Letter to
Rev Lyman Abbott

No 5

Subject
Department of Columbia

Mr Lyman Abbott,

My dear Sir:

I have proposed to myself to make a personal inspection of the different posts or stations of troops within the limits of the Department of the Columbia. The first two visits were made to Fort Vancouver - situated on the Columbia river a few miles East of above the confluence of the Willamette. The next inspection was of the Forts near the mouth of the Columbia of Fort Stevens, situated at Point Adams on the left bank of the mouth of the Columbia & just within the celebrated Columbia Bar - and of Fort Canby situated on a promontory. Apparently a continuation of the highly beautiful Great River - Returning from the latter post Saturday evening, the following Monday (Sept 10, 1849) with my Aid de Camp, Capt. J. A. Haden I set out for the posts of Walla-Walla & Dalles. At 5 A.M. I met the Captain on board the Steamer Onecota. Colonel Perry of the Cavalry who has been sometime here says that he noticed two peculiar rules of this part of the world, one is that every steamer or other public conveyance sets at four O'clock A.M. and continues that every vessel

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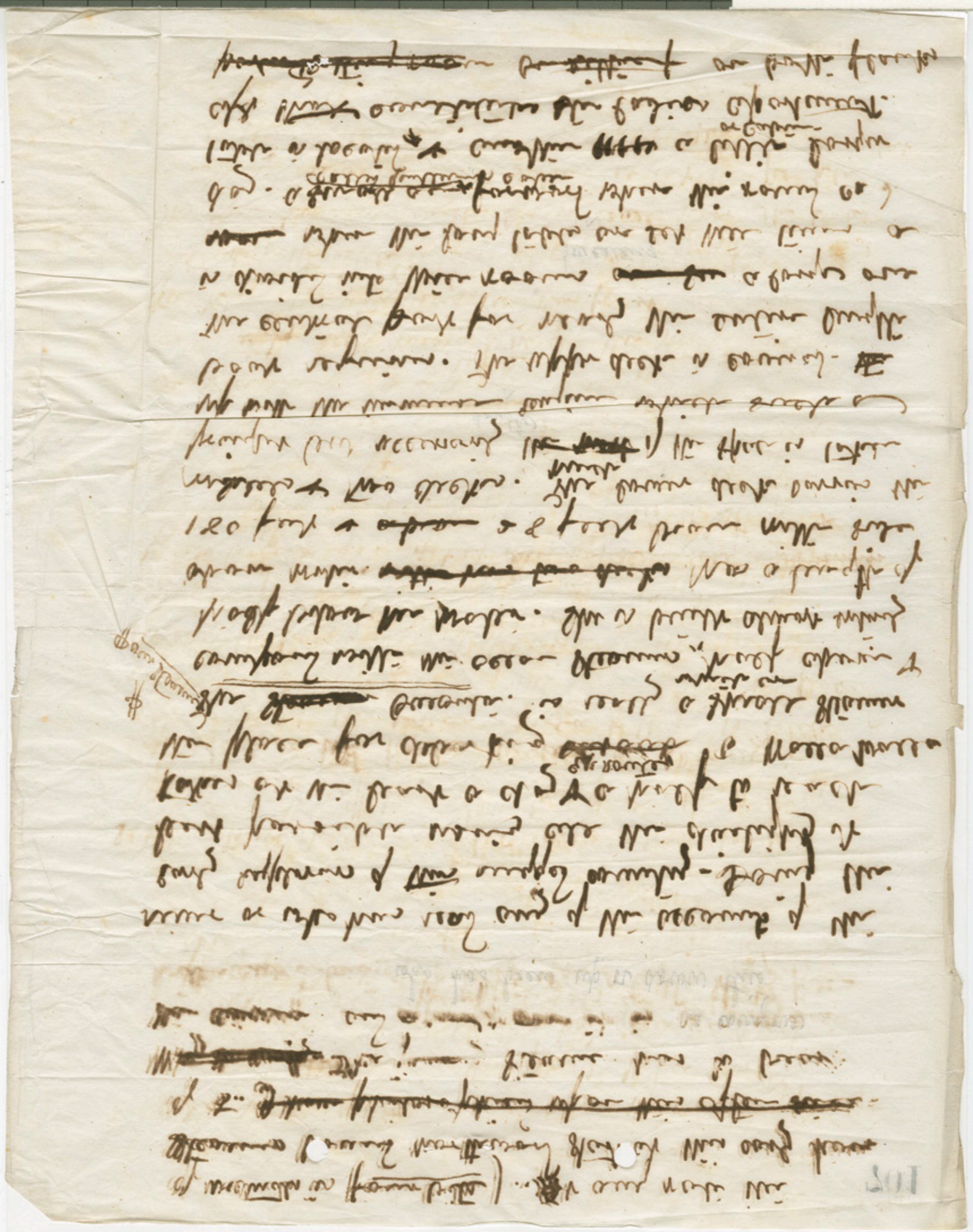
of wetness is (four bits) ... At any rate the Steamers bound northward start at this early hour of 5.. ~~I have philosophized upon this often since.~~ ~~W~~ ~~[illegible]~~ The inner figure has to bear the burden and ~~[illegible]~~ it is as everyone who has been up or down this river or who has read any of the accounts of the early explorers of this rugged country - doing the best possible using cale the daylight it takes at the least a day & a half to reach the place for debarking ~~[illegible]~~ en route to Walla Walla.

