Broke camp and started at 5:20 AM, the twenty-first of August—south toward Skidegate Channel. If Swan's penciled entries in the pocket diary could take on the color of mood they should here go green with hope. The closest they can come is to speak in spurts, this day's journey a series of notations of shoreline points and rock formations zipped past, much seen but little investigated. Swan has his mind strictly on speed, and the mended and lightened canoe glides on and on until at sundown we landed on Hippa Island. By far the lengthiest day of advance, this stopless one: more than thirty miles, with about the same distance yet to go to reach the entrance of Skidegate Channel. Swan and Deans after a hearty supper plop to bed with the assurance from Edinso that they are the first white men to sleep on Hippa.

Deans might have foregone the honor. Their tents had been pitched in a patch of cow parsnips and by morning the odor sickened him. However a cup of strong coffee made him feel better and Swan, rapidly not noticeably sympathetic to Deans's quimsy stomach, rapidly marshals everybody into the canoe again.
They have very nearly paddled to Skidegate Inlet in late morning when mist shut down thick and the rain commenced...Edinso knowing of a camping ground at a place called Tchuwa, we pulled and paddled, now against wind and tide and finally made a landing at 1 P.M. on a pebbly beach composed of paving stones and shingle and so steep that one could hardly climb to the top which from the landing to the summit is at least a hundred feet.

Struggling to the top, they find a tent site under large evergreens, a perfect ground in any Country but such a rainy one.

Swan sought out a small dry cave, sat down and wrote these notes...There was progress to report to himself:...did pretty well today...But that night, a severe attack of neuralgia in my head which induced me to retire after taking my 9 o'clock meterological readings...
He sleeps until seven the next morning, which approaches mid-afternoon in his traveling habits, and arose refreshed and feeling unusually bright which I attributed to the healthful influence of the fragrant spruce boughs which formed the groundwork of my couch.

Good health seems rampant: Deans is unnauseated and Edinso’s back is better. Indeed, the chief arises so jovial that he related many anecdotes and incidents of his early life. His main tale of the day was of how he had discovered the gold—white stones—which set off the Gold Harbor rush on the west coast of Moresby Island in 1849. Swan, who as early as North Island noted of Edinso that I find him rather inclined to romance, and listen to his stories cum grano salis, later learns that this historic prospecting was performed by another Haida. A Munchausenism, he edits here into Edinso’s fable.

The day’s only woe is the weather, which grabs them again. The rain beat through the tent in a fine mist like an umbrella under an eave gutter...while a small brooklet found its way under my bed.

As the soggy canoe party sits out the hours around the campfire, a stone explodes in the blaze. Swan guesses the detonation caused by water in a cavity of the stone which converted into steam. Not so the Edinso version:...it was the Spirits who were angry and had made the recent bad weather. He then threw a quantity of grease and some tobacco in the fire as a sort of peace offering.
Swan makes an offertory of his own by stenciling a marker displaying the following legend.

with James Deans Indian Department Victoria BC Camped here Aug 23, 24, 25, 1883
Edinso chief of Massett Captain of canoe
Johnny Kit Elswa Skillu Tsat1 Kundai Hanow SelaKootKung crew of canoe

I nailed this board to a tree where it will be a conspicuous object on landing, to any one who may be so unfortunate as to camp at this place hereafter.

Now only a matter of hours from Skidegate Channel, Swan and party push off to a late start the next morning, 7 o'clock instead of 5 which we should have done...Luckily we found the water smooth, and the canoe slid easily.

Johnny had collected some spruce gum yesterday, and...all hands took a piece, and soon the jaws of the whole party were in motion...We found the gum an excellent thing to chew before breakfast, cleaning the mouth, strengthening the stomach and aiding the appetite.

Chawing along in the improved weather, the paddlers idle more than Swan wants, and at one point stop to shoot at seals...After a delay of three quarters of an hour without killing any we again started and lazily proceeded. As the pace of paddling drops Swan's temper
climbs. By now had come up a light wind from the SW which was fair. I asked why sail was not set.
The reply was, "by and by," and the Indians stopped to light their pipes.

Swan erupts. Weeks of sopping weather, the dubious companionship of Deans, a doddering canoe with a fracture line down its center, Edinso's swings of mood, and now by and by and a casual cumulus of tobacco smoke. The ensuing scene in the diary pages is more terse than it possibly could have been: Swan ultimatuming Edinso

Swan erupts to Edinso that I would not pay for any more time to be thrown away... Finally the men took to their oars to their own accord, and having set two sails for the first time since leaving Massett, we began to advance...

Swan may have won the skirmish, but Edinso takes the day. The canoeists enter Skidegate Channel so late they are met by the ebb tide and must put to shore for the night. Idled away too much time, Swan grumps to his diary that evening. The better news is that delay is all he has suffered. I feel thankful that I am so near my journey, and in good health and that no accident has happened to us.

Next day, the twenty-sixth of August, Swan determinedly sergeants everyone into the canoe before daybreak. Indeed, they barely have blinked into morning when, a few hours after their start, Swan is noting their arrival pulling in at the Skidegate Oil Works... very kindly received by Mr. William Sterling the superintendent, who at once ordered a nice breakfast for us... and Mr. Alexander McGregor his partner who offered me a room in his house to write in and to spread my bedding making me more comfortable than I have been at any time since leaving Masset.
Swan as western venturer. Now that he is triumphantly at Skidegate, he puts me in mind of the history-bearer whom Bernard DeVoto once wrote of, the early frontiersman James Clyman. Clyman that uncanny accompanist to America's westward mood: born on George Washington's land in Virginia in 1792, westering with the fur trappers and explorers, battling Indians in the Black Hawk war in the same company as Abraham Lincoln, traveling the Oregon Trail in the 1844 emigration, rambling in California when gold was struck in 1848—ultimately settling to a ranch in the Napa Valley and living on until 1881, the presidency of Chester A. Arthur and almost to the time of this Queen Charlottes adventure of Swan's. In the way Clyman was, Swan too stands to me now as something of a template, an outlining human gauge: but of western possibilities rather than western past.

