

“...to boldly go...”

Igor Dumbadze

Literary Club

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Part I Deja vu at Turnagain Arm

We were driving along the Seward Highway - on the shore of Turnagain Arm - in our rented convertible car. The Hertz agent must still be smiling about the convertible she rented to the folks from the "lower 48." Turnagain Arm is one of the branches of Cook's Inlet - a 180 mile long body of water - stretching from the Gulf of Alaska to Anchorage, surrounded by active volcanoes, ragged, bare top mountains and glaciers on either side - and characterized by tidal excursions of up to 40' - the largest in the United States.

Turnagain Arm was named by Captain Cook's sailing master - William Bligh (of the *Bounty* fame), in a sign of frustration, as the search for the Northwest Passage failed to yield the goal - thus necessitating "turning around again" at the closed end of the arm!

Our younger son enjoyed the wind blasting him in the back seat, but becoming increasingly colder, he suggested that maybe we should put the top up! We pulled over on a lookout point to soak in the scenery and got out of the car; my wife Jane, said initially to herself, but later telling us, that she experienced an "unbelievable, absolute feeling of peace." She thought to herself - "I have been here before."

Not much more was mentioned about this until a few months later - I was browsing through an issue of *Outside Magazine*, and came across the name of John Ledyard in an article briefly citing his sailing in 1788 with Captain Cook

in what is now Turnagain Arm. “Hey” I said to my wife, “your middle name is Ledyard – isn’t this your relative...?”

Part II An Evening with Mr. Beaufoy

Good evening gentlemen. I am Henry Beaufoy, and I was invited by your reader tonight, to spend this evening with you reflecting upon my brief, but intense relationship with John Ledyard – sometimes known as “the traveler.” But let me first tell you a few things about myself.

Sometime in the mid-1780’s, a group of us began to meet several times a year at the St. Alban Tavern. We talked about the world of commerce, the rule of law and the rule of force between nations, and could there be an empire without slavery? It wasn’t long before we decided that the next frontier of exploration should be the interior of Africa, as European colonial efforts did not extend beyond the coastal areas. We had not even charted Africa’s greatest rivers: the Congo, the Nile and the Niger! Some had never even seen the Niger! We thus resolved in June of 1788 to change our name from the Saturday’s Club to The Africa Association in order to promote the discovery of the inland parts of Africa. I became secretary of the Association. We had briefly met John Ledyard shortly before his trip across Siberia, and we resumed our acquaintance after he returned to London in 1788. But I am jumping ahead in our story.

What I am about to share with you tonight, is a retrospection of the life of John Ledyard – based on his journal writings, his letters and our many hours

of discourse, often over a pint of ale! I had also corresponded a great deal with his cousin, Isaac Ledyard, a physician in America. We worked on the posthumous publication of John Ledyard's journals, but more about that later. I do want to introduce you to a most amazing gentleman traveller, an enterprising genius, a traveller of observations and reflections and endowed with a mind for discovery. Someone who may indeed have some special interest for the literarians gathered here tonight!

John Ledyard was born in the small port town of Groton, in the British colony of Connecticut in the year 1751 to Captain John and Abigail Ledyard. The patriarch of Abigail's family, the Reverend John Youngs, had established the first English town on Long Island in 1640, while the Ledyards, having arrived from England in 1717, were merchants, sea captains and lawyers. Captain John plyed the West Indies trade, carrying livestock and timber down south and returning with sugar and molasses for the local rum industry. Dealing with tropical storms and French pirateers, he never acquired significant wealth, but managed to rise to the level of men who governed the colony.

John, the future "traveller," became extremely close to his cousins Isaac and Benjamin. While the father's were away at sea, the cousins ran around Groton; they played in the family warehouse, they prowled for coyote and bear, spent hours paddling canoes, sledding in the wintertime and fishing in the summertime. They schooled together in Groton. Young Ledyard considered his cousins Ben and Isaac his brothers, and Isaac, despite his younger age, became

John's protector and champion. For many years, John Ledyard's letters to Isaac formed a running journal where he reported on his latest successes and disappointments, forwarded his observations of the places and people he had met and sometimes simply unburned his soul. Isaac's safeguarding of John's letters formed the basis for future biographical accounts.