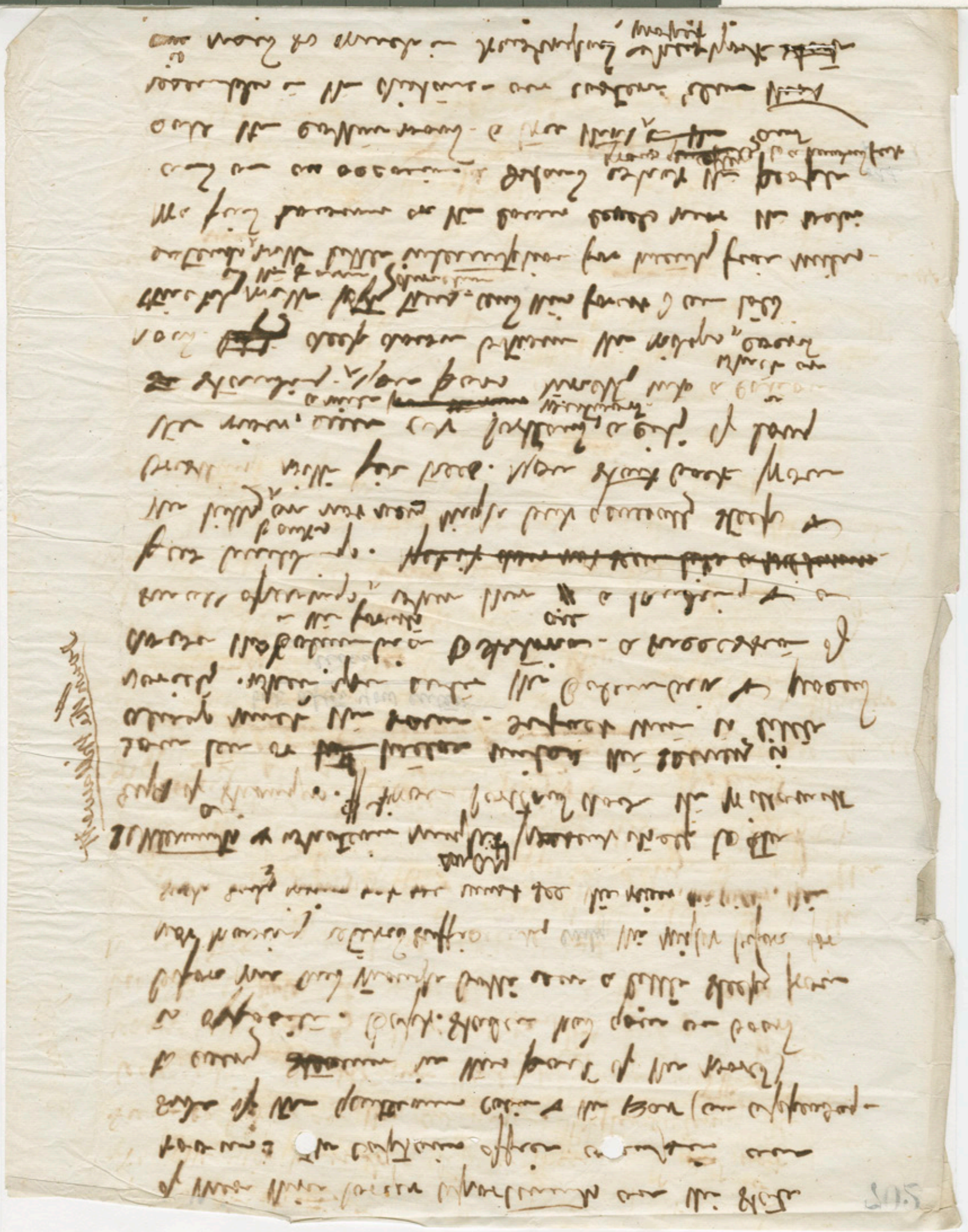
The ~~Steamer~~ Owenoka is really a small steamer compared with the ocean steamers, with an upper deck & half above & half below the water. She is built almost entirely above water ~~with two decks~~ has a length of 180 feet & ~~about~~ 28 feet beam with side wheels & two decks. The lower deck carries the freight and necessarily ~~the most~~ much of the space is taken up with the immense engine which such a boat requires. The upper deck is covered. ~~The~~ The central part for nearly the entire length is divided into three rooms ~~[illegible]~~ a large one ~~[illegible]~~ where the long tables are set three times a day. A ~~small~~ ~~[illegible]~~ smaller forward where the ~~[illegible]~~ ladies gentlemen & children table is located & another ~~[illegible]~~ a little larger aft ~~that~~ constitutes the ladies or Cabin apartment. ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ on ~~[illegible]~~ on both flanks



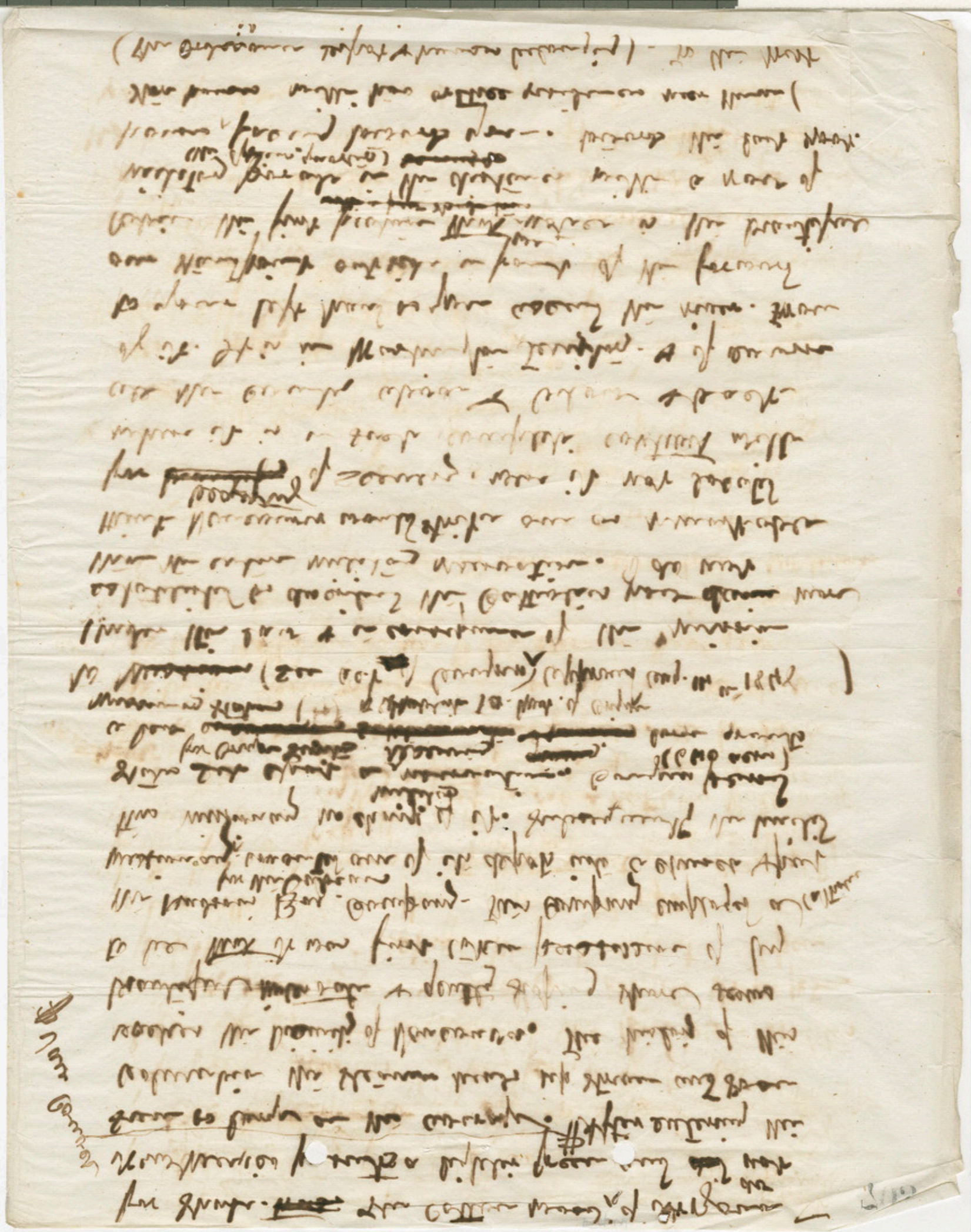
of these three lower apartments are the State rooms: the Captains office or cousin are side of the gentlemen cabin & the bar (an appendage to every steamer in this part of the world) is opposite. Capt. Slade had gone on board before me and thought both me a little sleepy from not having retired sufficiently early the night before for such early rising but we must see the sights, the