Swan literally is a being of our continental edge, rimwalking its landscape and native cultures. If I could put questions to Swan across time, I think they would try to reach toward invisible inward lines, those riggings of curiosity and gameness—for-damn-near-anything, hung deeper in him than anyone else I have encountered. Difficult to phrase, not say answer, but: what is the tidal pull of an earlier way of life, of the timescape of first people such as the Makahs and the vanished Haida villagers? What instruction does their west offer any of ours? And, since the diaries of the Queen Charlotte days say all but this: what, when reputation and thrill and all other incomplete reasons have been said, truly sends a man of sixty-five
seeking along an unknown treacherous coast? What mightier impulses
wade in the bloodstream? Questions which perhaps can never be
fully met with words, and so keep me straining to hear beyond,
into the deeps of a Swan.

Swan hurries a note of success to Baird at the Smithsonian...
20 days on the trip...head winds and rain all the time...With the
exception of the temperature being mild--54° the weather has been
like the winter weather off Cape Flattery...

His mood now, after the watery three weeks of exploration and
the complication of the cracked canoe, is
a rainbow of triumph and relief, glad that I have ended this tedious
and perilous journey from Masset to this place without accident. Old
Edinso has purposely delayed our travel...but I felt safe with the
old fellow as he is very skillful in handling a canoe. In the
mellowness of the moment, Swan even allows Edinso to use his tent
overnight and tells Johnny Kit Elswa to give the Indians the balance
of the rice which was enough for a good meal, a lot of biscuit,
teasugar and some bacon.

By the time Edinso sets off up the coast to Masset in the
cracked canoe a day or so later, however, Swan abruptly is inscribing
him as the biggest old fraud I ever have had dealings with... His
fresh pique has been furnished by Johnny, who has had a thoughtful
conversation with Edinso's canoe crew. They say the old man's lame
back was all sham.
Day seventy-seven

Warm breeze again today, nearly a chinook. Since morning I have changed shirts three times, each time to lighter material; now, at 2:30, it is 64 degrees. Winter is turning into winter/spring.

Absolute proof: I have begun sneezing, an allergy has thawed. Captain John of the Makahs once explained to Swan why he and the other Neah Bay natives recited several sentences after sneezing: they were asking the Great Spirit to spare them. If they did not utter this brief petition, the top of their heads would be blown off when they sneezed. I may yet prove Captain John right.

With Edinso and the cracked canoe and the west shore weather all out of his system, Swan draws a deep breath and begins to calculate the brief remainder of his Queen Charlottes summer. The steamer Princess Louise, taking on a cargo of dogfish oil at the Skidegate refinery, will convey his mail to Victoria. His fish tanks delivered to Masset by the providential otter hunter will be shipped from there by the Hudson's Bay Company. A crew of Indians has been sent off for black cod, the final fish specimen. The summer's last task is to garner more art from the Haidas, along Skidegate Inlet and the eastern shore of Moresby Island where the tribal villages still were living places.

It is the morning of the twenty-eighth of August when Rev. Mr. Robinson the Methodist Missionary came from Skidegate village with
Ellswarsh and his wife, Sam his dumb boy and Ellen his youngest girl a child of about seven years... Two years ago this family with an elder daughter Soodatil were in Port Townsend and occupied a room near my office where Ellswarsh worked making silver bracelets and other articles of jewelry. The children were very fond of me and came to my office every day and they had not forgotten the kind treatment they received from me.

Then the words Swan needs: Ellswarsh invited me to go to his house at Skidegate village where he had some things to show me.

After breakfast, the first morning of September, Johnny rowed me to Skidegate village. The distance is about two miles.... As soon as our salutations were over, a mat was spread on the floor and two chairs placed, one for me and one for Johnny. Then clean water in a wash bowl with soap and a clean towel to wash our hands and faces. By the time we had finished, the Indians began to come in with things to sell....

The pocket diary becomes a blizzard of buying:...carved spoon...scare mask...crow mask...Embroidered dance shirt of blue blanket, red figure, very fine... But as it was Saturday and I wanted to look around the village I concluded to defer other purchases till Monday.
One matter Swan decides he has deferred long enough: his feelings toward James Deans. Now that Swan is finished sharing canoe and campfire with him, several weeks of wrath are unloaded:

I find that Mr. James Deans who accompanied me from Masset and represented that he is in the employ of Dr. Powell has proved himself a great nuisance by interfering with my Indian trade and purchase of curiosities. He represented to parties here that he was in my employ and made bargains with Indians to take me about in canoes which I repudiated. He is filthy in his habits, and untruthful to a degree. I have not suffered him to go with me since I arrived here, and wish I never had seen the man.

This wish will be multiplied in a month or so when he discovers that Powell's Indian Department, considering Deans's assignment no longer valid when he missed the Otter and the first several weeks in the Queen Charlottes, will not reimburse Swan for any of the expenses of the free-lancing Deans.

Sunday, the second of September, the Indians dispatched for black cod return with 25 of the fish. Specimens the may be, but I had the tongues cut out and fried, and a chowder made of the heads, and roes and livers fried. They were all first rate...

Monday, the third of September, brings a new bargain. Ellswarsh to come tomorrow morning and take me in his large canoe to Skedans village, Cumshewas, Laskeek and other places of the eastern shore of the Queen Charlottes, the living shore of Haida culture.
Days seventy-eight, seventy-nine, eighty

I noticed one of the great slimy slugs, so common on the North West coast, crawling on the floor near my bed, and on throwing it into the fire, Ellswarsh asked me if white men eat slugs. I said no, we do not... He said that Indians did not eat them, but that chinamen do... He was at Fort Essington last year, at the canneries at Skeena mouth. The chinamen who worked at the canneries made a soup of the slugs and crows which were boiled together in a big iron kettle. Those chinamen, said he, are different people from Indians, we don't eat slugs and crows, they would make us sick... but the chinamen like em, they eat all the crows and slugs and all the soup, and scrape the kettle with their spoons, chinamen no good.

