

BELLE VUE SHEEP FARM CORRESPONDENCE 1853-1857

Fort Victoria
27th December 1853

Archibald Barclay Esq.
Sir

...I am in consequence of the Governor and the Committee's instructions of 16th Sept., engaged in forming a partial[?] settlement on San Juan, one of the Aro Islands, on account of the Fur Trade. I proceeded thither on the 15th Ins^t. with a deck load of sheep, in the Beaver, which were all safely landed the same evening. The following day the "Otter" arrived with another deck load of sheep, and I propose further to increase the flock to about 1300 breeding ewes.

I commenced the buildings on the banks of a rivulet in the centre of a dry elevated sheep run containing about 1500 acres of clear prairie land, besides a large extent of brush land, which will afford a good deal of feed. This land yields excellent grass and will support from 2000 to 3000 head of sheep. I have placed Mr Charles Griffin temporarily in charge of that establishment. I shall take measures to occupy Lopez Island, by opening a small farm, which I can probably do at a small expense, by employing persons to work it for a half share of the profits...

James Douglas

Victoria
5th July 1856

Chas. Jn. Griffin Esq.
Dear Sir

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the 3rd Inst. The tools forwarded for repair have been completed and are now returned by the canoe, with the articles noted in your Requisition, as your will observe by the Invoice herewith.

I have settled with Murdoch McLeod, and he is to receive wages at the rate of £35 per annum from the 1st day of August 1856.

The Indian boys have received supplies on their respective accounts, as per statement forwarded for your information.

Those supplies are charged to San Juan in the Sale Shop Books, and you will in turn, bring them against the individual Indian accounts.

By way of reinforcing your numbers preparatory to the lambing season, I now send you Alexander McDonald D. who is engaged for the term of 12 months, as Shepherd & Labourer. I have sent out for John Bull who is ~~living~~ supposed to be living somewhere about the Saw Mill and he will also proceed to San Juan, if he arrives in time.

I am glad to observe that you are making arrangements to part the ewes into flocks of 600 each; that is even too large a number to remain together, careful breeders generally making 500 the limit of their ewe flocks. In the lambing season, care must be taken to part the young lambs that have come during the night every morning from the flock, and to keep them apart until they are strong enough to range for themselves; shear each flock of ewes, within the lambing season, before then subdivided into two flocks each, so that you will require an additional number of hands to look after them, but the extra expense will be largely repaid by the increased number of lambs reared. The rams require much care and attention. The disease you describe as prevalent among those at San Juan is purely the effect of hardship and privation; if well fed and kept dry, the scab will soon disappear from among them; they should now receive a feed of oats daily, until they have perfectly recovered, and be well rubbed with a decoction of tobacco juice. I have spoken to McLeod about these matters; as a good shepherd ought to be well acquainted with them. I hope the wheat crops will turn out as productive as you at present anticipate, and that you will have a good large extent of new land broken up and laid down to Pease and Oats.

I am anxious to see McLeods Prairie and the other plains discovered on the interior of the Island. As the weather improves 8 or 10 Indians may be sent to open roads from the Establishment to those Plains and I will probably devote a few days to visiting them in the spring. We have no late news from England, neither have we lately heard from Nisqually.

With best wishes I remain
My dear sir
Yours truly
James Douglas

Victoria V.I.
31st March 1856

Chas. Jn. Griffin Esq^{re}
Dear Sir

I have perused with satisfaction your letter of 29th inst., and have sent your Requisition to the Store to be completed in all respects as means permit. The supplies for the Indian Boys will also be made up and charged to San Juan. The whole will be forwarded in course of tomorrow by steamer Otter. Faits[?] will also be sent by that conveyance and Ferron if we can prevail upon him to return.

I have duly weighted your remarks in regards to providing Servants with food for their families, and admit their force, but there are reasons equally cogent against the practice. At an inland Post supported on the resources of the country the expense is trifling, but at this place where we have to import Provisions at a very serious expense, the business would not repay the cost. A man like Ferron might easily salt 3 or 4 barrels of salmon at San Juan in the proper season, and cultivate a patch of potatoes, for the support of his family, and every facility and assistance should be given him in breaking up the land, and you might also furnish him with barrels for the salmon he may cure. By that means he might keep his family in comfort. I will talk the matter over with him quietly & endeavor to prevail upon him to return to you.

with best wishes
Yours very truly
James Douglas

1st April

I have engaged Napoleon Dease[?] for two years beginning with the 1st June 1856 at £35 per annum. Ferran[?] declines receiving his agreement at £25 per annum.

