

Establishment of Trade in British Columbia

Many of our Commissioned Gentlemen are so little acquainted with general business that they will not readily fall in with the view I have taken of the affairs of this side the mountain and others who are getting beyond the prime of life and attached to their Families would in order to be exempt from the laborious duties to which they would be exposed in settling a new country have no objections to relinquish all interest in its affairs and confine themselves to the business of the East side. The Services of those may be dispensed with and a sufficient number of enterprising men can still be found among our Chief Factors and Chief Traders who would readily enter into it and I am myself so sanguine and confident of its success if properly managed that in order to give it a certain tone in this country I should not hesitate to exchange my fixed Sal^y for an interest in the trade thereof.

In order to see the whole machine put in motion I should wish to pass one or two Winters on this side indeed if the Hon^{ble} Committee thought that my Services on the other side could be dispensed with for a whole year say 1826/27 I have the vanity to think that much benefit would be derived by my presence and I shall here take the liberty of pointing out how I conceive my time could be turned to the best advantage. The Vessel intended for the China trade would leave England in November or December 1825 so as to reach Fort George in June or July 1826 deliver the Outfit take in the Furs for China and be in readiness to take her departure from and after the 20th October. I should propose starting from York Factory after the arrival of the Bay Ship from the 20th of August to the 1st September and be at Fort George by the 1st November, accompanying the Ship to Canton, dispose of the Cargo either by delivery to the E. I. Co^{Y's} Agent, bringing it immediately to Sale or putting it into the hands of a respectable mercantile House to be disposed of afterwards as the state of the market or other circumstances might render expedient; take in a cargo of China Goods, proceed to Lima Acapulco or some port on that Coast most likely to present an advantageous market which the Hon^{ble} Committee would be able to ascertain from some of the London Mercantile Houses in that line and of which I should have information by the Bay Ships; dispose of the Cargo and remit the proceeds or leave it (the Cargo) in the hands of a respectable House of business to be disposed of afterwards as the state of the market would authorize; take in the goods required for the outfit of the following year and reach the Columbia in June or July 1827 by which time the interior Brigades would have delivered their returns and gone inland with their outfits. Embark the Furs people & property and proceed to the mouth of Frazers River; remain there until the 1st November by which time our Establishment would be completed and the York Factory Express arrived; dispatch the large Vesel for China and then proceed in the small Vessel along the Coast on a Trading Expedition, touch at the Russian Settlement in Norfolk Sound and see if any business could be done there, return to Frazers River in March proceed from thence to the mountain meet the different Brigades from the interior going with their returns and for their outfits to the Depot and be at

Norway House by the opening of the Navigation about the middle of June 1828 thereby being absent from the Councilling business at York only one Season.¹³⁹

In order that the important arrangements connected with the business may be in simultaneous operation (as no doubt exists in my mind that the Hon^{ble} Committee will see the propriety of extending the business on this coast) I shall forward a Carpenter who understands something about Shipbuilding from York next Fall (1825) for the purpose of cutting down & preparing Timber for the Small Vessel so as to be seasoned by the time the regular builder arrives from England in the months of June or July 1826 who would immediately commence laying down the Small Vessel and under the Superintendence of one of the two Naval Gentlemen who would come out in the capacity of Commanders she could be launched Rigged and ready for Sea by the time the large Vessel arrived from Canton and proceed together as before stated with the Establishment of people goods and Stores &c &c to Frazers River.

The Russian Settlements have hitherto been principally supplied with goods for their trade by the American adventurers on this coast payable by Bills on S^t Petersburg or in Furs; but if we conduct our business with good management according to the present plan that channel will be shut up as we ought to be able to put down all competition on the Coast in which case 'tis probable we should be enabled to do business with the Russians on advantageous terms; it would be with a view to see what could be done in that way I should purpose visiting the Director Von Baranoff at their principal establishment of New Archangel in Norfolk Sound.¹⁴⁰

