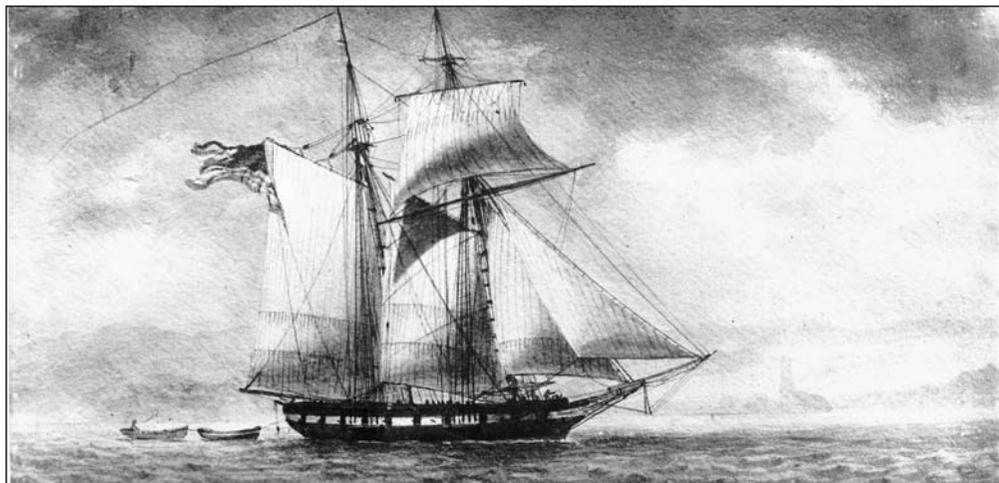


## “A Gallant Little Schooner”

### *The U.S. Schooner Shark and the Oregon Country, 1846*

ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1846, THE U.S. Schooner *Shark* reached the threshold of the Columbia River, its crew having spent the previous forty-seven days on a special mission upriver, visiting and gathering intelligence in the heart of the Oregon Country. The sojourn had thus far been a success, and despite the brief nature of the visit, the crew had gathered much information about the country and the disposition of its residents. The only remaining test for the *Shark*'s officers and crew was just within sight: their outward crossing of the Columbia's bar, one of the most treacherous of the world's navigational obstacles.<sup>1</sup> Days later, the vessel's young captain, Lt. Neil M. Howison, penned a private letter from the *Shark*'s anchorage in Baker Bay to Oregon's provisional governor George Abernethy, bidding the governor farewell and relating plans to cross the bar and return to the high seas that afternoon. "All I have to guard against being the effects of impatience," Howison observed candidly, "which might induce one to attempt getting out after much delay, with light or head winds or at an improper stage of the tide." On September 13, Howison wrote again to Abernethy — though he wrote not from sea but from the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver, more than 100 miles upstream from the river's mouth. "You have doubtless heard of the fate of the hapless Shark," he bemoaned, "swept to destruction by the overwhelming strength of the tide, for want of thorough acquaintance with which I did not make due allowance."<sup>2</sup>

By the time of its destruction in September 1846, the small but versatile schooner *Shark* had for more than two decades and throughout many of the world's major seas served vital American interests — from battling piracy



*A copy of artist Francois Roux's watercolor painting of the Shark on cruise in the Mediterranean Sea in the mid 1830s is one of the few extant images of the schooner. Among its many activities during this assignment, the Shark anchored near modern day Jaffa, Israel, and its officers accompanied several missionaries on a highly publicized visit to Christian shrines in Jerusalem.*

and the slave trade to protecting American maritime commerce. Arguably the quintessence of the antebellum American Navy, to understand the *Shark's* history is to understand the Navy's early history. The schooner's mission to the Oregon Country in 1846 brought to the Pacific Northwest both that legacy and the direct presence of the United States government, just when the region became what Howison later dubbed the "undisputed and purely American Territory of Oregon."<sup>3</sup> From the travails of its crew to the political maneuverings of its captain, and from the accounts of its tasks to the details of its wreck, an understanding of the *Shark* and its role in Pacific Northwest history is a crucial tool for grasping the spirit of the times in the Oregon Country during the decisive summer of 1846. This understanding is made even more poignant and opportune through the association with the *Shark* of two carronades discovered on the Oregon Coast in February 2008. More than a century and a half after the U.S. Schooner *Shark's* loss, recounting its experience provides an important voice to the region's narrative while inspiring continued research, interpretation, and public interest.

The experiences of the *Shark* prior to its arrival in the Oregon Country read much like a primer of nineteenth-century American naval history. Through assignments in Africa, the West Indies, the Mediterranean, and the Pacific, the schooner played an integral role in the U.S. Navy's post-1812 activities. Part of the reason for the *Shark's* extensive involvement was its

design. With the United States intent on thwarting the piracy that preyed on American commercial shipping in the Caribbean, by 1820 the Navy needed craft that could maneuver in and out of the innumerable reefs, inlets, and islands that provided pirates with safe harbor. The answer was the topsail schooner. The schooner's shallow draught allowed it to operate in much shallower water than larger ships, making it perfect for policing the Caribbean's many shoals and inlets. Its sail plan also provided greater mobility, speed, and maneuverability and allowed it to thrive in the Indies' coastal conditions as well as the Caribbean's open seas. The schooner's small size required fewer hands than the Navy's larger vessels as well as less funding for operations and repair — all considerations probably not lost on the fledgling Navy.<sup>4</sup>

In 1820, construction began on four new schooners designed by William Doughty — the *Alligator*, *Shark*, *Dolphin*, and *Porpoise*. Built for speed, their size was larger than many of the mercantile schooners but smaller in comparison to most of the Navy's other vessels — each was just 86 feet long with a beam of 24 feet nine inches, displaced 198 tons, and had a hold depth of ten feet three inches. Armament was a key feature of Doughty's schooners. His plans originally called for the *Shark* to carry an 18-pounder long gun on a pivot, with ten 6-pounder short guns at ports amidships, but this armament changed several times over the ensuing decades. The exact changes remain unclear. By the time it joined the Pacific Squadron, evidence indicates that two long 9-pounders had replaced the pivot gun, and eight 24-pounder carronades (short, smoothbore guns designed for short-range bombardment) replaced smaller carronades, which had, at some point earlier, replaced the 6-pounder short guns. Contemporary accounts from the *Oregon Spectator* and later remembrances from a crew member suggest that the 24-pounder carronades had been replaced with 32-pounder carronades by the time the *Shark* reached the Oregon Country.<sup>5</sup>

The schooner, with its masts raked slightly aft, cut an impressive and easily identifiable profile. It provided speed, but with costs. One cost was manpower — such a vessel required a crew of approximately seventy sailors to properly operate it. This was small in comparison to the Navy's larger vessels but sizeable when compared to mercantile schooners. Another cost of the extensive rig (masts, spars, and sails) and heavily laden foremast was the ship's inclination to lower its bow and dive under when pressed by the wind under full sail. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, the *Shark* and three other schooners designed by Doughty represented a lighter, swifter side of naval design. In the eyes of the Navy, such a schooner could deftly pursue and overtake the Caribbean's wildest pirate craft.<sup>6</sup>

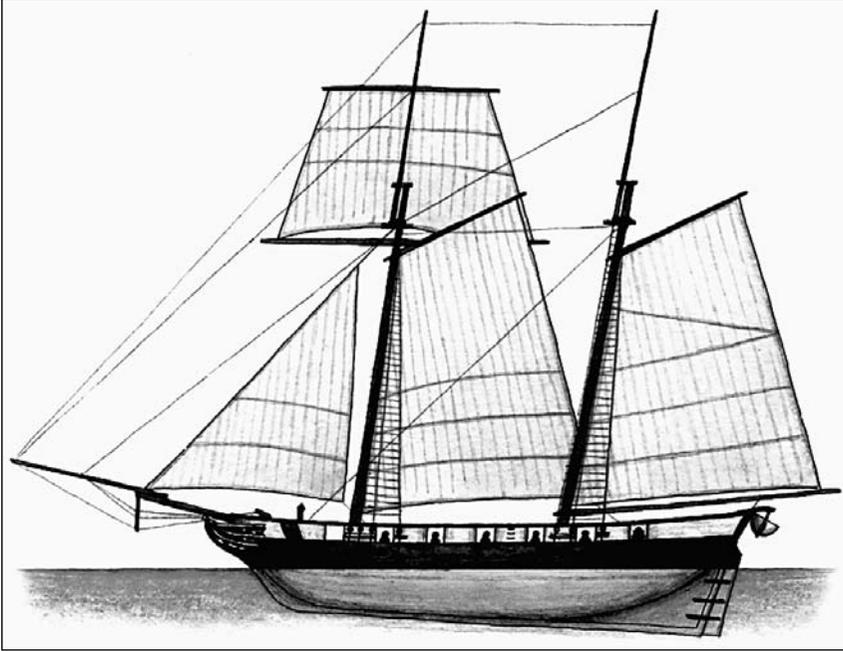
Despite the original plan for the *Shark* to battle the pirates of the Caribbean, its first assignment was to take on another vice: the slave trade. The United States Congress had banned the importation of slaves in 1808, but the business of slavery continued. By 1819, Congress had authorized U.S. Naval vessels to apprehend all American slave traders and help resettle captured slaves in Africa. On May 17, 1821, the *Shark* was launched at the Washington Navy Yard, and it soon began a 162-day cruise to the coast of Africa under the command of Lt. Matthew C. Perry (who later gained fame as the commodore who forced Japan to open its borders to American trade). On October 26, the *Shark* delivered Dr. Eli Ayres of the American Colonization Society to Sierra Leone. President James Monroe had tasked Ayres to locate and acquire territory for a colony of former slaves and free black families. The land Ayres acquired after his arrival on the *Shark* and a subsequent mission on the *Alligator* later became the nation of Liberia.<sup>7</sup>

After depositing Ayres, the *Shark* patrolled the area for American vessels involved in the slave trade. “The *Shark* boarded a great many Guineamen,” the *Boston Recorder* reported, “some of which she detained some time . . . but not an American was to be heard of, and it was pretty well ascertained that there are no American citizens at present engaged in the traffic.” The conditions on the boarded vessels — largely flying French and Portuguese flags — were frightening. “On board of a French vessel,” the *Niles’ Weekly Reporter* noted, “it was ascertained that the allowance to the miserable wretches . . . was a bottle of water and one ounce of rice per day!”<sup>8</sup> The following year, Perry and the *Shark* traveled to the Caribbean and participated in a bit of acquiring themselves. According to the *Niles Weekly Register*:

On the 25<sup>th</sup> [of March], possession was formally taken in the name of the United States of North America — the island called Thompson’s Island, and the harbor named Port Rogers, in honor of the secretary of the navy and president of the navy board, the American flag hoisted and a salute of 13 guns fired &c.<sup>9</sup>

The name Thompson’s Island has been largely lost, but the island acquired for the United States is recognizable by its modern name — Key West.

