, June 20, 1845. American Historical Review. XXIX. 691.
Some time later, Simpson warned Grant to be on guard against pillaging by the travellers.

There remains but one contentious point to be cleared in the discussion of relations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the immigrants. This is the question of Grant's retirement. Many have claimed that his resignation from the firm was requested because he had failed to keep the settlers out of Oregon.

Typical of such opinions is the following extract:

"Grant was retired in 1852 from his position at Fort Hall by the company on the grounds of impaired health, but it is now believed to have been the outcome of his failure to stem the tide of immigration into the Oregon territory." (31)

Such statements are far from true. In the first place, he did not leave his post at Fort Hall until 1852, by which time the number of immigrants passing that point had decreased considerably. This decline was due to increased interest in California, which had been annexed by United States in 1850 and was the centre of a great "gold fever". Indian hostility along the Oregon route was another factor which diverted immigrants from Fort Hall. Finally, a new and better route to California had been opened further south. In the second place, Grant's health was not good; rheumatism had made it increasingly difficult to carry on his arduous duties as head of the post. As early as 1850,

31 - "Idaho Yesterday and Today", no author, 44.
Simpson had recommended a furlough for Grant to give him an opportunity to recuperate from his illness and then suggested a transfer to Dunvegan in the Peace River district. It is, therefore, obvious that his resignation was not requested, but rather that he be permitted to take a holiday and then be transferred, for the sake of his health, where his work would be less arduous.

In summary, therefore, we note that the Hudson's Bay Company's attitude towards the immigrants was strictly one of fairness and kindness. Every possible assistance was rendered to the travellers, trading was carried on at normal rates, and there was no deliberate attempt by the officers of the company to divert the immigrants to California for a selfish reason. An excellent observation on the weakness of any contradictory attitude has been made by T.C. Elliott, an internationally recognized authority on Oregon's early history, whose fairness in such matters is widely acknowledged:

"... this is the ridiculous theory advanced by some writers that the Hudson's Bay Company, up to the time of the treaty between the United States and Great Britain in June, 1846, maintained the policy of preventing, or at least, of retarding settlement of the Oregon country by Americans and sent Chief Trader Grant to Port Hall to enforce such policy. No seriously and intelligently written history in recent years has contained such a direct statement, but there is a sort
of inherent delight in the American mind in 'twisting the British lion's tail' now and then, and writers of historic fiction and even of some local authorities so assert." (32)
Chapter VIII.

FORT HALL AFTER THE TREATY

For many years after the signing of the Oregon Treaty in 1846, the Hudson's Bay Company maintained Fort Hall, its southernmost post. The immigrants continued to pause at its white adobe walls to sell their cattle or other surplus supplies in return for flour, sugar, or other provisions in which they stood in need. In 1847, Chief Trader Grant reported that some 900 wagons trundled up to the gates of the post between July 11 and September 2 of that year. During the same year, the Mormons had inaugurated their settlement at Salt Lake and the aggressive chief trader had immediately established trade with them.

In 1848, the number of wagons passing Fort Hall was 300. In the next year, however, news of Sutter's gold discovery in California had spread to the east and Grant estimated that close to 10,000 wagons "passed on their way to the California Mines &." Small wonder that the Old Oregon Trail, in many places, especially in the soft volcanic soil of the Snake River valley, consisted of a depression some four or five feet deep.

The days of fame for Fort Hall were nearing an end, however, as were the days of the greatness of the old trail. As noted in the previous chapter, the opening of a new trail further south and the menace of Indian attacks in the Oregon region were major factors in turning the tide of migration to the sunny slopes of California.

These Indian attacks had started in 1847, with the massacre at Dr. Whitman's mission of the missionary and most of the settlers there. This started a period of restlessness among the Indians of the region who feared the advent of hordes of white settlers who would deprive them of their ancestral homes. Intermittent massacres and skirmishes lasted for many years and harassed the white settlers and traders.

To control the Indians, particularly the Yakima tribe, a detachment of United States troops was sent to the region in 1849, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel W.W. Loring.

