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Pacific Northwest Letters Of George Gibbs

EDITED BY VERNON CARSTENSEN

STORIES of the discovery of rich gold diggings in Calfornia spread across the country in 1848 and like a contagion the dream of picking up a fortune in gold nuggets from the gravel washes of a distant land infected people by the tens of thousands. Men from all walks of life—the rich as well as the poor, the educated as well as the ignorant—yielded to the dream and set out for California. Some were diverted enroute, some moved unswervingly to the diggings, some sought and found fortune and power in business and politics rather than in the gold fields, but others were never much more than observers. Among the latter was George Gibbs. In 1849 Gibbs was almost thirty-five years old—middle-aged by western standards. He had been practicing law in New York for eleven years. A detached, sophisticated, learned man, he lacked that singleness of purpose needed in the hard and energetic scrabble for success in the rapidly developing West. He started for the gold fields in 1849, but he did not get to mining until 1852 and he stayed at it only one season. He tried other things. He dabbled in a townsite venture without success. He collected notes on Indian dialects and he started to prepare a history of the Oregon Country. He made drawings of what he saw and he made maps of the country he visited. During the eleven years he spent on the coast he supported himself mostly by various federal jobs. He never came close to making a fortune, but his writings and his sketches, mostly dealing with Indians, are still highly regarded.

George Gibbs, the fourth of that name in succession in the Gibbs family of Rhode Island and New York, was the oldest of seven children of Colonel George Gibbs and Laura Wolcott Gibbs. Both his parents were of distinguished families. His paternal grandfather had been known as the "merchant prince of New Port and New York." His maternal grandfather, Oliver

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Wolcott, served as Secretary of the Treasury under both Washington and John Adams, and later as governor of Connecticut. His father, Colonel George Gibbs (the title was honorary), was a gentleman farmer of Long Island, and an amateur scientist, whose large collection of minerals was purchased by Yale University. He was a leading spirit in the establishment of the *Journal of American Science.* Oliver Wolcott Gibbs, one of his brothers, attained wide fame as a chemist.[1]

The fourth George Gibbs was born at Sunswick, the family farm on Long Island, July 17, 1815, and educated at the famous Round Hill School conducted by George Bancroft and Joseph G. Cogswell. His parents wanted him to enter the army but no appointment to West Point could be obtained either for him or his next older brother Oliver Wolcott. Alfred, the third son, did enter West Point, graduated, and rose to the rank of Brigadier General during the Civil War. Instead of preparing for an army career, George spent two years in Europe accompanied by his aunt, Miss Sarah Gibbs. Upon his return to the United States he began the study of law. He attended Harvard Law School and after his graduation in 1838, entered law practice in the office of Prescott Hall in New York City.[2] But the law claimed only a part of his interest. He quickly found a more congenial atmosphere in the New York Historical Society where he served on various committees and as librarian from 1842 to 1848. In 1846 he brought out *The Memoirs of the Administration of Washington and Adams* in two volumes, a history of the Adams administration based largely upon the papers of his maternal grandfather.

When Gibbs left New York in 1849 it was with the intention of going to California, but on the way he attached himself to the Mounted Riflemen who were marching to Fort Vancouver that summer. Part of his journal of the expedition, giving an account of his experiences and observations from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie, was published in two parts in the *Daily Journal of*

1. Cf. *Dictionary of American Biography* for the various Gibbses and Wolcotts; also George Gibbs, *The Gibbs Family of Rhode Island and some Related Families* (Privately printed, New York, 1933).

2. Cf. John Austin Stevens, Jr., "A Memorial of George Gibbs," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, 1873* (Washington, 1874), 219-225.

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Commerce and the *Mercury and Weekly Journal of Commerce,* July 25 and September 6, 1849, respectively.[3]

This account shows that Gibbs was enjoying the new sights and sounds of the prairies and plains, his association with the army officers, and his first sight of Indians and visits to their camps. Besides keeping a journal, Gibbs made a number of drawings, some of which would be later published.[4]

Gibbs went all the way to Oregon with the Mounted Riflemen, and shortly found a job as deputy collector of customs at Astoria. Here he engaged in a townsite speculation and other schemes, anxiously following meanwhile news of gold strikes in the Pacific Northwest. It even appears that he was preparing to take up the practice of law again. In July, 1850, he inserted a notice in the *Oregon Spectator* announcing that his services were available as a "Counselor at Law" at the customs house, Astoria, and as late as January, 1851, he was appointed prosecuting attorney for the third district of Oregon by the territorial legislature.[5]

In the meantime, however, he lost his job at the customs house and in the fall of 1850 he served with the Governor John P. Gaines Indian Commission, which negotiated treaties with the tribes of the Willamette Valley.[6] While on this expedition, Gibbs compiled a vocabulary of the Calapooya language.

Some time in 1851 Gibbs went south to California, but not yet to dig for gold. In September Redick McKee reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from his camp on the Big Bend of the Eel River that, "At Sonoma I was fortunate in securing the services of George Gibbs, Esq., formerly of New York, and recently attached to the Indian Commission in Oregon. He is acquainted with the Shinook or Chinook language, and the jargon spoken by all the tribes on the borders of Oregon and California. He is, moreover, a practical topographical engineer;

3. In 1940 Raymond W. Settle reprinted this account in his *The March of the Mounted Riflemen. First United States Military Expedition to Travel the full length of the Oregon Trail from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Vancouver May to October, as recorded in the Journals of Major Osborne Cross and George Gibbs and the Official Report of Colonel Loring* (Glendale, California, 1940).

4. Cf. David I. Bushnell, Jr., "Drawings by George Gibbs in the Far Northwest, 1849-51," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections,* Vol. 97, No. 8, March, 1939, pp. 28. 18 plates. Bushnell includes in this collection Gibbs' sketch of the Shoshone Falls of the Snake River, a drawing to which he refers several times in letters to his brother, Oliver Wolcott.

5. *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City), July 25, 1850, January 23, 1851.

6. H. H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (San Francisco, 1888), II: 208ff.

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has kept a journal of our entire route, and will furnish me, I hope in time for my annual report, a correct map of reconnaissance of the trail from Sonoma, showing the exact position of all important rivers, lakes, mountains, and valleys, together with a synopsis of the various dialects of the tribes we shall have met."[7] Obviously the New York lawyer and librarian had blossomed fast in the western climate.

As McKee had promised, Gibbs did keep a journal, an excellent one, which recorded the events of the expedition from August 11, 1851, to December 28, 1851. The journal, accompanied by Gibbs' drawing of Humbolt Bay, was published by Schoolcraft in 1853. Unfortunately his map of the area was not made a part of the report.[8]

Not until after this expedition did Gibbs finally get around to trying his hand at digging gold. He enjoyed no great success in his mining ventures, but his letters on the northern mines and miners give a clear, good-humored, and interesting picture of his life in the diggings. But by the end of the year he was through with mining and returned to hear the doubtful good news that he had been appointed collector of customs at Astoria to supplant his former chief, John Adair. He held the post only six months and then had to yield it to the man he had replaced.[9] During the period that Gibbs was collector of customs his letters indicate that his mind was filled with various literary schemes. He promised Oliver Wolcott that he would get the rest of his account of the overland expedition—that covering the march from Fort Laramie to Vancouver—ready for publication and he wrote Schoolcraft that he planned to write a history of Oregon

7. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1851* (Washington, 1851), 237.

8. "Journal of the Expedition of Colonel Redick M'Kee, United States Indian Agent, Through Northwestern California, Performed in the Summer and Fall of 1851" in Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (6 vols., Philadelphia, 1851-56), 3: 99-177. Cited hereafter as *Indian Tribes of the United States*.

9. According to the Custom House Records, Gibbs served as collector from January to June 30, 1853. United States Custom House, Oregon Papers, 1848-68, microfilm copy, Oregon Historical Society.

9. OHS card file index to microfilm of Astoria Customs House papers says Gibbs served as collector Astoria Jan. 1, 1852-June 30, 1853, though all refs. in docs. Jan.-June, 1853. OHS has in mss. files his reports as collector of customs, Umpqua, 1854-57. Also in index to Astoria Customs House microfilm, there is a reference to Gibbs as Collector of Customs, Astoria, Aug. 11, 1858 (F59,3).

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which would correct "Greenhow and others, where they have fallen into error."[10] He found time to visit the winter campsite of Lewis and Clark on the Oregon coast and he laid plans to see more of the country north of the Columbia River. His comment on the citizens, politics and politicians of Oregon Territory is both bitter and amusing.

No letters from Gibbs to members of his family have been found for the period after June, 1853, but he remained in the Pacific Northwest until the end of 1860. In July, 1853, immediately after losing his post as collector of customs, he was employed as ethnologist and geologist in Captain George B. McClellan's party engaged in work on the western portion of the northern line of the great railroad surveys of 1853 to 1855. In this capacity he prepared three reports which were subsequently printed: "A Report on the Indian Tribes of Washington," "A Report on a Reconnaissance of the Country lying upon Shoalwater Bay and the Puget Sound," and "A Report on the Geology of the Central Portion of Washington Territory."[11] Isaac I. Stevens, who commanded the entire northern surveying expedition, met Gibbs for the first time in October, 1853, when the Stevens overland party met McClellan's party at Fort Colville, then a Hudson's Bay trading post under the command of Angus McDonald.[12] "He is a thoroughly educated man," Stevens wrote of Gibbs, "and combines the habits of a student with the good qualities of a woodsman and mountaineer, and has become very well acquainted with the Indian tribes through whose country the party has passed."[13] Subsequently Stevens recorded his satisfaction with Gibbs' final report on Indians, although he was

10. Schoolcraft published four letters from Gibbs dated between April and November, 1853. Cf. Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes of the United States,* 5:662-65.

11. In *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, Sen. Ex. Doc. 78,* 33 Congress, 2 Session (12 vols., Washington, 1855-60), 1:402-34, 465-73, 473-486. Hereafter cited as *Pacific Railroad Reports.*

12. McDonald, by his own account, had laid in a supply of "50 imperial gallons" in anticipation of this visit. Stevens and "McLellan" partook freely of McDonald's hospitality, but neither had sufficient capacity or endurance to win his approval. Cf. F. W. Howay, W. S. Lewis, and J. A. Mayers, eds., "Angus McDonald: A Few Items of the West," *Washington Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 8 (July, 1917), 188-229.

13. Entry for October 20, 1853, in *Pacific Railroad Reports,* Vol. 12, pt. 1, p. 146.

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displeased that Gibbs had gone beyond what Stevens considered to be his orders by making recommendations concerning the Indian service to be established in Washington Territory. For this he received a mild reproof.[14]

In January, 1854, Gibbs accompanied Stevens on a trip along Puget Sound and as far north as Victoria. Later that year he accompanied Stevens on his treaty-making expedition through the country west of the Cascades. In January, 1855, the second Territorial Legislature of Washington, in response to Stevens' urging, enacted a law providing for the organization of a territorial militia under the control of a brigadier general to be named by the legislature. Gibbs was elected to this post, and immediately began to collect information about his office.[15] At last he had won a military rank.

