

## Thrilling Story of the Applegate Train, First Big Immigration to Oregon Country

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the ability of private individuals. But they miscalculated distance and obstacles, and found, when the rocky mountains were passed, that with foot-sore cattle and worn-out horses, they had still the most trying part of the journey before them; and thereupon doubts began to assail them of the wisdom of attempting to carry out their original plans of making a road to the Pacific, with the risk of being caught in the storms of autumn among the mountains, and having to abandon their property there.

Yet upon mature deliberation, with the spirit that impelled them to set out as founders of empire, they persevered in their determination to reach the Columbia River with all their wagons and herds. In coming to this conclusion they were influenced by the advice of Whitman, and the encouragement of William Fowler, one of the emigrants who had been in Oregon before. Fowler was a western man, and understood much better than Whitman what conditions could be.

**Whitman Chosen Guide.**  
A pilot was necessary, and Remont, a guide of the Hudson's Bay company, offered his services, which were however declined in favor of Whitman, who deemed himself competent, with the help of his Cayuses, as act as guide. A route was marked out with the assistance of Remont, on which distances, camping-places, and other useful information were carefully noted; and having repaired their wagons and purchased such supplies as were necessary, after a week or 10 days' rest they resumed their march.

There was regular organization after leaving Fort Hall. A few of the least encumbered took the lead on horseback. The California company, having abandoned their wagons, were now mounted, with a train of pack-animals, and were among the foremost, their pilot, William J. Martin, conducting the Oregon emigration also, as far as the turn in the road toward California, in the vicinity of the American Falls of Snake River.

From this point Whitman assumed the duties of guide, conducting the immigrants down Snake River to the Salmon Falls where the river was crossed in safety by all except Miles Eyres, a Scotchman who was riding a mule, and who missed the shallow water of the ford and was drowned.

**Think Danger Lurks.**  
M. M. McCarter who was in the lead with a small company, as they approached the falls was startled by what he mistook for a red flag. Thinking there might be hostile Indians in the vicinity, he formed his men for battle, and marching up to the red signal, discovered it to be a large salmon split open and hoisted on a pole to notify travelers that there were fish for sale. Thus the danger and difficulties of this portion of the journey disappeared on approach.

Fort Boise. A party, consisting of Whitman and his nephew, Lovejoy, Ricord and Nimrod Ford, pushed forward, leaving written notices by the way of the course to be taken by the wagons, which came after at a rate of 13 miles a day, notwithstanding the toughness of the terrain and the depth of the sand. At Fort Boise they were kindly received by Payette, but could not tarry, as it was already September 26.

Fording the Snake River, where it has since been necessary to have a ferry, by raising the wagon-beds a few inches on blocks, they reached the west side in safety. Following down the river, encountering no serious obstructions for three days, on September 24 they reached the Burnt River canyon, 25 miles in length, through which ran a small stream whose bed was used for a road for the greater part of the way, there being no time to clear away from the banks the masses of fallen and burnt trees from which the river was named.

**Like Grand Road.**  
The first grading required on any part of the route from the main Plate to the Columbia was at the crossing of the ridge at the head of Burnt River; and this, too, was the first occasion on which it had been necessary to double teams. From this point the tolls of travel increased, the country being rough and hilly. Nevertheless by October 1 the main body of the immigration had arrived at Grand Ronde Valley, which appeared so beautiful, set in its surrounding pine-clad hills, with its rich pasturage and abundant watercourses, that a portion of the immigrants were deterred from settling there only by the impossibility of obtaining supplies for the colony during the coming winter.

On the morning of October 2 two inches of snow whitened the mountain sides and warned the travelers not to waste precious time. On the next evening the first ridge had been crossed; and beyond this was still the main chain of the Blue Mountains covered with heavy timber which it was imperative to remove.

**A Blue Mountain Road.**  
As the sappers and miners of a military legion precede the army, a force of the most active and energetic of the emigrant legion fell upon these barriers to progress, and although their axes were dulled by a summer's use, and their hands were sorely blistered, 40 men in five days cleared a wagon road over the dreaded Blue Mountains, the wagons and herds following as the road was opened, boys and women driving the teams whose owners were clearing the way.

On October 5, and while the emigration was in the mountains, a severe snow storm was experienced, which made the beautiful valley of the Emattilla three beautiful by contrast when the travelers arrived on the evening of the following day at the western base. Here they found a Cayuse village and obtained fresh vegetables. On October 10 the im-

From Salmon Falls the route lay across an expanse of sage plains to migration was encountered within three miles of Whitman's station.

**Indians Steal Horses.**  
At Grand Ronde, Whitman was met by a courier from Lapwal with intelligence of the alarming illness of Mr. and Mrs. Spalding, and relinquishing his office of guide to Stecas, a Cayuse chief in whom he reposed confidence, left the party and struck across the country to the station. Stecas faithfully performed his duty, bringing the white men, to whom, as we know his people were anything but friendly, safely to the vicinity of the mission.