"The original order of the secretary of war, dated June 1, 1847, directed establishment of two or more of a chain of posts along the route to Oregon... one at or near Fort Laramie... the other at Fort Hall or on the Bear River near enough to be supplied from the Mormon settlements." (3)

Some confusion has been caused by various writers who assumed that Fort Hall was actually occupied by a military garrison, because of these orders. However,

this regiment really occupied an encampment near the fort in August, 1849:

"A temporary post called Cantonment Loring, about six miles from Old Fort Hall on the branch of the Snake River, was occupied by troops during a part of the years 1849 and 1850." (4)

This site was not found suitable and the location was moved in May, 1850, owing to a scarcity of forage for the horses. A new establishment was located near the Dalles on the Columbia River.

Following this military expedition through the Oregon Territory, there seems to have been a lull in Indian attacks. The menace had done irreparable damage to immigration into the region, however, and the flow of traffic towards Oregon was thinning to a mere trickle. In 1853, Chief Factor Peter Skene Ogden reported to Sir George Simpson that sufficient supplies were being sent to Forts Hall and Boise to supply the large number of immigrants expected. The number of travellers, however, fell far short of the company's expectations and, hence, trade decreased considerably. It is interesting to note at this point that this outfit was largely transported by wagons from Fort Vancouver to Fort

Hall and arrangements were completed to abandon the old mode of horse packing on this route during 1854. A further loss to the two Snake River forts, Boise and Hall, in 1853 was caused when they were inundated by the flood waters of the river.

In 1854, the fury of the reskins again burst forth with the massacre of 19 immigrants of a party of 21 near Fort Boise. A military expedition, sent to punish the Indians, succeeded in capturing some prisoners. After the troops departed, it was considered unwise for the company's officers and men to remain any longer at Fort Boise and it was therefore abandoned in 1855.

Two years later, there was another Indian massacre at the Cascades in which James Sinclair (of the Hudson's Bay Company) and 18 others were slain. Since this attack was in the proximity of the Fort Hall-Fort Vancouver route, great concern was felt at the latter point for the safety of the mountain post's inhabitants. On May 3, 1856, approximately six weeks after the attack, William Sinclair arrived at Fort Vancouver from Fort Hall. His report was forwarded through his superior, Chief Factor Dugald McTavish, to headquarters in London:

"Mr. Sinclair was fortunate in meeting very few Indians on the journey, which was performed without any mishap, with the exception of the loss of four horses, stolen from him, between Walla Walla and the Umatilla River— it is however distressing to mention, that Mr. Sinclair in ignorance of the disturbed state of affairs along the route despatched two men (Esdras Boisclair, a Canadian, and
Jean B‡t‡ Desjardins, a Red River halfbreed from Fort Hall on the 15th of January, for this place, with the accounts of his post, and as nothing has been heard of them since, I infer that they must have been murdered by the Indians.

In consequence of the accounts not having come to hand, I am unable to say exactly how matters stand in the Snake Country, but Mr. Sinclair reports verbally, that there was but little trade at Fort Hall during Outfit 1855, and when he left that place on the 15th April ultmo, the stock on hand consisted of trading goods & provisions to the value of probably six hundred pounds - at Inventory prices together with some forty head of horned Cattle and a few horses. The Indians have destroyed our establishment at Boise and I therefore feel somewhat anxious for the safety of Fort Hall, at which there are now only two men." (7)

Apparently McTavish received orders from London, authorizing him to evacuate the fort, for in July of the same year, he wrote:

"In consequence of the troubled state of the Country and the difficulty of keeping up the communication between this point and Fort Hall, I have directed Mr. Macdonald Chief Trader Angus Macdonald at Colville, to send a party and remove the people and property from Fort Hall to the Flatheads, and I trust he will succeed in doing so, without incurring much loss, and further that you will approve of this arrangement.

