

NATHANIEL JARVIS WYETH: BOSTON MOUNTAIN
MAN IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1831-1836

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ABSTRACT

NATHANIEL JARVIS WYETH: BOSTON MOUNTAIN MAN
IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST. 1831-1836

by Stephen Pistono

The central purpose of this thesis is to examine the attempt of Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth to establish a successful fur trading and salmon fishing enterprise in the Pacific Northwest (1831-36) and to determine the specific causes for his eventual failure.

In 1832, Wyeth commanded his first overland expedition from Boston to the Columbia, sizing up trading opportunities in the Northwest. A primary reason for the failure of this enterprise was the desertion of the members of his joint stock company who came from the Boston-Baltimore area and were thoroughly unaccustomed to the difficulties of western life. Moreover, Wyeth's own inexperience also contributed to his failure. The symbol of his greenness in the ways of the frontier was his invention of a canoe mounted on detachable wheels to be used in crossing the rivers and plains of the West. These complicated wagons proved useless, and Wyeth was forced to sell them at less than half of their original cost at St. Louis.

A second part of Wyeth's plan in 1832 was an arrangement he made with Joseph Baker, owner of the brig Sultana.

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Wyeth agreed to purchase any surplus goods that Baker's vessel might have on hand after completing its own trading venture in the Pacific Northwest. The Sultana, however, was mysteriously wrecked on a South American reef. This disaster meant that Wyeth would have no supplies to commence his fur trading operations in Oregon, since part of his supplies had been lost fording the Sweetwater while the remaining portion was cached in the Snake Country. Although his first venture in Oregon was a failure, the lessons learned on this expedition would provide for a feasible and well constructed plan later.

Wyeth returned East in 1833. Among the enterprising schemes which he conceived was one involving a tentative agreement with Milton Sublette and Thomas Fitzpatrick of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. According to this contract Wyeth was to bring \$3,000 worth of merchandise for that company to the annual fur trader's rendezvous of 1834, primarily in exchange for furs. He submitted this contract to Tucker and Williams, merchants of 37-38 Central Wharf, Boston, and concluded an agreement with them, which created the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company. It was the intent of this company to fulfill Wyeth's contract with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and to establish a post in the Pacific Northwest primarily for fur trading and salmon fishing. This post was to be supplied by sea from the Atlantic Coast; and the shipment of fish from Oregon would defray the

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freight costs on furs shipped to Boston. If either part of this plan failed, the result could be disastrous.

Wyeth's second expedition proved to be no more successful than his first venture. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company refused to accept his goods because Bill Sublette, principal creditor of the company, had reached the rendezvous first with supplies of his own. This turn of events forced Wyeth to establish an inland post near the confluence of the Snake and Portneuf Rivers--Fort Hall--in order to dispose of his trading supplies. He issued detailed instructions to Robert Evans, factor in charge. These instructions included a white tariff which prevented any profit from selling furs. Thus Wyeth depended primarily upon returns from selling supplies to mountain trappers. However, such events as Evans's poor management of the goods left in his charge and his excessive drinking, Blackfeet hostility around Fort Hall, the theft of supplies by Hawaiians working for Captain Joseph Thing, second in command of Wyeth's expedition, and the deaths of trappers who owed money at Fort Hall for their supplies, sharply reduced any possibility Wyeth may have had for profit.

Besides his inland operations, Wyeth's program rested upon the successful establishment of his salmon fishery. The failure of this operation must be in part imputed to the ill luck suffered by Captain Lambert, who sailed from Boston in 1834 with supplies and equipment for Wyeth's proposed post in the Pacific Northwest. His ship was attacked by

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Tierra Del Fuego Indians while sailing through the Straits of Magellan; and the main mast was shattered by lightning, forcing the vessel to put into Valparaiso for repairs. Consequently, Lambert arrived too late for the 1834 salmon season and no returns could be made the first year. Moreover, Wyeth began the 1835 salmon season with no knowledge of how fishing activities should be carried out; and he was forced to turn the project over to an equally inexperienced man, Captain Lambert, whose talent for salmon curing was highly questionable. As if these difficulties were not enough, one-third of Wyeth's men were continually on the sick list and seventeen of them died during the salmon season, sharply reducing the effective workforce. Thus a combination of bad luck and inexperience caused the eventual ruin of Wyeth's salmon fishery.

In the final analysis, there were many other factors contributing to Wyeth's commercial defeat in the Oregon Country. In the first place, the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company lacked the necessary capital to carry out the long-term financing needed to establish its fur trade and salmon fishing operations. And in the second, it was opposed by the Hudson's Bay Company, whose system was based on a 160 years of experience in the fur business. Moreover, Wyeth's eastern backers were unwilling to invest additional amounts until positive results were achieved. Thus with financial backers who were unwilling to make

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additional investments in a venture which might take years to develop, Wyeth's whole undertaking was in trouble from the outset.

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By

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CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCE OF HALL J. KELLEY

The origin of Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth's interest in the Pacific Northwest, properly speaking, began with another man, the feverish "Prophet of Oregon", Hall J. Kelley. Kelley, a Boston school teacher, became impassioned with the idea of saving Oregon for the United States as early as 1817. "I foresaw," he wrote, "that Oregon must, eventually become a favorite field of modern enterprise, and the abode of civilization."¹ Through the strong religious overtones that pervaded Kelley's thinking and writings, one could detect his principal purpose - the colonization of the Oregon Country.

In 1828, he submitted a memorial to Congress.² The signers of his petition stated that they were prepared to take the long trail to Oregon, if only the government would lend a helping hand by financing the venture and promising to protect the new settlements.

¹Hall J. Kelley, Hall J. Kelley on Oregon, ed. F. W. Powell (Princeton, 1932), p. 383. This is a collection of Kelley's major writings, with added source material such as letters, etc.

²Hall J. Kelley, "Kelley's First Memorial" in The Call of the Columbia, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver, 1934), pp. 3-6. Reprinted from House Document 139, 20th Congress, 1st Session.

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While anxiously awaiting congressional reaction, Kelley formed the American Society for Encouraging the Settlement of the Oregon Territory. The purpose of the society was simple: It proposed to transplant a Massachusetts town to the Oregon Country as the nucleus of American strength in the Pacific Northwest. In 1831, this organization was incorporated under the laws of Massachusetts as the Oregon Colonization Society, with its headquarters at Boston. Though Kelley was the society's mainspring, it had other supporters. General John McNeil, later surveyor of the Port of Boston, was president; Washington P. Gregg, later secretary of the Common Council of Boston was treasurer; while Kelley himself served as the General Agent.³

Meanwhile, through a series of "General Circulars", "Geographic Sketches", "Manuals of the Oregon Expedition", and various letters to newspapers throughout New England, Kelley endeavored to sign up three thousand emigrants for his proposed settlement.⁴ In order to procure the necessary

³Ibid., p. 9.

⁴Hall J. Kelley's writings prior to 1832 included: A Geographical Sketch of that Part of North America called Oregon (Boston, 1830); Manual of the Oregon Expedition (Charlestown, 1831); a second edition of the Geographical Sketch appeared in 1831 with the Manual as an appendix. Also in 1831, Kelley published in the Zion's Herald, "a series of letters addressed to members of Congress"; moreover, letters appeared in the Boston American Traveller, the New England Christian Herald, the New Hampshire State Herald, the Bunker Hill Aurora of Charlestown, Mass., the Connecticut Mirror of Hartford, and the Kentucky Gazette. This information was derived from Hulbert, The Call of the Columbia, p. 24 and Powell, Hall J. Kelley on Oregon, pp. xi-xii.

colonists, he resorted to every possible inducement including economic arguments that might invite the more practical minded settler:⁵

A free and exclusive trade with the Indians, and with a colony in Oregon, would very considerably increase the resources, and promote the commercial and manufacturing interests of our country.

The fur trade has been and still is found, vastly lucrative to those who pursue it . . .

. . . the fisheries might be more extensively and profitably pursued. They have long contributed a valuable branch of our commerce and a perennial and vital source of our comforts and prosperity. Fish, in vast shoals and of the most useful kinds, abound in the Western ocean.

It was words like these that originally interested Nathaniel Wyeth in the Pacific Northwest. Wyeth was a Boston iceman on a grand scale, who had been engaged with his employer, Frederic Tudor, in devising ways to ship Massachusetts ice to tropical ports. As an energetic entrepreneur in the ice business, he was an undoubted success; but the influence of Hall J. Kelley, was soon to change the course of his life. According to Wyeth's cousin, John B. Wyeth, "Mr. Hall J. Kelly's [sic] 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 held up to view by the ingenious and well disposed schoolmaster. Mr. Nathaniel J. Wyeth had listened with peculiar delight

⁵ Hall J. Kelley, A Geographical Sketch of that Part of North America called Oregon in Hall J. Kelley on Oregon, ed. F. W. Powell, pp. 61-63.

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to all the flattering accounts from the western regions."⁶

During 1829, Wyeth contacted Kelley. The latter recorded that "He came to me for the loan of my books, and documents concerning the far west, and the programme of the expedition in which he would enlist and he enrolled his name among the names of several hundred others in my emigrant book."⁷ By 1831, Kelley's projected colonization scheme had assumed more definite form. Two expeditions were to go to the Oregon Country. The first was to include only hardy young males able to make the rough continental crossing. This expedition was to leave on January 1, 1832. Once this group had been established, the second consisting of women, children, and the more dependent types would be transported to Oregon by ship.

At the outset, Wyeth planned to go to the Oregon Country as a member of one of the companies being formed

⁶John B. Wyeth, Oregon: A Short History of a Long Journey, in Early Western Travels, ed. Rubin G. Thwaites, 32 vols. (Cleveland, 1905), Vol. XXI, p. 25. Hereafter cited as Wyeth's Oregon. This account of Wyeth's expedition was written by his cousin, who had become disgusted with the expedition and deserted. On his return home, John Wyeth received help from Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse in writing his version of the venture. Waterhouse eagerly took the opportunity because he was interested in preventing future emigration from New England. Thus the account was written not only from the biased point of view of a deserter but also included the opinions of an anti-Oregon propagandist. Nathaniel Wyeth characterized the book as full of "little white lies."

⁷Hall J. Kelley, A History of the Settlement of Oregon in Hall J. Kelley on Oregon, ed. F. W. Powell, p. 308.

by Kelley's first expedition.⁸ There was, however, a basic difference between Kelley and Wyeth which could be found in their ultimate objective after arriving in the Pacific Northwest. Kelley was bent upon establishing a permanent settlement, whereas Wyeth "had no view farther than trade at anytime."⁹ Wyeth was willing to go to the Oregon Country under the auspices of the Oregon Colonization Society, but upon arrival he intended to ascertain the possibilities of the fur trade or other activities and then get financial aid from home to carry out his trading activities.¹⁰

Creeping doubts about Kelley's project began to emerge in Wyeth's mind. As early as November 12, 1831, he wrote his brother Jacob that "in case the contemplated colonization project should fail it is still our intention to go to the new country in which case we shall form ourselves into a Trading Company in furs."¹¹ By December 5, 1831, Wyeth had discovered that the Colonization Society

⁸Nathaniel Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, October 5, 1832. Nathaniel J. Wyeth, The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth 1831-6, ed. F. G. Young (Eugene, 1899), p. 1. Hereafter cited as Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals. This work is the most valuable source for this paper. It includes Wyeth's correspondence from 1831 to 1836 and his two journals.

⁹Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, January 16, 1832. Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, October 5, 1831. Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹Wyeth to Jacob Wyeth, November 12, 1831. Ibid., p. 5.

had joined both the first and second expeditions into one and had shifted the departure date to July 1, 1832. This change in plans meant that women and children would now be traveling West with the expedition and that, furthermore, they would impede travel and make it impossible to cross the Rockies before winter.¹²

Although Wyeth had not officially severed his connection with Kelley, the knowledge of the society's new plans and their impracticability forced him to adopt an alternate scheme. By December 19, 1831, he had definitely decided to go to the Oregon Country on his own.¹³ He proceeded to enroll thirty-one men for an independent expedition. His decision to operate independently did not preclude the possibility that the Colonization Society might still attempt an expedition. But by February 10, 1832, Wyeth was convinced that even this possibility had vanished. "I see no probability that Mr. Kelly's [sic] party will move at present. They have made no preparation as yet, nor do I believe that they can ever make provision for moving such a mass as they propose."¹⁴

¹²Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, December 5, 1831.
Ibid., pp. 8-10.

¹³Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, December 5, 1831.
Ibid., p. 8. Wyeth to Edward Everett, December 19, 1831.
Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴Wyeth to John Ball, February 10, 1832. Ibid., p. 36.

CHAPTER II

THE PACIFIC TRADING COMPANY: 1831-32

Since the voyages of the Columbia, Boston merchants had outfitted ships for the Northwest fur trade. After completing a cargo of sea otter furs on the Pacific Coast, the "Northwestmen" commonly stopped off at Hawaii to top off their cargo with sandalwood.¹ Then it was on to Canton to dispose of their furs, home to Boston via the Straits of Sunda, the Indian Ocean, and the Cape of Storms. So successful were these seafarers that Indians of the Oregon Country knew all Americans as "Boston men."² Having grown up with this maritime tradition, it was, therefore, only natural that Wyeth should develop a scheme very similar to that of the old Boston "Northwestmen." However, his long and diligent research led to a plan with a peculiar twist more reminiscent of John Jacob Astor.

Wyeth's general scheme was somewhat complicated. It included sending an overland expedition to the Columbia

¹Sandalwood was in great demand in Canton, where it sold for incense and for the manufacturing of fancy articles. Return cargoes from Canton usually included teas and textiles.

²Samuel E. Morison, "Nova Albion and New England," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXVIII (March, 1927), 9.

River and building forts on the Northwest coast. Ships would sail from Boston around Cape Horn and supply these posts with necessary trading goods. After receiving furs or "other articles", the supply vessels would either return home or "go elsewhere".³ By "elsewhere", Wyeth was probably referring to the Hawaiian Islands or the Spanish settlements in California. Although the Hawaiian sandalwood trade had greatly diminished by 1831, a lucrative native market was developing due to the efforts of American missionaries; and New England whalers brought additional new business by creating a local market for ships stores, chandlery, et cetera, and by giving Boston ships return freights of oil and whalebone.⁴ In 1830, Captain Dominis, a veteran Boston shipmaster, demonstrated an interesting variation in the Northwest fur trade. Instead of proceeding to China, he left his Canton-market furs at Honolulu for sale, in charge of the ship owners agent, keeping London-market furs such as beaver, for sale at Boston.⁵

³Wyeth to Theodore Bache, January 18, 1832. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 20-21.

⁴Samuel E. Morison, "Columbia River Salmon Trade, 1830," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXVIII (June, 1927), 115.

⁵The experience at Fort Vancouver demonstrated that sea otter pelts were still being collected in the 1830's. In fact, between 1825-1852, 490 large skins, 150 pups and one tail were purchased. The largest number in one year was sixty-five pelts. Victor B. Scheffer, "The Sea Otter on the Washington Coast," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, XXXI (July, 1940), 376.

Thus if Wyeth should come into possession of sea otter furs, he needed only to transport them to the Hawaiian Islands, depositing the pelts with agents of Boston merchants.

The inherent advantages in Wyeth's plan were readily apparent. The traditional thirty-month trading voyage of New England ships could be cut in half, because the time spent trading with Indians along the coast would be greatly shortened. The vessels would merely be collecting furs and returning to Boston, perhaps, after a short voyage to the Hawaiian Islands. The high supply costs experienced by overland traders would be greatly reduced by using the sea lanes and return expenses on furs would demonstrate the same advantage.

Wyeth's men would not only be collecting furs from the Indians but also trapping and working in the field themselves. They would evidently need traps, Indian trade goods, and arms. Thus the procurement of these basic items became of the utmost importance to Wyeth. Traps used in the Northwest trade were ordered from A. Norris and Co.⁶ From Davenport and Byron, Wyeth ordered three dozen Spanish knives with a five and one-half inch blade, sixty to eighty yards of red cloth, and fifty dollars worth of various-sized blue beads.⁷ Many other purchases

⁶Wyeth to A. Norris & Co., February 8, 1832.
Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 33.

⁷Wyeth to Davenport and Byron, February 28, 1832.
Ibid., p. 42.

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were made to complete a sufficient assortment of Indian trade goods. Inquiries were also made concerning the kind of gun used by the American Fur Company and its price.

In addition to the fur trade, Wyeth planned to carry on farming activities around his forts, in order to provide necessary food for the partners working at the posts and also to cultivate such articles as tobacco used in the Indian trade. The Yankee went to great lengths to learn everything he could about tobacco farming. He asked his brother Charles to gather information about tobacco, when and how it is planted, what types of soil are necessary and what methods are used in curing and preserving it.⁸ Evidently he was satisfied with his brother's reply, for he requested him to be "on the lookout" for a man competent in growing tobacco.⁹ Although Wyeth failed to find such a man, he still resolved to attempt tobacco farming upon his arrival in the Pacific Northwest and had enough dried tobacco seed "soldered up in tin cans" to provide "for a considerable crop".¹⁰

Wyeth thought that another profitable side line might be found in the possibility of salmon fishing on the

⁸Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, November 11, 1831.
Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁹Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, December 4, 1831.
Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, January 23, 1832.
Ibid., p. 24.

Columbia River. Many early white explorers of the Columbia had noted its abundance of fine salmon, and Yankee shipmasters who visited the coast had salted down a few barrels of salmon for use on the return voyage. The chance of profit from these fisheries would naturally occur to Wyeth, for pickled salmon had been a common article of the New England diet since colonial times and a good deal of it was still being imported from Newfoundland during the 1830's. In fact, when Captain Dominis had returned in 1831 from his voyage to the Pacific Northwest with fifty-three barrels of Columbia River salmon, he sold them at fourteen dollars a barrel.¹¹ Wyeth was aware of this event and determined to size up the possibilities of salmon fishing when his overland expedition reached the Pacific Coast.

