

be open by the sea. But it was a move the difficulties and dangers of which were appalling. All the previous history of the world had enforced the principle that broad belts of uninhabitable country and high mountain ranges constituted the natural limits of national territory. To overturn this god Terminus and lead the way to a wider and higher national destiny called for effort that was heroic. Wyeth and Whitman will always stand as representative American heroes because of their resolute initiative and achievement in connection with this American problem of expansion to continental proportions.

Let us note the elements of the situation at the opening of the year 1832, when Nathaniel J. Wyeth had first matured his plans for an expedition to the Oregon Territory. A quarter of a century had elapsed since Lewis and Clark had threaded the valleys of the upper Missouri and followed the waters of the Columbia to the western ocean. An accurate account of the character of the country and its inhabitants had been immediately given to the world. The Winships in 1809 and then Astor in 1811 made attempts at occupation with trading posts. Nearly twenty years had now gone since these ventures had suffered dismal discomfiture. These failures had not provoked renewed efforts for the conquest of the difficulties involved in the occupation of the Columbia basin. True, there had been immediately a considerable development of fur-trading activities with St. Louis as a base. Annual expeditions by two or three companies were made to the headwaters of the rivers flowing to the Pacific. Now and then American trapping and trading parties would penetrate to California and far down the tributaries of the Columbia. But American enterprise seemed to quail before the difficulties confronting any project for securing such a foothold in the Pacific Northwest as could become the nucleus of a colony. There was no promise in the posts of the fur companies scattered sporadically through the Rocky mountains.

The English were our only persistent rivals for the possession of the Columbia basin. Our claim to it was fortified by priority in discovery, exploration and occupation. Quite different, however, was the outcome of their ventures for joint occupation from the disasters which befell ours. In 1813 the British Northwest Company purchased what was little more than the wreck of Astor's outfit at Astoria. A few months later an English man of war arrived there to formally seize what was already British in sympathy. By the terms of Article I of the treaty of Ghent, 1815, all places "taken by either party from the other during the war" were to be restored, and accordingly in October of 1818 an American agent, a Mr. Prevost, received the nominal restitution of what had been Astoria, renamed Fort George. The American occupation of the Columbia basin had dwindled to what was represented in the ceremony of hauling down the British flag and running up