Lastly, Swan has a scrawling hand, evidently for use in a canoe or other deskless locales, and it asks a bit of crypto-
analysis. After a half-minute or so of blank staring, something like Prow & rum wood 8 will seep through to me as Snow & rain comparatively little wind S. Thankfully, there is of this written mumble.

The notebook hands have rich cousins: the two handwritings of the Neah Bay ledgers Swan began in 1862. (That tiniest of pocket diaries, 1863, he elaborated into ledger entries as well.) The more prominent of these is done in lines about as high as the thickness of a pencil, and slanted on the page as rain is with a brisk breeze behind it. These are pretty pages, each headed with the year and month--Swan showed real flourish here; the M of March, for instance, will begin off in space with a loop that seems to be going nowhere but then swoops in to make the central pillars of the letter and next curlies off into a smaller farewell barrel-roll--and the day's weather entries. Hard to believe that weather such as Cape Flattery's could be made decorative, but Swan has done it: each day's temperature readings at seven in the morning, two in the afternoon and nine at night are stacked within an elegant bracket which Swan draws beautifully, featherlike lines meeting in a precise pucker.

Rarely in these big pages is anything crossed out, and never blotched. Quirks show themselves--Swan's alphabet tends to flip open at the top, an a or o only slightly more closed than his u; a d at the end of a word may have a quick concluding stroke away
from its top, so that it looks as if a musical note has dropped in from somewhere; commas, when they exist, are the briefest specks a pen can make—but overall this is a steady hand for which, again, the only word is clerkly.

His language is remarkably not-out-of-date. He surprises me, for instance, by using *pretty* as loosely as any of us would: worked *pretty* constantly all day. The one off-word I *trip over* consistently is *eat* for *ate*, as when the schoolboys stay for supper with him: I *boiled* a shin of beef with potatoes...and they *eat* heartily and washed it down with cold water.

Swan's other handwriting in the ledgers, the fifth of the bunch, is simply more crouched than his standard ledger hand: about two-thirds in size. The reason could be in the deep springs of his psyche, Swan in these occasional pages showing some But my tightened mood. *I* guess is lamplight. That when Swan wrote at night, he hovered to the page more carefully to be within the narrow yellow puddle of light.

All in all, Swan the so-constant diarist puts me in mind of a story he once records, of meeting a seaman named John Johnson who had sailed aboard an American ship with three other Scandinavians of the same name in the crew, and who told Swan *I was called Johnson Number Four*. All of these days of pages are the shared craft of Swan One, Two, Three, Four and Five.
Day thirty-one

Point No Point is the tiny peg of map-line from which Puget Sound measures itself southward. Southward and southwestward, for the Sound at its farthest thrust begins to fringe toward the Pacific as if swept in a steady breeze. Those streamers of water extend the measuring considerably, because from here at the Point until the Sound has delineated its every last remote bay and channel, thirteen hundred and fifty miles of shoreline—the equal of the entire Pacific Coast from San Diego to Cape Flattery—edge the sprawling inlet's outline.

Evidently in derision, Point No Point was named by the Wilkes expedition of 1841, when that American naval survey team sailed up to what seemed from a distance to be a promontory prowling boldly into the Sound, and isn't. The forested ridgeline lies a few hundred yards back from the shore, and the flat acres intervening between the dark bluff and the water, plus the nubbin of beach which provides a perch for the lighthouse, proved to be the maritime sum of the site. But eminent or not, Point No Point marks the entrance to the great Sound, and nobody now remembers who Wilkes was.

Except for the four of us—Carol, me, Ann and Phil, good friends newly moved to the height above our valley—today's visitors to the Point all are out on the water with salmon as their purpose: twenty-five small boats in a bright shoal around the lighthouse. Many of them are red row-boats from the resort nearby, with dashing white script on their sides proclaiming Point No Point. The fanciness reminds me of another prank of language, that when his Mississippi townsmen used to scorn Faulkner
as an overelegant scribbler, they would call him Count No 'Count. Here is a site in scansion I can see that sly squire enjoying, out in one of the red rowboats with an antique bamboo rod and a flask of sipping whiskey, affirming to fellow anglers that yes, none other, he is Count No 'Count of Point No Point.

When the tide is down, as it is now, the beach can be walked for a few miles southward from the Point into long views of the forested rim of Puget Sound. In fact, an angled look across the water to a particular patch of the quilled horizon on the Sound's eastern shore exactly reverses my usual line of sight along the gray plain of water: the view from the top of the valley which holds our house, across into this Point No Point corner of the Sound. Now, here on the western shoreline, bluffs sit in sequence along the Sound's edge, like sterns of a moored fleet.

We begin to do the leisurely beach miles, and the friends' gab that goes with them.

Ann performs a squinched-up impression which she assures us is an abalone.

I retaliate with my imitation of a tenpenny nail being driven: rigid stance, hands at side, shuddering winces as my knees buckle downward.

Phil gently informs us that neither has much career ahead as sealife or spike.

Carol is first to see an inbound ship. Freighters entering the Sound pass close by the Point—indeed, emerging from Admiralty Inlet to round the bluff, they give the illusion that they are going to carve away the lighthouse as they come—and this beach is one of the few sites where I can share in Swan's fixation on passing ships. Windships sail day on day in his pages, rocking into view with the hidden push of air against

Nothing in our world is so richly, gaily named any more, unless it would be racehorses, and the sails that come and go on these waters now are for pleasure rather than commerce. Saturday spinnakers instead of daily broadsails. Swan would like it, though, that the region still is water-mad, in its way. To walk down to the shoreline of any Puget Sound community is to find mast-filled marinas, natural as coves of cattails. But schooners, barks, any of the working-canvas fleet that went past him, sometimes several a day--no.

Our version of a Quickstep sheers past the Point No Point light like strap-iron passing porcelain, then steadies massively into the shipping lane of the Sound. We try, and fail, to pick the name off the freighter's bow with field glasses.

Ann tells of a handy powerful monocular her father carries with him on hikes. A spyglass, it would have been in Swan's time.

As if the first freighter was the outrider, others now show themselves from behind the bluff regularly each half hour or so. The third black ship cuts past just at low tide, three p.m. As we have walked, I have been watching a known place on the horizon for any glimpse of Mount
Rainier, where I will be at this time tomorrow, but a squall in the center of the Sound's prairie of water is intervening. Soon the squall line moves north, off Whidbey Island, and try as we do to convince ourselves it can't boomerang toward us, it comes.

The Sound and sky go to deeper grays, the lighthouse begins sending out dashes of light, and we start back to the Point as the day's fourth ship, edges erased in the rain, passes indistinct as a phantom.
Day thirty-two

As I carry groceries from the car to the cabin, the forest challenges me. Rawf, it barks, Rowf rowf roof. Rawf. While showing me routines of the cabin, doorkeys and woodpile and pots and pans, Trudy and Howard had mentioned that a neighbor's small brown dog is fond of visiting. Solo and I would be instant friends, Trudy assured me. Dog friend is advancing on me now from the woods with his five-note salvo like a sentry triggering off warning bursts.

"Hullo, Solo, hey, Solo Solo Solo," I offer and coax him into being petted. At once he wags ecstasy, devotion, worship. But as I step down the path from the cabin, Solo moves to my heels and yammers steadily all the way to the car.

Before gathering the next armful of cargo, I again Solo Solo Solo him, stroke his back until the hair threatens to fray off, scratch his belly and the place between his ears, seem to have sent him irretrievably giddy. He then rolls to his feet and yaps me every step back to the cabin.

People sometimes comment, surprised, that I am remarkably at ease with their pets, in the same way they occasionally congratulate me--astonished, here--that I am good with children. But they are seeing a kind of social sleight-of-hand. In either case my heart is not much in the good manners. All I hope for, from youngsters
or from the animals that seem to take their roles in many house-
hold, is respectful truce, whereby we gaze mildly at one another
across some line fixed in the air between us. That, of course,
is never the set of terms the other side wants. Solo evidently
has seen through me at once to the secret agent against dogs, and
will bay the alarm through all eternity.

One more round trip we make, Solo yawping determinedly whenever
my hand isn't stroking him. I face the issue.

"Solo, goddamned if I'm going to spend four days petting you. Go home."

He wavers, somewhere between another aria of barking and a
demand for further ransom of petting.

"Get-the-hell-outa-here."

Off Solo scampers through the ghostly alders, looking faintly
regretful about having overplayed me. The silence that arrives
along his retreating tracks fills the forest, reaches instantly
down from the upthrust of fir trees and the hover of the mountain,
vast Rainier, somewhere above their green weave.  As the unquiet
introduction, an avalanche of stillness.

I am here for stillness. For pause in this winter at Swan's
heels, and, I suppose, in my own strides across time. Coming to
this underedge of snow country is a brief reflective climb back
to my first life in the West, the Montana life. I grew up in
powerful winters of white, amid stories of even mightier ones: the
The seasons which have swept western Montana each three decades since the first of them was registered, to the everlasting shock of the rangemen, in the late 1880s. 1919-20, which broke our family homestead under its six-month burden of frozen snow. 1948-49, when I watched my father struggle to save two thousand sheep, and our future, on the blizzard-lashed ranch at Battle Creek. Now, again, another thirty-year giant. For weeks Montanans have been telling me by phone or mail of the deep lock of cold in the Rockies, of snowdrifts across porch railings, concern for cattle soon to begin calving. Sentences from a Missoula friend: "Anything bad about this winter in Montana that you happen to hear, believe it. It is the worst ever, and it started November 9. The ground has been under snow since, and it hit -28 here on January 1, -50 in Butte."

I have had times of urge recently to return to Montana, go there for the experience of the great thirty-year winter. It may, after all, be the last to fall within my lifespan, and that ink of Swan's will not drain away in spring runoff. But I would be returning on a tourist's terms, which to me are tarnished ones. I have not earned this Montana winter by living with the land's other moods there, by keeping my roots within its soil. Half my lifetime ago I decided the point, although I did not then
know how long-reaching the decision would be, that the region of my grandparents and parents is no longer the site for me to work out life. The snowline I need as margin is here. A white edge of the Northwest where I can sit above rain and feed a stove instead of someone else's sheep. Hear what is being said in my skull. Watch mountain dusk draw down.

And gaze at deer, as I am now. The boldest of them wintering here is a doe which made her appearance as Trudy and Howard were leaving, and has ghosted back into the near-dark now. Black-tailed and gray-furred for winter, she eases past this cabin a time or two each evening, they told me, can be recognized by the nick in her ear. A wide screened-in porch rambles around three sides of the cabin, a pleasant half-hidden promenade up among the first branches of the trees, and from it she can be seen for several minutes on her route.

