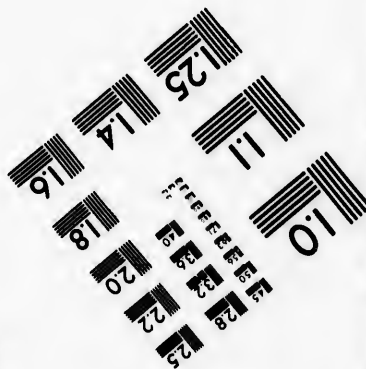
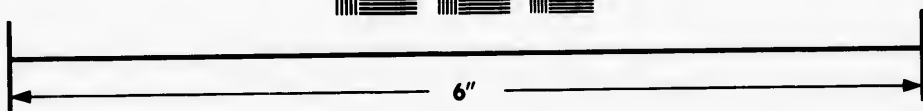
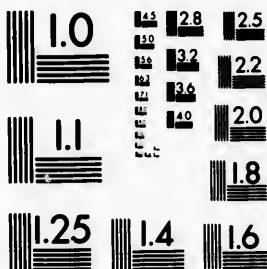


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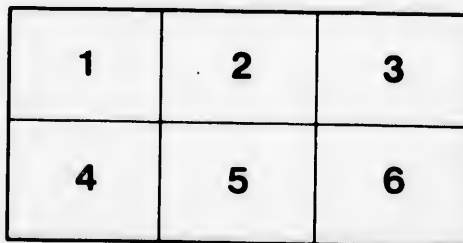
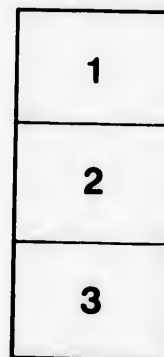
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NATHANIEL J. WYETH, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR OREGON.

By John A. Wyeth, M.D.

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NATHANIEL J. WYETH, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR OREGON.*

BY JOHN A. WYETH, M.D.

IN 1540 the eyes of civilized man first rested upon Oregon, when Cabrillo and Ferrer, sailing under the Spanish flag, coasted along until they reached as high as Cape Blanco, 43° north latitude, which Cape Blanco, in the year of our Lord 1892, is in Curry County, Oregon, and only a few miles north of the California line.

If Captains Cabrillo and Ferrer thrilled with enthusiasm in contemplating the possibilities of this portion of the rim of the North American continent, they successfully concealed it in their report to

* For many data in this article the author is indebted to the following sources: *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clarke*; Washington Irving's *Astoria*; the same author's *Buenaville*; *Oregon*, by William Barrows, in the "American Commonwealth Series"; *Oregon: a Short History of a Long Journey*, by John B. Wyeth; the Reports from the Census Bureau in Washington City.

that king of theirs, Charles V., under whose reign Cortez pillaged Mexico, Pizarro robbed Peru, and Almagro carried back to Spain all that was portable of Chili, for nearly two hundred years elapsed before another white man gazed upon it! Or perhaps Charles was too busy to settle Oregon then, since he had settlements of a bloody kind with Francis I. of France, with Germany, the Netherlands, Tunis, Algiers, and a single round with his Holiness, Pope Clement VII., spending more money in these European pastimes than his able lieutenants could steal from the murdered natives of the Western World.

Again a Spaniard, one Juan Perez, in 1774, sailed as high along the coast as the 54th degree of north latitude, discovered Nootka Sound, and theoretically planted the flag of Castile and Arragon over this



NATHANIEL J. WYETH.

quarter of the earth and sea, while his colleague, Bodega, a year later, took in the 58th degree of north latitude, together with the remaining earth and sea, including Mount St. Elias, which was in sight.

Up to this point everything was Spain's, but north of this a greedy Russian, who had long been engaged in building a town on the Gulf of Finland, had put in a prior claim, having hired a Dane, by name Vitus Behring, to go cruising along the northeast coast of Siberia. This Dane discovered a sea which was named for him, and which the United States bought, or was supposed to have bought, October 18, 1867. Anyhow, they do not allow any other nation to go fishing in it. Behring also found out that it was only a few

miles across from Siberia to America, and on July 18, 1741, he "discovered" the coast of Alaska as far down as Mount St. Elias, and claimed everything for his master, Peter the Great, or rather for Elizabeth, the daughter, for Peter had been a saint since 1725. Honors were about even as between Spain and Russia, but in 1778, Captain James Cook, a famous English navigator, who was afterward fatally run through the middle with a javelin by a Sandwich-Islander, and then devoured in true cannibal style, came coasting along these shores, saw that the country was good, and evidently told it, for in 1785 a school of British trading vessels swarmed in these seas, and they have swarmed there ever since.

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In 1790 the French navigators got up courage enough to get that far from home, and entered into competition for trade on the northwest coast. It was, however, not until 1800 that France put in her claim for Oregon, by virtue of her acquisition of the Spanish title to that vaguely bounded territory, "Louisiana."

In 1791 seven American vessels found their way to this quarter of the globe, and one of these on May 11, 1792 (George Washington had been three years President), commanded by a Massachusetts Yankee, Captain Gray, who distinguished himself by discovering and sailing into a broad and swift stream, "the waters of which were so perfectly fresh that the casks of the ship were filled within ten miles of the Pacific." He named it Columbia River, after his vessel of that name. Of course he landed and claimed the country all around, including the rivers and a fair share of the Pacific Ocean.