Later in 1822, pirates operating out of Havana briefly seized the American brig *Aurilla* in the Caribbean, robbing, beating, and raping many of its passengers. The *Shark* was the first vessel to encounter the *Aurilla* after that incident, and the crew forwarded the shocking news to the American public. As a result, Congress quickly appropriated funding for an expedition for the suppression of piracy, and the *Shark* joined that squadron and played a major role in its operations, escorting vessels and battling pirates. During the next eleven years, the *Shark* would patrol the Caribbean as part of the Navy’s



*This modern rendering illustrates, in profile, four of the Shark's most often used sails, including (from left to right) the headsail, the main topmast staysail, the lug foresail, and the mainsail. The Shark's sail plan provided the maneuverability and speed necessary to protect American maritime mercantile interests in a variety of locations.*

**DOUGHTY'S SAIL PLAN** expanded the standard Baltimore clipper design. Consistent with the traditional two masts and fore-and-aft sail plan (having sails on the masts running parallel to the keel rather than being square rigged with the sails on spars perpendicular to the keel), his design called for three headsails forward of the mast nearest the bow. Attached behind this mast — known as the foremast — was a boomless foresail, called a lug foresail. Above the foremast and attached to the fore-topmast, directly above this foresail, lay the main-topmast staysail, and above that a fore top-gallant that both provided additional power and speed when running before the wind. The sail plan aft (nearer the rear of the vessel) demonstrated a similar theme and variations. The large mainsail, attached to the mainmast, featured four lines of horizontal reef points. In case of a sudden foul turn in the weather, the crew could quickly gather up — or reef — the mainsail

to this diagonal point, thereby reducing the sail's size so that it could still be controlled when threatened by a squall. In addition, Doughty added a trapezoidal ringtail or studding sail that could be raised past the mainsail's after-edge for added speed when encountering lighter winds. Above the mainsail, Doughty set a gaff topsail that extended past the main-topmast on a gaff, or wooden spar. In addition to the fore and aft rig, several square sails shared the foremast, including a gigantic forecourse that dwarfed the mainsail, a fore topsail, and a fore topgallant. Each of these sails also possessed an additional sail set, known as studding sails, which would flank the square sails on small booms and help make the craft take advantage of favorable winds. Because of the difficulties that such a rig could provide a crew, the yards for these three square sails were rigged so that they could be easily brought down by halyards and even stowed on deck when necessary.

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SOURCES: Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), 326–30; and Donald J. Canney, *Sailing Warships of the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 177–82.

West Indies Squadron, with occasional assignments to deliver supplies and personnel to the coast of Africa.<sup>10</sup> Along with the schooner's policing and escorting duties, it also facilitated scientific research. In 1831, naturalist John James Audubon joined the *Shark* in St. Augustine, Florida, and accompanied the officers and crew for several weeks en route to New Orleans. While on the schooner, he observed snowy pelicans, cormorants, fish crows, young eagles, and herons; he and the *Shark*'s officers shot and collected several alligators "for the purpose of making experiment on them."<sup>11</sup> The forty-six year-old wildlife artist also lent his descriptive eye to the *Shark* itself:

The strict attention to duty on board even this small vessel of war afforded matter of surprise to me. Everything went on with the regularity of a chronometer: orders were given, answered to, and accomplished, before they ceased to vibrate on the ear. The neatness of the crew equalled the cleanliness of the white planks of the deck; the sails were in perfect condition, and built as the *Shark* was for swift sailing, on she went bowling from wave to wave. I thought that, while thus sailing, no feeling but that of pleasure could exist in our breasts. Alas! how fleeting are our enjoyments. When we were almost at the entrance of the river the wind changed, the sky became clouded, and before many minutes had elapsed the little bark was lying to, "like a duck," as her commander expressed himself. It blew a hurricane.<sup>12</sup>

Just two years later, the Navy directed the *Shark* to ply new, relatively hurricane-free waters. In 1833, the *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States* announced the reassignment of the *Shark* to the Navy's Mediterranean Squadron, patrolling to protect American mercantile interests. Four years later, the schooner, with ailing Commodore David Porter on board, sailed through the Hellespont to Constantinople — ostensibly in defiance of a treaty between Russia and Turkey that forbade the passage of vessels of war without permission. This action ignited an international incident and brought the *Shark* to worldwide prominence. The European and American press jumped on the story, with the British press claiming that the *Shark's* act was a demonstration on order of the U.S. government, intended to parade American disdain for the treaty. The *London Morning Herald* reported:

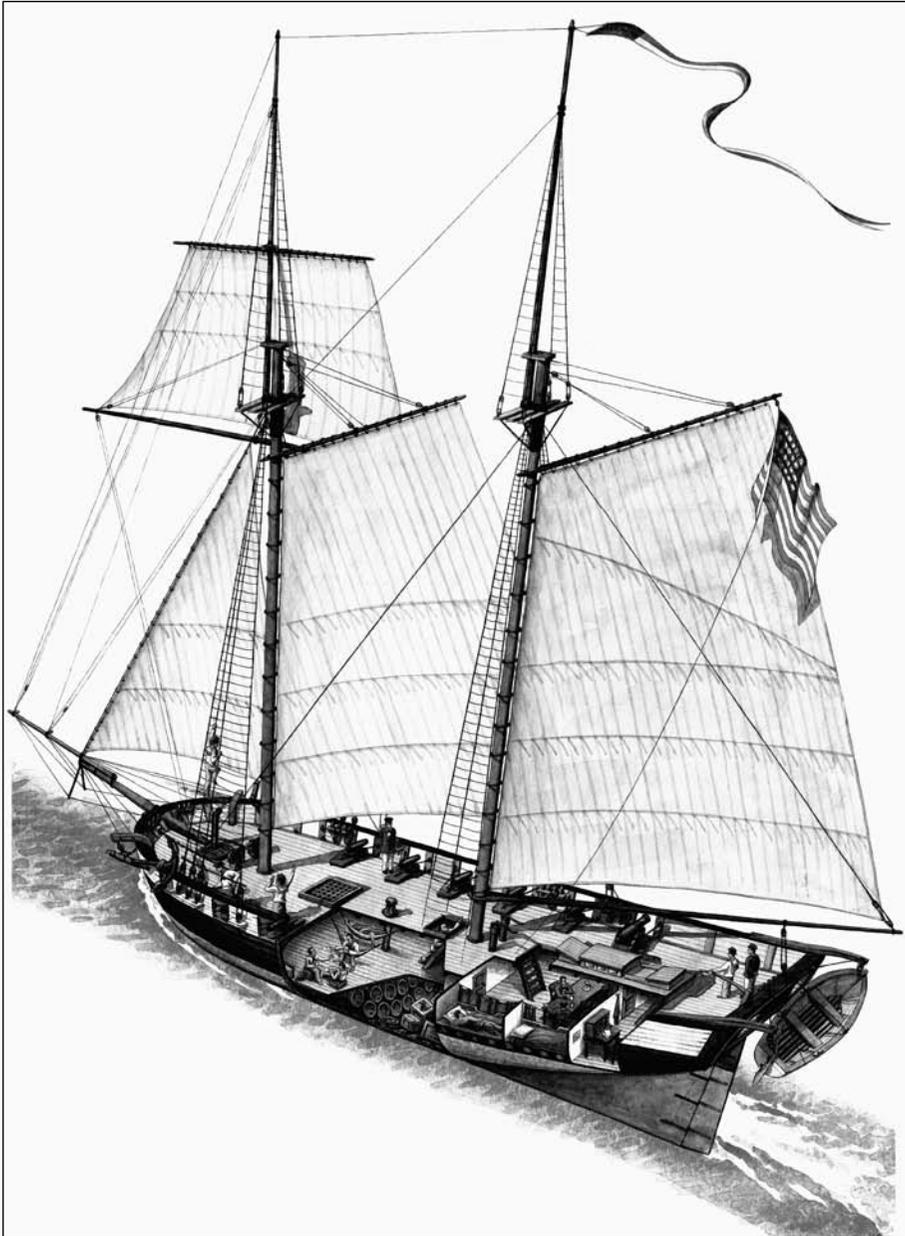
The famous, or rather infamous, treaty of Hunkiar Iskelessi has been set at naught, and that too by Americans, who, nobly despising the phantom dangers imagined to attend an infraction of it, have just brought up a vessel of war without as much as asking leave of the Porte. The *Shark*, a gallant little schooner, with all her guns grinning through the port-holes, (no unmasking, no nonsense) in defiance of the whole of the batteries of the Dardanelles, and of the hobgoblin menaces of the northern bugbear, to whom these batteries are made a protection, firmly and fearlessly passed the Hellespont and arrived here [Constantinople] on the 19<sup>th</sup> instant.<sup>13</sup>