In order to be able to size up the salmon possibilities with any degree of certainty, Wyeth proceeded to make inquiries concerning salmon fishing. He wanted to know when salmon went up and down rivers, how they were caught, and what methods were used to preserve them.¹² After receiving this information, Wyeth still failed to understand

¹¹ Morison, "Columbia River Salmon Trade, 1830," p. 115. Morison stated that the captain of the Owhyhee brought in fifty-three barrels of salmon. Howay, in a study of the ship's log, concluded that only forty-nine barrels were brought East. F. W. Howay, "The Brig Owhyhee on the Columbia, 1829-30," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXV (March, 1934), 18.

¹² Wyeth to Robert Gardiner, January 13, 1832 and same to same February 7, 1832. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 29, 34.

the methods of curing salmon and made further inquiries.

Much of Wyeth's interest in the economic opportunities of the Northwest had been derived from Captain Dominis' voyage. However, a more penetrating analysis of this event would have revealed some disturbing facts. The New York Gazette reported the following account of the captain's return: "Today arrived the Brig Owhyhee, Capt. Dominis, whom we have seen, who informed us that he passed the best part of Summers, 29 & 30 & the intervening Winter in the Columbia. He represents the Country as delightful, but that the Hudson's Bay Coy. are too well established for the citizens of the United States to make anything in the way of Fur Trade."¹³ This was a dramatic forewarning of what Wyeth could expect upon his arrival in the Pacific Northwest.

Indeed, the possibility of the Hudson's Bay Company as a competitive factor in the Oregon Country never occurred to Wyeth. The fur country selected by him for exploitation clearly demonstrated this point. It lay south of the Columbia River and north of the Spanish settlements in California. This very region was regarded by the British Company as a buffer province against American traders. Ever since its Snake River Expedition of 1824-25,

¹³John S. Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1957), p. 101. Hereafter cited as Galbraith, The H. B. C. Wyeth to Theodore Bache, January 18, 1832. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 20-21.

the Hudson's Bay Company had evolved a fixed policy of trapping as bare as possible Wyeth's proposed region of trading activity.¹⁴ Thus if Wyeth launched his fur trading plans in this region, he would come into direct conflict with the British Company's interests.

In order to prosecute his fur trading plans successfully, Wyeth had to turn his attention to the problem of getting financial support for his venture. He had two choices as he saw it. He could either form a joint stock company or hire all the men and take a few Boston merchants in as partners. He decided upon the former means and formed a company known as the Pacific Trading Company. This plan of organization was adopted because Wyeth felt that hired men might desert and, in any case, would not have the same spirit as men working for a share of the profits. Furthermore, wages would deplete his limited capital and would have to be paid out regardless of profit or loss. He also thought that the possibility for profit would be greater under the joint stock company.¹⁵

As finally conceived, Wyeth's company was described in these complicated terms: "Our compact is to last 5 years. The profits are to be divided in such a manner that

¹⁴ Frederick Merk, "Snake Country Expedition, 1824-25: An Episode of Fur Trade and Empire," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXI (June, 1934), 51.

¹⁵ Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, December 4, 1831. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 6-8.

if the number concerned was 50 and the whole net profits are to be divided in that number of parts, I should get 8, the surgeon 2 and the remaining 40 parts would be divided among the remaining 48 persons. The 8 parts which I take is [in] consideration for my services as head of the concern and furnishing the requisite capital and credit for buisness [sic] . . ."¹⁶ Each member of the proposed joint stock company was required to pay forty dollars, which was to cover the transportation and lodging expenses incurred on the trip to St. Louis. Any cost above the forty dollars was to be paid by the company. All the capital necessary to conduct the expedition would be deducted before the calculation of net profits.¹⁷

Although each man was to contribute forty dollars to the enterprise, Wyeth still considered it necessary to raise an additional \$5,000 to equip and supply his overland expedition. For example, each man was provided with a woolen uniform and cowhide boots, a musket and knife, and various types of camping equipment. Moreover, traps, wagons and horses for transportation west of St. Louis, and trade goods were necessary items not covered by the individual payment of the company's members. Thus Wyeth was compelled to liquidate his assets. He was able to

¹⁶Wyeth to Theodore Bache, January 18, 1832.
Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷Same letter, ibid., p. 21.

acquire half the total sum by this means; and the remainder was procured from his three brothers.¹⁸

The problem of getting supplies and vessels for the separate, naval part of his plan was much more difficult. Tucker and Williams, merchants of 37-38 Central Wharf, Boston, agreed to furnish the necessary trading goods, provided that security in the form of letters of indemnity against loss was given to them by responsible persons. Frederick Tudor offered his name for \$2,500, while Wyeth's brother Charles signed for \$1,000. Leonard, his brother in the lace importing business, rounded out the \$5,000 necessary to acquire the trading goods. The agreement with Tucker and Williams stated that the first shipment would take place after Wyeth had arrived on the Pacific Coast and could send orders home expressly requesting the shipment.¹⁹

This arrangement, however, did not provide Wyeth with trading supplies upon his initial arrival in Oregon; therefore, he contacted Joseph Baker, a veteran shipowner in the Northwest trade. Baker was interested in the salmon trade and already (October 5, 1831) had on board his vessel the Sultana about a thousand salmon barrels and a large

¹⁸Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, February 10, 1832. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

¹⁹Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, March 5, 1832 and same to same, March 15, 1832. Ibid., pp. 46-48. Supporting evidence in Tucker and Williams to Nathaniel Wyeth. December 19, 1832. Photoprint of typewritten copy, Oregon Historical Society.

quantity of salt.²⁰ He was intrigued with the idea of using Wyeth's proposed facilities on the West Coast for the salmon trade. Wyeth, however, did not hire the Sultana to carry trading supplies to the Northwest; instead he merely agreed to purchase any surplus goods that Baker's vessel might have on hand after completing its own trading venture.²¹ Certainly this agreement was tenuous; nevertheless, it was advantageous to both parties because the shipper could save the loss of carrying useless goods home and Wyeth would be able to purchase surplus goods at prearranged prices without paying freight charges.

Still much more preparation was necessary before Wyeth could depart. He was deeply concerned about the government's position in the Oregon Country and its possible Indian trade controls. Therefore, he wrote the Bureau of Indian Affairs about Indian trade regulations and their application in the Pacific Northwest.²² He followed up this inquiry with a letter to his congressman, in which he sought a copy of the treaties made between the United States and Britain "somewhere about the years 1817 and 1828."²³

²⁰William H. Bordman Jr. to Capt. Seth Barker, October 7, 1831. Morison, "Columbia River Salmon Trade, 1830," p. 131.

²¹Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, March 15, 1832. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 8.

²²Wyeth to Samuel S. Hamilton (Chief Clerk of the Bureau of Indian Affairs), November 28, 1831. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 6.

²³Wyeth to Edward Everett, December 19, 1831. Ibid., p. 12.

Still not completely clear on governmental trade regulations, he wrote again to his representative wondering if any permission was necessary for trading with Indians beyond the Rockies. From the above sources, Wyeth learned that the "government has not extended its laws over the country and claims over it only a right of preemption. . . . [and that] There can be no infraction of law where none exists and the right to trade there is inferred from the public acts of the Government. . . ."24

Wyeth also faced many questions regarding the best way to the West. For example, the question concerning the most suitable route to Pittsburgh had to be solved in terms of whether to start from Baltimore or New York. Inquiries were made to Wyeth's brother Charles in Baltimore concerning distance, fare, and means of conveyance from that city to Pittsburgh. Wyeth demonstrated his complete inexperience with travel on the Ohio River by inquiring whether horses and wagons could be brought aboard a steamboat and if the shippers would give him lower rates, provided his men would sleep on deck. Fares for deck passage were usually offered by steamers and invariably were much cheaper than cabins. The other possible route was to travel from New York up the Hudson River-Erie Canal system to Lake Erie and thence from Erie on the lake by canal to Pittsburgh. He wanted his brother Leonard to check on rates of fare for persons

²⁴Wyeth to S. K. Livermore, February 6, 1832.
Ibid., pp. 30-31.

and baggage per ton, distance involved, canal toll charges, and rate of travel.²⁵ Undoubtedly, the slowness of canal travel, the greater distance or the greater charges involved in the Erie-Hudson system made Wyeth choose the Baltimore instead of the New York route.

As the date of departure grew near, Wyeth was brimming over with self-confidence. He wrote, "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."²⁶ John Ball, a fellow traveler, found Wyeth "a man of some intelligence and great energy in his undertakings";²⁷ and after watching him on the trail, Ball added, "The captain is an active business man, and in his way, a great philosopher - all learned by observation. He goes ahead in everything, is a good hunter, fertile in expedients, and will mend a gun or wagon, or any other implement, with no other instrument than his jackknife."²⁸ In contrast,

²⁵Wyeth to Jacob Wyeth, October 5, 1831. Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, November 14, 1831. Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, November 11, 1831. Ibid., pp. 2, 5, 8.

²⁶Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, February 6, 1832. Ibid., p. 42.

²⁷John Ball, Autobiography of John Ball (Grand Rapids, 1925), p. 60. This autobiography was compiled by Ball's daughters; and as in all of the Ball sources, except his letters, there appeared to be a heavy leaning upon Wyeth's Oregon. The Ball sources were especially helpful in constructing the account from Pierre's Hole to Fort Vancouver.

²⁸John Ball to Doctor Brinsmade, April 29, 1832. John Ball, Letters from the Rocky Mountains, in The Call of the Columbia. ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver, 1934), pp. 166-167. The Call of the Columbia is a collection of writings by such men as Kelley, Wyeth, Ball, Snelling, and Ford.

he described Wyeth's men as "Loafers and laborers" with no real idea of what they were getting into. Wyeth's cousin in relating his account of the first expedition remarked, "I hoped everything, believed everything my kinsman the Captain believed and said, and all doubts and fears were banished."²⁹ This last illustration probably best described the feelings of most of Wyeth's men. They might have been greenhorns, but they were inspired with the dreams and hopes of their new leader.

²⁹Wyeth's Oregon, p. 31.

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CHAPTER III

GREENHORNS ON THE MARCH

On March 1, 1832, the greenhorns boarded the brig, Ida, at Boston and began Wyeth's expedition to the Pacific Northwest. They had a miserable fifteen-day journey to Baltimore. Though brief, the voyage provided a snow storm, severe cold, and a hardy gale for the land lubbers; but it was only a taste of worse hardships to come. The military appearing group created quite a stir in Baltimore. The twenty-six man company appeared in uniform dress: "Each wore a coarse woolen jacket and pantaloons, a striped cotton shirt and cowhide boots. Each had a musket, some had rifles. All had bayonets on their broad belts, with a large clasp knife for eating and general use. Some had pistols, but each had also a small axe or hatchet in their belts. To complete this outfit were utensils for cooking, tents, camp kettles and blankets."¹

Leaving Baltimore for Frederick proved an interesting experience, because the means of transportation was the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, the longest in the Union at

¹John Ball, "Across the Continent Seventy Years Ago," Oregon Historical Quarterly, III (June, 1902), 84. Hereafter cited as Ball, "Across the Continent." This article is the daily journal kept by Ball during Wyeth's first expedition.

this time. From Frederick, the party trudged along the National or Cumberland Road to Brownsville on the Mononghela. Camping out and cooking their own "grub" by fire was a novel experience for some. At Brownsville, they boarded a steamboat for Pittsburgh, where they made arrangements for passage down the Ohio to St. Louis. Once aboard the steamboat, Wyeth bargained with the skipper to have his men aid in hauling wood from the shore in exchange for a reduced fare. The men were not too impressed by their leader's efforts and showed their first signs of discontentment.

The steamboat arrived at St. Louis on April 18, 1832. The weary New Englanders entered the city in high spirits. Everything was hustle and bustle, as hundreds of men bound for the West had poured into the city during early spring; and close upon their heels, but going in an opposite direction, large troop detachments from Jefferson Barracks were moving out to fight the Black Hawk War. The central market place was filled with the jabber of French, English, and Indian tongues. Pool halls, taverns, and hotels were doing good business; and prices on corn, bacon, flour, and other commodities were high. Many old and experienced traders were in the city making preparations for their trek West. One of these hardy old mountain men was William Sublette, who was making ready the yearly supply caravan for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

Wyeth was fortunate to come in contact with these veterans of the fur trade because the contrast between their thorough knowledge of mountain business and his own inexperience became dramatically clear. Upon their advice, he applied to William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, for an Indian trading license.² In his application, he stated that twenty-six men comprised his expedition and that the capital employed was \$796.40. Wyeth's desire for an Indian trading license clearly revealed, for the first time, that he intended to trade east of the Rockies in direct competition with St. Louis traders. A comparison with other trading licenses demonstrated that he not only had the smallest number of men but also that he had the least capital invested in Indian trade goods. Thus because of inexperience, limited manpower, and inadequate capital, the St. Louis traders did not take him seriously.

In addition to pointing out the necessity for an Indian trading license, the mountain men gave other valuable advice. Wyeth had devised a unique means of transportation for overland travel. A half-boat, half-wagon was the ingenious contrivance; and it was suitably dubbed by Harvard wits as "Nat-wye-thium." Wyeth's cousin described the vehicle as "a boat about thirteen feet long and four feet wide, of a shape partly of a canoe, and

²Lewis Cass, "Licenses to Trade with Indians," House Document 104, 22nd Congress, 2nd Session.

partly of a gondola. The boat part was firmly connected with the lower, or axle tree or wheel part."³ Veteran fur traders immediately advised Wyeth that pack animals were used almost exclusively on the trail West. Therefore, he had to sell all three of the complicated boat-wagons at less than half their original cost. Wyeth's greenness would prove even more costly on the trip westward.

The pain of inexperience was partly soothed by the help rendered by western traders. Kenneth McKenzie, a partner in the American Fur Company, agreed to provide transportation for the easterners up the Missouri to Independence. The arrival there of William Sublette was immediately taken advantage of by Wyeth. He petitioned to join Sublette's sixty-three man party in hopes of getting an experienced guide as far as Pierre's Hole, the trading rendezvous now known as Teton Basin in eastern Idaho. Sublette was hospitable and believed Wyeth's plans to be no threat to his own trading prospects. Thus he agreed to combine parties, provided that sole command rest with him. Upon Sublette's advice, "two yoke of oxen and fifteen sheep"⁴ were purchased by Wyeth, as one could not depend upon the game of the "wild country" for sustenance.

Under Sublette's guidance, the two parties struck out across the prairies for the Platte River and reached

³Wyeth's Oregon, p. 31.

⁴Ibid., p. 48.

its upper branches, near the mouth of the Sweetwater River without mishap. Here, Wyeth decided to raft his supplies across the river, much to the objections of Sublette, who preferred the customary "bullboat". Sublette was right. After striking a partly submerged log, Wyeth's raft tipped over with its valuable supplies of steel traps, Indian trade goods, and gun powder. Although the raft had not carried all of Wyeth's goods, his Yankee stubbornness had proved costly. The caravan resumed its journey by following the Sweetwater and then progressed through South Pass along the foot of the Wind River Range. They encamped on a small stream which came down from the Wind River Mountains. About midnight, as Wyeth later related, "we were attacked by Indians, probably the Blackfoot. They approached within 50 yds. and fired about 40 shots into the camp and some arrows they wounded three animals and got 5 from Mr. Sublet[t]e. One from an Independent hunter and 4 which I left out of camp for better feed mine were all poor and sore backed and useless."⁵ This raid was merely a prelude of what was later to take place at Pierre's Hole.⁶

⁵Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 158.

⁶The journey of the first expedition from Baltimore to Pierre's Hole was reconstructed from: Wyeth's Oregon, pp. 34-72; Ball, "Across the Continent," pp. 64-77; Ball, Letters, pp. 163-182; Autobiography of John Ball, pp. 64-72. The journey from Independence to Pierre's Hole can also be followed in Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 155-159 and John E. Sunder, Bill Sublette, Mountain Man (Norman, 1959), pp. 103-108.

At the rendezvous itself, Wyeth and Sublette arrived in time to join in the famous battle against the Blackfeet, so vividly described by Washington Irving in his Adventures of Captain Bonneville.⁷ At this point, eleven of Wyeth's men deserted. They had suffered from hunger and diarrhea on the route West; and the danger from the Blackfeet during the latter part of the trip convinced them that it was hopeless to continue. Therefore, they attached themselves to Sublette's returning party after he completed his business transactions with his brother Milton, who was one of the partners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Since Milton Sublette had planned to trap westward along the Snake River, Wyeth and his remaining men decided to join his party.

The Wyeth-Sublette band crossed the Snake River and then took a southwesterly direction to the Portneuf River, then to the American Falls, where they arrived on August 13. For many weeks thereafter, the combined party trapped along the streams emptying into the Snake from the south.

⁷The Battle of Pierre's Hole can be trace in the following accounts: Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 159-160; Wyeth's Oregon, pp. 69-72; Ball, "Across the Continent," pp. 91-92; Autobiography of John Ball, pp. 77-79; Zenas Leonard, Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader and Trapper, 1831-1836, ed. W. F. Wagner (Cleveland, 1904), pp. 42-46; Washington Irving, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville U.S.A., ed. Edgeley W. Todd (Norman, 1961), pp. 53-57.

