

NARCISSA SEPTEMBER 1836

by Crystal Calhoun



September 1st, 1836

You can better imagine our feelings this morning than we can describe them. I could not realize that the end of our long journey was so near. We arose as soon as it was light, took a cup of coffee, ate of the duck we had given us last night and dressed for Walla Walla. We started while it was yet early, for all were in haste to reach the desired haven. If you could have seen us you would have been surprised, for both man and beast appeared alike propelled by the same force. The whole company galloped almost the whole way to the Fort. The fatigues of the long journey seemed to be forgotten in the excitement of being so near the close. Soon the Fort appeared in sight and when it was announced that we were near Mr. McLeod, Mr. Pambrun, the gentleman of the house, and Mr. Townsend (a traveling naturalist) sallied forth to meet us. After usual introduction and salutation we entered the Fort and were comfortably seated in cushioned armed chairs. They were just eating breakfast as we rode up and soon we were seated at the table and treated to fresh salmon, potatoes, tea, bread and butter. What a variety, thought I. You cannot imagine what an appetite these rides in the mountains give a person. I wish some of the feeble ones in the states could have a ride in the mountains; they would say like me, victuals, even the plainest kind, never relished so well before.

After breakfast we were shown the novelties of the place. While at breakfast, however, a young rooster placed himself upon the sill of the door and crowed. Now whether it was the sight of the first white woman, or out of compliment to the company, I know not, but this much for him, I was pleased with his appearance. You may think me simple for speaking of such a small circumstance. No one knows the feelings occasioned by seeing objects once familiar after a long deprivation. Especially when it is heightened by no expectation of meeting with them. The door-yard was filled with hens, turkeys and pigeons. And in another place we saw cows and goats in abundance, and I think the largest and fattest cattle and swine I ever saw.

We were soon shown a room which Mr. Pambrun said he had prepared for us, by making two bedsteads or bunks, on hearing of our approach. It was the west bastion of the Fort, full of port holes in the sides, but no windows, and filled with fire-arms. A large cannon, always loaded, stood behind the door by one of the holes. These things did not disturb me. I am so well pleased with the possession of a room to shelter me from the scorching sun that I scarcely notice them. Having arranged our things we were soon called to a feast of melons; the first, I think, I ever saw or tasted. The muskmelon was the largest, measuring eighteen in length, fifteen around the small end and nineteen around the large end. You may be assured that none of us were satisfied or willing to leave the table until we had filled our plates with chips.

At four o'clock we were called to dine. It consisted of pork, cabbage, turnips, tea, bread and butter; by favorite dishes, and much like the last dinner I ate with Mother Loomis. I am thus particular in my description of eatables so that you may be assured that we find something to eat beyond the Rocky mountains as well as at home. We find plenty of salt, but many here prefer to do almost, and some

entirely without it, on their meats and vegetables.

Sept. 2d. - Have busied myself to-day in unpacking my trunk and arranging my things for a visit to Vancouver. Mother will wonder at this and think me a strange child for wishing to add three hundred miles to this journey; not from necessity, but because my husband is going, and I may as well go as to stay here alone. If we were obliged to go on horseback, I think I should not wish to undertake it, but we are going in a boat and it will not take us more than six days to go there. A very agreeable change and I think I shall enjoy it as well as to stay here. I feel remarkably well and rested-do not need to lounge at all, and so it is with us all. I can scarcely believe it possible of myself, but it is true, I feel as vigorous and as well able to engage in any domestic employment as I ever did in my life.

I have not yet introduced you to the lady of the house. She is a native, from a tribe east of the mountains. She appears well, does not speak English, but her native language and French. The cooking and housework is done by men chiefly. Mr. Pambrun is from Canada, and much of the gentlemen in his appearance.

Sept. 3d. - Messrs. McLeod and Townsend left for Vancouver to-day, but Mr. McLeod is so loaded as not to be able to give us a comfortable passage. Mr. Pambrun is going by himself next week and offers us a passage with him.

