Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature [...] honey gatherers of the mind.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
In 1847 George Atkinson was commissioned as a home missionary to Oregon by the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS). Among the several elements in the Society’s initial charge to him was that he should report back to them on the territory as a whole:

In order to keep pace with other denominations, exploring must not be lost sight of.

(Milton Badger, AHMS Secretary, to Atkinson, June 27, 1848. Pacific University Archives)

A glance at Atkinson’s life reveals him as a peripatetic man, fascinated by new modes of transportation and the places to which they took him. Hence Milton Badger’s encouragement to explore was welcomed by eager ears. Within three weeks of his June, 1848 arrival in Oregon City Atkinson and Elkanah Walker took twelve days to explore the upper Willamette Valley.¹

Eleven years later, in November, 1859, he undertook a survey of Puget Sound, one of the most ambitious of his journeys. Washington had been part of the original Oregon Territory established in 1849. It was granted separate territorial status in 1853. That original Washington Territory included present Washington and Idaho, plus some of western Montana.

The 1859 journey was three weeks long. Although his report does not provide a detailed itinerary, he describes the first part of the journey as by boat, from Oregon City down the Willamette and Columbia

¹ Sevetson, 46.
Rivers to the Pacific Ocean, thence north to the straits of San Juan de Fuca, with an initial stop at Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula. Other stops on Puget Sound were at Port Gamble, Port Madison, Seattle, Steilacoom, and Olympia. The return route took him overland through Monticello to Vancouver, where he crossed the Columbia and continued home to Oregon City.

This document is his full trip report to the AHMS, dated Dec. 1, 1859. The brief addenda include letters with recommendations, requests, and financial accounting.
Report of a Survey of Puget Sound for the American Home Missionary Society, December 1859

Source: Archives, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University
Washington Territory
Oregon City Dec. 1st 1859


Dear Brethren—

I wrote you last from Port Townsend on Admiralty Inlet, at the finest of views of the Juan De Fuca Straits. I remained there two days after the Sabbath, and met with the “Dashaway Reform Club” one evening, and on the next addressed them and the citizens, on their invitation. The Concert house was full and good attention was given. This reform was and is much needed at that point. The citizens and strangers, especially the sailors, have suffered in purse, in health, and much in reputation from the use of intoxicating liquors. After a week of drunkenness, in the morning when their heads were aching and were apparently swollen to double size, with bloodshot eyes and trembling limbs about a dozen of the most hopeless inebriates took a solemn oath before a notary public that they would not drink or taste any kind of intoxicating liquors, whisky, brandy, (?) cider or beers, for six months.

Others joined them; in two weeks they numbered 25. The night on which I met with them their committee, appointed the previous week, reported a Constitution & Bylaws, which were well drawn up and fully guarded. They were adopted, being amended only to make them more stringent. Yet with the strictness of the law, they embraced also some of the Gospel, having a committee appointed to look up & provide for the poor & suffering, & to help the weak.

It was deeply interesting to see the clear working of their minds & hearts in this reform. Their differences of judgment were expressed in a manly way, and they, every one, yielded in a good spirit to the will of the majority. For three hours they worked over this Constitution & Bylaws, although only fifteen were present that eve, the rest being necessarily absent. It was (?) that several of them had seen better days. Though clad coarsely and looking rough, there
were beneath the marks of intelligent & noble men; such indeed as the Arch destroyer most frequently selects as victims of the Cup.

There is hope of the little Society. It is a spontaneous movement, an offshoot of the living temperance tree, and a mark of its inherent vitality and power. They take no slow steps up to the great principle of Total Abstinence, but spring to it at once, as the only true & safe course. One of their members died within four days after he had abandoned his Cups, and although the physicians said that he might perhaps have lived if he had left off gradually, his death & this inference worked no evil or hindrance to the rest of the Club, or to their influence. They are hailed as a necessity.

Two saloon keepers have joined them & they express the hope that the reform will stop their business. They do not agree to quit the sale or trade in liquors, but they all see and confess that this is to be the result.