On August 29, Wyeth parted company with Milton Sublette. He cached his furs, along with six horseloads of trading supplies, because his party was too small to transport them. Any hope of engaging in the fur trade near the Columbia River was now virtually gone. One possibility remained. Early in 1832, the Sultana had begun its voyage around Cape Horn to rendezvous with Wyeth's overland party on the Pacific Coast. If the Sultana had made a successful voyage, Wyeth could procure surplus goods from the vessel. With this hope in mind, Wyeth's party pushed on over the Blue Mountains and arrived at Fort Walla Walla, the Hudson's Bay Company post near the mouth of the Walla Walla River, on October 14.⁸

Five days later, Wyeth continued his trip to Fort Vancouver, the Company's head factory located at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. Testifying to the cordial welcome accorded him, he stated, "Here I was received with the utmost kindness and hospitality by Doct. McLauchland [sic] acting gov. of the place . . . I find Doct. McLauchland [sic] a fine old gentleman truly philanthropic in his ideas."⁹ John Ball added significantly,

⁸For an account of the Sultana's sea voyage see Frances Fuller Victor, "Flotsom and Jetsom of the Pacific . . . The Owyhee, the Sultana and the May Dacre," Oregon Historical Quarterly, II (January, 1901), 36-54. Wyeth's travels from Pierre's Hole to Fort Vancouver can be traced in Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 160-174; also in John Ball to Doctor Brinsmade, January 1, 1833, Ball, Letters, pp. 174-175.

⁹Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 176.

"We were received with the greatest kindness as guests, which was very acceptable, or else we would have had to hunt for subsistence."¹⁰

Though Wyeth candidly informed the good doctor of his fur trading and salmon fishing scheme, the chief factor refused to believe that the American's motives were wholly economic. He felt that " . . . though it may be as he [Wyeth] states, still I would not be surprised to find that his views are in connexion with a plan which I see in a Boston paper of March 31, to colonise the Willamette."¹¹ McLoughlin's suspicions proved to be false, although two members of Wyeth's party remained as the first permanent settlers of the Willamette Valley.¹²

After resting at Fort Vancouver for over two weeks, Wyeth and Ball proceeded down river to the mouth of the Columbia. The purpose of Wyeth's journey was to size up

¹⁰ Autobiography of John Ball, p. 80.

¹¹ John McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, October 29, 1832. John McLoughlin, The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee: First Series, 1825-38, ed. E. E. Rich (Toronto, 1941), pp. 108-109. Hereafter cited as McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-38). George T. Allan, a clerk at Fort Vancouver, also noted the arrival of Wyeth at this time and added "they say their object is to establish a Salmon Fishery but I believe they have some other thing in view." George T. Allan to James Hargrave, January 6, 1833. James Hargrave, The Hargrave Correspondence 1821-1843, ed. G. P. de T. Glazebrook (Toronto, 1938), pp. 103-104.

¹² Philip Henry Overmeyer, "Members of First Wyeth Expedition," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXVI (March, 1935), 95-101.

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the possibility of salmon fishing. From what he discovered, he felt that establishing a fishery was a "doubtful possibility" as long as one could trade with the Indians for salmon: "If each Indian catches three a day it would feed his family and still permit him to bring one along side, [our ship], and this would give more salmon than would be requisite for a cargo. . . ." ¹³ With the prospect of Baker's vessel arriving at anytime, Wyeth thought he might purchase a cargo of salmon from the natives in the following spring, since the current salmon season had ended in September.

On his return to Fort Vancouver, Wyeth learned that the Sultana had been mysteriously wrecked on a South American reef. This disaster meant that he would have no supplies to commence his fur trading operations, since part of his overland supplies had been lost fording the Sweetwater while the remaining portion was cached in the Snake Country. Moreover, his plan for purchasing salmon from the Indians would have to be cancelled. The shipwreck was a signal for almost all the rest of Wyeth's men to desert. The captain was left "high and dry" with no possible chance of embarking upon trading activities in the Northwest. ¹⁴

¹³Wyeth to Joseph Baker and Son, July 4, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 60.

¹⁴Wyeth to (perhaps) Dr. John McLoughlin (no date). Ibid., p. 56.

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Although his first venture was a failure, Wyeth had gained valuable information concerning the Hudson's Bay Company and its operations. For example, his trip down river to the mouth of the Columbia had revealed that Fort George was merely a lookout post, mainly being used to give intelligence when vessels arrived on the coast. Ball noted that "if an American vessel came into the river or onto the coast for trade the Hudson['s] Bay Company would at once bid up on furs to a ruinous price - ten to one above their usual tariff."¹⁵ In fact, competition from the Hudson's Bay Company and the Russians had cut profits for New Englanders engaged in the Northwest fur trade; and between 1821 and 1831 the vessels annually participating in this trade decreased from thirteen to two.¹⁶ Wyeth had known prosperous American merchants like J. Baker and Sons, the two Boardmans, Josiah Marshal, Dixie Wilde, and the Perkinses, who were engaged in the Pacific Coast trade; but he seemed to have been unaware of its declining nature.

Besides Fort George, Wyeth had made a careful inspection of other company posts. Observation revealed the military weakness of these forts except against Indians. Fort Walla Walla was "of no strength merely sufficient to

¹⁵ Ball, "Across the Continent," p. 100.

¹⁶ Samuel E. Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts (Boston, 1932), pp. 260-261.

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freighten Indians mounting 2 small cannon having bastions at the opposit[e] corners of a square enclosure . . .", with only "6 whites there . . ."¹⁷ Fort Vancouver had "no bastions or guns mounted or apertures for them."¹⁸ On his return trip, he stopped at Fort Colville at the confluence of the Colville and Columbia Rivers and its "defenses appeared no other than those commonly used against Indians."¹⁹

And yet the British Company possessed tremendous advantages over American competitors. Its traders, trappers, and hunters had been brought up in the service of the Company and were thoroughly familiar with Indian life and trade. Many of them were low-paid Canadians subsisting on little more than "Indian corn and grease." Abundant capital provided the Hudson's Bay Company with a wide assortment of goods which could be sold to the Indians at a cheap rate. Wyeth noted that "the vigilance of this company allows no accumulation of furs in the hands of Indians; their emissaries are constantly on the move, with the best assortments of Indian goods, to pick up the skins, one by one, as fast as the Indians obtain them; and thus

¹⁷Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 173.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁹Caleb Cushing, "Report Concerning an Inquiry into the Expediency of Establishing a Post on the Columbia . . .," House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 20.

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no motive is left for any American vessel to stop on the coast."²⁰ Therefore, the Company controlled the natives of the Northwest by virtue of its monopoly and the complete dependence of the Indians upon the trader's goods.

Diversification of trade was also part of the Company's policy. Lumber and wheat were shipped to the Hawaiian Islands and to Russian Alaska. A salmon trade with London had also been tried, but was not continued because, in every instance, the fish had deteriorated due to the length of the voyage.²¹

Wyeth could not and did not blame the Hudson's Bay Company for the failure of his first expedition. They had taken no steps against him; in fact, McLoughlin offered only kindness and help. A primary reason for the failure was the desertion of the members of Wyeth's joint stock company. Most young men interested in the fur trade ordinarily came from rural communities in the Middle West, where they had some training for the rigorous hardships endured in the fur trade. Wyeth's men came from the Baltimore-Boston area and were thoroughly unaccustomed to the difficulties of western life. Thus his assumption

²⁰Ibid., p. 12.

²¹Governor and Committee to Chief Factors in Charge, Columbia, July 22, 1824 and same to same, July 27, 1825. George Simpson, Fur Trade and Empire, ed. Frederick Merk (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 240, 252. Captain Dominis on the shorter voyage to Boston was able to sell his salmon cargo, but the wholesaler had a difficult time retailing them because the fish were poorly cured.

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that partners would not desert proved to be false because of the quality of the men he had chosen.

Losing the Sultana was another grave blow. It meant not only further discouragement to his men but also the last chance to get supplies. Furthermore, his Yankee stubbornness had cost him valuable supplies at the Sweetwater; and inexperience cost the loss of half the value of his complicated wagons at St. Louis. Both lack of capital at the outset and his unwillingness to accept a more secure financial arrangement played a part in his final failure. But the lessons learned on this expedition would provide for a feasible and well constructed plan later.

CHAPTER IV

"AFLOAT ON THE GREAT SEA OF LIFE"

"I am now," Wyeth wrote, "afloat on the great sea of life without stay or support. . . ."¹ Such was his initial reaction to being stranded at Fort Vancouver; but shortly afterwards, he would once again try to raise a fire out of the ashes of his first defeat. He realized that when he returned to Boston he would face serious difficulties in finding financial backing for a renewed trading effort in the Northwest. And thus his major efforts on his return home in 1833 were directed at securing business connections in the West that would act as a financial lever in convincing Boston merchants to back a second commercial venture.²

Wyeth's first goal was to come to some understanding with the Hudson's Bay Company. After observing the

¹Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 178.

²Primary sources for Wyeth's return East in 1833 include: Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 181-214 and Irving, Captain Bonneville, pp. 303-329. Secondary sources include: Hiram Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, 2 Vols. (Academic Reprints, Stanford, 1954), I, pp. 444-448; Bernard DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri (Boston, 1947), pp. 106-122; Philip Henry Overmeyer, "Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth," Washington Historical Quarterly, XXIV (March, 1935), 28-48; Sunder, Bill Sublette, pp. 127-129.

Company's trading methods, he proposed to McLoughlin that the Company equip him with the necessary outfit to hunt south of the Columbia. McLoughlin refused, stating that the Yankee "could go nowhere west of the mountains where the Company's regular employees could not go."³ The matter was then closed and no more conversations were held concerning it.

On February 3, Wyeth started his homeward journey in the company of a twenty-one man supply party under the leadership of Francis Ermatinger, a clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company. Ermatinger, who had become a fast friend of Wyeth during the winter days at Fort Vancouver, had three boats laden with supplies for the Company's mountain expeditions. Wyeth, in turn, had hired two men to accompany him home. The small band ascended the Columbia to Fort Walla Walla, then struck out northwest, arriving at Fort Colville on March 12, 1833.

At this post, Wyeth made another attempt to secure a western business connection. He wrote George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, proposing a trading agreement which was in essence an elaboration of his discussions with McLoughlin. This proposal stated, in effect, that if the Company would sell him supplies at an advance of fifty per cent on prime cost and then purchase

³Galbraith, The H.B.C., p. 102.

all the furs that came into his possession at a rate of five dollars per beaver skin and other skins in proportion, he would confine his activities to the region south of the Columbia and not trade within a hundred miles of any Hudson's Bay post. He added that, as an American, he would be able to visit parts of the country from which the British were excluded. These places included the region east of the Rockies prohibited by the federal law of 1816 and also the American rendezvous itself, which might prove hostile to British traders. Thus Wyeth was attempting to answer McLoughlin's argument against supplying him.⁴

Prime cost was the actual invoice value of goods sent from England to the Columbia in supply ships. The "advance" was the amount added to the original invoice value; it included the cost of freight, insurance, and kindred items. Wyeth was probably aware of the existing situation at Fort Vancouver as far as advance on prime cost was concerned. It had originally been set by the Governor and Committee at seventy per cent in 1821; but in 1827, Simpson authorized McLoughlin to reduce it to fifty per cent and, two years later, the Governor and Committee authorized a further reduction to thirty-three and one-third per cent.⁵

⁴Wyeth to George Simpson, March 12, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 56-58.

⁵E. E. Rich, ed., An Introduction to McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-38), pp. lxxvi-lvvvii.

At first glance, Wyeth's offer of paying fifty per cent advance on prime cost would appear interesting. However, the thirty-three and one-third per cent advance set by the Governor and Committee was misleading; indeed, it was only a paper change. For when making the reduction, the Governor and Committee had stated that although the lower rate would "not probably cover the charges," this was "a matter of little importance as the expenses actually incurred . . ." would be charged to the fur trade.⁶ Therefore, Wyeth's proposal of fifty per cent advance on prime cost was not as advantageous to the Company as might first be supposed.

Wyeth's scheme, reduced to its essentials, meant that he was simply to deal with the mountain men from the States, getting their furs in return for supplies instead of taking furs himself. This plan was strangely similar to an effort which Ermatinger had tried in 1832. It may have originated with Ermatinger and been passed on to Wyeth in casual conversation, because in a letter from McLoughlin to Ermatinger's brother, the chief factor stated, "Your brother is out in the Snake Country but more properly on a trading expedition than hunting. It is a plan mostly of his own and I hope it will (on his account) turn out well."⁷ In a report to the Governor and Committee,

⁶Merk, ed., Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 317-318.

⁷McLoughlin to Edward Ermatinger, February 1, 1834. Quoted in E. E. Rich, ed., An Introduction to McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-38), p. xcvi.

Simpson noted that the expedition had paid well and that Ermatinger was repeating the venture.⁸ Wyeth may well have noted the effort and its success.

From Fort Colville, the Boston mountain man traveled with Ermatinger's party into the Flathead country; and after depositing his goods at a Company post, Ermatinger led a trapping expedition south into the Snake Country. Wyeth went along with his two employees, but on April 28, the captain was forced to discharge one of them, who "appeared to think that as I had but two he might take libertys [sic] under such circumstances I will never yield an inch."⁹ Therefore, the stubborn employer paid him half his wage and kept moving.

Two days later, Wyeth met one of Captain Bonneville's hunting parties. Flexible as always, his plans now took a new bend. Through the clerk of Bonneville's party, Wyeth wrote to the army man proposing that the two adventurers merge their interests in a "mutual hunt in the country south of the Columbia. . . ." ¹⁰ On July 3, Ermatinger and Wyeth met Bonneville on the Upper Snake; and they traveled together for a while toward the Green River rendezvous. The Bostonian appeared to have reached

⁸Simpson's 1834 Report. Ibid., p. xcvi.

⁹Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 178.

¹⁰Wyeth to Benjamin Bonneville, June 22, 1833. Ibid., p. 45.

an agreement with Bonneville, for on July 4, Wyeth wrote that he expected to hunt "southward as far as the vicinity of St. Francisco in New California, in the following year with Bonneville."¹¹

Bernard DeVoto, in his book Across the Wide Missouri, suggested that the partnership was beginning under an important misconception, because "no part of California west of the Sierra divide and south of the San Joaquin Valley was good fur country. Even in such fur country as there was, the resources and the elaborate system of the Hudson's Bay Company were required to turn a profit - if indeed the Hudson's Bay Company which had been working the field for eight years, did show an overall profit."¹²

Wyeth's motives for attempting this alliance were based partly on a stubborn refusal to return home as a failure and, more importantly, on the possibility of retrieving his cached furs and goods. He felt that on the return trip from California he could collect these items. The total value of the deposited furs at eastern prices would pay the expenses incurred on his first expedition. Also, Wyeth was to lead the combined hunt and

¹¹Wyeth to Frederick Tudor, July 4, 1833. Ibid., p. 115.

¹²DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri, p. 108.

receive half of the total fur catch.¹³

Almost as quickly as the partnership had begun, it was abandoned. In a letter dated July 5, 1833, Wyeth stated, "I am here in direct train for the states and cannot without some extraordinary accident fail of reaching home in October next."¹⁴ Washington Irving, a chronicler of Bonneville's adventures, failed to mention this whole merger episode, so it is impossible to determine the reason for the abrupt change of heart by either Wyeth or Bonneville.

The three camps - Ermatinger, Wyeth, and Bonneville - remained together until July 7, when the Company's brigade departed, leaving Wyeth and Bonneville to continue together toward the Green River Valley. Eight days later, they arrived at Bonneville's Fort Nonsense on the Green in time for the rendezvous of the mountain men. Wyeth took this opportunity to size up the American fur competition and he passed the information along to the Hudson's Bay Company. In a letter to Ermatinger, he described the gathering as follows: "Found here collected Capt. Walker, Bonneville [sic], Cerry, [sic] of one Co. Dripps & Fontenelle of the Am. Fur Co. Mr. Campbell just from St. Louis, Miss.

¹³Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 4, 1833. Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, July 4, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 64-67.

¹⁴Wyeth to John McLoughlin, July 5, 1833. Ibid., p. 68.

Fitzpatrick, Gervais, Milton Sublette of the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. and in all the Cos. about 300 whites and [a] small village of Snakes.. . ."15

Wyeth not only noted the American companies present; but he also attached a list of how many beaver each outfit had caught, so that the Hudson's Bay Company could better evaluate its American competition. The American Fur Company's return amounted to fifty-one packs (100 pounds of beaver skins per pack). Bonneville had only twenty-two and a half, while the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had fifty-five packs.¹⁶ Probably, Wyeth passed this intelligence on to Ermatinger to pressure the Hudson's Bay Company into accepting his proposals.

In addition to his detailed report on the American companies, Wyeth's letter to Ermatinger was to serve another purpose. Ermatinger had come fairly close to the Green River rendezvous, indicating in Wyeth's mind the possibility that the Hudson's Bay man might attempt to supply the mountain fur traders. In an earlier dispatch to Simpson, Wyeth had stated that he could go to places such as the American rendezvous from which the British were excluded. A successful trading venture by the Company would prove his contention false. Thus Wyeth decided to

¹⁵Wyeth to Francis Ermatinger, July 18, 1833.
Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁶Same letter, ibid., pp. 69-70.

illustrate clearly that such a move by the Hudson's Bay Company would be extremely dangerous. He attempted to frighten Ermatinger by speculating as to what would happen to him at the rendezvous: "In my opinion you would have been robbed of your goods and Beaver if you had come here. . . . I give you this as a honest opinion which you can communicate to the Co. There is here a great majority of scoundrels. I should much doubt the personal safety of anyone from your side of the house."¹⁷ If this tale of horror succeeded in its purpose, Wyeth might hope to become the sole Pacific Coast supplier to American companies in the Central Rockies.