As I watch down from the porch, the motion of the doe's each step seems to recoil slightly into her, as if some portion of poise is being pulled back each time in reserve. This tentative grace of deer, which stops them just short of being creatures of some other element—hoofed birds, perhaps, or slim dolphins of the underbrush. Who would have thought, on a continent of such machines of the wild as bison and elk and the grizzly, that it would be deer
to best survive? For once, the meek have inherited.

Before bed, I look up Swan on deer. The blacksmith at Neah Bay was undertaking to raise one from a fawn. The twenty-sixth of January, 1865: Mr Phillips tame deer has been missing for several days and I strongly suspect the Indians have killed it in retaliation for sundry dogs which Phillips and Mr Maggs have shot.

But the next day: The deer made her appearance this morning and much to my satisfaction...It is very tame, looks very pretty running about among the cattle.
Day thirty-three

New snow, two inches of dry fluff. The entire forest has been fattened by it, everywhere a broad white outline put onto all branches of trees and brush. The effect comes odd against yesterday's green and gray of the forest, like a white blossoming gone rampant overnight.

Time along the Nisqually River today, first at its freshly white bank and then atop its dike of small boulders which rises about half again my height. Even at winter pace, the Nisqually rattled past faster than I could sprint. The sliding water measures about sixty feet across at this time of season, but in a flood year its width bellied out to some hundreds of yards, which is the theory behind the dike. Howard described to me how the floodwater bashed open predecessor wall of boulders and gathered into its flow nine vacation homes.

The lone survivor of what had been the rank of ten, a house bricked above the gravel-bottom scour where the river scooped in and looking still intimidated from the thinness of its escape, I crunched past during my dike amble; and was reminded by it that Carol and I once traveled casually into the Sierra Nevada foothills where the gold towns had blossomed and found all rivers bucking in high white fury, with reports daily of rafting Californians drowning themselves. "Damn river is like Niagara Falls laid out flat," some California official or another complained to a newspaper reporter, and so the waters of the lode
country all looked, so the Nisqually must have loomed when it decided to do something about habitations crowding its banks. I was careful to tell the river, in my mind where its rapid keen burble kept asking, that I am only visiting.
Day thirty-four

I intend as mild an afternoon as can be spent aboard snowshoes. Whop around on the slope above the National Park buildings at Paradise, watch the weather seethe around the summit of Rainier a mile and a half above. When my thigh muscles make first complaint about the pontoons at the bottom of my legs, ease off the fluffy ridge, try to keep the car from becoming a bobsled on the white-packed road down to Longmire Lodge and coffee and pie: then the forest’s miles back to the cabin, and dusk.

But halfway above Paradise I wallow onto rodent prints stitching a path in and out of the stands of firs. Fate has written in the snow. There is no choice but to become a tracker. Along tilts of slope, over drifts, up, down, across. After several minutes, I glance back from the tiny pawprints to my wake in the snow. It is what a whale might churn up in hot pursuit of a minnow.

Shameless, I plow on, occasionally deserting the tracks for the pleasure of creating my own didoes in the white. I discover that the south face of every fir I pass is gray-white with ice: frozen melt at the very end of the branches, in fat cellular conglomerates sectioned by the green fir bristles. Grenades of ice. A sudden thaw would put me under bombardment. Doves of peace—no, gray jays ambling through the air to me, pausing just off my shoulder as if kindly offering to search
my pockets for any loaves of bread which might be burdening me.

The jays sortie off to elsewhere and time drifts out of mind after them, replaced by attention to the weather atop Rainier, lowering, rising, brightening, darkening. As though the mountain, when it ceased being a volcano of fire, became a cauldron for weather. Like all else in this region of the Cascades, this casual slope I am on--still not far above Paradise and its visitor center and lodge--points quickly up toward Rainier, as if in astonishment at how it looms. I was surprised, far back along the highway when I was arriving to the cabin, how the lift of the mountain made itself felt even there, the road suddenly jerking into rising curves.

Inventorizing the arc of mountains which surround Rainier, themselves lofty but less than half the giant peak's height, I come onto the thought that the geographical limits of my Northwest winter are Tatoosh and Tatoosh--Tatoosh Island offshore from the outermost perch at Cape Flattery, the Tatoosh Range of crags in view to the south here at the crest of the Cascades, jagging white up through the high-country fabric of forest. At Swan's first mention of a visit to the Tatoosh lighthouse, I looked into a place-names guidebook, found that the derivation could be from the Chinook jargon word for "breast" or the Nootkan word for "thunderbird." Divvy the deriving, I decide: give these cleavaged profiles their due, let the thunderbird have the island.

Bulletins from below. Thighs are threatening open rebellion. Snowshoes still want more country. Tatoosh-tatoosh tatoosh-tatoosh
the webs sing into the snow as I go onto a fresh drift.
Day thirty-five

Strange, to be again in a house of entirely wood. Under the rough brawn of ceiling beams and amid the walls' constellations of pine knots. Almost two decades of suburban wallboard intervene from when ranchhouse and bunkhouse nightly surrounded me with board walls.

What is it about a cabin within a forest or beside a shore that sings independence from the common world of dwellings? Something more than hinterland site or openly-outlined strokes of beams and rafters; some natural stubbornness against ever being thought an ordinary house shouts through as well. Cabination or anti-domicility or some such rebellious shimmer of the atoms of wall-wood; a true surmiser of cabins would have the term. I simply know that cabin-y distinctness says itself, and I step across the threshold as if going into some chamber of a far year. The broad central room of this cabin, for instance, trades adamantly back and forth between the family who spend summers and weekends here and the abiding forest outside. A wallbeam aligns the china plates which sit on it as if they were shiny droplets on a branch; beneath runs a long bank of mullioned window, the small panes fondling separate bits of the forest as if they were scenes on porcelain. On another wall is the cabin item that interests me most, a crosscut saw. Blazon of sharpened steel, the crosscut is a remarkably elegant tool to have inspired its epithets: "misery harp" the least profane description Northwest loggers had for it as, sawyer at either end, they ground
the blade back and forth through a Douglas fir or red cedar. Having caught from Swan the winter virus of measure-and-count, I've learned by yardstick that this slicer of forests is six and a half feet long, by careful finger that it has sixty-eight beveled sharpnesses interspersed with sixteen wider-set prongs which make space for the sawdust to spill away. A giant's steel grin of 84 teeth, and as innocent and ready in this cabin amid these woods as a broadsword on a Highlands castle wall.

Sawed wood--firewood--decides my site when I am here inside the cabin. I settle at the kitchen table, close by the cookstove which must be fed each hour or so. (Howard has told me he will harvest his own firewood when summer comes, from the stand of alder woven within the mullioned window. A neighbor who owns a team of workhorses will skid the downed trees in for sawing. I wish the harnessed horses were there now, the leather sounds of their working heft coming down the mountainside. Instead, if anything is out there, it will be either Solo on reconnaissance to see whether I have mended my anti-dog ways, or the slowly gliding deer.) Today out of the mound of mail which has been building on my desk since Swan's diaries moved into my days, I finally have winnowed the letter from Mark, in his faculty office in Illinois—we may be the last two American friends who write regularly and at such length to one another—and the quote which he found during his research on mid-nineteenth-century frontier missionaries. The Reverend Summers, reporting from Benton County, Iowa, in July of 1852:
"A young man recently left for California, who for two years has been very anxious to go, but during his minority had been restrained by the influence and authority of his parents. They offered, for the sake of diverting him from his purpose, to furnish him the means to travel and visit the Eastern cities. He derided the idea. He would not turn his hand over to see all that could be seen in the East, but he must go to the Utopia of the New World; and he has gone."

Gone west, and cared not so much as a flip of his hand to know any of that lesser land behind him. In all but flesh, that young Iowan was my grandfather, my great-uncles, my father and his five brothers, me. After my Doig grandparents sailed from Scotland and crossed America to a high forest-tucked valley of the Rocky Mountains, nobody of the family for two generations ever went to the Atlantic again. When I journeyed off to college, I was spoken of as being "back east in Illinois." My father adventured to Chicago once on a cattle train, and twice to visit me. My mother, after her parents moved from Wisconsin to the Rockies when she was half a year old, never returned beyond the middle of Montana.

This westernness in my family, then, has been extreme as we could manage to make it. We lived our first seventy years as Americans on slopes of the Rockies as naturally, single-mindedly, as kulaks on the Russian steppes. (Nights when I have been at my desk reading Swan's pages, I have noticed that my square-bearded face reflected in the desk-end window could be a photographic plate
of any of those museful old Scotsmen who transplanted our family name to the western mountains of America. If we have the face we deserve at forty—or thirty-nine and some months, as I am now—evidently I am earning my way backwards to my homesteading grandfather.) My own not very many years eastward—which is to say, in the middle of the Midwest—amounted to a kind of instructive geographic error. (Instructive, literally: Montana as evaluated at Northwestern University in Evanston, 1957: "youse guys," confides my new college friend from The Bronx, "youse guys from Mwawntana twalk funny.") The journalism jobs in the flat-horizoned midland turned my ambition in on itself, impelled me to work the salaried tasks for more than they were worth and to sluice the accumulating overflow of ideas into pages of my own choice. Also, happiest result of my misguess of geography, I met Carol there, already edging west on her own, and when the two of us turned together, away from editorial careers and ahead to independence, we stepped a fourth of the continent farther than any of my family had done. Puget Sound's salt water begins six hundred yards from our valley-held house close by Seattle.

And so with Swan, I judge. When the reverend wrote those opin ing words, Swan of Boston already had been on the Pacific shore for more than two years, and was about to head onward to Shoalwater Bay and ultimately, the Strait and Cape Flattery. Finding the place to invest his life meant, as it has to me, finding a west. (Roulette of geography, of course, that the American frontier stretched from
the Atlantic toward the Pacific instead of the other way around.