There is a flourishing organization of the same kind at Victoria, and a motion for one at Olympia. Captains of steamers, who have been noted for intemperance, have joined in it. They are hard at work bringing in others. I left Port Townsend on Wednesday, in company with a very obliging friend, Seward Wilson, Esq., of Port Gamble. We took passage in a Plunger, a small vessel of five or six tons burden. These vessels afford safe passages on these waters, and they should be taken instead of whale boats, & in preference to anything except steamers or large sea going vessels.

We reached Port Gamble in four hours. I hoped to be there 36 hours before the Sound Steamboat came along, yet at the suggestion of Mrs. Wilson, we had an appointment made for a meeting that evening. About 40 persons came in. The little village is made and sustained solely by the lumber business. The mills saw regularly 60,000 ft per day, and when there is need they can saw 100,000 ft each twenty-four hours. Sometimes a dozen vessels are there at once loading lumber & spars.

The proprietors are very strict in enforcing a prohibitory liquor law, which they have enacted on their own account. They and their
families are from East Machias, Me., and most of their employees are from Maine. The other mills adopt the same policy, yet they cannot keep all liquor away. The “Beach Combers”, of the worst class, will steal along in the night & sell to their men. We passed a hut kept by one of these Whisky traders. His boat was hauled up for the day, ready to launch for the night.

I found five or six professors of religion at Port G. And a larger number who had been religiously trained. All these expressed a desire to have a minister come and settle among them. One truly devoted Mother in Israel, formerly from Danvers Mass., lately from San Francisco said, that this was her constant prayer. A few brethren were just then proposing to commence a prayer meeting. As well as perhaps a Bible class for the Sabbath.

The holy day is spent too much in giving and receiving visits. Officers of vessels come on shore to call & dine. The mill men go into the woods to hunt, or spend the day in washing or mending their clothes, or in idleness. They need a Sabbath. A faithful minister could, were he here, with the divine blessing greatly change this state of things. They want an intelligent man, who can instruct them, and a man whose whole life will correspond with his teachings. They express themselves as tired of untrained, ignorant preachers. In fact they have given such the cold shoulder so decidedly that they do not come any more.

I hoped to have a full day with the people at Port G. But the steamboat came at midnight. I was obliged to leave without saying good bye to even the few to whom I had been introduced.

Port G. as I have written before is a center, from which a minister can easily visit Port Ludlow, Sebac, Port Madison, Port Orchard, & Hulsilladilic Mills. I promised them that I would recommend the Society to send them a minister with his wife early the next year.

At sunrise we were at Seattle on the east side of the Inlet, having called at Port Madison on the way. Seattle is situated on a fine Bayou, one of the many which indent the land around this inland sea. It has a steam mill and besides a large farming region back to the Cascades, which will give the place business.
The Duwamish river enters the Bay here. Back of the town about two miles, is a lake 40 miles long, deep, abounding in fish, and surrounded by fine timber and farming lands. A navigable branch of the Duwamish flows from the lake. The Snoqualmie Pass, through the Cascades naturally leads to Seattle. The village has now only about 250 people; but it is gaining in the public favor as an important and permanent settlement. I had no time to go ashore but my convictions have been strengthening that we should have a man stationed there next year. One of the citizens remarked that an intelligent devoted minister would be well received and in part sustained.

We passed on through the narrows which are the dividing line between Admiralty Inlet and Puget Sound, and reached Steilacoom in four hours, and Olympia in two & a half more.

Olympia is the Capital of the territory, & the largest town. It is at the head of Budd’s Inlet. At low water long flats extend out from the town. At high water, large vessels can land at the wharf. The buildings of the town look rather dingy for recent erections. Yet the place has marks of considerable business. The town is spread out around the Inlet, and about two miles up there is another village, about a water mill. At high water vessels go up to get their cargoes.