Even in the 1800s, the media were known to overreact. Weeks later, on learning of the intense interest, the *Shark's* captain Lt. George F. Pearson clarified in a published letter that the commanding pasha had allowed the *Shark* to proceed as an exception to regular protocol. "It was in compliment to Commodore Porter altogether that they let us pass," explained Pearson, "and that only on account of his very bad health."<sup>14</sup>

The *Shark* returned to the United States in 1838 and underwent repairs for a reported tenth time. This soon caught the eye of critics, and a subsequent exposé in the *Southern Literary Messenger* exclaimed:

though the materials to build her in the first instance cost but \$14,000, and the labor \$9,000, she is charged, for this once repairing, \$18,000 for materials, and \$27,000 for labor! Three times as much for labor to *repair* as to build! And for the satisfaction of the Senate, it is gravely stated in a note, that she was "*(nearly rebuilt)*."<sup>15</sup>

In July of the following year, the schooner again went to sea, bound for the Pacific Ocean and the Navy's Pacific Squadron. Rather than doubling Cape Horn, Lt. Abraham Bigelow sailed the *Shark* through one of the inward passages known as the Strait of Magellan. That harrowing thirty-three-and-a-half day excursion, with gale-force winds and dire winter conditions, marked



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*Approximately seventy officers and crew worked and lived within the confines of the Shark's 86-foot length and 24-foot, 9-inch beam, resulting in extremely close quarters. To help alleviate overcrowding, sailors would have worked, eaten, and slept in different shifts — called watches — thereby reducing the number of hammocks, benches, and other facilities necessary at any one time, as shown in this modern rendering of the ship.*

the first time that a U.S. Naval vessel had passed through the strait from east to west. Bigelow's subsequent report was widely circulated and published, as was his praise for the schooner. "No vessel could be better calculated to pass through the strait than the Shark," Bigelow exclaimed, "with the exception of her being a dull sailer. This, however, is in a measure compensated by her great capacity to bear sail. I doubt if a large, or even moderate sized, *square-rigged vessel* could have made the passage, under similar circumstances, in double the time."<sup>16</sup> The *Shark* patrolled with the squadron in the Pacific Ocean, spending most of its time between the coasts of North and South America and the Sandwich Islands (today's Hawai'i). By the early 1840s, the U.S. Navy had become increasingly interested in the area, and the end of war between Chile and Peru helped increase the number of American merchant vessels in the Pacific. Communication and supply needs, as well as the possibility of conflict with Mexico and Great Britain, led the Navy's Pacific Squadron to primarily patrol the ocean's eastern waters.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the Oregon Country's remote location in the early 1840s, citizens of the United States and Great Britain were well exposed to reports from the region. "Oregon is the principal topic of inquiry and conversation throughout Europe and America," exclaimed the *Oregon Spectator* newspaper with typical sensational flair in 1846:

No political subject has involved and elicited so much public interest and discussion within the last twenty years, both in Europe and America, as the settlement of the Oregon question. . . . The public newspapers are literally filled with discussions on the Oregon question.<sup>18</sup>

The area known as the Oregon Country — bounded by Russian Alaska to the north, Mexican California to the south, the crest of the Rocky Mountains to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west — had been jointly occupied by the United States and Great Britain since 1818. In 1825, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) established its headquarters on the north bank of the Columbia River and named the place Fort Vancouver. This appellation strategically tied the location to British interests through the purposeful association with Capt. George Vancouver, the British navigator whose junior staff had earlier explored the area. The location itself, furthermore, defined the Columbia River as the HBC's preferred international boundary. The post thrived, serving as the headquarters and supply depot for the HBC's operations in its Columbia Department and in Hawai'i and also as the coastal maritime trading operation for the Pacific Coast. The HBC's chief factor, John McLoughlin, promulgated a *de facto* policy to preserve British interests north of the Columbia. While he provided credit and other support to an

increasing number of American immigrants, often without recompense, he also actively encouraged their settlement south of the river.<sup>19</sup>

By 1846, the confluence of several factors fractured this loosely brokered stasis, bringing the boundary issue to a critical head. A spirit of manifest destiny continued to rise in the United States. The new nationalistic refrain of “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” — calling for the annexation of the Oregon Country up to the boundary of Russian America — echoed from newspapers in 1846, building on the expansionist momentum that had driven voters to elect American president James K. Polk two years earlier. Newspapers reported that Polk was “inflexibly determined upon claiming the whole of Oregon.” An increasing number of American immigrants echoed Polk’s spirit in their journey along the Oregon Trail, and conflict with the HBC over control of the land soon resulted. According to the *Oregon Spectator*, the general opinion expressed in newspapers was “that if . . . no satisfactory compromise upon the subject of the northern boundary line of Oregon could be effected, war between the two nations would be the inevitable result.”<sup>20</sup>

British leaders were aware of such exhortations. Britain’s Prime Minister, the anti-mercantilist Sir Robert Peel, and his Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen, harbored no desire for war with the United States in Oregon over the Pacific Northwest but seemed confident in their ability to wage one successfully if provoked.<sup>21</sup> They had overwhelming naval supremacy, but the Royal Navy’s Pacific fleet was taxed by saber rattling with the French in Tahiti. Nonetheless, by 1846 the Royal Navy could claim nine vessels of war in the northeastern Pacific and three in Pacific Northwest waters. The sloop of war HMS *Modeste* was one of these. It anchored at Fort Vancouver in 1844, after having been dispatched to the lower Columbia to protect British interests and keep a vigilant watch over the United States. The *Modeste*’s Capt. Thomas Baillie’s official orders were clear. He was to

afford such assistance as may be most likely to maintain the rights of Her Majesty’s Subjects without infringing those of the Subjects of other nations . . . . Should any of the Vessels of War of the U.S. enter the River, you are to endeavour to preserve good relations with the Commanders thereof . . . & at all times to be on your guard against the decks of the *Modeste* being surprised by any attack.<sup>22</sup>

A subtle nuance was clearly implied; this was to be gunboat diplomacy, but not a provocation. Not to be outmaneuvered, in April 1846, Commodore John Drake Sloat, in command of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Squadron, ordered the U.S. Schooner *Shark* to the Oregon Country for a short mission, returning no later than September 1, 1846. Howison’s orders, in part, were to sail to



Lt. Neil M. Howison, photographed by W.W. Forester in 1847, did not live to learn of the interest generated by his report to Congress on the Oregon Country. Shortly after returning from the West, he died in Fredericksburg, Virginia, of a heart ailment at the age of forty-three, in February 1848, just as the report was published. (OHS digital image no. bb003613)

the Willamette Valley [and] determine the disposition of the residents of those friendly to United States compared to those friendly to Great Britain, and the extent, character, and tendency of emigration from the United States and from its quarters, and the condition and prosperity of the territory.<sup>23</sup>

Howison, a forty-one year-old from a prominent Fredericksburg, Virginia, family, was “universally admired for his skill as an officer — his courtesy as a gentleman, and his exhaustless conversational resources.”<sup>24</sup> Howison was an up-and-coming *wunderkind*. Described by statesman and former U.S. Vice President John C. Calhoun as “one of the most accomplished seamen in the Navy,” Howison entered into naval service as a midshipman in 1823, and then successfully completed his exams in seamanship and, thus, became a passed midshipman six years later.<sup>25</sup> In 1832, after earning the rank of lieutenant, Howison served as a junior officer on the U.S. Frigate *Constellation*, and in 1836, he commanded a steamboat in action on Florida’s Chattahoochee River during the Second Seminole War. One year later, Howison was on the short list for assignment to the United States Exploring Expedition — a U.S. Navy surveying and exploring voyage in the Pacific Ocean

from 1838 to 1842. Howison was personally selected by the expedition’s early leader (and fellow Virginian) Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones, but this opportunity vanished when Jones withdrew from command.<sup>26</sup> On his arrival in the Pacific, Howison served in the highly esteemed position of flag lieutenant (aide-de-camp) to Commodore Alexander J. Dallas, under whom he had served on the *Constellation*. Shortly after his arrival, Dallas appointed Howison captain of the *Shark* — “a select command.”<sup>27</sup>

Howison seems to have had a congenial relationship with his subordinates on the *Shark*. Providing a rare window onto the captain’s personality,

one midshipman described his first encounter with Howison as “amusing” despite the potentially harrowing circumstances:

While on this voyage [to Panama on the *Shark* in 1844] we passed quite near the Lobas group of islands . . . where seals and sea lions reared their young in great numbers. We were running with a free wind with our square sails set, and the course given me took us quite near the rocks. Upon the near approach of the schooner the seals set up a great roaring as they rolled into the water from their rocky beds and frolicked around in the water in our wake. It happened to be just at dinner time, and the officers taking passage were at table with the captain [Howison]. I put my head down the hatchway and called to the captain to “come and see the seals playing around the vessel.” He replied: “Will be up as soon as I finish dinner,” but one of the officers came up at once. Calling out, he said: “Howison, come on deck!” . . . He [Howison] directed me to “put the helm down and haul on the wind and give good distance in passing the rocks,” remarking, by way of pleasantry, “Mr. Kell, you must think you are in a coach and four, driving round a street corner.” I was strictly carrying out my orders, but was wanting in experience as a watch officer. For a long time after that I heard a great deal of “those seals and my coach and four.”<sup>28</sup>