When smallpox claimed the life of Captain John in 1762, the widow Abigail returned to her family's hometown of Southold, Long Island. John, however, was sent to live with his grandfather, Squire John, in Hartford – a major commercial center on the Connecticut River, on the far periphery of European settlement and retaining the characteristics of a frontier town, with wild animals and native peoples.

Hartford was good for young John. Squire John was a prominent politician, magistrate, a well to do businessman and an active member of the Congregational Church in Hartford. Squire John had become a close friend of its pastor – Elnathan Whitman, whose skills as an educator were channeled into young Ledyard's education, including the classical languages of Greek and Latin and the assorted classics in those languages so necessary for a gentlemanly adulthood.

Sixteen year old John Ledyard embarked on his first career path: studying law and apprenticing under his uncle, Thomas Seymour, the mayor of Hartford. What young John learned during this period was to speak with skill and

persuasion, broadening his social network and reinforcing the qualities of a gentleman.

In 1771, John Ledyard, now a man of some 20 years of age, with the help of his uncle Thomas Seymour, saw a new path for himself with the opening of a college in New Hampshire – Dartmouth College – where in exchange for several years of Christian missionary work in Indian country, undergraduates could pursue their education. The work study system at Dartmouth made it an egalitarian place – not the sons of wealthy landowners, but the sons of country farmers and the local Indian tribes.

Ledyard told me that Mr. Wheelock, a dear friend of his grandfather and a founder of Dartmouth College, invited him to come to Hanover, nestled amidst the forest along the Connecticut River. Because of his mother's urging and her empathy for the deplorable state of the Indians, he proceeded to study to become a missionary among them. He also recounted that he was a good student, but just not very diligent. He had problems with discipline and found it really irksome to have to attend a set schedule of classes and walk the same trails to chapel and the recitation rooms.

After 4 months at Dartmouth, Ledyard left for Indian country near Lake Champlain and even farther into Mohawk country, wandering amongst the Indians of the Six Nations, thus giving him his first contact with native peoples beyond the formal colonial territories of Britain. He stayed three months, acquiring some language skills, but what he mostly acquired was a sense of

adventurousness. He finally came back to school, but his feeling of being hemmed in did not get better. He was, however, inspired to show his good character, physical strength and leadership through acts of courage. He led a small group of fellow students on an overnight trek through snow and dense forests, eventually scaling Velvet Rocks, a small mountain summit and freezing during the night around a small campfire.

He fled Dartmouth in a fifty foot dugout canoe, hollowed out by adzes with his friends, and stocked with some food, a copy of Ovid and a Greek version of the New Testament; he floated down the Connecticut River, concealed in a bearskin wrap drawn around his neck, arriving on the shore of his grandfather's old farm in Hartford. And although this episode has become a part of Ledyard's myth, perhaps what it best revealed was his future inclination to travel and his bountiful resourcefulness.

Having dropped out of college, having antagonized the president of Dartmouth, and having abandoned his legal career, Ledyard turned towards the ministry. But securing a clerical position, under his circumstances, was not promising. Not possessing enough money to acquire any farmland and with the eve of your Revolution on the horizon, Ledyard turned to being a common sailor aboard a New England vessel plying the European trade through the port of Gibraltar. The wonders of the world beyond New England drew him to a new calling; if poverty and reputation kept him from higher callings at home, and while unburdened by family and property, he would make his way as a traveler.

After returning to New London, he signed on a vessel bound for Falmouth, England, where he sought out wealthy relatives in London, who subsequently turned him away, and thus Ledyard, was arrested for vagrancy. The option of joining the British army was preferable to being sent to a penal colony, but the Revolution becoming more of a reality, Ledyard did not relish the thought of fighting against his countrymen; fortunately an opening in the seaborne marines gave him a way out. When Captain James Cook and his ships the *Discovery* and the *Resolution* prepared to set sail for the Pacific in July of 1776, Ledyard, aged 24, secured passage. He was unmarried, had no living father or grandfather, no estate and had done little to distinguish himself - sailing the Pacific would be his chance.

The broad, shallow hulled, 462 ton *Resolution* was Ledyard's home for 4 years. Cook had already circumnavigated the world twice and this third voyage would take him south to the Cape of Good Hope, east through the Indian Ocean, south of Australia to New Zealand, then north to America's uncharted northwest coast, Alaska and the Bering Sea. Ledyard kept a journal of the entire voyage with Cook, indicating that...