Scenery & whatever may present itself to the eye of a stranger. Off from Portland down the Willamette some ten or twelve miles the scenery is always much the same. In fact there is little variety. When you enter the Columbia & proceed down the Columbia to Astoria - a succession of small openings in the forests, where there are a landing & a few buildings. ~~yet it does not seem like a settlement~~ The hills or banks are not very high but generally steep & covered with fir trees. You start back from the river, when at Portland, a city of long standing, a mile westward, you pass directly into a forest road deep down between the ridges which are covered thickly with lofty trees, and this forest I am told extends in the same direction with little interruption for nearly four miles. We find houses on the lower levels near the water and on an occasional island where the people raise potatoes. The cottonwood - a tree that grows quickly to a hundred feet and resembles in the distance our eastern elms ~~that~~ is used so much in Newfoundland & New York ~~state~~ proper.

Down the Willamette



for shade. The Cottonwood of Arizona
Territories presents a lighter green and do not
seem so large on the average. After entering the
Columbia the steamer heads up stream and soon
reaches the Diamond of Vancouver. The history of this
beautiful island & gently sloping shore seems
to be that it was first taken possession of by
the Hudson's Bay Company. This Company employed a Catholic
missionary for the Indians & established one of its depots into & chosen upon
this missionary no change of it. Subsequently the United
States set apart a military reservation. Congress passed
a law for Oregon Territory reserving (640 acres) some grants
missionary stations (to Methodists & Presbyterians to Bd. of Oregon
to Missions (See act of Congress approved Aug. 14th 1848)
Under this law & in consequence of the previous
establishment, the Catholics now claim more
than the entire military reservation. I do not
think Vancouver would strike one as remarkable
for beauty of scenery, were it not located
where it is & such complete contrast will
aid the eye always below & back
of it. It is in Washington Territory & of course
to your left hand as you ascend the river. From
our standpoint outside in front of the forward
cabin the first feature that we notice is the beautiful
wooded bluff in the distance with a row of
houses (the officers quarters) facing towards you — towards the last spot.
Nine houses with two other residences near them (
(the Ordnance depot & houses belonging) — To the West



& nearly the little town of Vancouver. In front of the building parade & nearer yet are the gardens ~~belonging to~~ for the Officers, Soldiers & Quarter-Masters departments; & then close down by the shore the Quartermaster's buildings. The lower stretches from the ~~road~~ river stretch as far as the eye reaches & perhaps beyond. Behind the intervening stretch of open grounds within a stone's throw of the building post is a thick forest of evergreen trees that extends uninterruptedly for miles beyond. If the Eastward is followed up the river the grass land ~~[illegible]~~ is spread out along a long stretch growing narrower till in ~~[illegible]~~ miles or so the woods & the river meet again. The banks rise higher, become rougher and steeper where the trees have been felled for the use of the steamer there few signs of the axe have been for a long time

Breakfast at 8 o'clock

5

around walls. The table cloth & linen has had the long tables drawn out neatly covered with a snowy cloth and made to shine with a nice hot breakfast.