This is a new kind of a mess and I make note of it as slugs and crows may yet find a place on the bill of fare at the Driard House in Victoria, or Delmonico's in New York.

High good humor from Swan in this final chapter of his Queen Charlottes exploit. Slugs and soup and Chinamen, I almost expect cabbages and kings next on the triplicate pages. The collecting jaunt to the eastern shore has begun with Ellswarsh and three paddlers pulling in for Swan and Johnny Kit Elswa - the morning of the fourth of September, and hard weather at their heels. The party canoes out of Skidegate Inlet and around the first point of coast southward, meets the full whap of storm, scuttles for shore. Wind blew so violently that it was difficult to pitch my tent but having succeeded with the united aid of the whole party I found myself very comfortable, and I invited Ellswarsh to share my tent and table. (And mentally invited the memory of Edinso to look on and howl?) Johnny Kit Elswa and the canoemen occupy a
second tent and take their meals in the open air by the camp fire. Unluckily for Swan, the first of those meals features some red berries which they mixed with grease...They were sour and...cleaned me out good.

Freshly scoured from the inside out, Swan wakes the next morning to a fair wind. This rare chance to hoist a sail brings the canoeists early to the village of a chief named Skedance. He gave us a hearty welcome and soon had a breakfast ready, composed of dried halibut and fish oil, fish eggs, boiled dried salmon, and boiled dried dulse mixed with fish eggs and red huckleberries. So far off his feed from the previous night's experiment with berries-and-oil is Swan that he passes up this imaginative smorgasbord for bread and tea. His mood, anyway, is to bargain. After breakfast Skedance showed me a fine chest or box elaborately carved, but did not name any price. He showed me some other things, and I bought of him two dancing hats, a bow and arrows made of copper, used as ornaments while dancing and a carving in wood resembling an eagle's foot holding a salmon.
Shopping done at Skedans, at the top of the afternoon the canoe party pushes on. The next village, Laskeek, is one Swan has been keen to see. The previous chief of the place was Kitkune, the Haida whose tattoos of whaleswolves and double-tailed codfish Swan had copied off ten years earlier for the Smithsonian Contributions article. Now young Kitkune who married the widow of the one I knew and is heir to his name and property, accompanied us from Skedans village...

After the days of burial caves and ghostly lodges on the western shore of the islands, here at Laskeek was the living face of the Haida culture. It was mighty. Kitkune's home, Swan records, measured 57 feet long by 51 feet wide with a great fire pit in the center and two successive broad platforms of plank around the width and length of the structure. Everything about this building is of the same massive proportions, even the latch of the door is made of a piece of old iron which must weigh 3 or 4 pounds.

Nor did the wonder of the Laskeek house stop there. Young Kitkune opened a secret door skillfully framed into one side of the house so as to be unnoticed even by careful search and disclosed a chamber or building place where were stowed away for safe keeping the sacred emblems of the old Chief. These are the finest of any I have seen...

Problem. The young man was not willing to part with many of
them and for these he asked a large price. I purchased a few rare and curious masks. One of these represents the Oolalla, a demon who used to come from the mountains and devour the Indians. This mask was a head piece representing a skull from which descended a perfect jointed skeleton of wood arranged by means of strings so that the teeth would gnash, and an arm would stretch out and point a bony finger to an intended victim.

Swan decides (with a familiar vote from the weather: Much rain, which continued...) to stay on at Laskeek for a few days to see whether further Haida marvels will be brought out, and his waiting strategy works. On the eighth of September in this era of good feeling, after dinner young Kitkune showed me the place where the remains of his Uncle Kitkune lie...The remains are in a box elaborately carved, and decorated with abalone shell. This box which appeared to be four feet long, three feet wide and three feet high, is placed on the back of a carving representing a beaver of enormous dimensions...On a sort of a table at the right of the beaver as we looked at it... two old guns, ammunition boxes and various paraphernalia of the old Chief among which was his Taska or carved stick which he held in his
hand when distributing presents...

Swan is not easily startled, but here in the burial house is taken aback by some singular carvings representing a person with the eyes pulled out and resting on the knees and connected with the eye sockets by a ligature painted red and presenting a revolting appearance.

Eyes sitting out on knees: the first carving of the kind I have noticed...On asking Ellswarsh the meaning he told me that it represents the sea anemone or Se-eap which is supposed to be the eye of the mythical marine being who has the power of extending its eyes and withdrawing them at pleasure. A sort of argus eyed monster with millions of eyes all over the coast...

"The same winds blow spring on all men's dreams." Swan, I wish I could cross time to say that sentence into your ear and whisper further that to the Haidas' scalp-tingling line of wilderness devils such as the Oolalla and the Se-eap, our white tribe has added the modern Northwest version, the sasquatch. Gorilla-like and big, big: nine of them would make a dozen. Eyes like obsidian set in coconut shells, breath heavy and dank as swamp smell. Legend lives yet in these coastal woods, we lack only the Haida genius for fashioning awe and fear into carved anthems of art.

A sudden favorable turn of weather decides the storm-wary expedition
to return up the coast to Skedans. Suppertime there finds Swan
pensive, willing to have passed several days at Laskeek as there
is more of interest there than at any village I have seen. But
the people are not anxious to sell their curiosities, as they have
not yet come under missionary influence, but keep up their tomanawas
ceremonies in ancient style which I would much like to witness.

Ninth of September, Sunday. Gale of wind and torrents of rain
all night and this morning. The sabbath produces an odd little sectarian
wrangle. Old Ellswarsh thought I ought to trade, but I told him I did not trade on Sundays. I was anxious to get back to Skidegate and although it rained the wind was fair and if we had started at 6 o'clock as I wanted to we could have made the distance easily, but he said he would not travel on Sunday as the missionary had told him not to work on the Sabbath, so we remained in the dismal old house all day.