"...I based it on what I saw and heard. Our two ships, the *Resolution* and the *Discovery* left England on July 12, 1776, arriving at the Cape of Good Hope on December 1st, where we refitted, and then set out in a South Easterly direction. After some 25 days, we came across the Kerguelen Islands. It rained profusely, the shore was covered with seals and flocks of birds. They were totally unafraid of man, and we were able to secure food and oil for for our ship. After

celebrating Christmas, we set sail for New Holland (which is what we called Australia back then), where provisions were plentiful.” (1)

It is at this point that Ledyard showed his noteworthy skills of observation, as he described the native inhabitants. I suspect that his experience with the Indians and the outdoor wilderness, persisted in his innate abilities to observe and interact with the native people of his journeys. Ledyard recalled that...

“...the men, women and children came down to greet us; they were naked and carrying only sharpened sticks with them; they had black skin, curly hair and the men had beards. They were unafraid of guns...they lived under some pieces of bark laid over poles...” (2)

Ledyard continued with his narrative, describing their stop in Queen Charlotte’s Sound, in what you today call New Zealand, and then sailing onward to Otaheite, which is Tahiti, and because of strong winds, needing to make a stop amidst the Friendly Islands, which is now called Tonga. He described many islands and islanders, who would often bring out fruit and hogs in their canoes in order to trade.

By August 14, Cook had reached Tahiti in the Society Islands, where Ledyard picked up his story...

“...we were greeted by festivities and recognition of old acquaintances from the previous two visits. The inhabitants were tall, strong limbed with a clear olive complexion with many tattoos, coarse black hair and handsome

faces. They were courteous, hospitable and wore clothing made from the bark of trees; they liked music and dancing..." (3)

After about 10 days, Cook set sail for the American coast, anchoring in Nootka Sound, which on today's maps is along the western coast of Victoria Island. Ledyard again seemed to see in the natives a resemblance to the Indians for whom he had such an affinity from his days at Dartmouth College; he continued his astute observations on the peculiarities and commonalities of the native people. He commented that...

"...the people on the northwest coast resembled the people that inhabited the other side of the continent and also had strong resemblances to the natives of Queen Charlotte's Sound in their manner of dress, physical appearance, guttural manner of language and even the cannibalism. I found copper bracelets that could have only come from the area of Hudson Bay...exploration could be a mercantile enterprise..." (4)

They left Nootka Sound after a few days and sailed north towards the Bering Sea, which, this being August, was free of ice. Ledyard continued his journal...

"...the forests were thick along the coast, whales breached in sheltered waters and the fish were plenty. Hing south east Alaska, we explored a number of inlets, but the cul-de-sacs were dead ends, including Turnagain Arm...the gloomy, unpredictable foggy weather imposed major hardships, and after sailing into the cold Chukchi Sea, encountering walls of ice, we decided to head south. We worked our way through the Aleutian Islands, anchoring near Unalaska, where we undertook repairs to the leaks in *Resolution's* hull." (5)

With great glee, Ledyard described an incident that occurred...

“...I must recount an interesting encounter in Unalaska, which strongly suggests the presence of Europeans. We saw two different types of people - aboriginal and asian; they spoke different dialects but most amazingly, the chief served us a cake of rye meal with a piece of salmon in it, seasoned with salt and pepper; there were white strangers in the country who also came in large vessels like ours. Captain Cook decided to send me on an exploration of the island, guided by the native chief. We travelled some 15 miles into the interior of the land, surrounded by dense fog, passing some small villages, and in a large village with some 30 huts, we encountered a number of Russian fur traders, who offered us spirits, tobacco snuff, boiled whale and halibut and broiled salmon. I had a comfortable bed of different fur skins, a hot bath in the morning, and while a snow storm delayed my return to the *Resolution*, I did get a chance to visit the Russian's sailing sloop in which they came over from Kamchatka, across the Bering Sea, to set up a pelt and fur factory some 5 years earlier. Upon our return, they visited with Captain Cook, before we set off in October 1788 on a two month course to Hawaii.” (6)

You can imagine the unbridled exhilaration of the crew of British sailors, who had spent the previous 7 months searching the frigid Arctic waters for the Northwest Passage, when they saw the lush flora and foliage of the islands. The layover in Hawaii was marred by the untimely death of Captain Cook at the hands of the natives. I learned later that there was much debate about the circumstances surrounding Cook's death, but since numerous witnesses from

the *Discovery* placed Ledyard at the scene and thus a witness to Cook's death, Ledyard's journal provided a vivid starting point for the discussion.