About noon Mr. and Mrs. Spalding arrived with their company, having made better progress than was anticipated. Here we are all at Walla Walla, through the mercy of a kind Providence, in health and all our lives preserved. What cause for gratitude and praise to God! Surely my heart is ready to leap for joy at the thought of being so near the long-desired work of teaching the benighted ones the knowledge of a Savior, and having completed this hazardous journey under such favorable circumstances. Mr. Pambrun said to us the day we arrived, that there had never been a company previous to ours, that came into the Fort so well fed as ours for the last days of the journey. All our friends of the East company, who knew anything about the country, dreaded this part for us very much. But the Lord has been with us and provided for us all the way, and blessed be his holy name. Another cause for gratitude is the preservation of our animals, in this difficult, dangerous and lengthy route, while many parties previous to ours have had every animal taken from them, and been left on foot in a dangerous land, exposed to death. Two horses have given out with fatigue and have been left, two have been stolen or lost, but most that we have now, have come all the way from the settlements, and appear well. Two calves only have been lost. The remainder came on well except those we left at Snake Fort.

Sabbath, 4th. - This has been a day of mutual thanksgiving with us all. Assembled at the Fort at 12 o'clock for worship, our feelings are better imagined than described. This first Sabbath in September, a Sabbath of rest; first after completing a long journey, first in the vicinity of our future labors. All of us here before God. It is not enough for us alone to be thankful. Will not my beloved friends at home, the disciples of Jesus, unite with us in gratitude and praise to God for his great mercy? It is in answer

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to your prayers that we are here and are permitted to see this day under such circumstances. Feel to dedicate myself renewedly to His service among the heathen, and may the Lord's hand be as evidently manifest in blessing our labors among them, as it has been in bringing us here, and that, too, in answer to your prayers, beloved Christian friends.

5th. - Mr. and Mrs. Spalding have concluded to go with us to Vancouver, so nothing can be done by either of the parties about location until the Indians return from their summer's hunt. Expect to leave tomorrow. Have had exceedingly high winds for two days and nights past, to which the place is subject. Our room shakes and the wind makes such a noise that we can scarcely hear each other converse.

Sept. 7, 1836. - We set sail from Walla Walla yesterday at two o'clock p.m. Our boat is an open one, manned with six oars, and the steersman. I enjoy it much; it is a very pleasant change in our manner of traveling. The Columbia is a beautiful river. Its waters are clear as crystal and smooth as a sea of glass, exceeding in beauty the Ohio; but the scenery on each side of it is very different. There is no timber to be seen, but there are high perpendicular banks of rocks in some places, while rugged bluffs and plains of sand in others, are all that meet the eye. We sailed until near sunset, when we landed, pitched our tents, supped our tea, bread and butter, boiled ham and potatoes, committed ourselves to the care of a kind Providence, and retired to rest.

This morning we arose before sunrise, embarked and sailed until nine o'clock, and are now landed for breakfast. Mr. Pambrun's cook is preparing it, while husband and myself are seated by a little shrub, writing. We are this moment called. Farewell.

8th. - Came last night quite to the Chute (above The Dalles), a fall in the river not navigable. There we slept, and this morning made the portage. All were obliged to land, unload, carry our baggage, and even the boat, for half a mile. I had frequently seen the picture of the Indians carrying a canoe, but now I saw the reality. We found plenty of Indians here to assist in making the portage. After loading several with our baggage and sending them on, the boat was capsized and placed upon the heads of about twenty of them, who marched off with it, with perfect ease. Below the main fall of water are rocks, deep, narrow channels, and many frightful precipices. We walked deliberately among the rocks, viewing the scene with astonishment, for this once beautiful river seemed to be cut up and destroyed by these huge masses of rock. Indeed, it is difficult to find where the main body of water passes. In high water we are told that these rocks are all covered with water, the river rising to such an astonishing height.