The tug of wills between the collector who wouldn't collect and the canoeist who wouldn't canoe is forgotten the next morning as Swan and Ellswarsh ready to return to Skidegate. The Skedans Haidas take it as the moment to bargain, began to bring their things for sale, and I bought quite a lot. This would seem to be quick understatement, because much of the Haida magic of knifestroke-onto-wood-or-stone—the total trove to the Smithsonian, together with the fish specimens, was an eventual 29 freight boxes' worth—seems to have been procured at this farewell session. Think of Swan by now as a person who has shopped cautiously through the supermarket and at the end of the last row decides to fill the basket as reward to himself.

At ten in the morning closed my trade and got off in my canoe from Skedans village. The day was pleasant but the wind was ahead and the Indians had to row which they did with a will.

Soon before dark the canoe scrapes ashore at the village of Skidegate.
Swan's days, weeks, months of unveiling the Queen Charlottes have ended. He deserves to deliver his own last words. I have had a rough time since I left Masset but have gained in health and knowledge and leave the islands with regret. The refinery superintendent has told him the supply steamer departs for Victoria in a matter of days. So I began to prepare to go on her as there will not be another steamer here till next spring and although I would like to remain all winter to see the medicine dances and masquerade performances I must avail myself of this opportunity to return to civilization.
Day eighty-one

Swan’s first set of hours at sea for Victoria:

I dreamed last night that little Jangi, Jimmys boy, was in bed with me and told me that we should have a pleasant day and a fair wind, both of which we have had. In fact this has been one of the most delightful days I ever saw.

I found on waking, that I did not have Jangi but a wooden image of an Indian Skaga or doctor which I had put on the back side of my berth, which probably caused my dream.
Day eighty-two, eighty-three

Victoria, in almost-spring sun.

Not at all like the dry and dowdy little Queen whose name it wears, this capital of British Columbia. Rather, the city is in the manner of the youngest daughter of some Edwardian country house family, attractive and passionately self-absorbed and more than a little silly.

Victoria imagines among other things that it is a sward of Olde England somehow rolled out like turf over Western Canadian bedrock. Consequently you can sip tea in the massive Empress Hotel while across the street, seaplanes yatter in and out of the Inner Harbor with shaggy civil servants from up-island or logging company men off to soon-to-be-deforested shores. A block away the Parliament building presides in grand daffy Empire style, a sprawl of gray stone beneath a central dome, the entirety of this castle of government outlined with light-bulbs so that at night it blazes like a profile in a fireworks display. I never look at it without expecting the dome to begin spewing up skyrockets.

Such preoccupation with glitter is not new. British troops and sailors stationed at Victoria in the last century would drill in such solemnly spectacular style that the watching Haidas went home and asked a missionary to teach them such fine maneuvers. To gauge from Swan's entries of his occasional visits to Victoria he noticed that the town was a bit high faluting: Had my hair cut. Paid 75¢ a Victoria swindle.
For its part, Victoria likely found Swan a little too Americanly robust in his drinking and his opinions. (Wrote to Dr Powell a letter of apology for my actions while in Victoria, runs one diary entry of earlier years.) But according to the holdings of the Provincial Archives, all seems forgiven on both sides when Swan arrived back from the Queen Charlottes in late September of 1883. The Victoria Daily Colonist pronounced that "Mr. Swan's researches have been conducted with assiduity and attended with success." and began running a series of articles written by him. Better yet, the British Columbia legislature invited Swan to speak, and he instructed the lawmakers for more than an hour about their little-known northern archipelago. Two notable features were his snub of Deans—I had no occasion for the services of a white man, and consequently took none in any capacity—and his runaway enthusiasm for black cod, which took up nearly half his address.

The British Columbians voted him their appreciation, and here I give him my ovation as well. Swan's west shore adventure defeated some of the North Pacific's most difficult weather. From the Haidas of the eastern shore villages he purchased—which is to say preserved, brought forward for posterity's study—29 crates of Haida craft and art. With his combination of pencil and pen and eventual typewriter, he added to the lore known of the Haidas, at a time when it was not at all certain that the tribe itself would survive. Most of all he did his dare of himself: went off to
one more west, lived according to the place's own terms, and came home to tell about it. I think of the last miles of walking out of the Rockies from the Marshall Wilderness and of hikes completed in the Olympic Mountains and along the Cape Alava shore, and believe I know a fraction of Swan's satisfaction.

The other journeyers of 1883, I turn elsewhere in the Provincial Archives to find.

Deans died at Victoria in 1905. The lasting effects of his jaunt with Swan seem to have been some lame poetry ("On a Queen Charlotte Island Mountain Torrent": Up in the mountains high/ Springs a small river/ Down through the forests high/ Rushing for ever ) and an enthusiasm for Indian legends and artifacts. "He was always digging for Indian trophies....He was looked upon, therefore, by many as a complete crank, an eccentric."

Edinso lived until 1897. His age was uncertain, but probably he was at least eighty-five when death at last caught him. A white settler at Masset remembered of Edinso's last years that "the old chief would wander around the village with an old blanket around him and a staff in his hand and an old stub clay pipe in his mouth. The old fellow would call on my mother at the Hudson's Bay house, come in the back door of the kitchen and sit on his haunches beside the stove and tell her yarns of the ancient glories of the Haidas." The Colonist's last word on Edinso was the declamation that "it is doubtless partly owing to his influence and example that the Haidas have taken so readily to civilized ways and become one of the most law abiding tribes on the Coast."
The famous man of the bunch is the carver, Charlie Edenshaw (as his name has come down in history). "...We now know he was a prodigy among a race of artists," runs one encomium. Examples of his work in ivory and coal-black stone called argyllite proudly grace the display cases of the Provincial Museum, and in his name the Canadian government has erected a memorial longhouse at Masset.

Of Johnny Kit Elswa, there is a print of the studio photo posed with Swan before they left Victoria for the north, and not a trace more.

I decided to make one more delve, to the Ethnology Division of the Provincial Museum to go through their collection of photos taken in the Queen Charlottes in the nineteenth century. A photographer made a stay at Masset and Skidegate the year after Swan, and the village skylines of carved poles counted by Swan rise vividly. The Masset carvings more fluid with images, the Skidegate columns more often topped with single great bird figures. One bold Skidegate eagle seems ready to flap away with the sixty-foot column in his claws.