Owing to the hostile feeling evinced by the Indians, Mr. William Charles found it necessary to leave Boise last autumn, and as we have now to abandon Fort Hall, for the same reason, I

presume we shall have a claim for damages on the United States Government." (8)

The evacuation of the fort was carried out by Michael Ogden, and little or nothing of any value was left behind. The business, however, was not wound up without a loss. This despatch may be considered the requiem of the fort, for floods swept over it in 1862 and 1864 and, weather, too, wreaked its havoc on the structure. In 1865, Walker reported:

"The old fort was found to be a heap of ruins, but out of the adobe and some abandoned buildings of the Overland Stage Company, a shelter was erected." (9)

As noted above, a claim on the United States Government for the property, grew out of its abandonment by the company. In 1847, one year after the signing of the Oregon Treaty, the company placed a value of £2114 on Fort Hall. By 1865, however, the claim had risen to the sum of $24,333.33 (approximately £5000). This claim was finally settled with all the other claims of the company against the United States Government by a joint Anglo-American commission. While the value of Fort Hall was itemized for the work of the committee, in the final settlement

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10- See appendix W.
a lump sum of $3,822,036.27 was decided upon as a payment to the company.

Today, the whole site once occupied by this interesting post has been completely inundated by a man-made lake created in a hydro-electric scheme harnessing American Falls.
Chapter IX.

CONCLUSION

There is little more to be said of the story of this mountain post, but it is necessary to briefly review the importance of its short, but vivid history.

In the first place, it was the only American-built trading post in the interior of the jointly-occupied territory, and though it did not remain long under the Stars and Stripes, yet it had a symbolic importance. One writer, referring to Wyeth, its builder, states:

"His venture as a fur trader scarcely caused a ripple on the surface of life in Oregon, but in the East it kindled interest in the territory beyond the mountains, an interest dormant since the days of Lewis and Clark. Was Oregon a land for settlement? Men began to ask that question." (1)

The location of Fort Hall on the Oregon Trail brought it more pre-eminence as an equipping station for the travellers than it had managed to attain when beaver pelts were its principal source of revenue. During 20 years, from 1836 to 1856, some 200,000 travel-weary pioneers paused at its gates for rest, provisions, or assistance. Since it was further west than Fort Laramie, its supplies were of even greater value to the travellers than were those of the American

2 - "Idaho, Yesterday and Today". 65.
post. Ezra Meeker, one of the last links with the Oregon Trail, once stated:

"So when I drove with my ox team into Pocatello in May, 1906, on my way over the Oregon Trail, searching for suitable spots upon which to erect monuments, I naturally first queried to ascertain the site of Fort Hall, which I then and do now, consider the most important historic point on the great trail. It was here the early pioneers must needs abandon their wagon and proceed on their weary journey as best they could; some on horseback, some afoot, and some with oxen or cows packed, while the unfortunate pioneer trudged along behind covered with dust and in many instances enduring parched lips of thirst." (9)

The facilities offered by Fort Hall were absolutely essential for the success of the Oregon Trail and the immigration which passed over it. If the post had not been located where it was, it would have been impossible for the travellers of the 1840's to continue their hazardous journey out of the Great Basin, through the Rocky Mountains, and down the Pacific slope. The journals of many of the immigrants bear witness to their hard-pressed condition by the time they had crossed the 1288 miles from the usual starting point at Independence, Missouri. It has been pointed out that supplies were made available at Fort Hall to the weary travellers, even though continuance of their journey would help to establish their nation's claim to the region, and be a detriment to the company which owned the fort and to

\[\text{\small - cit. Brown, 365.}\]
the nation to whom it owed allegiance.

If Fort Hall had never been built, it would have been impossible for such great numbers of American settlers to cross the continent and the history of the American Pacific coast might well have been different. The northwest section would not have possessed so many American citizens when its ownership was decided; the sunny land of California might still be in the hands of the Mexican government.

Some of the trails which were later opened as "cut-offs" or "short-cuts" merely served to enhance the importance of Fort Hall, for it became as prominent a junction for the white travellers as it had once been for the Indians.

".........authorities agree that Fort Hall was for a generation the most noteworthy of all the halting places on the Oregon Trail. There the road forked, one branch running northwest to Oregon, another southwest across what is now Nevada to the Sierras and beyond to California; and so it was that members of emigrant trains halting at Fort Hall to refit and reorganize, frequently, at this parting of the ways, changed their minds as to their destination, some who had originally planned to go to Oregon, deciding in favor of California, and others who had set out for California making a twelfth-hour choice of Oregon." (§)

The fact that so many immigrants did change their minds as to their ultimate destination while at the fort gave

both Oregon and California predominantly American populations. The presence of this majority was a mighty factor when the sovereignty of the two regions was finally settled.