Following Sloat’s orders to “obtain correct information of that country and to cheer our citizens in that region by the presence of the American flag,” Howison and the *Shark* sailed to the Oregon Country and entered the Columbia River on July 18, 1846.<sup>29</sup> On the night of July 24, the *Shark* arrived at Fort Vancouver, almost 100 miles upriver, surprising HBC officers who had not expected the visit. The schooner was not alone at the post’s bustling wharf, however; also anchored were three HBC vessels and one Royal Navy vessel, the HMS *Modeste*. A sloop of war launched at Britain’s Woolwich Dockyard just nine years earlier, the *Modeste* undoubtedly dwarfed the *Shark*. It measured 120 feet long, displaced 568 tons, and bristled with eighteen guns — two 32-pound guns and sixteen 32-pounder carronades. It carried a crew of ninety men, including a detachment of Royal Marines.<sup>30</sup>

At the time of the *Shark*’s arrival, the HBC and the Royal Navy were on civil but not overly amiable terms. According to Royal Navy officers, their HBC counterparts offered “no information or assistance on arrival” in Hawai’i, and when one HBC officer allegedly became drunk and “refused to drink the health of Rear Admiral Thomas, and then heaped a mass of abuse upon all British Naval Officers,” it contributed to the Royal Navy officers’ characterization of the HBC as unpatriotic.<sup>31</sup> In turn, HBC officers felt that Baillie and his fellow officers were uninterested in the Oregon Country. HBC Chief Factor James Douglas — one of a group of three managers who had taken over after McLoughlin retired earlier that year — noted that the Royal Navy officers “did not exhibit that degree of interest in the scene which I expected. . . . They were all young men, and though most courteous and

agreeable, had more taste for a lark than a ‘musty’ lecture on politics or the great national interests in question.”<sup>32</sup> The actions of the Royal Navy actually reinforced this perception, perhaps by design. Far from saber-rattling, the officers of the *Modeste* entertained lavishly, hosting such “larks” as excursions, balls, picnics, and races — even actively wooing in verse published in the *Oregon Spectator* at least one member of Oregon’s female population.<sup>33</sup> The most popular of these entertainments, judging by the response of the area’s residents, were the theatrical performances, which were the first recorded in the Pacific Northwest. Casting American women in several female roles, the *Modeste*’s tars performed almost a dozen plays from Henry Fielding and other playwrights for Oregon’s citizens. The performances, which went on before, during, and after the *Shark*’s visit, were highly touted by those on both sides of the boundary issue and fomented much goodwill.<sup>34</sup>

While he believed they dampened external tensions and provided entertainment, Howison doubted such activities had any deeper effect. He observed that “the English officers used every gentlemanly caution to reconcile our countrymen to their presence, but no really good feelings existed. Indeed, there could never be congeniality between persons so entirely dissimilar as an American frontier man and a British naval officer.”<sup>35</sup> Howison recognized his role — and the role of the *Shark* — as one of peacekeeper, not warmonger. He brought important news to the country: despite the brazen expansionist rhetoric that had carried Polk to election two years earlier, the United States was officially preparing only for a peaceful resolution to the Oregon question. Howison described the challenge presented by his role:

In the excited state of public feeling which existed among the Americans upon my arrival, the settled conviction on the mind of every one that all Oregon belonged to us, and that the English had long been gleaning its products, I soon discovered that, so far from arousing new zeal and patriotism, it was my duty to use any influence which my official character put me in possession of to allay its exuberance, and advise our countrymen to await patiently the progress of negotiations at home.<sup>36</sup>

Howison’s advocacy of patience ostensibly paid off, for both he and the *Shark* appear to have been well received by the American population in Oregon. Howison and his crew inspired the *Oregon Spectator*, for example, to wax poetically and patriotically:

We have recently been honored with the presence of the officers of the U.S. schr. Shark amongst us, and heartily glad we were to see them. There appears to be an undefinable something about them different from officers of other nations. Is this prejudice in us? Is it because we are glad to see anything that has Uncle Sam about it? Or is it that every citizen of the United States, of whatever rank or station, has instilled in him a portion



*Lt. Trevelyan Penrose Coode, an officer of the Royal Navy's HMS Modeste, painted this image of the interior of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver, looking west, a year before the Shark's visit. Coode and his fellow British officers dined and socialized with the American officers of the Shark at Fort Vancouver in 1846.*

of that principle so forcibly expressed in the immortal words of Jefferson, that "all men are born free and equal?"<sup>37</sup>

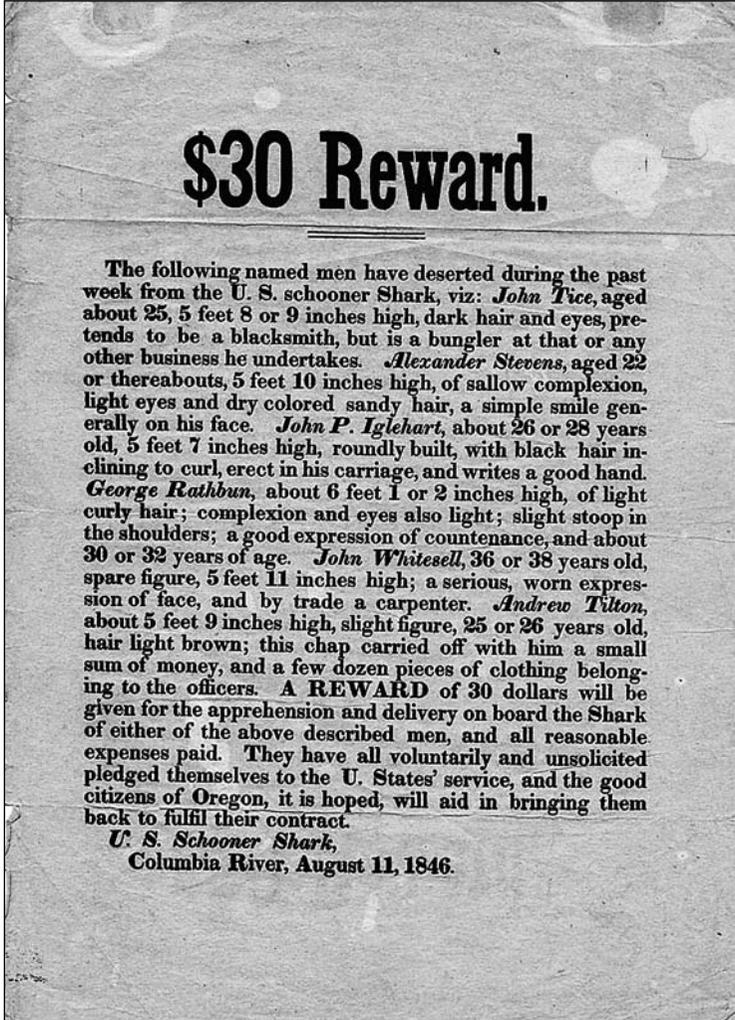
The Americans were not alone in their welcome. Howison reported that the HBC

expressed to me their fervent hopes that the United States would keep a vessel of war in the river. . . . They have been excessively annoyed by some of our countrymen who, with but little judgment and less delicacy, are in the habit of infringing upon their lands, and construing the law to bear them out in doing so.<sup>38</sup>

Officers of the HBC also seem to have shared a class-based connection with Howison, who they received as a fellow gentleman, that may have partially blurred, transcended, or even complimented their national interests. HBC clerk George B. Roberts recalled late in life a telling exchange with Howison: "Well he said pointing to a group of [American] frontiersmen — they may be Americans but they are as much of a curiosity to us as they are to you."<sup>39</sup>

The majority of Howison's time was spent exploring and studying the area. At Oregon City, he was received by George Abernethy, the provisional governor, and honored with a salute fired from a hole in the town blacksmith's anvil, no cannon being available. For ten days, Abernethy toured Howison throughout the Willamette Valley by horseback. Howison later explored the Tualatin Plains and the Chehalem Valley, lauding the "long sorrel mare which led the party so bravely," meeting American immigrants, and collecting vital information from the area.<sup>40</sup> This contact was not limited to political, nautical, and mercantile information; it also included an extensive evaluation of the area's agricultural propensity.<sup>41</sup> With such a small window of time in the Oregon Country, Howison also dispatched his officers to gather local intelligence. Lt. Woodhull S. Schenck, for instance, traveled upriver as far as The Dalles to learn about the impending mass of immigrants expected from the United States that autumn.<sup>42</sup> All was not exploration, however; one of Howison's orders of business was administrative — authorizing the public sale of the launch, or small boat, from the wreck of the USS *Peacock*. Five years earlier, Lt. Charles Wilkes, commander of the U.S. Exploring Expedition, had placed the launch in the charge of John McLoughlin, and while several Americans inquired about its use, McLoughlin refused to turn it over to anyone but an officer of the U.S. Navy. Although Howison spent much of his thirty days in the Willamette Valley, the *Shark* and the majority of its personnel remained at Fort Vancouver. Ironically, the British commercial trading center served as the hub for the U.S. Navy's activities and supplies while Howison's explorations radiated out to the area.