As I flip the last of these hundred-faced horizons, ethnologist Alan Hoover happens by from his office. "I've got something to show you." He leads me to a back room shelved full of tribal masks and baskets, reaches into a drawer, turns, grins, opens his fist to me.

"Jesus," I breathe. "Jesus, Jesus. It's Jumbo."
Across the palm of Alan Hoover's hand the ivory elephant's head lies like a meld of silver and gold. The trunk has been carved and accented by Charlie Edenshaw so that it looks like the downspout of a faucet; a glorious fat aqueduct of a snoot. Jumbo's eyes are the large teardrop shape often seen in Haida art, without iris or pupil, at once blank as blindness and seeing all. His tusks curve up and across the trunk and like it are plump and blunt. This is plainly an elephant of gaiety rather than rampage, and the carver put even more play to him by substituting for flap-like ears a sweeping coiffure of elegant waves and tucks, very much as if Jumbo had decided to wig up for an appearance at the court of Louis XIV.

What came into Swan's head when he first looked upon this suave beast of Charlie Edenshaw's at Masset ninety-six years ago I cannot know. But I find myself absurdly remembering a sardonic quote read somewhere: "'Every man for himself!' cried the elephant as he danced among the chickens." Or perhaps not absurd, for this is a wondrous ivory Jumbo who can be imagined dancing with serene care, when he chooses, in any company whatsoever, capable as well of minuet and magical circling prance within a firelit longhouse.
Day eighty-four

Swan to Baird:

I think that your attention has not been called to the fact that there is a balance due me of $1,147.82... Those Englishmen in Victoria cannot understand why I could not have closed my accounts with them at the close of the year 1883...

And Baird to Swan:

I notice what you say about coming east some time with your Haidah Indian, and overhauling the collections, and putting them properly in order. I have no doubt that it would be of great advantage to us, but the question is as to the means to compass it....

Familiar shuttlecock, which the corresponding pair has been carrying on since Swan's completion of the Makah memoir two decades earlier. But Swan is arriving to the time of his life when the familiar begins to evaporate. Over the next few years he does a few dabs of local collecting for Baird and the Smithsonian, tries every so often to pry up some support there for another Queen Charlotte's journey, then on the twentieth of August of 1887, the diary entry with a black stroked box drawn around:

The news comes today of the death of Professor Baird who died yesterday at Woods Hole Mass--I set my flags at half mast in token of my respect for his memory.

The Smithsonian itself passes from Swan next. By the end of 1889 he has written:
Professor Baird's death was a great blow to me from which I have not recovered. There is a new deal and no sympathy in Washington. A new king has arisen over Egypt who knows not Jospeh.

These half dozen years from the Queen Charlottes achievement to that disgusted sign-off of the Smithsonian emerge from the diary pages to me as written echoes. Line upon starting line the pen's skritch skritch now murmurs reprise of Swan's earlier Port Townsend life. Dolly Roberts has married a naval lieutenant and become Dolly Biondi, but briefly Swan is drawn to another well-made young lady: Grand opening ball at Learends Opera House. Took Harriet Appleton and danced for the first time in my life at a ball. Had a good time & got home at 2 AM.

He is back at the usual sheaf of paperwork jobs; his letterhead recites Attorney at Law and Proctor in Admiralty United States Commissioner Commissioner of Oregon for the State of Washington constant Notary Public Hawaiian Consul and there are matters in the ungirdled Port Townsend style: Capt Moore of US Rev Cutter Wolcott came this morning to ask my advice about his Chinese steward who smuggled some opium on board when the Cutter was last in Victoria, and yesterday he brought it ashore in the Captain's soiled linen and attempted to sell it to the steward of the Rush, now lying in port. There were 8 pounds of this opium which he seized & confiscated and now has the Chinaman in Irons. I told Capt Moore that I thought if he kept the Chinaman in
irons for 10 days, it would be punishment enough as the loss of the opium worth $100 added to being 10 days in irons would be a sufficient vindication of the law and... I did not think it necessary to put the Government to the expense of a trial. He jaunts to Boston and family another time, goes to Matilda's grave, with more sentiment than scruple of fact plucks a geranium leaf as a memento of my dear wife. He occasionally visits Neah Bay, or Neah Bay will visit him: Sch Lottie arrived from Neah this morning. All Jimmys family came up on the schooner. I took Jangi to Peysers store and gave him a complete outfit. He returned to the vessel as proud as an eagle. Swan remains ready, at the nudge of a pen nib, to share with any correspondent his Indian lore: Recd letter from Mrs Mary B Leary Seattle requesting me to give her an Indian word suited for the new City Cemetery—I suggested "Washelli" the Makah word for west wind, and quoted from "Hiawatha" to show that the west is the "region of the hereafter," and that "Washelli Cemetery" would mean the "Cemetery of the land of the hereafter." His palate is as enthusiastic as ever: Capt Dalgarding called on me this evening and we celebrated New Years with a pitcher of punch stuffed olives and potted duck and felt much refreshed. And so is his sporadic thirst for alcohol, for again, on the first of June of 1885, there is another court order adjudging and decreeing that "James G. Swan is an Habitual Drunkard..." As ever, he keeps this hooded, like a falcon never allowed to flap up into view from his writing wrist: his page this day reports instead that This morning I eat a hearty breakfast of salt cod and potatoes which caused a violent fit of indigestion.
Yet something new does speak within the diary lines, and it is that Swan the pioneer is shading into Swan the Pioneer. I have seen this happen before, among the two Montana generations older than mine: homesteaders or cowboys or sheepmen who endured decades enough that longevity began to intensify their outline, as a tree against an evening sky will become more and more darkly stroked, distincter than reality. Part of the process is simply to have outlived the other figures from your time and Swan definitely has been doing so; his pages at times read like a visitation book as he makes calls on sinking Port Townsend acquaintances. Part of it as well is to have honed a sharper than those of your neighbors, skill and Swan has become rightly recognized for his knowledge of the coastal native cultures. As President Hayes had done in 1880, the famed in July of 1889 to Swan as a rare ambassador to the tribes. anthropologist Franz Boas pays his respects in July of 1889. (Their introduction occurred in Victoria: Met Dr Franz Boaz and went with him to see a lot of Haidas which had just arrived. They were all drunk yet another but civil.) And part of the capping of the P of the notion of "pioneer" simply is—what else would it be in Swan's case?—literal: he joins and is an enthusiastic member of an old-timers' group called Washington Pioneers. He amply qualifies. Washington Territory was not created yet until a full year after Swan sailed into Shoalwater Bay that late autumn of 1852, and now, the eighteenth of November of 1889 at Olympia:

This is the Inauguration day when we become a State.