But the legislature had provided no funds for the militia so perhaps it is not surprising that the territorial militia was not organized when the Indians, first in the interior and then those on the Puget Sound, rose against the whites. Governor Stevens made no attempt to employ the militia. Instead he raised volunteer forces to fight the Indians when he found the regular army unwilling to give him support on his own terms. Although Brigadier General Gibbs put no forces in the field against the Indian warriors, he followed the course of the "war" closely. His lucid letter to James Swan, published in 1857, setting forth the various causes of the Indian war has ever since disturbed partisan supporters of Governor Stevens.[16]

During 1855 and 1856 Gibbs seems to have been employed by the regular army at Fort Steilacoom and also entered a donation land claim of 318 acres in Pierce County.[17] In 1856 Gibbs became

14. *Pacific Railroad Reports,* Vol. 1, p. 434. Hazard Stevens, in his biography of his father, charged that Gibbs "nursed a grievance, in that the governor had rejected an extensive and ambitious policy of Indian treaties and Indian management which Gibbs had elaborately set forth in his report on the Indians, and which, if accepted, would probably have furnished a good position for himself." Hazard Stevens, *Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens* (2 vols., Boston, 1900), 2:246. This "grievance," according to Hazard Stevens, explained Gibbs' opposition to Stevens' use of martial law during the Indian wars of 1856. What appears to be the original of the Gibbs report and recommendations, or an early copy dated March 4, 1854, is in the General George B. McClellan Papers, Vol. 5, pp. 1070-1195, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

15. Laws of Washington.

16. James G. Swan, *The Northwest Coast or Three Years Residence in Washington Territory* (New York, 1857), 425ff.

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a conspicuous critic of Governor Stevens. Early in 1856 Stevens ordered certain Pierce County settlers to leave their claims and come into the protected settlements. He charged that these people, some of them with Indian wives, were giving aid and comfort to marauding Indians. The settlers refused and in March Stevens sent some of his volunteers out to arrest and bring them in. Placed on parole, the settlers promptly returned to their claims, were rearrested, and held for military trial. Steps taken to obtain writ of *habeas corpus* were cut off when Governor Stevens proclaimed martial law in Pierce County. When Judge Edward Lander opened court he was arrested by the volunteers under orders from Stevens. Gibbs was in court that day and took a leading part as a member of the Washington bar in denouncing this illegal, autocratic, and arbitrary act. He served as secretary of the meeting of the bar that convened immediately to prepare a report on the episode, to be sent to President Pierce, and he joined with H. A. Goldsborough to report this and subsequent related events to Secretary of State Marcy.[18] One of the Gibbs and Goldsborough letters was reprinted in Washington Territory newspapers in 1857 to discredit Stevens in his campaign for the post of Territorial Delegate to Congress. It provoked a harsh response from Stevens' supporters. Gibbs himself then contributed a pungent letter dealing in such a candid way with

17. The National Archives lists two maps among the cartagraphic records of the office of the Chief of Engineers (Record Group 77) carrying Gibbs' name, as follows: "Reconnaissance of the route for a military road from Astoria to the Tualatin Plains, O.T., by Geo. H. Derby, Lieut. Top'l Engineers, August 1855. Drawn from the original field notes-scale 1 inch to 2 miles, by Geo. Gibbs, C.E." (Roads, 136, No. 2), and "U. S. Military Road from Columbia Barracks to Fort Steilacoom. Surveyed by Lieut. Geo. H. Derby, U. S. Top'l Engineers, Assisted by Geo. Gibbs, C. E. Under the direction of Maj. Hartman Bache, Top'l Eng'r., Superintendent of Military Roads, Oregon and Washington Territories, October, 1855." (Map W 31, Nos. 2, 3, and 4.) The American Geographical Society has one hand-drawn Gibbs' map, "Map of the west part of Washington Territory, 1856." The "C. E." attached to Gibbs' name on these maps was no doubt bestowed by the Army for the same reason that the Smithsonian Institution attached the letters "M. D." to his name in some of their publications. See Charlotte Shackleford, "Donation Land Claims," in Charles Miles and O. B. Sperlin, eds., *Building a State: Washington 1889-1939* (Washington State Historical Society Publications, Vol. III, Tacoma, 1939), p. 433, for identification of Gibbs' land claim.

18. These documents were printed for Congress. Cf. *Sen. Ex. Doc. 98,* 34 Congress, 1 Session (Washington, August, 1856). For a full exposition of this incident, see the admirable article by Roy N. Lokken, "The Martial Law Controversy in Washington Territory, 1856," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly,* Vol. 43 (April, 1952), pp. 91-119.

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Stevens' character and behavior as to bring howls of abuse from the Stevens' supporting *Pioneer and Democrat*.[19] Perhaps only the fact that Stevens died a hero's death in the Civil War has kept these documents from receiving the consideration they merit in appraising the administration of I. I. Stevens as governor of Washington Territory.

By 1857 Gibbs was well enough known, doubtless partly because of his opposition to Stevens, to be proposed as a candidate to run against Stevens for the position of delegate, or as the *Oregonian* put it, to run against the candidate of the "master party," which had been allowed "to trample in the dust the constitution and the liberties secured by it."[20] He was not nominated, nor is there evidence that he sought the post. Perhaps he was more pleased with the tribute from James Swan, who wrote from Washington: "My friend General Gibbs has gained for himself a good reputation at the War Department for the fine style of execution and correctness of outline displayed in the maps of his surveys which have been forwarded to this city."[21]

In June, 1857, Gibbs joined the International Boundary Survey as interpreter and geologist. The survey was engaged in locating the western portion of the forty-ninth parallel between salt water and the crest of the Rocky Mountains. Gibbs served in the field until the end of 1860 and then returned to Washington, D.C. He continued as a member of the survey until May 32, 1862.[22] Subsequently he served as secretary to the Hudson's Bay Claims Commission; he published a series of Indian dialect vocabularies from the Pacific Northwest, and he devoted much time to the arrangement of materials in the Smithsonian Institution bearing on Indian ethnology and philology. Moreover, he found time to expand the report on Indians, which was published posthumously.[23] Similarly his work with the Boundary Survey bore additional fruit when he prepared an extensive paper for the American Geographical Society and presented it at a meeting in

19. Gibbs to the Citizens of Washington Territory, *Washington Republican* (Steilacoom), June 12, 1857; see also *Pioneer and Democrat* (Olympia), April 10, June 12, 1857.

20. *Oregonian* (Portland), March 21, 1857.

21. *Pioneer and Democrat,* February 20, 1857.

22. Marcus Baker, ed., *Survey of the Northwest Boundary of the United States, 1857-61* (Washington, 1900), 14, 17.

23. "Tribes of Western Washington and Northwestern Oregon published with Extensive Vocabularies," in J. W. Powell, ed., *Contributions to North American Ethnology* (Washington, 1877), 1:163-361.

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November, 1869, and subsequently printed it.[24] Certainly these were unexpected fruits of that march to the gold fields in 1849.

Gibbs continued to interest himself in Washington Territory. August G. Kautz, a regular army officer who had wintered at Fort Steilacoom with Gibbs, wrote to Edward Higgins in March, 1862. "Gibbs I see often and I believe he is watching over the interests of the Territory better than Wallace is, for he is always on the look out to do something for it when he can, and the old fellow has a great deal of influence in a quiet way."[25]

In 1871 Gibbs married his cousin, Mary Kane Gibbs, and moved to New Haven, Connecticut. He died two years later.

John Austin Stevens, Jr., a friend of long standing to whom he had written engagingly about prospecting, prepared a memorial statement for the New York Historical Society which was printed in the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution. He spoke of Gibbs as a man of "plain, outspoken, manly, and unvarnished speech... His faults were all those of a large and generous nature such as one may look to find in the broad, deep chested, short statured man, whose large play of vital functions keeps him forever harshly busy until the whole machine breaks down in one crash."[26] Stevens asserted that during the years that Gibbs lived in the West he wrote to his family once or twice a week. "His letters are full of graphic description of life and nature and should be published. No better contribution could be made to the history of the early days of these settlements."[27] Stevens overestimated the number of these letters but there were originally many more than the nineteen printed here for the first time. These letters were written between 1850 and 1853, nine to his mother, eight to his brother Oliver Wolcott, one to his brother Alfred, and one to John Austin Stevens, Jr. Four were written from the northern California mining country, twelve from Astoria, two from Vancouver, and one from Portland. They provide an interesting picture of the Pacific Northwest—particularly politics and mining—as seen by an informed, thoughtful, sensitive, and articulate observer. They stand as Gibbs wrote

24. "Physical Geography of the Northwestern Boundary of the United States," *Journal of the American Geographical Society*, 3:134-57; 4:298-392.

25. August V. Kautz to Higgins, March 1, 1862, Bagley Papers, University of Washington Library.

26. John Austin Stevens, "A Memorial of George Gibbs," in *Annual Report . . . 1873*, 224-225.

27. *Ibid.*, 223.

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them except that rare misspellings have been corrected. Material relating to family affairs has been omitted except where it bore upon Gibbs' observations of the western country and people. The originals, together with other Gibbs and Wolcott family papers, were deposited with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1949 by Mrs. J. J. McGrath of Milwaukee, a grandniece of George Gibbs the fourth.

* * *

Astoria June 26, 1850

My Dear Mother

Uncle Sam must go by the board this steamer for I am determined that you shall have a letter from me at least once a month. I got a package of your and Laura's letters from Alfred[1] through Stewart yesterday by which I find that you are still in the dark about me. How so many letters have miscarried I can't imagine al[though?] not regularly I have still written a number. My last by a sailing vessel told you what I was about here and of my intention to remain unless something unexpected occurred. I have since had the survey of my claim completed and intend bringing the lots into market at once. I have also bought $1000 into the steamboat which I have every reason to expect will bring a handsome return. You need be under no apprehension of my wanting money, as I see you and Wolcott are from your offers, for I get about 2000$ a year and have a reasonable credit for ready money when I need it. I hope before fall to be able to pay off all my obligations for property here as well as what I owe in New York.

The discovery of the gold in this territory will if the quantity is confirmed, increase vastly the value of property here. Already about 200 have gone to the Spokane country, on the north fork of the Columbia to search and a very large body have gone south to the Umpqua and Rogue rivers, the latter is the Tshartoli of the maps. Gold is known to exist there, but its discovery in the Spokane country is yet questionable in my opinion. It is said that an Indian who found a bit of black sand, took it to his priest, telling him that he had found the white man's powder, the "Boston skookum pollalle." The priest examined it carefully,

1. Five of Gibbs' brothers and sisters lived to maturity: Elisabeth Wolcott (1819-1906) married Lucius Tuckerman; Oliver Wolcott (1822-1908); Alfred (1823-1868); Laura Wolcott (1827-1908) married T. M. d'Oremieulx; and Francis Sarason (1831-1883).

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& put it away, telling the chief that he would curse him if he divulged the secret to any one, as if he did the Bostons would overrun the country and exterminate the race. The chief however was still bent on his gun powder and brought a powder horn full of the sand down to Portland, where he showed it privately to a trader. It was ascertained on examination to be excessively rich. The Indian would not tell where he got it although large bribes and "lum" were offered him, but the story got wind and the whole upper country is in a blaze about it. I trust they will find enough of it, for a good deal will go into my pockets if they do. Still the matter is yet to be decided. The general healthiness of this country will induce great numbers to come here in preference to California. Excepting in some of the low grounds on the Columbia & Wahlahmet, I doubt if there be a healthier country anywhere. If folks did not drink themselves to death occasionally I don't know what else they would die of. Somehow or other too a rough mountain & forest country like Oregon possesses strong attractions, especially to the roving class of our men.

I wrote you before showing some reasons why Francis was unfitted for Oregon. I might mention others as to its unfitness for him. There is as you might imagine a general recklessness of character prevading all men—Money is of but little consideration to any but those who look forward to a return to civilized life. They therefore spend it as freely as they make it, gambling and drinking are the every day vices of the country—though to do the people justice they are in great measure the only ones. Generally speaking they are a fair representation of their class in the states they respectively come from, and the farmers particularly, although indolent, are excellent people. But it is no country for one who has not the power of self-denial, and a strong inducement to labor. For myself I shall be contented when the possession of a competence takes me out of it. I have about five years longer of good working time left, which I would almost agree to give for the certainty of it, though I have hopes that half the time will do, and then dear mother I shall be near you or with you always. It is however miserable enough that a man should spend the little left of his youth in the wilderness in order to pass his down hill among cities. Where one has a wife and family around him it is a different thing, though it is a shame to bring a white woman into such a country. You need be under no alarm however about my marrying *here*.

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I am very anxious to see Alfred & hope he will be able to come on this summer, for there is little chance of my going down to San Francisco. I have not been away from here since I came down. I trust he will act with judgment in the management of his property in California. He wanted me to use part of it here but I declined it. I wrote you that Fert [?] had got what he wanted at San Francisco. He bought an engine for a boat & one for a steam saw mill, bringing on men to build the boat. It is to be launched this week and is a right pretty one, 90 feet long, & 14 ft wide, nicely finished with white pine from the East![2] think of that in this wooden country. It is to run from here to Portland and Oregon City, and I think will prove a good speculation. It shows some enterprise to do this with so little to start upon. The steam mill is sold to a man on condition to erect it on land immediately adjoining mine and about two miles from the Custom house. It will be soon in operation and furnish us with lumber for the town, close at hand. Lumber is so low in California that it don't pay to send it there now, but the price for consumption here is still good, and the mills above pay very well. All goods brought into this country continue to command excellent prices. . . .

