

THRILLING STORY OF ADVENTUROUS EXPEDITION BY MEN WHO BLAZED WAY FOR "SOUTH ROAD" INTO OREGON COUNTRY, TOLD BY MEMBER OF THAT HISTORIC PARTY

Immigrants of 1843 After Losing Sons in Whirling Waters at Celilo Determined to Find a Safer Route for Subsequent Immigrant Trains; the New Route They Proposed Was Through an "Unexplored Region."

(From the Oregon Historical Quarterly.)

After the lapse of thirty-one years (as there has been no history of this circumstance placed before the public), I propose to give a plain statement of facts from notes taken at the time and from memory, giving motives that led to the enterprise. Our immigration of 1843, being the largest that had ever crossed the plains, our progress was necessarily slow, having to hunt out passes for our wagons over rivers, creeks, deep gullies, digging down the banks where nothing but a pack trail had been before, cutting our way through the dense forests before we could reach the valley of the Columbia, and then it appeared as though our greatest troubles had begun; for here we had to encounter cataracts and falls of the Columbia and the broad and lofty Cascades with their heavy forests.

At Fort Walla Walla, on the banks of the Columbia river, with our teams almost exhausted, we were advised to leave our wagons and animals over winter at that place in the care of the Hudson's Bay Co. A portion of the immigrants, including my two brothers, families and my own, accepted the proposition, providing we could secure boats in which to descend the river, as it was supposed we might secure them from the Hudson's Bay Co. Under these considerations we made arrangements with the said company for the care of the latter through the winter. We failed in our efforts to obtain boats; having a whipsaw and other tools with us we hunted logs from the masses of drift wood lodged along the river banks, hewed them out, sawed them into lumber, and built boats and with our families and contents of our wagons, commenced the descent of the river. Dr. Whitman procured the services of two Indians to act as pilots. The Dalles. From there we thought we would have but little trouble by making a portage at the Cascades. We did well till we reached The Dalles, a series of falls and cataracts. Just above the Cascade mountains, one of our boats, containing six persons, was caught in one of those terrible whirlpools and upset. My son, ten years old, my brother Jesse's son, Edward, same age, and a man by the name of McChellan, who was a member of my family, were lost. The other three who escaped were left to struggle the best they could until we made the land with the other boats. Leaving the women and children on shore while we rushed to the rescue, it was only with the greatest effort that we were able to keep our boats from sharing the same fate. William Donke, a young man who could not swim, held on to a feather bed until overtaken and rescued. W.

Parker and my son Elsha, then 12 years old, after drifting through whirlpools among craggy rocks for more than a mile, reined themselves by catching hold of a large rock a few feet above water at the head of Rock Island. At the time of the disaster it was utterly impossible to render them any assistance for it was only with the greatest skill that we succeeded in saving the women and children from sharing the same fate. It was a painful scene beyond description. We dare not go to their assistance without exposing the occupants of the other boats to certain destruction, while those persons were struggling for life in the surging waters. The whole scene was witnessed by General Fremont and his company of explorers who were camped immediately opposite, and were powerless to render us any assistance. The bodies of the drowned were never recovered, though we offered a reward to the Indians who searched the river for months. We reached the Cascades without any other incidents worth relating.

We then made a portage around the falls, packing the most of our effects on our backs, dragging boats over the rocks, reloading and proceeded on our way to Vancouver, ascending the Willamette river to the falls, there made another portage around the falls, reloaded again, ascended the river 25 miles, coming to a place called Champag, where we finally left our boats and made our way across the valley to Lee's Old Mission, ten miles below where Salem now stands, and on the first day of December entered one of the old buildings to remain for the winter.

Precious to this, we had been in the rain most of the time for 20 days. Oh, how we could have enjoyed our hospitable shelter if we could have looked around the family circle and beheld the bright faces that accompanied us on our toilsome journey almost to the end! Alas, they were not there! That long and dreary winter, with its pelling rains and howling winds, brought sadness to us. Under these sad reflections, we resolved if we remained in the country to find a better way for others who might wish to emigrate, as soon as we possibly could, afford the time. From what information we could gather from old pioneers and the Hudson's Bay Co., the Cascade mountains to the south became very low or terminated where the Klamath cut that chain; and knowing that the Blue mountains lay east and west, we came to the conclusion there must be a belt of country extending east towards the South Pass of the Rocky mountains, where there might be no very lofty ranges of mountains to cross. So in 1846, after

making arrangements for subsistence of our families during our absence, we organized a company to undertake the enterprise, as follows:

Levi Scott, John Scott, Henry Boyce, Lindsay Applegate, Jesse Applegate, Benjamin Burch; John Owens, John Jones, Robert Smith, Samuel Goodhue, Moses Harris, David Goff, Bent Osborn, William Sportsman, William Parker. Each man had his pick-horse and saddle-horse, making thirty animals to guard and take care of.