Meanwhile the Anglo-Saxons of the British Isles and from the United States were pushing into the Western wilderness from the rapidly filling Eastern country. As far back as 1778 one Frobisher, an agent of the Hudson Bay Company, had established a trading-station on Athabasca Lake, 59° north latitude, which in 1778 was transferred to the extreme western end of this lake and named Fort Chippeawayan. About this time there came hither Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who, in 1789, footed it to Great Slave Lake, built some canoes, and finding a good-sized stream flowing out of this lake, floated down and on until he found himself on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, near the northwest corner of the American continent. Not wishing to be caught there in winter, he hurried back as he came, and reached Chippeawayan on the one hundred and second day after leaving it. Like Keats, he "wrote his name in water," and as long as water runs down Mackenzie River, both will be remembered of men. Three years thereafter this danger-loving Scot left this same fort, canoed it up Peace River, got "snowed in" in the Rocky Mountains, camped there all winter; in May of the next year crossed the "Great Divide," and reached the Pacific Ocean, 52° north latitude, July, 1793, *the first white man to cross the North American continent*. On a rocky eminence he engraved: "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada by land, the twenty-second of

July, Seventeen hundred and ninety-three."

In 1804 Lewis and Clarke started on their famous expedition, reaching the Columbia River November, 1805, and returning to St. Louis September, 1806.

In 1806 Simon Frazer, a Canadian, settled on Frazer River, and is claimed to have been the first white settler west of the Rocky Mountains. In 1808 Mr. Henry, of the American Fur Company, established Post Henry on Lewis River. Two years later Mr. Wilson Price Hunt, with about sixty persons, left St. Louis, and travelling overland, fifteen months later reached the mouth of the Columbia, and built Astoria. He was driven out by the British in 1813, and Astoria was rechristened Fort George. In 1818 it again fell into the hands of the United States, and the name of Astoria was restored. In 1820 a resolution was introduced in Congress to establish a chain of trading-posts on the Missouri and Columbia, and to secure immigration to Oregon from the United States and China. In 1824 President Monroe advised the military occupation of this territory, and President Adams, a year later, repeated this advice in his message. The gallant pioneer and trader Ashley had, however, paved the way for military occupation, for in 1823 he reached the head-waters of the Platte; in 1824 established a fort near Salt Lake, to which, for purposes of defence, in 1826, he conveyed a 6-pounder cannon. In 1827 Pilecher, bent on a trading expedition, left Council Bluffs with 45 men and 100 horses, struck the upper waters of the Columbia at Fort Colville (now in Washington), went northeast by the Columbia, recrossed the Rocky Mountains, and in 1829 descended the Missouri.

At this date, 1827, there was not in the possession of an American citizen a single settlement or trading-post in all this vast region. The ownership of the country was in warm dispute. It had been claimed in turn by Spain, Russia, Great Britain, France, and the United States. In the struggle for possession prior to 1827 Spain had sold out to France; the latter, for a consideration paid Napoleon Bonaparte, had disposed of her interests to the United States, while Russia had retired within the icy circle of Alaska. The battle was now between the British Empire and the United States. The Anglo-Saxons were holding on. Time and

time again it seemed that war could not be averted. That blood was not shed was probably due to the statesmanship of Webster, and that eloquent champion of peace, Rufus Choate. Although the Columbia River was discovered by Captain Gray in 1792, the treaty which settled upon the 49th parallel as the boundary line between British Columbia and the United States was not signed until July 17, 1846, nor were all the details closed until left to the arbitration of Emperor William of Germany, who gave the final decision October 21, 1871.

In 1830 the excitement over the occupation of Oregon was running high. Newspapers were teeming with articles descriptive of its vast resources, and the inducements it offered for settlement. Congress had been asked for the authority to establish there a territorial government, or an independent State governed by Americans. Others derided the effort to try to colonize and hold this remote region, and the question was asked, "Was Oregon worth winning?" Oregon, with its 251,000 square miles of territory, its hundreds of miles of sea-coast, its fertile valleys, wide ranges of pasture-lands, rich deposits of minerals, its magnificent rivers sweeping from mountains of perpetual snow with impetuous haste to pay their tribute to the great Pacific! The verdict of three-quarters of a million inhabitants to-day is that it was worth the struggle.

I have before me the private correspondence and diary of a man who in 1831 was far-sighted enough to see the value of acquiring a territory so vast and important, and that to acquire it, it was necessary to colonize it with Americans.

Though but twenty-nine years of age, with a courage, skill, and energy which challenge admiration and deserved success, he organized a movement for the colonization of Oregon, and between 1831 and 1836 led two expeditions across the American continent in the effort to found a State in the great Northwest.

With what enthusiasm he was filled to give up a prosperous business, a happy home commanding the comforts of life in the centre of American civilization, to part from a loving wife, family, and friends, and tempt fate in a perilous journey of thousands of miles through trackless forests, across seemingly boundless prairies, over rugged and unknown

mountains, at every turn exposed to dangers from hostile savages as brave as they were cunning and merciless! No one can read this old and musty diary, stained with frequent wettings from overturned bull-boats or drenching rains, in many places illegible by actual wearing out of the leaves by friction upon each other, without paying the tribute of profound respect and admiration for the man.

Of him Washington Irving wrote: "His enterprise was prosecuted with a spirit, intelligence, and perseverance that merited success. All the details that we have met with prove him to be no ordinary man. He appears to have the mind to conceive and the energy to execute extensive and striking plans. He had once more reared the American flag in the lost domains of Astoria; and had he been enabled to maintain the footing he had so gallantly effected, he might have regained for his country the opulent trade of the Columbia, of which our statesmen have negligently suffered us to be dispossessed."