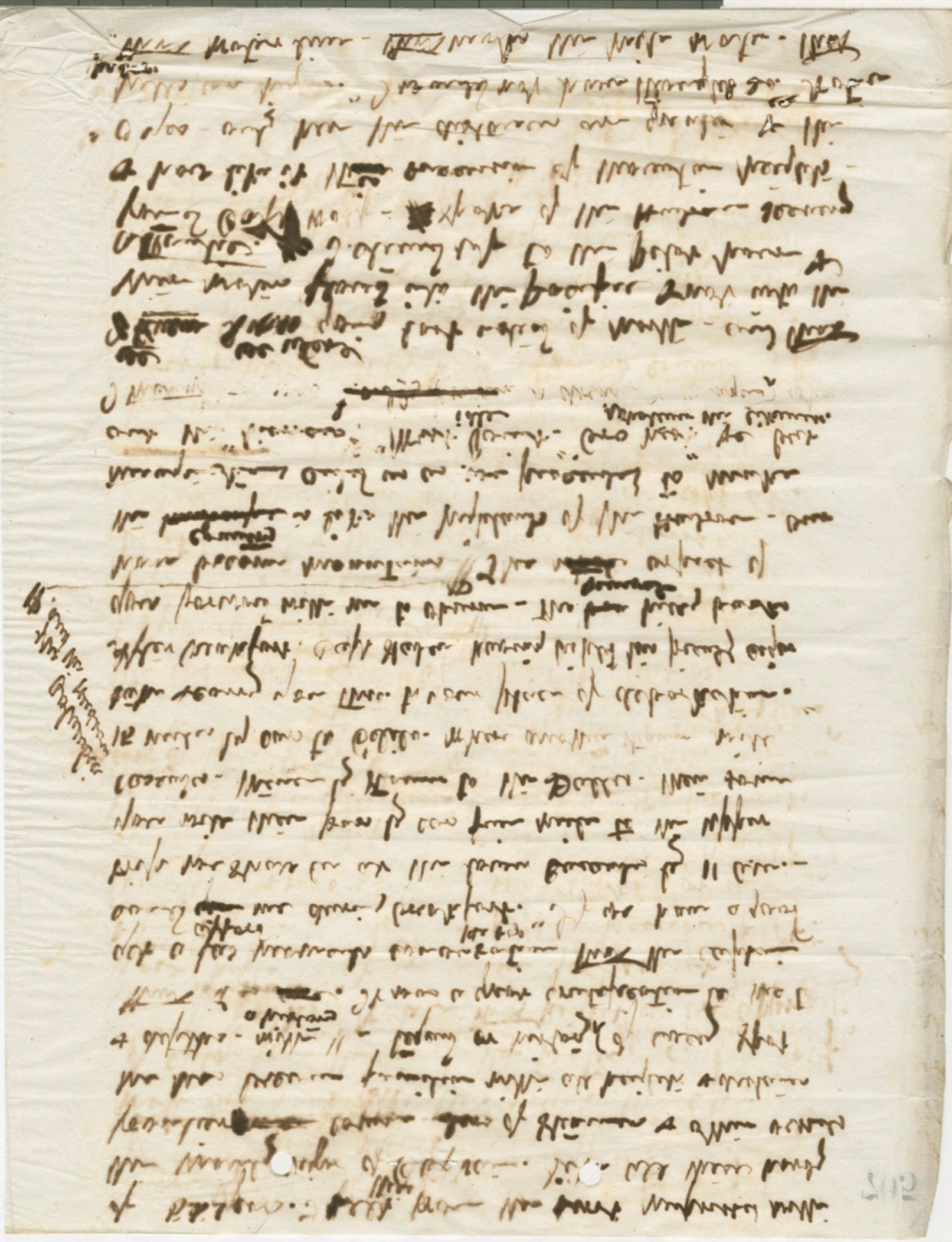
The Captain of the steamer was to sit at his left hand as he takes his seat facing forward at the lower end of the table. Capt. Jas. Wolfe has slightly the accent of a German - but has in form, features & manner the appearance of an American (I mean one of the Anglo Saxon type who are recognizable from Maine to San Francisco) He has a deep manly voice - is stiff & tight, height with a face & frame hardened by exposure - a dark skin blue eye & hair quite black - apparently a man

of Bridges. I felt proud the boat supplied with the usually vigor of the Oregonian. Like all these hardy pioneers the Columbia has been in possession with all heights & distances & depths. with a legend or history of every spot that has a history. It was a great anticipation to me. I got a few moments conversation with the captain and after breakfast. "If we have a good trip we shall be at the lower Cascades by 11 A.M. – you will then pass by cars from there to the upper Cascades. Thence by steamer to the Dalles. Then some 15 miles by cars to Celilo. where another steamer will take you on thence to your place of debarkation." After breakfast. Capt Slater having finished his pleasant cigar goes forward with me to observe – The low hilly banks have become mountains. The general aspect of the country is like the highlands of the Hudson – our meanderings ended as we proceeded to make out the "Palisades", "West Point", "Cro Nest" &c but idle attempt to delineate the likeness.

We were going East instead of North – and that the waters flowed into the Pacific not into the Atlantic. I attempted to the pilot house & found Capt Wood – spoke of the Hudson scenery & how like it the succession of mountain heights – "Yes only here the distances are greater & the heights can be." I would not have thought so. Notice the water line – marks the mile water – that