After paying the Indians for their assistance, which was a twist of tobacco about the length of a finger to each, we reloaded, went on board, sailed about two miles, and stopped for breakfast. This was done to get away from a throng of Indians. Many followed us, however, to assist in making another portage, three miles below this.

Sept. 9th. - We came to The Dalles just before noon. Here our boat was stopped by two rocks of

immense size and height, all the water of the river passing between them in a very narrow channel, and with great rapidity. Here we were obliged to land and make a portage of two and a half miles, carrying the boat also. The Dalles is the great resort of Indians of many tribes for taking fish. We did not see many, however, for they had just left.

Now, mother, if I was with you by the fireside, I would relate a scene that would amuse you, and at the same time call forth your sympathies. But for my own gratification I will write it. After we landed, curiosity led us to the top of that rock, to see the course of the river through its narrow channel. But as I expected to walk that portage, husband thought it would be giving me too much fatigue to do both. I went with him to its base, to remain there until his return. I took a handful of hazelnuts and thought I would divert myself with cracking and eating them. I had just seated myself in the shade of the rock, ready to commence work, when, feeling something unusual on my neck, I put my hand under my cape and took from thence two insects, which I soon discovered to be fleas. Immediately I cast my eyes upon my dress before me, and, to my astonishment, found it was black with these creatures, making all possible speed to lay siege to my neck and ears. This sight made me almost frantic. What to do I knew not. Husband was away, sister Spalding had gone past hearing. To stand still I could not. I climbed up the rock in pursuit of my husband, who soon saw and came to me. I could not tell him, but showed him the cause of my distress. On opening the gathers of my dress around my waist, every plait was lined with them. Thus they had already laid themselves in ambush for a fresh attack. We brushed and shook, and shook and brushed, for an hour, not stopping to kill for that would have been impossible. By this time they were reduced very considerably, and I prepared to go to the boat. I was relieved from walking by the offer of a horse from a young chief. This was a kindness, for the way was mostly through sand, and the walk would have been fatiguing. I found the confinement of the boat distressing, on account of my miserable companions, who would not let me rest for a moment in any one position. But I was not the only sufferer. Every one in the boat was alike troubled, both crew and passengers. As soon as I was able to make a change in my apparel I found relief.

We made fine progress this morning till 9 o'clock, when we were met with a head wind and obliged to make shore. We met the crew last night with the Western express. This express goes from and returns to Vancouver twice a year.

Eve. - Have lain still all day because of the wind. This is a detention, as we intended to have been at Vancouver by to-morrow evening. A party of Indians came to our camp this eve. Every head was flattened. These are the first I have seen near enough to be able to examine them. Their eyes have a dull and heavy expression.

10th. - High winds and not able to move at all to-day.

11th. - We came to the Cascades for breakfast-another important fall in the river, where we are obliged to make a portage of a mile. The boat was towed along by the rocks with a rope over the

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falls. This is another great place for salmon fishing. A boat load was just ready for Vancouver when we arrived. I saw an infant here whose head was in the pressing machine. This was a pitiful sight. Its mother took great satisfaction in unbinding and showing its naked head to us. The child lay upon a board between which and its head was a squirrel skin. On its forehead lay a small square cushion, over which was a bandage drawn tight around, pressing its head against the board. In this position it is kept three or four months or longer, until the head becomes a fashionable shape. There is a variety of shapes among them, some being sharper than others. I saw a child about a year old whose head had been recently released from pressure, as I supposed from its looks. All the back part of it was a purple color, as if it had been sadly bruised. We are told that this custom is wearing away very fast. There are only a few tribes of this river who practice it.

Sept. 12th. - Breakfasted at the saw mill five miles from Vancouver, and made preparations for entering it. You may be surprised to hear of a saw mill here when I said that there was no timber on the Columbia. Since we passed the Cascades the scene is changed, and we are told there is timber all the way to the coast.