I must write a line to Lucius on the other half sheet. Eliza and Puss must content themselves with the consideration that these letters are common property. I have so much writing to do, and there is really so little to say here that the multiplication of letters is impossible. Gen. [John] Adair has gone to Nisqually with Capt [W. P.] McArthur of the Navy to bring back a vessel seized for breach of the revenue laws, so that I am "hyas tyee" here at present, and have to look after everything. The quarterly returns I imagine have to go by the next boat. Wolcott won't venture to tell me of his success in lecturing or how he stands. You must do it yourself and tell me what his style is. $1000 a year is poor pay and as the old negro said "suppose d---d poor preach too." How is it?

Don't write on thin paper to me. I am acting PM myself & I had rather pay double than spoil what's left of my gooseberries, Goodbye, Dear Mother & all

George

Tell Wool that I have not received a single newspaper. I want him to send me two or three weekly. Let him also blow up Howe

2. The *Columbia,* first steamship built on the Columbia River. See *Oregon Spectator,* April 18 and July 11, 1850.

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& Hungkrud for not answering my letters. I would like very much to have a package of a dozen cheap books, Putnams or Harpers, uncut ones and of character—The last vol of Macaulay etc. By the way I want a copy of my own book, as I neglected to bring one & my partner, who oddly enough is an old blue light wants to see it. George McLeane is going home for his wife & has promised to take this. Hatch will probably go also. Be good to both of them.

* * *

Oct. 23, 1851
Scott's Valley, near Mt. Shasti

My Dearest Mother

I am writing you from one of the far off ends even of this far off part of the world. It is one of the valleys which lie on the headwaters of the Klamath River & near the great snow peak which commands this vast mountain region, but you will look in vain for it upon any map until you see mine, for Fremont's & the others are as far wrong as if they had been of the kingdom of Timbuctoo. Major [Henry W.] Wessells and Dr. John S. [?] Griffin return tomorrow from here to Sonoma with the command, and I write down by them. I remain here a week or ten days to see the commission wound up and pacificate a couple of thousand Indians, *or less.* I wrote to Eliza before leaving the forks of the Klamath & Trinity. We left there on the 9th and followed the Klamath to the mouth of this river & thence to this place a few miles above it. The entire distance has been but 110 miles, but we seldom could make more than ten miles a day & were obliged occasionally to halt to have a talk with the natives. A more savage country I never saw. It is a wilderness of mountains through the gorges of which these huge mountain torrents have forced their way, and nothing but the extraordinary impetus given to human enterprise by the hope of gold would ever have explored it. As it is, it is tracked from end to end, up every stream & on every range by the trails of the miners, while upon the great routes the packers have made paths for their mules trains carrying Chili flour, Cincinnati pork, Brazil coffee and Manilla sugar where a year ago bear meat & acorns or salmon & roots were the only articles of food. To give you an idea of this wonderful traffic, a single town, started into existence a year ago, was accustomed to pack 100 tons of flour a month to the miners on the lower parts of the river. The vicissitudes which follow

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individuals have however attended that place, almost all the miners having been drawn from below by richer diggings recently found here & in the neighboring streams, & three thousand men are now at work upon the mountains around. The extent of their operations would astonish you. Scotts river for three miles above its mouth its turned into canals built of stone & earth ranging from one to two hundred yards long and ten wide & dammed more than thirty times. All this has been done in one summer. There are in this district a great number of Indians who have been very troublesome, being for that matter often provoked, & the miners had determined this winter to revenge the deaths of their comrades by a general war of extermination. We hope to avert this entirely & Col[Redick]McKee in convening the Indians has also invited delegates from all the mining parties to be present in council. The leading men who have visited our camp have all promised their influence to bring about a peaceful settlement. I have prepared a pretty full map of our route & added all the information I could collect about the adjoining country, & I think that in my new trade of a geographer I shall succeed pretty well. My journal is also full & will contain a good deal of valuable information. Col McKee expects to go on to Washington himself & has promised to get the map & sketches properly executed & I shall write Schoolcraft to see that the vocabularies are spelt right. Of these I have obtained quite a number of new ones. I shall give McKee a letter to you and also one to Mr. Stevens, who I think will be glad to obtain information which he can give. I have a handsome quiver with bow and arrows, and an apron made of deerskin and braided grass worn by the Klamet women (I tried hard to get a full dress, but did not succeed) and also the only garment of a young chief, a very particular friend of mine so long as my beads and brass buttons lasted. It is made of sewn skins of a small & very rare fox. These Indians set so high a value on their own manufactures & are so unwilling to part with them, that I could not afford to make large purchases as I should have liked to do.

I have not yet had a line either from Alfred or you since I left & am getting very anxious to hear. I wrote to him requesting my letters to be sent to Trinidad, but imagine that he did not get it in time. Whether I shall be able to see him before he leaves is very uncertain. I am afraid not. Which route we shall take from here, whether towards the coast & thence to San Francisco by

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water, or to the Sacremento river and down will depend upon the state of the weather. We shall be here about a week or ten days, but as the season is late and the rains expected which become snows in the mountains, we may be in an awkward scrape. I had intended to remain here during the winter & mine, but am so anxious to get my map and journal properly completed, that I shall return to Sonoma for a couple of weeks first and decide after getting any letters whether to return here or go elsewhere. My health is perfect & the *fat* you were troubled about is pretty well worn off. I shall write as soon as I get into a post office country. At present Goodnight. Love to the girls and kind remembrance to all my friends from

George

* * *

Forks of the Salmon, July 17th 1852

My Dear Wool

It is a disagreeable necessity that of commencing every letter with a geographical disquisition on the country, but I presume it will be necessary to tell you that the Masouruk or Salmon is a branch of the Klamath, & that this place is about 25 miles from my usual headquarters, Orleans Bar. I wrote mother the week before last giving an account of our illustrious Indian campaign, & the fatal necessity of Hannibal's recrossing the Alps or otherwise my quitting my diggings & seeking some, where my red brethern were scarcer. Fortunately at this place they are pretty much exterminated. I have spent a week or ten days here & in the neighborhood prospecting in company with a party of three. Our object being to find a bar onto which we can turn the water and which will afford us permanent diggings. Two of the men are out today & if on their return they do not make a favorable report I shall pitch my camp here and work alone as long as I can make fair wages. My prospect for present work gives me from half an ounce to ten dollars a day, quite sufficient to prove a temptation at a time when few make more than six. The main part of this letter will be devoted to the subject of mining but it is necessary to prelude it with something on the important question of self. You bid me in yours not to give my notes to Uncle Sam but send them to you to make into a book. I think I have written before that I engaged to prepare a journal of our expedition when I set out on it last summer & that although it proved a serious cost to me & the expedition itself a great loss of

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time, because owing to the season of the year, I was prevented from reaching the mines before the spring storms set in & was consequently out of employment for some months, still I felt bound to fulfill my word. A portion of this journal only would prove of interest beyond the mere occasion & its relation to the particular objects of the Indian treaties. As to the rest, the views of Indian manners etc—Geography, mining & so on, I shall have the means of extending & connecting those notes very materially & have already added much in my memoranda. Should it finally prove of any account, you shall dispose of them as you please & I will put them in proper shape. Some notoriety would obtain at any rate from the publication of the journal by Congress—But upon this matter I must have written a dozen times. You must recollect that living a sort of Arab life in tents or under the broad canopy itself, the means and appliances of writing are none of the best, that is I cannot take things round with me when travelling on my own account & even when in my camp, dare not have them by me but must leave them at some trading post when I can only get at them occasionally. I cannot afford a mule as yet, & if I move have either to pack what I need, or watch some chance of getting my things carried for me. These Indian bedevilments have lost me nearly a months work out of the good season, a consideration which the more induces me to remain on this river. I had before made, not any great amount it is true, but at the close of the first month about a hundred dollars beyond my expenses & outfit. This has been somewhat diminished but I shall work up again. The mines are nowhere what they have been, & a half ounce a day is higher wages than most men earn. Five or six indeed is getting to be common & mere laborers can be hired for seventy five dollars a month and their board. As board is a dollar & a quarter a day on the most economical footing—I mean providing & cooking for oneself, & the other expenses, clothing, particularly boots, tools, etc are in proportion, five dollars is little more than a living, especially if one loses time by having to move. Rigid economy is therefore necessary to lay by any considerable sum, unless one encounters those fortunate strikes of which you read in the newspapers and which occur now and then. For my part, what troubles me most is the recollection of the debts I left at home and the time I have in one way or another fooled away since I left there. If instead of going to that bloody Oregon & staying two years in the vain hope of

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building up Astoria without capital or advantage in itself, I had gone at once into the mines before the cream was taken off, I might long since have discharged them and made a capital on which I could have worked to advantage. But it is no use talking now. I *must* & will work myself clear before I think of returning home. If I can succeed in getting a suitable location & forming a company to work it, by hiring laborers etc, I can make money yet. If not, I shall work alone hereafter. Do not think any more of public offices. The more I see of their operation here the less I like them and the idea of a possible appointment distracts my attention & prevents my feeling the fixedness of plan necessary for my success. The Chinese mission is a tempting bait in many respects but do not place my application for there at least until a new election, when if the unlikely event of a whig President occurs it may be worth while. Meanwhile I will work out my own destiny here. On this I am decided. What I want is money & poor as the mines are I believe them better than office under the disgusting tenure in which they are held here.

You will see by the date of this that it is my thirty seventh birthday. No very comfortable or pleasing contemplation. There was a time when I hoped that before reaching it I should have been something else than a Klamath miner. And the retrospect affords no particular ground for the indulgence of vanity. Time fooled away in desultory studies & pursuits instead of being concentered upon some one object & a good deal wasted in an even worse manner are what I have the satisfaction of looking back at. Half a long life time gone in this way and the only hope forward that of making some provision for keeping old age out of the alms house. But my candle is burnt out—or rather run down by the wind blowing through the tent & I must stop. I write in a huge canvass trading house where I am domiciled for a day or two until we have decided on our location.

Friday 18th Today we concluded on our plans. Two of the men have gone off in different directions & the other remains with me. We have moved into a vacant log house & got to work in earnest again. As I find one of the packers going down to Trinidad tomorrow, I shall send this off by him although it is not what I intended to write when I commenced. My next shall be exclusively devoted to the diggings & not to the digger. You will think from the dismal strain in which I have written that I am desponding. This is not so, for though not sanguine of any

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great success or rapid result, I am of good cheer for hard work and am determined to fight the battle out. Thank mother for the efforts she has made for me and my other friends for their support, but tell her not to urge any more applications. I should feel as if I returned disgraced if I did so as poor or worse than when I left home. It grieves me to be so long absent and no prospect of speedy return for I feel that with all the sacrifices she has made for us, she is entitled to our support & comfort in her age, and it is a reproach to me that I can not offer it now. I love her and all of you with stronger affection as I look back from this distant land and hope that she will yet have many years to live with the wanderers returned and to the girls and my aunts and Molley with whom before you get this I presume you will be at Newport. I shall steal time in the course of the week to write to Francis and Alfred. . . . Goodnight old fellow all good fortune to you.

George.