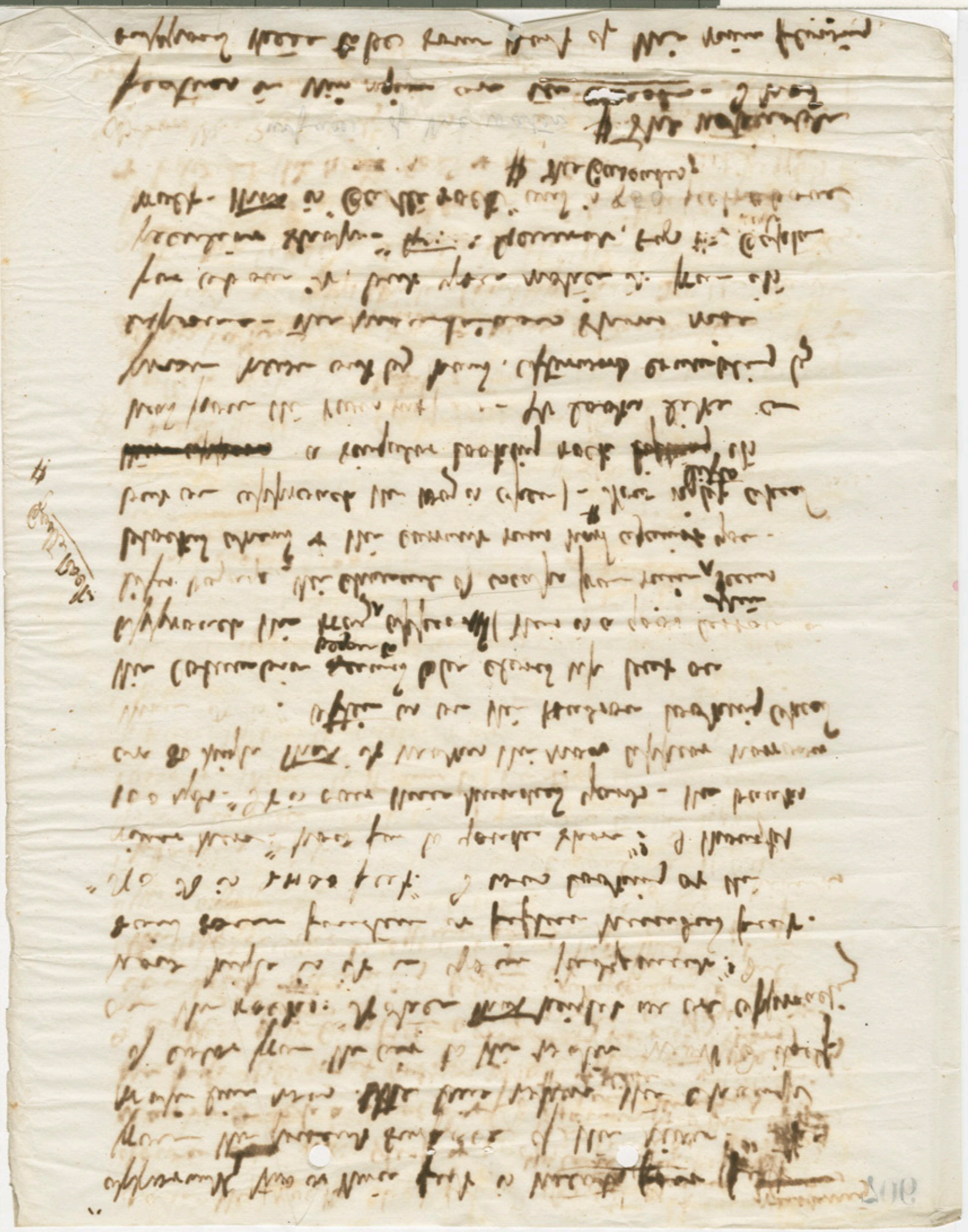
Pilot house

the



"apparently two or three feet is necessary for the
from the present surface of the river." The
water line was the line between the change
of color from the air to the water
on the rocks. "At what height we are approaching
how high is it in your judgement?"
I saw some fourteen or fifteen hundred feet.
"No it is 2400 feet." I was looking at the
river here "How far to yonder shore"? I thought
100 yds. "It is over three hundred yards - the banks
are so high that it makes the river appear narrow
. Often as on the Hudson looking down
the Columbia seems to be closed up but on
approach the way opens. (This is a good harbor in
high water. The channel of escape from ruin seems
blocked ahead & the current runs hard against you -
but on approach the way is open) - Now right ahead
~~the appears~~ a singular looking rock lifts its
head from the river. - It looks like a
person hewn out by hand. Afterwards crumbling by
exposure - The mountainous shores rise
far above it, but you notice it from its
peculiar shape." Gen. General says the Captain
said - "This is Castle rock" and is 850 feet above
the Cascades,
surface of the water. The noticeable
features in this region are the Cascades - I had
supposed these to be some part of the river flowing

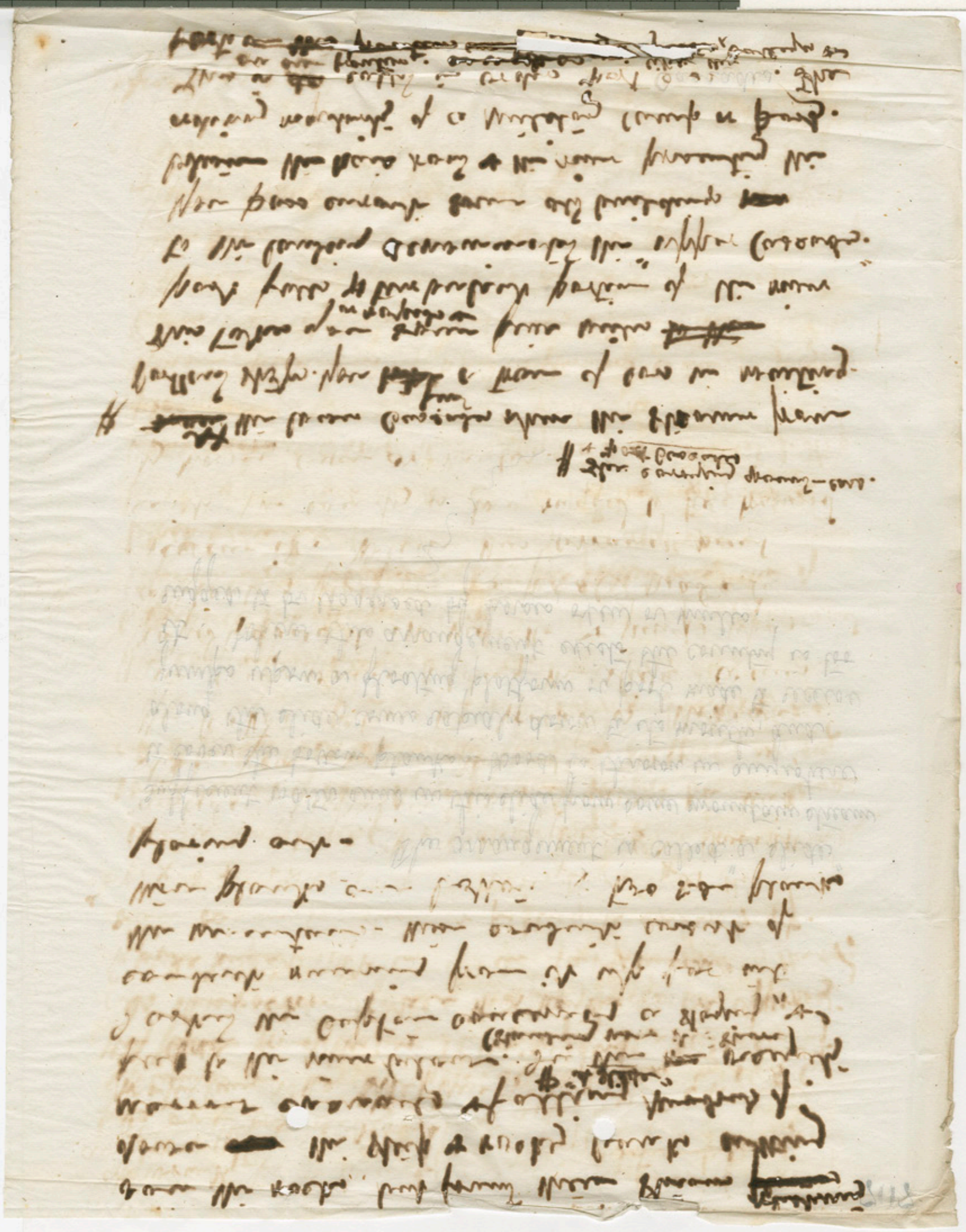
Castle Rock



down the rocks, but found there stream flowing down — the steep & rocky banks cutting narrow canyons & falling hundreds of feet to the river below. At the "slide" (standing near it shown) I asked the Captain opposite a staging & conduit running from it up far into the mountains. This conduit consist of three planks — bottom, two side planks placing out. The arrangement is called "a slide" sufficient water runs in this slide from some mountain stream to cover the bottom planks. Wood is thrown in anywhere along the slide, comes rapidly down to its mouth, and jumps upon a floating platform or pool made to receive it. Where this arrangement exists the country is too rugged to be traversed by horses, oxen or mules.