James Douglas

Douglas to Griffin 11/12/1856

The weather has been so far pleasant & favourable for stock farming and agricultural pursuits. It is impossible as yet to foresee, what may be the character of the winter, but you are so well provided with fodder this year, that with careful management the storms of winter may do their worst without inflicting much injury. I would however intreat you to bear in mind that every mouthful of the straw you have on hand may be needed before spring, as the seasons are occasionally much more severe than any we have experienced. A barn of 70 or 80 feet will certainly be required, and I would recommend your getting the wood squared and hauled and as opportunities offer and I will serve you aid from this place to get it created, and also a few Indians to make shingles on the spot for roofing it.

John Work to Griffin 2/15/1859

Your favor of 12th inst. is received the supplies you require are sent as per accompanying account. Your plough is being repaired by the blacksmith and a new iron plough besides is sent which it is hoped will enable you to get on with your farming operations. It would be very advisable to get as much crop in the ground as you possibly can both grain and green crops so that you may have abundance offered for your stock ensuing winter, if you cannot procure natural grass in your swamps for hay, you might obtain this very necessary article by sowing a quantity of oats and having it cut when green, and cured, it would make good hay and not very expensive should the soil be such that the oats would grow pretty rank...

W. F. Tolmie to Griffin 8/30/1859

...I have read with much interest the remarks about the sheep at Bellevue contained in your letter. You cannot, I fear, be relieved of the 400 cull lambs you desire to dispose of. If they be, as you state, in "splendid condition", why not endeavour to force their sale, if even at a small reduction of price as you will lose some of them, should the winter be severe. We have sold here some small slots of cull lambs the --? at 8 ½ c? live weight, averaging 5⁶³ and the second, ten days later, the lambs being still unpeaned? at 5⁶⁴.

I am glad to learn that you obtain as much as nine or ten dollars for fat ewes – How many have you sold at this rate since the 1st August, and how many in all? Please advise us of the number of sheep you may sell from here to --?, stating prices.

In the sixth paragraph of your letter occurs the following passage "With reference to the price of our sheep, you --? that it is much better to sell them alive at 8 ½ c? I can sell any number at 8⁰⁰ a head which is more than I could get, if I sold them at your figure."

Now on reference to my official letter to you of the 29th inst. I found no such remarks as shall above mentioned. My reason for suggesting your selling by live weight was simply this that M^r Warbass, sutler to the U. S. Troops on San Juan told me here, soon after my last visit to Bellevue, that he was purchasing from you at 8⁰⁰ each the dry fat ewes you told me were safe for an overage of 61 # each – I am glad to learn by your last that you obtain better prices for them now.

A M^r Barthrop of Port Townsend was yesterday informed by letter in reply to his enquiry that he could have 200 ewes from your for from 7 to 8 dollars each. Should he apply cash in hand for such sheep, you will of course --? for him, according to these prices, reserving the 9⁰⁰ and 10⁰⁰ sheep for your present customers.

If you had advised me earlier as to how your are selling I would have been better prepared to have answered M^r Barthrop's letter.

P.S. Do not sell any of your rams till further advice, but let me know, meantime, should application be made for rams.

W. F. Tolmie to Griffin 2/13/1860

...I have agreed to let the Frenchmen have 200 cross bred Southdown ewe lambs for five dollars each to be taken out of your flock, after you have first of all had out 100 of the best.

After you have selected one hundred of the purest bred and largest Southdown lambs, Mr Eckstein's are to be got by alternate selections on your part, and his. He of course desiring the best – and you the worst in the flock, provided that you do not give any sickly ones, and that you pick from the X bred Downs.

It has also been agreed that Mr Eckstein has the option of getting from you, instead of four ewe lambs, four of your inferior, or cull ram lambs – Should he prefer taking better ones, charge for them from Ten to Twenty dollars each.

Mr Eckstein has decided on taking another hundred ewe lambs with the understanding that he may have two inferior ram lambs in place of ten ewe lambs.

P.S. On presentation of this let Mr Eckstein have the lambs as above directed – he has paid in full – should your cross bred Downs not hold out, complete with whitefaced lambs.

A. G. Dallas to Griffin 9/11/1860

Upon reference to our books I find that the expenses of your establishment for last year amounted to about ₦1,800 exclusive of your own emoluments. To meet the expenditures of the current year, you have an increase of only about 550 lambs, & a few foals and calves of little value. I need not therefore point out to you the necessity of some reduction in your expenditures. The main items are, wages, supplies from Victoria, & expenses of transport to San Juan. I must leave it to yourself to make such retrenchments as your probably can, but I would suggest that you incur the expenses of sending a canoe to Victoria only when absolutely necessary.

Victoria V.I.
12th September 1860

Thomas Fraser Esq.
Secretary
Hudson's Bay House
London

Sir

Having lately paid a visit to the island of San Juan, I beg to call the attention of the Board to the present state & prospects of our farming operations upon that island.