Erase Santa Maria and Mayflower, ink in Chinese junks anchoring
at San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound four hundred years ago, re-read
our history with its basis in Confucianism, its exploit of
transcontinental railroads laid across the eastern wilderness by
coolie labor from London and Paris, its West Coast mandarins--the
real item--aloofly setting cultural style for the country.) What
Swan and his forty-year wordstream will have told me by the end
of this winter, I can't yet know, but already I have the sense from
his sentences and mine that there are, and always have been, many
wests, personal as well as geographical. (Even what I have been
calling the Pacific Northwest is multiple. A basic division begins
at the Columbia River; south of it, in Oregon, they have been the
sounder citizens, we in Washington the sharper strivers. Transport
fifty from each state as a colony on Mars and by nightfall the
Oregonians will put up a school and a city hall, the Washingtonians
will establish a bank and a union.) Swan on the Strait has been
living in two distinct ones, Neah Bay and Port Townsend (and sampled
two others earlier, San Francisco and Shoalwater Bay) and neither of
them is the same as my own wests, Montana of a quarter-century ago
and Puget Sound of today. Yet Swan's wests come recognizable to me,
are places which still have clear overtones of my own places, stand
with mine alike in being distinctly unlike the rest of the national geography.
Perhaps that is what the many wests are, common in their stubborn
separatenesses--each west a kind of cabin, insistent that it
is no other sort of dwelling whatsoever.
Days thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight

At Neah Bay, Swan writes on. Writes the daily diary entries, frequent newspaper articles, writes letter after letter in the series which, as I began to crank 120-year-old words into sight, filled a roll of microfilm thick as my fist. From the files of the Smithsonian Institution, "SWAN, JAMES G., Official Incoming Correspondence."

Eventually, nearly four hundred pieces of correspondence flowed from Swan to the savants within the Smithsonian's castle-like museum. It was--is--a spellbinding cataract of mail: Swan's machine-magnified handwriting reads like lines from a Gulliver who every so often pauses on one North Pacific promontory or another to inventory his pockets and his thoughts. I have now ready to ship by first opportunity a case containing 16 bird skins, mostly large 2 Indian skulls 1 backbone of fur seal with skull 2 grass straps for carrying burthens 1 dog hair blanket specimen sea weed 1 fur seal skin 2 fur seal skulls 4 specimen fossil crabs 2 miniature hats 2 down blankets shells taken from ducks' stomachs. The Indians here judge of the weather for the following day by observing the stars whenever there happens to be a clear night in this humid atmosphere. If the sky is clear and the stars "twinkle brightly," they predict wind for the following day and with uncanny certainty. If on the contrary the stars shine tranquilly they say there will be but little wind, and consequently, prepare themselves at midnight to go off to their
fishing grounds some 15 to 20 miles outside Cape Flattery. They believe
the "wind in the air" makes the stars twinkle.

I have been reading with great interest the work on archaeology
by Mr Haven, which was received among other books from the Smith-
sonian....On page 148 Mr Haven remarks in his conclusion while speaking
of the Indians at the Columbia River & Nootka, "There too prevails
the singular and inconvenient custom of inserting discs of wood in
the lips and ears." Now the fact is, that there is not an Indian
from the Columbia to Nootka who has, or has had, a disc of wood in
either lips or ears....

...In 66 consecutive days there has fallen a little more than
2½ feet of water. I think that Astoria, which is usually accounted
the most rainy place on this coast, can hardly beat this quantity....

...I have got the names of the male descendants of Deearl the
chief from whom Neeah Bay or Deeah as these Indians pronounce it is
taken. There are twelve generations and by a little patience I can
trace the various collateral branches and by that means find out the
relationship existing between the present descendants. But to ask
these Indians as Mr Morgan lays down the rule viz "what do I call
my grandmothers great aunt" &c, the answer invariably is "Klona's"
or don't know.

...2 Indian cradles 1 grass blanket 2 medicine rattles
made of scallop shells 2 birds nests 1 little basket robins eggs
fossil crabs baskets of shells 1 bark head dress 1 crab...
When we think of our once glorious Union, from its struggling commencement, to the culminating glory of its zenith, as Longfellow says, "We know what master laid the keel/What workmen framed thy ribs of steel..." and then look upon the old ship of state as she now lies wrecked, broken, and apparently a total loss, it is almost enough to make a man doubt whether that Providence who has hitherto watched over us, has not for some national sin withdrawn from us for a season his protecting care.... But I am digressing from a commonplace letter on bird skins into topics that have puzzled wiser heads than mine.

Most often, these bulletins from Swan's persistent pen emerged onto the desk of an even more prodigious creator of mail: Spencer Fullerton Baird, Assistant Secretary and second-in-command of the Smithsonian. Swan had met both Baird and the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry, during that interim of his in the national capital in the late 1850's. Henry and Baird were one of the formidable museum teams of all time. While Henry, a practical scientist known for his work in electromagnetism, steadfastly nagged at Washington officialdom about the value of funding the Smithsonian for "the increase and diffusion of knowledge," Baird was endeavoring to fill the place up like a silo.

He was one of those Victorian work machines, Baird, who could have run the world by himself if he'd had more writing hands. In 1860, he noted in his journal that he had dashed off a total of 3,050 letters that year, without the aid of stenographers—and he
soon got stenographers. Baird's passion was nothing less than to capture nature for the Smithsonian. When he moved from his post as a professor of natural history to the Smithsonian in 1850, with him arrived two freight cars of his own bird specimens. Ever since, he had been welcoming, as the institution's annual reports show, items ranging from dead garter snakes to meteorites. And perpetually, perpetually, churning out his messages of encouragement to an army of unofficial Smithsonian helpers who ranged from backyards amateurs—"Never fear the nonacceptability of anything you may send," Baird once wrote to an enthusiast who had been mailing in insects from Eutaw, Alabama—to such scientific eminences as Louis Agassiz and George Perkins Marsh.

Swan's enlistment date was January 10, 1860. He put a box of seashells aboard a steamer at Port Townsend, happy at all times, he assured the Smithsonian's caliphs of science, to add my humble collections to specimens in your museums.

Inevitably, Swan had to be on the short side of this proposition. The Smithsonian and Baird were rare eminences to his back-of-beyond existence, while he was merely one, and the most distant one at that, of a battalion of science-struck gleaners. When the orb of microfilm begins to glow out its "LETTERS TO SWAN FROM SPENCER F. BAIRD," then, the differences between the letters of the man in the frontier schoolhouse and the man in the red-brick castle registers about as might be expected.
I should be pleased if your time permit it you could give me some reliable idea of the state of affairs at Washington, Swan will pen, exuberantly—wistfully—filling all four sides of a folded broadsheet. I can gather very little from the contradictory state-
ments of the newspapers and know about as much of the doings of the Khan of Tartary as of our own government. Back from Baird arrives a considerable fraction less of paper and bonhomie: We had the very great pleasure today of receiving the box of shells from Nee-ah Bay sent by you...

Master of perfunctory encouragement that Baird was, he none-
theless did enrich Swan's life at Cape Flattery. The specimens
Baird asked for—birds and fish, particularly—made a welcome change
of task from the Neah Bay routine Swan once described as attending
to the sick, listening to Indian complaints of various kinds and
looking after things generally. And as Swan sent in his hodgepodge
of promising items, Baird sent west to him an array of books of
science, another bonus to a frontier life. Most vital of all in
these Neah Bay years, however, Baird's encouragement sat Swan down
to an ambitious piece of scholarly writing: an ethnological study
of the Makahs.
Swan likely did not even think of his intention as ethnology, or its mother science, anthropology. Only in the wake of Darwin’s theory of evolution, not all that many years before, were such fields of study becoming recognized. But Swan did have the necessary impulse, the flywheel of curiosity within him. I know the importance of making these collections and writing the Indian memoirs now, while we are among them and can get reliable facts, he once writes to Baird. The time is not distant, when these tribes will pass away, and future generations who may feel an interest in the history of these people will wonder why we have been so negligent.

The Indians of Cape Flattery took Swan more than two years to write, and his constant deskmate was interruption. In order to have the work go on as rapidly as possible with the Government buildings I have been obliged to sink the teacher into the caterer for the
mess, Swan reported to Baird in the midst of the schoolhouse construction, and a person arranging for the appetites of six hearty men who must have three full meals per day cannot find much opportunity for belles lettres.

But on the thirteenth of April, 1865, Swan could write Baird that I have finished my paper on the Makah Indians at last and packed it with the sketches which accompany it in a snug parcel...

"Paper" barely described the work: a 55,000-word ream of manuscript about how the Makahs lived and spoke and believed. Swan's fetish for fact is on the finished result like a watermark. He describes the Makahs' canoes, how they fished and hunted seals and whales, what their ceremonies and legends were, how their masks looked, the tribal ailments, what games the children played, what the tribe ate and wore, how they told time, what they called the months of the year: think of a daily moment of life and Swan probably has put down for you how a Makah spent it. And what an interplanetary meeting of wordmen it is to imagine Spencer Baird being introduced, courtesy of Swan's pen, to Captain John: About three years ago he had lost the use of one of his feet, probably from paralysis, but which he attributed to a "skookoom," or evil spirit, entering into it one day while he was bathing. He had been confined to his house for several months, and was reduced to a skeleton. I saw him during this sickness, and thought he could not recover. One pleasant day, however, according to his account, he managed to crawl to a brook
near his house, and, while bathing, heard a rustling sound in the air, at which he became frightened, and covered his face with his blanket, whereupon a raven alighted within a few feet of him and uttered a hoarse croak. He then peeped through a corner of his blanket, and saw the raven with its head erect, its feathers bristled, and a great swelling in its throat. After two or three unsuccessful efforts, it finally threw up a piece of bone about three inches long, then uttering another croak it flew away. Remaining quiet a few minutes, till he was satisfied that the raven had gone, he picked up the bone, which he gravely informed me was of the Ha-hek-to-ak. He hid this bone near by, and returned to his lodge, and, after relating the occurrence, was informed by the Indian doctors that it was a medicine sent to him by his tamanawas, and this proved to be true, as he entirely recovered in three days.... The tale of the raven alighting near him is not improbable, as ravens as well as crows are very plenty and very tame; nor is it impossible that the raven might have had a bone in its mouth, and finally dropped it; nor is it entirely uncertain that the circumstance so affected his superstitious imagination that it caused a reaction in his system, and promoted his recovery. The same effect might perhaps have been produced by a smart shock from a galvanic battery.

The manuscript done, Swan sat back to await publication by the Smithsonian. It began to be a long sit. In the microfilm’s blizzard of lines, a year passes, two, three. Swan is writing heavier and
heavier nudges to Baird. The second of November, 1868: Can you give one any encouragement that it will appear within the next decade?
Yet another year: sixteenth of November, 1869: When that Makah memoir is published??!!! I should like some copies to send to several officers at Sitka who are much interested in Indian matters....