‖ Flat carrying freight-cars. ‖ Cascades

‖ ~~[illegible]~~ This is Lower Cascades where the steamer from Portland stops. You ~~[illegible]~~ find a train of cars in waiting. This takes you seven miles ~~[illegible]~~ past falls or rapids ~~[illegible]~~ turbulent portion of the river to the landing denominated the "upper Cascades." You pass around some old buildings ~~[illegible]~~ between the main road & the river presenting the ordinary appearance of a military camp or post. This is ~~the~~ called in order, Fort Cascades. The ~~[illegible]~~ on the frontier. ~~[illegible]~~ like the ~~[illegible]~~ perhaps the



and ammunition on our frontiers ~~have been~~ ~~for~~ over 50 only in name — Notice however in two of Hen. Leslie's orders in 1856 the place is denominated simply The Cascades — as these orders give a brief & suggestive history I will insert them. Yrs. &c. Adjt. of the Army

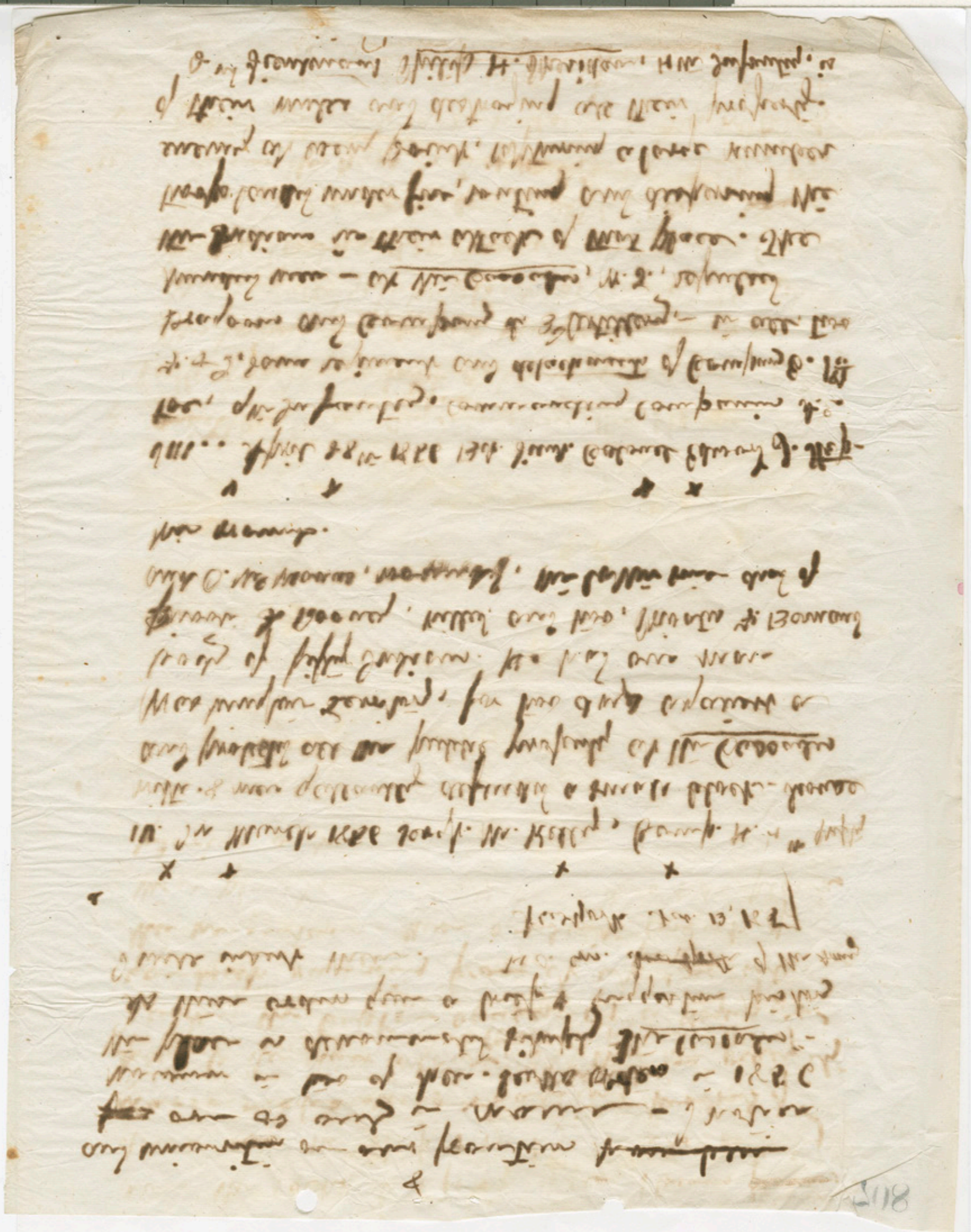
Newyork Feb. 13, 1857

x x x x

IV. In March 1836 Sergt. M. Kelly, Comp. H. 4th Infty with 8 men gallantly defended a small block-house and protected all the public property at the Cascades Washington Territory, for two days against a body of fifty Indians. He had one man killed & Cooney, killed, and two, Privates J. Bernard and O. McPeaks, wounded. He bailed some dead of his wounds.

