

NACHES PASS TRAIL. BARTLETT Student History

Laura B. Downey Bartlett, "First immigrant train over the Cascade Mountains," Students history of the Northwest and the State of Washington. Tacoma: Smith-Digby, 1922. p. 161-166.

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In the early part of 1853, while the Territory of Washington was being brought into life, another most important move was being made, through and by which the newly made territory would be greatly benefitted.

On the 15th day of April, 1853, at Independence, Missouri an immigrant train was leaving for great Oregon Territory, as they supposed, but which had, in the interim of their coining, become the Territory of Washington.

The founders of this train, with their families, household goods, supplies and other necessary equipments, loaded into a dead-" wagon, drawn by oxen, though a few had horses, started on their long, laborious journey- to an unknown country-in number less than one hundred-people, all told.

They were six months on the way, but increased their numbers enroute to one hundred and seventy-five people, by smaller companies joining them.

On leaving Independence, the party realized the necessity of having a Captain, and to that end Mr. James Biles was chosen, with William R. Downey, Bartolomew Baker, Charles Biles, and Nelson Sargent as Assistants.

The first company to join the original train was that of James Longmire, with Mr. Longmire in command, who made famous the "Longmire Springs" which he later discovered and located.

The next company to join in was that of Tyrus Himes and family, one of whom, a small boy at that time, is George H. Himes, who is now Secretary of the Oregon State Historical and State Pioneer Associations.

To appreciate some of the experiences of this first emigrant train coming over the Cascade Mountains into the Puget Sound country, and to realize the stamina and determination of its people - and what its coming meant to western Washington, it will be necessary to relate some of the incidents in connection with it; some of which were very amusing, but which might have been very serious; while others taxed them to their extreme power of endurance.

Soon after the family of Mr. Tyrus Himes joined into the main train, and while they were encamped on the Blue Mountains, before reaching the Umatilla River, Chief Peu-Peu Mox-Mox (Yellow Serpent), with a number of his braves, all dressed in fringed and beaded buckskin suits and feather war bonnets, rode into camp and were attracted to the wagon of Mr. Himes, where the Chief became very much interested in the little golden-haired baby sister her brother George was taking

care of.

Indians are partial to red and light hair, and the little red-haired baby girl took the eye of the great Chief of the Walla Walla. He, with his braves, mounted their horses and rode away, and the next morning hundreds of Indian ponies were seen around the hills close by. They soon learned they were being driven there by order of Chief Peu-Peu Mox-Mox, to trade for the little red-haired baby.

Later in the day the Chief and his braves came, he offering all those horses for the little girl, but, it is needless to say, his offer was declined, and he left with a sad heart, followed by his braves, meanwhile striking his breast, saying: "Nika tum-tum, wake skookum," meaning his heart was not strong, or was weak and sick.

This one incident is a proof of Indian honor; for in this proposed business transaction of his, when rejected, had the Chief been of evil mind and so inclined, with his great number of warriors, he could have returned and massacred the immigrants, who were so few in number as compared with his followers, and taken the coveted prize.

On reaching the Wenas Valley, Yakima, the train, now consisting of one hundred and seventy-five people, with thirty-six wagons, and a few saddle horses, camped for a few days' rest before crossing the mountains to the Puget Sound country, and fortunate indeed were they in their selection of a camping ground, for they soon learned they were located near a garden owned by Chief Ow-hi, and from him they bought potatoes, which were at that time a great treat, as they had had no vegetables, and provisions were running low.

This property is now owned by Mr. Longmire, who was a small lad in the 1853 train. Mr. Longmire has caused to be placed on the spot where they camped a historical shaft, marking and dedicating it to the "Pioneers of the First Immigrant Train, Coming over the Cascade Mountains via the Nachez Pass to Puget Sound."

After a few days' rest-they made ready to climb the mountains.

It was late in September, and they soon found that the most laborious part of their trip was before them. On reaching the top of the pass they camped for the night on Summit Prairie, in full view of Tacobet Lemonti (Indian name for all perpetual snow covered mountains), United States Geographical name, Rainier.