The town is crowded to excess The pioneers met at Columbia Hall and each one had a nice badge furnished...
At 10 AM we marched out and took our places in the grand procession. First the Tacoma Bank, then the Pioneers headed by E C Ferguson, President, James G Swan, Vice President, Frank Henry, Secretary, & Geo A Barney, Treasurer. Then followed some 50 or 60 Pioneers, men & women. Then the Military, more bands, the Governors members of the Legislature and citizens generally....
Days eighty-five, eighty-six, eighty seven

This has been a stormy cold disagreeable day, the first of February of 1893. Snow falling all day. The worst day this winter. I have felt much depressed with the many deaths of friends since New Years. Felix Dobelli lies dead at the Undertaker and Capt Sampson died last Sunday and Mrs. Morrison is very low. My turn may come soon.

#

The diaries of the 1890's. Common tan pocket notebooks for the decade's opening year. Inauspicious. But for 1891, an elongated Standard diary with maroon leather covers and gilt page edges. Notebooks again for 1892. Then beginning with 1893, five volumes in a row with Excelsior Diary in gilt script across a maroon cover. 1894 is longer and slimmer than the other Excelsiors, but the group is more uniform than any other of Swan's sets of years.

For Swan and his town, the decade itself is not at all so orderly, and red ink the more usual coloration than maroon. Port Townsend had boomed at the end of the 1880's; Seven thousand population, streetcar lines, an electricity plant fed with slabwood; the big downtown buildings which still stand, three- and four-story dowagers of stone and brick, were built then. Naturally, railroad hopes had freshened. A line called the Port Townsend Southern, the first mile laid by the townspeople themselves, caught the attention of eastern railroad men--officials of the Union Pacific this time--and drew a promise of completion to Portland. The acreage Swan bought west of town in--twenty years earlier
at last looked as if it would pay off; an offer of $100,000 had been made to him, he wrote his daughter Ellen. Swan had bet as well by investing in a fish processing plant, and Franz Boas was salarying him to do some artifact collecting for the famous Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Then with the depression of 1893, financial fizzle for both Port Townsend and Swan. Again no railroad, again no profit from the long-held land.

Whether the dull day, the eleventh of January, 1894, or as a precursor of bad news I have felt remarkably dull and low spirited. The times are very dull, taxes are due and no money to pay them and I feel as if I have lost all.

But there are thousands of people worse off, and I have good health. I have much to be thankful for, but I feel very despondent.

As when he explored the west shore of the Queen Charlottes Swan now is going into territory where I, as a modern winterer, cannot follow. Just once have I experienced the lack of money which plagues Swan now--sixteen years ago, as I arrived back to Montana out of the Air Force, stepping off the train at Ringling with two dollars, both of them borrowed--and mine was only a moment, tiniest fraction of his new chronic brokeness.

Stormy day, the twenty-sixth of December, 1895, remained at home and dyed my pilot jacket which had become faded and rusty. I used
diamond navy blue dye and tomorrow I can tell how I have succeeded.
The next day: Pressed out my navy jacket and it looks as good as new.
The old pantaloons which I dyed and pressed a few days ago, and this fresh dyed jacket make my friends think I have just bought a new suit of clothes. I am much pleased as now I can renovate my old clothes with but small cost... 

Nor can I truly share the fact of age as it works now on Swan. I can watch his reports of it in the diary pages of 1896 and 1897, how the wide days of Northwest summer seem to mean less to him now, and the days of coastal winter become newly treacherous—Snow showers this evening. I slipped down on the crossway and sprained my right thumb. How he records as ever, the letters sent and received, whom he has called on, met on the street, borrowed two dollars from, but all the while the incidents of his life becoming smaller and smaller, a walk around town chronicled as a canoe trip to Neah once had been. I see, and am moved by, the way Swan begins to be shared among his coastal friends. The women who were the Roberts sisters of Swan's smitten sentences of twenty years before, Dolly Biondi and Mary Webster, take turns with Sarah Willoughby, wife of the Makah Reservation agent during Swan's last trio of years at Neah Bay, in hearing again his stories, seating him to the table: Dined at Mrs Websters on Stewed chicken, mushrooms and huckleberry pudding—delicious. His landlord forgives him his office rent, the family of Jimmy Claplanhoo—Jimmy has fledged into Capt James Claplanhoo in the diary, owner and skipper
of a schooner of his own—provides frequent visits from Cape Flattery and an occasional gift of a suit of clothes. Study as I may, however, I know I do not grasp this process, silent as spiderspin, which is happening to Swan here and which is called age. My belief is that we cannot truly see ourselves as we will be when old; perhaps dare not; and so are unable to imagine into the oldness of others. All I can learn for certain from Swan, and it may be plenty, is that now some of his days are better than other of his days, but no day is easy.

Yet if such information must be secondhand until I encounter age myself, it would not be Swan's wordstream if it were not also clear as a diary pen can make it. On the first of April of 1898, Swan's eightieth year, he begins to use an old but unfilled pocket diary, a mustard-colored Standard published for 1890. Generally he remembers to add the tiny loop of ink atop the 0 of 1890 to transform the year, but when he doesn't, it is as if his entries ebb back and forth between the years the way—life imitates life—this winterbook has traveled between his time and mine.

The twenty-eighth of June: Weighed myself on Joe Gates scales. I weighed 143 pounds the lightest I have weighed in some time. My long sickness pulled me down but I am getting better slowly.

