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.... (March 4, 1869, xerox)

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 saloon. The commercial future is 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 main magnets into rail-fed ports.

Had Swan and his hamlet of destiny been able to admit it, the very sweep of water which had been 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 needed him as its local scout.
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 streak of hokum in him, which begins at his wallet.
It is understandable enough: Swan is chronically short of money in these years. 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 steadily ready with a few dollars. The sums usually go from Swan so promptly that he scarcely leaves a fingerprint on it: Borrowed of Bulkeley $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 is 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 considerable 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 made a trading trip to Sitka in Alaska, the venture seems not to have produced much except some interesting new scenery.
So, 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 bringing 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 made 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 Port Townsend 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 journey of horseback, steamboat, and stagecoach. Very hot and dirty, the battered diary of this trip mutters...alkali plain...hottest ride I have yet had... desolate...twenty bushels of bad bugs....At last at Ogden, a message met Swan: Canfield had decided not to wait for him. Swan went downhill both fiscally and physically after that. Arriving back at Port Townsend after the three and a half week wild goose chase, he jots notes of bad health—

S 4, '70

Sick in house all day from the effects of my journey and a cold and (Oct. 9) sick for some time and probably despond as well. He also begins to record that the Northern Pacific had omitted to pay him several months' wages, and he has 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, 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 spoke against the total, suggesting if nothing else that half the number of houses--on lots the same size as those on our side of the valley--made a more swallowerable sum for the area. The zoning law, however, permitted that the size of the lots could be averaged over the entire acreage--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 as not to look quite so much like a buffalo
hunter 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 how he toil. Guises aside, we
probably are not so very different; "self-made" types, with the rough
edges that usually means, and origins which took some muscle. I would
at least guess I was piling hay bales as early in life as he began 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 society's fiscal theology.
Day fifty-three

And then Port Townsend would jerk awake again and scarcely blink one span of a dozen weeks, between excitements. In 1894, Swan inscribes these doings: between the first day of January and the last day of March.

...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 o'clock 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 sixty-three

A quiet rain, which hangs bright beads on the birches—at the elves' balloon of end of every branch, and strung at random in between, silver dinner against the evergreen valley slope.

Swan's weather at Neha, this same date— the twenty-first of February— in 1881:

very heavy rain during night 3.25 inches fell stormy dull day. This is the perihelion of Venus Jupiter & Mercury and the last quarter of the moon The weather is quite warm and buds are well started.

Another 1881 entry: the twenty-fourth of May:

The Teazer brought the "Intelligencer" and "Argus" in which is the announcement that Mr H A Webster Collector of Customs has been removed from office and this will of course remove me so that I presume the month of June will close my time as Inspector.
The twenty-seventh of July:

Arrived at Port Townsend from Neah Bay at 2 o'clock PM.

Called at Custom House and reported myself to the new Collector A W Bash...Received an invitation to tender my resignation as Inspector of Customs which I took into consideration. Dined at Mr Websters and gave Mrs W a boquet of flowers which I brought from my garden at Neah.

The first of August:

Left Port Townsend at 11 AM for Neah Bay to get my things....Before leaving I handed Collector Bash a letter in which I declined tendering my resignation and he in turn gave me a notification that my services were no longer required...
The second of August:

Very pleasant morning and smooth all night. Arrived at Clallam Bay at 6 AM and after leaving mail proceeded on to Neah where we arrived at 9 AM. Capt Munroe blew the whistle before we reached Baadah, and on rounding the point Mr C M Plympton teacher came off in a canoe and took me ashore.

I immediately commenced packing my things and was assisted by Jimmy and others.

I gave Jimmy all my floor mats, an empty barrel, a lot of coal oil cans and a variety of stuff.

I gave all my little garden tools to Ginger and distributed a lot of other things to Martha, Ellen, and some other children and to Martha I gave many of the flowers in the garden particularly my white lillies and Tiger lillies.

I feel more regret at leaving my flowers and plants than anything else, as they have been to me a source of pleasure the past three years.