They made an early start the next morning, but soon came to a sudden halt. They had come to an almost perpendicular drop of thirty feet, and for at least a thousand feet farther it was so steep that an animal could scarcely stand up; but there was no other way to go, as careful examination had demonstrated, and go on they must.

When it was learned that the ropes were not long enough to lower the wagons to safety, Mr. James Biles said: "Kill one of my poorer oxen and make a rope of his hide, and if that is not long enough, kill another." Three steers were killed before the necessary length was secured.

Two wagons were demolished in lowering them down the mountain side, some provisions lost. They could spare the wagons, but food was getting too scarce to be lost. The cattle were driven down single file by a circuitous route. On arriving at the foot of the mountain, it took two days to

make the descent, they crossed Greenwater River and camped for the night.

On the 9th of October, 1853, only lacking a few days of being six months on the journey, they arrived on the West side of the mountains and camped on Bare Prairie, where they found a bubbling spring of clear water.

This prairie they named Bare, from the lack of verdure, having neither grass nor shrubbery growing on it.

From there they proceeded on to near Clover Creek, where they camped, and there they were given garden stuff by two settlers named Lackey and Mahan, and some beeves by Dr. William Tolmie, of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a branch of the Hudson's Bay Company.

When these beeves were sent to camp, Dr. Tolmie placed them in charge of a very estimable lady, Mrs. Mary Ann Woolery, known among the pioneers as "Aunt Pop", and instructed her to keep the beeves until the two elder men returned to camp, upon whom should fall the duty of equally dividing them.

It was not long before Mrs. Woolery was put to the test of guarding her trust—and thus far on the journey all the honor and credit had been given the men for strength of will and character—but here the little lady, of not over one hundred pounds weight, steps to the fore, showing so much determination and pep that she backed down a large, over-bearing man, bent on running things to suit his own pleasure, regardless of others. This man referred to came with a knife and wanted some meat. Mrs. Woolery said: "No, sir, you can't have any now."

He replied: "I am hungry and I am going to have some of it. I can't wait." Then Mrs. Woolery replied: "You will have to wait; I am just as hungry as you are, and I expect to wait; and so are all the rest hungry; and the man (meaning Dr. Tolmie) said I was not to allow any one to touch the meat until the two eldest men came into camp, and they would divide it evenly."

The man again said: "I can't wait for that, and I will not either."

"You will have to," she replied.

"By what authority?" he questioned.

"There is my authority," she said in a defiant tone, shaking her clenched fist at him, "and if you touch that meat I'll take that ox bow to you," and suiting her action to her word, she picked it up and stood between the man and the fresh meat. The man, seeing she meant business, gave it up and went away to await his turn with the others.

The two eldest men soon after returned, released her from guard duty and divided the meat.

The fresh meat and vegetables were a most welcome treat to immigrants, who were indeed more than deserving of the best that could be furnished them at the end of their long and tedious journey.

This was the last time that all the company camped together. From there, they went in different directions, the majority of them taking up donation claims and settling in Pierce or Thurston Counties, and their children coming with them, constitute those who remain of the 1853 Immigrant Train.

It is true there were a few settlers on the west side of the mountains before the first immigrants came over the Naches Pass, but they came either around Cape Horn in sailing vessels, or across the Isthmus of Panama, and from there up the Coast in sailing vessels; while others crossed the plains, came down the Columbia River to the Cowlitz landing and from there to Olympia by road, and from Olympia to Steilacoom and Seattle by canoe, which was the only means of transportation at that time and for some time thereafter.

Among some of the inconveniences which the immigrants of the 1853 train had to contend with and overcome-was that of fording so many streams, and we may well wonder how they accomplished it. The Yakima River they crossed eight times, the Naches sixty-eight, Greenwater River sixteen times, White River seven and the Puyallup once.

These were a part of the people who paved the way for the settling and developing of the State of Washington, who, through their adherence to the principles of justice to all, and their endurance. of many trials and struggles, leave to this generation a lesson it would be well to follow. We owe to them an obligation which can be repaid only in loyal American Citizenship, and to protect from disloyalty within our borders, and from invasion without, this, our Western Empire, which they founded.

No greater compliment, when truthfully said, can be paid to young men or women than this: "They are our splendid samples of American citizenship."