This extract from his diary, written January 11, 1835, when "snowed in" in the mountains, at last convinced that after all he had done or could do Oregon must be given up, speaks with a pathos deeper than I can command:

"The crackling of the falling trees and the howling of the blast are more grand than comfortable. It makes two individuals feel their insignificance in the creation to be seated under a blanket with three and one-half feet of snow about them and more coming, and no telling when it will stop. The thoughts that have run through my brain while I have been here in the snow would fill a volume; my infancy, my youth, my manhood's troubled stream, its vagaries, its plans, mixed with the gall of bitterness, and its results, viz.: under a blanket, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles from a friend, the blast howling about, smothered in snow, poor, in debt, nearly naked, and considered a visionary."

Nathaniel Wyeth lived to see Oregon a Territory of the United States, and although he died before it was admitted as a State in 1859, his last years must have been happier in the knowledge that he had done much to make the occupation of this territory possible to his fellow-countrymen.

Barrows, in his *Oregon*, pays a tribute to his genius and skill in the selection

* *Bonneville.*

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of a site for Fort Hall (Idaho), which he built in 1834.

In a letter he says: "I have built a fort on Lewis or Snake River, in latitude 43° 14' N. and longitude 113° 30', which I named Fort Hall. We manufactured a magnificent flag from some unbleached sheeting, a little red flannel, and a few blue patches, saluted it with damaged powder, and wet it in villanous alcohol, and after all it makes a very respectable appearance."

Nine years later, in 1843, when, in the race for the occupation of Oregon, Dr. Marcus Whitman led his great caravan of about two hundred wagons and eight hundred souls, he selected the route by Fort Hall, which even at that date was in the hands of the Hudson Bay Company. Barrows writes: "As this expedition turned the balance for Oregon, so Fort Hall was the pivotal point. This Fort Hall, on Lewis or Snake River, about one hundred miles north of Salt Lake City, was originally an American trading-post, built by N. J. Wyeth, but the Hudson Bay Company crowded him out by the many monopolizing and outraging means which a wilderness life made possible. Many of his traders and trappers were scattered wide; some of them were killed, and his business generally was ruined. At this point many immigrant companies had been intimidated and broken up, and so Fort Hall served as a cover for Oregon, just as a battery at the mouth of a river protects the inland city on its banks.

In later days, when the spirit was aroused for "the whole of Oregon or war," the question was raised whether it was to be taken under the walls of Quebec or on the Columbia. Neither was the place. Oregon was taken at Fort Hall.

The first indication of the proposed expedition I find is in a letter dated Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 5, 1831, written to his brother, Mr. Charles Wyeth, of Baltimore: "My plan is to go out there and carry with me what property I can spare after leaving a support for my wife," etc. On November 11th he wrote to a brother in the South for explicit instructions in regard to the cultivation of tobacco, which he hoped might be introduced and cultivated successfully in the new colony.

On December 19, 1831, he wrote from Cambridge to the Secretary of State: "Hon. Edward S. Everett: Sir,—Enclosed you have a letter from Mr. Nuttall, con-

taining in part my views in regard to this application to the Executive. I have to repeat that no view of emolument induces it, but only a desire to serve the views of the government in regard to that country. It occurred to me that the government might avail itself of my services to obtain information concerning that country, which in time would be useful. I would willingly devote a portion of my time to their service without other compensation than the respectability allotted to all those who serve their country."

To the same gentleman, on January 6, 1832: "I believe it is not lawful for armed bodies of men to pass through the country. I would beg leave to inquire of you whether any permission is required, and to obtain the same, and also permission for trading with the Indians beyond the Rocky Mountains." He also in this letter expresses the hope that the attention of Congress may be called to the subject in such manner as to induce them to act in "aiding good men to form a settlement in that region, and assume the government of the colony."

On March 11, 1832, with a company of twenty-one men, fully armed and equipped, Mr. Wyeth sailed out of Boston Harbor, and landed fifteen days later in Baltimore. From Baltimore they journeyed by rail for sixty miles to the terminus of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at the foot of the Alleghanies, and thence on foot to the nearest point on the Monongahela River, where they took a steamboat for Pittsburg. At a tavern on the mountains the proprietor refused to entertain the members of the expedition because they were *Yankees*. "The disagreement ran so high that the tavern-keeper and the Yankee captain each seized his rifle. The latter demanded lodging and refreshment, and the dispute ended in our captain sleeping in the house with three of his party, well armed, determined to defend their persons, and to insist on their rights as peaceable and inoffending travellers."* From Pittsburg the voyage was continued to St. Louis by steamboat, reaching this latter city April 18, 1832; thence by steamer to Independence, the last white settlement on the Missouri River, near the present Kansas City. Here two of the company deserted and returned to the States. From Independence, in the latter part of May, the expe-

* J. B. Wyeth, *Short Account of a Long Journey*.

dition started out across the plains, struck the Platte River (near Grand Island, Kearney County, Nebraska), followed along its bank, crossed the South Fork (Lincoln County), marched along the south bank of the North Fork of the Platte; on June 9, 1832, passed "the Chimneys" (Chimney Rock, Banner County, Nebraska); reached the Black Hills (present State of Wyoming) June 15th, and Rock Independence, on Sweet-water River (Wyoming), on the 21st. "From this time to July 2, frost each night, and snow." July 2d: "This night, at about twelve o'clock, we were attacked by Indians, probably the Blackfeet. They fired about forty shots and some arrows into the camp."