* * *

On Salmon River Sept 4 th 1852

My Dear Austin (J. Austin Stevens Jr. Esq)

I have owed you a letter for some time, but the very irregular life that a miner necessarily leads renders writing at all both difficult and irksome. I have been now for some months in the mines and find every reason to regret that instead of remaining in Oregon as I did, employed in projects that turned out abortive, I had not at once entered them before the cream was taken off. In every thing I have undertaken the want of capital has foiled me & to have obtained this by direct means should have been my first effort. It is now late to begin, but though my success hitherto has not been flattering, I do not despair of bettering my fortunes yet. If you have any curiosity about the operations in this part of the country, get Woolcott to show you a letter I wrote a few weeks ago, giving details of mining, etc. The northern mines, as those of the Klamath & its tributaries & of Roges River are called, have not hitherto proved as rich as those on the Sacramento or still further south. They are however still undeveloped & this has been to me an inducement to prefer them, as well as the circumstance that I had already become acquainted with the country, and that the outfit required was far less than elsewhere. I have been for the last fortnight engaged in a "prospecting" excursion, examining the sources of a number of the tributaries of this river which is one of the larger branches of the Klamath

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and though not successful in finding rich diggings in the direction we took, I believe that I have hit upon ground which will occupy me through the fall & insuing winter. The expedition was moreover of some importance to me as I obtained an acquaintance with an entirely unexplored region. I cannot without running beyond the bounds of a letter, give you an account of our journey, though I should be glad to do so, as it presents a picture of the adventure which a pioneer in new diggings goes through with. Our party consisted of four, all thoroughly armed & we took with us two mules, one carrying blankets, mining tools, a few cooking utencils, & such provisions as our rifles would not supply us with; the other intended to pack game or to ride in case of need. Our first days travel was directly up a long steep spur of a mountain between two creeks, lying in deep ravines, or gulches as they are called here, the object being to attain at once the crest of one of the high ridges. Upon these crests it is necessary to travel altogether, for the smaller streams lie always in deep & broken beds, very narrow & filled with dense forest and underbrush. From eight to twelve miles a day was a good journey & the very severe march only enabled us to reach a level flat near the summit in which we found water & grass for the animals. These ridges, or sierras, at least the principal ones, are so near the snow line that we found occasional banks of snow lying on their northern exposures. Notwithstanding they are covered with dense thickets of cheruisal manzanita and other scrubby growths, through which it is very difficult to force a way, except where the elk & grizzlies have trodden their well worn paths, and the various evergreen trees, the balsams, firs, pines, etc. cover many of them. A peculiarity of the country is that the only approach to valleys among these mountains are small flats lying at the very heads of the gulches & embosomed in the tops of the mountains. There the grass is fine & springs of the finest & coldest water abound & to these the elk, the black-tailed deer and bears resort. In them we always made our camps, descending to the gulches to prospect & returning towards night, no light labor as we often had to go down some 1200 or 2000 feet to the beds of the water courses below. The number of grizzlies that frequent these places is enormous & their trails & footprints are seen everywhere. It is not the season to hunt them for they are now as lean as race horses, but we were on the constant look out that they did not hunt us. One of our party going out alone one morning to get a

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deer saw an enormous old fellow come out of some bushes a short distance off & thought he would give him a shot for amusement. Before however he had time to fire another followed and then another until five marched out. He had very quickly concluded not to trouble them & was in some doubt as to the expediency of climbing a tree but they finally walked away, though as he remarked not in any hurry. The elk proved scarce for we ascertained that a party of Indians had been hunting them and had driven them off. We however got one enormous old bull, weighing very nearly 1000 weight. He stood the shots & we chased him a couple of miles down the mountain before he concluded to die. As we could not carry him to camp, two of us watched him during the night making a huge fire to keep off the bears while the others went back for the mules & in the morning they started down to the river with a lot of meat, which they sold and returned, going to camp that evening they found a grizzly already there taking provisions, & shot at him but without effect. The also saw two old cow grizs. and four young ones promenading on the ridge over their heads, probably with the benevolent object of stealing a mule during the night, but the design was thwarted by setting the brush on fire. Such were a few of the little incidents of a trip by no means adventurous. One of the men however thought he had lit upon a more substantial affair. The fire in the mountains had already warned us that Indians were hunting & we did not know to what tribe they belonged. Our man who was hunting alone suddenly came upon four of them, two of whom had firearms & concluded that he was to have a private fight as he did not recognize them under their paint. They however sang out the ai eguih [?] or word for friend and the appearance of the women reassured him. They came on to our camp together & we found they were some of my old neighbours, very excellent Indians at present, as they do not want to have their houses burnt this winter and knowing from a late example that a white man's revenge is sure if it is slow.

I am however getting towards the end of my sheet & must be brief. I write at a trading post to send by packer who goes to Trinidad tomorrow. I presume that Seward & Gricom [?] have long since closed their accounts with you, though I fear that you made no profit on the consignment sincerely trust you lost nothing & that you were satisfied with their exertions. I have not heard from them since last winter and in fact but rarely

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get letters my way as the mail to Humbolt bay, the nearest sea port, is only sent occasional. I am hoping for letters from home now by every packer who comes up. You are the only correspondent I have out of the family who has proved true to me and I trust you will even if not paid in full still give me a remembrance occasionally. Tell me all sorts of personal news, gossip & scandal particularly. You cant think how this mountain air and the absence of all society whets the appetite for such items. The marriages & deaths of persons I never cared a d - - - am for are most interesting particulars. Cant you stimulate the club to write me a letter. . . . For my part I can offer but little in exchange. Whether Osage Bill has got his wing dam in or Dancing Jack has found his mules would not interest you, any more than who won the last game of poker that some lazy dirts have been playing this evening for a pair of woollen socks. Besides the candle is burning low & I must soon retire to bed, to wit a pile of blankets which are lying under a tree not far off. Remember me very warmly to your father, mother & sisters & show this to Wolcott as it may leave the bay before I get another down. Direct always to San Francisco from whence my letters are sent when opportunity occurs. Fairwell old fellow, good luck attend you. For my part I hope to be a few ounces richer before this reaches you, but I must needs work out a good many before I see you in person

Yours very truely George Gibbs.

* * *

Gullion's Bar, on Salmon River
Oct. 8 '52

My Dearest Mother

It is about six weeks since I wrote Wolcott and it is high time that I gave an account of myself, though I suppose that Austin Stevens showed you a letter I sent him on my return from the mountains as I requested. Something has again detained yours to me for I have received none since the batch that came in June and which were of no later dates than March. I need not tell you how anxious I have become to hear of yourself and the family. I have written down to Mr. Moore and George Wm. to enquire as to their fates. Mr. Moore is very kind. I received the other day a large package with papers N. Lond. [New London] News and magazines from him, a great treat in these wilds, and which after I had done with them were duly scattered

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among the miners camps of the Salmon. Since the date of my letter to Austin I ascended the South Fork of the river to near its source in the hope of finding better diggings in the "gulches" as they are called, than I would get here, and generally to satisfy myself about the country. Not meeting with any thing satisfactory I have returned here and unless something unforeseen happens shall remain here for the winter. Next week I think of knocking up a small log cabin where I shall be by myself and can during the rainy days employ the time in writing. The fact is that since I left home I never have had a place to myself except the woods and there one cannot very well feel stationary. The expansive ideas formed under the blue canopy and which made a view of fifteen or twenty miles the matter of perhaps five minutes consideration, are very inconsistent with sedentary pursuits. At this place I shall have some company for the winter of very good men and with a hole of my own can manage to live. The diggings to be sure are not very good, but I have not found much better by prospecting, and as this takes money as well as time, I must quit it. As yet I have laid up nothing of consequence though I have avoided getting in debt. In the Spring I think I shall abandon this part of the country and strike for some other rivers. Do not make yourself unhappy at any dull prospects, I have patience and resolution, good health & hope for the future withal and shall try and profit by the experience of former mistakes. As for the rest have no fears. I never touch liquor and do not gamble. I find myself generally both liked and respected and there are many men around laboring like myself who are intelligent, moderately well educated and are both pleasant companions and very obliging good friends. The only trouble upon my mind is that I cannot discharge my debts at home as I hoped long since to have done. I left none in Oregon except a mortgage for a few hundred dollars on some land, and I have written to my friend [Amory] Holbrook to sell out & pay that off. If hereafter I can realise a few thousand dollars, and that not many, I shall come back to you again, but I cannot do so poorer than when I left. I have given a note of introduction to a Mr. Liscom, a sensible, honest and every way worthy man, who is going home to bring out his family. He has been very obliging to me in various ways & I should like to have you ask him to a family dinner and get Laura to play on the piano for him. He can give Wolcott a good deal of practical in-

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formation about the mines. I also gave him a note to Wm. F. Channing. Unfortunately my sack containing a box of seeds and shrubs etc which I had collected for Aunt Sarah is at my last camp, 25 or 30 miles off waiting for an opportunity to come down by some pack train or I would send it by him. I will try and forward it to some express office however on its arrival. Tell Aunt Sarah that I have made three separate collections for her and lost them all. The last one had varieties of acorns of different evergreen oaks, nuts of the bay tree or Indian olive, a superb and fragrant evergreen etc. I have now a quantity of seeds of the great scented California mountain lily, the manzanita & other shrubs & will try to add some sugar pine nuts, and those of the big cone or common Indian nut pine. It is however impossible to get any thing of this sort except on happening upon them in the mountains as the Indians always cook or break them. I shall also write to a friend at Humboldt bay to forward a dozen plants of the famous Redwood cedar, the gigantic tree so often spoken of as growing on the California coast, and a dozen more of the Salmon berry bush, a species of raspberry that grow to the height of twenty feet. The berry resembles the flesh of the fish in color, though more yellow. The Chinooks of the Columbia have many superstitious associations concerning it and the Salmon whence its English name. It blooms about the time the Salmon first appear & the fruit is ripe when they are in full season. Formerly they would not sell the fish uncooked until the berry was ripe. It is about an inch long and tart. I regret exceedingly the difficulty of making any collections here or of keeping anything. But seeds unless the plant is very conspicuous cannot well be obtained as when out of bloom you lose sight of it. The Redwood and the Salmon berry would I think both flourish at Newport. Tell Aunty I am afraid she thinks me ungrateful in not writing to her direct and I ought long since to have done so. I will make up for it by a long yarn about plants and scenery soon.

I am just recovering from a strange affection of the eyes. The sailors, of whom we have many through the mines, all insist that I was "moon struck." Just after my return I was sleeping as usual on the ground, but as it happened with my face directly exposed to the full broad moonlight. The night was cool but I had plenty of blankets and slept very soundly. In the morning when I woke I found that I could not see with any distinctness, had a sort of double vision and tottered in walking. In fact I had to close one eye to

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see at all. This you might think rather equivocal as regards my amusements the night before, but I had drunk nothing but tea. I might have thought it a billious attack but there was no headache or other symptoms. I had walked fifteen or twenty miles the day before without fatigue and never felt better in my life than when I went to bed. During the day I was quite sick. The right eye squinted outwards considerably and both were inflamed and swollen. The affection did not wear off for a week, and even now the lids are inflamed, but for two or three days I could distinguish nothing clearly and felt weak and staggering. Now I have lived and slept so much in the open air that taking cold in the face seems out of the question, but what occasioned the attack otherwise is incomprehensible unless the moon did it. I leave it to Wolcott as physician & philosopher to decide whether she is guilty of such offences in reality. The sailors all swear they have seen men's faces distorted and paralized by sleeping in the moon in southern latitudes. For his satisfaction I will revise and add to my Klamath notes this winter & send them to him with the map. What has been done about the journal at Washington? Did they order it printed, and above all did they order it paid for. I meant to have sent him the specimens of gold alluded to in my letter, but alas they were transformed into pork and flour during my journey. I can however replace them and when I get a few ounces ahead again will send them with the 100 I borrowed of you. There are some few other particulars about the mines which I must keep till my next. Give my best love to the girls and remember me as usual to my friends. Tell some of your acquaintances in Congress to send out what public documents there are of interest, especially all relating to Oregon and California. I have neither heard from Alfred nor Francis since I wrote you. I shall write them both in a few days. Meantime abuse Alfred vehemently, for I have no letter from him since he left Panama. Goodbye dearest mother from your son who wishes most of anything to see you again. GEORGE

P. S. Since the above was written I have received yours of April, May & June in regular file but none later, also one of last November, two from Frank besides those you sent, and have one from Alfred & one from Mary, William and Aunt Ruth. I will in a short time write to Aunt R & Mary. Meantime thank them for these letters. Yours were a great relief to me. I must close this but will soon write again. In haste George.

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Hereafter direct to care of Gibbs & co. San Francisco. Love to Alfred. I will answer his letter in a few days.