Either the deprivation of the Sitka officers or the explosion of punctuation did the job. At the start of 1870, The Indians of Cape Flattery, even yet the primary source on the historical Makahs, came into print.
Day thirty-nine

Time spent in the words of other westerers, to try see Swan within his lineage of frontier ink.

The journals of Lewis and Clark, while their expedition sheltered in winter quarters at the tiny stockade called Fort Clatsop, just south of the mouth of the Columbia River. Like Swan, Captain William Clark marks the daily weather scrupulously, but his has a terrible soggy sameness: in four months at Fort Clatsop, it rained every day but twelve. A late-February day in 1806 begins with typical lament:

we are mortified at not having it in our power to make more celestial observations since we have been at Fort Clatsop, but such has been the state of the weather that we have found it utterly impracticable.

Then the captain brightens and, as Swan so often did, turns sketch artist.

I purchased of the Clatsops this morning about half a bushel of small fish—they were candlefish, an oily little species—which they had caught about 140 miles up the Columbia in their scooping nets. as this is an uncommon fish to me and one which no one of the party has ever seen. on the next page I have drawn the likeness of them as large as life...

The candlefish swims delicately there among the words, eternally
angled along the flow of Clark's handwriting as if feeding now and again on stray periods and apostrophes.

In Stegner's The Gathering of Zion, an excerpt from the trail diary of the Mormon girl Patience Loader. In the overland migration to the far half of America opened by Lewis and Clark, she was coming west to Zion with one of the handcart brigades of 1856, the travelers' tumbrils in heavy groaning tow all the thousand miles from the Missouri River to Utah. Having trudged six hundred of those miles, Patience Loader and weary others began to ford the North Platte River in Wyoming:...the water was deep and very cold and we was drifted out of the regular crossing and we came near being drowned the water came up to our arm pits poor Mother was standing on the bank screaming as we got near the bank I heard Mother say for God Sake some of you men help My poor girls... Several of the brethren came down the bank of the river and pulled our cart up for us and we got up the best we could...when we was in the middle of the river I saw a poor brother carrying his child on his back he fell down in the water I never knew if he was drowned or not I felt sorry that we could not help him but we had all we could do to save ourselves...

Clark's winter of black rain brightened by a candlefish, Patience Loader's wade through horror. Reminders, to be kept in mind while I amble in Swan's orderly ledger, that the edge of America can also be a brink.
Day forty

A silver-bright day. Air clear and cold, ready to crinkle like silk, and for the second night in a row, frost has daubed its way all across the ground and up into the first branches of the evergreens.

I have a queer edgy clarity in myself, consequence of so few hours' sleep: a grittiness like diamond dust. Luckily, sleeplessness comes to me in small seasons--two or three nights in a row, then vanishes--else I cannot imagine what my daily mood would be like. These strange beings, ourselves. Needing the night but sometimes entirely at odds with it. My nights when sleep will not come I roll like a driftlog on one of Swan's beaches, and between last bedtime and early morning I wallowed a deep trough in the dark. In the bed beside me, Carol's breathing form calmly ingested the blackness, channeled it on its smooth underskin routes. While my mind was a black blaze. Anything makes fuel--a walk taken around the neighborhood after supper, the day's writing, a letter from a friend. I steadily try a number of sleep-making stunts. Breathe deeply, with forced regular rhythm. Make my tongue loll. Try to sheet the mind with a white blankness. And I have the success of a man trying to win attention to his coin trick against the roaring backdrop of a three-ring circus.

The frustration is double. Sleep at best is a sharp cost of time, not-sleep is a cost to both. Yet not always; there is this
morning's cold clarity, as if the white duff of frost had come into me during the night too.

Swan on the Makah version of restlessness: Last evening Peter wanted his Squaw to go home with him, she was then in Tahahowtl's lodge. She refused, whereupon Peter pitched into her, pulled her hair and blacked her eye. Tahahowtl interfered and Peter went at him and they had a hair pulling match and finally separated to get their guns but friends interfered...

Noon. The morning would not be calmed, kept shoving aside Swan's logbooks for its own. I let the hours roam back along the entire wordstream of this winter so far, turned them loose on the question of why the west takes hold of a James Swan, an Ivan Doig. Notions--they are not answers yet, if they ever will be--tumbled like the lines in yesterday's retrieved notebook of the Marshall Wilderness days:...Perhaps the choice of place is in our body chemistry simply as other pattern of tastes are, regulating me to dislike the color pink, brussel sprouts, and square miles of pavement....The west of America draws some of us--not because it is the newest region of the country but because it is--the oldest, in the sense that the landscape here--the fundamental nature's shape of things--more resembles the original continent than does the city-ratation of the Eastern Seaboard or the agricultural factory of the Midwest. (As for so much else, mountains account for it. They, and the oceans, are virtually the last pieces of earth we have not somehow way tamed, transformed. Although we are striving. So in an
airplane above the Cascade Range to see clearcut logging like countless patches of fur shaved off. Study the logging roads which incise the high edges of the Olympics. . . . Or are we drawn west, or merely delivered?
The way, say, spores drop into a forest; some spot is found in the immense environment, life is stubbornly established and clings to, whether the site turns out to be rich humus or up a tree? . . .

Enough. What counts for now, this winter, is to keep the question open, let the hours work at it when they will.
Day forty-one

\[\text{in the elegant ledger diary:}\]

The fifth of April, 1866. \(\text{Yesterday, Ahayah killed the first whale of the season...}\)

The next day: I was much amused last evening with Johns moves. It seems he feels ashamed that he has not killed any whales and has concluded to go through the ceremonies to constitute him a skookum whaleman. Which ceremonies consist of going without sleeping or eating for 6 days and nights, to bathe in the salt water and run on the beach to get warm. John went into the water with his accoutrements on but soon got so cold that he was glad to come and warm himself by my fire. He had gone all day without eating and I think his courage was failing him for he admitted that he thought he could not stand it more than two days and if that would not suffice to make him a whaleman he could kill sharks. He intended to stop by my fire all night and occasionally go out and wash in the bay, but when I got up this morning he was gone and I learned that he was afraid to sit alone by my fire and had sneaked out about midnight with his courage completely cooled and has concluded that from shark killing he will be content with killing dogfish.
Day forty-two

God, how the blood strums in such weather. What it tingles out is: be truant.

Which I am. I woke with the sense that this would be another day brought pure by the cold, and that I needed to be out in it at once. When daybreak came, a dry crackle of light onto the frost, I already had arrived here at Shilshole, a bay favorite to me for its head-on view west across the Sound to the wooded headlands and mountains. The Olympics, clouds caped on their backs, as yet are pale, wraithy, in the beginning day. Snow gods, asleep standing up, like horses. Going past is a big seagoing tug, in from the north and in a hurry. It seems to ride the floe of white water pushed up by its impatient bow. Freighter traffic is starting to procession past.

Two ships inbound to the Seattle dockfront, two out. Three of the fleet are outlined in traditional lines of superstructure, masts and plow-pointed bow. But the fourth is squatty as a huge barge, some new style of vanship. Swan would enter in his diaries' ship list an occasional herm brig—hermaphrodite brig, with a square-rigged foremast but a triangular schooner-sail on its mainmast. The day now of the herm freighter?

One inbound vessel overtakes the other, and as it begins to pass, the dark shapes merge, then slowly attenuate, pulled longer and longer like a telescope being extended, until they are two again.

After an hour or so of shivery wandering the Shilshole bayline,
I go on to the dockside coffee shop at Salmon Bay, the fishing fleet schooled into winter berths all around.

"Breakfast, Bill?" the waitress asks the regular on the stool next to me.

"No, a doughnut."

"Any particular kind, or whatever I grab?"

"Whatever you grab, dealer's choice."

"Powdered sugar. There you go."

There you go: that western byphrase from waitresses and bartenders, sometimes from friends or just people in conversation. I hear it in Montana as I do here and like it immensely, the friendly release in the saying, the unfussy deliverance it carries. A very independent little trio of words, encouraging yet declaring okay—I've-done-my-part—it's-up-to-you-now. The best of benedictions.

Mid-morning. Here at the desk, attenuation again. Swan has begun to pull from his five years at Neah Bay. I am surprised with myself, he has recently mused into the ledger to find that I have so much patience as I have with these children. I get almost discouraged at times and then again I feel as though they were doing something. But they try my patience sorely and occasionally I feel like giving up my situation in despair of ever being able to do any good... In April of 1866 had occurred the tensest time Swan experienced at Cape Flattery, the arrival of troops to arrest Peter for
the fatal stabbing he had tossed as ant will into the rivalry with the Elwhas. The Makahs resented the show of force, the soldiers resented being thumped down on the back porch of the continent, and we are all heartily sick of their protracted stay. Also, the month’s weather was rampageous even for Cape Flattery: 11 7/10 inches Rain 3 pleasant days during month. The diary pages twang more than a little. The Swan who liked to intone that he never carried the least calibre of self-defense among the Indians—I have always found that a civil tongue is the best weapon I can use—now inscribes something different: Bought a Remington revolver of Mr Philips this PM...

Nerves cool a bit in the next weeks, but in mid-Summer Swan takes a twelve-day respite from Neah Bay—visiting in Victoria, Port Townsend and Port Angeles—and a few days after his return, there is the entry the year’s diary pages have been marching toward. Wednesday, the twenty-second of August:

Notified Mr Webster of my intention of sending in my resignation as teacher when I send in my monthly report. The resignation to take effect on the 1st of October.

I want not to see Swan step from Neah Bay; not see this particular Boston bird drift back townward from the ultimate point of the west, Cape Flattery. It may account for my own tautness of the past days. The glimpses I have had into the diaries ahead do not suggest the rhythmed richness of these regal ledger pages. Port Townsend, which will be Swan’s next site, I think cannot be such a transfixed place
as Cape Flattery, nor probably one to which Swan's talents are as steadily alert. There is grit in the ink to come, I judge. But 1866 is Swan's cosmos, not mine. Whatever I might wish here in the ether of the future, he traces his own way with that ceaseless pen. And in the last few weeks of more than two hundred and fifty spent at Neah Bay, that pen begins to record farewells.
First, a ceremony—a bit of fabulous chumminess from exactly the quarter it could be expected. This forenoon, the twenty-third of September, Capt. John brought me in his box of "Whale medicine" which under promise of secrecy on my part he showed me after going up into the tower and locking the door....The relics were in a box enclosed in a bag and had evidently been under ground a long time as they were covered with mould which stuck bag and box together so as to make it difficult to open them. When at last the box was opened there a piece of coal which had been rolled by the surf into an oval pebble as large as a goose egg....John very grandly assured me that it was taken from a dead whale and was a great medicine...The other was nothing but the blow hole of a porpoise...