On July 8, 1832, the expedition arrived at Pierre's Hole, and remained there to July 17th, "during which time all my men but eleven left me." July 18th, "when near starting we observed two parties of Blackfeet Indians coming, about two hundred in number. A skirmish ensued, and one of the Blackfeet was killed, and his blanket and robe brought into camp. The women and children were seen flying into the mountains. The Indians made for the timber, and fortified themselves in a masterly manner. We attacked them, and continued the attack all day. There were about twenty of them killed, and thirty-two horses were found dead. They decamped during the night, leaving their lodges and many of their dead. We lost three whites killed; eight badly wounded. Ten of the Nez Percés and Flatheads (fighting on the side of the whites) were killed or mortally wounded. One of our men who was killed inside of their fort was mutilated in a shocking manner. This affair will detain us some days.*"

On July 25th the remnant of the expedition, eleven in number, with a small party of Nez Percé Indians, continued their march for the valley of the Columbia.

On the 21st of August they encountered a village of Snake Indians who were friendly. Ten days later, following the bed of a creek, "the rocks on each side closed over the top and formed a natural bridge, elevated about fifty feet."

From Pierre's Hole the route of the

* In Irving's *Bonneville* there is a thrilling description of this bloody encounter with the Blackfeet, in which Nathaniel Wyeth is spoken of in the highest terms of praise for the active part he took in the fight.

expedition was west and a little north until the Snake or Lewis River was reached, then along this stream, arriving at Fort Walla Walla, a trading station of the Hudson Bay Company, October 13, 1832, having on the way been forced to kill their horses for food. On the 19th they left Walla Walla, and travelled down the Columbia in canoes to Fort Vancouver, another station of the Hudson Bay Company, arriving there October 29, 1832. "Here I was received with the utmost kindness and hospitality by the acting Governor of the place. Our people were supplied with food and shelter from the rain, which is constant."

Scarcely without exception throughout the entire experience of Mr. Wyeth within the area controlled by the Hudson Bay Company, its officers were personally kind and courteous. It was in matters of business they were harsh, exacting, and ultimately ruinous to competition.

Later in a report to Congress he wrote, "Experience has satisfied me the entire might of this Company will be made to bear on any trader who shall attempt to prosecute his business within its reach."

He was impressed with the productive-ness of the country around Fort Vancouver on the Columbia; "They raise 4000 bushels of wheat; barley, 3000; Indian corn, 3000; potatoes, 1500; pease, 3000; and a large quantity of pumpkins. There are about eight settlers on the Multonah (Williamette), old 'engagés' of the Company. The soil is good, timber is heavy and thick, and almost impenetrable from underbrush and fallen trees."

November 4th, one of the remaining seven men of the twenty-one which left Boston eight months before died, and the others, becoming discouraged, asked to be released from their contract, which was to remain for five years in the attempt to settle Oregon. November 15, 1832, "I have now no men, and am afloat without stay or support, but in good hands, i. e., myself and Providence."

With the loss of his entire force Mr. Wyeth immediately set about to acquaint himself with the topography and resources of the country, determined to return to the States and enlist a larger and better-equipped expedition, and again seek a home and fortune in the valley of the Columbia. His will was indomitable. He

* House of Representatives, No. 101, February 16, 1839. Barrows's *Oregon*.

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believed in himself, and if success was possible he would achieve it.

By November 30th, with two men and a canoe, "I started up the Wallamet or Multonomah River" on a voyage of discovery. The diary is rich in notes concerning the topography of this region, the forests of heavy pines; "on the bottoms there is considerable oak of a kind not found in the States, of excellent quality for ship-building." "I have never seen a country of equal beauty except the Kansas country, and I doubt not it will one day sustain a large population. If this country is ever colonized, this is the point to commence." This prophecy is fulfilled, for Portland, Oregon, is built on this location. In January, 1833, having finished his expedition in the Willamette country, he volunteered to accompany a party starting to the Northeast, but the Governor would not consent, "which I interpreted into a jealousy of my motives."

Under date of January 16, 1833, from Fort Vancouver, is a letter to his parents: "After much delay and some difficulties in the shape of long marches on foot, I am at last here. You can have but little idea how much men improve in some points of character in situations like these, and if polite carriage and shrewd intellect are best acquired in the more populous parts of the earth, generous feelings are fostered in the wilds, and among savages the civilized man seems to uphold his character better than among his fellows."

To Messrs. Tucker and Williams on same date: "My men have all left me, and I am about returning across the mountains with two men that I have hired for this purpose." He left for Walla Walla February 3, 1833, arrived there on the 13th, and by April 23d was "fairly in the dangerous country. Near here two hundred Flatheads, Conterays, Ponderays, and others were killed by the Blackfeet Indians."

On the 29th he encountered a village of friendly Indians of "one hundred and sixteen lodges, containing upwards of one thousand souls." Here he remained for some days, studying the customs and character of these Indians.

April 30, 1833: "Every morning some important Indian addresses either heaven or his countrymen, exhorting them to good conduct to each other and to the

strangers among them. On Sunday there is more prayer, and nothing is done in the way of trade or games, and they seldom fish, kill game, or raise camp. Theft is a thing almost unknown among them, and is punished by flogging. The least thing, even to a bead or pin, is brought you if found, and even things we throw away are brought again to us. I think you would find among twenty whites as many scoundrels as among one thousand of these Indians. They have a mild, playful, laughing disposition, and their qualities are strongly portrayed in their countenances; they are polite and unobtrusive, and, however poor, do not beg except as pay for services. They are very brave, and fight the Blackfeet, who continually steal their horses. They wear as little clothing as the weather will permit. The women are closely covered and chaste, and the young women are good-looking."

These friendly tribes were chiefly Nez Percés and Flatheads, and evidently they had been influenced by association with missionaries, and chiefly those of the Catholic Church.