The twelfth of July: Mr. Springs of Everett was here to day and talked against Port Townsend, said...if the rail road is completed it will do no good as vessels will all load at Seattle and a lot more such rot. I told him if the road is completed to here, that trains of cars
can bring their grain direct to Port Townsend as well as to Seattle or Everett, but he would not admit that...

I told him he is an old fossil & he had better remain in Everett as it is an evidence of ignorance and bad taste to go into a town and run it down before its residents. He is a regular crank and is fit for such a place as Everett.

The second of August: Have felt very much depressed all day. Think there is to be a change of weather.

The seventh of August: I did not go to church, as it seemed that everything was wrong about my clothes and I did not get ready to go out till 12 o'clock noon.

The twenty-fourth of August: A lot of Quilliate and Makah Indians arrived today and camped at Point Hudson. They are going to pick hops. I went down to the beach to see them. They all knew me and were glad to see me. It looked like old times to see so many Indians on the beach.

The eleventh of September: Commenced a letter to my daughter Miss Ellen M Swan. The letter I received from her on the 7th I burned as it was a very disagreeable one.

The fifteenth of September: Mrs. Webster gave me a bagfull of doughnuts for bringing her mail from the Post Office to her however
I took the doughnuts to Mrs Biondis and her sharp perceptive faculties soon found out the contents of the parcel and she soon had an impromptu course of hot coffee, cake and doughnuts, we enjoyed them.

The tenth of October: Dr Brooks O Baker examined me for vertigo which has troubled me at intervals since last January. He said it proceeds from heart weakness and gave me a prescription of his own preparing, of which strychnine forms one of the ingredients. Commenced taking Dr Bakers medicine this afternoon.

The thirtieth of December: Have had quite an attack of vertigo this evening.
Day eighty-eight

My first birth day in the new century, the eleventh of January, 1900. 82 years old. May this new Era bring new prospect and may I live to see its so glorious promise unfold....I have been reading evenings in my diaries and it seems singular to see half my life therein...50 years ago I left Boston and 41 I began my daily journal but yet my early years at Neah Bay are fresh to my mind. Only when I recall the deaths of so many friends Prof Baird Maj Van Bokkelin friend Webster Bulkley & storekeeper Gerrish my own dear son Charley last year, does the time seem so long as it is. And the Indians I formerly knew are gone Swell Duke of York old Edinso Capt John only Peter alive...Ellens letters and the little sums she sends are all I have now to tide me over to improved times. My wish is that Pt Townsend will yet take its rightful place as the most magnificent city of the west and that my burden of debt will pass from me. As the Poet John G Whittier writes "for all sad words of tongue or pen The saddest are these, it might have been!" But if it is ordained otherwise I have other remuneration in life my collecting for the Smithsonian Institution the Makah memoir The Northwest Coast my expedition to the Queen Charlottes Archipelago the knowledge of Indian ways and language which otherwise would have been lost for future generations, I would not trade for more worldly wealth. For if I have not prospered greatly in my western life yet I am greatly prosperous in what I have done...
Swan did not write those words. I have written them for him, or rather, for the both of us, this dusk of winter and of his life. The archival diaries end with 1898, the volumes for 1899 and 1900 held in a private collection, but the entries have been dwindling anyway, Swan lamenting to his daughter Ellen his failing grip:

My hand and wrist are still painful and I have to write slow. I don't think this is so much of a Rheumatic affection as it is the pen paralysis from over exertion writing...But it is very annoying to me to have such continual pain in the cords of my hand when I attempt to write. I have been trying a little instrument called the "Electropoise" which my cousin Edward kindly sent from New York. It sends a gentle current of electricity to the part affected but it is too much bother for me to use it properly.

Swan hooked to an electrical rheumatism gizmo rather than a pen is Swan become an old bewildered stranger to himself, I am afraid. From that eighty-second birthday of his, where my imagination takes over the telling, he has four months and a week to live.

But I discover an odd thing as this companion of my winter begins to fade from life. There at the first days of this century Swan comes into view to me in a strong new way: as if a new-instead-of-tawny cat suddenly has padded into sight at the forest edge. Swan stepping to the century-line which I crossed in his direction almost three months ago now has endured into time which touches my own. A little more than a year from that eleventh morning of 1900, my father will be born at the homestead in Montana. The grandmother who will share in raising me and be the one to begin noting down our family winters, already is a
seven-year-old farmgirl in Wisconsin. (In history's less personal terms, put it this way: Swan was born when James Monroe inhabited the White House and Napoleon was yet alive, and now he is almost to Theodore Roosevelt's America, and Einstein already is thinking the world into a nuclear future.) Connection of lifespans is added to our shared places, our intermingled wests.

So much of Swan I still do not know, even after studying him through the fifteen thousand days and two and a half million words of his diaries. In his lamplit times alone in the schoolhouse tower at Neah or the narrow office at Port Townsend, for instance, what urges of the night worked in him, moving behind his brow, under his thatch of beard, between his legs. Or why, like me, he chose to invest his life at this edge of America over all others—although I think it has most to do in both our cases with a preference for gossamer possibilities, such as words, rather than hard and fast obligations. Or why he would admit into his pages whatever peeves he had, but no hatreds; details of infatuation with a choirmistress, but none of the fact of it; hints of whiskey, but never direct confession of too many bottles. Unlearnable, those beneath-the-skin frontiers. Even the outer ones leave questions, for I believe now that no one winterbook—no book—can find nearly all that should be said of the west, the wests. Profundities of westering there undoubtedly are, but do they count for more than a liking of mountains and of hearing a waitress say, There you go...?

What I do take from this time of musing in Swan's wests is
fresh realization that my own westernness is going to have to be a direction of the mind. Geography restlessly shifts in America, much as plates of bedrock are said to grind and jostle against one another far under the surface of the earth. My west, or wests, inevitably are going to be smaller and a bit more skewed than Swan's and the more intensely held, felt, worried over, for that reason.