In abandoning the Establishment¹⁴¹ and removing so high up the River as the Jolie Prairie or Belle vue Point I do not think that any loss will be sustained by the Trade; nearly the whole of the Furs got now at this place pass through the hands of three Chiefs or principal Indians viz. Concomely King or Chief of the Chinooks at Point George, Casseno Chief of a Tribe or band settled nearly opposite to Belle vue Point and Schannaway the Cowlitch Chief¹⁴² whose track from the borders of Pugets Sound strikes on the Columbia near to Belle vue Point; the first is much attached to us and will follow wherever we go; his favorite Daughter is kept by M^r McKenzie one of our Clerks¹⁴³ and he offers to place his Grandson (eldest Son of the Prince of Wales)¹⁴⁴ under my care in order to be Educated at the Missionary Society School Red River so that his trade and that of his band may be considered as secured to us.

Casseno who is the most intelligent Indian I have seen and who endeavours to imitate the Whites in every thing is likewise much attached to us declares he is not an American but a Relative and subject of King George and residing nearly opposite our Door is not likely to desert us and go a distance of 70 miles with his Furs to our opponents. . . . Between the mouth of the River and Belle vue Point there is not a spot of Ground fit for the site of Establishment on the north side as the Banks are either high perpendicular Rocks or low points which are overflowed by the River in the Season of high Water. The place we have selected is beautiful as may be inferred from its Name and the Country so open that from the Establishment there is good travelling on Horseback to any part of the interior; a Farm to any extent may be made there, the

pasture is good and innumerable herds of Swine can fatten so as to be fit for the Knife merely on nutritious Roots that are found here in any quantity and the Climate so fine that Indian Corn and other Grain cannot fail of thriving; it is much better than that of the Coast say at Point George being less exposed to the Sea Air. The distance from the Harbour is the only inconvenience but that is of little importance being now a secondary Establishment;¹⁴⁵ the small Vessel however can run up a considerable way and a Leighter or large Batteaux can work or drift down in a couple of tides.

The Establishment of officers and men at this place is very large no less than Seventy in all about thirty five of whom may be considered extra men for the purpose of assisting in the transport of the outfits & Provisions inland as the people attached to the interior posts could not take up the whole; these extra men are not therefore chargeable to the Post of Fort George alone but to the Deptm^t generally. According to the System now laid down however the Services of these Men would be dispensed with altogether if there was no prospect of extending the Trade and in that case I should have taken them across the mountain this Spring but as there is a probability that the Hon^{ble} Committee will see the propriety of conducting their business on a more enlarged scale I have thought it advisable to keep such of them as are useful on hand in the meantime but not to be employed as heretofore. The outfits of the interior will therefore be taken by the people immediately belonging to those Establishments only, forming a Brigade of about Thirty Two officers & men, and the Supernumeraries or extra men in question will be equipped for a whole year and sent off from Fort George on a Trapping Expedition in the month of May accompanied by all the Freemen in this neighbourhood so as to form a party of between Fifty & Sixty under the command of Mess^{rs} Finnan M^cDonald & Thos M^cKay¹⁴⁶ their route will be up the Wilhamot River across a Mountainous Country which we know little about to the Umpqua River and from thence Hunt their way to the Banks of the Rio Colorado keeping either inland or towards the Coast as the state of the Country in regard to Fur bearing Animals and the means of living may direct; they will remain out all Winter and Spring and return to Fort George in the month of June following (1826)¹⁴⁷ about the time the Ship will arrive from England by which conveyance the Hon^{ble} Committee will be pleased to intimate to the Gentlemen in charge of this place their future intentions and the party will be re-equipped and sent back to their Hunting Grounds from whence they came or sent on another Expedition to the Northward to pass Winter 1826/27 as the Committee may direct or the state of the Country render expedient and return to Fort George in the Spring or Summer of 1827 for the purpose of going to Establish Frazers River Depot or returning to the East side of the mountain if the Co^y should unfortunately determine on not extending the Trade. If my Despatches from hence which shall be forwarded from Norway House in June reach the Committee sufficiently early to make the arrangements proposed (in regard to the purchase of a Vessel, preparing the Indent or requisition and engaging Commanders for the Vessels &c) before the month of Novem^r 1825 (say the usual time of Sailing) instead of

November 1826 the plan of establishing Frazers River Depot can be carried into effect after the arrival of the Vessel from England in Summer 1826 but on the contrary which is more than probable it must be postponed until 1827.