On May 5th there was some excitement among the Indians. "There is a new 'great man' here getting up in the camp, and like the rest of the world he covers his designs under the great cloak of religion. His followers are now dancing to their own vocal music, and perhaps one-fifth of the camp follow him. He is getting up some new form of religion among the Indians more simple than himself. Like others of his class, he works with the fools, women, and children first. While he is doing this the men of sense stand by and laugh; but they will soon find out that fools, women, and children form so large a majority that with a bad grace they will have to yield. These things make me think of the new lights and revivals in New England."

The Messiah craze and the ghost dances of 1890 created a little more disturbance than in 1833!

May 21st: "Snow as usual." 24th: "Rain, hail, snow, and thunder;" and then follows the only effort at being jocular in the diary. "We are so near where they make weather that they send it to us as if it cost nothing!" This jocularly is, however, short-lived, for the next entry is: "Twenty lodges of Blackfeet are now camped at our last camp;

moved seven miles." June 5th: "The 'Three Buttes' came in sight one by one, and then the *Trois Tetons*." On the 7th, "moved fifteen miles, without water the whole route; enough dust to suffocate one." 10th: An Indian was mortally gored by a buffalo; "he very composedly made his will by word of mouth, the Indians responding in concord at the end of each sentence; he appeared not in the least intimidated at the approach of death. I think the Indians die better than the whites. Perhaps they have less superstition in regard to the future, and argue that as the Deity makes them happy here, he will also hereafter, if there is existence for them."

June 15th: "Last night some Blackfeet fired into our camp." For one of the crippled Indians a novel stretcher or litter was made. "He has a good bed made on poles, the points of which, like shafts, were carried by a horse led by his wife; the hinder part, by six men and women, on their shoulders."

On July 9th he was again at Pierre's Hole, where the big battle was fought a year previous. Six days later there were new alarms that the terrible Blackfeet were upon them, but still no enemy in sight. "On this day killed thirty buffalo."

On July 18, 1833, Mr. Wyeth wrote Mr. Ermatinger: "I arrived here nine days ago, saw no Indians, but saw the bones of Mr. Moore, killed by the Blackfeet last year, and buried them. He was one of my men who left me in Pierre's Hole. A Mr. Nudd was also killed. I have letters from the States. . . Cholera has killed five thousand people in New York. . . General Jackson, President. . . Insurrection in Southern States on account of the tariff."

July 26th: "Country covered with buffalo. Shot a cow with a very young calf, which followed our mule for a long way before it discovered its mistake." 28th: "I found a grizzly in a thicket, and after firing pistol and throwing stones, he came out as though he meant fight. I gave him the shot of my rifle through the body. He then rushed on us, and I ran as fast as I could. Mr. Sublette also ran."

August 1, 1833: "Mr. Bredger sent four men to look for us, Smith, Thompson, Evans, and a half-breed. Fifteen Snake Indians came up to them, and after smoking departed. After they had gone,

Thompson, having been out hunting and fatigued from loss of sleep, was dozing. He was awakened by a noise among the horses, and, opening his eyes, the first thing that presented itself to his sight was the muzzle of a gun in the hands of an Indian. It was immediately discharged, and so near his head that the front piece of his cap alone saved his eyes from being put out by the powder. The ball entered the head outside of the eye, and breaking through the cheek-bone, lodged in the neck. While insensible an arrow was shot into him from the top of the shoulder downwards."

August 7th: "Camped on Gray Ball River. Here I found a piece of about five pounds of bituminous coal, which burned freely. Its fracture was too perfect to have come far." August 11th: "Saw four grizzlies. 12th: Arrived at Big Horn River, and went out to get bull-hides to make boat."

This boat was eighteen feet long, and was made in this way: Slender willow poles or branches were cut and the butts forced a short distance into the ground in an elliptical shape, corresponding to the rim of the boat. These were about one foot apart. The ends of opposite poles were now bent towards each other until the proper curve for the bottom of the boat was secured, and then tied together with leather thongs. Other poles and branches were interwoven in an antero-posterior direction until a strong wicker frame was completed. The skins of three buffaloes were sewed together with thongs, and these were laid raw side out upon the frame, to which they were securely stitched. A slow (not blazing) fire was then started underneath the shell, and in this way the skins were dried and made to contract tight upon the frame.

In this boat, on August 15, 1833, accompanied by Mr. Milton Sublette, two Indian lads and two half-breeds, Mr. Wyeth undertook one of those perilous voyages occasionally recorded in the annals of frontier life. The starting-point was near the fatal ground where, in 1876, the gallant Custer and his entire command perished at the hands of Sitting Bull and his merciless braves, and not very remote from the place where this unprincipled savage met a bloody end, December, 1890. A thrilling description of this voyage is given by Mr. Irving in *Bonneville*. Down the Big Horn they floated into the

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Yellowstone, and thence into the Mis-
souri, and on to St. Louis, traversing
Wyoming, Montana, Dakota, Iowa, Ne-
braska, Kansas, and Missouri, thousands
of miles of perilous windings, over rapids,
bars, drift-wood, snags, and rocks, requir-
ing as much vigilance to keep their frail
bark from being sunk as to keep out of
rifle or arrow shot of the cunning savages
who prowled along the banks. With all
their precautions of crawling into the
willows and dragging their boat after
them at break of day, and travelling only
at night to prevent their being seen by
the Indians, they were taken in by a
large band of Crows. Fortunately they
met with this mishap so near to Fort
Cass, a trading-post at the junction of
the Big Horn and Yellowstone, that the
Indians, fearing to kill, only robbed them,
and allowed them to depart.