Following their departure from Hawaii, nearly a third of their voyage remained, filled with a myriad of trials, storms and adventures. They finally lashed their ships to the London docks on 7 October 1780, some 4 years, 2 months and 24 days after their departure and completing one of the great sailing voyages ever undertaken.

The third voyage of Cook is likely the most documented of his journeys. Ledyard's journal was drawn from notes kept by Ledyard during the voyage and its concerns were mostly scientific and ethnographic, with several artful essays on the Pacific Islanders, the breadfruit trees, the native people's religions, social customs, clothing, diet and government. He pondered possible migration patterns and the commonality of language. Writing a journal account of this voyage was important to Ledyard, as he strived to present himself as an honorable, disciplined and duty bound individual on a voyage under the command of the British Navy's most skilled commander. After some publication challenges, he did publish his only work in 1783, *A Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage*. Probably the most memorable part of the journal was Ledyard's absolute fascination of seeing the west coast of North America and concluding that the North American continent was much bigger than the boundary of the Mississippi River!

Following the Cook journey, Ledyard began to find support for a bold scheme to exploit the rich commercial resources of the Pacific Northwest. He suggested that the exotic goods from China – the teas, the silks, the spices and porcelains, that made it to America via British trade, could now be obtained for the price of a few otter skins. This could be the economic engine of a new American imperial project.

Sometime during the spring of 1783, Ledyard met Robert Morris, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, and convinced him to be a patron of such a venture, using furs as the commodity for trade. Freed from British constraints after the Revolutionary War, American merchants could now freely tap the world's markets, and the mother lode was China. There were plenty of ships left over from the Revolutionary War, but to get to China, a ship had to sail to the Northwest coast, either rounding the treacherous Cape Horn or sailing across the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans! While debates raged regarding the best passage, Morris was able to mobilize enough capital to start provisioning an assortment of ships. European competition, however, was increasing for the furs. Inspired by Cook's journeys, and led by former commanders in Cook's expeditions, British and French ships were arriving frequently to the Northwest coasts. The stampede to this region gave investor's pause, with concern for rising fur prices and a glutted Chinese market. Ledyard's prospects for an oceanic fur trade were diminishing, but with Morris's encouragement, Ledyard arrived in Paris, where he hoped its wealth

and a growing American expatriate community would provide investors and patrons. With the resolve of a Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Ledyard fell upon good fortune again, meeting the American naval commander John Paul Jones. The ever daring Jones seized upon Ledyard's scheme and along with Ledyard, made plans to take two ships to the Northwest coast, where they would establish a trading factory, overseen by Ledyard himself, and then in due course sail to China laden with furs. Ledyard's experience gained from the Cook voyages and Jones's great fame would lure investors. During the fall of 1785, while Jones was procuring the ships, Ledyard became a fixture in the social elite in Paris. He resumed his writing, and Thomas Jefferson, the new minister to France, became his new friend. Ledyard fell in with the circle of notables who congregated around Jefferson's residence.

Ledyard greatly admired Jefferson and his intellect. Long discussions regarding social issues occupied their time, as well as the place of the new United States in an unfriendly world, now devoid of British protection in the Mediterranean Sea and along the West Africa coast. And so, Jefferson began to envision an American empire, not based on a network of transoceanic commerce, but using the Pacific Northwest as a foothold for a new continental empire, ports on both coasts with a vast, productive transcontinental hinterland, free from the hazards of oceanic commerce. Jefferson had talked with General George Rogers Clark about leading an expedition to the California coast to explore the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific

Ocean, but Congress, in its post revolution phase, had neither the will nor the resources to support such a project. Realizing that the oceanic trade enterprise was collapsing, Ledyard proposed to Jefferson that he would become the first white American to explore on foot, the western expanse of North America. Jefferson saw the benefits of such a venture, and they began planning a land crossing of Russia to the Kamchatka Peninsula, then a crossing voyage in a Russian vessel to Nootka Sound, going south on foot to the latitude of the Missouri River and then across the United States. Notwithstanding the commercial mission of the journey, the collection of geographic data was intertwined with the primary objective. There was concern that possessing Western goods could endanger Ledyard's life, in that Ledyard would be robbed of any implements by "savages and perhaps murdered..." an ingenious system was devised that Ledyard would "prick certain characters into his own skin with the juice of some herbs." These characters would correspond to coordinates of important rivers and other landmarks. Ledyard would have the length of an English foot tattooed on his body, from which measurement he could craft a stick, craft a crude sundial and do some basic calculations to determine latitudes.