With official representatives of all three parties committed to keeping the peace, evidence suggests that the officers and crew of the *Shark* had a cordial relationship with HBC employees and members of the Royal Navy while at Fort Vancouver. The schooner's nine officers dined with the *Modeste's* officers and the fort's gentlemen on numerous occasions. When the *Shark* grounded at the mouth of the Willamette River on a visit to Oregon City and the Willamette Falls, the *Modeste's* officers sent a scow and bateau to lend support and get the vessel off the sand bar. The crew of the *Shark* also assisted the HBC and Royal Navy in suppressing a dangerous fire near the fort. HBC clerk Thomas Lowe recorded that, on August 18, "fire broke out this forenoon . . . by which one house was burned and two others torn down to prevent it from spreading. Men were sent both from the *Modeste* and *Shark* with buckets to assist in extinguishing the flames." Officers from the *Modeste* and *Shark* did compete against each other — and employees of the HBC — but only in structured, gentlemanly activities. On at least two occasions, the HBC organized a day of horse races with judges, prizes, and



*As Howison and his crew observed the agricultural and commercial propensity of Oregon, the possibility of desertion from the Shark became a particular concern. The detail included in this reward poster by Howison — meant to facilitate capture — provides modern historians with an uncommon glimpse of the physical attributes and skill sets of common American sailors of the era.*

spectators. At one September race, Lowe recorded that “four of the prizes were gained by the Modeste, one by the Shark, and one by the fort.”<sup>43</sup>

Life in the Oregon Country was probably much different for the crew of the *Shark* than for its officers. Designed to limit opportunities for desertion,

the Navy's policy of keeping all hands aboard vessels in port was widely unpopular. The record is unclear as to the extent to which this policy was enforced in the Oregon Country — schooners were known to have less on-board regulation than the Navy's larger vessels — but all was not fun and games for the common seamen. Further enticed by opportunity and high wages in the growing Willamette Valley settlements, several crew members deserted. In one of the Oregon Country's first printed circulars, Howison publicized a reward for their return. His colorful description of deserters such as John Tice — “aged about 25, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, dark hair and eyes, pretends to be a blacksmith, but is a bungler at that or any other business he undertakes” — provides rare personal details about the *Shark's* crew.<sup>44</sup>

As August waned, Howison's official assignment drew to a close, and the schooner prepared for departure in early September. From his perspective, the visit had been a success. Working alongside HBC officers, American immigrants, and Captain Baillie and the crew of the *Modeste*, Howison and the *Shark* had played an important role as representatives of the U.S. government in the Oregon Country. Ostensibly, Howison allayed American exuberance and advocated patience, ensuring a peaceful order that supported both American and HBC interests. In Howison's mind, the sojourn was over, and he looked forward to his next assignment.<sup>45</sup>

The HBC, however, perceived Howison's accomplishments differently. Significant concerns had arisen regarding the effect of his visit, leading the HBC's Board of Management at Fort Vancouver, comprised of James Douglas, Peter Skene Ogden, and John Work, to report their concerns to the HBC's governing body:

Before the arrival of the “Shark” the Americans with very few exceptions were settled in the Willamette and other districts to the Southward of the Columbia River, and . . . they never showed much inclination to take lands on the north side. . . . The case was reversed when Captain Howison in the very unreserved communications he made to his Countrymen told them that the United States would never accept of any boundary short of 49 [degrees] and that this settlement at Fort Vancouver and all the Country South of that line would certainly become United States property. This opinion resting on the authority of a person in whom they had confidence and falling in with their own prepossessions on the subject produced an electric effect in the settlements, which put the whole host of Yankee speculators and deputations in motion all rushing towards “Vancouver” to be in time for a snatch at the loaves and fishes, not a morsel of which was to be left for us, the rightful owners, as they made no secret of their intentions to take possession of every acre of land in this neighborhood in defiance of any rights thereto, on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>46</sup>

The claim that, following Howison's visit, an increase in American interest in the land north of the Columbia is not without merit. Still, Howison may have contested the perception of his visit's effect. He recognized that "the conduct of some of our countrymen toward the [Hudson's Bay] company has been highly reprehensible," and that the

helping hand held out by the company to the early American emigrants not only relieved them from actual distress at a critical moment, but furnished them with means to make a beginning at cultivation, and unquestionably accelerated the growth and settlement of the country in a manner which could not have succeeded but for such timely assistance.<sup>50</sup>

Howison also reported that "English jealousy and unoccupied territory in the south [of the Columbia River] have interposed to prevent American emigration to the north side of the Columbia until last autumn." He also related at least one episode in which he dissuaded from further claim jumping an American immigrant incarcerated in Fort Vancouver's jail for that very crime. "I expostulated with the man on the subject," Howison noted dryly. "I believe he gave over the idea."<sup>48</sup>

**THE SHARK DEPARTED** Fort Vancouver on August 23, 1846, without a river pilot; the American barque *Toulon* had previously engaged the only available Native American guide. This caused Howison much consternation. "I had not, nor could I procure," lamented Howison, "a map giving even an outline of the general direction of the stream."<sup>49</sup> Constant head winds hammered the schooner, and a three-day delay in aiding the *Toulon*, grounded on a sand bar just below Fort Vancouver, further delayed the vessel's arrival at the river's mouth. On September 8, Howison observed the Columbia's perilous bar the following day and prepared to cross it — despite his own caution against impetuosity. On the afternoon of September 10, he "hailed on the wind to pass to Sea" and soon found the tide forcing him onto the dreaded south breakers. He quickly tacked to the northward; this was unsuccessful, and as a result, the racing tide turned the *Shark's* bow to point directly at the breakers and the sands of the bar. Howison then tacked to the southward, but the raging current forced him dangerously to leeward. The situation grew increasingly dire. Howison dropped an anchor, but it immediately snapped "like a packthread." The *Shark* then stood northward, losing even more ground to the rapid tide. Tacking to the west, fortune seemed to smile on the languishing schooner — a "favorable change of wind excited hopes of passing safely out." Any elation was short lived, however, for seconds later the schooner struck violently on the bar and held fast. As a last resort, Howison used a press of sail to try to muscle the vessel off, but

it was no use. The tide “immediately began to break over her broadside and told us too plainly that she should float over its surface no more.” Howison’s efforts now shifted away from the schooner and focused on the crew, and the schooner’s four boats quickly began to hit the water. The purser and doctor, laden with the vessel’s papers and valuables (including an iron box with \$4,000 in gold) took to the small gig, along with the sick. To the horror of all, the churning seas slammed the *Shark*’s anchor into the tiny gig, stoving it in and causing it to swamp and sink. Through the foresight of Howison, the ends of the schooner’s running rigging had been dangled overboard to provide a last-ditch safety line for any crew members unlucky enough to fall overboard, and this, combined with the herculean efforts of the crew onboard the *Shark*, ensured that those on the gig were hauled back aboard the foundering schooner. The vessel’s papers and valuables — including Howison’s log-book — were not so lucky; they went down with the gig.<sup>50</sup>

The following hours must have been horrific. The pounding surf prevented the lowering of the other boats, lest they met the same fate as the gig. All hands were trapped on the *Shark* with no direct means of escape, as Howison realized that the only recourse remaining was to weather the breakers now actively rolling over the *Shark*, in hopes the change in tide might allow an opportunity to flee. To afford some semblance of security, Howison had each man tied off to the vessel with a long rope. By 11:00 p.m., the tide had shifted, abating the crushing waves. This was Howison’s opportunity; he dispatched all but twenty-four crew members to the shore in the remaining boats. On board, the schooner had taken on so much water that the only relatively safe spots were the bowsprit and the two quarterdeck houses. There, the men who remained with Howison spent the entire night soaked by the tide, clinging to the hope that the boats would survive the breakers and return for them. Sunrise brought a new day and with it, relief. The boats returned and delivered the remaining crew to safety. Though the *Shark* was a total loss, all hands were safely ashore, shivering on the Clatsop beach. “The conduct of the Officers and men during the whole of this trying occasion was most praiseworthy,” Howison reported to Congress, “and to their cool exertions and orderly manner of carrying on the duty may be principally ascribed the preservation of our lives.”<sup>51</sup>

Howison’s account explains the *Shark*’s loss in great detail, and extant primary sources point to six factors contributing to this loss — all inextricably intertwined.

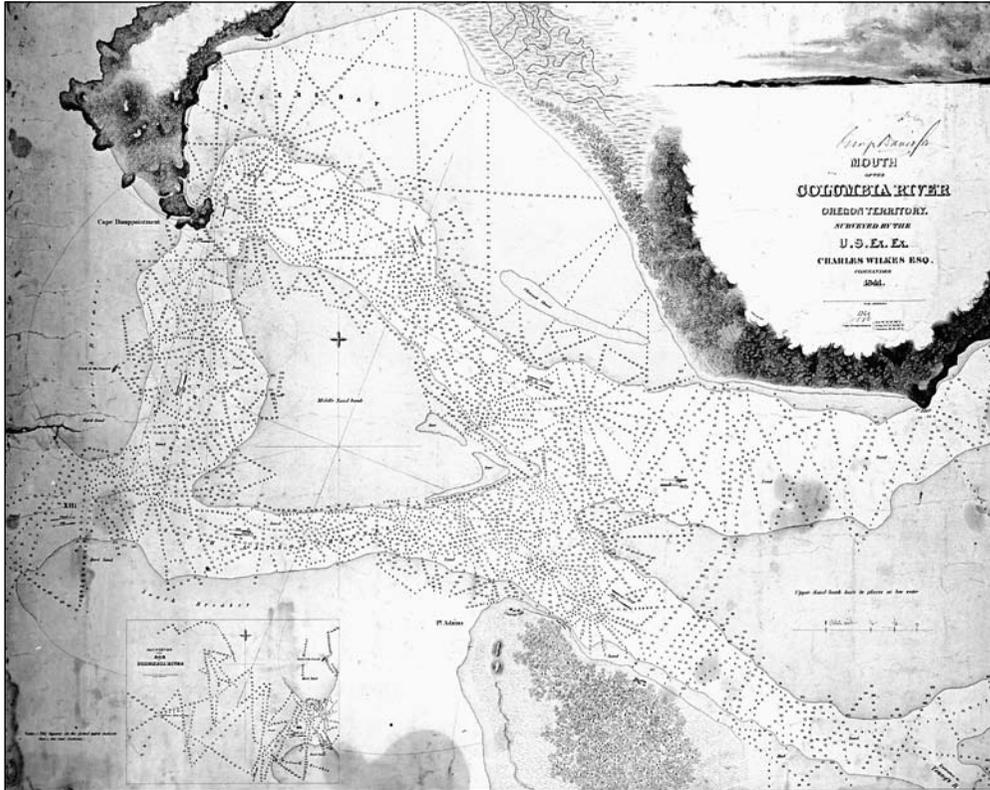
*The Shark had no pilot with local experience.* Oregon’s provisional government had not yet appointed an official bar pilot, and vessels had to make due with whatever support could be found. On the *Shark*’s initial arrival

at the river's mouth, a self-proclaimed bar pilot — an African American deserter from the USS *Peacock* named James D. Sauls and known simply as “Saul” — had hoodwinked Howison into engaging his services, but his subsequent incompetence nearly caused the schooner's loss. The HBC's Alexander Lattie soon provided the *Shark* a safe entry, but September 1846 found Lattie — arguably the HBC's most knowledgeable Columbia River navigator — recently dismissed from the company's service and unavailable. So, too, was the HBC's William Sangster, another knowledgeable seaman. The master river pilot known as Indian George had helped conduct the *Shark* to Fort Vancouver earlier in July, but he was retained by the *Toulon* in September.<sup>52</sup>