...the great medicine came last, the bone of the Hah hake to ak this was unrolled from some old trash and presented to me. It was a shapeless piece of rotten quartz which had no resemblance to a bone of any kind....John's father had been humbugged by some smart Indian into this belief that the quartz was a real bone, and John was firm in the same belief. I thought that any animal who had such heavy bones must acquire considerable momentum in darting through the air, and it was not surprising it could split trees, or kill whales when ever it struck them.

Then, recessional, Neah Bay style. After closing up my business, the first of October, and packing my books and effects I went to Baadah to pass the night with Mr. Webster previous to taking my final leave of Neeah Bay. I have been gratified and surprised at the
manifestation of feeling on the part of the Indians at my departure. They are not usually very demonstrative but children and adults appeared very much affected, the former shedding tears and the latter singing a chant expressive of their sorrow.

I have tried to do my duty toward these Indians and these friendly expressions on their part are more grateful to me than the approval of others...
February  The White Tribe
Day forty-three

Whidbey Island, this first dawn of February. Admiralty Inlet, with the Strait of Juan de Fuca angling like a flat blue glacier into one end and Puget Sound out the other. This promontory surge of the island's steep edge, lifting me to look west onto the entire great bending valley of water. And south to the trim farmland where on a summer midnight in 1857, Indians snicked off a head.

The beheaders were, no surprise, northern Indians: Tlingit warriors from an Alaskan island near Sitka, knifing downcoast nearly a thousand miles in their glorious high-prowed canoes. The victim they caught and decapitated was a settler named Ebey, a militia officer and member of the Washington territorial legislature. There was no specific quibble between the raiding party and Ebey; simply, one of their tribal leaders had been killed during a clash with an American gunboat the previous year, and the Tlingits now exacted a chief for a chief.

Strange, for a timber-and-water empire which looks so everlastingly placid, and was explored by whites and yielded by the natives with perhaps less bloody contention than any other American frontier, that the practice of beheading crops up so in the Sound and Strait country. Recall the Makahs bringing home to Neah the pair of Clallam heads from Crescent Bay like first cabbages of the season. The earliest white expedition in from the Pacific, Vancouver's in 1792, was met with "A Long Pole & two others of smaller size...put
upright in the Ground each having a Human Scull on the top." That trio of skulls rode the air at Marrowstone Island, in direct line of sight across Admiralty Inlet from where I am perched, and the exploring Englishmen were blinklessly deferential about the display. Lieutenant Peter Puget, whose quote that is, proceeds to remark that he does not wish to criticize a people "whose Manners Customs Religion Laws & Government we are yet perfect Strangers to." Whether His Majesty's lieutenant would have been as equable about the northern warriors' manners in carrying Ebey's head away from here with them and eventually peeling the scalp off it and swapping the skin-and-hair hank to a Hudson's Bay trader for six blankets, a handkerchief, a bolt of cotton, three pipes and some tobacco--the trader then returning the grisly prize to Ebey's family for burial--it would be interesting to know.

Come look from this eminence of bluff now, in the soft hour before daybreak, and you will declare on Bibles that the Tlingits' act of 122 years ago was the last sharp moment on this landscape. The island's farm fields are leather and corduroy, rich even panels between black-furred stands of forest. Tan grass which broomed the backs of my hands as I climbed the path up to here now whisks soundlessly against a four-wire fenceline. The sky's only clouds are hung tidily on the southernmost Cascade Mountains, at the precise rim of summit where the sun will loft itself. Yes: Rural America of the last century, your eyes say--or Westphalia, or Devonshire.
Directly below where I stand sits an aging barn with its long peaked eave pointing southeast, like the bill of a cap turned attentively toward sunrise. We will sunwatch together. As much as I value the half-dawn, all the secretive shadings it goes through to hint how the world forms itself out of the mist of night, I am ready for sunlight and whatever heat it will bring against the frost. Hand by hand I put my fingers in my mouth to warm them, dry them rapidly on a pants leg, pull on my too-thin brown cotton garden gloves again.

Across Admiralty, the street lights of Port Townsend begin to quench into the day. The timber-heavy shoreline angling westward out the Strait from the town seems not so black and barbed as it was minutes ago. That shoreline is my reason—one of my reasons; the other is sheerly that I love this blufftop arc above the tiering horizons of water and shore and mountains—to be here. Across there, invisible yet imprinted, curves the canoe route which Swan traveled time on time during his six Neah Bay years.

A hundred water miles stretch between Port Townsend and Cape Flattery, and the journey along the fjord-like shore of the Olympic Peninsula usually took three days. The Olympic range, recorded Swan from afloat, presents a wild forbidding aspect. But then: the line of foot-hills...disclosing deep ravines, with fertile valleys lying between them, and reaching quite to the base of the great mountains. As for the long rough-hewn channel of the Strait itself, Bays and points are bold, precipitous and rocky. The water at these points is
deep, and, when the winds are high, dashes with tremendous force
upon the cliffs, making a passage around them, at times, a difficult
and dangerous matter.

I can see exactly to where one such matter occurred, beyond the
headland where Port Townsend nestles. Early in his years on the Strait,
Swan was inbound from Neah Bay one afternoon when his Makah canoe crew
pulled ashore to camp at Discovery Bay instead of padding on the the
half dozen miles to Port Townsend. Since the Indians' canoe pace seemed
to be regulated part of the time by weather savvy and prudence, and the
other part by indolence, it took some knowing to tell the moods apart.
(Swan had mused on a similar puzzle of canoe etiquette during his time
among the Chinooks and Chehalis at Shoalwater Bay. Speed will be kept
up for a hundred rods, he wrote in Northwest Coast, then the paddles
put to rest and all begin talking. Perhaps one has spied something,
which he has to describe while the rest listen; or another thinks of
some funny anecdote...or they are passing some remarkable tree or cliff,
or stone, which has a legend attached to it...When the tale is over...
all again paddle away with a desperate energy for a few minutes...)
This day, Swan decided the crew was being entirely too casual with his
time, and insisted they continue. An old Makah woman in the canoe
grumbled her disagreement, for she said she knew we should have a gale
of wind from the northwest. The weather lambasted them as promptly
as she predicted. We met the tiderips, and had a fearful time....On
we flew like an arrow, every sea throwing a swash into the canoe,
keeping two persons constantly bailing. The old squaw began to sing a death song... The paddlers at last managed to teeter the canoe atop breakers which skimmed it to shore, and a shaken and wiser Swan hiked the rest of the way to Port Townsend.

Twin gulls break into my sight around the bend of the bluff. "Slim yachts of the element," Robinson Jeffers christened them, and taking him at his words these two are gentleman racers.

They stay paired, the inshore birds a few feather-lengths ahead, in a casual motionless glide past me, and on down the bluffline.

Then one flaps once, the other flaps once--evidently the rules of this contest of air--and they flow on out of my vision.

After his near-disaster, Swan slowed himself to the Indian pace of canoe travel, and it seems to have been a pleasant enough one. He recounted for a San Francisco newspaper the trip when a paddler named Tom Squi-qui commenced a Catholic hymn, which he sung in a fine clear voice, accompanied by all the others in chorus. John Fay then officiated as priest, and they went through the service in a regular and devout manner, till the word "O-mah-sista," or Amen, when Billy Barlow gave a whoop, and struck off into singing "Old Dan Tucker," joined by the rest, who gave quite as much attention to the negro melody as they had to the canticles of the church.

Ten minutes have passed since I joined the barn in peering for signs of sunrise. The light is slowed by the cloud lid. Now, overhead, a sudden dark constellation. Birds, oh god, birds in thousands,
a complete swift seine of them sweeping the daybreak sky. Half a mile of wingsom at once swishing in across the water, flinging beyond into the farm fields. That quick flutter, brief glide: telltale marmalade breast: robins.

Six times across Admiralty they come, the squadrons a minute or two apart. I can forecast that I will happen onto robins all the rest of the morning on the bluff, spillover of these abrupt sky-filling migrations.

While I am monitoring birds, the first full daylight has reached into the peaks of the Olympic Mountains. The highest crags, far west into the range—Olympus itself is in that backfile, 8000 feet high but so discreet of summit that you must know where to look to pick it out—rather than the front pyramids of white. So a ceiling of sunshine is somewhere up there, and in minutes I will be granted the floor of it down here.

I suck warmth into my fingers one more time and hurry north along the bluff, wanting to watch the light come onto the lagoon which bows out from the shoreline below. The lagoon is not quite like any other piece of coastwork I have ever seen: a narrow band of gravel beach which mysteriously has looped out from the base of the bluff—the curve of the gravel snare about two hundred yards across at its widest—and entrapped several acres of tidewater. Driftlogs by the hundreds float within it like pewter tableware spilled across marble.
At two minutes before eight, the first beams set the lagoon aglow, the pewter suddenly is bronze.

The sun now rides clear of the mountains, but so far onto the southern horizon at this time of year that its luster slants almost directly along the Sound and Admiralty Inlet, as if needing the ricochet help from the water in order to travel the extreme polar distances to the lagoon and, at last, me.

The canoes that slipped through these water distances like needles; Beautifully modeled, Swan said of the crafts of the Makahs, resembling in their bows our finest clipper ships...Formed from a single log of cedar, carved out with skill and elegance. The best canoes are made by the Clyoquot and Nittinat tribes, on Vancouver Island, who sell them to the Mackahs, but few being made by the latter tribe owing to the scarcity of cedar in their vicinity... Propulsion was either the deft broadhead paddles carved by the Clyoquot or square sails of woven cedar bark, which made the vessels look all the more like small clipper ships, diminutives of that greatest grace of sea-faring. The grace perhaps flowed up out of the cedar into the canoemen. Swan records that when the Makahs would convey him downcoast from Cape Flattery to the Hosett village at Cape Alava, they would thread the canoe through the archways where waves have pounded through the offshore seastacks. On one of these through-the-hole voyages Swan and the Reservation doctor had an opportunity of witnessing the operation of three tremendous rollers which came sweeping after us and which I feared
would knock us against the top of the arch. The doctor said he had
his eye on a ledge which he should try to catch hold of in case of
emergency, but fortunately we had no occasion to try our skill at
swimming as the Indians worked the canoe through the passage
beautifully.