Nearly a year passed between the time Ledyard began planning the excursion and his departure in December of 1786. Part of the delay was funding, but the more damning setback was Empress Catherine's refusal to grant permission to traverse her dominions; she said "...I do not know these

Americans at all and have nothing to do with them until now.” Despite this lack of permission, Ledyard set sail from London to Hamburg, made his way to Stockholm, expecting to then cross a frozen Gulf of Bothnia to Finland aboard a horse drawn sledge, a journey of some 50 miles, and then travel southeast to St. Petersburg. But an unusually warm winter kept the Gulf from freezing, necessitating travel north aboard sleighs, using logging roads through Lapland, just below the Arctic Circle, and then going down through the difficult and sparsely populated Finnish interior – a journey taking some eight weeks. Ledyard wrote that he only had his English cloak for protection against the cold and snow and depended heavily on the generosity of ordinary people along the way.

Arriving in St. Petersburg in March of 1787, a bit frostbitten but determined more than ever to continue his travels, he seemed unimpressed by the city itself, while consumed with the frustration of travel in the Russian dominions, where movement depended on the actions of a large, impersonal state bureaucracy.

After nearly three months in St. Petersburg, Ledyard was able to secure papers necessary for travel and was thus able to use the post roads. He travelled in a covered, horse drawn coach to Moscow, then east through the Ural Mountains and across the vast steppes to Barnaul, a 2 month journey of nearly 2500 miles! The coach was barely insulated from the wind and rain as

they drove day after day through the monotonous, desolate forests and steppes. Ledyard wrote that...

“...he encountered in the Urals his first Tatar, and they looked so much like the natives I met in the forests around Dartmouth and Nootka Sound. Had they not been separated by the sea, they would have been the same people.”
(7)

These were radical observations for 1787, but more about this later.

After Barnaul, Ledyard departed eastward to Irkutsk, using a kibitka pulled by three horses and an assortment of flat bottomed boats along the vast system of rivers; a journey of 1200 miles through hilly, rough, thickly forested countryside with very few inhabitants. The wealthy city of Irkutsk, ruled by merchant elites and populated by convicts and exiles, was a center of the Russian fur trade as well as a major trading post with China. While in Irkutsk, Ledyard explored Lake Baikal, taking careful measurements, while noting that the bitterly cold, gray, overcast weather reminded him of sailing with Captain Cook in Alaska!

Ledyard met Grigori Shelikhov, a fur trading entrepreneur who in 1784 had founded Russia's principle American fur trading factory on Kodiak Island, with the avowed intent to solidify Russia's control of the North Pacific fur trade. This was actually the forerunner of the Russian America Company. Shelikhov shared charts and maps with Ledyard, and offered Ledyard passage aboard one of his vessels leaving the following summer from Okhotsk for Kodiak. Ledyard then travelled another 1500 miles to Yakutsk, with eventual plans to set off for

Okhotsk, but by late September, with the arrival of snow and ice, local officials warned Ledyard about the foolishness of attempting to traverse the 500 miles to Okhotsk, and thus Ledyard spent the winter in Yakutsk, living among the local population and writing in his journal.

