

NACHES PASS BANCROFT ACCT.

[Hubert H. Bancroft. Works. Volume XXXI. History of Washington Idaho and Montana, 1845-1889. San Francisco: History Company, 1890 p. 63-66].

The most important thing to be done for a new country is the laying-out and improvement of roads. No country ever suffered more from the absence of good roads than Oregon, and the pioneers of the Puget Sound region realized fully the drawback they had to contend against to induce immigrants from the border states to come to the shores of their new Mediterranean after having reached the settled Valley Willamette.

The only way in which they could hope to secure large families of agricultural people and numerous herds of cattle, with work-oxen and horses, was to have a road over the Cascade Mountains on the north side of the Columbia as good as the one around the base of Mount Hood on the south side. As early as 1850 it was determined at a public meeting to make the effort to open a road over the mountains and down the Yakima River to Fort Walla Walla, to intersect the immigrant road from Grand Ronde.

A sum of money was raised among the few settlers, and a company of young men, headed by M. T. Simmons, was organized to hew out a highway for the passage of wagons to the Sound. Another incentive to this labor was the alleged discovery of gold on the Yakima and Spokane rivers by J. L. Parrish and W. H. Gray, while making a tour through the eastern division of Oregon.

The undertaking of opening a road through the dense forests and up and down the fearfully steep ridges proved too great for the means and strength of Simmons' company, and only served to fix the resolve to complete the work at some future time.

There was, previous to 1852, no road between Olympia and Tumwater, or between Tumwater and Cowlitz landing. The first mail contract over this route was let July 11, 1851, and the mail carried on horseback, in the pockets of A.. B. Rabbeson, Simmons being- postmaster at Olympia, and Warbass at the Cowlitz, or Warbassport.

The road was so much improved in 1852 that a mail-wagon was driven over it that year, yet with great difficulty, being avoided as much as possible by passengers.

In 1853 an express line was established over the route by John G. Parker and Henry D. Colter carrying mail and light packages on horseback,[44] nor was there much improvement in this route for another two or three years.

In 1853 it was again resolved to open the road for the immigration to come into the new territory over the Cascade Mountains. A general meeting of citizens was held at Olympia May 14th to discuss the subject in all its bearings, when G. N. McConaha, Whitfield Kirtley, Charles Eaton, John Edgar, and E. J. Allen were chosen road-viewers to report upon the practicability of the undertaking.

At the end of three weeks a report was made of the route from Olympia to the summit of the Cascade Range, and by the middle of July volunteers were at work upon the survey, who so far succeeded in their design as to cut a way by which thirty-five wagons reached the shores of the Sound that autumn, bringing between one and two hundred men, women, and children, to populate the rich valleys of White and Puyallup rivers.

The wagon-road was not then, nor many years later, a good one, but in summer it compensated for the discomforts of the ride by giving the traveller a view of the most magnificent fir forest in the world, the boles of the trees towering 100 or 150 feet without a limb; while 100 feet above, their tapering tops seem to pierce the sky.

This enterprise will receive further mention hereafter. The men who labored for it were, besides those before mentioned, George Shazer, B. F. Yantis, William Packwood, B. F. Shaw, John Alexander, B. Close, A. W. Moore, E. Sylvester, James Hurd, and W. W. Plumb. The men who worked upon the eastern end of the road were Whitfield Kirtley, Edwin Marsh, Nelson Sargent, Paul Ruddell, Edward Miller, J. W. Fonts, John L. Perkins, Isaac M. Brown, James Alverson, Nathaniel C. Stewart, William Carpenter, E. L. Allen, A. C. Burge, Thomas Dixon, Ephraim Allyn, James H. Allyn, George Githers, John Walker, John H. Mills, H. S. More, B. Forman, Ed. Crofts, James Boise, Robert Patterson, Edward Miller, Edward Wallace, Lewis Wallace, James H. Smith, John Barrow, and James Meek.

Among them [the Longmire Byles Wagon train] were John W. Lane and wife, Samuel Ray, William Ray, Henry Mitchell, H. Rockenfeld, James Barr, J. A. Sperry, William Catlin, Evan Watts, J. J. Ragan, William McCreary, G. Miller, John Nelson, James Longmire, wife and 5 children, Erastus A. Light, wife and child, William M. Kincaid, wife and 6 children, Isaac Woolery, wife and 4 children, Abram H. Woolery, wife and 3 children, and Peter Judson, wife and 2

children, composing the first train of 47 persons.

This train had 62 work-oxen, 20 cows, and 7 mares. There were, besides, J. W. Woodward, John B. Moyer, Z. Gotzan, Aaron Rockenfeld, Norman Kilborn, Isaac Lemmon, H. A. Finnell, William H. Downey, wife and children, John James Downey and daughter, Abiel Morrison, Charlotte his wife, and family, George Haywood, James Bell, John Bell, W. H. Brannon and family, John Carson and wife, Israel Wright, Byrd Wright, Frank Wright, Van Ogle, and Addison S. Persham, most of whom crossed by the Nachess pass. Many of them had families and friends who are not named here.