In the field of Anglo-American relations, Fort Hall occupied an important place. While its name scarcely appeared in any official documents, yet, as has been noted, it was a centre of controversial discussion for many years. This controversy brought American criticism upon the head of the old "King of Oregon", Dr. John McLoughlin. Contradictory stories which proved that the old trader had aided the immigrants made him the prey of British critics. Much of this argument centred about the orders which he despatched to the servants of the company at Fort Hall. The defamatory allegations hounded him to his grave. Yet, present-day evidence proves the inaccuracy of the charges. It is to be hoped that the facts presented herewith will refute any similar charges that have been made against Hudson's Bay Company officers at Fort Hall. These men carried out their duties in a manner which was loyal to their employer, but which was, at the same time, primarily one of kindness and fairness to the weary travellers who stopped at their gates. These very travellers were, of course, those who were filling up the land to such an extent that they were going to secure the land for their nation, and, after a lapse of some nine years, to restore the site of Fort Hall to American sovereignty.
APPENDIX

I.

The Santa Fe traders were the men who carried on a lucrative trade from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, Mexico. Owing to the distance of Santa Fe from Vera Cruz, it was a logical market for overland American traders. Goods from the east, usually fabrics, were transported by caravan to Santa Fe and sold there in return for specie, bullion or fur. The trade averaged about one hundred to one hundred fifty thousand dollars a year between 1822 and 1843. These traders had strong support in Washington and were often given military escorts of far greater expense than the value of the trade warranted. Probably the reason for this was the presence of their excellent advocate, Senator Thomas Benton, in Washington, who guarded the monopoly of his Missouri trading constituents with the utmost vigilance.

II.

"... Mr. McLeod left this on 18th April with an Outfit, and proceeded to the American Rendezvouse which he reached on 28th June, on Green River, a Branch of the Rio Colorado, about 200 Miles S.E. of Salt Lake. On the 18th July the Americans arrived from St. Louis, when he was informed through Captain Thing, Mr. Wyeth's Clerk, that Mr. Wyeth had given over the business, and given him power to sell out, but states nothing regarding the proposal he made to Your Honors, and he writes Captain Thing he would find further instructions at Vancouver. Captain Thing offered Mr. McLeod at once to sell the Hudsons Bay Company all Mr. Wyeth Goods & at a 100 p Cent on Boston prices,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td>1000 Dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traps</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>&quot; ea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>&quot; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>his Trappers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

advances at their valuation in the Books; Mr. McLeod very properly would not accept these terms as too high, and Captain Thing immediately sold his Traps and Horses to Fountenell and Drips at those prices, and brough(t) down his Furs here, and according to the offer you made him, I purchased his Goods & valuing them at our Importation of '36, and taking the Boston prime cost for such articles as we had not, and allowing him our Inventory advance as you offered, and putting no value on
useless articles, (however to give us a claim on these last, when the accounts were made out, I gave him Fifty Dollars for them) Beaver 4½ Dollars pr lb (The Rocky Mountain price) on condition that he would take Five Hundred Dollars for Fort Hall and his Outstanding Debts, to be paid by Bills on Oahu, and if we have no funds there, to be paid by Bills on England, the Dollar to be valued at 4/2, but if these terms did not suit him I offered him a passage for his effects and Furs to Oahu, on his paying freight; he accepted the offers I made him, and sold us all Mr Wyeth Furs, Goods & as you see by the accompanying account, and for which I will draw on the terms stated when we have closed his accounts, and he leaves this for Oahu."

Chief Factor Dr. John McLoughlin to H.B.C. London - Fort Vancouver, 31st October, 1837. (H.B.C.Arch. B. 223/b/17, f. 43d-44)

III.