*The Shark had few — if any — accurate charts or maps of the Columbia's mouth.* Howison notes that he relied on one chart — that created by Lt. Charles Wilkes and the U.S. Exploring Expedition five years earlier. The nature of this chart is striking; by Howison's own admission, it was a copy of a copy, made on tracing paper. Making navigation even more challenging, Howison learned from HBC and American captains in Hawai'i that his chart was out of date; the sands had shifted, causing significant changes to the river's mouth.<sup>53</sup>

*Howison was not thoroughly acquainted with the river's mouth.* Howison did not possess enough personal knowledge of the Columbia's mouth to ensure the *Shark*'s safe exit. It is difficult to fault Howison for this; few if any U.S. Naval officers possessed more than a rudimentary knowledge of the Columbia's bar. Although he was a keen navigator with extensive sailing experience, Howison's background had not included experience on the Columbia River. This is not to say that he did not gather information; the crew of the *Shark* had “kedged, sounded, and buoyed” on entering the river in July. The day before attempting an exit, Howison took soundings and planned his course of action. His efforts that day were stopped, perhaps prematurely, by the shift in tides and oncoming night.<sup>54</sup>

*Howison was anxious to depart the “troublesome navigation of the Columbia.”* Howison had received specific orders to depart the Columbia River by September 1, and he was nearly ten days behind schedule when he attempted to cross the bar. Headwinds had battered the schooner all the way downriver, and it had taken three days to free the *Toulon* from the sand bar below Fort Vancouver. Howison was aware of the advent of war with Mexico, and his later public report and private letters suggest an “anxiety to rejoin the squadron” and ardent interest in being involved in its operations.<sup>55</sup> The Columbia's bar was well known to be a navigational hazard, even to the most



*Howison sailed the Shark into the mouth of the Columbia River in the summer of 1846 using a chart, perhaps similar to the 1841 one above, based on the observations of the U.S. Exploring Expedition several years earlier. To his dismay, Howison found that the bar had shifted, rendering the chart dangerously inaccurate.*

knowledgeable of captains, and understanding of the prior wrecks of the USS *Peacock* and the HBC vessels *William and Ann* and *Isabella* may have caused him additional anxiety.

*Howison was physically exhausted.* In a private letter, Howison described spending much of the day prior to the *Shark's* loss on an unsuccessful elk hunt. "I passed a day on Lewis and Clarke's River," he wrote, "ranging the woods all day long, in hopes of getting a shot at Elk, but although their foot-steps were to be seen in all direction, yet the animal himself was never seen." The hunt sapped Howison's strength. "I returned aboard," he continued, "overcome with the fatigue of as rough a day's walk as I ever took."<sup>56</sup>

*Howison chose to attempt to cross the bar at the wrong tidal stage. Privately, HBC officers believed this was Howison's major fault. In his private journal, clerk Thomas Lowe noted that "it is said that Capt. Howison ought not to have endeavoured to run out until more than half ebb, when the sands would have been more distinctly visible, as the water would then be lower."*<sup>57</sup>

SAFELY ASSEMBLED ON WHAT HOWISON called Clatsop Beach, the *Shark's* officers and crew hastily lit a fire. Burr Osborn, a member of the schooner's crew, later recalled that "the first fire that was built was made out of the wreck of the sloop of war *Peacock*, U.S.N." At least one of the *Shark's* unnamed crew must have felt especially luckless; he had survived the *Peacock's* loss five years earlier and now found himself again cold, wet, and shipwrecked at the Columbia's mouth. Prior to relocating to Astoria, the shipwrecked party found refuge in an old shanty, about twelve feet by twenty-five feet in size. "This shanty that we stopped in at Clatsop Beach," Osborn recounted, "we learned subsequently had been built by some of Lewis and Clark's men, some forty years previous."<sup>58</sup>

In his later report to Congress, Howison described the scene on the beach and its aftermath:

Cast on the shore as we were, with nothing besides the clothes we stood in, and those thoroughly saturated, no time was to be lost in seeking new supplies. I left the crew, indifferently sheltered, at Astoria, and . . . pushed up the river to Vancouver, where news of our disaster had preceded us, and elicited the sympathy and prompt attentions of the factors of the Hudson's Bay Company and of Captain Baillie and the officers of its Britannic Majesty's ship "Modeste."<sup>59</sup>

In addition to coffee, tea, tobacco, and bread sent down in the *Modeste's* pinnace, HBC chief factors Douglas and Ogden also made their resources available to Howison. On his return to Fort Vancouver, Howison found that his "wants of every kind were immediately supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company and although cash was at Oregon city . . . the company furnished all my requisitions, whether for cash or clothing."<sup>60</sup> This support amounted to more than \$3,000 and is all the more significant considering the HBC's negative perception of the effect of Howison's visit.

Howison sought to charter an HBC vessel to transport the *Shark's* weary officers and crew to California, but none was available. Over the following weeks, Howison or his officers made several trips between the fort and their small encampment at Astoria. For shelter, he sent a detachment downriver, where they cut and hauled timber to construct a log house at Point George. That house and a small frame structure nearby were soon dubbed Sharksville

by the crew.<sup>61</sup> While waiting for a vessel to charter, the officers and crew of the *Shark* spent several months at the mouth of the Columbia River, attempting to save any last vestiges of the schooner. Howison found that spars, decking, and other parts had washed ashore along seventy-five miles of coastline. Local Native Americans soon reported finding a section of the hull with guns on it south of today's Tillamook Head. Howison quickly responded:

I sent Midshipman Simes, an enterprising youth, to visit the spot. He did so, and reported that the deck between the mainmast and forehatch, with an equal length of the starboard broadside planking above the wales, had been stranded, and that three of the carronades adhered to this portion of the wreck. He succeeded in getting one above high water mark; but the other two were inaccessible, on account of the surf; and as it would have been utterly impracticable to transport any weighty object over the mountain road which it was necessary to traverse, I of course made no exertions to recover them, but informed the Governor of their position, that during the smooth seas of next summer he might send a boat round and embark them.<sup>62</sup>

Back at Sharksville, the situation grew worse. Two more crew members deserted, which Howison attributed to Astorians “tampering with the fidelity of the men” with business schemes and treating his crew with “inhuman conduct” by charging exorbitant prices for bread.<sup>66</sup> In late October, Howison's location at the mouth of the Columbia proved fortunate for the first time; the barque *Toulon* returned with news that the boundary was settled at the forty-ninth parallel. Thus, Howison was one of the first — if not the first — to receive the news in the Oregon Country, and he began privately dispatching diplomatic advice to Abernethy. By November, Howison's luck had improved; he had secured use of the HBC schooner *Cadboro* — a vessel even smaller than the *Shark* — and departed Astoria. He then spent six weeks waiting in Baker Bay for the weather to clear enough to allow for a safe crossing of the bar on January 18, 1847. Just before his departure, Howison presented Governor Abernethy with the *Shark*'s flag — one of the few items rescued from the vessel. According to Howison, it was “the first United States flag to wave over the undisputed and purely American Territory of Oregon.”<sup>64</sup>

THE STORY OF THE U.S. SCHOONER *Shark* is fascinating, and its global narrative — ranging from the coast of Africa to the Caribbean to the Mediterranean and through the Straits of Magellan to the Pacific Ocean and the Columbia River — chronicles the early, formative years of the United States Navy. One hundred and sixty-two years after the *Shark* arrived at Fort Vancouver, winter storms and low tides revealed what may turn out to be



*Masked by more than a century and a half of concretions, the first of two carronades discovered at Arch Cape in the winter of 2008 sits on the beach prior to its recovery by Oregon State Parks & Recreation Department personnel. Subsequently, the guns were transported to nearby Nehalem Bay State Park, where they were immersed in water to draw out the salts and prevent corrosion.*

another vestige of the ship. Two pieces of ordnance, believed to be carronades, were recovered at Arch Cape, Oregon, in February 2008.<sup>65</sup> The carronades were under the temporary care of staff at Nehalem Bay State Park during the summer of 2008, and plans call for them to undergo conservation to remove a century and a half of concretions before going on public display. In April 2008, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) established a thirteen-member Cannon Advisory Team to recommend next steps for conservation and to help identify the most appropriate repository. The conservation will be funded by OPRD and contributions gathered by the Oregon State Parks Trust. Staff from Oregon Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service television series *History Detectives* spent several weeks in Oregon and Washington, investigating the carronades, interviewing the finders and several subject matter experts, and organizing the participation of additional experts and equipment to provide state-of-the art analysis.<sup>66</sup>

Robert Neyland, head of the Underwater Archaeology Branch of the Naval Historical Center, concluded that the carronade he examined

compares very favorably to the cannon that was recovered in the 1890's [sic] and is now on exhibit so it's suggesting it is the same type of cannon, perhaps even from the same ship. I don't see anywhere where it says *USS Shark*, or U.S. Navy but this is all consistent with the carronade. So far, circumstantial evidence, it is consistent with what we'd expect to see for a carronade from the *Shark*.<sup>67</sup>

Time — and further investigation — will tell whether the ordnance can be connected to the *Shark* more directly, but the wave of interest and enthusiasm surrounding the recently found carronades has certainly launched a new interest in the schooner. For citizens of the Pacific Northwest, the *Shark's* story has particular historical resonance. From Arch Cape, where a creek and road bear the name of the *Shark*, to Cannon Beach and Nehalem Bay State Park, where the carronades were available for public viewing in the summer of 2008 and where a capstan and now three carronades believed to be from the *Shark* are on display at the Cannon Beach History Center; from Astoria, where visitors can view part of Shark Rock and a sword purportedly from one of the *Shark's* officers, to Portland, where several of Howison's letters, Osborn's map, and many other important documents are archived; from Oregon City, where the period of Howison and Abernethy is interpreted through a variety of museums and heritage programs, to Fort Vancouver, where living history programs, reproduction uniforms, reconstructed buildings, and archaeological finds help bring the story of the *Shark* and its era to life — through all of these, one can learn how the vessel the *London Daily Herald* dubbed “the gallant little schooner” played an integral role just as the Oregon Country first became part of the United States.