Before Cook's men returned with stories of potential profits from the North Pacific fur trade, Russia had very little competition in that region. Russia, under Catherine the Great, felt that by "virtue of discovery," they had indisputable claim to the land around the Alaska mainland. Shelikhov was having his suspicion about the American traveler with British papers, who had uncertain motives and numerous questions about those very lands, thus possibly threatening Russia's lucrative, and vital, fur trade. The fact that a seemingly backward foreign power would question his motives, was incomprehensible to Ledyard. What he saw in Unalaska, a few crude villages, no substantial harbor, no great fur trading factories, did not convey the significance of this outpost, which was becoming a vital component in a larger Russian Imperial project. Catherine II had already sent an expedition, led by Joseph Billings, to survey and secure these lands; Ledyard had not seen the more significant development on Kodiak Island, and the obvious fact that Russia was quite reluctant to grant some foreign traveler the ability to encroach upon their North Pacific claims. The Empress by now had determined that Ledyard was no longer welcome in Russia; Russian police detained him and escorted him back to the Polish borderlands and eventually to Prussia. He

returned from his trip haggard and exhausted. He was penniless and once again would depend on his friends. His only valuable possession was a travel diary.

Returning to London in 1788, Ledyard found a world in flux. The Americans were in the process of ratifying a constitution whereas in England, debates about the abolition of slavery and cessation of the slave trade, were raging. It was at this time, that The Africa Association, in order to promote discovery and generate knowledge of the inland parts of Africa, began to seek persons who could be sent on journeys of exploration. Africa offered solutions as a source of raw materials for industrial Britain and perhaps a replacement for the loss of the American colonies. It was to Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society and the Association secretary, yours truly, that Ledyard offered his services in 1788. We were very impressed with Ledyard, not only for his physical presence, but also for the gentlemanly persona, what we considered the very embodiment of the gentleman traveler.

I spread a map before Ledyard, tracing a line from Cairo to Sennar (what today you call Sudan), and thence westward in the supposed direction of the Niger. This was the proposed route of exploration. Ledyard's response was that he was ready to leave the next day! I was very much impressed - he was enlightened enough to communicate information, engage non-European peoples and yet rough-hewn enough to endure the physical hardships.

As he prepared to leave for Africa, he wrote to his cousin Isaac in New York, sending him his beloved cloak...

“...it was made in London. I travelled on foot with it in Sweden, Finland and Lord knows where; in opulence and poverty I have kept it, slept in it, drank in it, fought in it; it has been my constant and faithful servant...and to give it asylum, I send it to you...” (8)

His Russian journal he left with me.

On June 30, 1788 he left Paris, then on to Marseille, across the Mediterranean to Alexandria and then to Cairo. He wrote in his letters...

“...up the Nile to Cairo, there were many villages on the bank, and boats laden with onions, dates, sheep...finally we landed in a small village, and took asses to Cairo - Christians could only ride on asses...Cairo was dusty, dirty, smelly and a mud puddle. About half the size of Paris...with bugs, mosquitos, lepers and fever. A wretched hole and a nest of vagabonds...The Venetian consul arranged for a room at the Christian convent...and the most powerful Bey in the region gave me letters of protection...” (9)

Ledyard planned to secure supplies in Cairo, then latch on to a caravan heading for Sennar, from where he would embark westward in search of the Niger. He anticipated a journey of 3 years. He spent 3-4 months in Cairo, keeping a diary and dressed in the local clothing of a turban, loose fitting pants with flowing robes; but whether it was impeded by tribal wars or dust storms, a misunderstanding of local customs or the geography of the land, a caravan failed to materialize.

In his last letter to the Association, Ledyard indicated that he had indeed secured a merchant who would guide him to Sennar, and asked that he be remembered to Jefferson. Letters took two months to reach France, and when in early 1789 his letters stopped, we assumed that Ledyard was now deep in Africa. I learned later, that the caravan never took off. Ledyard developed a case of dysentery and swallowed a dose of “acid of vitriol,” what we now call sulfuric acid, which was used in small doses to treat digestive disorders; this was followed by potassium antimony, as an emetic, which resulted in forceful vomiting, bleeding and after three agonizing days, Ledyard died in his small convent room. He was buried in an unmarked grave in a small cemetery reserved for visiting Englishmen.

I continued to deal with Dr. Isaac Ledyard for many years and in 1797, the family did obtain the journal and many of Ledyard's Africa writings.

Gentlemen, my story draws to a close, the evening is getting late, my notes are exhausted and the ale is running low. I have immensely enjoyed my visit with you - fine literarians that you are. My host tonight, will finish the story, as history, extending beyond my own timeline, has some of its own final judgements.

As always, I remain your humble servant...

Part III And so...”where in the world is John the Traveler?...”