Makah canoemanship introduced Swan to Swell, dressed in that
fresh suit of Boston clothes, bound out from Port Townsend to Neah
Bay on a mid-September day of 1859 with a cargo of flour, bacon, molasses
and blankets. Swan climbed in for the jaunt, and ever after was im-
pressed with Swell, wrote at once of him that line that he is still
quite a young man, but if he lives, he is destined to be a man of
importance among his own and neighboring tribes.

If he lives. Why those edged words amid the admiration, on a
fine bright journey out the valley of water to Neah?

Whatever the reason for those three uneasy jots of Swan's pen,
they were exact augury, Swell long since dead by the time Swan canoed
away from the Neah Bay teaching job seven Septembers later, reversed
that original route to arrive in from Cape Flattery to Port Townsend
across the water here.

A second illumination of this sunrise. I realize that I come back
and back to this bluff because here, scenes still fit onto each other
despite their distances of time. Becoming rarer in the west, constancy
of this sort. What I am looking out over in this fresh dawn is little
enough changed from the past that Swan in a Makah canoe, coming or
going on the Port Townsend–Neah Bay route, can be readily imagined across there, the sailing gulls slide through his line of sight as they do mine. Resonance of this rare sort, the reliable echo from the eye inward, I think we had better learn to prize like breath.
Day forty-four

So to Swan's next frontier address: Port Townsend. Even now, the place is a destination not on the route to anywhere else. No ferry from the cities of Puget Sound connects to Port Townsend, and the road to its flange of headland on the Strait is a dozen-mile veer from the main highway of the Olympic Peninsula. In fogless weather I can very nearly see to the town, north past the jut of Point No Point, from the bluff above our valley. But driving here on this day of murk, the sky like watered milk and the road spraying up brown slush, Port Townsend seemed to me far-off and elusive as a lookout tower atop a distant crag.

From its initial moment of settlement, which was in 1851, the remarkable siting has been Port Townsend's blessing and curse. As the first community astride the Strait of Juan de Fuca-Puget Sound water route, claiming a spacious headland with a sheltering bay along its southeastern side, Port Townsend looked to be a golden spot in the map. But the promontory site turned out not as the dreamed-of stroke of geography collecting all inbound ships, but merely a nub of coast around which the lane of maritime commerce bent, like a rope pulleyed over a limb, and lowered cargoes onward to the docklands of Seattle, Tacoma, Everett and Olympia. Those cargoes still are going past.

The civic personality did not quite work out as anticipated, either. In more places than one, huge aspiring Victorian houses and unexampled views across water are side by side with the scruff and
shagginess of a forest clearing. The town is divided between the abrupt waterfront (brink-like in more ways than one: Swan once reports to his diary that One Arm Smith the waterman fell through the privy of the Union hotel down onto the beach and injured himself severely & perhaps fatally) and the expansive reach of bluff behind it, where the big old betrimmed houses rise like a baker's shelves of wedding cakes. Downtown is divided again, between the blocks of brick emporiums of the 1880s and a straggle of modern stores which look as if they have been squeezed from a tube labeled Instant Shopping Center.

Port Townsend always has lived a style of boom-and-bust, and that record of chanciness is a main reason I cherish the town. In a society of cities interested most in how svelte their skyscrapers are, Port Townsend still knows that life is a dice game in the dirt. I have been in and out of the place as often as I could these past dozen years, and I can almost feel in the air as I step from the car whether the town is prospering or drooping. Small shops will blossom in the high old downtown buildings. My next visit, they have vanished. A grand house will be freshly painted one day. When I look again, peeling has begun. This time, I was in town only moments when I heard that a few of the vastest old mansions have been trying life as guest houses. That seemed promising, but now the state is requiring that every room be fitted with a metal fire door, and the mansion proprietors proclaim themselves staggered toward bankruptcy by the prospect.
from the diaries

I discovered that Swan had his move from Neah Bay to here at Port Townsend by way of Boston, a transcontinental detour not surprising from him; if he had been paid by the mile in this Strait period of his life, he would have made it to millionairehood. The holiday season of 1866 and the first months of 1867, Swan spent with his daughter and son, Ellen and Charles, and not incidentally was on hand to claim a windfall: an inheritance of $6,427.14 from an uncle. About half the sum, he rapidly poured off for merchandise consigned to Port Townsend (1 dozen money belts, the pocket diary begins enumerating day by day, 1 covered wagon...1 set harness... cod lines...pistols etc.). Much of the rest flowed away in gifts for Ellen and Charles, and in an astounding number of $25 checks written to himself. By the first of June, 1867, he had his bank balance successfully depleted to $647.32, and took ship for the west again.

In mid-July Swan was back here at Port Townsend—he had short-cutted by way of Panama—and in mid-August drifted out the Strait to visit at Neah Bay. Near year's end, he made a buying trip to San Francisco for one of the Port Townsend storekeepers. In 1868, at last I find pages where he begins to settle into town life.

Swan has had another windfall, of sorts. The ship Ellen Foster smashed apart on the rocks near Neah Bay, and he undertakes to salvage the wreck. This is beachcombing in the truest sense of the word, and Swan holds no illusions about it. The warehouse he rented
on the Port Townsend waterfront to sort the Foster's bounty is consistently dubbed in his diary the junk store.

Simultaneous with the junkwork, Swan begins to take on paperwork. As the customs port for the Puget Sound region and county seat and the biggest dab of settlement between Victoria and Seattle, Port Townsend had become a kind of official inkwell for the Strait frontier. Swan always swims best in ink. Rapidly, he plucks up semi-job of some official sort after semi-job. I have established myself here at Port Townsend, he soon writes in one of his letters to Baird at the Smithsonian, having been appointed by the Governor as a notary public and Pilot Commissioner, and by the Supreme Court as United States Commissioner, and having appointed myself as a commission merchant and ship broker. Thus you see honors are easy with me....I reverse the saying that a prophet is without honor for I have the honors without the profit.
Days forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven

Swan has come down with railroad fever.

How strong and delusory a frontier ailment, this notion that wherever you Xed in your town on the blankness of the west, a locomotive soon would clang up to it with iron carloads of money. I admit for Swan and Port Townsend that they had a germ of reason for their railroad hopes: the attractive harbor sited closer to the Pacific and its trade routes than any other of the contending anchorages of Puget Sound. And a single germ can bring on delirium. Swan's breaks forth in letters to Thomas H. Canfield, an executive of the Northern Pacific Railroad:

Had the most skillful engineer selected a site for a great and magnificent city, he could not have located a more favored spot than the peninsula of Port Townsend....It may be of interest to you as a meteorological fact, that while during the past winter, the snow on the Sierra Nevada has been so deep as to obstruct the Central Rail Road, causing the mails and express to be transported for a time on snow shoes, and while at San Francisco, snow has fallen to the depth of two inches, yet in the mountain passes north of the Columbia River, the greatest depth of snow does not exceed five feet, and on Puget Sound particularly Port Townsend from whence I write, there has not been a particle of snow this winter....The whole of the rich valley of the Chahalis, which empties into Grays Harbor, and the valley of the Willopah the garden of the Territory, which connects with Shoalwater Bay, would be tributary to a city at Port Townsend, and could furnish supplies for a population larger than the dreams of the most sanguine enthusiast....A ship could
sail direct from New York with a cargo of Railroad iron, which could be landed at any desired point on Hoods canal....

Swan, I would turn you if I could from this railroad courtship. I know its outcome, and you would be better off spending your ink money and postage to bet on fistfights in your favorite waterfront saloon. The commercial future lay in wait here along the eastern shoreline of Puget Sound, not across there with you at Port Townsend, Seattle and Tacoma, these points where the westward flow of settlement quickest met deep harbors—they became the region's plump rail-fed ports. Had Swan and his hamlet of destiny been able to admit it, the very sweep of water which served as Port Townsend's concourse—Admiralty Inlet and Puget Sound—now was its moat.

The letters to Canfield flew on, however, and in the sixth of the series Swan made bold to say that the Northern Pacific not only needed Port Townsend, it required him as its local eyes and ears:

I would respectfully submit to you whether it would not be for the interest of the company to have some careful reliable person to prepare a statement of all matters of interest relative to the harbors of Puget Sound....For $150. a month I will undertake to furnish every information, and pay all the expense of obtaining it, such as travelling expenses boat and canoe hire &c....

Swan in this Port Townsend life is showing something I have not seen much of since his time among the Shoalwater oyster entrepreneurs. He has a little bright streak of hokum in him, which begins at his wallet.
It is the one thing I would change about the west, or rather, about an ample number of westerners. Their conviction that in this new land, just because it is new, wealth somehow ought to fall up out of the ground into their open pockets. Such bonanza notions began with the Spaniards peering for golden cities amid buffalo grass, and continued through the fur trade, the mining rushes, the laying of the railroads, the arrival of the loggers, the taking up of farmland and grazing country, and even now are munching through real estate and coal and whatever can be singled out beyond those. Besides a sudden population, the west—the several wests—has had to support this philosophy of get-rich-quicker-than-the-next-grabber, and the burden of it has skewed matters considerably. So Swan is on a central route of his era, a place he is not generally found, in his quest for wealthstrike. His problem is the common one; nowhere among his skills is the knack for hitting it rich. This stone fact asserts itself in these Port Townsend years not only keeping Swan unrich, but chronically short of any income at all. Time and again, the diary makes account of small
borrowings, from Henry Webster, from a friendly storekeeper named
Gerrish, most of all from the local jeweler, Bulkeley, who is
steadily ready with a few dollars. The sum usually goes from Swan
so promptly he scarcely leaves a fingerprint on it: Borrowed of Bulkly
$5.00 Paid wash bill $1.00... His credit plainly is good; generally he
notes repayment of his debts the same day he comes into any real cash,
and is himself then touchable for a loan. But chronic is chronic,
and so the Swan I find in these railroad missives still is a fellow
I would cheerfully accompany to Katmandu, but am not so sure I would
buy a horse from, if he happened to be looking for funds at the moment.

Swan tried to tap the field he knew best, the native artwork of the
Northwest, but without much success. In his periodic letters to
Baird at the Smithsonian, he tries now and then, with ample justification,
to pry whatever occasional collecting salary he can: I know that I
can do this work as well and probably better than any man on the Pacific
Coast, but I cannot do myself or the subject justice, unless I am paid
for my time, labor and expense. Baird's thrifty fist stays closed. When
Swan on his own makes a trading trip to Sitka in Alaska, the venture
seems not to produce much except some interesting new scenery.