x x x x

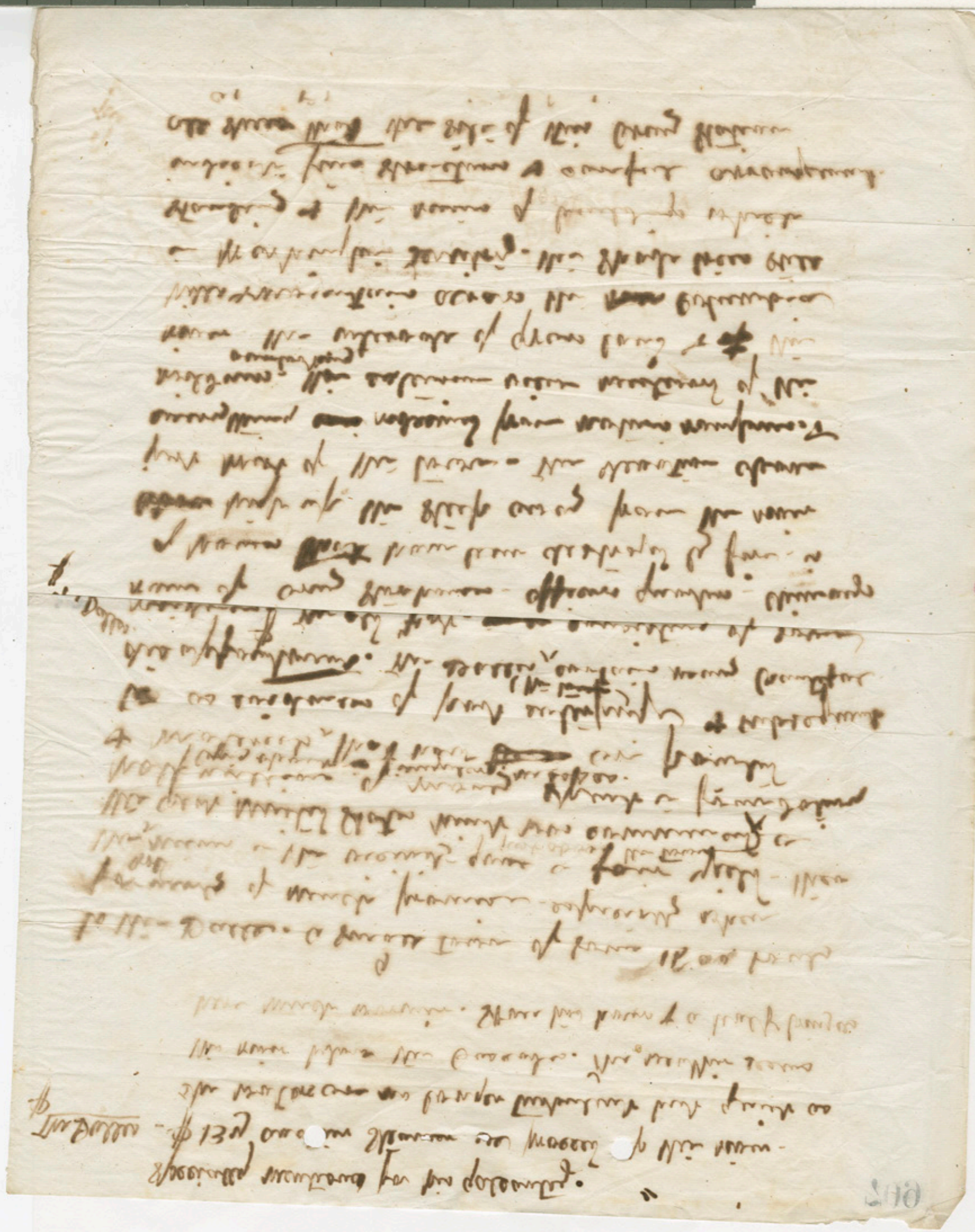
VIII. April 28th 1856 1st Lieut. Colonel Edward J. Steptoe, 9th Infantry, commanding Companies A. F. & I, same regiment and detachments of Company E. 1st Dragoons and Company A. 3d Artillery — in all, two hundred men — at the Cascades, W. T., repulsed the Indians in their attack of that place. The troops landed under fire, routing and dispersing the enemy at every point, killing a large number of their males and destroying all their property. 2nd Lieutenant Philip H. Sheridan, 4th Infantry, is



specially mentioned for his galantry.

The Dalles — By another Steamer we proceed up the river — the waters are no longer turbulent but quiet as the river below the Cascades. The weather seems here much warmer. Stone houses & a few hedges

to the Dalles. a small town of some 1500 souls possessing of much promise — especially when the great United States Mint has commenced a half million of money spent in foundations & machinery, that has been on paper as evidences of past enterprise & subsequent disappointment. The Dalles contains many tasteful residences & the ruins of not a few of the mansions of some of the first Steamboat officers quarters. Chimneys of houses that have been destroyed by fire — is high up the steep away from the river just west of the town. The elevation above everything around adds from natural romantic wildness. The extensive view westward of the river overlooking the interwoven of grass land & the Cascade mountains across the Columbia in Washington Territory. The shade trees still standing & the ruins of buildings which indicate fine structures & comfort arrangement all show that the site of this Army Station



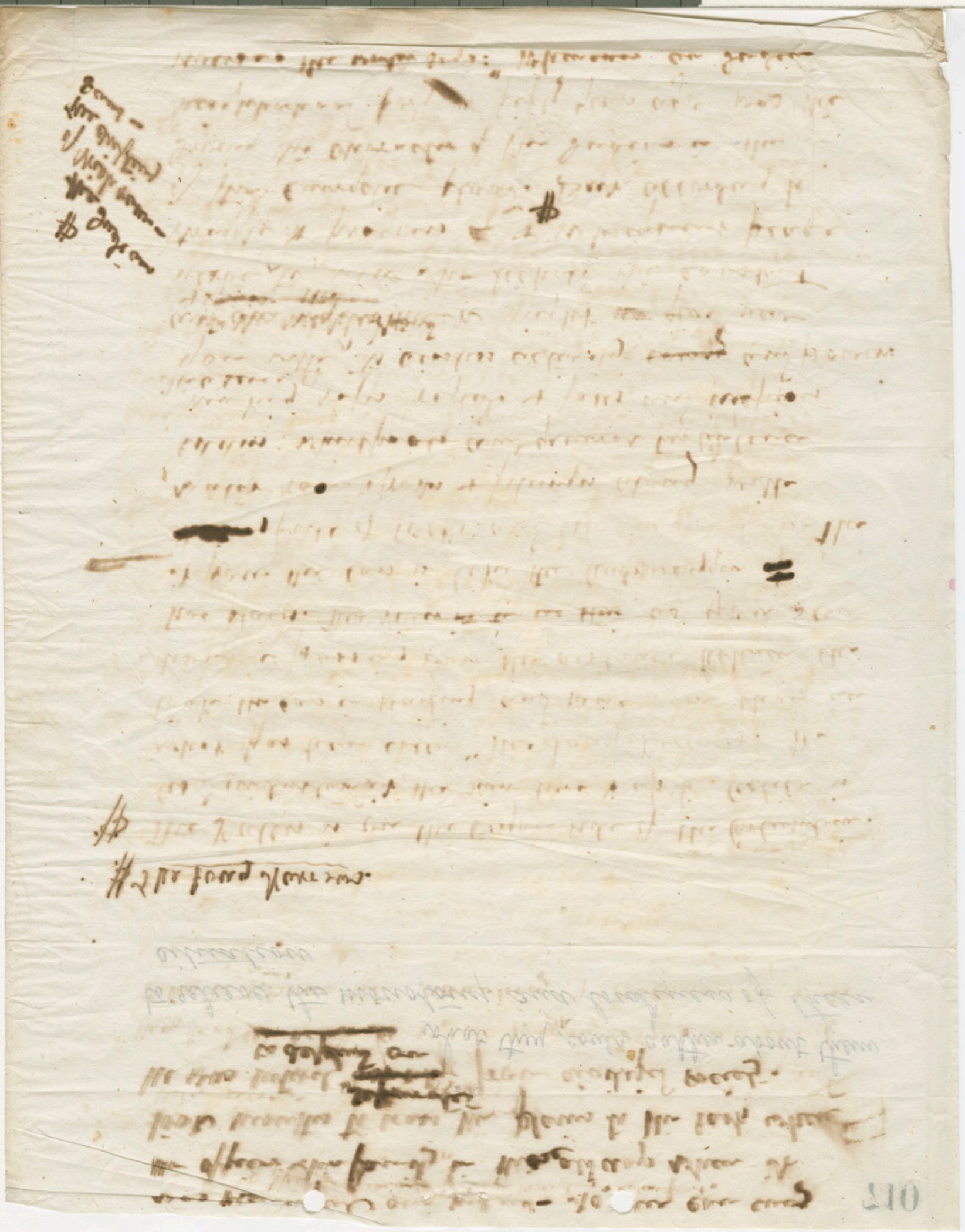
[illegible] the family [illegible] always when it took months to cross the plains to the fort where he was [illegible] to depend on [illegible] civilized society.