In order to make this hope a reality, Wyeth turned his attention to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. When the rendezvous broke up on July 24, Wyeth, Milton Sublette, and other members of the company, pushed eastward to the Big Horn. On the banks of this river, Wyeth made his fourth effort to secure a western business connection by concluding an agreement with Sublette and Thomas Fitzpatrick. He agreed to furnish the Rocky Mountain Fur Company with three thousand dollars' worth of trade goods at their rendezvous on or before July 1, 1834. The contract stipulated that Wyeth should receive \$3,521 above the original cost of the trade goods. Payment would be made in beaver skins at four dollars a pound; and Milton Sublette

¹⁷ Same letter, ibid., p. 69.

was to accompany Wyeth eastward to oversee procurement. In case either party did not fulfill his end of the contract, a five hundred dollar default payment would be made.¹⁸

The explanation for Wyeth's contract could be given in terms of the financial history of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. In 1832, its debts totaled \$46,700; and after the company's two-year catch was sold at St. Louis, it still owed an estimated \$5,400. Furthermore, by 1833, the debt had increased to \$12,000 and had become consolidated in the hands of one man, William Sublette.¹⁹ Therefore, he had a complete monopoly on supplying the Rocky Mountain Fur Company with goods at his own prices.

The Rocky Mountain Fur Company's connection with Sublette had other disadvantages too. During the four-year association, Sublette had managed to deliver only one caravan of supplies (1832). A year earlier, Fitzpatrick had been forced to go East to procure the necessary goods, although he still purchased them from Sublette. In 1833, Sublette had made new plans to concentrate upon the trade of the Upper Missouri in an increased effort against the American Fur Company. For example, he was in the process

¹⁸Copy of the original contract, Big Horn River, August 14, 1833. Photostatic copy, Missouri Historical Society.

¹⁹Articles of Agreement between the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and William Sublette, July 25, 1832. Reprinted in Don Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels (New York, 1961), pp. 416-418. The estimated debt of \$5,400, ibid., p. 274. The 1833 debt, ibid., p. 321.

of planting posts near all the American Fur Company forts in that region. Just two miles below the mouth of the Yellowstone, he was building a post to rival Fort Union. With his mind completely occupied with this project, his brother, Milton Sublette, thought that in the future he might have a difficult time taking supply trains to the mountains.²⁰ Indeed, William Sublette's past record indicated that his brother could not thoroughly depend upon him in any case. Thus when Wyeth put forth a sound Yankee proposition, Milton Sublette listened with interest.

In theory, carrying supplies from Fort Vancouver to the mountains would be infinitely cheaper than the traditional overland route from St. Louis. Wyeth calculated that carrying \$3,000 in goods from Fort Vancouver would cost \$1,554, while from St. Louis the same \$3,000 in goods would cost \$8,382 to transport.²¹ By using the Pacific route, supplies could be transported to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company at less than half the price that William Sublette was charging them. This was Wyeth's general plan. Milton Sublette must have thought it a good one, for he signed a contract which provided for a trial run

²⁰Sunder, Bill Sublette, p. 129.

²¹Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 75-76.

of Wyeth as supplier.²²

After the completion of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract, Wyeth and Sublette broke up camp and in their bullboats, quickly floated down the Big Horn and the Yellowstone. At Fort Union, they met Kenneth McKenzie, who had given Wyeth's expedition transportation up the Missouri. He was in charge of the American Fur Company's fort there. The federal government had issued strict liquor regulations of late; and the Scotsman displayed his answer to the new regulation by building a distillery which (as McKenzie himself said) made "fine sweet liquor."²³ McKenzie would not have been so elated, had he known Wyeth's intentions.

²²The total cost to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was about \$6,500. For the same amount of goods the previous year, William Sublette had charged \$15,620.^a The Wyeth contract provided that the debt was payable in beaver skins at four dollars per pound. In 1832 William Sublette had sold the company's furs at four dollars and twenty-five cents a pound but had charged fifty cents per pound for transportation, leaving the Rocky Mountain Fur Company three dollars and seventy-five cents per pound.^b Wyeth was therefore giving them twenty-five cents per pound more for their furs. Furthermore, in another business contract made at the 1833 rendezvous, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had calculated furs to be worth only three dollars and twenty-five cents per pound.^c

- (a) Articles of Agreement between The Rocky Mountain Fur Company and William Sublette, July 25, 1832. Reprinted in Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, pp. 416-418.
- (b) Ibid., pp. 416-418.
- (c) Articles of Agreement between The Rocky Mountain Fur Company and Edmund T. Christy, July 21, 1833. Reprinted in Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, p. 320.

²³McKenzie to Pierre Chouteau (no date), reprinted in Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, p. 331.

After leaving Milton Sublette at his brother's post two miles below the Yellowstone, Wyeth continued down the Missouri to Fort Leavenworth, where he revealed the fact that Kenneth McKenzie was operating a distillery at Fort Union. Undoubtedly, Wyeth had given this information to help William Sublette, who was in opposition to the American Fur Company. Wyeth's report would certainly affect operations at Fort Union and tend to make William Sublette think more highly of the "downeaster."

With this final bit of business manipulation, Wyeth had done all he could in the West. From Missouri on October 4, he wrote his Boston suppliers, Tucker and Williams, saying he would be home on the 10th of the following month to discuss business matters. He actually arrived at Cambridge slightly ahead of schedule on November 7, 1833, ready to plan new business operations.

CHAPTER V

COLUMBIA RIVER FISHING AND TRADING COMPANY: 1834

Upon Wyeth's return home from the Northwest, he heard that the Hudson's Bay Company in London had been notified of his proposals. This news prompted him to write the Governor and Committee, informing that that he had made a contract to supply the Rocky Mountain Fur Company for the following year. If the British concern would agree to his proposals, he would fulfill his contract with Sublette and "hand over the furs . . ." to John McLoughlin on the Columbia at five dollars per beaver pelt.¹

According to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract, Wyeth would receive \$6,521 in beaver skins at four dollars per pound at the rendezvous. This would give him 1,630 pounds of beaver pelts. The average beaver skin weighed one and a half pounds and sold at six dollars per skin at the 1833 rendezvous.² Therefore, the 1,630 pounds of beaver skins would amount to 1,087 individual pelts or a value of \$5,435 at Fort Vancouver. When completed, the transaction would mean a loss to Wyeth of over a thousand

¹Wyeth to George Simpson or the Governor or Agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, October 12, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 72.

²DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri, p. 103.

dollars. Thus it is doubtful that he expected to make a profit or break even. Perhaps he thought it worth the loss in order to establish himself with the Hudson's Bay Company.

Turning his attention to local mercantile interests, Wyeth outlined the possibilities of a second Oregon commercial venture to Tucker and Williams, sponsors of his first expedition. By locating a base on the Pacific Coast instead of St. Louis, Wyeth calculated that goods could be transported to the mountain rendezvous more cheaply from the Northwest than from Missouri. Using \$3,000 in trade goods as an example, he made a cost-comparison between freighting supplies via the Missouri and via the Columbia:³

St. Louis

Ins. & Sundrys	\$160.00
Baling of the above and Sundrys bought at	
St. Louis	100.00
50 pack saddles and 50 Riding Do	250.00
Hobbles 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	3,750.00
Provisions to Buffalos	100.00
Pack covers	50.00
Am[m]unition	100.00
100 animals	3,000.00
Guns	300.00
First cost of goods	3,000.00
Six months interest on all charges except	
wages	222.00
	11,382.00

³Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 75-76.

Columbia River Basin

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 blkts	30.00
15 men for 4 months at 15 per month	900.00
Provisions	100.00
Pack covers	50.00
Am[m]unition	25.00
Guns	90.00
65 animals at \$5 ea	325.00
First cost of goods	3,000.00
Interest for 10 months on all charges except wages of men	<u>182.00</u>
	4,736.00

These computations apparently proved that by transporting \$3,000 worth of supplies from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountain rendezvous, one could cut costs by \$6,646 and therefore sell to the American trappers at a cheaper rate. Wyeth anticipated that in time he could supply all the goods required by the mountain men, which in a single season he estimated to be \$12,000 "first cost New York."⁴

A further breakdown of Wyeth's calculations explains the price-differentials favoring the Pacific Northwest, as a base for supplying the American rendezvous. Because a distance of over four hundred miles overland would be saved and because of the relative safety of the country to be traversed in contrast with the St. Louis route, Wyeth felt that less men would be needed and for a

⁴Same letter, ibid., p. 74.

a shorter period of time. Thus the Pacific route would provide a savings of \$2,850, which needless to say was the largest expense item in overland transportation. Secondly, the cost of pack horses in the Columbia basin was only one-sixth of that charged at St. Louis, providing an additional saving of \$2,675. Pack saddles and riding accoutrements could be purchased from West Coast Indians for relatively cheap trading goods, saving another \$233.⁵

Furthermore, Wyeth believed that the expenses of transporting goods by sea to Oregon and returning the furs to Boston could be defrayed by the profits from curing salmon. He foresaw two possibilities for obtaining salmon. First, he could purchase fish from Indians and salt them down in Yankee fashion. The disadvantage in getting salmon in this manner was that they were usually from six to thirty hours old before traders received them.⁶ This time lag between catching and curing provided a poorly preserved product. However, Wyeth felt that even poor quality salmon would bring twelve dollars per barrel, enough to pay shipping expenses on furs and supplies.⁷ His second choice was to establish his own fishery. This method seemed somewhat dubious to Wyeth, because he did

⁵ Same letter, ibid., p. 76.

⁶ Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 4, 1833. Ibid., p. 63.

⁷ Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, ibid., p. 76.

not know the "proper mode" of catching salmon. Furthermore, when he had examined the salmon possibilities of the Columbia, it was the off-season. Thus he was wary of establishing his own fishery before he had "made a thorough examination at the proper time."⁸

Besides procuring furs from American trappers in the Central Rockies, Wyeth was determined to have his own trappers in the field. He believed that "a good hunter can take an average of 120 skins in a year. These are worth in Boston about \$1,000. Such hunters can be hired for about 400\$ payable in goods at an average of 600 per ct profit."⁹ In addition, each member of a trapping party would use the cheaper horses from Oregon, providing a continual savings in this item.¹⁰

As if to cap these convincing arguments, Wyeth sent both the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract and the Hudson's Bay Company proposals to Tucker and Williams. He felt that "the [R.M.F. Co.] Contract . . . will amt. to little more than carrying me into the Indian country free of expense and procuring the buisness [sic] of a very efficient concern, in this light I hold it to be

⁸Same letter, ibid., p. 76.

⁹Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, July 4, 1833. Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁰Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, ibid., p. 77.

valuable."¹¹ It is difficult to understand how this contract would carry him "into the Indian Country free of expense." His first shipment to Sublette's company was to be overland from St. Louis; and according to his own computations, the goods would cost \$8,382 to be transported from that city to the rendezvous. Furthermore, the contract stipulated a \$3,521 profit above first cost of the supplies. Thus, to break even, he had to make some profit in the sale of the furs taken from the Rocky Mountain Fur Company at the rendezvous. The company was to pay for the trade articles in beaver skins at four dollars per pound; but the eastern price had dropped from four dollars and fifty cents in March of 1833 to three dollars and fifty cents by October of that year.¹² According to these facts, it would seem that the agreement's only advantage was "procuring the buisness [sic] of a very efficient concern." In this regard, Wyeth may also have been mistaken. The company had been continuously in debt to its suppliers from its inception in 1830 through the rendezvous of 1833.¹³ However, if "efficient" meant merely the ability to trap beaver, then Wyeth's assumption was correct, because at the 1832 rendezvous Sublette's concern had taken 140 packs of

¹¹ Same letter, ibid., p. 77.

¹² DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri, p. 424.

¹³ Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, p. 272, 321. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company owed \$15,532 in 1830; \$18,532 in 1831; \$5,400 in 1832; and \$12,000 in 1833.

beaver as opposed to only thirty packs taken by the American Fur Company, its nearest competitor.¹⁴

The final decision on Wyeth's scheme rested with Tucker and Williams. On November 20, they reached a favorable verdict;¹⁵ and a new company was formed, the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company, capitalized at \$40,000.¹⁶ Wyeth was not only placed in charge of the overland expedition but also given authority over the sea expedition as soon as it reached the Columbia. For his services in the field, he was to receive twenty-five per cent of the net profits of the company.¹⁷ As a stockholder,

¹⁴Wyeth to Joseph Baker and Son, November 17, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 84. In this letter, Wyeth reviewed both the 1832 and 1833 fur seasons at the rendezvous and gave the amount taken by each company by packs (100 lbs. per pack). In 1832, 380 packs were taken; while in 1833 only 303 packs were taken. Wyeth's comment concerning the decrease was that "maybe it will decrease yearly." This observation does not seem to have affected his thinking.

¹⁵Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, November 20, 1833. Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁶Its capital was paid for as follows: Tucker and Williams, four-sixteenths; Howard and Merry, four-sixteenths; Henry Hall, three-sixteenths; J. D. W. Williams, two-sixteenths; George Abbott, two-sixteenths, N. J. Wyeth, one-sixteenths. W. C. Eaton, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," Pacific Historical Review, IV (June, 1935), 104. Professor Eaton had access to the Letterbook of Henry Hall containing unpublished material about Wyeth's second expedition. Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, January 6, 1834, Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 96. In a previous letter, dated November 20, 1833, Wyeth stated that the company would be capitalized at \$20,000.

¹⁷Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, November 20, 1833. Ibid., p. 85.

he needed to raise \$2,500 for his share. From his brother Charles, he received \$1,000, while Frederick Tudor loaned him an additional \$2,500. He also realized another \$1,000 from an estate that was settled.¹⁸ Thus Wyeth got more money than he actually needed for his share.

Throughout the above negotiations, Tucker and Williams, as well as members of Wyeth's family, showed their confidence in him as a businessman regardless of his initial failure in 1832. His brother Leonard expressed the family's sentiment in the following way: "Nat," he wrote, "may be a machine of God (as Napoleon or Wellington) for the civilization of the regions west of the Rocky Mountains. Why is it that he has been endowed with a spirit that brooks no control? Why is it that the strongest constitutions break under hardships at which he laughs? Why is it that he has no ties of children and - to keep him at home, and more than all that, how is it that he has shown such a wonderful capacity for such an undertaking."¹⁹

¹⁸Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, December 8, 1833. Ibid., p. 91. Wyeth to James Brown, March 11, 1834. Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁹Leonard Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, December 27, 1833. Reprinted in Eaton "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 102. Professor Eaton also had access to the letters of Charles Wyeth (unpublished manuscripts in the possession of a descendant of Charles Wyeth.)

As a representative of the new concern, Wyeth wrote George Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company and told him about the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company. He informed Simpson that "consequently all further negotiations for the present are at an end in regard to this subject [Hudson's Bay Company proposals]".²⁰

With this matter disposed of, Wyeth began feverishly preparing for his new expedition West. The ship May Dacre was chartered and then directed to sail to the West Coast in order to be there for the 1834 salmon season and also to deliver the supply goods which Wyeth had purchased at New York. Although he had definite misgivings about establishing a salmon fishery, Wyeth appeared to have changed his mind on this important question when final plans for the expedition were consummated with Tucker and Williams. For in his instructions to Captain Lambert, his "charge d'affaires" at sea, Wyeth ordered the veteran shipmaster to stop at the Hawaiian Islands and secure twenty natives to be used in salmon fishing. Furthermore, upon his arrival at the Columbia, Lambert was to erect buildings on shore and commence gathering a cargo of salmon. Finally, in order to avoid competition, he was to make an agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company concerning a common Indian tariff.²¹

²⁰Wyeth to George Simpson, November 20, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 84.

²¹Eaton, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 106. Copy of Captain Lambert's instructions, Boston, January 1, 1834. Letterbook of Henry Hall, pp. 10-14.

Lambert was not the only naval man to play an intimate part in Wyeth's plan. Captain Joseph Thing, a former Boston sea captain, was selected as second-in-command of the overland expedition. Before the expedition's departure, he served as Wyeth's general factotum; and thereafter, his major assignment was to follow Wyeth to Missouri and attend to various details concerning the procuring of necessary equipment and minor trading supplies. By taking these responsibilities, he would enable Wyeth to start West at an earlier date. At Boston, Captain Thing was ordered to see to the final transactions concerning tents, oil covers, an India rubber boat, traveling cases, and one hundred beaver traps. He also made additional arrangements at New York, including the purchasing of rifles, spades, and scalping knives; and finally, while en route to Missouri, he was requested to procure medicine for smallpox at Baltimore and tobacco and alcohol at Lexington, Kentucky.²²

The success of the overland expedition hinged largely upon the successful fulfillment of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract. This agreement had been a matter of great concern to Wyeth even before his return to New England. At St. Louis in 1833, he wrote to Milton Sublette

²²Wyeth to Joseph Thing, February 5, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 107. Wyeth to Thing, February 14, 1834. Ibid., p. 113. Wyeth to Thing, February 26, 1833. Ibid., p. 117. Wyeth to Thing, March 13, 1834. Ibid., p. 179.

disclosing the nature of his position with regard to the contract at that moment: "You may depend upon the contract or the bond and you will hear from me within 9 weeks stating positively which." At this juncture, Wyeth was not sure whether he would be able to perform the contract or not; but he "would be able to pay the default."²³

After concluding the financial arrangements with Tucker and Williams, Wyeth wrote Milton Sublette that he was now ready to fulfill the contract made at the Big Horn. He also had ideas concerning the surplus furs the Rocky Mountain Fur Company would have on hand after meeting its contractual obligations at the rendezvous. If the previous year's catch of 5,500 pounds of beaver skins were any indication, there then might be an excess of nearly 3,900 pounds of beaver skins at the rendezvous.²⁴ Therefore, if the Rocky Mountain Fur Company would sell him their remaining furs at a profitable rate or pay him for transporting them, Wyeth would agree to outfit a party to carry the pelts overland to St. Louis.²⁵

²³Wyeth to Milton Sublette, October 9, 1833. Ibid., p. 71. Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Ibid., p. 77.

²⁴On page 46 of this thesis, the author calculated that \$6,521 payable in beaver at four dollars per pound amounted to 1,630 pounds. The 5,500 pounds of beaver were Wyeth's estimate of the 1833 Rocky Mountain Fur Company's catch.

²⁵Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 77.