"The dry goods for an overland trip are best found in New York and the other articles in St. Louis. A small charge must be added for transport to St. Louis for those bought in New York, say on 4000 lbs. including

- Insurance & Sundrys $160.00
- Baling of the Above and Sundrys bought at St. Louis $100.00
- 50 pack saddles and 50 Riding Do $250.00
- Hobbies and Halters for 100 animals $150.00
- Shoeing for 100 animals $50.00
- Corn and sundry for horses $50.00
- Saddle Blankets $100.00
- 50 men for 5 months at 15 per month $3750.00
- Provisions to Buffalo $100.00
- Pack covers $50.00
- Ammunition $100.00
- 100 animals $3000.00
- Guns $300.00
- First cost of goods $3000.00
- Six months interest on all charges except wages $222.00

$11382.00

being the Cost of transporting goods (including the first cost) of the value of $3000 from St. Louis to the Trois Titons Leng. 110 deg. west Latt. about 43, Air line distance 900 miles.
In making an estimate of the cost of transporting the same amt. of goods from the head of navigation on the Columbia I shall make the difference in time and force required which from some knowledge I think just and also cost of Harness and Horses,

50 pack Saddles and 15 riding do to be bought of the Inds for about 25 cts. ea in goods $17.00
Halters and Hobbles for 65 animals 17.00
Buffaloes for bklts 30.00
15 men for 4 months at 15 per month 900.00
Provisions 100.00
Pack covers 50.00
Ammunition 25.00
Guns 90.00
65 animals at $5 ea. 325.00
First cost of goods 3000.00

Interest for 10 months on all charges except wages of men 182.00

$4554.00
$4736.00

being a difference of $6646.00 in far. of transporting goods from the first rapids on the Columbia to the Trois Titons Long. 110 deg. west, Latt. 43 deg N. (and 400 miles air line) ever and above St. Louis."

Sources - N.J.Wyeth to Henry Hall and Messrs. Tucker and Williams, Cambridge, Nov. 8/1833. 75-76

IV.

Value as set on Fort Hall for the Angle-American Joint Claims Commission:

1 2-storey adobe dwelling 22' by 12'......£132
1 2-storey store 22' by 14'......£220
1 range adobe building 27' by 10'......£235 (with 2 dwellings and material store)
1 range of adobe building 36' by 10'...... £144
......2 dwellings and blacksmith shop
1 range of adobe building 57' by 10', viz. 2, dwelling houses and mill house and lumber room £228
2 2-storey bastions, 8' by 8' by 10' by 10' £ 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-storey building, store house,</td>
<td>12' by 12'</td>
<td>£60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall of the fort, high by 19' thick</td>
<td>100' by 80'</td>
<td>£400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling house,</td>
<td>35' by 10'</td>
<td>£175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 horse yard or park wall, high by 19' thick</td>
<td>130' by 160'</td>
<td>£190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse yard or park wall, 5' high by 19' thick</td>
<td></td>
<td>£250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** £2,114

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**V.**

Further excerpts from the notes supplied by the Archives Department of the Hudson's Bay Company and published by the authority of the Governor and Committee of the company:

"........ and where I understand he intends to keep a store to supply the trappers in the Mountains. He traded there last year, about six hundred Beavers.

..............

Mr. (Thomas) McKay passed the Winter in the vicinity of Mr. Wyeth's fort, and will also pass the Winter thereabouts this year. He is supplied with a small outfit for trade, and a few men to trap."


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"McLoughlin reported to the Governor and Committee on the 16th November, 1836, that Wyeth's fort was still being kept up at that time (H.B.C. Arch. B. 223/6/12, f. 70d), but in December of the same year Wyeth was writing to the Governor and Committee proposing that they should buy all the property of his company - the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Co. Fort Hall was also to be included in the transaction. (N. J. Wyeth to H.B.C. London, 5th December, 1836. -H.B.C. Arch. A.10/3.)"
"The Governor and Committee were satisfied with the results of this transaction and stated that Fort Hall, together with Fort Boise, which the Company had previously erected in the Snake Country in opposition to Wyeth, should be maintained. The trapping expedition was also to be kept up in order to compete with any American trapping parties that might come from St. Louis."