At last all was packed, and boxes and packages taken to the beach and put into Kichusam's canoe, and soon the Dispatch came up and anchored and my things were taken off. It took two canoe loads. I went on board in the last canoe after bidding good bye to the family and friends I have lived with the past three years. The school children will miss a kind friend.

I do not regret leaving Neah Bay as I think I can do better elsewhere....
Day seventy-one

I flip the month on the photo calendar above my desk, and the room fills with lumberjacks. The calendar came as a gift, a dozen scenes from the glass plates of a photographer who roved the Peninsula lumber camps in the first years of this century, and I've paid no attention to the scenery atop the days: January a simple stand of trees, February a few dodgy sawyers off in the distance from the camera. But March's four loggers, spanned across the cut they are making in a cedar tree as big in diameter as this room, hover in as if estimating the board footage my desktop would yield.

The logger at the left stands on a springboard, his axe held extended in his left hand and resting almost tenderly against the gash in the cedar. He is like a man casually fishing from off a bridge beam, but absent-mindedly having picked up the camp axe instead of the bamboo rod.

The next man is seated in the cut, legs casually dangling and crossed at the ankles. A small shark's grin of spikes is made by the bottoms of his caulked boots. His arms are folded easily across his middle; he has trimly rolled his pant-legs and sleeves; is handsome and dark-browoned with a lady-killing lock of hair down the right side of his forehead.

The foodman beside him is similarly seated, arms also crossed, but is flap-eared, broad-hipped, mustached. Surely he is the Swede of the crew, wherever he is from.

The final logger, on the right edge of the photo, is a long-faced giant. As he stands atop a log with his right foot propped on the cut, left hand hooked into a suspender strap where it meets his pants, there is tremendous length to his stretched body. The others must call him Highpockets— or Percival, if that is what he prefers. His shirt is work-soiled, his eyes
pouchy but at ease. Unlike his mate across the tree, he clenches his axe a third of the
way up the handle, as if having tomahawked it into the tree just over the
left jug-ear of the Swede.

Down the middle of the picture, between the seated sawyers, stands
their glinting crosscut saw. If the giant is six and a half feet tall as
he looks to be, the saw is ten—the elongated great-granddaddy of the
crosscut in Trudy and Howard's cabin. Under its bright ladder of teeth
are strewn the chips from the cut.

The men have not much more than started on the great cedar, and already the
woodpile is considerable.

Twenty-one days until spring in the company of these timber topplers,
and by-god forceful company they are going to be. I want all at once to
see the Peninsula woods that drew whackers like these, if only to reassure
myself that they're not out there now leveling daylight into whatever green
is left. Late tomorrow, Carol will be finished with her week's classes.
We will head for the Hoh rain forest.

Swan at Kioosta, his forty-eight day in the Queen Charlotte islands:
and his fourth on the venture along the western shore:

Very disagreeable morning, thick with misty rain. He decides to sit tight
and do such diary matters as ruminating on the blessed total absence of
fleas and other annoying insects so common and universal in Indian camps and
villages...Edinso says that formerly fleas were very numerous, and at Masset
they were so plentiful as the sand on the beach and they remained as long
as the Indians dressed in otter skins and bark robes, but when the white men
came with other kind of clothing and bought all the old fur dresses, the
fleas began to disappear. At last the Indians all went to Victoria, and
on their return they found that the fleas had entirely left...Edinso said
perhaps the world turned over and all the fleas hopped off.
as one more outermost particle of the American impulse to head for sunset. Through nearly all the decades of his bachelor household here, Ahlstrom's was the homestead farthest west in the continental United States.

Originally, which is to say within the first few dozen days after his arrival in 1902, Ahlstrom built himself a two-room cabin close beside the Ozette-to-Alava trail. That dwelling burned in 1916, and he lived from then on in the four-room structure which still stands, thriftily but sturdily built with big tree stumps as support posts for its northwest and northeast corners, a few hundred yards from the trail.