On August 21st: "Passed the mouth
of Powder River, and on the 24th struck
the Missouri. Here the bull-boat was
abandoned for a canoe, or a 'pirogue.'"

September 3d, they came in sight of
twenty-one lodges of Indians. "Imme-
diately had the boat put into a thicket
and fortified as well as I could. As soon
as it was dark we proceeded forward with
a high wind and cloudy sky. All went
well until we were just opposite the vil-
lage, when we unluckily went aground
on a sand bar. Here we worked hard for
some time to get off, and had the Indians
seen or heard us we could have made
little resistance; but they did not, and
after some time we got off. These were
the Aricaros, and would have scalped
us."

With all these dangers the trip was not
without its fascinations. On September
4th, after tipping the boat, getting wet,
and then going ashore to dry, they
"floated through the night eleven hours,
a beautiful still night, the stillness inter-
rupted only by the neighing of the elk,
the low of the buffalo, the hooting of the
large owl and the screeching of the small
ones, and occasionally the splashing of a
beaver in the water,"—a picture of wild-
ness and solitude now only possible in
retrospection.

September 6, 1833: "Seeing an elk on
the sand, killed him. Very acceptable, as
we had had nothing to eat since yester-
day noon; saved his horns for my best
friend, Mr. F. Tudor, of Boston. 16th:
"Run on a sand bar and was unable to

extricate the boat in the dark; the mos-
quitos almost murdered us!" September
21st: "Passed Council Bluffs;" and on
September 27th the voyagers reached Fort
Leavenworth (Kansas). On the 28th this
long and exciting boat voyage ended at
Liberty, Missouri, where Mr. Wyeth took
a steamboat for St. Louis and the East.

The indomitable energy and undaunted
pluck of this man is evinced in the im-
mediate execution of his purpose to again
go over this terrible journey to the Ore-
gon country. He would not give up his
dream of civilizing this valuable territory.
His clear mind saw in the near future a
vast commonwealth, dotted with farms,
villages, and cities, on the Pacific slope
of the Rocky Mountains, and this a part
of the Union! Scarcely half a century
has elapsed, and lo! in this wilderness,
out of which he was forced to go, dwell
to-day nearly three-fourths of a million
citizens of the United States.* He was a
visionary then; a prophet now!

I have a proposition written to Mr. E.
M. Samuel, dated Liberty, Missouri, Sep-
tember 29, 1833, asking for an estimate
for an equipment of a second expedition,
as "it is my intention to return across
the mountains to the Columbia next
spring."

October 17th, Mr. Wyeth arrived at
Cincinnati, and I find a note to General
Harrison ("Tippecanoe"): "Sir,—The
enclosed I received from your son on the
Big Horn. I met him on Green River,
or the Colorado of the West; was with
him some twenty days. He was in good
health, and told me he should remain in
the Indian country through the winter.
He has taken an outfit from Fitzpatrick
and Co. of some horses and men for the
trapping business. It would have afford-
ed me much pleasure to have delivered
the letter to you in person, but haste pre-
vents."

October 26th, he arrived in Baltimore,
and was in Cambridge, Massachusetts,
November 8, 1833, one year and seven
months having elapsed since his depart-
ure for the Pacific coast.

He was already busy arranging for the
return trip, for on this date, November 8,
1833, he wrote to Henry Hall and Messrs.
Tucker and Williams a long letter setting
forth his plans. A vessel was chartered
on November 20th, and was soon loaded

* Census of 1890. Oregon, 317,767; Washing-
ton, 349,390; Idaho, 84,385. Total, 751,542.

and ready to sail for the Columbia River *via* Cape Horn.

There is also a letter dated at Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 9, 1833, directed to Hon. Lewis Cass, Secretary of War, the subject of which is to enquire if trappers and employés of the Hudson Bay Company should be unmolested in their possessions should they settle and open up lands on "the Wallanet or Muttonohah, a river coming from the south into the Columbia."

From New York, December 20, 1833, he wrote to Messrs. Samuel and More, Liberty, Missouri, to proceed to the purchase of animals for an early start, May 1st, for the mountains. "Thirty-five Spanish riding saddles without finery, for the men, and six of a superior sort for 'us gentlemen'; not expensive, but good and plain."

On same date he wrote to his old friend and companion in the bull-boat trip from the Big Horn, Milton Sublette, to hasten his expected visit, as "I am desirous of a spree with an old mountaineer; these folks here won't do."

Mr. Wyeth left Boston early in February on his second expedition, by way of New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and was in Pittsburg February 26th, Cincinnati February 28th, Louisville March 5th, St. Louis March 11th.

The following letter was written from this last place, and dated March 5, 1834:

"DEAR WIFE,—. . . It is true that Mr. Fitzpatrick was robbed by the Crow Indians, but I was in hopes you would not hear of it. I knew of it before I left Cambridge, but did not wish to alarm you. I do not think there is much danger with so large a party as I shall have. Mr. Nuttall, and Mr. Townsend, another naturalist, passed through this place to the rendezvous last week. . . . Baptiste* continues a pretty good boy. I shall not forget my promise to send for you if there is any chance of doing so with propriety, but you must not be too sanguine; a thousand circumstances may prevent, although I desire it much. I feel as much as you can the lonesomeness of my way of life, but you know the success of what I have undertaken is life itself to me, and if I do fail in it they shall never say it was for want of perseverance. I am yet sanguine that I shall succeed. I will take good care of myself, and perhaps the life which began in turmoil may yet end in quiet and peace, and our sun go down from a clear sky. I cannot but reproach myself that I have made you in some measure

* The Indian boy who accompanied Mr. Wyeth on his first return trip from the Pacific coast.

a widow, and I fear you will brood over hopes that have been blasted by me. These things make me melancholy, and I believe I have got the blues. Good-bye, my dear wife, and may God bless you. N. J. WYETH."