There are several old favorite Canadian Servants and useless Iroquois about this Establishment who we must get rid of altogether as they are merely a burthen on our hands, I shall therefore take them out with me this Spring for the purpose of being sent either to Red River Colony or to Canada and it is highly necessary to reduce the number of Families at this place as altho' the Company do not feed them their consumption of Provisions added to the regular demands of the Fort creates a competition in the Market which the Indians avail themselves of and raise the price of their Fish and other supplies accordingly; the population now exceeds one hundred and fifty Souls but I am in hopes it will this Season be reduced to less than a hundred.

The Inland Brigades arrive here generally about the latter end of April or beginning of May and remain idle until the arrival of the Ship in the month of June or July thereby exposing us to the Expence of their maintenance, and both men and officers losing the three most valuable months in the year whereas if any thing like activity or Enterprize had been observed these people might have been usefully employed in exploring the Coast to the Northward & Southward of which to our shame be it said we are still nearly totally ignorant:—such indolence and indifference is unpardonable must be broke through this year and I am satisfied my Friend the D^r will not allow it be repeated during his administration; we have therefore determined that the Gentlemen who come from the interior this Season shall immediately after their arrival proceed in charge of the people of their Brigades from hence by the Willamot River so as to fall on the Coast about too miles to the Southward and push forward as far as their time will admit on a trading excursion and in order to acquire a knowledge of the Coast Natives and Country.¹⁴⁸ We have every reason to suppose that the Country is rich in Furs and that Sea Otters are numerous on the Coast and if the report of this party is favorable we shall endeavour to open a regular communication with the Natives or fit out a small trapping & trading Expedition the following Season. Indeed the Southern shores as far as California we know to be very productive in Sea Otters and I have no doubt that considerable advantage may be derived from paying that line of Coast an Annual visit with one or other of the Vessels; the Natives are not Hunters but if the different Spanish Missions encouraged it and rendered their protection we should in all likelihood be enabled to prevail on some of the Pugets Sound Indians or the Natives of the Coast more to the Northward who are very expert at hunting the Sea Otter to go thither for that purpose annually to be taken to the Hunting Grounds and back to their Homes at the proper Seasons by our Vessels on the Coast.¹⁴⁹

A few Sandwich Islanders mixed among the Canadians and Europeans can be usefully employed here as Guards and for common drudgery about the *Establishments* but they are not

generally disposable men being unfit for the laborious duties of the Voyage; they are however valuable in establishing new Countries as they can be depended on in cases of danger from the natives; when they first came here and until last year their terms were merely food and cloathing which is sufficient recompence for all the Services they render, M^r Cameron¹⁵⁰ however by way of following up the strict Letter of the Minutes of Council regulating the Wages of Servants (which did not provide for Sandwich Islanders) advanced theirs to £17 p Annum thereby putting them on an equality with the Canadian & European Servants which occasioned much dissatisfaction and very naturally so as they are by no means such serviceable people, We have therefore reduced them to £10 p Annum which satisfies all parties; there are about 35 of them now on this side the mountain but we can employ 15 more to advantage if the trade is extended and in that case I would beg to recommend their being taken on board as the Vessel intended for the China trade passes Owyhee on her passage hither from England.

Having now worn the subject of the trade of the North West Coast nearly threadbare I shall conclude my remarks thereon by giving it as my humble opinion that if the Hon^{ble} Committee enter into it on the scale proposed it will turn out highly advantageous to the concern and at no very distant period become an important branch of Commerce in a national point of view and so anxious am I to see it set agoing on a regular and well organised footing that if I find my Services can be dispensed with at York by the 1st of next July and that the Committee have not chalked out any particular duty to occupy my attention during the following Winter I purpose starting for England via Canada so as to be there in the course of the month of September which might enable them to make the necessary arrangements for commencing the business in the Summer of 1826 instead of waiting until 1827 and the object of my presence at Rome would be to give information on many points that might be essential to its future interests which do not at present occur to me and cannot be anticipated & sufficiently explained or understood by correspondance.