In order to be the first trader out of St. Louis in the spring of 1834 and possibly to be on the Columbia in time to supervise the tail-end of the salmon season, Wyeth made advance arrangements for procuring equipment and men with the firm of Samuel and More of Liberty, Missouri. He had met Mr. Samuel at Liberty on his return trip East in 1833 and at this time inquired into what would be necessary to open business relations with the Missouri firm.²⁶ He explained that his objective was to make a second expedition West and that he wanted the Liberty businessmen to act as his purchasing agents in Missouri. During December (1833), Wyeth wrote Samuel and More, instructing them to purchase sixty horses and sixty mules. They were also to hire thirty men for two and one-half years' service in the fur trade. Wyeth drew up an agreement which the men were required to sign, stipulating that half of them would be transferred to Sublette's company when they reached the rendezvous. Finally, the Yankee ordered thirty-five Spanish riding saddles, requesting that they should be as cheap as possible and without any "finery".²⁷

²⁶Wyeth to E. M. Samuel, September 29, 1833.
Ibid., p. 70.

²⁷Wyeth to Samuel and More, December 4, 1833.
Ibid., pp. 90-91. Wyeth to Samuel and More, December 20, 1833. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

Shortly after the New Year, Wyeth resumed his correspondence with the Liberty businessmen. He ordered them to purchase "2 bulls and 8 cows for driving overland to stock a fort also one yoke of cattle for provisions fat for eating and 30 sheep."²⁸ The first expedition had taught Wyeth the necessity of having food provisions until reaching the buffalo country. In addition, he notified Samuel and More that a Mr. Wiggin Abbot (an employee on the first expedition) was on his way to take care of any animals that might have been purchased. In private orders to Abbot, Wyeth instructed him "to ascertain the real cash value of [the] horses and mules. And it would be well to let them [Samuel and More] see that you take note of these things, this not that I doubt their good faith, but they having [sic] much buisness [sic] on their hands."²⁹

The result of this careful planning with Samuel and More seems to have been quite fruitless. As late as March 10, 1834, when he arrived in St. Louis, Wyeth had still heard nothing concerning his orders for horses, mules, and men. And not till three weeks later did he find out what had been done regarding the saddles. The Missouri firm had made a contract to purchase thirty-five

²⁸Wyeth to Samuel and More, January 8, 1834. Ibid., p. 100.

²⁹Wyeth to Wiggin Abbot, January 7, 1834. Ibid., p. 99.

saddles at ten dollars each. Wyeth was outraged, for he could have purchased the kind of saddles he wanted at St. Louis for less than half that.³⁰ Whether he liked it or not, his party would be going West in style, at an additional cost of \$210.

Horses, mules, and men were still Wyeth's primary concern. Early in April, he was notified that the livestock was at last being purchased.³¹ An unfortunate result of the delay which had occurred was that spring prices on horses and mules had risen because of the demand put upon them by Santa Fe traders and the United States cavalry.³² And since no men at all had been hired, Wyeth had to recruit all but six of them at St. Louis. In the final analysis, Samuel and More had done little or nothing; in fact, what they had accomplished was to Wyeth's disadvantage--expensive saddles, horses, and mules.

Two vital parts of Wyeth's plan need to be re-emphasized, because the success of the expedition depended

³⁰Wyeth to Samuel and More, March 28, 1834.
Ibid., p. 127.

³¹Wyeth to Samuel and More, April 3, 1834.
Ibid., p. 129.

³²John K. Townsend, Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River and a Visit to the Sandwich Islands, Chili, etc. in Early Western Travels, Vol. XXI, ed. Rubin G. Thwaites (Cleveland, 1905), p. 136. Hereafter cited as Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains. Townsend also kept a journal from which his narrative was constructed: "Extracts from the Journal Kept During The Passage etc." in The Call of the Columbia, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver, 1934), pp. 188-226.

primarily upon them. In the first place, Wyeth was attempting to establish himself with American trappers in the Central Rockies through his contract with Milton Sublette's company. Secondly, his proposed salmon fishery was of critical importance, because the shipment of fish would defray the freight costs on furs shipped to Boston. If either part of the plan failed, the result could be disastrous.

CHAPTER VI

THE RACE TO HAM'S FORK: 1834

In the spring of 1834, St. Louis was filled with commercial activity, readying supply and trapping parties for another year's exploitation of the fur trade. Wyeth had arrived in the city on March 10, 1834; he designated Independence, Missouri, as the assembly point for his expedition; and in early April, men and supplies were already gathering there under the guidance of Captain Thing for the overland trek.¹ Wyeth had hired about fifty experienced mountain men at \$250 each for eighteen months, in contrast to the eastern greenhorns who had caused so

¹The primary source materials for Wyeth's second trek West include (in the order of their importance): Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 123-154, 221-251; Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, pp. 121-369; Jason Lee, "Diary of Jason Lee," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XVII (June, September, and December, 1916), 116-146, 240-266, 397-430; Osborne Russell, Journal of a Trapper or Nine Years in the Rockies, 1834-1843, ed. Aubrey L. Haines (Portland, 1955), pp. 1-39; James B. Marsh, Four Years in the Rockies; or The Adventures of Isaac P. Rose (New Castle, Pa., 1884), pp. 18-40; William Marshall Anderson, "Anderson's Narrative of a Ride to the Rocky Mountains in 1834," Frontier and Midland, XIX (Autumn, 1938), 54-63; Charles Henry Carey, "The Mission Record Book of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Willamette Station, Oregon Territory, North America, Commenced in 1834," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXIII (September, 1922), 232-238; P. L. Edwards, letter June 23, 1834 in Niles Register, Baltimore, October 11, 1834, Vol. 47, p. 92; Daniel Lee and J. H. Frost, Ten Years in Oregon (New York, 1844), pp. 114-126.

much difficulty on his first expedition.²

Along with these veterans of the fur trade came two other groups which Wyeth had agreed to take West. During the previous winter, he had invited two scientists from Philadelphia (Thomas Nuttall and John K. Townsend) to go along with the expedition in order to study western birds and plants. The other group consisted of two Methodist missionaries, Jason and Daniel Lee and their four attendants, who planned to carry religion to the Indians west of the Rockies. Membership in the expedition was complete when Milton Sublette, who had agreed to go West with the supply caravan destined for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, arrived on April 14.

At the outset, Wyeth seemed to be quite pleased with the way in which preparations for his second trip westward were proceeding. However, three days after Sublette's arrival, Wyeth wrote some disturbing news to Tucker and Williams.³ William Sublette and Robert Campbell were outfitting a party of men and goods in competition with his own enterprise. William Sublette made his position clear by refusing to honor a five hundred dollar draft which he owed his younger brother. He would pay the debt on

²Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, pp. 136-137. Aubrey L. Haines, ed., In an Introduction to Journal of a Trapper, p. vi. Haines examined the Fort Hall Ledger Books, 1834-1837, pp. 13-14.

³Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, April 25, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 129-130.

one condition only - if Milton Sublette remained at home - and this the younger brother refused to do.

The explanation for William Sublette's surprising move could be found in the changing nature of his business relations with the American Fur Company. In 1833, he had planned an all-out effort against the American Fur Company by establishing posts and carrying on trading opposition to them on the Upper Missouri. However, early in 1834, he had gone to New York City and reached an important agreement with the American Fur Company. A document was drawn up, in which Sublette agreed to give up his trade and posts on the Upper Missouri, in exchange for which the American Fur Company agreed to "retire from the mountain trade" for one year.⁴ Therefore, Sublette would be exploiting the same general area as Wyeth.

In addition to his renewed interest in Wyeth's trading region, Sublette was convinced that the Rocky Mountain Fur Company might collapse without paying the debts they had incurred. He had extended additional credit to the company each year and the amount due had grown alarmingly. In its present financial state, one poor trapping season could mean the virtual end of the company. Therefore, according to Sublette, the shaky financial status of the company and its agreement with Wyeth were "likely

⁴Sunder, Bill Sublette, p. 134.

to operate against the goodness of the debt due . . ."⁵
him.

With Sublette's position perfectly clear, Wyeth realized he must take every precaution to arrive at the rendezvous first. He equipped his expedition with more expensive horses⁶ and hurriedly prepared to leave Independence before Sublette could get started.

Wyeth's party began its march on April 28. It was a large brigade, consisting of seventy men, and two hundred and fifty horses. John Townsend described the procession in these words: "Captain Wyeth and Milton Sublette took the lead, Mr. N. and myself rode beside them. Then the men in double file, each leading with a line, two horses heavily laden, and Captain Thing (Captain W.'s Assistant) brought up the rear. The band of Missionaries, with their horned cattle, rode along the flanks."⁷ Two days later, Sublette and his thirty-man party pushed out of Lexington and entered the race.

Wyeth's party began the journey in high spirits. But as the days passed, difficulties soon beset the travelers; and their enthusiasm soon dimmed. Horses and cattle were lost; and a few members of the expedition deserted. These

⁵Hugh Campbell to Robert Campbell, April 5, 1834. Quoted in Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels, p. 358 and in Sunder, Bill Sublette, p. 137.

⁶Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, April 25, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 130-131.

⁷Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, p. 141.

were only minor troubles compared with the problem that confronted Wyeth on May 8, when Milton Sublette was forced to turn back because of an irritating "fungus" growth on one of his legs. As Jason Lee gloomily recorded, "[I] was very sorry to have him leave us for he is a clever man and far better acquainted with the route and customs than any man in the company."⁸ Lee's comment could not have adequately expressed the feeling of regret felt by Wyeth. Milton Sublette was the key link in his connection with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and had already received a \$500 advance, based upon the expected sale of beaver pelts at the rendezvous. Thus the departure of Milton Sublette meant that the race with his older brother took on a new sense of urgency.

As Wyeth's caravan moved westward from Independence, it crossed the Kansas River and proceeded in a north-westerly direction toward the Platte. Its pace proved unrewarding. Before the company reached the Big Blue River on May 12, it was evident that Sublette had passed them by, thus taking the lead in the race to Ham's Fork on the Green River, site of the 1834 rendezvous.⁹ This new turn of events worried Wyeth, for much of his plans depended upon his success at the rendezvous. He immediately sent an express ahead to Thomas Fitzpatrick assuring him that he would arrive at the rendezvous before July 1 with a

⁸Jason Lee, "The Diary of Jason Lee," p. 120.

⁹Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, p. 151.

sufficient amount of goods to supply the mountain man according to contract. In addition, he naively informed Fitzpatrick that Milton Sublette had returned to St. Louis.¹⁰ Wyeth's revelation of this fact was a serious blunder. Milton Sublette had made most of the financial decisions for the company; it was his influence that had brought about the contract initially. Thus with the knowledge that his partner would not be present at the rendezvous, Fitzpatrick could do as he pleased.

Wyeth continued on toward the Platte, reaching Independence Rock on June 9. He had still heard nothing from Fitzpatrick and dispatched a second express which contained a more strongly worded message. He stressed the advantages in dealing with the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company, especially in future shipments from the Pacific Coast and clearly indicated his desire that Fitzpatrick should make no commitments until he arrived.¹¹ As the caravan continued moving westward across the Sweetwater heading for the Green River Rendezvous, Wyeth could only hope for some response from Fitzpatrick. By the 16th, he was becoming more agitated by the minute. As Jason Lee acutely observed, "The Capt. has heard nothing

¹⁰Wyeth to Thomas Fitzpatrick, May 12, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 132.

¹¹Wyeth to Fitzpatrick, June 9, 1834. Ibid., pp. 132-133.

from his express nor from [the] rendezvous [sic] and hence he is wandering about not knowing whether he is going to or from it."¹² The following day, when suspense got the better of him, Wyeth himself left camp in search of the rendezvous and Fitzpatrick.

He finally located them both and his disappointment could scarcely have been greater. A brief entry in his journal summed up his unhappiness: "to my astonishment the goods which I had contracted to bring up to the Rocky Mountain Fur Co were refused by those honorable gentlemen."¹³ These words failed to reveal the irritation he must have felt; but surely a subsequent letter to Milton Sublette demonstrated his sentiments more clearly: "I do not accuse you or him [Fitzpatrick] of any intention of injuring me in this manner when you made the contract but I think he [Fitzpatrick] has been bribed to sacrifice my interests by better offers from your brother."¹⁴ In addition to these comments, Wyeth was reported to have said, "Gentlemen, I will roll a stone in your garden that you will never be able to get out."¹⁵ Perhaps, he was

¹² Jason Lee, "The Diary of Jason Lee," p. 126.

¹³ Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 225.

¹⁴ Wyeth to Milton Sublette, July 1, 1834. Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁵ Frances Fuller Victor, The River of the West (Hartford and Toledo, 1870), p. 164.

portending the establishment of Fort Hall on the Snake River.

Although Fitzpatrick had refused to honor the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract, he paid Wyeth the five hundred dollar forfeit and the five hundred dollar advance to Milton Sublette. However, he refused to pay the interest on the cash advance; and since William Sublette had already bartered for most of the furs with his own supplies, Wyeth was only able to sell "a few goods at low prices."¹⁶ The proceeds from the forfeit, the advance, and the goods sold (after deducting wages for men who quit at the rendezvous) were forwarded to Tucker and Williams.

Difficulties at the rendezvous continued. Sublette made every effort to induce Wyeth's men to join his party. Wyeth returned this challenge with one of his own. In fact, William Marshall Anderson, one of Sublette's men, evidently thought Wyeth's offer the more intriguing and adventurous. As Wyeth's man, he would not only cross the remaining portion of the continent but would also get return passage to the East Coast on the May Dacre.¹⁷ This final clash between Wyeth and Sublette seems to have

¹⁶Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 1, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 138.

¹⁷Anderson, "Anderson's Narrative of a Ride to the Rocky Mountains in 1834," pp. 61-62.

ended in a draw because, as Wyeth said in summing up the encounter, "I have hired enough of theirs [Sublette and Campbell] to make up [for my losses] and do not fear falling short of troops."¹⁸ With this problem solved, Wyeth began to make new plans for the disposal of his unaccepted goods at the rendezvous.

¹⁸Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 1, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 139.

CHAPTER VII

FORT HALL: AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION

The defeat which Wyeth had suffered at the hands of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company set in motion a series of events which culminated in the establishment of the first inland American post west of the Rockies. It would demonstrate in concrete terms to the Hudson's Bay Company that American competition in the Snake Country was a reality; and to American suppliers, it would reveal itself as a threat to their very existence.

As early as November 8, 1833, Wyeth had foreseen the possibility of a broken contract with Sublette's company and had provided for it. If the Rocky Mountain Fur Company should not fulfill their contract, he proposed to proceed to the Columbia River and establish a post for the disposal of his trade goods.¹ An additional safeguard against a broken contract was taken at St. Louis. On April 2, 1834, Wyeth was issued an Indian trading license for a period of two years.² It permitted him to

¹Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 73.

²Mahlon Dickerson and Elbert Herring, "Abstract of Licenses Issued to Persons to Trade with Indians (1834) . . ." House Document 97, 23rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 2.

trade with Indians east of the Rockies at specific locations and required him to post a \$2,000 bond in addition to stipulating the amount of capital involved in his trade goods. The total sum was \$3,504.40 and after deducting the supplies earmarked for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, he had only a mere \$504.40 worth of goods left for the Indian trade.

In view of this information, it is not surprising that Wyeth knew exactly what his next step would be. The day after the broken contract, he wrote two letters East describing his next move: "I am obliged to establish a fort, which I shall do on the Lewis River about a hundred miles west of this [location] for the purpose of trading my goods and then leave a part of my men at it. . . ."³ In order to drum up business for the proposed fort, Wyeth invited various tribes (Pawnavs, Shoshonees, Snakes, Nez Perces, and Flatheads) to make robes and trade them at the new post.⁴ Throughout all the bustling activity at the rendezvous, the thought kept plaguing Wyeth that his eastern partners might become discouraged if no returns were made the first year and that in consequence, they might force him to give up the enterprise.⁵ He was so vexed by this

³Wyeth to Frederic Tudor, June 20, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 134.

⁴Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 1, 1834. Ibid., p. 133.

⁵Wyeth to James Fenno, June 20, 1834. Ibid., p. 133.

idea that he wrote an intimate friend in New England of his wishes to be informed on the "state of affairs at home" as quickly as possible.⁶

Pushing himself onward despite his despondent frame of mind, Wyeth left the rendezvous and struck out in a northwesterly direction toward the Bear River. On July 8, after arriving on the big bend in that river, Wyeth's camp was visited by Thomas McKay, leader of a Hudson's Bay Company hunting party. All was joy and cordiality, for Wyeth did not realize the potential danger McKay represented. The Company agent offered to go along with Wyeth's caravan as far as the Portneuf River; and the combined parties left the Bear River and crossed a series of high stony hills before they came out into the valley of the Snake. On July 11, they camped near the headwaters of the Blackfoot River; and three days later, they reached the banks of the Snake. By July 16, Wyeth had determined the location of his fort - about nine miles north of the Portneuf on the east bank of the Snake River.⁷

The proposed site was located on a large plain with an abundance of excellent grass and rich soil. The opposite side of the river was thickly timbered with

⁶Same letter, ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁷An examination of the Fort Hall Ledger entries and chronicles by various visitors to Fort Hall had led Richard Beidleman to the conclusion stated. Richard G. Beidleman, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," Oregon Historical Quarterly, LVIII (December, 1957), 209.

cottonwood trees which would provide building materials for the new fort. Wyeth's men quickly began cutting logs and taking them to the designated spot for the new post. Logs were set in an upright position, side by side, and sunk two and one-half feet in the ground. The finished product was a stockage eighty feet square with a fifteen foot wall. In addition, two bastions, eight feet square, stood at opposite angles. In these bastions were portholes for guns - "100 guns and rifles" constantly loaded.⁸

These cottonwood trees might also serve the purpose of a winterfood for Wyeth's horses. An early fur trader had observed that horses wintered well on sweet bark cottonwood. In fact, he thought it "quite as nutritious as timothy hay."⁹ Of course, there were two types of cottonwoods, the second variety being bitter and unusable for horses. It is difficult to tell if the sweet cottonwood was available at Fort Hall, for Wyeth's only comment was that "Horses winter well in the river bottoms of the section [Fort Hall region]".¹⁰

Since the fort was close to good buffalo country, Wyeth's men were readily supplied with meat. A hunting

⁸Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, p. 210. Marsh, The Adventures of Isaac P. Rose, pp. 37-38. Russell, Journal of a Trapper, p. 5.