A portion of the country we proposed to traverse was at that time marked on the map "unexplored region." All the information we could get relative to it was through the Hudson's Bay Co. Peter Ogden, an officer of that company, who had led a party of trappers through that region, represented that portions of it were desert-like and that at one time his company was so pressed for the want of water that they went to the top of a mountain, filled sacks with snow, and were thus able to cross the desert. He also stated that portions of the country through which we would have to travel were infested with fierce and war-like savages, who would attack every party entering their country, steal their traps, waylay and murder the men, and that the Rogue River had taken its name from the character of the Indians inhabiting its valleys. The idea of opening a wagon road through such a country at that time was counted as preposterous. These statements, though based on facts, we thought might be exagger-

Denby's Private "Navy"



Secretary of the Navy Denby can't get away from naval matters even on his vacation. Witness him in his private "battleship" on Lake Oakland. That body of water adjoins his farm at Clintonville, Mich., and his secretary is battling the underwater demons with hook, line and sinker.

ated by the Hudson's Bay Co., in their own interest, since they had a line of forts on the Snake river route, reaching from Fort Hall to Vancouver, and were prepared to profit by the immigration.

One thing which had much influence with us was the fact that the question as to which power, Great Britain or the United States, would eventually secure a title to the country, was not settled, and in case a war should occur and Britain prove successful, it was important to have a way by which we could leave the country without running the gauntlet of the Hudson's Bay Co.'s forts and falling a prey to Indian tribes which were under British influence.

On the morning of the 20th of June, 1846, we gathered on the La Creole, near where Dalles now stands, moved up the valley and encamped for the night on Mary's river, near where the town of Corvallis has since been built.

June 21—Moved up the valley and encamped among the foothills of the Calapoosia mountains.

June 22—This day we traveled along the base of the Calapoosias, our course being nearly southeast, passing a prominent peak since called Spencer's Butte. In a little valley near the butte, on the south side, we discovered Indians digging canyons. On perceiving us, most of them secreted themselves in the timber. One of our party succeeded in capturing an old Indian, and representing to him by signs the course we wished to follow, the old fellow preceded us two or three miles, and put us on a dirt trail which had

been marked by twisting the tops of the brush along the route. It had only been used as a foot-trail and but seldom at that. It led us into a prairie at the base of the main Calapoosia chain. Crossing the prairie, we found the little trail where it entered the mountains with difficulty, and being guided by the broken brush, reached at sundown a little stream on the Umpqua side, where we camped for the night in a beautiful little valley where the grass was good and the ground almost covered with the finest strawberries I had ever seen.

The next morning, June 23, we moved on through the grassy oak hills and narrow alleys to the north Umpqua river. The crossing was a rough and dangerous one, as the river bed was a mass of loose rocks, and, as we were crossing, our horses occasionally fell, giving the riders a severe ducking. On the south side we encamped for the night.

On the morning of the 24th, we left camp early and moved on about five miles to the south branch of the Umpqua, a considerable stream, probably sixty yards wide, coming from the eastward. Traveling up that stream almost to the place where the old trail crosses the Umpqua mountains we encamped for the night opposite the historic Umpqua canyon.

The next morning, June 25th, we entered the canyon, followed up the little stream that runs through the defile for four or five miles, crossing the creek a great many times, but the canyon becoming more obstructed with brush and fallen timber, the little trail we were following turned up the

side of the ridge where the woods were more open; and wound its way to the top of the mountain. It then bore south along a narrow backbone of the mountain, the dense thickets and the rocks on either side affording splendid opportunities for ambush. A short time before this, a party coming from California had been attacked on this summit ridge by the Indians and one of them had been severely wounded. Several of the horses had also been shot with arrows. Along this trail we picked up a number of broken and shattered arrows. We could see that a large party of Indians had passed over the trail traveling southward only a few days before. At dark we reached a small opening on a little stream at the foot of the mountain on the south, and encamped for the night.

On the morning of the 26th we divided our forces, part going back to explore the canyon, while the remainder stayed to guard the camp and horses. The exploring party went back to where we left the canyon on the little trail the day before, and returning through the canyon, came into camp after night, reporting that wagons could be taken through.