"Attempts at cultivation at Port Hall do not appear to have met with much success. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining provisions in many parts of the Snake Country, two ploughs were sent there from Port Vancouver in 1839, but the summer of that year was so excessively dry that the attempt to raise grain for seed was a failure. It was intended to continue the experiment, (Chief Trader James Douglas to H.B.C. London, 14th October, 1839; H.B.C. Arch. B.223/b/23, pp. 26-27) and although we have found nothing further in our archives concerning agriculture at Fort Hall, it appears from the evidence of various witnesses given before the British and American Joint Commission referred to above that the further attempts were also failures."

"Chief Trader Richard Grant reported to Governor Sir George Simpson that in 1845 not less than 456 wagons, besides several packing parties, passed Fort Hall on their way to the west with thousands of cattle, and that he had traded with them to the extent of a few hundred dollars. He had heard rumours to the effect that 'several Thousands of Mormons' were preparing to make their way to California."

- Chief Trader Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 2nd January, 1846. (H.B.C. Arch. D.5/16).

"We have not found any record of the number of wagons passing Fort Hall in 1846, but by 1847 the figures had risen considerably. Chief Trader Richard Grant reported to Sir George Simpson on 31st December, 1847, that the first immigrants appeared that year on 11th July, and from that time until the 2nd September, 901 wagons, besides several packing parties, passed Fort Hall on their way to Oregon and California. The Mormons with 600 wagons had arrived at the Great Salt Lake in the same year and Grant had visited them there, later furnishing them with necessary supplies."

The number of wagons passing Fort Hall in 1848 was estimated at about 300."


"In 1842-43 the Snake country, then comprising Forts Hall and Boise and a trapping party, traded nearly 2500 beaver skins from American trappers and Indians. At that time sixteen men and three officers were employed in the district. During season 1845-46 the returns amounted to nearly 1600 beaver besides other small furs, the whole being valued at £3000."


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"The trade which Chief Trader Richard Grant had carried out with the Mormons came to an end by 1850, because by that time they had become well supplied with necessaries and they could obtain supplies from other sources at cheaper rates than from Fort Hall."

- Chief Trader Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, 22nd February, 1850. (H.B.C. Arch. D.5/27).

"Trade with the immigrants still continued at Fort Hall and on 20th April, 1853, Chief Factor P.S. Ogden reported to Sir George Simpson that an ample outfit was being sent into the Snake Country as the number of immigrants expected during the course of the summer was likely to be very high. Part of the outfit was to be taken in from Fort Vancouver by wagons, and arrangements were being made to abandon entirely the old mode of horse packing during the ensuing season. The numbers, however, fell short of what was expected and business declined accordingly. "In the same summer both Forts Hall and Boise suffered another misfortune by being inundated by the rise of the Snake River."


"- Ibid. p.99.

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"Michael Ogden carried out the removal of the Company's property from Fort Hall to the Flathead Post and little or nothing of any value was left behind. The business, however, was not wound up without a loss."

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This material is published, of course, by permission of the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.


B. Primary Sources, Printed:

This volume is absolutely essential for a proper survey of the early days of the post during the days of its American regime. No better source can be used to trace the rise and fall of a dream of empire than the letters of the dreamer himself, Wyeth, which are contained in this volume.


Excellent material from the journals of early travellers, who not only watched history being made, but contributed to its making.

Philadelphia. 1839.
This book was written by the naturalist who accompanied Wyeth on his second western journey. It is extremely valuable as an account of the expedition and its adventures as viewed by an eyewitness and participant.

C. Secondary works:
   Brosnan does much to break down the Whitman legend. The story of Lee is an essential adjunct to that of Wyeth. Excellent research has made this volume very useful for this study.

   This volume, the only complete one so far published on the post, deals excellently with the period of American fur trade in the west and with Wyeth's ownership of the fort. Unfortunately, the section covering the Hudson's Bay Company's regime at the post is passed over very briefly and is coloured with pro-American prejudice. Most of the latter section of the book is devoted to a discussion of the Oregon Trail.

   This work covers the early history of Fort Hall very completely: it has proven of inestimable value. It was recommended for the study by the Hudson's Bay Company's officials.

   Several important details were obtained from this volume.

   Irving included Wyeth's story in an appendix to this book, having secured the details from the trader himself in a personal interview. In his usual flattering style, he pays high tribute to his fellow New Englander.
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    1907.
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