For this service many were ungrateful, for two reasons: it took them 45 miles out of their course; and exposed them to the annoying persecutions of the natives, who not only intruded into their camps by day, but stole their horses at night in order to obtain a reward for returning them—a practice which was repeated every 24 hours.

The great ambition of the natives along the Columbia, as elsewhere, was to secure the clothing worn by white men. Lewis and Clarke mention seeing old garments, evidently obtained from trading vessels on the coast, in the possession of these natives as early as 1805, and which must have been purchased from the Indians on the lower Columbia. After the Oregon immigration began they were to be seen arrayed in cast-off wearing apparel of every description, presenting a motley and fantastic appearance. They gladly sold what they had for shirts, dresses or hats; but as stealing and selling back a horse to its owner was a more productive plan, it was greatly affected by the Cayuses.

**A Shirt for a Horse.**  
Kaber in his narrative complains of these practices, and says that at the mission he called a council of chiefs, and told them that he had paid his last shirt for having his horses returned by the thieves, and that hereafter when he found one of them about his camp after dark he would shoot him. This warning was not without its effect. Burnett also speaks of paying a shirt for several successive mornings to get back the same animal; and Waldo, in his cynical style, remarks that the immigrants had no trouble with the natives until they encountered the mission Indians.

When Whitman arrived at Lapwal he found Mr. and Mrs. Spalding convalescing, and hastened to his own station to meet the immigrants and furnish them with supplies, which had to be brought from Lapwal and Colville, his grain and mill having been destroyed the previous winter. For this service he was censured by some and applauded by others. That it was a wise and philanthropic action to give the immigrants an opportunity to purchase fresh provisions, the sequel proved; besides, it was personally known to Whitman that some of them had exhausted their supplies before reaching the Columbia.

**Charge High Prices.**  
But whether they were or were not in need, they found the prices at Wallatpu exorbitant when compared with those of Missouri, and accused Whitman of selfish motives in conducting the immigration past his station, making them pay additional miles of travel which, with their worn-out teams and the lateness of the season, became a matter of serious importance. Kaber was among those who felt themselves injured by being piloted out of their way, and by having to pay a dollar a bushel for wheat. So obstinate were some, says Burnett, that they refused to purchase until the wheat was all gone, in consequence of which he had to divide his supply with them before the end of the journey.

There were other causes of dissatisfaction and subsequent reproach. Neither Whitman, nor McKinley at Fort Walla Walla, knew anything of the country back from the Columbia River, or whether there could be found crossings for the wagons at the John Day and Des Chutes rivers; and both advised the immigrants to leave their wagons and cattle in the Walla Walla Valley to be brought down in the spring, and to make themselves boats in which to descend the Columbia.

One of the arguments used in favor of this plan was that no grass would be likely to be found on the route, as the natives were accustomed at this season of the year to burn it off—a statement which unfortunately proved the doctor's ignorance of the country, and which was construed to his advantage by those who travelled through it.

**Motives Are Questioned.**  
From a journal of Burnett's published in a Missouri paper a year or two after the emigration, there seems to have been some ground for suspicions of interested motives in advising the immigrants to leave their cattle. "The residents of the mission agreed," says the journal, "in advising us to leave our cattle and wagons at the station. McKinley of Walla Walla also advised us to leave the animals, either to exchange for California cattle, or to pay one dollar per head for their keeping. . . . What surprised me most, after the representations that had been made, was a fine pasturage we met all along the way, and especially at The Dalles, where we had been led to believe the cattle could not subsist at all during the winter."

Applegate gives some further information, where he tells us that at the mission they received one fat bullock of Spanish stock for two poor emigrant oxen. Those who did not distinguish the difference between Spanish and American cattle consented willingly to pay this price for fat beef. Without any expense to the missionaries they had in the spring two fat American work oxen for their one bullock. The natives did better, who gave a fat bullock for a lean heifer, for breeding purposes.

the Columbia with their wagons and stock. Propositions were made to some members of the company to remain at Wallatpu, which were rejected on account of the thieving habits of the natives, and the difficulty of taking care of their cattle on so wide a range as the Walla Walla Valley, besides the general desire to reach their destination that year.

But at Fort Walla Walla, a portion of them being still in doubt from the representations made to them of the difficulties in the way,

finally agreed with McKinley to leave their cattle with him and take orders on the Hudson's Bay company for the same number and description of California cattle in the Willamette Valley. Among those making this arrangement was Jesse Applegate, who with Waldo owned more stock than any two men in the emigration.

Waldo proceeded with the main body to The Dalles by land, while Burnett, Beagle, McClane, the Applegates, and others, 71 in all, decided to take the advice of Whitman

and descend the Columbia in boats, he obeyed the intrepid Indian pilot implicitly. This party arrived in safety at The Dalles.

The Applegate company being less manageable canoes constructed by themselves, and less skillfully handled, were not so fortunate, one of their boats overturned in the rapids, by which accident a son of Jesse Applegate was drowned, a son of Charles Applegate crippled for life, while Elisha, a son of Lindsey Applegate, and William Duke narrow-

ly escaped. (Continued on page 20.)



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