Eve. - We are now in Vancouver, the New York of the Pacific Ocean. Our first sight, as we approached the fort, was two ships lying in the harbor, one of which, the *Neriade*, Captain Royal, had just arrived from London. The *Columbia*, Captain Dandy, came last May, and has since been to the Sandwich Islands, and returned. On landing we first met Mr. Townsend, whom we saw at Walla Walla. He is from Philadelphia, and has been in the mountains two years. He is sent here by a society to collect the different species of bipeds, and quadrupeds, peculiar to this country. We brought a parcel of letters to him, the first he had received since he had left home. Mr. Townsend led us into the fort. But before we reached the home of the chief Factor, Dr. McLoughlin, we were met by several gentlemen, who came to give us a welcome, Mr. Douglas, Mr. Tolmie and Dr. McLoughlin, of the Hudson's Bay Company, who invited us in and seated us on the sofa. Soon we were introduced to Mrs. McLoughlin and Mrs. Douglas, both natives of the country-half breeds. After chatting a little we were invited to walk in the garden.

What a delightful place this is; what a contrast to the rough, barren sand plains, through which we had so recently passed. Here we find fruit of every description, apples, peaches, grapes, pears, plums, and fig trees in abundance; also cucumbers, melons, beans, peas, beets, cabbage, tomatoes and every kind of vegetable too numerous to be mentioned. Every part is very neat and tastefully arranged, with fine walks, lined on each side with strawberry vines. At the opposite end of the garden is a good summer house covered with grape vines. Here I must mention the origin of these grapes and apples. A gentleman, twelve years ago while at a party in London, put the seeds of the grapes and apples which he ate into his vest pocket. Soon afterwards he took a voyage to this country and left them here, and now they are greatly multiplied.

After promenading as much as we wished, and returning, we were met by Mrs. Copendel, a lady from England, who arrived in the ship *Columbia* last May, and Miss Maria, daughter of Dr.

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McLoughlin, quite an interesting young lady. After dinner we were introduced to Rev. Mr. Beaver and lady, a clergyman of the Church of England, who arrived last week in the ship Neriade. This is more than we expected when we left home-that we should be privileged with the acquaintance and society of two English ladies. Indeed, we seem to be nearly allied to Old England, for most of the gentlemen of the Company are from there or Scotland.

We have not found Rev. Samuel Parker here, to our great disappointment. He went to Oahu in the ship Columbia, a few weeks before we arrived. We have mourned about it considerably, for we thought it would be so acceptable to our dear parents and friends at home to hear him say that he had seen us alive here, after completing this long, unheard-of journey. Besides, I wished to send home many things which I cannot now. More than all this, his counsels and advice would have been such a relief to us, at this important time, as to location, character of the Indians, and the like. But it is wisely ordered, and we submit. He appears to have been a favorite here, and to have done much good.

The Messrs. Lee left Vancouver on Saturday last for their station on the Wallamet. Mr. Daniel Lee has been out of health, and for the year past has been at Oahu. He returned on the Neriade, benefited by his visit.

Sept. 13. - This morning visited the school to hear the children sing. It consists of about fifty-one children, who have French fathers and Indian mothers. All the laborers here are Canadian French, with Indian wives. Indeed, some of the gentlemen of the company have native wives, and have adopted the custom of the country not to allow their wives to eat with them. French is the prevailing language here. English is spoken only by a few.

Just before dinner we went on board the Neriade, the first ship I ever saw. She is a man-of-war, and goes to the Northwest coast soon. The Columbia returns to London this fall. The Company have lost three ships on the coast.

Sept. 14. - We were invited to a ride to see the farm. Have ridden fifteen miles this afternoon. We visited the barns, stock, etc. They estimated their wheat crops at four thousand bushels this year, peas the same, oats and barley between fifteen and seventeen hundred bushels each. The potato and turnip fields are large and fine. Their cattle are numerous, estimated at a thousand head in all the settlements. They have swine in abundance, also sheep and goats, but the sheep are of an inferior kind. We find also hens, turkeys, and pigeons, but no geese.