On May 5, 1834, our explorer was again on his way across the continent, with sixty men and a sufficient number of horses and mules, starting from Liberty, Missouri, crossing the Kansas near its confluence with the Missouri, day after day pushing on in a direction slightly north of west through Kansas (of our present map) into Nebraska, striking the Platte about 41° north latitude and 99° west longitude, following the north fork of this stream into Wyoming, passing the Black Hills, and on June 9, 1834, the expedition arrived at Rock Independence, on the Sweetwater, 42° 30' north latitude and 107° west longitude.

Beyond an occasional bout with Indians, nothing occurred worthy of note, although the diary faithfully details the march of each day.

June 1, 1834: "Crossed Laramie Fork." 8th: "This day killed two grizzlies." 16th: "The grass is miserable, and my horses are starving." Several hunters had also not returned to camp, and the diary reads, "Fearful they have been scalped." July 8th: "Made northwest to a place where there is a soda spring, or, I may say, fifty of them. There is also here a warm spring which throws out water with a jet." This location is now within the National or Yellowstone Park. They were now on Bear River, and it was well named, for on July 10th they "killed three grizzlies."

From July 14th to August 6th they were busy in building Fort Hall, on Lewis River. The strategic importance of this fort has already been referred to in the introduction to this article.

The expedition now bound for the Pacific coast numbered "in all twenty-nine." They were now entering the section of country in which Mr. Hunt's party in 1811 suffered so severely for food being forced finally to scatter in small detachments to seek subsistence. Some of these perished in the mountains.

August 15th the expedition struck Snake River. Food was getting scarce. "Killed some dusky grouse, and dug some kammas root, which assisted in living a little. Saw one Indian at a distance on horseback." 19th: "This day found a colt left

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by the Indians, on which we will breakfast, as provisions are running short." Rations were still shorter two days later, for the entry on the 21st, with a grim suggestion of a joke, says, "No breakfast; feel very much purified in the flesh." 24th: "Scorpions are quite common. Two nights since, just as I was about lying down, I saw something move on my blanket, and found it to be a good-sized scorpion." "Our party now numbers seventeen — Indians, *literati*, and all." The *literati* referred to were Mr. Nuttall, the botanist, and Mr. Townsend, the ornithologist. September 1st: "Camped at ten o'clock, having found no water, and the whole country as bare as my hand, affording a bad prospect for our poor horses." On the next day, pretty well worn out, the remnants of the expedition reached Walla Walla.

September 4th: Mr. Wyeth left Walla Walla in a canoe for Fort Vancouver. 9th, had reached "The Dalles" (or Narrows) of the Columbia. "Party arrived with news that they had drowned one of the horses and the jackass. I valued him more than ten horses as a breeder." Down the Columbia was not smooth sailing, for September 10th "the gale swamped one of our canoes, which frightened the Indians back." 13th: "Made the portage of the Cascades; and next day, September 14, 1834, arrived at Fort Vancouver, nineteen months after leaving this place for the East, *having in this time twice traversed the American Continent.*"

September 15th: "Early in the morning, having hired another canoe, put ahead down the Columbia, and at twelve o'clock met the brig *May Dean*. Boarded her, and found all well." This ship Mr. Wyeth had loaded with supplies and despatched from Boston. "She had been struck by lightning and rendered disabled, having put into Valparaiso for repairs. Captain Lambert brought me twenty Sandwich-Islanders, two coopers, two smiths, and a clerk." September 22d Mr. Wyeth settled upon a large prairie near the Willamette River, about fifty miles from its mouth. "It is about fifteen miles long, seven wide, surrounded with fine timber, and a good wide stream on it." On the 25th he was back at Fort Vancouver, making preparations to send out parties on exploring and trading expeditions. 27th: "Sent Stout up the Willamette with two men and implements to commence farm."

From this date to October 13, 1834, he was busy "making preparations for an expedition into the Snake country, and in building a fort on the Columbia River, forty miles from its mouth (Fort William).

October 6, 1834, he wrote to his old friend Mr. Frederick Tudor, of Boston, "I am now making an establishment on the Multnomah [Wallaumet, now called Willamette], about fifty miles above its mouth, and one on the Columbia forty miles from its mouth. This winter I go up Lewis River to make one more fort on its waters, and one on the south side of Great Salt Lake."

On November 23d, Mr. Wyeth with four men descended the Walla Walla and Columbia to the mouth of the River Des Chutes, along which he ascended directly south into the heart of Oregon. By December 19th they were well into the unknown country, across "an extensive plain, beyond which, white and high, rose a range of mountains, disheartening to look at; *but ahead is the word*, and the spirit seems to rise to the occasion."

By December 25th they were reduced to such straits that one of the horses was killed for food. "Snow and rain all day, and a miserable Christmas."