The American detachment, still under the command of Captain Pickett, is stationed close to our buildings, where they are housing themselves in a permanent way. They give us no trouble, & Captain Pickett seems anxious to disavow any anti-English feeling. Our own troops, to the number of about eighty, are encamped at a distance of fifteen miles, & they are also housing themselves permanently. The whole island is overrun by squatters & whiskey sellers. Our sheep & other animals are consequently much disturbed, & excluded from several of their former runs altogether, & the Indians & our own people much demoralized. In fact, upon my arrival there on Sunday afternoon, every man we had was in a state of drunkenness & Mr Griffin driven to his wits end. I mention this as one of the great difficulties we have to contend against at all our outposts, viz. the demoralization through drink & contact with strangers, of our people & of the Indians, whose labour is thus lost to us.

The expenditure upon the farm outfit 1859 amounted to about L 1,800. There was an apparent profit of £800 resulting entirely from sales of stock. The latter now amount to about 2,000 sheep, including this year's lambs (about 550). There are also a few cattle & horses not worth much. It will thus be seen that we have little more than an increase of 550 lambs to meet the expenditures of the current year. These lambs can not be valued over \$4 to \$5 per head. I am urging upon M^r Griffin the necessity of reducing his expenditures, but with increased rates of wages, & extra watching required, this is no easy matter to effect. A heavy item is the cost of transport & communication to & from San Juan. The above expenditure is inclusive of M^r Griffin's emoluments, and other indirect charges.

At the close of Outfit 1858 the debt against the farm amounted to £6633 exclusive of interest, M^r Griffin's emoluments, charges of management at Victoria, & other indirect expenditures. A total & final sale of our stock would do no more than cover M^r Griffin's emoluments & other indirect charges, since the establishment of the farm, leaving the above sum of £6,633 with interest to be provided for. M^r Douglas' opinion is that we have a claim upon the Crown, on the ground that the farm was established, & the island occupied solely to secure its possession to the British Crown against the Americans. This would be a preferable mode of settlement for us than a grant of a part or even of the whole island. Such a grant is not likely to be made, & would cause a great outcry on the part of the public. Its value to us would be small. All public lands in both colonies are to be sold at a dollar an acre. The purchasers[?] are few, & I see no prospect of our being able from a sale of the island, admitting it were ours, to cover our past outlay. I have no hesitation in advising an immediate settlement of the matter by a direct payment from Government being urged as opportunity may arise.

A. G. Dallas

The exact amount of sheep is 2110 including this years lambs 676 not 500 as above. A.
G. D.

W. F. Tolmie to Thomas Frazer, Secretary 14 May 1864

...The Company's farm of "Belle Vue" on San Juan Island having long ceased to be of use or profit to the concern, we have this spring leased it at a nominal rent for three years to the person previously in charge there, Robert Firth, an old and trustworthy servant of the Company. It is provided in the lease that Firth is to give up possession at any time, on condition that an allowance, not to exceed a small, stated sum, be made for any standing crops on the place, when required again by the Company. We have left in Firth's charge nearly two hundred breeding ewes, which he is to have on shares for three years, the terms being, that he pays all expenses, and returns the original number at the end of the term of years, on condition of having for himself half the annual wool crop, and increase of the flock. The advantage of this arrangement is that the Company without further outlay, or risk, save that of the sheep on these shares with Firth, retain their rights on the Island of San Juan. The livestock removed from "Bellevue" will later in the season, when the mountain roads improve, be sent with our surplus horned cattle from this, to Thompson's River, British Columbia, where they can be advantageously disposed of....

Victoria V.I. British Columbia
11th November 1867

William G. Smith, Esquire
Secretary

Sir

1.

We have now the honor of addressing you on the subject of the losses sustained by the Company at the Island of San Juan since its occupation by use, through damage by State or Federal Acts.

2.

Until the occupation of San Juan Island by the Military Forces of the United States in 1859, the whole island was in the possession of the Hudson's Bay Company and was pastured by their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, horses, and pigs. The Company also carried on farming operations there, having had in different localities farm buildings, inclosed fields, sheep stations a wharf and fisheries, particulars of several of which as they existed in 1859 is given below.

3.

The arrival of the Military, and of numerous American settlers following in their train, made it impracticable for the Company to continue in the operation for their live stock was dispossessed and deprived of their usual range. The Military and those who supplied them, imported Beef Cattle which were herded on the open lands, and the settlers squatted upon the lands inclosed and unenclosed, taking possession thereof and of the buildings. These aggressions may be considered as consequent on the act of the Federal Government in placing troops on the Island etc and testimony in proof of the same can, if needed, we believe obtained.

4.