* * *

Astoria, Oregon, Dec. 19, 1852

My Dearest Mother

I wrote a hasty letter to Wolcott last Sunday to apprise him of my arrival in San Francisco on my way here and as you will probably want an autobiography of the last few months of my life, I will give you that in brief, and the business matters to him on another sheet. My letters to you have clearly met with the same misfortunes that yours have on their way to my "diggings." I trust however that they will all eventually turn up. I have written once a month through the summer until the last month, November, when I was prevented by want of paper, until the end of it, & then as I had resolved to go to the seaboard for the winter I deferred it till I should reach the Bay. I received quite a number of letters at the end of September and dispatched in return a large budget by the next train that went down. The next I got were at the Bay on the 1st December and still more at Astoria the day before yesterday. These came down to September from you and Laura & one from Wolcott of Oct 8th I mention them particularly because I find from your letters as well as Alfred's that you have been under some alarm. I remained at Gullion's bar on the Salmon after my return from the mountain expedition of which I gave some account in my letter to Austin Stevens, from the end of September to the middle of November, mining in the river bed or in the bars & creeks, but without much success, as in October it rained heavily for a few days and the water rose rapidly. The best work is done at the extreme low water which precedes the fall rains. This year these set in nearly a month earlier than usual for a short time and though the river fell again so as to enable the miners to repair the dams and resume work, they recommenced with great violence & not only the dams were washed away but the bridge over the Salmon carried off. In these canyons a rise of 15 feet in a night is not unusual. I intended next to conduct the water of one of the small creeks over a high bar & work a long tom for the winter, on my own account. A company had been engaged all summer in building a heavy timber dam across a larger branch, for the purpose of throwing it over the extensive flat of Gullion's bar & I had expected to hire water from them. I had accordingly spent a fortnight on the

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house we were to winter in, but the freshet prevented their finishing the work. I concluded to try a smaller one myself. But the train sent down for our provisions did not return & there was every appearance of severe scarcity in the mines generally. I did not consider it safe to remain cooped up in a place almost impossible to get out of or into after the snows fall & still did not like to move again, when I heard that a packer who had passed up had reported that I was appointed to an office, which, according to the rumour was worth $100,000. In some wonder at the liberality of Congress & the Cabinet, I shouldered my rifle and travelled up to the packer's trading post. There I got a little clearer idea of the matter. It was a custom house officer in Oregon, but there were no letters. The idea of going back to Astoria at the old pay of a collector, as I supposed it still to remain, did not please me, but I was of course ignorant how far I might be committed, was pretty near *broke* again, and had every prospect of present starvation, saving always black tailed venison which is not much better than mule. Accordingly I concluded to get out of that, at any rate, trusting to find some certain information below or at any rate to get employment for the winter at the saw mills on Humboldt Bay. One or two other miners were of this same mind and the storm holding up for a day, I shouldered my inevitable gun took my blankets on my back & leaving the rest of my plunder at the shanty crossed the mountains to Orleans Bar on the Klamath, my old stamping ground. There I found one or two old letters & a note from an acquaintance mentioning my appointment. It was lucky I got out when I did, for it snowed that night heavily on the mountains & covered the trail. At the bar I learned that there was no provision on the river, that everybody had put off packing till the last in hopes of a fall in prices & in consequence had been caught by the early rains. After spending a day with my friend Dr. Whitmore finding it would *not* stop raining, I travelled down to the forks with a couple of companions, making about twenty miles, on an awful trail, wet through & what was worse being obliged to pack my blankets, which weighed twenty pounds dry & I don't know how much more when well soaked. At the forks of the Klamath & Trinity however we found a welcome at the trading post of a friend of mine, Mr. MacDonald, a New Yorker who was with us on the expedition last year and had fixed his tabernacle at this point. He was luckily going down with his train which saved

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me forty five miles of severe footing, so I put my blankets over a pack saddle, tied a rope round a mule's jaw for a bridle & with a hide lariat twisted into a pair of stirrups started to help drive his train. We had no other company but a big dog, and it was not altogether a safe operation, but needs must etc. We had to make two camps in the mountains, at the second and most dangerous one fortunately finding company in a train going up & the third day got into Union

I never was a good horseman yet but when I hear of "rough riding" I shall always think of travelling through the Redwoods behind a light train on a pack saddle as a highly creditable performance. The soil in these Redwood forests is a deep black mould which when wet becomes a greasy glutinous paste to an astonishing depth. The ground is moreover in this particular tract, very rough in steep up and down pitches & covered with protruding roots between which on the trail are deep holes full of water & mud. Through all this we hurried at breakneck pace to reach the town before nightfall, the mules sometimes not raising a foot for twenty feet where a good slide presented itself & at the bottom bringing up "all sitting" instead of standing. Besides this we had to cross several streams swollen just to the swimming point and rapid as torrents. I believe I gave you a description of mule driving last spring when I went out to the mines with the cattle—but driving a light train is worse than a loaded one as the animals are always running off the road to pick up grass. At the bay I found several vessels ready to go out, but we were detained until the 4th by the severe storms which have swept this coast the past month. There I found just arrived a package of letters which the boys had forwarded containing among others two from Mr. [Elisha?] Whittlesey informing me of the appointment Etc. We had a speedy but boistrous run down to San Francisco, thirty six hours. There I saw George and his brothers and met some army friends of Alfred's and mine. Capt. [George] Stoneman, Major [Osborne] Cross etc I also saw Dr. Stout and passed part of the evening with him. Lt. Col. [Joseph] Hooker, I believe intends soon to return to the states. I beg if you see him you will show him all attention as most gentlemanly officer & a warm friend. Williamson I understand was going home too, but did not meet him. Dr. Griffin was at Benitia [Benicia] I had previously got a very long and pleasant letter from him. He is a perfect trump and when you see him you will not wonder

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that we both like him as much as we do. I left with the boys to forward to you by the Sovereign of the Seas, which was to sail in a few days, a quantity of Indian traps—Two Klamath womens aprons, one of straw ornamented with the nuts of the sugar pine and the "dew claws" or little hoofs of the deer, and the other entirely of pinones or pine nuts. This last is very dirty but it is the most valued of the two & may be considered as like old lace. There is also a necklace of straw braid & some tassels for the hair. Specimens of rope and twine and a number of baskets the round small ones worked in figures are worn on the head the flat ones are used to winnow seeds from the chaff—the close deep ones are pots in which they cook the acorn porridge by putting in hot stones. The six round sticks are the gambling tools. The game is to guess in which hand the player holds the one which is unmarked, the whole being first rolled up in a bit of bunch of hay & torn in two, an accompaniment of singing & gesticulating being kept up. I will give you a clearer account of this when I send you my notes. You will also find a Humboldt Bay quiver with bow and arrows, some fish hooks, a seal spear head of bone & an Elk horn in the velvet. I could not get any skins except at an outrageous price. By the way, I have not heard whether you got the things I sent you last winter. I trust the sea otter got out safe. I have sent by express to Mr. Hall a dozen Redwood seedlings and half a dozen young Salmon berry plants. Tell Wolcott to say to him that the Redwoods are to be planted in a oriface[?] —of mold (vegetable) and say I will write to Mr. Hall himself soon. I sent Wolcott an account of the sugar pine a while ago. If he did not publish it tell him to hold on to it and I will send a more correct one together with measurements of the Redwoods, counting ages by rings Etc. Did he get the account of the Shoshonee falls which I sent for publication. Whenever he prints anything I should like a copy. If he has a spare one of the Salmon article tell him to send it to me. Schoolscraft writes me that he is publishing my journal in his large work with the map reduced. I regret this as I could now add much to it. I was in hopes it would have appeared merely in the annual Indian Department report. It is not valuable enough for a more permanent or costly shape. But the moment I am settled I mean to rewrite the portions relative to the Klamath & embody my notes of the last summer which I will send to Wolcott to do what he likes with. I have written a note to Mr. de Couviers[?] whom I had

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not time to hunt up to apologize to him for my apparent neglect & to let him know my future address, as well as to ask his. I always envy you the pleasant people you constantly speak of in your letters as having met. I am afraid it is true that I should be somewhat out of water at a watering place now a days, but the imagination still wants society with a great deal of pleasure. What would you have said if I could have suddenly appeared among the Newport crowd in my usual costume. A pair of buck skin breeches fringed down the legs—a red flannel shirt over a hickory one and a panama hat, once worth an ounce but blackened with dust & sweat. A leather belt supporting a sheath knife and revolver and a beard as long and grizzly as a bear skin. I am sorry you have had any uneasiness about me. I have never been in better health though my weight is much reduced—even Alfred could no longer complain of my fat—I weigh but 153 pounds.

Well in any event I had to quit the mines for the winter and even if our new Uncle Sam turns me out next spring I can but go back again with the experience of the past summer I think I should meet with success. It takes some time to learn that as with any other trade. But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Goodbye my dear mother I will write again by the next steamer & must now talk to Wolcott. Love to all my friends from your son

GEORGE

* * *

Astoria, Dec. 22, 1852

My Dear Alfred

I presume you are again wondering what the devil has become of me for I fear that my last letter to you has miscarried as I hear nothing of others sent at the same time. I wrote you from the Salmon at the end of September and just as I had finished it yours of April and some other date came along. It was the first time I had heard of you since your departure. I gave you in mine, a full account of my doings and wanderings since the previous one. You very naturally blame me for my neglect of writing home, but I have written once a month since I went to the mines with perhaps one exception & sometimes oftener. There is however no mail farther than Humboldt Bay and access to that is very uncertain. We not only have great trouble in getting letters, but as the only means of sending is through occasional pack trains, are by no means confident that ours will go out safely. In fact I did not hear of my appointment till about the 20th of

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November and then by a mere report brought up by a man who came from San Francisco. My letters did not reach the Bay until the 1st December. But for the impending famine through all the northern mines, I should not have left them even on hearing of the appointment, for I was not an applicant for it, and was ignorant then that the salary had been raised. To remain was however out of the question for I saw clearly that the suffering would be terrible and that the winter diggings there would not warrant one in remaining. There was not ten days provisions in the whole country when I left, the rivers were high and snow fell immediately after to an unusual depth. All the signs are of a very severe winter and a very early one. Here where I now write in Oregon, the country is covered with snow to the depth of over a foot & it is hard frozen. There is not a hope of saving the cattle. Many will perish through almost the whole extent of Oregon. Many emigrants will lose from five to ten thousand dollars worth. The potatoes have been frozen to a serious extent, for you know they rarely more than house them & even the seed wheat has been ground up. Wheat is worth six dollars a *bushel.* Flour at the Oregon mills 40 $ per bbl. So that you see the prospects in the mountains. The Columbia is frozen nearly across at Vancouver, a very unusual thing.

Even had I been aware of the increase in the salary of the collector of Astoria, I should not, until knowing how the election had gone, have left the mines with any favorable prospects, for I had firmly determined to continue in them until I had money enough to establish me in something else. There is no country in the world where money is as necessary to success as it is in California and Oregon. To take this office for a few months & then to be turned out of it, with outstanding bonds and the necessity of waiting until my accounts are settled before I go out of gunshot would be ruinous to me. Even on my arrival at San Francisco to which place I hurried, I was in great doubt whether I ought not at once to decline it, & it was only on learning the probability that Wolcott had forwarded my bond with the necessary security and on the urgent recommendation of Hooker that I concluded to defer a decision till my arrival. I have written to notify the department of my being here, and am going up to Oregon City and Salem as soon as the mail comes to see the Governor and ascertain if they have been sent to him with the commission as I was advised. If so I am bound in honor to qual-

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ify under any circumstances, for [John] Adair is a defaulter, and although I never applied for the office, nor did any of the family, I feel that I ought to do so under the circumstances even if I were turned out the next day. It seems that [President Millard] Fillmore gave me the appointment of his own accord, on being satisfied that the report of my intemperate habits was incorrect. And speaking of that, let me set you at rest on the subject. When we parted I told you that I had resolved not to drink anything as long as I remained on the Pacific—I did not consider or intend it as a pledge but as a resolve,—and in fact for a long time drank little or nothing—However when our expedition was up, and after being detained until too late to do anything, I found myself adrift again, I did drink considerably—less as a habit than when I was with other men who did. When I went to the mines, I solemnly pledged myself however that I would use no ardent spirits whatever, & I have kept it. I have not touched a glass of liquor in more than six months, & even of wine & ale I have been very sparing. And now that for the first time I write you since you told me of the affair, I renew the pledge to you on my word of honor, so that you can be easy on that score at least.