⁹Harrison Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of the Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829 (Cleveland, 1918), pp. 138-139.

¹⁰House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 7.

party was dispatched soon after the beginning of construction on the fort; and Townsend, a member of the party soon reported that the camp looked "like a slaughter house - piles of meat laying around us in every direction."¹¹ He went on to say that "We are a merry company; we are aware, however, that we are in dangerous country." This region was a "dangerous country"; and Wyeth was cognizant of the fact that one of the primary disadvantages of the Fort Hall area was the hostility of the Blackfeet. However, he was confident that his fort and "its Bastions stand a terror to sculking [sic] Indians and a beacon of safety to the fugitive hunter."¹² Not all Indians were hostile; in fact, a great majority were friendly and would supply salmon for practically nothing in case of a hard winter.

An additional source of food might be found in farming. Although Jason Lee¹³ thought agricultural opportunities would be severely limited at the new post, Wyeth's more detailed picture demonstrated that some farming was possible. According to him, "the wide bottoms of the Snake at that place [Fort Hall] have some very fertile lands but a large portion is injured by salts deposited by

¹¹Townsend, "Extracts from the Journal, Kept During the Passage, etc." in The Call of the Columbia, p. 194.

¹²Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, October 6, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 146-147.

¹³Jason Lee, "The Diary of Jason Lee," p. 243.

the water of the hills; and although the days are very warm, the nights are too cold for almost everything but small grains; all of which we tried succeeded well; onions cabbages and turnips were also produced of good quality."¹⁴

However important a good food supply may have been, Wyeth's chief concern was the availability of beaver in the area. He felt that good returns of beaver could be made at Fort Hall.¹⁵ This judgment was based on his own experience in the Snake River bottoms. In less than a month in 1832, he had taken more than a pack of beaver pelts. He was pleased with the quality of the skins and thought that beaver were reasonably abundant in this region.¹⁶ In fact, he had cached six horseloads of furs and supplies on his first expedition some forty-five miles east of Fort Hall. Thus he had ample reason for choosing the site he did.

The mere availability of beaver did not mean that Fort Hall would be automatically successful. The operations of the new post had to be carefully planned. Wyeth's first step was to issue detailed instructions to Robert Evans, the factor in charge. These instructions

¹⁴House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 7.

¹⁵Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 1, 1834.
Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 139.

¹⁶Wyeth to Hall, Tucker and Williams, November 8, 1833. Ibid., p. 78.

contained an Indian tariff and a white tariff. A selected sample of what an Indian received for one beaver or robe will illustrate the profit margin Wyeth expected at Fort Hall.

At first glance, one general conclusion can be reached from Table 1. The greatest profit margin appeared in luxury items such as beads which might indicate that Wyeth expected to receive beavers from Indians for practically nothing. However, Indians tended to be more interested in items such as blankets, cloths, and rifles where the profit margin was considerably lower. Ammunition was one exception. The Indian could trade one beaver for thirty ammunition loads or twenty rounds in combination with such small value items as an awl, gun worm, or flint. The common Indian trade gun was light, short-barrelled and cheaply constructed. It was gauged to shoot a one ounce ball. Since Wyeth valued his lead at six and one-fourth cents a pound, the lead portion of an ammunition load cost less than one-half cent per round. Furthermore, the Indian trade gun was typically sixteen gauge or about .66 caliber. This gauge would use about eighty-five grains of powder per load;¹⁷ and Wyeth's wholesale value of powder was fifteen cents per pound. Although it is difficult to determine the actual amount of powder used

¹⁷Carl P. Russell, Guns on the Early Frontier (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), pp. 104, 342.

Table 1. Indian Tariff.¹⁸

For Robes and Beavers	Wholesale Price	Wyeth's Cash Value of Beaver	Profit	%
1 Bunch Common Beads Cut	11¢ per bunch	\$5. at Ft. Hall	\$4.89	4446%
1 Fathom Largest Cut Beads	5-1/2¢ per Fathom	" " "	\$4.94-1/2	8991%
1 Common Blanket	\$2.12-1-1/2 each	" " "	\$2.87-1-1/2	135%
1 Shirt	\$1.25	" " "	\$3.75	300%
1/2 Yard Blue Cloth	81-1/2¢	" " "	\$4.18-3/4	515%
1/2 Yard Scarlet Cloth	82-1/2¢	" " "	\$4.17-1/2	506%
Rifle-12 Beavers or Robes	\$10.00	" " "	\$50.	500%
Fuzil-8 Beavers or Robes	\$3.75	" " "	\$36.25	967%
Horses-25 Beavers per Animal	\$20 - \$25	" " "	\$105-	525%
			\$100.	500%

¹⁸Table 1 was constructed from the Indian Tariff found in Fort Hall Ledger (I, pp. 6-7) and reprinted in Beidleman, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," pp. 217-218. The wholesale value per unit was also listed in Fort Ledger, (I) and reprinted in Beidleman, pp. 220-222. The cash value of beaver at Fort Hall was part of the Whiteman's tariff reprinted in Beidleman, pp. 218-219. The wholesale price on horses is Benjamin Bonneville's estimate. Bonneville to Major General Alex Macomb, July 29, 1833. Irving, Adventures of Captain Bonneville, p. 366. Bonneville gave a complete range of prices in the mountains, although in some cases it is difficult to determine the unit involved.

per load, it is evident that prices on lead and powder were so low that traders profited greatly from exchanging one beaver for a few ammunition loads. As Table 2 demonstrates, even greater profit was possible from the less important pelts.

Table 2. Indian Tariff.¹⁹

Muskrats or Mink	Wholesale Price	Wyeth's Value of Muskrats or Mink	Profit	%
1 Gunworm	5-1/2¢	25¢	19-1/2¢	355%
1 Fire Steel for 3	3¢	75¢	72¢	2400%
1 Awl	1¢	25¢	24¢	2400%

The total Indian tariff, when compared to that of the white man, seemed quite unfair. The white trapper received five dollars per pound or six dollars per skin, if he traded his beaver for goods. If he decided upon cash, his beaver brought three dollars and fifty cents a pound or five dollars per large beaver skin. In addition, for muskrats or mink, the hunter got a straight twenty-five cents for each pelt.²⁰ Indeed, Wyeth's cash price for beaver was more than fair for white men. The St. Louis price in the fall of 1833 was three dollars and

¹⁹ Indian Tariff, Wholesale list per Unit and White Tariff, Beidleman, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," pp. 218-219.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 219.

fifty cents per pound, while it will be recalled that the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had valued furs at only three dollars and twenty-five cents at the rendezvous.²¹

Furthermore, in March of 1834, the Boston Weekly Messenger had valued muskrats at twenty-five cents per pelt and mink at fifty cents each.²² From these figures, it would seem that Wyeth's profit must come from the supplies he exchanged for fur pelts. Table 3 gives a list of typical goods used by trappers and the profit that the Yankee businessman expected to make.

Table 3. White trappers goods.²³

Item	Wyeth's Wholesale Price	Retail Price to Trappers	Profit	%	Rendezvous Price 1833
Alcohol	8¢(pint)	3.00(pint)	2.92	3050%	\$5 & up
Coffee	15¢(lb.)	1.50(lb.)	1.35	900	\$2.00
Flour	4¢(lb.)	1.50(est.)	1.46	3650	\$2.00
Lead	6-1/4¢(lb.)	1.50(est.)	1.43-3/4	2102	\$2.00
Pack of playing cards	16¢	2.50	2.34	1463	
Powder	15¢	2.50(lb.)	2.35	1567	\$2.00 (7¢ type)
Rum	3-1/2¢ (pint)	3.00(pint)	2.96-1/2	8471	\$3.00
Sugar	12¢(lb.)	1.50(lb.)	1.38	1150	\$2.00
Tobacco	12-1/2¢ (lb.)	1.50(lb.)	1.37-1/2	1100	\$2.00

²¹See footnote 22 in Chapter IV.

²²Beidleman, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," pp. 218-219.

²³Table 3 was constructed as follows: Wholesale price - Beidleman "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," pp. 220-221; Retail prices - Eaton, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 112; 1833 Rendezvous prices - DeVoto, Across The Wide Missouri, p. 103.

An examination of Table 3 reveals that Wyeth was in a favorable competitive position with respect to the American rendezvous. The typical mountain price on tobacco, coffee, sugar, flour, and lead was two dollars per pound. Wyeth had undercut his mountain competition by fifty cents per pound with respect to tobacco, coffee, and sugar. No figures are available for his retail prices on flour or lead; but it seems probable that he undercut those prices at the same rate, making these items sell at one-dollar and fifty cents per pound. Wyeth also held the advantage in alcohol distribution, selling it at three dollars per pint, while the rendezvous price was five dollars a pint and up - and usually diluted on a three to one basis. Moreover, Table 3 illustrates the character of the trade at Fort Hall. It was largely a luxury trade in the sense that trappers used most of these articles only for a short time and subsisted largely on buffalo meat while in the field. Since nine-tenths of the furs received at Fort Hall were trapped by white men, the majority of supply goods went to these men.²⁴ Wyeth estimated that there was an average five to six hundred per cent mark-up on supply articles to traders.²⁵

Upon closer scrutiny, the opportunity for profit did not seem so favorable. Seventeen itemized bales of

²⁴Eaton, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expedition," p. 111.

²⁵Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, July 4, 1833. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 66.

goods were stored at the fort with a total valuation of \$1,056.54-1/2.²⁶ According to Wyeth, the cost of transporting \$3,000 of goods from St. Louis to the rendezvous was \$8,382. Assuming that he was leaving about \$1,000 in goods at Fort Hall, one-third of the transportation expense would amount to \$2,794. An average 600% profit on \$1,000 of goods would be \$6,000 or \$3,206, after deducting the transportation expenses. The fort was garrisoned by twelve men; Evans, factor in charge received \$450,²⁷ while the remaining men were hired at \$250 for eighteen months. Since Wyeth calculated his men's wages as part of the transportation expenses from St. Louis to the rendezvous (three months involved in the trip), only five-sixths of the amount paid to Fort Hall employees can be deducted from profit expectations. This amount was \$2,700 and would reduce Wyeth's returns to a slim \$506. Since his white tariff prevented any profit from selling furs, he depended primarily upon his supplying operation to produce profitable returns. Other expenses such as loss from deaths of debtors to the company, the risk of being plundered by marauding Indians, and the cost of distributing free alcohol to Indian chiefs as incentives to trade would further reduce his slim supply profit. In the final analysis,

²⁶Beidleman, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," p. 219.

²⁷Ibid., p. 213.

Wyeth's only hope was to break even at the outset and establish a foothold from which to expand operations at a later date.

On August 30, Thomas McKay and the missionaries started the long journey to Fort Walla Walla. Wyeth planned to follow them shortly. After christening Fort Hall with gun powder and liquor and raising a Stars and Stripes made from unbleached sheeting and red flannel, he began the last phase of his overland venture to the Pacific.

CHAPTER VIII

MERCANTILE EMPIRE IN THE OREGON COUNTRY: 1834-1837

Wyeth's company consisting of thirty men, several Indian women, and one hundred and sixteen horses left Fort Hall on July 7, struck directly northwest across the Snake River plains past the Three Buttes, and met Captain Bonneville near the Grande Ronde River towards the end of the month. As early as the Ham's Fork rendezvous, Wyeth had thought of the possibility of transporting Bonneville's furs to Boston via his brig the May Dacre.¹ Now at the Grande Ronde, he offered to convey the army man's furs to the eastern seaboard on his ship when it returned the following summer at thirty-seven and one-half cents per pound, including insurance. The two easterners seemed quite hopeful of cutting into the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly; and apparently they proposed to trade with the Cayuse Indians in the Grande Ronde Valley, with Wyeth supplying the necessary trade goods from his brig.² However, these plans were shortly to fall through because

¹Wyeth to Tucker and Williams, July 1, 1834.
Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 139.

²Wyeth to Bonneville, September 1, 1834. Ibid.,
p. 141. Wyeth to Bonneville, September 1, 1834. Ibid.,
p. 142.

both men would experience setbacks, making their future business activities uncertain.

After Wyeth concluded his discussions with Bonneville, he proceeded down the Columbia to Fort Vancouver, where he met the May Dacre and learned some discouraging news. Captain Lambert had arrived on the Columbia two days earlier after a fantastic set of misfortunes. His ship had been attacked by Tierre Del Fuego Indians while sailing through the Straits of Magellan; and the main mast had been shattered by lightning, forcing the vessel to put into Valparaiso for repairs. Many of the ship's crew deserted at this Chilean port and at Honolulu, where twenty natives were secured for salmon fishing.³ Consequently, Lambert had arrived too late for the salmon season; and thus the second part of Wyeth's plan had failed. He sadly commented: "This buisness [sic] looks very bad at this time. We have failed in everything for the first year. I shall do all I can one year more, which will I think shew [sic] whether anything is to be done here or not."⁴

In order for "anything . . . to be done," Wyeth

³Wyeth to Frederic Tudor, October 6, 1834. Ibid., p. 143. Also Captain Lambert to Tucker and Williams, February 17, 1834; June 5, 13, 1834; August 8, 1834. Letter Book of Henry Hall, 55-61. Eaton, "Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 108.

⁴Wyeth to Jas. W. Fenno Esq., October 6, 1834. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 143.

had first to get concessions from the Hudson's Bay Company. Returning to Fort Vancouver, he proposed to McLoughlin that if the Company would not oppose him in his projected salmon exportation scheme or in the trading of horses and supplies to the interior to American trappers, then he (Wyeth) would agree to divide the Snake River region with the Hudson's Bay Company. West of the Grande Ronde River would be the Company's territory and Wyeth would not compete in the fur trade in this area. Surprisingly enough, McLoughlin agreed to this division, but in a modified form. The British concern would not trade beyond the Grande Ronde River except for the trading parties under the leadership of Francis Ermatinger and Alexander McKay. Wyeth agreed to this modification and the arrangement was tentatively completed.⁵

The explanation for McLoughlin's acceptance of Wyeth's proposals could be given in terms of the Company's changing attitude toward the Snake Country. As early as 1832, George Simpson had considered the region so over-run with Americans and so nearly trapped out that he thought the Company should withdraw.⁶ A year later, the Governor

⁵ McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, November 16, 1836. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. 166. McLoughlin to McKay, October 4, 1834. Ibid., p. 169.

⁶ E. E. Rich, An Introduction to McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. xcv.

and Committee informed McLoughlin that they wished to have the Snake River Expeditions discontinued because they had proved unprofitable for several years.⁷ Thus McLoughlin was conceding little to Wyeth, since the Company had planned to withdraw from the Snake River territory in any case. However, furs were still being gathered in this region (1834), although in reduced quantities. Therefore, changing conditions required new techniques; and Wyeth's description of the Green River rendezvous in 1833 probably stimulated McLoughlin into sending Alexander McKay east to American trappers with trading supplies in 1834. The chief factor's insistence upon McKay's right to trade in the Snake Country in essence preserved the Company's only valuable connection in that region.

After McLoughlin agreed to Wyeth's terms, he received some disturbing instructions from the Governor and Committee based on the contingency of Wyeth's reappearance in the Pacific Northwest. The chief factor was now informed that Wyeth's proposals (1833) for cooperative action had been rejected; and if the American returned, McLoughlin was to "endeavor to put him [Wyeth] down by steady well regulated opposition." However, "Violence must on no consideration be resorted to except

⁷Governor and Committee to McLoughlin, December 4, 1833. Ibid., p. xcv.

in defense of Lives and Property."⁸

"Violence" would have been the last worry of London officials had they known of McLoughlin's reaction to the Company directive. The chief factor's response was most clearly revealed in his instructions to Pierre Pambrum, the clerk in charge of Fort Walla Walla. Pambrum was to assist Wyeth "as far as consistent with our interest and our engagement to Mr. McKay." If Wyeth should find find difficulties in transporting supplies to Fort Hall, Pambrum was instructed to store the property for him.⁹ These instructions were issued after the Company letter had arrived and demonstrated McLoughlin's willingness to continue his agreement with Wyeth despite London opposition.

McLoughlin must have had strong motives for continuing his agreement with Wyeth in the face of Company disapproval. His chief concern had long been with how he could economically run fur trading operations in his department; and his simple arrangement with Wyeth meant that the British concern could avoid destructive competition. Furthermore, he was convinced that Wyeth's whole effort was unsound and that there was no need of going to great expense to oppose it actively. Many Company employees

⁸Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, February 1, 1834. Louis S. Grant, "Fort Hall under the Hudson's Bay Company, 1837-1856," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XLI (March, 1940), 35.

⁹McLoughlin to Pambrun, October 13, 1834. Galbraith, The H.B.C., p. 103.

concurred with his opinion. This group included such respected Company men as John Work, leader of numerous Snake River Expeditions. He felt that if Wyeth's agreement were strictly adhered to, the American would have little chance of success. He not only thought that Wyeth's salmon fishery was doubtful but also that the Yankee's chances of supplying his countrymen would be seriously affected by McKay's presence in that region. Finally, he believed that the region that Wyeth was confined to by agreement was so nearly trapped out that little was to be done there anyway.¹⁰

Besides these reasons for favoring Wyeth's proposals, some justification for McLoughlin's course of action could be found in previous Company directives. In the past, the Company had discussed the idea of reaching an agreement with American trappers in order to divide the trade in the Snake Country. For example, as early as 1827, it had directed George Simpson that the leader of the Snake River Expedition should have instructions if he encountered Americans. These orders stated that the field commander should attempt to reach a friendly arrangement with his opposition and divide the region to be trapped in order to avoid interference with each other.¹¹ However, it should be noted that these arrangements were meant to

¹⁰John Work to John McLoughlin, April 6, 1837. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. 197.