Therefore, his crowbar work on the coffers of the Northern Pacific. To
my astonishment, which shows how much I know about financial sharpstering,
Swan is hired, and at his price. I can only think that the New York
railroaders wanted to miss no chance, and if the shore of the Strait of
Juan de Fuca somehow proved worthy of railroad iron, this careful reliable person who wrote such blarneying letters did know that shore. Getting himself hired, however, proved different from pulling a railroad into town. Swan escorted the railroad moguls around when Canfield led a group of them out from New York, lobbied now and again in the territorial capitol at Olympia, tried to tout the prospect of trans-Pacific trade with Siberia after talking with a barkentine captain who had come from the Amur River in the very short passage of 28 days, made maps of the proposed rail route up from the Columbia River to Port Townsend, lined up local pledges of land if the town was tapped as the terminus. Then Canfield inexplicably telegraphed Swan to meet him at Ogden, Utah.

Swan jounced off into sage and desert on a 700-mile journey of horseback, steamboat, and stagecoach. Very hot and dirty, the battered pocket diary of this trip mutters...alkali plain...hottest ride I have yet had...desolate...twenty bushels of bed bugs....At last at Ogden, a message met Swan: Canfield had decided not to wait for him. Swan skidded downhill both fiscally and physically after that.

Arriving back at Port Townsend from the three and a half week wild goose chase, he jots constant notes of bad health—Sick in house all day from the effects of my journey and a cold and sick for some time—and probably despond as well. He also begins to record that the Northern Pacific has omitted to pay him several months' wages, and he is having to nag for the sum.

It all spins out, Swan's several years of railroad fantasy, into a
few words at the end of the summer of 1873. That spring, having
thoughtfully bought much of the townsite first, the Northern Pacific
had chosen Tacoma as its transcontinental terminus; now, on the
eighteenth of September, the railroad underwent a financial collapse
which took years to mend. Swan wrote unknowing prophecy in his
diary at Port Townsend two days earlier: Town very dull nothing doing.

I have some feel for Swan's railroad debacle, because the bulldozers
on one of the slopes across this valley remind me steadily of futility
of my own. My effort was to narrow progress, Swan's was to lure it
in his direction, but in the end we are each as futile as the other.

The bulldozers are carving out housing sites. On any scale, the
slope they are swathing was no hillside of grandeur: scrub alder,
madrona. But amid Seattle's spread of suburbs it made a healthy green
lung, and its loss is one more nick toward changing the Puget Sound
region into Los Angeles North.

At the hearing I alone spoke against the total of 107 houses
designated for the site, suggesting if nothing else that half the
number—on lots the same size as those on our side of the valley—
made a more swallowable sum for the area. The zoning law, however,
permitted that the size of the lots could be averaged over the entire
acreage, including slopes of unbuildable steepness—a principle by
which Los Angeles can be averaged off into the Mojave Desert and it be
proven that every Angeleno owns a numerical rancho—and 107 houses it
is going to be.
While they were eating me like banqueters sharing a cheese, the landholder's lawyer and the developer's experts and the county's planners, the developer himself said least of all, and I remember an instant when our glances met, baffled. I wore my one suit, so beaver trapper as to look less like a from among the bureaucrats. The developer, who may make more money from this one hillside than I am ever apt to see in my lifetime, was in his rough shirt to show humble toil. Guises aside, we probably are not so very different; "self-made" unsmoothened types, with the edges that usually means, and origins which took some muscle. I would guess I was piling hay bales at least as early in life as he started pouring concrete. But the matter between us has become one of creed—how many homeowners may dance on the top of a surveyor's stake?—and the prevailing scripture is on his side, not mine. Which is why his housing developments fell my forests, and tracks are laid to a town the railroad owns instead of one where a Swan dreams. Preach as we may in our own backyards, cottagers do not often sway a society's fiscal theology.
Day forty-eight

Rain trotting in the drainpipe when we woke up. Now, at ten in the morning, a gray pause has curtained between showers, a halfhearted wind musses among the trees. Today and yesterday are standard Puget Sound winter--rain and 45 degrees--after the weeks of clear frost-rimed weather. A rich winter of two seasons, this. Time of frost, time of cloud.

Last comment found from Swan on the railroad adventure. Did not alter my opinion, I come across him suddenly grumbling, apropos of nothing, during a visit to Tacoma years later. That it is unfit place for terminus.
Day forty-nine

About daylight this morning, the twenty-first of September, 1868, in Swan's small pages, a party of 26 Clallams attacked a party of 19 Chimseans who were asleep near Dungeness light, and killed 18 of them.

The numbers of the situation have never been so certain--Swan himself next hears the death toll given as 19--but one Tsimshian woman did survive the ambush, and the strand of beach that was the killing ground has become known as Graveyard Spit. Other than those yoked facts of casualties, survivor and nomenclature, this incident drifts in the history of the Strait country as a wayward half-legend, some-Indians-some-time-slew-some-other-Indians; I am intrigued that Swan is going to detail the story. I can help him this far: that single bloody dawn tided over nature's own fact about the little coastal loop of sand, which is that here is one of the stubbornest sites of life anywhere. Graveyard Spit is a pocket desert, sheltered into its thirstless ecology by larger Dungeness and the dry rain-shadow which extends north from the Olympic Mountains out over the Strait. Rubbery buttons of flowers and varieties of crawler-plants hug low and determined onto the beach-like hundred acres or so; sand rodents make tiny roads among them, and are ambushed by nighthawks in whistling dives.

Went with Agent King, the twenty-ninth of September, to Pt. Discovery relative to the Indian murder at Dungeness... Mr King had a talk with the Indians implicated in the Simsean murder and told them they must go to the Reserve tomorrow.
It can't be known either whether the incident conformed to the version "a gentleman from Dungeness" furnished the newspaper at Olympia: that "as the unfortunate victims were all asleep at the time of the attack, the murderers made quick work of it, and then commenced mutilating the bodies, dismembering them, throwing the legs here, the arms there, and the hands
elsewhere." Nor is it definite that the survivor "received seven stabs and cuts in her right side, three near the heart, and others on her head, arm and hip," although that relentless counting suggests mightily that the informational gentleman was Swan. What seems sure is an element of revenge in the attack, product of the history of raids into the Strait and Puget Sound by the powerful tribes from the northern reaches of the British Columbia coast--Haidas, Tlingits, Tsimshians. The immediate motive, however, was that the Tsimshians overnighthing on the sheltered spit had just finished a summer of work in the Puget Sound sawmills, and their homebound canoe rode low in the water with the goods their wages had bought.

This morning, the thirtieth of September, Mr King started for Hoods Canal with the Indians and their families whom he yesterday told to go.

He also requests me to proceed... to Dungeness & get the rest of the murderers and also to get all the goods I can recover....

At Graveyard, Swan salvaged the Tsimshian canoe, some sails and a few paddles, four sacks of flour and four trunks and four guns, and five gallons of molasses. Missing, according to the wounded Tsimshian woman, were $330 in coin, a quantity of silver jewelry, some blankets and much clothing. (When the woman--her name was Kit-tairlk--eventually recuperated enough to travel, Swan would put her aboard a Hudson's Bay Company steamer to go north to her home village with the salvage and some gifts to her tribe as restitution from the Indian Affairs officialdom of Washington Territory.)
Slept at Mr Clines last night, the first of October, & made a memo of articles saved from Chimsean canoe.

Indians say that Charley Blake & Smalley advised them not to go to Hoods Canal & consequently none left with me altho some promised to go & meet me at Pt Townsend.
Left Dungeness river at 10 am & reached Pt. Townsend 6 Pm

That Swan could nod to the divvy of opinion among the Clallam raiders and blithely canoe home to await those who promised to go to the Reservation with him says all about his authority among the Northwest natives. He could be as supple, bendable, as they were; in the hard-edged white society which had taken over this coast, one man of contours.

Indians arrived this forenoon, the second of October, from Dungeness for Hoods Canal.

Started from Port Townsend at 1 PM with Patrick Henry, Emily & Dan in Lame Billy's canoe.

The Dungeness Indians in two canoes, with 2 small canoes towing.

The canoe flotilla went south up Admiralty Inlet, the high clay bluffs of Whidbey Island announcing one shore and the blunt timbered headlands on the Olympic Peninsula side the other; paddled for Foulweather Bluff and the entrance to the eighty-mile fjord called Hood Canal; passed Port Ludlow, with its lumber schooners tethered like workhorses; and pulled ashore for the night at the next sawmill village, Port Gamble.

Paid my hotel bill at Port Gamble, the third of October. $1.00 & started at 8 am for Hoods Canal.

... opposite Sebec near mouth of Nuth lu wap--took lunch.

... 6 PM camped at bend in Canal opposite Humhumi.

Where Swan's canoe party that morning came around the first point of land after leaving Port Gamble, a highway bridge today sweeps across the water on barge-sized concrete pontoons. The five canoes would look so many pieces of driftwood passing beneath the girderwork of the Hood Canal span. A few miles more, on the eastern shore a military base is being built for
nuclear-missile-bearing Trident submarines. The killing capacity of Swan's passing Indians compares to that of a Trident as a jackknife to bubonic plague.

Started at 7 AM after eating breakfast and breaking up camp, the fourth of October. Arrived at Reservation at noon. Mr King paid me $25. coin. . . . Left Reservation at 3:45 PM & camped at 7 PM about 10 miles down the Canal.

The next day, last line of the Graveyard Spit saga, Swan was back in Port Townsend by suppertime.
Day fifty

A day that promises better weather one minute and reconsiders the next. The valley is sought out by wind every so often, but not yet rain, and the thermometer is nosing 50. I would have known without checking that the mercury was up, for the cat is atop a post of the fence at the far side of the neighbor's yard. More than ever he looks like a lion seen from far off, adoze at the edge of some thornbush thicket, waiting for a bunny-sized wildebeeste to patter into his dreams.