I was unsuccessful in the mines though I made my expenses. I think however I could do much better another year with my present experience, and if I lose this office, I shall return to them to remain. As to that the boys told me that Pierce had given Uncle William a promise not to remove me, and though I do not put much confidence in that, I have more in the urgent assurances of Hooker that I need be under no apprehension. He could not of course go into particulars but I felt satisfied that he would use his own influence to aid in having me retained. I told him that I should of course be glad of any assistance from my friends, but I could not consent that any other interest should be sacrificed on my account, as I had no right to ask favors from the new administration, and it might exhaust their influence to keep me in. There are some excuses for lenity towards me it is true, for Adair though a democrat has been suffered to remain through his whole term, and I was only appointed at the expiration of it on his proving a defaulter. This being a territory too and not a state & having therefore no right to vote is of less consequence, but there will be awful kicking if any whigs are left in. There is a split in the democratic ranks and at the head of one branch is Judge [O. C.] Pratt, with a tail of [S. R.] Thurston men. They

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are the most violent foul mouthed and abusive blackguards out of hell, and Pratt the d—dest rascal agoing & every possible effort will be made by them to clear the kitchen. To this set belong the old Methodist Mission backsliders and all of Pike and Posey counties, and a beautiful lovely and charming set they are & be d—d to them. Now I want to be perfectly candid with you in the matter, for I know you will wish to exert your self about it, and may possibly ask from Gov [William?] Smith's friendship his influence with the administration. If I am not removed I shall hold myself perfectly aloof from politics here and elsewhere, without a sacrifice of any principle. What turn matters may take hereafter I cannot forsee. — I am a whig, but I am a union man first. I have always held Seward in contempt and never would vote for him since his first election for anything. If as is possible, the old union whig party is dead, I am free to follow any banner I see fit, but I do not choose to commit myself in advance nor do I wish to make that any recommendation. But what I wish particularly to say is that feeling perfectly satisfied that I have no *right* to ask any favors, I do not wish any one as a mere matter of friendship to push his influence to retain me. The office is now worth 5000 $ a year, for the salary was raised to $3000 on Adair's account and the fees & commissions will probably amount to that in addition, the highest limit allowed. There will therefore be many applicants for it. If I can retain it without undue or unreasonable solicitation well and good. If not, I shall blame no one, nor complain, but go my way rejoicing that it is no worse. So much for that.

Now as to yourself. I had a long conversation with Stoneman at San Fran. who told me more particularly than you did the conduct of Mr. Secretary [C. M.] Conrad & Gen. Scott to you. As to Conrad, I knew he was a blackguard from a letter he wrote Gov. [J. P.] Gaines in reply to one drafted by me at the time the troops were withdrawn from this country, but I did think better of Scott. I did not work for him at this election and should not ever have voted had I known as much as I do now. However his fish is somewhat overdone and there is no use saying more of it. As to [Ethan Allen] Hitchcock, I did not call on him at San Francisco & should not even had I time. I did not like him last winter at Benitia and my opinion is not elevated since. He has behaved very badly about the troops which he promised to send immediately for our protection & to punish the Indian murders

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on Klamath, instead of which he sent four companies I think to Fort Vancouver where there was no more use for them than in Heaven, besides one or two to Port Orford, a little hole in the coast in which it is said he owns lots and where he has had dragoons infantry, topags, artillery & what not surveying roads etc for more than a year past.[3] I saw Hooker but for fifteen minutes, but spent an evening with Stoney D—n it but it does me good to meet an army man. There is something in the grip of one's fist that goes to the marrow of a man's heart, and your old friends have been so much mine that I seem to be hugging you when I meet them as I suppose they feel towards me. Stoneman too is a glorious good fellow, hearty knowable & very much attached to you, as to do you justice all are. I'll tell you one man I like, & that is Stone. I think more of him than of almost any body of his age I ever saw. If he does not make a great man one day, it will be because he does not get a fair show. Poor Kennedy & old Miller had both lost their number in the mess since I was at Benitia. Griff I did not see. Only think of the old heathen's writing me a letter of seven pages. I saw Cross who was with us in coming across the plains & Major [Andrew I.] Smith, the Doctor's brother who puts me in mind of him a good deal. Your report that the bloody Rifles still hold me in pious remembrance corroborates the words of the prophet that the memory of the just shall live. I wish I could see their old mugs once more. Remember me to them one and all with the heartiest Merry Chistmas I can give. By the way the ancient Steeve is in San Francisco in the Marshall's office—He has left his wife here and I learn that she is going home. Hathaway broke his leg last winter in jumping off the second storey piazza of Irvings old house. I presume he is recovered long since. As soon as I get warm in office I am going up to see them at Vancouver. Actona is abandoned to my great discontent. I shall move the office down to the lower burg. Adairville [upper Astoria] is deserted & Leonard & Green live below at Hinsill's old Store. The Frosts are in California.

Oregon City, Dec. 26. I am up here at Oregon City again—came up to see if my bonds had been executed, but if so they have not arrived. I shall wait until the arrival of the next mail

3. See *Senate Executive Documents,* 32 Cong. 2 Sess., 1852-3, vol. 2, pp. 103-122 for official report of the Port Orford venture. General Hitchcock's published diary throws little light on this episode. *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A.,* W. A. Croffut, ed. (New York, 1909), pp. 384 ff.

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before giving a definitive answer to the department. As yet I have merely notified them of my arrival in the Territory. To give $ 50,000 bonds here is as you can imagine, out of the question. If my friends in New York are willing to back me, well and good. If not I shall be under all the less obligation to them and continue to paddle my own canoe as best I can. I am rather anxious now that I am here to get the place, for as soon as I can write out my account of the Klamoth country to send on for publication, and finish copying my journal of the Rifle Regiment tour, which if I remain here I *will* do this winter & send to *you*. I mean to go seriously to work at a book on Oregon intended to be of a permanent character. I ought to have done this before, but I have hitherto had no settled quarters of my own since I have been in the country. Now however the disposition to scribble is strong upon me as you will imagine from the length of this letter.

What you say about your being in debt distresses me. I hope to heaven however that you will under no circumstances be induced to part with or mortgage your farm. Wolcott writes that Hall McAllister wishes to purchase it. To lose a source of certain income would be ruinous for you can never in human probability replace it. I am afraid that you lived far too extravagantly at Sonoma with your drag. etc. For God's sake Alfred be prudent and keep within bounds If you can't live on your present pay as an aid & the rent from the farm what will become of you if you lose your little capital & are reduced to the former alone—especially as that may be diminished hereafter. I am certainly a poor example of prudence & economy, but if you knew the regrets that beset me for my past want of providence, you would think me a good warning at least. It is a bitter mortification that I, the oldest should at this time be not only unable to help the[e] out & to add something to mothers comfort but am living from hand to mouth with so little hope for the future. Griffin is constantly abusing me for not taking the farm when I was in San Francisco, but I am satisfied I did right, for to carry it on without means adequate in advance would have been madness & the result of your tenants experience shows that even a large sum could readily be sunk there. Nor would I have ventured to borrow the money for the purpose where failure would have risked every thing—credit & all—What little I still owe is a nightmare to me & with God's grace I will not run further into debt. I shall try and obtain employment for the winter here and as soon as I

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can return to the mines & stay there. I presume that with the new administration Gov. Smith will return to California & you with him I hope the prospect, of both will then brighten. They are dull enough now . . . .

I shall close this to be ready for any chance to send to Astoria. The river has been entirely shut up, but it is now raining and there is every probability of a severe freshet. The snow is eighteen inches deep over the whole country & if it goes off rapidly Oregon City may go too.

Give my respects to Gen. [Persifor F.?] Smith & remember me to any of my old friends you see. I shall write if possible when the mail comes in to let you know what I do about the collectorship. Take care of your self & may the skies be brighter when we again meet. GEORGE

I have written you several times though you seem to have got but one. Your letter of August 12 is the last I have got & this reached me on arriving at Humboldt Bay about the 1st.

* * *

Portland Oregon Dec. 31, 52

Happy New Year

Dear Wolcott

On reaching Oregon City I found the Judges there returning from court at Salem. They had a confab with Holbrook, the dist. Atty & Col Beston [John B. Preston] the Surveyor General & it was determined that I should give bonds there. Accordingly two of the wealthiest men in Oregon were applied to & consented at once. The bonds were executed & I took the oath & received my commission. This whole thing was unexpected, as I was unwilling to make application for the security to men on whom I had no earthly claims, but the other officers were very anxious for me to qualify & took the matter on their own shoulders. The result was the more gratifying as a d—d contemptible loco foco—a methodist missionary had been around cautioning people not to give security for me. This however renders me the more anxious that the security required should previously have been furni[shed] at home, in which case I should cancel the Oregon bonds. If however I do not get it by this mail I shall not expect it. Now if any substantial influence can be made with Pierce to leave me in, well & good—I think I shall have strong military aid & have written to Alfred & Col. Hooker to let them know that I have accepted. The Salary etc are limited to $3000 not 5000 as

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I wrote you. This has been a very severe spell of weather—the Columbia River frozen up so that I could not go down. 18 inches snow all over the country—all the emigrant & many of the old cattle perished. Thermometer nearly down to zero. It is now a warm rain and the Willamette rising with great rapidity & there is danger of a worse flood than in 1849. The suffering among the emigrants is very great, both from their want of preparation for the winter & the dearth & price of provisions—flour is worth 42 $ per bbl, the usual price being 10 to 12 $ I trust in heaven the miners who were talking of holding meetings when I came away, will go down in a body & lynch the pack of German Jews who have monopolized it. I scribble this in the express office. I expect to go down to Astoria tomorrow & take possession of the office. Adair is going on to Washington, report says to lobby for the Governorship. He and Judge Pratt who is there already, will do all they can to turn me out. I told you that Adair was a defaulter—He is a deceitful & false man to boot, & Pratt an unprincipled rascal—so that if you take any steps you must look out for them. I shall put things on the most economical footing possible so that there will be no fault to find with my management in any event. In case I get letters in time at Astoria I will write again by this mail. Meanwhile love to all. Tell Lidy I will write to her by next steamer.

Yours always

GEORGE

* * *

Astoria—Oregon, Jan 3, 1853

My Dear Wolcott

This will be handed to you by my friend Mr. Herman C. Leonard of Astoria, who is going to New York on business, but will I hope find time to see you. He can give you a tolerable fair account of this end of the world after some three years experience. Introduce him to our mother and show him what attention his time will permit him to accept for the sake of your aff'te brother. GEORGE GIBBS

Dr. Wolcott Gibbs

* * *

Astoria, Oregon, Jan. 20 1853

My Dear Mother

As we are expecting the Fremont down tomorrow I shall scrawl you a line although I have written till my fingers are tired, get-

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ting up my monthly despatches for our Step Uncle, but you must have your letter even if I have nothing to tell you of, for as there are the means of sending from here, I might well consider me undutiful if I did not use them. I am gradually getting settled in my little office, which I have had lined with white domestic and have been painting & fixing up so as at last to have a comfortable place to live & work in. In a few days I shall be regularly at work & will then commence writing up my notes. We have had a series of awful storms, very high tides & a freshet in the Willamette combined, which have done great mischief. Several houses in Oregon City have been washed away & stock & goods destroyed, & here at the mouth of the river two vessels have been lost though with out loss of life fortunately. The weather has now cleared up and it is as pleasant as spring. . . . Let me know whether you got the Sea otter skin among the rest. Gunther knows precious little about their value, or else is a cheat. Such as he describes are worth $ 100 and upward. I can get $ 75 for them here.