## NOTES

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1. See Neil M. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison, United States Navy, To the Commander of the Pacific Squadron; Being the Result of an Examination in the Year 1846 of the Coast, Harbors, Rivers, Soil, Productions, Climate, and Population of the Territory of Oregon* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, 1848), later published in *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 14:1 (March 1913), 3–60. See also J. Quinn Thornton, *Oregon and California in 1848* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), 35–6; Hubert H. Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Vol. 29, History of Oregon* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), 584–90; and Edmond S. Meany, *History of the State of Washington* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1910), 145. Several secondary sources have promulgated the misleading notion that the *Shark* arrived in the Columbia after the boundary issue was settled. While technically correct, the Oregon Country did not learn of the resolution until October 1846, after the *Shark* wrecked. See, for example, Charles Henry Carey, *History of Oregon* (Chicago & Portland: The Pioneer Historical Publishing Company, 1922), 451; and Samuel A. Clarke, *Pioneer Days of Oregon History* (Portland, Ore.: J.K. Gill Co., 1905), 600–601. Following the reprinting of Howison's report in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in 1913, Burr Osborn, a survivor of the *Shark*'s wreck, opened correspondence with historian George H. Himes, which Himes subsequently published that same year. See George H. Himes, ed., "Letters by Burr Osborn, Survivor of the Howison Expedition

to Oregon, 1846," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 14:4 (December 1913): 355–60. Norman A. Howerton summarized the *Shark*'s early history and based a short article on information from the Naval Library and Records Center; see Norman A. Howerton, "The U.S. Schooner *Shark*," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 40:3 (September 1939): 288–91. For a contemporary introduction to the *Shark* that includes an excellent focus on the Cannon Beach area, see Jim Dennon, *The Schooner Shark, Shark Rock, and Cannon Beach* (Seaside, Ore.: Jim Dennon, 1988). For a general introduction to the *Shark* and Lt. Howison, with an emphasis on the interactions with the HMS *Modeste* and the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, see Gregory P. Shine, *Sympathy & Prompt Attention: Fort Vancouver's Relief of the U.S. Schooner Shark on September 13, 1846* (Vancouver, Wash.: U.S. National Park Service, 2007). For a summary of the *Shark*'s various cruises, see James L. Mooney, *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (Washington, D.C.: 1974).

2. Neil M. Howison to George Abernethy, September 11, 1846, and September 13, 1846, George Abernethy Correspondence, MSS 929, Oregon Historical Society Research Library [hereafter Abernethy Correspondence].

3. Howison to Abernethy, November 25, 1846, Abernethy Correspondence.

4. Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), 324; Donald J. Canney, *Sailing Warships of the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 177–82.

5. See Canney, 179; Chapelle, 334.

6. *Ibid.* For reference to the *Shark* carrying 32-pounder carronades, see *Oregon Spectator*, October 15, 1846; and Himes, "Letters by Burr Osborn," 355–60. Dennon believed that references to the *Shark* carrying 32-pounder carronades came from Osborn's recollections in 1913. See Dennon, *The Schooner Shark*, 5.

7. *Niles Weekly Register*, May 26, 1821; *Christian Register*, January 25, 1822; *Boston Recorder*, January 26, 1822; *The Religious Intelligencer*, February 2, 1822. On Perry's command of the *Shark*, see John H. Schroeder,

*Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 31–42.

8. *Boston Recorder*, January 26, 1822; *Niles Weekly Register*, January 26, 1822.

9. *Niles Weekly Register*, May 11, 1822.

10. *Niles Weekly Register*, June 22, and December 21, 1822, February 1, and 15, 1823, and March 20, 1823. On the *Shark's* cruises in the Caribbean and Atlantic, see *Niles Weekly Register*, April 17, 1824, June 12, 1824, December 4, 1824, July 9, 1825, March 11, 1826, September 2, 1826, December 2, 1826, December 16, 1826, August 4, 1827, July 19, 1828, August 2, 1828, September 17, 1831, January 21, 1832, and February 11, 1832; *Christian Register*, October 15, 1824, February 11, 1832; *Cohen's Lottery Gazette and Register*, January 14, 1825; *Saturday Evening Post*, September 9, 1826, April 21, 1827, August 29, 1829; *Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph*, August 22, 1828; *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, October 4, 1828; *The Episcopal Watchman*, November 29, 1828; *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*, August 14, 1830; *The Military and Naval Magazine of the United States*, March 1833, and May 1833; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Courts of Inquiry and Court Martial, in Relation to Captain David Porter, Convened at Washington D.C. on Thursday, the Seventh Day of July, A.D. 1825* (Washington, DC: Davis & Force, 1825).

11. Quoted in Lucy G. B. Audubon, ed., *The Life of John James Audubon, the Naturalist* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 210.

12. *Ibid.*, 209. For an entertaining anecdote regarding Audubon and the *Shark* in New Orleans, see A.S. Packard, Jr., ed., *The American Naturalist: An Illustrated Magazine of Natural History, Vol 2* (Boston: H.O. Houghton, 1877), 507.

13. Quoted in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, August 3, 1837. See also *Waldie's Literary Omnibus*, July 28, 1837.

14. *Army and Navy Chronicle*, September 14, 1837.

15. *Southern Literary Messenger*, May and June 1841, 358.

16. *Army and Navy Chronicle*, April 30, 1840. For references to the *Shark's* return to

the U.S. and subsequent departure to the Pacific Ocean, see *Army and Navy Chronicle*, March 29, 1838; *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, April 18, 1838. To compare the *Shark's* account to that of the British vessel *HMS Beagle* in 1827, see Herbert K. Beals, R.J. Campbell, Ann Savours, Anita McConnell, and Roy Bridges, eds., *Four Travel Journals: The Americas, Antarctica, and Africa, 1775–1874* (London: Ashgate, 2008).

17. On the *Shark's* activities in the Pacific Ocean, see *Niles National Register*, July 27, 1839, May 16, 1840; *Army and Navy Chronicle*, April 30, 1840; George Coggeshall, *Thirty-six Voyages to Various Parts of the World, Made Between the Years 1799 and 1841* (New York: George Coggeshall, 1858), 399–401; John McIntosh Kell, *Recollections of a Naval Life, Including the Cruises of the Confederate States Steamers "Sumter" and "Alabama"* (Washington: The Neale Company, 1900), 17–18; Walter Colton, *Deck and Port, or Incidents of a Cruise in the United States Frigate Congress to California* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1850) 348–51. The captain of the *Shark* that Colton refers to as Harrison could possibly be Howison. For an overview of U.S. Navy diplomacy in the Pacific during this era, see David F. Long, *Gold Braid and Foreign Relations: Diplomatic Activities of U.S. Naval Officers, 1798–1883* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 88–112, and 179–83. For first-hand accounts of Navy and Marine Corps personnel serving in the Pacific Squadron during the era, see Mary Kline Rose and L. Stuart Taylor, eds., *Pacific Ocean Campaign, 1842–1844: Journal of a Cruise of the U.S. Frigate United States, Written by Corporal Edward W. Taylor VII, United States Marine Corps* (Vancouver, Wash.: Rose Wind Press, 2004); and Herman Melville, *White-Jacket: or, the World in a Man-of-War* (New York: BiblioBazaar, 2006).

18. *Oregon Spectator*, September 3, 1846.

19. On the British fur trade and the Hudson's Bay Company's activities in the Oregon Country, see Richard S. Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains: The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793–1843* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); and James R. Gibson, *The Lifeline of*

*the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811–47* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). On Fort Vancouver, see John A. Hussey, *The History of Fort Vancouver and Its Physical Structure* (Portland, Ore.: Washington State Historical Society & National Park Service, 1962). On the Oregon Country in 1846, see Shine, *Sympathy & Prompt Attention*. See also Dorothy N. Morrison, *Outpost: John McLoughlin and the Far Northwest* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999).

20. *Oregon Spectator*, September 3, 1846.

21. Barry M. Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Cost of North America, 1810–1914: A Study of British Maritime Ascendancy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), 65–70. Both Peel's son and Aberdeen's brother served in the Royal Navy's Pacific Station. Peel's son, Lt. William Peel, visited Fort Vancouver and the region in 1844 and reported on British interests in Oregon; see Barry M. Gough, "HMS America on the North Pacific Coast," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 70:4 (December 1969): 301.

22. Quoted in "Log and Letters," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 61:4 (December 1960): 430–31. Howison reported that the Royal Navy had two other vessels in the Pacific Northwest — the frigate HMS *Fisguard* and armed steamer HMS *Cormorant* in Puget Sound; see Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 3–4. For a detailed history of the British Royal Navy's activities in the Pacific Northwest, see Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America*; and Gough, "HMS America on the North Pacific Coast," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 70:4 (December 1969): 293–311.