At Olympia there are two churches, an O.S. Presby & a M. Episcopal. My impression is that the Episcopalians, also, have an organization here. The two former have buildings. The Methodists have also an Academy. As the field is fully occupied I did not stop in Olympia. The O.S. Presby have a church also on Chambers Prairie, seven miles from town, and a good house of worship. They have a smaller church at Grand Mound Prairie, 25 miles from Olympia, but no house of worship. Rev. J.M. Goodell has ministered to this church for a few years past. He died a few weeks since, leaving a large family to mourn his death. There is only one Presby minister now in Washington Territory, Rev. G.W. Whitworth, who ministers to the church at Olympia & who has the care of three other small churches. He informed me that he was expecting two or three ministers from their Board very soon.
The route from Olympia to Monticello\(^i\) on the Columbia, or rather on the Cowlitz near its mouth is for 60 miles most level and for 30 more rough, as the military road is now laid out. The settlements are scattered. On the Cowlitz Prairie are several old Hudson Bay farms, or farms which were taken by their Canadian employees. They are now selling out to Americans and moving to British Columbia.

We crossed the Chehalis twice, which is navigable for steamboats from Gray’s Harbor up to these crossings, or about 120 miles. The valley of this river is now in process of settlement. The route across is the natural one for a Rail Road from the Sound to the Columbia, and the only way in which we can easily go from Oregon to the (?) portions of Washington.

As Monticello is at one terminus of the route, it becomes a natural and growing center of business as well as travel. I arrived there Monday evening, and having sent forward an appointment the day before, I found the people expecting me. The landlord kindly prepared a room which was filled, and good attention was given to my discourse, though I was much wearied by my long ride & walk over the frozen hills. I did not stop at Vancouver, as we can readily visit this place on our way up the Columbia. There are Methodist Episcopal and Catholic churches at V., and a Catholic school for boys & another for girls. This is their second attempt in what was formerly all Oregon. The seminary which they had at Oregon City was given up & the buildings sold. But they have begun again at Vancouver; and recently the Archbishop arrived with eight Priests and sixteen sisters of Notre Dame, to commence one or two schools in Portland and the female seminary again at Oregon City.

My tour of exploration around and through the western portion of Washington Territory has magnified my estimate of the value and importance of that portion of our national domain. I had thought it unworthy of the noble name it bears, but my conviction now is that this rising state will be among the foremost in the union and worthy of him, who was first in the hearts of his countrymen. It is not one thing, like extensive prairies or superior mines, which

\(^i\) Monticello was on the north bank of the Columbia River, south of today’s Kelso.
will make Washington the home of hundreds of thousands. It is the combination of many advantages which must unite and combine multitudes of people for that rising state. First and most attractive now are its vast lumber interests. This portion of the territory has few prairies, but its plains, hills, and mountains, from the Columbia to the De Fuca Straits, and from the very surf of the Pacific to the Snow Line of the Cascades are all covered with the loftiest, largest and most useful kinds of timber trees.

I have already written you that the lumbering business, is the most lucrative. Probably more capital has been invested in this than in all other employments. An agent of the Port Gamble mill informed me that their company was assessed on $180,000 worth of property at that point. It may have been too high, for other places almost equal were set below these figures. But it is estimated that 30,000,000 of feet will be exported this year from the mills already in operation; 16,000,000 was the estimate for last year. The amount for this year is set too low, as can be easily seen from the amount sawed per day at each mill.

The next great advantage, and the one which gives value to the forests, is their proximity to navigable waters. Mr. Greeley remarks that the Sierra Nevada Mts. will furnish exhaustless supplies of lumber and timber not only for California but for the whole Pacific region, but those forests are far from sea, and among inaccessible highlands. The forests of Washington and many of those of Oregon also border on deep waters, which allow the passage of all manner of ships among them in all directions.

Capt. Molthrop, formerly of New Haven, who has navigated the Sound Inlet, and straits and bays of Washington for the past year, informed me this week that by careful estimates those waters afforded two thousand miles of shore line, including the inland shores. There are at least forty islands in this Archipelago, some of them large and valuable, nearly all covered with forests.

We may add to this estimate 130 miles on the Pacific, besides the small Bays, and to this the 40 miles afforded by Shoal Water Bay, and 30 or 40 by Gray’s Harbor. We may add also 120 miles of steam
boat navigation on the Chehalis into the heart of the country, and
130 on the Columbia, to the Cascades, besides all the facilities for
sending timber & lumber to the sea which the smaller rivers, as
the Lewis, Cowlitz, Whilapah, Queniault, Snohomish, Duwamish,
and Nisqually afford. Indeed, the whole of this part of the territory
is divided or surrounded by waters. All its wealth in forests and
minerals can go into the great highways of commerce. And even
now the small population has business with the great marts of the
world, China, the Hawaiian Islands, Australia, the South American
ports, France & England, besides our own Coast ports.