We take a curious foreign sort of interest in all matters of home affairs. People here speak always of "the States". I sometimes think that we get a better view of the proportions of objects & men than you do there, as one does in looking down from a steeple. The other day while at Oregon City I read the Marvels' *Lorgnette* & was heartily amused—without being as personal as Carl Benson, he cuts up follies & fashions very well. I see by the papers that Calhouns life etc dont sell. The truth is that Calhoun *died*. With the body his power & in fact his mind expired. A subtle & acute logician, he indeed influenced men while living, but the principle of life was wanting to himself. Much of his power was in his moral character. Clay had a greater hold upon the affections of men, for he was genial, cordial—full of sympathies, but his speeches will never be read. Their power was in his delivery. On paper they are as prosey as Blairs essays. Not so with the last of that great triumvirate. I have always considered that Websters greatest fame, analysed, was his *literary* fame. If he had never spoken a word, if he had never been in Congress or the Cabinet, he would still have ranked as the first living American *Author*. What a pity that he did not write his contemplated history of the first eight years of our government. Still, he will live in his own dying words, & that too when most of our great men are not merely dead but forgotten. He wrote his

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name on the great monuments of his country with great ideas.

Dejected Rome her last *great* man adored, that is until after his funeral, & then it was as busy as ever about what the smaller ones were doing. "vich" as Mr Weller would say is werry natural, for the present is after all the subject most near to ones thoughts —"let the dead past bury its dead" Still I cant help thinking about that "small Cathedral" as Sidney Smith called Websters head, or the stoney eyes that looked out of it.

But good night—you are about returning from the opera and the men in the next room are swearing at me for taking away the light.

Love to all from GEORGE

* * *

Astoria, February 15, 1853

My Dear Mother

I have let two mails slip without writing you as I have been in a state of scatteration here consequent on several arrivals, one of them an English vessel bringing some £20,000 sterling worth of goods which have to pay duties, and which will take me up the river to discharge her. This will put Uncle Sam in funds out here but give me the responsibility of taking care of about as many thousand dollars. However I am very glad to have something to report as on hand to the new Cerberus of the Treasury. I did not find the first red cent on my arrival, Adair is in Washington hoping to get reinstated, but whoever gets the place I do not believe he will. He boasted here before he left that he would oust me on the 4th of March, but he will find that there are some other cases to be attended to before his, and that they will want to see his old accounts settled before he opens new ones. I see by the papers that Pierce is overrun with applications for all sorts of places & undergoing a species of martyrdom in advance. The legislature have adjourned in this territory and have made preparations to instruct him on the subject of appointments here. Whether he will attend to them remains to be seen. I have two letters from you and Frank, to the 5th of January. The next mail I presume informed you that I had reached San Francisco. . . . You appear to have changed climates with us. Last winter it was very mild with us and severe with you, this year it seems the reverse, tho' for the last two weeks it has been comparatively pleasant. February generally is so, but next month we have to look out. I hear disastrous accounts from the country

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I left. Starvation, heavy rains & snow on the mountains, men unable to work & unable to procure food with the proceeds of labor. I dreaded this when I came out & am thankful that I had the prudence to leave when I did.

George

* * *

Astoria Oregon March 4, 1853

Dear Wool

The Columbia brought me your letter as also mother & Laura's joint epistle, the former announcing officially that you were to be the first of the four off the bachelor's list. I can congratulate you sincerely for I like Josephine very much, I have a good enough opinion of her to believe that she can content herself with far less than she has been accustomed to. There is spice enough in her to keep you alive when a soberer specimen of femality would have suffered you to subside into fogyism. I have written her by this mail and beg you to apologize for a yellow envelope, the custom house affording no more suitable covering for this sort of correspondence, which in fact uncle Sam probably did not contemplate. To day is the fatal one for the Whig office holders and I suppose there are long faces enough in Washington, but I do not anticipate so sudden an outturn for myself as Old Adair indulged in when he went away, still less that he will be reinstated & it may be that my friends may succeed in keeping me in. There will be a strong *Army* influence exerted I think. However be the result as it may I shall not disquiet myself and if the new mines in eastern Oregon turn out as good as they promise they may trot out my successor whenever they please. You will already have heard that I procured bonds here without difficulty; but as the Comptroller desired that if any were executed in the States they should be substituted, I shall forward the new ones when they come and let them take their choice. If they remove me they will probably make no change. Schell & I were good friends but whether he will interfere I dont know. I told you that I regretted that Schoolcraft had put my notes in such a shape, as they were too slight for it, and my opportunities of last summer enabled me to correct them materially. However it is now too late, but I am putting them into the form of a general view which I will forward when completed. Send me on the books when you get them, at any rate the one containing the notes *by express,* & the others when some opportunity

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occurs. I wrote to him to send me a few copies of the map.... I think you had better ask Causten what links will be required to fill out the chain of claims in his hands. Perhaps other papers may be accessible & it is probable that old accounts & books of the house are in the hands of the Channing heirs. Ascertain what is the total amount for which we claim.[4] I am glad mother has found material for a pretty muff out of the Indian fixings, but cant imagine what has become of the Sea otter skin which would have made two or three. However I shall be able to pick up something here in future, but that skin was a beauty— Keep all the bows & arrows & other such traps that you get as by and bye I mean to have a little museum of them. I must hold off now as I shall write to the Dutchess by this mail. Love to all as usual.

George

* * *

Fort Vancouver Oregon
March 18 1853

Dear Wolcott

I have but a moment to say that yours Mother's and Laura's letters of 5th Feby reached me here yesterday. I am very busy in discharging a vessel & shall not get back to Astoria in time to mail this, but send it to San Francisco by private hand. Your letters have given me more pleasure than any I have had for a long time notwithstanding the d—d rascality of the Governor. I will write fully by the next mail. If Mother can really afford to lend me 1000 $ I shall be glad to use it. I can well afford to pay her 10 per cent, and if I find I can draw on New York firm here, will do so, not by this, but the next mail and at ten day's sight. You had better deposit the money with Lucius & ask his permission to let me draw on him as I can negotiate one on a business house more easily & to better advantage than I can on her. Mrs. Gracie has written me about a deed of his & I write her by this mail in reply—telling her I wlil sign it & recommending her to get Howe to look for the deed to me among my papers.

Mr. Peter S. Ogden has returned here, well & hearty. I am

4. The claims referred to were based on war losses sustained by George Gibbs the 'merchant prince' of Newport, grandfather to the author of these letters. Those claims are still unpaid and unforgotten by surviving Gibbs. See "J'Accuse Les Etats-Unis," by Wolcott Gibbs, *The New Yorker,* Feb. 1, 1947, pp. 22-24.

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well & getting on well. Be sure I have adopted none of Adairs official children & shall not be caught in *that* snap

Yours always

George

* * *

Astoria, O. T. April 13, 1853

My Dearest Mother

The Columbia arrived yesterday, bringing me a letter from you and Laura of October 18th one from Alfred of Feby 5th and a lying one from the Governor in answer to mine, who promises moreover a second chapter by the next mail. Your letter had been to Humboldt Bay and back, which accounts for its length of time in reaching me. Its mention of Oliver however leads me to write at once and ascertain what he is doing & if he is in actual want. I regret excessively that I can do little more for him, my own tenure of office is as you know very doubtful, and I have no patronage. What I can save from my pay is necessary, at least for the present quarter, to discharge my debts. At the same time I should be shocked to hear him descend to a menial occupation. One of mere personal labor, I should care nothing about, for I have done it myself and may again before long. Alfred's letter seems to be written in good spirits, though he speaks with regret of Mrs. Smiths death. I have been tremendously busy since I wrote you last, and have only just got through the worst of my duties, the getting off of the first quarters returns. If I have another to make up, it will be lighter. I took a run the other day up the Lewis & Clark's river as it is called to the place of the W[inter] encampment, which long as I have been here I never visited before. The site of their log hut is still visible, the foundation logs rotting where they lay. Their old trail to the coast is just visible being much overgrown with brush. Their camp was about 4 miles from the beach. Indians are still living who knew them, though the numerous tribes of that day are almost all gone & the small pox has again swept them this winter.

Our spring is opening pleasantly, though the weather is cool. The Salmon are beginning to run again, which is an occasion of great rejoicing among the hungry here, white man & savage. We have just got news of the Inauguration & of the Cabinet which creates some surprise, particularly as regards [Wm. L.] Marcy. Pierce's speech seems an honest one and I notice that all

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the better class of papers at home approve it. Guthrie who has the Treasury I know nothing about, except that he is a Kentuckian. I feel some interest in him! Tell Laura that Gov. Ogden has given me some music for her, Chansons des Voyageurs, which I shall send by the first chance The aires are pretty—the words worthless. What is Frank about. I hope in mercy the next steamer will bring some letters from you of a tolerably recent day. I promised you a long one this time but must break it. I have in fact but little to say, for every thing is dull as a tomb here., but besides there is a vessel unloading at Green's store where I live, & I must help him with her. I shall keep this open in case I have time or think of anything to add to it. You may suppose that what interests me most at present is this confounded office. There is a report here that Adair's friends have received letters from him saying that he has got the appointment. I presume that it means he has got the promise of it, for Gen Pierce would hardly give him a commission before he got his own. The Secretary of the Treasury has possibly given him the promise. It will be a pretty commentary on Pierce's inaugural for one of his first acts to be the restoration of a defaulter. But one never knows how these things are smoothed over. I am going down to the sea shore, about ten miles off to shoot geese as soon as the Columbia is out. All my returns are ready, and go by this mail and before the next comes I shall have the balance of my writing done and be ready to hand over if necessary. The business of this office is generally in one or two jobs during the year, and the rest is nothing. My love to all as usual and to you dear mother from

George

* * *

Fort Vancouver, April 29th 53

My Dear Wolcott

A transient vessel which arrived three or four days ago brought word of Adair's reappointment in advance of the mail. I am considerably astonished as I thought that after Pierce's inaugural, he would at any rate try and appoint men to office who were not actually recorded on the books of the department as defaulters. However I presume that between Gov. [Joseph] Lane & Mr. [James] Guthrie, the Secretary of the Treasury, who is a Kentuckian, that they shoved Adair through without stopping to ask about him. Some of their other appointments have been

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of a similar character. The land surveyor of Portland in this territory, Wm. M. King is the keeper of a doggery, & has not drawn a sober breath himself in five years. That of Jack Hayes as Surveyor General of California is of a piece with the rest. He knows no more of surveying than I of Sanscrit, & if he saw a map could not tell the rivers from the mountain chains. He was a captain of Texas Rangers & that was the extent of his acquirements.

Well it wont trouble me much after all. My salary for the four months I have held office will square off all my old accounts here & leave me free on that score. My accounts can be settled in ten minutes if they choose to do it, and I am ready to turn over at a moments notice. I have consulted the District Attorney, who is also counsel for my sureties here as to what I ought to do. I have not received a line from the Department since I was in office, though I have forwarded my estimates and returns regularly. I shall therefore retain in my own hands the amount of my salary & my official disbursements & pay the balance only over to their order unless they send me warrants to cover my expenses before Adair arrives. I never received a cent from them on entering upon the office to pay its current expenses & I do not choose to wait till they see fit to send me the money, perhaps a year or two. But as my expenditures have been on the smallest scale & are all justified & necessary I have no fears that they will be objected to. I wish however to have them settled & my bonds cancelled at once. & I by you will consult with some one, Col Murray for instance, or Mr. Schell and see if it cannot be arranged.

I shall remain at Astoria for some weeks to write out my journals & notes & then make a break again for the mines of some other money making place. Meantime I hope to hear from you on the subjects of my various letters.

I am here for a day or two on business & the mail steamer has just arrived, but I shall not be able to reach Astoria & get my letter in time for her return. Therefore I write this at once.

Tell Mother not to waste any sighs over this disappointment. It will not be long before I am at something which will not depend on any humbugging loco foco. Love to the rest

George

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Astoria, May 10th 1853

My dearest Mother

I wrote a hasty scrawl to Wolcott by the last steamer, while up the river, since which I have a letter from you and Laura which I found awaiting me here. I trust that you will not suffer my removal to annoy you, as there is no help for it, and I hope before long to find some other occupation independent of political favor, and free from the anxieties of public trust. In fact I should not willingly resume the office when once clear of it, nor do I think I shall ever put myself in the way of another. As it is, the pay will have been so far of service to me in the time I shall have held it that it will have cleared off sundry small debts which I owed in Oregon, and leave me money enough to last till I get to work again. My present plan is to finish up a quantity of my notes forthwith & send them on to you, within which time I shall expect to hear that my accounts have been settled. Then I shall probably go over to Puget sound on a journey to see the country, which I have not yet visited. I cannot however absolutely decide as yet on my next steps. You may I think depend on my retaining a sort of headquarters at Astoria for some time to come. Adair is not expected here by his family until the first of June, though he may possibly arrive earlier. The sooner the better so far as I am concerned since he is to come.