We found everything all right on the morning of the 27th, although the Indians had hovered around us all night frightening our horses a number of times. From the tracks we could see that they approached very closely to our encampment. Making an early start we moved on very cautiously. Whenever the trail passed through the cuts we dismounted and led our horses, having our guns in hand ready at any moment to use them in self-defense, for we had adopted this rule, never to be the aggressor. Traveling through a very broken country the sharp hills separated by little streams upon which there was small openings, we came out at about noon into a large creek, a branch of Rogue river, now called Grave creek, on which we rested about two hours. During the afternoon our course was over a more open country—through scattering pine and oak timber. Towards evening, we saw a good many Indians posted along the mountain side and then running ahead of us. About an hour by sun we reached a prairie, of several hundred acres, which extends down to the very bank of Rogue river. As we advanced towards the river, the Indians in large numbers occupied the river bank near where the trail crossed. Having understood that this crossing was a favorite place of attack, we decided as it was growing late, to pass the night in the prairie. Selecting a place as far from the brush as possible, we made every preparation for a night attack.

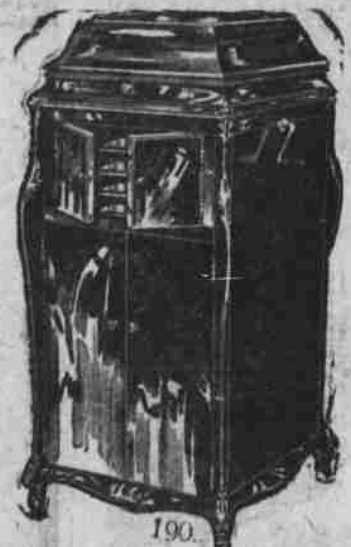
In selecting our camp on Rogue river, we observed the greatest caution. Cutting stakes from the limbs of an old oak that stood in the open ground, we picketed our horses with double stakes as firmly as possible. The horses were picketed in the form of a hollow square, outside of which we took up our positions, knowing that in case of an attack there would be a chance of losing our horses and that that would be a complete defeat. We kept vigilant guard during the night, and the next morning could see the Indians occupying the same position as at dark. After an early breakfast we began to make preparations for moving forward. There had been a heavy dew and fearing the effects of the dampness upon our fire-arms, which were muzzle-loaders, of course, and some of them with flint-locks, we fired them off and reloaded. In moving forward we formed two divisions, with the pack horses behind. On reaching the river bank the front division fell behind the pack horses and drove them over, while the rear division occupied the brush, with gun in hand, until the front division was safely over. Then they turned about, and the rear division passed over under protection of their rifles. The Indians watched the performance from their places of concealment, but there was no chance for them to make an attack without exposing themselves to our fire. The river was deep and rapid and for a short distance some of the smaller animals had to swim. Had we rushed pell mell into the stream, as parties sometimes do under such circumstances, our expedition would probably have come to an end there.

After crossing, we turned up the river, and the Indians in large numbers came out of the thickets on the opposite side and tried in every way to provoke us. Our course was for some distance southeast along the bank of the river, and the Indians, some mounted and some on foot, passed on rapidly on the other side. There appeared to be a great commotion among them. A party had left the French settlement in the Willamette some three or four weeks before us, consisting of French half-breeds, Columbia Indians and a few Americans; probably about eighty in all. Passing one of their encampments we could see by the signs that they were only a short distance ahead of us. We afterwards learned that the Rogue River had stolen some of their horses, and that an effort to recover them had caused the delay. At about three o'clock, we left the river and bore southward up a little stream for four or five miles and encamped. From our camp we could see numerous signal fires on the mountains to the eastward. We saw no Indians in the vi-

(Continued on page 3.)



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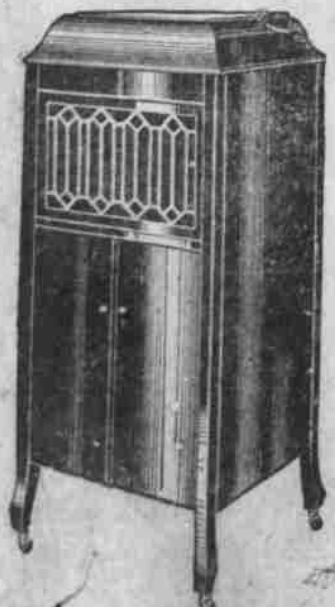
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