what they could gather about them to relieve the monotony and loneliness of their situation

The Long Narrows.

[illegible]

[illegible] the Indian [illegible] the Indians [illegible] peace [illegible] according to [illegible] the character of the Indians in the neighborhood [illegible] years ago was the [illegible] the water boys: whenever an Indian



of this same faith

as said to have

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¶ The River Indians at the Rapids – giving

¶ These river Indians are still very much attached to their fishing grounds; & when lately here the Surveying party were about to begin the survey of the rapids with a view of improving navigation – the Indians vehemently protested – They feared it would eventuate in the loss to them of these waters, so abundant in fish – Giving though the Editor here, a characteristic solution of these votes a wonderfully accurate description of these Indians & their mode of gaining their subsistence – ~~[illegible]~~ These poor people have very other but wonderfully the same character.

He says:

¶ The Columbia above Celilo

¶ There is little change in the look of the country after leaving Celilo till you reach Umatilla. The woods have disappeared. The country is rolling "rolling". It seems like immense heaps of sand rounded off by winds & gullied out by water and then covered with sufficient soil to produce grass. At this season the grass has a dried up, fall look and you wonder how the cattle can find enough to eat in such good condition as you find them. Occasionally we approach one of the different reputes in the Columbia. Capt. Stump a middle aged dark eyed full built, resolute man now master of the steamer takes his place at the wheel. He dies at the roughest part of the boiling & foaming water. The vessel turns to the right and left at just the right point. You hold your breath in suspense or fancies into the Capt's face for assurance. How memory repeats! I have never! The dangerous point is passed. The steam steadiness of the

Captains face disappears as he assumes his seat on deck to tell you stories of rough times before the mast which seem so well remote. What necessary it is to have the right man in the right place — ~~[illegible]~~ ~~perhaps necessary to the old Stoker~~ a Grant, Sherman or Thomas to fight a battle — a Capt. Cincinnatus (who jumped his farm with a steamer on the Stalley) or a Capt. Sherry who handles his vessel in a boiling roaring whirling flood as easily as a Indian steers his canoe in smooth water." (On board) have made the acquaintance of two important persons — a British judge & Representative Mr. Da Dow. The judge is a young man, to have been Lord Chancellor in Scotch Cambrian by the way of Walla Walla — & the other is the successor of Mr. Scottitta in Congress, the Hon. Mr. Da Dow. I was much entertained by these acquaintances — the judge, a young man, is a type of English conservatism — as true to his class as was Lord Clarendon in the time of Chas. 1st. Anti republican, Anti democratic, Anti liberal, loyal all through. A living man with all those old characteristics, the epitome of courtesy, constituency & aristocracy, frankly opposed to popular rights —

Macaulay

I enjoyed this brief pithy utterance more than I do the rantings of McCarthy. He is a true, old democratic congressman in his direct antipathy of the English judge. He is fleshy, of large build, with a face that speaks for itself. He

notices with some show of alarm as we are approaching with him, rounding a little to his leeward. He says to me aside does we do a dozen belong to the House of Representatives? It not that exactly. Parliament? No, I do know but nothing heard talk in Congress, but it pretty generally understood with me quite at length con-
cerning his duties. He has good to make his fellow citizens speeches theoretically but does not think he will press them (his opinions) when he gets into his seat in the House. He will steadily keep steadily in his place and not fail to vote the good old democratic ticket. They heard warmed towards him (founding in his simply generous style) as he pressed me to visit him at his home some fifty or sixty miles from Umatilla - from which he walks thirty miles (leaving wife behind) to the railroad station. Umatilla has been disappearing - the sand drifts like snow in the streets of the town. Its importance to supply the interior has been diminished by the Pacific R.R. It seems now hardly larger than the ordinary frontier trading post with its stores, hotel, a post office & a few houses. There are signs of a larger population, when the census gives the enumeration of nearly 3000 people. It will be seven times, of course, before it will reach this figure again. Every town I have visited has had at some time a touch of "the running fever". Umatilla doubtless had it. The Chinamen in their calm indefatigable style are distributing themselves along this part of the Columbia even now. And you will see them digging in the sand along the banks of the river.

Umatilla

Shrimp soup this afternoon, clear, two & three dollars a piece in gold dust by their peculiar. Too slow for the gambler, but the Chinaman is satisfied with the gleanings. And possibly he is to be on gleaning here & elsewhere with Ruth-like fidelity & steadiness, and he may grow the larger inheritance - the heavenly birthright. by his patient economy & self-denial.

I will write again - you will hear from me.

Yours truly

O. H. Howard