¹¹Governor and Committee to Simpson, March 12, 1827. Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 286-287.

be seasonal rather than permanent, as Wyeth's proposals implied.

Although McLoughlin did not take Wyeth seriously as a competitor in most matters, he had one real fear that kept plaguing him. He believed that Wyeth might "endeavour to unite his country men in One Body and that he would bring them their supplies by the Columbia."¹² To keep the Yankee happy with modest concessions seemed justified, since a rebuff might force him to seek help elsewhere. It would seem that McLoughlin overemphasized Wyeth's influence with his own "countrymen" and also with his eastern business connections. The rendezvous of 1834 had seen the virtual end of competition between American companies. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company had been dissolved, Bonneville was almost ruined,¹³ and from the ashes of many enterprises had risen one power in the Central Rockies - The American

¹² McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, November 16, 1836. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. 166.

¹³ Wyeth had summed up Bonneville's prospects in 1834 in one sentence: "I think his concern is finished." Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 139. Lucien Fontenelle, leader of an American Fur Company party, wrote bossman, Pierre Chouteau, on September 17, 1834, his appraisal of Bonneville's efforts: "You must have heard before this of the returns that were made by Mr. Sublette and the company of Bonneville and Company. The latter I think by next year will be at an end in the mountains. They have sent down from twelve to fourteen packs of beaver and admitting that it should sell at a high price it is not enough to pay their retiring hands." Quoted in Chittenden, American Fur Trade, I, p. 305.

Fur Company.¹⁴ Thus Wyeth had nothing left to unite. Furthermore, his position with his eastern backers was very shaky. They were extremely disappointed in his efforts and had made that fact very clear to him.¹⁵ Wyeth had little hope of securing additional aid until he had proven himself; and to this task, he addressed himself during the fall of 1834.

With competition from the Hudson's Bay Company effectively neutralized on the Pacific Coast, Wyeth began making plans to insure his tenuous hold in the Oregon Country. His first effort was directed at locating a farm to furnish provisions for his men. The proposed site was forty miles up the Willamette River; and Wyeth was quite pleased with its rich soil, abundant game, and fine timber.¹⁶ In conjunction with the farming enterprise, he sent the May Dacre to the Hawaiian Islands with a cargo of lumber

¹⁴An official of the American Fur Company summed up activities at the 1834 rendezvous in this fashion: "they [former R.M.F. Co. trappers] have concluded not to have anything more to do with William Sublette and it will surprise me much if he takes more than ten packs down next year. I have entered into a partnership with the others and the whole of the beaver caught by them is to be turned over to us by agreement made with them in concluding the arrangement." Fontenelle to Chouteau, September 17, 1834. Quoted in Berry, A Great Majority of Scoundrels, p. 368.

¹⁵Wyeth to Frederic Tudor, September 6, 1835. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 150.

¹⁶Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis, October 6, 1834. Ibid., p. 147.

exchanging this item for cattle, sheep, goats, and hogs. Moreover, Lambert was instructed to bring back another thirty natives to be used in the following salmon season.¹⁷

Salmon fishing was now Wyeth's main concern; and a post had to be constructed near the Columbia for that purpose. He chose to build this establishment on the southwesterly side of Sauvies Island about eight miles from the mouth of the Willamette. During the winter (1834-35), C. M. Walker, a former member of Jason Lee's party, took charge of activities on the Island getting ready for the forthcoming salmon season. Extensive preparations were made. Although the men still lived in tents and temporary huts, several log houses were being built to provide more comfortable quarters and storage space for supplies. Coopers were busy the entire winter making salmon barrels, while other specialists such as blacksmiths and carpenters were actively engaged in their trades.¹⁸ In addition, Wyeth had built "a house boat 70 feet long for a conveyance about to the different fisherys [sic]"¹⁹ and "a canoe 60 feet long wide and deep enough to chamber barrells [sic] of which she will take 25."²⁰ When the

¹⁷Wyeth to J. G. Palfrey, December 13, 1847.
Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁸Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, pp. 318-320.

¹⁹Wyeth to Weld, April 3, 1835. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 189.

²⁰Ibid., p. 251.

salmon season commenced, Wyeth intended to acquire salmon not only from fishing but also from trading with Indians.

The result of this elaborate preparation proved to be much less than Wyeth had expected. It had been a very discouraging salmon season. A mere half cargo of fish was obtained. It amounted to an estimated 300 barrels of salted salmon²¹ which were sold partly in the Hawaiian Islands at twelve dollars per thirty-gallon barrel and the remainder in Boston at seventeen dollars per barrel.²²

In part, Wyeth's salmon failure could be attributed to the fact that his men seemed continually ill. Throughout the salmon season, one-third of his company was almost always on the sick list. It is difficult to determine what caused the illness among Wyeth's men, for his only comment was that, "Our people are sick and dying off like rotten sheep of billious [sic] disorders."²³ Furthermore, seventeen men had died during the summer months by accidents, murders, or natural causes, sharply reducing his effective work force.²⁴ Secondly, Wyeth had been

²¹ McLoughlin is responsible for this 1835 estimate. McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, September 30, 1835. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. 141.

²² House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd session, p. 12.

²³ Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, September 22, 1835, Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, pp. 153, 251.

²⁴ Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, September 22, 1835. Ibid., p. 153.

dubious about establishing a salmon fishery until he had observed the salmon run in season. However, he had arrived too late in 1834 for that purpose and in the forthcoming year, was forced to begin fishing activities without any prior experience. Finally, he had to turn his attention to supplying Fort Hall before the salmon season closed; and this move meant that Captain Lambert would be left in charge. In letters to eastern relatives, Wyeth frequently complained that Lambert did a poor job of salting down the fish;²⁵ and another observer related that many fish were left on the ground to rot.²⁶ Thus Lambert's poor leadership may have been an additional cause for the reduced cargo of fish.

The British reaction to Wyeth's failure was probably best summed up by a clerk working at Fort Walla Walla. He sympathetically commented: "The salmon fishing established by Wyeth has gone to the right about - I am sorry for Wyeth however impolitic it may be - as he is a fine honourable man and one I should be glad to see or hear of brighter days shining on - it is however most probable he will yet oppose the Co. in the Snake

²⁵Wyeth to Leonard Wyeth, September 22, 1835.
Ibid., p. 153. Wyeth to Parents, September 22, 1835.
Ibid., p. 154.

²⁶Sam Parker, Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains (Auburn, 1846), p. 188.

Country. . . ."27

The bulwark of Wyeth's opposition in the Snake Country was Fort Hall; and ever since its inception in 1834, Wyeth's inland operations had been beset with difficulties. Shortly after his arrival on the Columbia, Wyeth had directed Captain Thing to lead a relief party to the new fort. Twelve Hawaiians, who constituted the majority of the party, deserted, taking with them twelve horses, two mules, and two bales of goods worth \$175.²⁸ This event drastically altered Wyeth's own plans which included going inland with a twenty-man party and building two additional forts.²⁹ Instead, he found it necessary to reinforce Thing's band with members of his own party and to begin searching for the Hawaiians and the stolen supplies and animals. In the meantime, Thing continued his trip to Fort Hall, whence in the following spring (1835), with a crew of twelve men and supplies he proceeded to a branch of the Salmon River. Here, in accordance with Wyeth's plan, he intended to build a new fort.

²⁷W. G. Rae to James Hargrave, March 20, 1836. G. P. de T. Glazebrook, ed., The Hargrave Correspondence (Champlain Society Publications XXIV, Toronto, 1938), pp. 234-235.

²⁸Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 235.

²⁹Wyeth to Charles Wyeth, October 6, 1834. Ibid., p. 146.

The Blackfeet, however, attacked the infant post taking the supplies leaving only a few horses and the men unharmed.³⁰ This disastrous result was one of a series of events demonstrating that Indian hostility would not only curb Wyeth's inland activities but could actually destroy his entire operation. A year later, a visitor to Fort Hall summed up the Blackfeet menace in this manner: "This is a dangerous situation in the vicinity of the Blackfeet, a bloodthirsty Indian tribe, frequently at the gates of the fort, have destroyed many lives and stolen hundreds of horses."³¹

Besides the Salmon River debacle, Wyeth's first visit to his Snake River fort in the fall of 1835 revealed additional difficulties that had befallen his inland operations. His employees had become disgruntled with the life at Fort Hall; and since their eighteen months' service had terminated, many of them decided to try their luck as independent trappers. Fortunately, Wyeth foresaw this turn of events and had brought with him several Hawaiians and others from Sauvies Island and the May Dacre.³² However, Wyeth found other problems for which he had no quick solution. Robert Evans, agent in charge, had drunk too

³⁰Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, pp. 326-328.

³¹H. H. Spalding to William Parter, October 2, 1836. "Letters to Reverend H. H. Spalding and Mrs. Spalding, written shortly after completing their trip across the continent," in Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIII (December, 1912), 373.

³²Russell Osbourne, Journal of a Trapper, pp. 38-39.

freely and squandered a greater part of the goods left in his charge. Furthermore, he had left the fort on many occasions contrary to Wyeth's orders.³³ As if to top off these troubles, two employees had left Fort Hall with a large load of beaver skins destined for the Pacific Coast. En route, they had been shot and scalped and relieved of their precious pelts.³⁴

A further aggravation to Fort Hall's critical situation was the competition from the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1834, Alexander McKay had decided to lead a trading party east to the American trappers in the Central Rockies. Although McLoughlin had instigated the expedition, he insisted that McKay was operating as an independent trader. Sometimes it suited the Company to have its servants pose as private individuals, especially when the Company wanted to hunt and trade in American territory. To complete this fiction, McKay was to pay the cost of the entire outfit for trade and was obliged to deliver all furs collected to Fort Vancouver.³⁵ However, he arrived at the rendezvous too late to exchange his goods for furs. Misfortune failed to still his optimism; and after encountering Wyeth on his return trip, he decided to see

³³ A. Baker, Jr. to Tucker and Williams, June 17, 1835, quoted in Eaton, "Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 32.

³⁴ Townsend, Across the Rocky Mountains, p. 326.

³⁵ McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, November 16, 1836. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), pp. 168-169.

what opposition he might create in the Fort Hall area. In order to insure McKay's competition against Wyeth, McLoughlin officially transferred his private account to a Company account;³⁶ and with full Company backing, McKay proceeded to build an opposing fort at the mouth of the Boise River in the winter of 1834-35. According to McLoughlin, the sole purpose of Fort Boise was to intercept any Nez Perces that might be attracted to Fort Hall.³⁷ However, a later visitor to this area described the functions of Fort Boise somewhat differently: "From it [Fort Boise] the Hudson's Bay Company sent their trading parties over the country south, in advance and rear and around every movement of Wyeth. And by using liberally the fund laid by annually for that purpose they undersold the American. . . ."38

However convincing the above statement may sound, it is difficult to pinpoint just how McKay's opposition to Wyeth injured Fort Hall. In fact what little evidence there is, indicates a slightly different picture. For example, McKay spent the winter seasons of 1834-35 and

³⁶McLoughlin to McKay, October 4, 1834. Ibid., p. 169. McLoughlin to John McLeod, May 10, 1836. Ibid., p. 169. "I have as Mr. McKay requested transferred his outfit of last year to the Company and he will be credited with his wages and if the Expedition turns out well it will be taken into account."

³⁷Ibid., p. 349, stated in the biography of Thomas McKay, Appendix B.

³⁸Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies in Early Western Travels, ed. Rubin G. Thwaites (Cleveland, 1906), XXVIII, p. 326.

1835-36 in the vicinity of Fort Hall, receiving trade goods from Wyeth's post on several occasions. Specifically, on February 16, 1835, he received, "Flat Head Equipment . . . for Ind trade & use" worth \$292.65.³⁹ If McKay was a competitor, no one at the Fort seemed to mind. Secondly, an examination of the Fort Hall ledgers revealed that nearly one hundred and fifty men had accounts at the post.⁴⁰ Such a large number of men on the books would tend to indicate that Fort Hall was doing a reasonably good business. However, there is no information available as to what percentage of the total trade Fort Hall had as opposed to Fort Boise. In fact, the only figures available relate to McKay's expeditions during 1834-35 and 1836-37.⁴¹ They returned profits to the Company of £ 411 and £ 997, respectively. Although this insufficient evidence seems to indicate that McKay might not have seriously affected operations at Fort Hall, Wyeth (writing in 1839) felt that the final failure of Fort Hall was in part due to McKay's establishment of Fort Boise and the continual presence of McKay's brigade in the Snake River Country around Fort Hall "with a especial view to injure its trade."⁴²

³⁹Beidleman, "Nat Wyeth's Fort Hall," p. 232.

⁴⁰McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, October 31, 1837, McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), pp. 208-210.

⁴¹Eaton, "Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 112.

⁴²House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 20.

Whatever the real reasons were for Fort Hall's critical situation, one point was vitally clear to Wyeth when he returned to the Pacific Coast in 1836. His present position was untenable. New arrangements had to be made in order to continue any hopes he might have for a successful business venture in the Oregon Country. With this realistic appraisal of his present situation, he proposed a new agreement to McLoughlin of May 20, 1836. He wished to secure supplies from the Company at an advance of seventy-five per cent on prime cost, to hire men and horses at stipulated prices and to have the Company guarantee to purchase all his furs at £ 1 per pelt. Beaver skins weighing less than one pound would be considered as half beavers and prices on other types of furs would be determined at a later date. Wyeth was even willing to abandon Fort Hall if required, and would in no case trade with any Indians or freemen below his fort on the Snake River. Furthermore, he would not establish any posts on the Columbia or any of its branches without the consent of the Hudson's Bay Company. Indeed, he would confine his operations to the "Upper Waters of the Snake River and to the Countries to the South and South east of the line of demarcation which should be distinctly drawn."⁴³

⁴³Wyeth to McLoughlin, May 5, 1836. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), pp. 340-341.

Once again, McLoughlin would agree to Wyeth's terms only with a stipulation. The American would have to abandon Fort Hall and transfer it to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴⁴ Apparently, McLoughlin and Wyeth had had previous discussions about these proposals and had actually arrived at a private agreement which was to become effective after approval by London officials. For in special orders to Chief Trader McLeod on May 7, McLoughlin instructed him to give Wyeth "an opportunity to specify the goods he would like to have delivered in the spring of 1837."⁴⁵ Furthermore, McLeod was to "establish a common tariff for the Snake Fort [Fort Boise] and Fort Hall at a level low enough to offer Indians from Walla Walla no inducement to bring their furs there in hopes of higher prices."⁴⁶

In a letter to the Governor and Committee, McLoughlin outlined his reasons for a positive recommendation of Wyeth's proposals.⁴⁷ He felt that Wyeth was determined to make his last stand in the Snake Country at Fort Hall. The agreement would not only rid the Company of Wyeth's opposition in this area but also allow the British

⁴⁴ McLoughlin's comments upon Wyeth's letter, ibid., p. 341.

⁴⁵ Mr. Chief Trader McLeod's Instructions, May 7, 1836. Ibid., p. cxi.

⁴⁶ Galbraith, The H.B.C., pp. 106-107.

⁴⁷ McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, June 17, 1836. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), p. 150.

concern to have an agent in a country which McLoughlin believed would soon become American. A refusal on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company would compel Wyeth to look elsewhere for his goods, thus introducing a new competitive force in the Snake Country. Once again, McLoughlin seemed to overestimate Wyeth's potential danger.

In addition to these reasons given London officials, McLoughlin might have had other motives for wanting to help Wyeth. The two men had been extremely friendly despite their competitive relationship. A comparison with the treatment Bonneville received at the hands of the Company reveals a striking contrast. Bonneville had appeared in the Oregon Country in 1832 to launch a three-year career of trading and trapping; and he was opposed vigorously in typical Company fashion. Late in 1834, he arrived at Fort Walla Walla requesting supplies; but Pambrum refused him. The clerk informed Bonneville that the Company would "do nothing which should facilitate or encourage the visits of other traders among the Indians in that part of the country."⁴⁸

However, Pambrum sold Bonneville a roll of tobacco and some dried goods at prices paid by freemen. When McLoughlin heard of what Pambrum had done, he informed the clerk that the transaction was "injudicious" and proceeded to explain "the error he had committed" in

⁴⁸Irving, Captain Bonneville, p. 261.

trading with the opposition.⁴⁹ McLoughlin's treatment of Bonneville would have been applauded by Company officials as being the correct procedure while his arrangements with Wyeth could only be described as being against Company policy. This contrast in the treatment received by these two Americans seems to indicate that there was more behind Wyeth's agreement with McLoughlin than the chief factor cared to admit to Company officials in London.

Whatever this mysterious element may have been, the agreement itself never became effective. Wyeth left on June 19, 1836, for Fort Hall and after a short visit, proceeded East by way of Taos and the Arkansas River, withdrawing forever from competition with the Hudson's Bay Company. McLoughlin's policy seemed vindicated; and he could write London with satisfaction that "Wyeth is obliged to withdraw, the American trappers are Receding from us - our Returns have not decreased and our Books show our profits have not Diminished."⁵⁰

The final consideration Wyeth had to face was the disposal of Fort Hall and his post on Sauvies Island. Captain Thing was authorized to engage with the Hudson's Bay Company agents for the sale of Fort Hall and its

⁴⁹ McLoughlin to Governor and Committee, October 31, 1837. McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters (1825-1838), pp. 195-196.