The appointments for this territory were evidently turned over body and boots to Gov. Lane and such another set of officers is not often seen. The Chief Justice Pratt is a swindler who was whipped publicly in San Francisco by Dr. [E. H. ?] Griffin & only escaped it here by abject cowardice. Of the other judges, one is a dough head who drove a wagon across the plains for the U.S. Paymaster. The Attorney Gen does not know the first word of law. The Surveyor of Portland is *the* town drunkard and has not drawn a sober breath within the memory of man & so on to most of the act. Considering the extraordinary pretensions to, or rather promises of purity which Gen Pierce made at the start, it seems to me that he might have enquired a little into the characters of his new agents. I trust his administration generally is not to be of the same stamp.

Our spring is a late one here and we are compensating for the rare occurrence of a pleasant month of March in long continued rainy & cold weather. The salmon too, our great necessary

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of the season is slow in coming and provender is therefore both scarce and meagre. The amount of business doing is not great, in fact everything is as dull as the skies. When I was at Fort Vancouver I met a young Mr. [Theodore] Winthrop, a relative of the Chanlers and quite an intelligent man. He has been some time in the mail Cos employment at Panama and was to start for the Salt Lake in company with Capt [Thomas L.] Brent of the Army, & thence proceed to the States. I told him to call and see you, and I also gave him a letter of introduction to an English gentleman, Mr. Fitzwilliam, a son of the Earl of that name—who travelled a great deal in the western country and has recently been returned to parliament. He was about to cross the country likewise. You will find him very pleasant. . . .

George

* * *

Astoria, Oregon May 23, 1853

My Dear Wolcott

The mail steamer came down the day before we expected her and having my monthly reports to send to Washington I had left a letter to Mother unfinished, wh. however I sealed up and dispatched when the gun fired and I presume she has received. The mails here are a great nuisance. No one knows within three days when to expect one from San Francisco. The steamer now just drops a way mail here and goes up, and returns when ever it may happen, so that we can never tell when to be ready. Adair did not arrive by the last, but I presume will be in towards the end of this week, which will give me nearly five months in office, and about $1250 salary, a sum sufficient to pay off everything I owe and leave a small balance. I had forwarded the bond which you and mother executed, previous to receiving news of my removal, in pursuance of Mr. Whittlesey's request that if one were executed in New York, it should be substituted for the Oregon bond, but desired them if it should not be needed to return it to you. I understand they do not return bonds, but on accounts being settled, enter them as cancelled. I should be glad if by any means not too troublesome my accounts could be brought to a speedy settlement. The quarterly accounts and vouchers were transmitted in April for the proceding three months, and as soon as Adair arrives I shall send on the rest. I wish you would consult with Col. Murray or some one who understands the wires at Washington and see if he can advise

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how to get them taken up. They are very short and simple as my official expenses are but small, & it would be a great relief to me to know that the slate was wiped clean.

Johnston's advise to me to go to San Francisco and practice law is well meant, but it wont do. I cant study a profession over again, and to be any thing as a land title lawyer would require a far more thorough acquaintance with the Spanish language & laws than I ever had. Besides a library would cost a great deal of money, & the expenses of *waiting* practice would be ruinous. I shall make or find some employment here before long. As to returning to the mines I am not decided upon it, but if those on the Yakima, a branch of the Columbia, where gold is reported, prove true, I shall most certainly start for them. There is an arrangement already made to prospect them.

I am more anxious about Francis than I am about myself, and write him by this mail on the subject. Tell him to show you my letter & advise him about it. It seems to me foolish for him to enter business as a clerk in New York, where he will spend his salary on dues & amusements & can never hope to be more than a dry goods jobber anyway. I am inclined to think that the advise I have several times given you to sell the Broadway house may have been erroneous. As Broadway seems destined to become the exclusive thoroughfare of trade, instead of mixed dwellings and shop, rent will probably continue high, I yet dont like leased property & the amount of rent demanded by the company is enormous. A war may knock all that card house structure of New York property into a cocked hat, & it is a very possible calamity in my opinion.

I presume you are all Chrystal Palacing in New York. Is the thing likely to turn out well, or will it be a glass house that all the rest of the world will throw stones at. If Macaulay's last volumes are printed in a cheap form as I presume they will be, send them to me by mail. Reading matter of any value is scarcer here than any thing else. I wrote to ask you to send me Schoolcrafts volume with my Journal by Adams & Cos express but repeat the request lest you should not have received my letter as the mails are so uncertain. The last one brought me letters from you from February 21st to April 3d. You don't tell me whether you ever received the description I sent of the great cataract on the Snake river, of which you had a couple of drawings and which I wished published. If not I will send another or publish

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it here, as I want to establish my claim to the first visit. I have been trying to write up some notes, but find the task irksome & laborious of putting them together, I write so slowly that I am discouraged. The collection of materials is pleasant enough & if I saw any probability of returning to the states I should leave it off. However meantime I shall try to do something toward it & yet somehow time fritters away here awfully. Does Putnam pay well for articles. What more about the half breed pretender to the French crown & what does Prince Joinville say about the matter.[5] Is the man simply a liar out and out, or is he cracked?

Give my best love to Josephine. I wrote to her some time since & will again by and bye

George

* * *

Astoria, May 30th 1853

My Dearest Mother

The steamer arrived yesterday, but without letters except one from Alfred & to my surprise without Mr. Adair, so that I remain in office. I presume however that the next arrival will settle that matter, & in fact as it is so soon to be, I am rather anxious than otherwise to get clear, for I want to go over to the Sound as soon as the weather is settled, and may perhaps cross to Vancouver's Island, as the trip will cost me little or nothing.

I was obliged to finish my last letter very abruptly for the Fremont returned the day before she was expected, on her way back. I have written to Frank about coming to this country to go into business. You think that he is not mature enough for California. I do not believe that if he remains in New York he will ever come to any thing, for even if employed there he would still be in the way of all the foppery of his school of youngsters & he will not resist the temptation. Towns of this country are much less attractive to him & I do not think that the grosser kinds of dissipation are in his way. If he can contrive to create a business on this side, by all means let him come. The longer he remains unemployed at home, the less chance there is for employment of any kind, for the very people who invite him about, will therefore not trust him with business. Besides all which there is no prospect for young men rising in New York

5. The pretender to the French throne was Eleasar Williams, then of Wisconsin. See Louise P. Kellogg's sketch of Williams in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

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except under very favorable circumstances. With any industry he might make a fortune in trade here, while there he would be making a step at the desk. I would not of course advise him to come out naked and without something on hand, but if he exerts himself he may get up something on account of others which will start him here.

All Oregon except Astoria is busy with politics. We whigs are very much rejoiced to hear of Pratt's rejection as Chief Justice & have some small hopes of defeating Lane, who has pretended to resign as Governor in order to run again for Congress. Love to the Girls

George

* * *

Astoria, June 14th 1853

My Dear Wolcott

I received yours & Mother's & Laura's of the 28th & 29th April by the steamer yesterday. . . .

I am glad to hear that there is a chance of an awakening in Columbia College. I suppose you would retain both professorships should you get that unless the salary was an independent one. How the devil does Trinity Church permit a heretic to enter the sacred wall—sacred to religious, classical & scientific fogyism. As to Schoolcrafts books, get Austin Stevens to ship them by the first clipper ship that sails, directed to [address omitted] I trust that Schoolcraft published the map, with the report. It is worth nothing without, & I want to get a few copies of the map separate to insert the boundries of the Indian tribes on.

Fitch's proposition is a fudge—No one could prepare a work of that kind worth a continental-dime without years of labor & travel. To do it by Nov. 1st would be a physical as well as mental impossibility.

I wrote some time since to ask you to send me a Treasury Draft for the money mother offered to lend me and that I should not draw on Lucius in consequence. I am sorry I did not think of telling you to pay it to Leonard who would have given me an order on his house here which is as good as possible. If you have not done it, buy for me a good plain Camera Lucida, having a magnifying power so as to embrace a small field on a good scale. A Schmalcalder Azimuth compass, and a good but light & portable spy glass with case—not to have more than 3 joints. My

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glass which William gave me was stolen with my other traps 10 months ago on the boat from San Francisco to Benitia. The Azimuth should have a leather case with a loop to pass a belt through—Deduct the price of these and a half years interest at 10 per cent from the money & send me the balance by draft.

A Mr. Cary, a friend & correspondent of Agassiz in San Francisco has sent me a ten gallon keg of alcohol in which I am putting up specimens of the fish of this river for him & hope by and bye to know something certain about the varieties of the salmon.

Adair is to arrive by the next steamer, which will give me six months in office—something of an object as it has enabled me to square all the yards here & will leave something over. I understand he brings out a whole raft of his family connexions.

I wrote to George Moore a couple of weeks ago and asked him to send me a copy of Barletts report and some other geographical & Indian reports to Congress. Stir him up about them. Where is George Authur nowadays.

I still think Frank might do well by establishing himself in this country. Goods are low now in consequence of the large stocks sent out, but in five months they will be as high as ever. Dont let him fail to send me the fur reports at any rate.

The spring here has been late, at least the spring rains continue far beyond the usual time. The last reports are that gold has been discovered on one of the branches of the Willamette, the Santiam, & they are digging from 10 to 50 per day. If so I shall break for there as soon as I am released. My papers & everything will be ready to turn over but I want to hurry them in the settlement of my accounts. Ask Schell if there is no way in which I can get them put through at Washington. The department have not vouchsafed me one line since I have been in office, except to order the payment of one of Adairs old matters—& if they are proportionately long in auditing my quarterly returns, I may be in the Sandwich Island or Sitka or Sidney before they take them up. The columbia is tremendously high this year. At Vancouver nearly up to the fort, a rise of 20 feet or more. All the low lands are overflowed and the Pikes who have squatted where ever they saw any "flats" are drowned out like musquashes. The election for Delegate has just come off. Lane who resigned his office of Governor to run is elected over Skinner by 1000 or 1200 I presume. This country is unmitigatedly Pike and of course

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Loco foco. Perhaps you dont know what a Pike is. He is a native either of Pike Keanrety Missouri or of Posey Keanrety Illinye, brought up in Pike, Missouri aforesaid, & is in the writ the representative of Hossierdom in the abstract, as characteristic as a first family is in Virginia. Ignorant, conceited, arrogant, dirty hog & hominy people are the Pikes.—the women with big feet, dirty clothes & a drawl to which the veriest Connecticut is outspoken. The men believe in Gen Jackson, Tom Benton, and "Old Joe" Lane who drinks whiskey with them & kisses their children. Voya.

I dont remember anything certain about the Gracie lots. Howe will undoubtedly find the deeds among my old law papers. Wm. Gracie owed me some money, but that is nothing. I would not receive it on any account. If the lots are in my name I suppose they were put there to save them from his creditors. Tell Howe to see that it is all right for me. Give my regards to the old villain & tell him I wish I could send him a 40 lb salmon. They are here in abundance. In fact we get hardly anything else & I dont eat any except particular cuts. He is a lazy rascal or he would have written me long since telling me how the bar gets on & what has become of the old crowd. Every now & then I see some burning and shining light that we never thought of, exalted in the newspapers. Tell him I met that little squirt Alex Wells that married Miss Van Wyck in San Francisco last winter. He is a judge & great loco foco leader, god save the people. I was just landed from the mines—in an old Panama hat—a ragged pea jacket & indiscribable boots & breeches. We contemplated one another as we passed & it gave me a sort of serious satisfaction to detect the look of triumph in his fat oily countenance as he regarded my grizzly beard and dilapidated exterior & thought to himself that pride had had a fall—that he was a judge and perhaps I might come before him for trial for horse stealing, which is possible, but not probable.

Love to all & goodbye GEORGE

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