What regulates this periodic cat, besides the day's warmth sliding in through his fur, or any other of the cats I have watched past my writing-room windows for the past dozen or so years, I have no conception. They are the most constant animals I see, and the most out-of-camouflage: they pace through our wooded backyard in robes of color entirely unsuited to hunting. Harlequins against the green. Yet unlike the neighborhood's dogs which lollipop around the street in dizzy concern for human attention, cats are thoroughly in place within their routes. Only other cats stir their imagination. Those aloof encounters by day when any two, stalking like muffed-and-coated heiresses, will ostentatiously keep the full length of the backyard between them, then the rites by night when they try to murder one another as inventively as possible. Otherwise, it takes the profoundest kind of intrusion to nick into a catly routine. The gray-and-white wanderer who one day tiptoed into the garden dirt,
scratched a hole, daintily settled atop it in hunched but poised position—Queen Victoria on a thunderbox—to do the necessary, did it, scratched the lid of dirt into place, looked uneasily around, spotted me watching from the window, and fled as if aflame. (No such episode from the tan cat; it would not be lionly.) Probably the mind of cats is territory we are better off not knowing. The winter Carol and I lived in London, I stretched back from my typewriter one morning and looked directly up at a cat on the ceiling. Our flat was the below-stairs portion of a Georgian townhouse, a long warren of rooms with plumbing pipes and electrical wires vined along the walls like root systems and a splash of daylight at the rear, a kind of glassed-over porch with frosted panes as its roof. The cat was roof-sitting. Ceiling-sitting, from my point of view. Into the middle of the roof-panes of glass a light fixture had been webbed, on the English electrical principle that unless the electrician has been specifically told by the householder not to expend 232,000 miles of wiring he will proceed to rig a bulb to the underside of the moon, and the light as it glowed threw upward a small circle of heat. By some instinct the cat had ambled up from the alley to curl itself to the warmth. (Is it Eiseley?—"In the days of the frost seek a minor sun.") The rest of the day, I would glance overhead every so often and find the cat absorbedly licking its paws, its midnight- and-snow face dabbing in and out of focus through the frosted glass. That time of an alley tabby in wavery orbit over me convinced me
that whatever their thousand daily pretences, cats all are secret Cheshire.

To Swan of Port Townsend now, another here-again-gone-again of my wintering, countenance His effort to woo the railroad was mostly told in spare pages of the ledger diary he had used at Neah Bay--evidently a special effort to keep straight the skein of blandishments being tried on the Northern Pacific executives. The Graveyard Spit interlude was set down in a pocket notebook, and the several years that follow it are an era of pocket diaries: lines jotted instead of composed. Scrawled small as they are, these entries will be day upon day of decipherment. But beyond doubt, worth it. I lift pages to the start of 1869 and find:

Stormy day. Commenced to occupy office on the lower floor of old Post Office building Pt Townsend, as the office for Commissioner of Pilots. US Commissioner. Notary Public &c rent $5 pr month

I check the final night of 1874 and learn:

One Arm Smith & I worked this PM sodding Bulkeley's grave & planting shrubbery around it.

Even for Swan, these seem broad enough brackets of endeavor.
Days fifty-one, fifty-two

Pleasant day, nothing of interest occurred except a fight... between Ginger Reese and Sam Alexander in Reeses saloon...

Dave Sires Lieut Paige and several officers of the Cutter gave me a serenade about 12 oclock PM...

Col Larrabee & Col Pardee passed the evening with me discussing Swedenborgianism...

Swan's frontier Americans as they clumped themselves together into the barely-in-out-of-the-weather settlement they called Port Townsend. To the local Clallams and visiting Makahs, they must have seemed exotic as albino bears, this white tribe.

Their customs and rites of leadership are sporadic but frenzied. (Most memorable, at least by Swan's report, was the election of 1860: The Republicans burned a tar barrel in honor of the supposed victory of Abe Lincoln.)

They have a fixation on honorific titles: officers from the army post near town always addressed as "Colonel" and "Major," those from ships on station in the harbor as "Captain" and "Lieutenant": at the courthouse, it is "Judge" and "Sheriff." (Swan himself in these years served for a time in charge of a municipal court and became thereafter on the streets of Port Townsend "Judge Swan." Such distinction was not without drawbacks: Tom Butler and I had a talk in Jerseys saloon this evening in which he made threats that he would hold me responsible for my decision in case of Butler vs Butler.)

This they extend with guffawing generosity to the Indians, renaming the local Clallam chief Chetzemoka as "the Duke of York" and one of his wives "Queen Victoria."
This white tribe's sacred notions focus not on the earth and its forest and its roof of sky, but on obscure ancient quibbles among humans. (White humans, at that. As early as his Shoalwater days, Swan made note of the chief of an Oregon tribe who shook his head firmly when told the story of Christ's crucifixion. The Indians had enough trouble getting along with each other without borrowing conflict; he said; this Jesus matter was a quarrel the whites would have to settle among themselves.) They hold as well a strange sense of territoriality, strong as that of wolves, basing it on invisible boundaries: not the borders of common sense where you know yourself liable to ambush from another tribe, but seams on the earth somehow seen through a spyglass mounted on a tripod.

Their weaponry is potent and mysterious, and growing more so all the time. (Lieut Hanbury US Topographical Engineer called on me today he is engaged on steamer Celilo taking account of force of current at various points on the Sound for the purpose of ascertaining if it is practicable to make use of torpedoes as a means of harbor defence.)

Their boats are even more prodigious. Long schooners which moor at the sawmill settlements and take aboard what had been sky-touching thrashing groves of trees. Steamboats which with their steaming sidewheels can travel without the wind.

Their food ranges from disgusting--hard salted beef which the sailors call "mahogany horse"--to marvelous: molasses, rice, coffee.

Their views on whiskey are inconstant: some Port Townsend whites irate about the Indians sharing in it at all, others making
a commerce of the liquid fire. (Thomas Stratton brought a bottle of whiskey to me which he took from a Clallam Indian this noon under the wharf of the hotel. The Indian said he got it at Sires saloon and it was lowered through the floor to him.)

So too their notions on sex: the white men are ostentatious about preferring women of their own skin, yet Port Townsend has a growing population of half-breed children. They are showy as well about their dead, keeping them about for a day or more for the sake of ceremony instead of putting them instantly to rest in the earth. A good many of them are several baths per annum less clean than the Indians. (Especially less so than the Makahs, of whom Swan at Neah recorded that whenever a grimy task such as flensing a whale carcass was completed, they at once scoured themselves in sand and surf and came out clean and bright as so many new copper tea kettles.)

Above all, this: they are a moody people, hard to predict, their community sometimes boisterous, sometimes dead silent. The day, make it, that Swan and the other townspeople learned that the iron wagons of the railroad would not be coming: watch them from the eyes of Chetzemoka the Duke of York, how the bearded men cluster and mutter and slump away to their houses, how the street stands emptier than empty after them, how even the whiskey voices in the saloons cannot be heard.
You might imagine, the myth already finding words inside your lips, that this odd white tribe had got aboard one of its wheeled boats and gone away.
Day fifty-three

And then Port Townsend would jerk awake again and scarcely blink between excitements. In one span of a dozen weeks, Swan inscribes these doings:

...Edwin Jones died during the night of heart complaint. He had been playing in the band at a dance in Masonic Hall and was on his way with the rest to Allens to get supper. He stopped in at Urquharts Saloon where he had a room, laid down and died immediately.

...About Midnight Wednesday night Bill Leonards cow came into my entry and I drove her out. Then Ike Hall brought a drunk man into his office and I got up to see who it was and took cold by so doing....

...A Clallam Indian was cut in the head by another Indian and the squaws came and complained. The Sheriff took the guilty Indian and locked him up.

...John Martin stabbed Poker Jack this morning about 2 oclock in Hunts Saloon....

...Joseph Nuano the half breed Kanaka-Hawaiian—who murdered Dwyer on San Juan—was hanged today at the Point near the Brewery....

...The 6 canoes of Haida Indians who have been camped on Point Hudson for several days left this morning—They first went to Point Wilson where they burnt up the body of a Hydah man who died in Port Discovery 3 days ago—then they gathered up the bones and carried them off all leaving for Victoria and thence to their homes on Queen Charlottes Islands—
Day fifty-four

Lot of Hydah Indians with me this day in office, the tenth of May of 1873. I copied the tattoo marks on the back and breast of Kitkune...

He did indeed, and the creatures from Kitkune's epidermis writhe up at me now, from the pages of Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge No. 267. The breast tattoo is a head-on image of a codfish, twin tails looping beneath its gills to both sides: it is a broadline cartoon of some tropical mouth-breather which might gape at you from an aquarium tank. The creatures of the back—a pair of them, sitting up and facing to opposite directions like book ends—are crossbreeds of killer whales and wolves. They have snouted heads with teeth like sawpoints, claws long and pointed as fork tines, broad curved scimitar-like tails, and an extra eye just beneath the neck.

The skin art of the visiting Haidas plainly enchanted Swan. He sketched a dozen of the patterns—the most decorative visitor seems to have been a canoeman named Kit-ka-gens, who had a thunderbird across his back, squids on each thigh, and frogs on each ankle—and lamented that they were but a portion of the whole which were tattooed on the persons of this party...

Soon another of his letters was away to Baird at the Smithsonian proposing the article for Contributions. (Proposing a bit nervously, given all these whalewolfes and ankling frogs: the Haidas, Swan assured Baird, are no more grotesque in their attempts to imitate nature than are our designs of griffins, dragons, unicorns and other fabulous animals.)

His fascination with the Haidas is more than understandable. They surge in the history of this coast as a Pacific Northwest version of Vikings.
Writers are captivated with the analogy of raids down from northern waters, canoes like small dragonships, fur-shirted warriors bursting up from the thwarts to do battle. Swan never blazons that comparison, and I think he was right. The Haidas of his time amply deserve attention entirely as Haidas. Undo the past, and disperse a few hundred thousand Haidas along this coast from their home islands of northern British Columbia, the Queen Charlottes, south as far as the mouth of the Columbia River between Washington and Oregon, prime them with firepower equal to ours, and white civilization still might be waiting to set its first foot ashore here. The Haidas, from all I can judge, would have warred implacably as long as we could have stood it, then negotiated us to a frazzle.

The actual arithmetics that as late as 1835, perhaps as many as six thousand Haidas lived in the Queen Charlotte Islands, and by 1885 there were eight hundred. Alcohol and other allurements of white frontier society had made their usual toll of a traditional way of life, but more terrible harvest yet, civilization's diseases killed these warrior people like kittens. A smallpox epidemic in 1862 spread north out of Victoria and devastated what was left of the natives of the British Columbia coastline. No one knew the total of corpses—a ship's captain counted a casual hundred, scattered along the shores like flotsam, on his voyage from the Stikene River to Victoria—but the estimate has been that of a coastal Indian population of perhaps sixty thousand, one-third perished. Among the Haidas, that smallpox outbreak obliterated several particularly strong villages along the remote lengthy western margin of the Queen Charlottes archipelago. That west shore population, reported a visiting geographer in 1866, "has become wholly extinct;' every Haida had left in terror or stayed and died.