⁵⁰ McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, November 16, 1836. Ibid., p. 171.

accoutrements. He sold the fort, its furs, and supplies for \$8,179.98.⁵¹ In addition, he sold a number of traps and horses to the American Fur Company, receiving \$1,000 for twenty-five horses, \$552 for twenty-two traps, \$9.12-1/2 for six pack saddles, and \$138 for three horses and three traps.⁵² With respect to the post on Sauvies Island, Wyeth directed C. M. Walker "to lease it to some trusty person for 15 years unless sooner reclaimed."⁵³ However, the Hudson's Bay Company made no proposal concerning this post; and it was subsequently left unattended, to become overrun by future Oregon settlers.

⁵¹Grant, "Fort Hall under the Hudson's Bay Company, 1837-1856," p. 35.

⁵²Beidleman, "Nat Wyeth's Fort Hall," p. 248.

⁵³Wyeth to J. G. Palfrey, December 13, 1847. Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 255. "It remained only to close the active business which was done by paying every debt and returning every man who deserved, to the place whence he was taken . . ."

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, there were many factors contributing to Wyeth's commercial defeat in the Oregon Country. In the first place, the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company lacked the necessary capital to carry out the long-term financing needed to establish its fur trade and salmon fishing operations. And in the second, it was opposed by the Hudson's Bay Company, whose activities stretched half-way around the earth, whose system was based on 160 years of experience in the fur business, and whose headquarters were located in London, the financial capital of the world. Moreover, Wyeth's eastern backers were unwilling to invest additional amounts until positive results were achieved. Indeed, Wyeth felt that his enterprise must be terminated because "those who are now engaged in it [with me] are not the men to make it so. The smallest loss makes them 'fly [off] the handle' and such can rarely succeed in a new buisness [sic]."¹ Thus with financial backers who were unwilling to make additional investments in a venture which might take years to develop,

¹Wyeth to Frederic Tudor, September, 1835.
Wyeth's Correspondence and Journals, p. 150.

Wyeth's whole undertaking was in trouble from the outset.

Furthermore, the refusal of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to accept Wyeth's goods played a vital part in the failure of his scheme. Whether Wyeth could have averted this calamity is doubtful. Surely he had no control over William Sublette's changed plans to operate in the Central Rockies; and he could not foresee Milton Sublette's return home while on the trail West. Nevertheless, he made a serious blunder by informing Fitzpatrick that Milton Sublette would not be present at the rendezvous. Thus in this case, he might have been able to forestall the impending disaster at the rendezvous.

Besides the Rocky Mountain Fur Company contract, Wyeth's program rested upon the successful establishment of his salmon fishery. The failure of this operation must be in part imputed to the ill luck suffered by Captain Lambert on his voyage to the Pacific Northwest. His late arrival meant that no salmon returns could be made the first year; and since Wyeth's whole scheme rested precariously upon limited capital, his tenuous hold in the Oregon Country was further aggravated; and his position with eastern backers increasingly undermined. Moreover, Wyeth began the 1835 salmon season with no knowledge of how fishing activities should be carried out; and he was forced to turn the project over to an equally

inexperienced man, Captain Lambert, whose talent for salmon curing was highly questionable. As if these difficulties were not enough, one-third of Wyeth's men were continually on the sick list and seventeen of them died during the salmon season, sharply reducing the effective workforce. Thus a combination of bad luck and inexperience caused the eventual ruin of Wyeth's salmon fishery.

Another factor usually attributed to Wyeth's failure was the competition of the Hudson's Bay Company. One historian, for example, has seen the building of Fort Boise and its deflecting of the Indian trade from Fort Hall, as the most decisive element in the British opposition.² This conclusion hardly seems justified when one considers that nine-tenths of the furs acquired by Fort Hall came from white men. Even if the Indian trade had been deflected, it is doubtful that Fort Hall would have suffered seriously. In fact, when Wyeth returned to Missouri in 1836, he brought with him 1,100 beaver furs³ from Fort Hall, returns which would indicate that operations at the inland post had been fairly successful from the standpoint of collecting furs. Furthermore, Fort Hall continued to have accounts with 150 trappers; and even McKay purchased supplies from the post. Thus it would be difficult to prove in concrete terms that the British

²Overmeyer, "Nathaniel Wyeth," p. 46.

³Eaton, "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," p. 109.

concern had seriously injured Wyeth's fur gathering operations.

A much more determined external force was the Blackfeet Indians. They had successfully prevented Wyeth from building additional forts in the Snake Country and had continually harassed Fort Hall by stealing horses and murdering wayward hunters. Although one cannot calculate in absolute amounts the losses caused by the Blackfeet in terms of supplies, horses, and men, yet numerous examples of Blackfeet hostility tend to indicate that their presence in the vicinity of Fort Hall proved costly to Wyeth.

In addition to Blackfeet hostility, Wyeth's inland operations were affected by his delegation of authority to individuals who were generally unreliable. A good example would be Robert Evans, who had been placed in charge of Fort Hall. He drank heavily and squandered a greater part of the goods left in his possession. Furthermore, he continued to allow McKay the right to purchase supplies even though the Hudson's Bay man built an opposing fort.

To top off his poor judgment in entrusting authority, Wyeth selected a completely inexperienced man, Captain Joseph Thing, as his second in command. By contrast, the Hudson's Bay Company so highly organized their fur business that no one would be placed in charge of important transactions who had not undergone a severe apprenticeship.

Wyeth had no such program; and Captain Thing clearly illustrated this point. The latter was aware of his own shortcomings and felt that "a man wants two or three years experience in this wild place to know how to do business in it, everyone when first in the country knows nothing of the ways and means of the people, to defraud, cheat and steal as is the custom of the Mountain Boys . . . lying stealing and cheating is the mottos of the boys in this country, they are certainly a very uncooth set, honesty hardly dare show his head."⁴

Indeed, the results of Captain Thing's inexperience were quite obvious. He lost twelve Hawaiians placed under his charge and was responsible for the Salmon River debacle. In each instance, valuable supplies and horses were stolen; and in this fact lies the real cause for the failure of Wyeth's inland operations. Since his white tariff prevented any profit from selling furs, Wyeth depended primarily upon returns from supplies. Certainly such events as Evans's poor management of the goods left in his charge and his excessive drinking, Blackfeet hostility at Salmon River and around Fort Hall, the theft of supplies by Thing's Hawaiians, and the deaths of trappers who owed money at Fort Hall for their supplies, sharply

⁴Joseph Thing to Tucker and Williams, July, 1836. Ibid., pp. 110-111.

reduced any possibility Wyeth may have had for profit. Thus Wyeth's failure in the Pacific Northwest could be ascribed to his poor judgment in selecting subordinates, hostile Indians, a lack of proper financial backing, his own inexperience in the salmon fishing, and the tremendous amount of misfortunes which befell him.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

As has been demonstrated throughout the above discussion, the endeavor of Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth to set up a successful mercantile empire in the Pacific Northwest touched upon many aspects of the American fur trade. His commercial efforts brought him into contact with the old Boston Northwest and China trade, the cutthroat competition of the mountain men in the Central Rockies, and the fur monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Oregon Country. The scholar who wishes to evaluate Wyeth's eventual failure must piece together the final picture from a variety of sources related to these three major phases of the fur trade. The purpose of this essay is to indicate the significant literature which would be necessary for such an undertaking.

I. Primary Materials. Descriptions of Wyeth's expeditions have appeared in several publications, particularly important being his own account, The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth 1831-6, ed. F. G. Young (Eugene, 1899); and the conflicting interpretations of his ability as a leader on the first trip West presented in John B. Wyeth, Oregon: A Short History of a Long Journey, in Early Western Travels, ed.

Rubin G. Thwaites, 32 vols. (Cleveland, 1905), Vol. XXI, pp. 17-107, and John Ball, Letters from the Rocky Mountains, in The Call of the Columbia, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver, 1934), pp. 166-174.

John B. Wyeth, a deserter from the first expedition, was aided in writing his volume by Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, who wished to discourage emigration from New England to the West. In order to vindicate his own actions and further Waterhouse's anti-Oregon propaganda, John B. Wyeth severely criticized his cousin Nathaniel's handling of the whole western enterprise. By contrast, John Ball presented quite a favorable impression of Wyeth through his letters home. Indeed, both he and Wyeth, were inspired in their determination to go West by the same man, Hall J. Kelley, whose major writings are collected in Hall J. Kelley on Oregon, ed. F. W. Powell (Princeton, 1832). Ball's daughters also compiled from their father's notes an Autobiography of John Ball (Grand Rapids, 1925) and a daily journal, "Across the Continent Seventy Years Ago", Oregon Historical Quarterly, III (June, 1902), 82-106. However, these works appear to lean heavily on John B. Wyeth's book.

On the second expedition, several members of the party recorded favorable impressions of Wyeth. The most detailed of these observations is the account of John K. Townsend. His experiences have been published

in several forms, including his Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains, in Early Western Travels, ed. Rubin G. Thwaites, 32 vols. (Cleveland, 1905), Vol. XXI, pp. 107-369; and "Extracts from a Private Journal Kept by Mr. John Townsend . . .," originally appearing in Waldie's Select Circulating Library for 1835 and reprinted in The Call of the Columbia, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver, 1934), pp. 184-226. Townsend's original journals and letters concerning the trip are at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Townsend's account should be supplemented by the following (in the order of their importance): Jason Lee, "Diary of Jason Lee," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XVII (June, September, and December, 1916), 116-146, 240-266, and 397-430; Osborne Russell, Journal of a Trapper or Nine Years in the Rockies, 1834-1843, ed. Aubrey L. Haines (Portland, 1955); James B. Marsh, Four Years in the Rockies; or The Adventures of Isaac P. Rose (New Castle, Pa., 1884); William Marshall Anderson, "Anderson's Narrative of a Ride to the Rocky Mountains in 1834," Frontier and Midland, XIX (Autumn, 1938), 54-63; Charles Henry Carey, "The Mission Record Book of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Willamette Station, Oregon Territory, North America, Commenced in 1834," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXIII (September, 1922), 232-238; P. L. Edwards, letter June 23, 1834 in the Niles Register, Baltimore, October 11, 1834, Vol. 47, p. 92; and Daniel Lee and J. H. Frost, Ten Years

in Oregon (New York, 1844).

A number of the preceding sources also include material concerning Wyeth's relations to the Hudson's Bay Company. However, the most valuable sources for this subject are John McLoughlin, The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee: First Series, 1825-1838, ed. E. E. Rich (Toronto, 1941) and Wyeth's report to Congress dealing with British activities in the Pacific Northwest, Caleb Cushing, "Report Concerning an Inquiry into the Expediency of Establishing a Post on the Columbia . . .," House Report 101, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, pp. 1-20. Additional British observations on Wyeth's operations in Oregon can be found in James Hargrave, The Hargrave Correspondence 1821-1843, ed. G. P. de T. Glazebrook (Toronto, 1938). McLoughlin's correspondence is the only primary source available that contains information about Wyeth's agreements with the Hudson's Bay Company during the years of his second expedition to Oregon; and Wyeth's review of the Company's activities in Oregon clearly depicts the methods utilized by the British concern in their competition with Americans.

For a general background on British policy towards American competition west of the Rockies prior to Wyeth's arrival, George Simpson, Fur Trade and Empire, ed. Frederick Merk (Cambridge, 1931) and "Snake Country Expedition, 1824-25: An Episode of Fur Trade and Empire," Mississippi

Valley Historical Review, XXI (June, 1934), 49-62 are essential. Both of these sources are necessary in determining British policy towards Americans in the Snake Country, where Wyeth's inland operations were established at Fort Hall.

Certain individual documents are especially useful in understanding Wyeth's activities in the Central Rockies. They include the two Indian trading licenses issued to him: Lewis Cass, "Licenses to Trade with Indians," House Document 104, 22nd Congress, 2nd Session and Dickerson, Mahlon, and Herring, "Abstract of Licenses Issued to Persons to Trade with Indians (1834) . . .," House Document 97, 23rd Congress, 2nd Session. These documents are essential in assessing the size of Wyeth's enterprise in comparison to such men as Benjamin Bonneville and Bill Sublette, supplier of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

For further information on Wyeth's business connections with Bonneville and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, one should examine Washington Irving, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville U.S.A., ed. Edgeley W. Todd (Norman, 1961) and a copy of the original contract between Nathaniel Wyeth and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Big Horn River, August 14, 1833 (Photostatic Copy, Missouri Historical Society). Irving's account should be considered a primary source, although it was written from the journals and correspondence of not only Benjamin Bonneville but also Nathaniel Wyeth.

Furthermore, for a general background on mountain life during the rendezvous period and some observations on Fort Hall, certain accounts of trappers and travelers are helpful. Primary among these would be Zenas Leonard, Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader and Trapper, 1831-1836, ed. W. F. Wagner (Cleveland, 1904). His report on prices of mountain supplies in 1833 is the only source for such information. Leonard's observations on mountain life can be supplemented by the adventures of Joe Meek as told to Frances Fuller Victor, The River of the West (Hartford and Toledo, 1870). This account should be read with great care because numerous inconsistencies appear when it is compared with other journals of the period. Finally some observations concerning Fort Hall and its British Competition can be found in Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies, in Early Western Travels, ed. Rubin G. Thwaites (Cleveland, 1906), Vols. XXVIII-XXIX; Sam Parker, Journal of an Exploring Tour beyond the Rocky Mountains (Auburn, 1846); and "Letters of Reverend H. H. Spalding and Mrs. Spalding written shortly after completing their trip across the continent," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIV (December, 1912), 377-379.

II. Secondary Materials. Any study of the American fur trade must begin with Hiram Chittenden, A History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West, 2 Vols. (Academic Reprints, Stanford, 1954). As an over-all

study of the trade, this work is the most complete and useful study made to date. However, since new source material has come to light since Chittenden wrote (1902), it appears that his efforts need some modification on points of detail.

These volumes should be supplemented by certain studies, dealing specifically with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Wyeth's principal business connection in the Central Rockies. The best starting point would be Harrison Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific 1822-1829 (Chicago, 1918), which emphasizes the exploratory work done by the mountain men. In addition, Dale reprints several documents of first importance such as Ashley's narrative of his expedition in 1825 and the two journals of Jedediah Smith's California expeditions.

A more complete history of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company (1822-1834) can be found in Don Berry, A Majority of Scoundrels (New York, 1961). Berry's work is based primarily on the wealth of source material contained in the archives of the Missouri Historical Society; and he reprints many contracts, agreements, and financial data which are essential in understanding the business relationship between Wyeth and Milton Sublette. Although Berry has written a good deal about Bill Sublette's connection with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, the best

authority on this subject remains John Sunder, Bill Sublette, Mountain Man (Norman, 1959). Sunder's analysis of Sublette's competition with the American Fur Company clearly reveals why the mountain man opposed Wyeth as a supplier of his brother's company. Finally, for a history of the fur trade after the collapse of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Bernard DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri (Boston, 1947) makes an excellent introduction.

Another aspect of the American fur trade touched upon by Wyeth was the old Boston Northwest and China Trade. A general history of this trade from its inception in 1790 can be found in Samuel Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts (Boston, 1932). Morison has also written several articles on this subject, particularly useful being "Boston Traders in Hawaiian Islands," Washington Historical Quarterly, XII (July, 1921), 166-201; "Nova Albion and New England," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXVII (March, 1927), 1-17; and "Columbia River Salmon Trade, 1830" Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXVII (June, 1927), 111-132. In the latter study, he reprints several letters from the correspondence of Josiah Marshall, owner of the brig Owhyhee. This vessel, in 1830, returned to Boston from the Pacific Northwest with fifty-three barrels of salmon, an event of special significance to Wyeth. More detailed accounts of the voyage of Marshall's vessel include F. W. Howay's study of the ship's log in "The Brig Owhyhee on

Columbia, 1829-30," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXV (March, 1934), 10-21, and Frances Fuller Victor, "Flotsom and Jetsom of the Pacific . . . The Owhyhee, the Sultana and the May Dacre," Oregon Historical Quarterly, II (January, 1901), 36-54. In addition, for a tabulation for the amount of sea otter collected for the China trade between 1825-1852 along the Washington Coast, see Victor B. Scheffer, "The Sea Otter on the Washington Coast," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, XXXI (July, 1940), 371-388.

All of the secondary sources mentioned thus far have been concerned with Wyeth only as a small episode in the exciting story of the American fur trade, however, three scholars have focused their attention specifically upon him. Philip Henry Overmeyer has compiled a short biography of each member on Wyeth's first expedition in "Members of First Wyeth Expedition," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXVI (March, 1935) 95-101; and he has traced the routes taken by Wyeth on his two trips West in "Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth," Washington Historical Quarterly, XXIV (March, 1935), 28-48. A second writer, W. C. Eaton has analyzed Wyeth's second expedition in "Nathaniel Wyeth's Oregon Expeditions," Pacific Historical Review (June, 1935) 101-113. Eaton had access to the Letterbook of Henry Hall and the Letters of Charles Wyeth, containing unpublished material about Wyeth's financial operations in Oregon. This study should be supplemented by John S. Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869

(Berkley & Los Angeles, 1957). Galbraith had access to the Hudson's Bay Company archives and has unearthed material concerning Wyeth's agreements with the British concern which are not to be found in any of the primary sources including McLoughlin's correspondence.

Finally, Richard Beidleman has made a detailed examination of the establishment of Fort Hall in "Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall," Oregon Historical Quarterly, LVIII (December, 1957), 197-250. Perhaps the greatest value of this article is the fact that Beidleman reprints the instructions to Robert Evans by Wyeth and the tariff, included as a preface to the first volume of the Fort Hall ledgers now in the manuscript collections of the Oregon Historical Society. In order to understand the tariff one should examine Carl P. Russell, Guns, on the Frontier (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1957) which contains a wealth of information on the types of guns used in the Central Rockies during the rendezvous period; and for the history of Fort Hall after Wyeth's departure for the East in 1836, see Louis S. Grant, "Fort Hall under the Hudson's Bay Company, 1837-1856," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XLI (March, 1940), 34-39.

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