Even now as Carol and I whip through the brush to this latter-day cabin, all signs are that Ahlstrom kept a trim, tidy homestead life. In his small barn on the route in, the window sills above a workbench are fashioned nicely into small box-shelves. At the cabin itself, the beam ends facing west into the prevailing weather are carefully masked with squares of tarpaper. Inside, when Ahlstrom papered the cabin walls with newspapers, he carefully wrapped around the pole roof-beams as well, a fussy touch that I particularly like. Summers in Montana when I worked as a ranch hand, I spent time in bunkhouses papered this way, and neatness made a difference. Always there were interesting events looming out at you----ROOSEVELT ORDERS BANK HOLIDAY or U.S. GUNBOAT PANAY

SUNK BY JAPANESE--or some frilly matron confiding the value of liver pills, and the effect was lost if the newsprint had been slapped on upside down or sideways.

This rainbelt homestead of Ahlstrom's never quite worked out. Regularly he went off into the Olympic Mountains on logging jobs and other hire to earn enough money to survive the year. On the other hand, the homestead went on never quite working for five and a half decades,
has been seductive. Opening the pages of Swan's years is like entering a room filled with jugglers and tumblers and swallowers of flame, performance crowding performance. This morning we discovered a large wolf in the brook dead from the effects of some strychnine we had put out. It was a she wolf very large and evidently had five whelps. Maggs and myself skinned her and I boiled the head to get the skull...Mr. Fitzgerald of Sequim Prairie better known as "Skip," walked off the wharf near the Custom House last night and broke his neck. The night was very dark and he mistook the way... Jimmy had the night mare last night and made a great howling. This morning he told me that the memeloose were after him and made him crazy. I told him this memeloose was dead squid which he ate for supper very heartily... Mr Tucker very ill with his eye, his face badly swelled up. This evening got Kitchook's Cowichan squaw to milk her breast into a cup and I then bathed Mr Tucker's eye with it... Swan records weather three times a day, at seven each morning, two in the afternoon, nine at night; notes down when salmonberry has popped into spring bloom, when autumn's geese begin to aim past to the southern horizon; logs all ships that sail past his eyes; remarks his off days. I can find little

Severe attack of neuralgia today. Dr Minn tried to cure it injecting morphine or something of the sort under the skin on my left cheek—This checked the pain but made me feel dizzy & sick at the stomach—the remedy was worse than the disease.
one back page, a little Indian girl on the wharf at Seattle, the child prettily prone on the planks as she holds a tiny fishing pole to the water and directs a level stare at the pencilman creating her.

Elsewhere, the unmistakable pyramidal outline of Mount Baker, the dominant peak of the Strait country; how many thousand times Swan saw its white cone. On yet another end-page, the roughed outline of a galloping horse and above it in block letters the name SWELL, with five-pointed stars fore and aft; if Swan carried out the design, Swell sailed under the gaudiest canvas in the North Pacific.

On an inside cover, inspiration of another sort, a pasted-in clipping of a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier: Though dim as yet in tint and line We trace Thy picture's wise design And thank Thee that our age supplies The dark relief of sacrifice Thy will be done!

Terrific as all the expended energy is, page upon page and volume after volume, the simple stubborn dailiness of Swan's achievement seems to me even more dazing. It compares, say, to that of a carpenter whanging an hour's hammerstrokes on the same framework each morning for forty years, or a monk or nun spending the same span in recitation of missals. Or to put it more closely, a penman who, a page or so a day, writes out a manuscript the span of five copies of War and Peace, accomplishing the masterwork in frontier town and Indian village and sometimes no community at all.

Swan's own brevets of identification still are on the diaries—a small paper label on each cover where the title of a book would appear, the year inked there in his slanting hand—and on opening the earliest one, 1859, I found that it advertises itself as Marsh's Metallic Memorandum Book WITH METALLIC PENCIL The writing of which is as permanent as when written with ink, a claim I could now tell Swan is not nearly true. Luckily his experiment with Marsh's wan stylus ended when Swan ran out of pages in the memo book on the last day of August and switched to a plain tan pocket notebook and an ordinary pencil of blessed black clarity. But it is back
Writers are captivated with the analogy of raids down from northern waters, canoes like small dragonships, fur-shirted warriors busting up from the thwarts to do battle. Swan never blazoned 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, the Queen Charlottes, south as far as the mouth of the Columbia River, 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 arithmetic is 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 coast-line: no one knew the total of corpses—a ship's captain counted a hundred, scattered along the shores like flotsam, on his voyage from the Stikine 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 entire west shore population, reported a visiting geographer in 1866, "has become wholly extinct;" every Haida had left in terror or stayed and died.
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 overnighting 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 they 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—would eventually be well enough to travel, Swan 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.)
Days twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight

The Neah Bay schoolroom once more, that wrestling site for Swan's tutoring and the Makahs' resistance to it. This morning after breakfast, the fourth of January of 1865, all the boys left without saying anything to me and have not returned all day.

Swan took the opportunity to do some housecleaning, inspect the trail being built from the village to the cattle pasture at Waatch Prairie, and spectate a wrestling match in Captain John's lodge. The first who commenced were boys, stripped naked. They seized each other by the hair and twisted and wrung themselves about like snakes. Some were successful and threw their opponent while others after a spell of hair pulling had to desist. Some little girls also joined in the sport with the exception that they did not disrobe themselves. But in the diary, he stayed in a huff about the absence of his students, and his powerlessness to stop them from passing in and out of the schoolroom like hummingbirds. I think best for them to stay away till Mr Webster comes. I have said all I could and shall say no more. They seem to think they are doing me a great favor by coming and I want them to know that the favor is towards them and not me.

Till Mr Webster arrives was proving an elusive moment. The Indian agent's absence now counted up to two and a half months, and the agency was running as low on supplies as on authority. The twenty-eighth of January: All hands out of work. Mr Jones has been packing up his things to go home. Mr Jordan has no lumber to work with, and Phillips no coal. I have no boarders, as I have nothing but potatoes to give them and they wont eat potatoes without something else. A few boys come in to warm themselves and will look at their books a few minutes and then leave.
operations was about moving off, when I was again summoned in a manner that left no doubt in my mind but that I was wanted.

The Makahs gesture Swan into the circle, beside the heads. Cowbetsi and an Indian who is to interpret to Swan face him.

Cowbetsi orates to Swan that they killed the Elwhas because the territorial Indian agent did not settle the matter of Swell's murder. A line of fact indisputable.

Swan responds gingerly that the Indian agent at the time has been removed from office, consequently he could not come as he had promised, but that he had not lied for I knew that he fully intended to have done just what he had promised to do; that Mr. Simmons was a friend of Swell's and they all knew—a careful veer here—I was a friend also.

"Yes," said Cowbetsi, "we know you are our friend, and we are friends of yours."

Swan notes a degree of relief when I was assured of the fact; but I thought that their friendship was of the kind that might induce them, should I give offence, to stick my head on top of a pole for a memento. . . He stands silent through a victory dance performed while four Makahs point guns at the heads and his general vicinity, and does not give offense. Only the two heads of the Elwhas go up on poles above Neah Bay like queer jack-o-lanterns.

Swan by this time has made his way, in years and fractions of years, through four diaries—black, tan, black and tan again—and been back and forth between Neah Bay and Port Townsend until he seems more a citizen of mid-water than of either community. Early in the diary of his fourth year on the Strait—the brown pocket volume for 1862—a different rhythm begins to come out to me. Swan is at Neah Bay with the hope, now, through Webster's doggedly achieved new position
Day twenty-three

From places here at the outer corner of the Strait, it can be seen clearest how abruptly close the Olympic range of mountains stands to this coastline: like gorgeously-caped elephants about to go wading. Along much of the Peninsula south of the logging town of Forks, for instance, peaks of 4,000 to 7,000 feet rise within thirty miles of the Pacific shore, rather as if the Rockies were to begin at Philadelphia, or the Sierra Nevada just beyond the east alleys of Oakland.

Such rare brinking closeness between the earth's ice-tipped summits and its arcing horizon of water is even more pronounced toward Port Angeles and Port Townsend, where from one particular swoosh of this roller-coaster Neah Bay road, the Olympics look as if they are striding right into the Strait. Some shore sites back there--the best for this, as so much else, is Dungeness Spit--open so directly onto an overhead wall of white crags that you lose sense of any ground between. Wave-slosh and caping forest, and that is all.