A Unitarian minister and future president of Harvard University, Jared Sparks, published Ledyard's biography some 3 decades later, from which many of the quotes in this paper originate, and which continues to give readers a protagonist admirable for his fortitude and for an abiding refusal to be cowed by failure. Acknowledging that Ledyard actually accomplished little, Sparks nevertheless closes his book with the conclusion that the “acts of Ledyard's life demand notice less on account of their results, than the spirit in which they were performed. “ Ledyard was the progenitor of a unique breed of men who selflessly served their nation and its imperial ambitions. He forged a new American archetype – the heroic explorer: the explorer who wanted to go to unmapped places, be the first contact and be out in the field, not the armchair of the library. He inspired other explorers such as James Cochrane, who in 1820, tramped across Siberia in Ledyard's footsteps, and Mungo Park, who completed Ledyard's Africa journey. Some academics have speculated that Ledyard was the inspiration for Melville's Ishmael, as he is directly cited in *Moby Dick's* early chapters. Inspired by Ledyard's tales of fur pelts in Nootka Sound, the sailing ships *Columbia* and *Washington* sailed out of Boston in 1787 bound for the Northwest, and Jefferson, refusing to give up on the idea of exploring North America from coast to coast, some 15 years after meeting Ledyard, appointed Lewis and Clark to head East to West – the two of them eventually standing on the coast of Oregon in 1805.

Although anthropology as a word did not appear in print until 1805, literate civilizations, having come increasingly into contact with a number of different societies, were beginning to discuss and debate cultural differences among them and the biological origin of humans. Ledyard's focus on cultural and physical similarities amongst all the indigenous peoples he visited, contributed to the debate and suggested to him that we were all one people, the same family and of common origin. Ledyard was certain that the difference in the color of men was the effect of natural causes.

Ledyard lives on at Dartmouth College, where a plaque marks Velvet Rocks, site of Ledyard's camping on a winter night, and a forerunner of the Dartmouth Outing Club; undergraduates created the Ledyard Canoe Club, which recreates his trip down the Connecticut River, now an annual pilgrimage. Next to the Club's building, there is a small stone monument honoring their compatriot and extolling that "He heard the voice crying in the wilderness. He was the Dartmouth spirit." Legend has it that in his farewell letter to Mr. Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth, Ledyard gave the college its signature green color when he wrote that it would "flourish in immortal green."

Robert Frost, class of 1896, cherished American poet and Literary Club visitor, despite leaving Dartmouth after his freshman year, opened his 1955 commencement address by saying:

"I'm one of the original members of the Outing Club - me and Ledyard. You don't know it, and I shouldn't tell it perhaps, but I go every year, once a

year, to touch Ledyard's monument down there as the patron saint of freshmen who run away." (10)

A haunting image of a stooped, white haired New Englander going on a Ledyard pilgrimage along the banks of the Connecticut River.

At the center of Ledyard's story lies the ambition of the man himself. He became the first American to experience the magnificence of North America's Pacific coastline, bask in Hawaii's tropical pleasures and trek across Siberia's icy tundra. Through a long series of failures, Ledyard nevertheless persevered in his relentless pursuit of knowledge. Ledyard was aware that the simple experience in faraway places would not earn him the fame that he craved so much, so he was able to translate that experience into language that lured patrons to support his travels. In Ledyard's time, scientific data collection was in its infancy, but it was language in the written form that lent authority to this experience. Ledyard's travel journals reflected his deference to this imperative. He would have made a fine "literarian."

Oh, and by the way, when I asked my wife - "Isn't he your relative - your middle name is Ledyard..." - the answer was "yes." He is her great, great, great grandmother's first cousin!

And interestingly enough, there is a Literary Club connection: Judge William Ledyard Avery, my wife's great grandfather, whose grandmother was Ledyard's first cousin, was a "literarian" and read his paper entitled "The North Briton No. 45," to the membership on April 23, 1887

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3. Ibid., 46-51.
4. Ibid., 46-51.
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6. Ibid., 99-103.
7. Ibid., 195-196.
8. Stephen Watrous, ed. *John Ledyard's Journey Through Russia and Siberia 1787-1788. The Journal and Selected Letters* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 246-247.
9. Sparks, *The Life of John Ledyard*, 203-204.
10. James Zug, *American Traveler. The Life and Adventures of John Ledyard. The Man Who Dreamed of Walking the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 23.