You will ask what kind of beds they have here. I can tell you what kind of bed they made for us, and I have since found it a fashionable bed for this country. The bedstead is in the form of a bunk, with a rough board bottom, upon which are laid about a dozen of the Indian blankets. These with a pair of pillows covered with calico cases constitute our beds, sheets and covering. There are several feather beds in the place made of the feathers of wild ducks, geese, cranes and the like. There is nothing here suitable for ticking. The best and only material is brown linen sheeting. The Indian

ladies make theirs of deer skin. Could we obtain a pair of geese from any quarter I should think much of them.

Sept. 16th. - Every day we have something new to see. We went to the stores and found them filled above and below with the cargo of the two ships, all in unbroken bales. They are chiefly Indian goods, and will be sent away this fall to the several different posts of the company in the ship *Neriade*. We have found here every article for comfort and durability that we need, but many articles for convenience and all fancy articles are not here.

Visited the dairy, also, where we found butter and cheese in abundance-saw an improvement in the manner of raising cream. Their pans are an oblong square, quite large but shallow, flaring a little, made of wood and lined with tin. In the center is a hole with a long plug. When the cream has risen they place the pan over a tub or pail, remove the plug, and the milk will run off leaving only the cream in the pan. I think that these must be very convenient in a large dairy. They milk between fifty and sixty cows.

On visiting the mill we did not find it in a high state of improvement. It goes by horse power and has a wire bolt. This seemed a hard way of getting bread, but better so than no bread, or to grind by hand. The company have one at Colville that goes by water, five days ride from Walla Walla, from whence we expect to obtain our flour, potatoes and pork. They have three hundred hogs.

Dr. McLoughlin promises to loan us enough to make a beginning and all the return he asks is that we supply other settlers in the same way. He appears desirous to afford us every facility for living in his power. No person could have received a more hearty welcome, or be treated with greater kindness than we have been since our arrival.

Sept. 17th. - A subject is now before the minds of certain individuals, in which I feel a great interest. It is that we ladies spend the winter at Vancouver, while our husbands go to seek their locations and build. Dr. McLoughlin is certain that it will be the best for us, and I believe is determined to have us stay. The thought of it is not very pleasant to either of us. For several reasons, I had rather go to Walla Walla, where, if we failed to make a location, or of building this fall, we could stay very comfortably, and have enough to eat, but not as comfortably, or have as great a variety as here; besides, there is the difficulty of ascending the river in high water, not to say anything of a six months' separation, when it seems to be least desirable; but all things will be ordered for the best.

Sept. 18. - Mr. Beaver held two services in a room in Dr. McLoughlin's barn to-day. Enjoyed the privilege much. This form of worship, of the Church of England, differs in no way from that of the Episcopalians in the States. The most of the gentlemen of the fort are Scotch Presbyterians, very few being Episcopalians. The great mass of the laborers are Roman Catholics, who have three services during the Sabbath, one of which is attended at this house, at which Dr. McLoughlin officiates in French. He translates a sermon or a tract, and reads a chapter in the Bible and a prayer. The singing in Mr. Beaver's church was done by the children, some of their tunes having been taught them by

Rev. Mr. Parker, and others by the Mr. Shepherd, of the Methodist mission.

Sept. 19. - The question is decided at last that we stay here about four or five weeks. There is so much baggage to be taken up now, that the boat will be sufficiently loaded without us. Have the cheering promise that our husbands will come for us in a short time if prospered. One thing comforts us. They are as unwilling to leave us as we are to stay, and would not if it were possible for us to go now. From this we are sure that they will make every effort to return for us soon. We are told that the rainy season will commence soon, and continue through the winter, and late in the spring, while at Walla Walla there is none. Vancouver, too, is subject to fever and ague. These are quite good reasons for preferring Walla Walla, even if we had to live in a lodge.