There is a kind of stolen thrill, something unearned and simply granted, about the presence of the Olympics. The state of Washington makes its margin with the Pacific as if the land west of the Cascade Mountains had all but dropped heavily against the ocean, causing wild splatters of both land and water: the islands of Puget Sound and the San Juan group, streaky inlets everywhere, stripes of peninsula such as Dungeness and Long Beach, and a
webwork of more than forty sizable rivers emptying to the coast. Amid this welter, the Olympic Mountains stand in calm tall files, their even slopes like fur to shed the wet. The region's history itself seems to step back and marvel at these shoreline mountains. The coastal Indians seem not to have troubled to travel much in them. Why wrestle forest when the sea is an open larder? White frontier-probing too went into an unusual and welcome slowdown when it reached the Olympics. Although the range sits only some fifty miles wide and long, not until 1889 did a six-man expedition sponsored by a Seattle newspaper trapse entirely across it and leave some of the loveliest peaks of America with a curious legacy of being named for editors. Thereafter, its terrific shaggy abundance of timber saved the range; giant fir and cedar and spruce stood so mighty along its shorelines and foothills that the heart of the Olympics was not logged before National Park status came in the 1930's.

Good fortune for the northwest earth that was, for where the early loggers did make whacks into the Olympic Peninsula forest, they butchered the country; you can see it still in places beside the highway, obliteration where the ancient stumps lie about like knuckle bones after cannibals had done with them. Those cut-out-and-get-out loggers had some excuse, not yet understanding or having to care that falling the timber that denuded the slope that lost the silt that clogged the stream would kill salmon runs and other interties of nature, and figuring anyway that the trees and salmon and all else would last forever, but we know now that America's forevers tend to be briefer than the original estimates.
What is original, the Olympic peaks, rise to me, when I climb—and other sharp horizons, to the rim of our valley, as the great Sawtooth Range mashed up to the west of my family's Montana grassland. They were my first shore, those snow-topped headlands which stop the flow of plains in the Montana I was born to, and later, when I went back to write about that rock-topped land, I began to see the geography as a vast archipelago of mountains and to remember how, like people in fast outriggers, we traveled in pickups and trucks the valleys between the high islanded clusters. Now it is Townsend, Olympus, Constance, The Brothers, two dozen Olympic peaks alive in jagged white rhythm like lightning laid lengthwise, that make the uneven but steady skyline. From the instant I saw them a dozen years ago, I have felt exhilaration from these mountains like a gust down from their glaciers. If they did not exist, I think I would not live here; would need to be within sight of some other craggy western horizon. As it is, over the years
Days thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight

At Neha 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 the 120-year-old words into sight,

Mar 22, 1864 ("16 bird skins" lead)

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...

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.
S to Baird, Jan. 29 '63:

...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 Smithsonian...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...It is a custom confined to some tribes north of Nootka...Occasionally some of the wooden
S to B, March 13, '63

...In 66 consecutive days there has fallen a little more than 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) feet of water. I think that Astoria, which is usually accounted the most rainy place on this coast, can hardly beat this quantity....

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S to Be Aug. 12 '64

I have got the names of the male descendants of Decart 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 "Klonas" or dont know.

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S to Be Jul 10, '64

...2 Indian cradles 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...

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S to B, March 13, '63

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 thy 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 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
out 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 made a 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 the
Smithsonian's "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 country 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
And perpetually, churning out his messages of encouragement to a network of unofficial Smithsonian helpers who ranged from backyards amateurs 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 told the Smithsonian, to add my humble collections to specimens in your museums. Inevitably, Swan was on the short side of this proposition. The Smithsonian and Baird were rare eminences in his back-of-beyond existence, while he was merely one, and the most distant one at that, of a battalion of scientific leaders.
the letters of the man in the frontier schoolhouse and the man in
the red-brick castle comes forth about as might be expected. I should
be pleased did 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 statements 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 fraction of 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...