January 2, 1835: "Made snow-shoes, but they were too small. I frequently sunk into the snow, and it bothered me much to get out again." 5th: "Killed two swans so fat we could not eat all the grease. Seems good to live well after poor horse-meat," which suggests an adage, Scotch in origin, I believe, that a mighty little does a poor body good. "One swan furnished two of us only two meals; they do not eat so in the States." On the 16th the thermometer was below zero. One of the men had his feet badly frozen. The snow was four feet deep now, so that further advance was impossible. Fearful of perishing, and as delay was dangerous, "we abandoned everything but our blankets, books, and ammunition, axe and kettles, and took it on foot with about sixty pounds each on our backs. Made six miles, killed one deer, and camped. Am tired and hungry, but the deer will cure all." January 22, 1835: "Snowed all night; breakfasted on two beaver tails." 25th: "We heard a gun, and fired in return, and a Snake Indian came to us and led us to his camp; he brought a lean dog on which we supped, and had enough left for breakfast."

January 29th: "This is my birthday, but I have forgotten how old I am." Mr. Wyeth was on this day thirty-three years old. February 3d: "At this camp there is a hot spring, too hot to bear the hand in, and smoking like a coal-pit, 134°; took a good bath by going down stream until I found a suitable temperature." By February 10, 1835, Mr. Wyeth was again on the Columbia, *en route*, "in a very leaky canoe, which kept us bailing all the time," for Fort Vancouver, where he arrived two days later. This tour of exploration occupied nearly three months, in the dead of winter, and in the more elevated and coldest part of Oregon. I cannot, in the limits of a magazine article, give the details as I have them in the daily record of his wanderings. Enough is given to show that this man possessed untiring energy, guided by superior intelligence and tact. He realized that in order to induce immigration the country must be fully explored and described, and this was his great aim in life, to succeed in the colonization of Oregon.

By February 27th he was again on the Wallamet, and established a post at Wappatoo Island, near the mouth of this river. He immediately put his force to work, getting out a cargo of hoop-poles and lumber for the Sandwich Islands, and making a large canoe to "lighter" over the shallows into deep water near the mouth of the Wallamette. "The whole tree was two hundred and forty-two feet long, and this by no means the largest tree on Wappatoo Island." This island is near Portland. This "canoe was sixty feet long, deep enough to chamber twenty-five barrels, clear of knots, shakes, and almost of sap."

The diary of Mr. Nathaniel J. Wyeth ends with this date. If any further record of his labors was kept it is lost. From a study of his character I think it is more than likely that the journal was continued, for he not only was industrious and exact in keeping his diary up to this period, but even kept copies of his correspondence, which copies, covering this interesting chapter of his career, are now in my possession. From these letters I gather that he established a settlement, which he hoped would be permanent, on Wappatoo Island, about four miles from the mouth of the Wallamette.

From Fort William, in the winter of 1834, the brig *Ida*, loaded with lumber,

coopers' material, etc., had sailed for the Sandwich Islands, returning on April 3, 1835. He had, in addition to building Fort Hall on Lewis River (now in Idaho), built Fort William on the Columbia, about forty miles above its mouth, opened a large farm fifty miles up the Wallamette, and made an establishment on Wappatoo Island. About this time he was prostrated by an illness, brought on by overwork and reckless exposure, which long threatened to terminate his career. In the mean time his men became discouraged and demoralized in the absence of their leader, upon whom their hopes rested. The Indians, fearing that they were about to be supplanted by the settlement of their lands by enterprising whites, took advantage of the demoralization; and, as Barrows, in his *History of Oregon*, suggests, it is probable that the Hudson Bay Company, seeing in Mr. Wyeth's persistent energy and pluck a formidable competitor for the trade and possession of this country, were silent abettors of the persecution and ultimate destruction of this expedition. Governor Pelly, of this company, writes in 1838, "We have compelled the American adventurers to withdraw from the contest."

This was doubtless their policy, for they avowedly built Fort Boisé, near Fort Hall, for the purpose of killing off the trade and influence this establishment rapidly acquired. Mr. Wyeth, however, always acknowledged the personal courtesies and kindnesses he received from the officers of this company, and did this publicly in one of the Boston newspapers after his return. After a terrible struggle, well deserving a better fate, and more than this, deserving a recognition of his services for Oregon, which his countrymen in that section of the country have not yet accorded him, broken in health and bankrupt in purse, and deserted by those of his followers who survived, he gave up the fight.

Here is his last letter written from Oregon:

"COLUMBIA RIVER, Sept. 23d, 1835

"DEAR WIFE,—I have been very sick, but have got well, and shall be on my way to the mountains, to winter at Fort Hall, in about six days. I expect to be home about the first of November, 1836. Mr. Nuttall is here, and well. I have sent you a half-barrel of salmon, which I hope will be in good order. I cannot attend to putting them up myself, therefore

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they may not be so good. The season has been very sickly. We have lost by drowning, disease, and warfare seventeen persons up to this date, and fourteen now sick."

The people of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho will no doubt do honor to his memory, now that his services are a matter of record. General Fremont was styled the Pathfinder in 1846, yet Whitman had gone over this route in 1843, and Nathaniel Wyeth had four times made the trail between 1832-6. During his life, which ended in 1856, he shrank from publicity to a degree that was almost morbid. In one of his letters from Oregon to a friend in the East he closes by saying: "Now I do not wish this letter published. I hate anything in print." He never would consent to have a portrait or photograph of himself, and the

only one in existence was taken after his death. He was only twenty-nine years old when he led his first expedition over the "Rockies," and but thirty-four when, after five years of perilous labor, having four times traversed the American Continent from ocean to ocean, he reached the fireside of his home in Cambridge, "a visionary and a failure."

Will Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, with their three-quarters of a million inhabitants within fifty-five years of the time he left it, when there was not a single American settler in that country, their busy cities, fertile farms, their transcontinental railroads, their ocean steamers, clearing for China, Japan, and the Orient, and their glorious future, of which this is but the dawn, deem Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth a failure?