¹³⁹ Simpson did not carry out this program partly because of decisions by the London Committee, partly because of changes in his own views. The London Committee decided not to attempt to bring the Columbia Department furs to market at Canton. This disposed of the need of a China vessel. The only ship sent out to the Northwest Coast was therefore a small coasting vessel, the "Cadboro," which put in her appearance at Fort George in the spring of 1827. Simpson was constrained on learning of the true character of the Fraser River to give up the project of locating the Columbia Department depot at its mouth, and though Fort Langley was built there in 1827-28, it was built as a secondary trading post. Simpson did not return to the Pacific until 1828-29. He came then by way of the Peace and Fraser rivers, and saw for himself the hopelessness of the Fraser as a highway of commerce. See McLeod, *Journal of A. McDonald, 1828*; Bancroft, *Pacific States*, XXIII, 477 ff.

¹⁴⁰ New Archangel is the present Sitka, Norfolk Sound is Sitka Sound. Simpson was unaware of the fact that Baranof had died in 1819 and that Governor Mouravief presided at New Archangel in his place.

¹⁴¹ Refers to the abandoning of Fort George and the building in its stead of a new post, Fort Vancouver, on the north bank of the Columbia River opposite the mouth of the Willamette.

¹⁴² For these chiefs see *post*, 104. Schannaway is the Schachanaway mentioned by David Douglas in his *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823-27* (London, 1914), 62.

¹⁴³ Fur traders were quite ready to make such alliances with the daughters of tribal chiefs, with the view, partly at least, to winning the good will of the tribes, while the chiefs on their part were eager for the prestige and profit that flowed from such connections. Concomely, for example, boasted two white sons-in-law, Duncan McDougal, senior partner of the Pacific Fur Company, whose nuptial ceremonies in 1813 are picturesquely described by Washington Irving in *Astoria*, I, chap. xxvi, and A. McKenzie, the Hudson's Bay Company clerk here referred to. Servants of the fur-trading companies almost without exception kept Indian women and had children by them.

¹⁴⁴ Cassicus, eldest son of Concomely, was known to the fur traders as the Prince of Wales. Concomely's daughter, the consort of A. McKenzie, was known as the Princess of Wales.

¹⁴⁵ This refers to Fort Vancouver which was intended at first to be a secondary establishment. Simpson had in mind at the time to locate the main depôt of the Columbia Department at the mouth of Fraser River. Fort Vancouver did not become the main depot until after the Fraser had been determined to be unnavigable in its middle reaches.

¹⁴⁶ Simpson inserted the names of McDonald and McKay into the manuscript at some time subsequent to his first writing.

¹⁴⁷ This is the Umpqua Expedition subsequently mentioned in the journal. It did not carry out the program here sketched for it. It started late because of Indian troubles in the Columbia, and consequently could not take the route to the Umpqua Country which Simpson had ordered. It took instead a southeasterly course, crossing the Cascades, probably by the near-lying Santiam Pass, and proceeding thence up the Des Chutes River toward the unexplored Klamath Country. It had been ordered to penetrate that country and to proceed as far southward toward California as possible, but it did little more than cross the outer edge of its objective. Somewhere on Williamson River it turned back, making for the Des Chutes River, where it effected a junction with the crippled Snake expedition, and accompanied it thence eastward on a long hunt to the upper waters of the Snake River. See *post*, 282; also *Oregon Hist. Quart.*, X, 336-365; XI, 210, 211, 218.

¹⁴⁸ No such expedition appears to have been sent in 1825, but one went out the following year under A. R. McLeod. See *post*, 290.

¹⁴⁹ It was a common practice for the Russian American Company to transport parties of native northern hunters with their sea canoes to the California shores in search of sea otters. Some American adventurers did likewise. But the California sea otter was not as valuable a fur as that found further north.

¹⁵⁰ Chief Factor J. B. Cameron was one of the officers in charge of the Columbia Department for several years prior to the advent of John McLoughlin.