The waters abound in fish. Salmon, cod, halibut, herring & sardines,
and the flats & sand spits in oysters & clams. Wild game is abundant
in the woods. The beaver, otter, mink & marten along the streams,
and ducks & geese are everywhere. Beds of coal have been traced
from Bellingham Bay, where they are worked, across the smaller
islands to Vancouver Island, where also they are worked. This coal
is becoming an important article of trade, being used in Victoria
now instead of wood by many of the families.

East of the Cascades, Washington Territory has fine grazing regions,
in fact, regions unsurpassed for these purposes.

The Colville and (?) gold mines are attracting miners with fresh
interest and are becoming remunerative, if not alone at least in
connection with those of Frasers and Thompsons Rivers, which lie
in the same gold range still further north. Marble and lead mines
have also been found within the same limits. The great Columbia
affords navigation, it is now believed, through a large part of this
interior basin. Every year develops some new and interesting
feature of this interior country.

There are no very serious hindrances to the settlement of the
whole country. The Indians west of the Cascades are mostly on
reservations, and I am sorry to add that they are fast disappearing.
Whisky and venery are decimating them. I know not what can or will
be interposed to save this part of them. Some of the tribes east of the
Cascades are in a more hopeful condition, and if Government favors
the wise plans of Rev. E.W. Geary, the present Superintendent of
Indian Affairs for Oregon & Washington, some of the latter tribes may be saved—especially the Nez Perces, to whom Bro. Spalding begs to be again sent. He is near them now, often visiting them and watching over his little church there, but he has no means of support among them, and he cannot, therefore, give them his whole time. He wants to translate larger portions of the Bible for them & to employ two Indians, his former pupils, to help him, but he has no funds & no means to do this.

Settlers will find all the trials of a new country in coming either to Oregon or Washington, but they will find many compensations. People who reside here a few years have very little disposition to go East again or to abide if they go. A minister will find things some what rough, but with a spirit of adaptation and content he can do a great & good work.

Yours in the Gospel
G.H. Atkinson

Oregon City  Dec. 2, 1859


Dear Brethren—

We received, through you, authority to act as an exploring agency of the A.H.M.Socy for the current year, in Oregon and Washington. One of our members has accordingly spent three weeks in Washington Ty. Chiefly visiting the settlements in Pugets Sound & Admiralty Inlet. The information which we have gained of the state of the country and the character of the settlements leads us to the conclusion that three brethren with their wives can now be successfully employed a three stations there, viz. Port Townsend, Port Gamble, and Seattle, in preaching the Gospel, and otherwise extending the Kingdom of our blessed Redeemer. It is
our conviction, from what we know of pioneer labors, that as many ought to be employed there by your Society. We find a readiness and a desire to have such laborers as you send out. They need to be educated & devoted men, versed in human nature & versed also in the Gospel. Eastern men are preferred by the citizens of two of the places, as they came mostly from the East. Men with wives are much preferred, as they will abide & grow up with the place, and exert a greater power.

A brother should take a steamer ticket to Port Townsend, and if he has goods ship them to San Francisco and reship either to Port T. or Port Gamble or Seattle, on one of the lumber vessels, which come up frequently. Messrs. Talbot, Pope & Kellar constitute the Port Gamble Co. And they have a house in San Francisco.

The people desire a minister as early in the year as possible.

Please to inform us if the Society accedes to our request, and how soon we may expect one or more brethren. We desire to inform the friends on the Sound as early as possible.

Yours very truly,
G.H. Atkinson
P.B. Chamberlain
P.H. Hatch—Committee on Destn & Supply.

Oregon City
Dec. 2 1859

Rev. M. Badger Secy. A.H.M. Socy

Dear Sir. Please find below a certified statement of my expenses, while on the late tour of exploration for the Society, and charge the difference between these and my draft on your Treasury for $100, to my account.
We certify that the above is a fair and correct estimate of late exploration of Washington Territory.

P.B. Chamberlain—Committee on Destitution & Supply for Oregon Assn.

P.H. Hatch