Have been making some necessary purchases for our two Indian boys, Richard and John, which we are glad to do, partly as a reward for their faithful care of the cattle during the journey. We left them at Walla Walla. They regretted our leaving them, and now I cannot feel willing to stay away from them all winter. Their anxiety to study continues the same, especially Richard. We love them both and feel deeply interested in their welfare, and shall treat them as our own as long as they deserve it.

Sept. 20th. - Dr. McLoughlin gave my husband a pair of leather pantaloons to-day. All the gentlemen here wear them for riding for economy. Riding horseback and carrying a gun is very destructive to cloth pantaloons.

Our husbands have been making preparations to leave us to-day, but have found so much to do that they could not get ready to leave much before night. They have concluded to start the boat a short distance and camp, while they, with Mr. Pambrun and Mr. Gray, remain in the Fort to leave early in the morning.

Sept. 21. - Our friends left us this morning early. One thing I should have mentioned, as decided upon before they left, was the propriety of making two stations. After consideration it was decided best to do so for several reasons. The Cayuses as well as the Nez Perces are very anxious to have teachers among them. They are a numerous tribe not numerous, but wealthy and influential. -M. Eells] and speak the same language as the Nez Perces. There are other fields open ready for the harvest and we wish that there were many more laborers here ready to occupy them immediately. Several places have been recommended which our husbands intend visiting before they fix upon any place. You will recollect that we had Grande Ronde in view as a location when we left home. Our reasons for not fixing upon that place are insurmountable. The pass in the Blue mountains is so difficult and the distance so great that it would be next to impossible to think of obtaining supplies sufficient for our support. We could not depend upon game, for it is very scarce and uncertain. Mr. Parker recommends a place on the Kooskooska (Clearwater) river, six days' ride above Walla Walla. I hope to give you our exact location before I send this.

Sept. 22. - Dr. McLoughlin has put his daughter in my care and wishes me to hear her recitations.

Thus I shall have enough to do for diversion while I stay. I could employ all my time in writing and work for myself if it were not for his wishes.

I have not given you a description of our eatables here. There is such a variety I know not where to begin. For breakfast we have coffee or cocoa, salt salmon and roast ducks with potatoes. When we have eaten our supply of them, our plates are changed and we make a finish on bread and butter.

For dinner we have a greater variety. First we are always treated to a dish of soup, which is very good. All kinds of vegetables in use are taken, chopped fine, and put into water with a little rice, and boiled to a soup. The tomatoes are a prominent article, and usually some fowl meat, duck or other kind, is cut fine and added. If it has been roasted once it is just as good (so the cook says), and then spiced to the taste. After our soup dishes are removed, then comes a variety of meats to prove our tastes. After selecting and changing, we change plates and try another if we choose, and so at every new dish have a clean plate. Roast duck is an everyday dish, boiled pork, tripe, and sometimes trotters, fresh salmon or sturgeon-yea, articles too numerous to be mentioned. When these are set aside, a nice pudding or an apple pie is next introduced. After this a water and a muskmelon make their appearance, and last of all cheese, bread or biscuit and butter are produced to complete the whole. But there is one article on the table I have not yet mentioned, and of which I never partake. That is wine. The gentlemen frequently drink toasts to each other, but never give us an opportunity of refusing, for they know that we belong to the Total Society. We have talks about drinking wine, but no one joins our society. They have a Temperance Society here and at Wallamet, formed by Mr. Lee.

Our tea is very plain. Bread and butter, good tea, plenty of milk and sugar.

Sept. 30th. - We are invited to ride as often as once a week for exercise, and we generally ride all the afternoon. To-day Mrs. McLoughlin rode with us. She keeps her old fashion of riding gentlemen fashion. This is the universal custom of Indian women, and they have saddles with high backs and fronts. We have been recommended to use these saddles, a more easy way of riding, but we have never seen the necessity of changing our fashion.

I sing about an hour every evening with the children, teaching them new tunes, at the request of Dr. McLoughlin. Thus I am wholly occupied, and can scarcely find as much time as I want to write.