23. Dennon, *The Schooner Shark*, 7. For an overview of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Squadron, see Robert E. Johnson, *Thence Round Cape Horn: The Story of United Naval Forces on Pacific Station, 1818–1923* (Annapolis, Md.: United States Naval Institute, 1963).

24. *Fredericksburg News*, February 25, 1848. On Howison's service, see "Record of Service of the Late Lieutenant Neil M. Howison, U.S. Navy" *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 14:4 (December 1913): 364–65. Howison's sister refers to early childhood and family

life in Jane Howison Beale, *Journal of Jane Howison Beale of Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1850–1862* (Fredericksburg, VA: Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, 1979). A genealogy of the Howison family is located in Claude E. Laws, *The Howison Family in America: An Account of the Descendants of John Howison of "Braehead", Scotland, from His Emigration up to the Year 1935* (Richmond, Va.: J.F. & M.L. Howison, 1935). Howison's various appointments and activities can be found in accounts including the *Niles Weekly Register*, March 20, 1830; *Army and Navy Chronicle*, June 23, 1836, July 7, 1836, July 21, 1836, August 19, 1836, October 27, 1836, January 19, 1837, September 14, 1837, October 12, 1837, July 19, 1838, and May 2, 1839. The Oregon Historical Society Research Library holds approximately fifteen letters written by Howison while in the Oregon Country; they can be found in MSS 929, George Abernethy Correspondence. Howison's activities in the Oregon Country are detailed in the *Oregon Spectator*, July 9, 1846, August 6, 1846, August 20, 1846, September 3, 1846, September 17, 1846, October 1, 1846, October 29, 1846, December 24, 1846, and March 4, 1847. Howison died on February 23, 1848, and his obituary was carried in several Virginia papers, including the *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, February 29, 1848, the *Richmond Enquirer*, March 7, 1848, and *Fredericksburg News* February 25, 1848. The *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1848, carried a short tribute to Howison in the article "Steam Navigation to China." Howison's grave site is noted in Robert A. Hodge, *Tombstone Locations and Data in the Fredericksburg City Cemetery* (unpublished document, Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Va.), 188.

25. Quotation in Clyde N. Wilson & Shirley Bright Cook, eds., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun: vol. 25, 1847–1848* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 274.

26. *Army & Navy Chronicle*, January 19, 1837. In the 1840s, a young Herman Melville joined Jones and the frigate *United States*, part of the Navy's Pacific Squadron. His loosely fictionalized account, *White-Jacket: or, the World in a Man-of-War*, led, in part,

to Jones's court martial in 1850 and the abolishment of flogging in the Navy. See Gene A. Smith, *Thomas ap Catesby Jones, Commodore of Manifest Destiny* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000).

27. Ibid. Dallas's brother was George Mifflin Dallas, eleventh vice president of the United States, serving in the Polk administration.

28. Kell, *Recollections of a Naval Life*, 17–18.

29. Quoted in Dennon, *The Schooner Shark*, 9.

30. On the *Modeste* in the Oregon Country, see "HMS *Modeste* on the Pacific Coast 1843–47: Log and Letters," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 61:4 (December 1960): 408–36; and Shine, *Sympathy & Prompt Attentions*.

31. Quoted in "HMS *Modeste* on the Pacific Coast 1843–47," 423, 425.

32. E.E. Rich, with an introduction by W. Kaye Lamb, *The Letters of John McLoughlin, from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee: Third Series, 1844–1846* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1941–44), 180.

33. See "To Mary," *Oregon Spectator*, May 13, 1847. For the attribution of this and other poems to Lt. T.G. Drake of the HMS *Modeste*, see George B. Roberts, "Letters to Mrs. F.F. Victor," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 63:2 and 3 (June–September 1962): 200. It is also possible that the officers of the Royal Navy were representing the anti-mercantilist stance of the Peel government, where monopolies such as the HBC were out of favor.

34. For more on the *Modeste's* theatrical performances, see Alice H. Ernst, *Trouping in the Oregon Country: A History of Frontier Theatre* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1961).

35. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 4.

36. Ibid., 18.

37. *Oregon Spectator*, August 20, 1846.

38. Ibid., 19.

39. Roberts, "Letters to Mrs. F.F. Victor," 188.

40. Howison to Abernethy, February 19, 1847, Abernethy Correspondence.

41. As early as 1829, the U.S. Navy's Pacific Squadron collected information on

agriculture and other topics to demonstrate the Navy's value to more than mercantile and maritime interests. See Johnson, *Thence Round Cape Horn*, 41.

42. Schenck died on May 9, 1849. A summary of his career can be found in Edward W. Callahan, ed., *List of Officers of the Navy of the United States and the Marine Corps from 1775 to 1900* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), 485. An 1842 mess letter from Schenck is included in Sophie Radford de Meissner, *Old Naval Days: Sketches From the Life of Rear Admiral William Radford, U.S.N.* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 106–107.

43. Thomas Lowe, "18th. Tuesday. [18 September 1846]," and "22nd. Saturday. [22 September 1846]," *Private Journal Kept at Fort Vancouver, Columbia River*, manuscript, typescript in Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C.

44. Shark Broadside, 1846, Document no. 13,010, Oregon State Archives, Salem. The deserters include John Tice, Alexander Stevens, John P. Iglehart, George Rathbun, John Whitesell, and Andrew Tilton. In a letter to Abernethy on September 11, Howison lists seven deserters still at large (John Tice, George Rathbun, Tilton, Isaac Stevens, George Buckman, Peter Hollinton, and Jackson). The names and descriptions included suggest that three of the initial deserters — Alexander Stevens, Iglehart, and Whitesell — may have been recovered or otherwise accounted for and that four more had deserted. See Abernethy Correspondence.

45. There is no indication from his letters that Howison was aware of the *Shark's* next assignment. "As soon as the schooner Shark returns from the Columbia River," Com. Robert F. Stockton wrote, "I will send her on a cruise for the protection of our whale-ships." See *A Sketch of the Life of Co. Robert F. Stockton* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), A2.

46. Quoted in Frederick Merck, "The Oregon Pioneers and the Boundary," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 28:4 (December 1927): 375.

47. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 29.

48. Ibid., 5.

49. *Ibid.*
50. Howison to Abernethy, September 13, 1846, Abernethy Correspondence; Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 5–6; Himes, “Letters by Burr Osborn,” 355–64.
51. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 5–6.
52. On Sauls, see “Alexander Lattie’s Fort George Journal, 1846” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 64:3 (September 1963): 226*n*. The reasons behind Lattie’s dismissal have been a matter of debate; see *Ibid.*, 203. Sangster was engaged with another HBC vessel and unavailable; see *Ibid.*, 243.
53. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 2. Howison’s statement suggests that he did not chart any soundings during his journey upriver.
54. Himes, “Letters by Burr Osborn,” 363; Howison to Abernethy, September 11, and 13, 1846, Abernethy Correspondence.
55. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 6.
56. Howison to Abernethy, September 11, 1846, Abernethy Correspondence.
57. Lowe, “14th. Monday. [14 September 1846],” *Private Journal Kept at Fort Vancouver, Columbia River*.
58. Himes, “Letters by Burr Osborn,” 355–60. In a footnote on page 360, Himes postulates that the shanty described by Osborn was near the Lewis and Clark Expedition’s salt works. Although highly unlikely in light of today’s understanding of the location of the salt works, Osborn’s recollection nevertheless depicts the stark nature of available shelter available to the shipwrecked crew. It is possible that the shanty may have dated from the wreck of the *Peacock* just a few years earlier.
59. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 5.
60. *Ibid.*
61. While portions of the Sharkville structures survived only into the early twentieth century, one remnant of the *Shark*’s visit still exists. Survivors of the wreck carved their names into a large rock, subsequently named Shark Rock, and an upper portion of it is preserved and on public display at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon.
62. Howison, *Lieut. Neil M. Howison*, 6. For a detailed history of one of the cannons allegedly located by Simes in this account, see Jim Dennon, “The Schooner Shark’s Cannon,” *Cumtux: Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly* 9:3 (Summer 1989): 3–13.
63. Howison to Abernethy, November 25, 1846, Abernethy Correspondence. In the same letter, Howison adds: “I state these things to you to account for the little respect I entertain for many of our countrymen about Astoria; whose duty it was as respectable citizens to obstruct the perfidious cause of deserters, and expose those who aided them.”
64. *Ibid.*, December 1, 1846.
65. Media coverage of the find was substantial throughout the Pacific Northwest. See, for example, Michael Rollins & Noelle Crombie, “Loose Cannons,” *Oregonian*, February 20, 2008; and Dean Baker, “USS Shark Resurfaces?,” *Vancouver Columbian*, February 21, 2008. For an example of the story resonating throughout the region, see “Cannons Boom in Vancouver, Too,” *Oregonian*, February 21, 2008; and Eric Baker, “USS Shark Opens Portal to the Past,” *Oregonian*, August 17, 2008. See also Pat Smith, “A Shark Tale of a Great Ship” *Greensburg (IN) Daily News*, August 27, 2008. For the findings of the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, see Dennis Griffin, *Recovery of Arch Cape Cannon: Report to Oregon State Parks and the Division of State Lands Regarding the Discovery of Two Cannon at Arch Cape* (Salem: Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, 2008).
66. For example, X-ray services were provided by FUJIFILM NDT Systems USA, Inc., and Professional Service Industries, Inc. Their donated time and services were coordinated by Oregon Public Broadcasting and the *History Detectives* television program.
67. Quoted in the *History Detectives* transcript “Season 6 Episode 9: Shipwreck Cannons,” 8. Document available online at: [http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/pdf/609\\_shipwreck.pdf](http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/pdf/609_shipwreck.pdf) (accessed November 12, 2008).