Yet the separations between Swan's territory and mine mysteriously close at some moments. Scenes of this winter and of Swan's own western-edged seasons
do flow together, in the way that beings mingle in one of those great
carvings of the Haidas. ("They weren't bound by the silly feeling
that it's impossible for two figures to occupy the same space
at the same time.") Perhaps atoms merge out of the landscape into
us. However it happens, the places are new in me. Whidbey
Island, gulls balteeting along the roofs of wind. Dungeness Spit,
days there glossed with sea ducks and crowned with an eagle. The thrusting
Capes, Flattery and Alava, their surfs bringing in perpetual
cargoes of sound. This suburban valley, at its mouth the greater
gray-blue water valley, Puget Sound. The cabin at Rainier, summing
all these sites by being abode for a dweller rather than a citizen.
The patterns explore their way back and forth between centuries as
well, and I see with less surprise than I would have three months
ago that a torpedo test Swan watches in the Port Townsend harbor
will become Trident nuclear submarines in Hood Canal. That his
dream of railroad along one shore of Puget Sound must bend and
become a transportation megalopolis along the opposite shore. That
his introduction of the alphabet in the Neah Bay schoolhouse in 1863
has led to a federal grant for the preservation of the Makah language.
That no more than Swan knew of such eventuating can I know what is
ahead for my west. And there, in that specific rill of realization,
I suppose is the truest bond of pattern I have to you, Swan, old
coastal nomad, remembrancer of so many diary pages, canoeist of
yestertime. Winter brother.
Day eighty-nine

Sometime in the morning of the eighteenth of May of 1900, Swan lies in his room and listens for footsteps. They are slow to come, time needed for it to dawn on one or another downtown citizen of Port Townsend that the old man has not been seen to emerge to the street as usual. Feet at last are heard and a knock questions through the door; then, silence all too much answer, the inquiring friend forces in to find him where the stroke has pinned him. 

Life stays in Swan through the day, but only half the night.

He is buried near the center of this graveyard west from Port Townsend's headland of houses, under a gray marble stone. Rust-orange lichens have crept down into the cut letters but they can be read: PIONEER-HISTORIAN JAMES G. SWAN Born Medford Mass. Jan. 11, 1818 Died Port Townsend Wash. May 18, 1900. From here at the grave-stone my automatic line of sight is across the land Swan owned, to the dark hackled profile of Whidbey Island and beyond to the Cascade Mountains, but the view does have competition from the thrusting stones all around, the urn-topped and pyramid-peaked monuments of the merchants and ship's captains of Swan's era. Amid them, his low box of stone is the shape and size of a lectern.

The Port Townsend Morning Leader, four days after Swan's death:
"...The friends of the deceased were permitted to take a last look at the venerable pioneer, and just before the casket was closed a delegation of Indians from Neah Bay appeared and asked permission to take a last look at their oldtime friend and adviser. The Indians as they gazed upon the rigid features gave expressions of their grief in low moans and each affectionately patted the face of the dead man."

Swan's grandnephew in Massachusetts to the Port Townsend lawyer who notified him that debts would swallow Swan's scant belongings:
"Of course the manuscripts & diaries can have no great money value... and I would hope they might be lodged in some library interested in the special subjects they relate to."
Day ninety

Winter's last dozen hours. Today the Sun crosses the line and it is the first day of spring, Swan wrote on this date, the twentieth of March, in his lustrous year of 1880 at Neah Bay, then stepped outside to admire his larkspurs and lilies. As we approach Neah Bay, mid-morning sun making shadowplay with the trees and sea boulders along the shore of the Strait, I calculate where we will be when spring arrives tonight at nine twenty-two: back aboard the big ferry, south from Port Townsend by about an hour; near Point No Point, its lighthouse the ushering beam from Admiralty Inlet into Puget Sound: almost home.

Two sites ahead of us before then. One is the rock tip at Cape Flattery, where Carol and I will be by mid-day to watch for whales in northward migration, out past Tatoosh Island. From our watching times elsewhere on this coast, other springs, we know that first the spouts will be glimpsed, small here-and-gone geysers in the ocean, then sudden blades of dark in the water that are the grey whales. Only those ridges of their backs—the wet island of being which the Makah hunting canoes shadowed in on—rising in quick glistening view, until for an instant the great Y of a tail is seen to lift, then plunge.

But before the whales, the stop at Neah Bay. Sometime amid this winter's constant scud of words the brief casual news: oh yes, that still exists, it's tricky to find but if you ask so-and-so at Neah Bay...
Luck. We reach Neah at low tide, and the rock deck of shore beneath the low coastal precipice lies open to us. A young woman who works for the Makah Tribal Council leads us beneath the cliff face, peering carefully. In a minute or so she says: "There it is. There." As she returns up the bluff to her construction work—the Makahs are building a greenhouse of translucent plastic to grow vegetable seedlings; progress I am glad to see from Swan's depot of potatoes—we are left with the bayline sheet of rock.

The sun's brightness stops a stride or so short of the cliff. Shadowed sandstone swells as high as my chest, bulges and rounds there and then recedes as a sudden ledge, angled at about thirty degrees. That afternoon in 1859 Swan stood atop something, likely a driftlog long since reclaimed by the Strait, to reach this beveled shelf. The deep-cut letters J G S are level with my eyes, and above them rides the stone swan.

Tail fluted high to a jaunty point.

Neck an elaborate curve gentle and extended as a suitor's caress.

Breast serenely parting the shadowed current of cliff.

As Carol inserts a roll of film into her camera I span my hand three times to measure the length of the bird, less than half that for its height. A bit more than two feet long, a bit less than a foot high, this swimmer of rock. Swan's diary entry for the afternoon of that long-past day is this project—worked carving a swan on a sandstone cliff with my initials under it—and surely the stone embossment
took the full set of hours. So clearly and firmly did he sculpt in that only the downthrust of the bird's head, where the beak and eyes would be, has faded with erosion, the weathering-away providing a demure mask of time.

Otherwise Swan's swan, as I step back until it is just visible within the cliff-shadow, punctuates the flow of this coast as firmly for me as it did for him. The stone dot that puts period--and seed of the ellipsis for whatever continuation is on its way--to this winter.