Thus, interfered with the Company operations had to be gradually discontinued, and their livestock reduced and ultimately withdrawn.

5.

In 1858 & 59 the Company owned, and occupied the following amongst other buildings and improvements in the localities now known as

1st Hubbs Point viz A Fishing Station having thereupon a large log building, and strong Cattle Pens for shipping stock.

2nd Main Station or "Bellevue Farm"

Consisting of several squared log dwelling houses, a Granary, large Barn, and enclosed fields, &c. The United States Military Post is built on part of this Station. A portion of it is leased to an old employé of the Company,

named Robert Firth, for a minimal rent, in order to retain possession.

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 3 rd “Frasers Farm” viz | Sheep Station, Pens, &c. |
| 4 th “Dwyer do” “ | Log dwelling House, Garden and Pens, enclosed fields. |
| 5 th “Blakes do” “ | Log House and Pens |
| 6 th “Longacres do” “ | Two Log Houses “ do. |
| 7 th “Chandlers Prairie” “ | Dwelling house “ do. |
| 8 th “New Station” “ | Do. “ do. |
| 9 th “Limestone Station” “ | Sheep pens |
| 10 th “ John Bull do” | Dwelling house and sheep pen also a cultivated field. |

On the Main Station, Dwyer Farms, and Bulls Station land was cultivated by the Company, and the Stations as a whole gave complete command of all the pastures on the Island.

6.

In paragraph 4 of M^r Dallas’s letter of 20th February 1860 to M^r Secretary Fraser to which we would beg to draw particular attention, the balance of Account against the San Juan Establishment as on 31st May 1859, say for Outfits 1854 to 1858 inclusive – is stated at £6633.15/5 besides the least of many services of steamers &c rendered to the Island, but for which no charge has ever been made. We now beg to inclose an abstract Statement of the Account thus referred to, exhibiting apart from the Steamboat – and other service rendered as abovementioned, the Company’s Outlay in Establishing and stocking the Farms &c on the Island, after crediting proceeds or Returns therefrom each year, and to be regarded as expenses incurred by the Company, with the other uncharged items aforementioned up to that time, in retaining possession of San Juan Island, as a dependency of Vancouver Island. It amounts to £6633 “ 15 “ 5 exclusive of interest, which at 5% per annum come to £3920 “ 1 “ 20 making all a sum of £10553 “ 16 “ 7 as shown in the statements.

7.

The above includes a sum of £1450 13/” transferred in Outfit 1855 to the debit of the United States Government for that Outfit on account of loss sustained, as shown by the Accounts that year transmitted to London – with £870 “ 7 “ 10 Interest thereon at 5% per annum for the (12) twelve years from 1855 to 1867, being together £2321 “ 0 “ 10 and which we presume is still unpaid in London. In this connexion we beg to refer to Chief Trader Douglas’s letter of 28th September 1855 to the Secretary, on the subject of the losses inflicted on the Company by the unlawful proceedings on San Juan Island of

certain American citizens, residing in Washington Territory, and pretending to act under authority of its laws. The damages in consequences as claimed against the United States amounted to £2990 “ 13/ “ and were by M^r Douglas represented as a moderate estimated of the losses sustained. The details of the same were set forth in a Report and Statement from M^r Griffin the Company’s Officer in 1855 and till 1859 and subsequently in charge at San Juan.

We trust that the documents are to be found in the London Office, as we have not been able to find them here. Copy of M^r Douglas’s letter therein referred to is enclosed.

8.

This aggression which is clearly chargeable against the Territorial Government of Washington Territory is the first on record, although for some time prior to the year 1855, the Legislative Assembly of that Territory pretended to include the Aro Islands in the County of Whatcom, and San Juan is the principle of these. The next aggression recorded is the killing in June or July 1859 of a Boar Pig belonging to the Company at San Juan by a recently arrived Squatter there named Cutler, and this is also to be regarded as a consequence of the Territorial Act of claiming these Islands as United States Territory, although it was ostensibly the immediate cause of the Establishing of troops there by the U. S. General Harney.

9.

We also enclose an abstract Statement of Account for Outfit 1859 to 1864 inclusive, showing by amount realized from the Sale of Stock &c. after deducting Wages and Interest as shown in the Statement:

£4247.8.2
@ 5% per annum 1147.5.6
£5394.13.8

The Company have now no stock on any part of the Island. We have given the above mentioned Accounts in separate Statements, and have calculated the Interest in the particular manner, shown on the documents, as being the most desirable course in our ignorance of the present position of the case, as well as of the manner in which the Governor and Committee purpose dealing with it.

10.

The particulars of the Accounts in the two Statements will be found in the detailed Accounts for the several Outfits in London.

I have the honor to be &c &c &c
W. F. Tolmie