

# The First Road in Southern Oregon

By Alice C. Sargent.

I am writing this article with the hope that the people of southern Oregon, and the Rogue River valley in particular, may become interested in learning something of the history of the first road through this valley.

The only account of this hazardous undertaking was written by Lindsay Applegate, one of the organizers of the expedition, some years after the completion of the work.

In order that all who read this little sketch may understand the motives which induced this little body of men to undertake this dangerous work, I shall quote from the manuscript written by Lindsay Applegate:

"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 about exhausted, we were advised to leave our wagons and animals over winter at that place in the care of the Hudson Bay Company. A portion of the immigrants, including my two brothers' families and my own accepted the proposition, providing we could procure boats in which to descend the river, as it was supposed we might procure them from the Hudson Bay Company. 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, saved them into lumber, and built boats, and with our families and the contents of our wagons, commenced the descent of the river. Dr. Whitman procured us the service of two Indians to act as pilots to 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, Warren, 10 years old, my brother Jesse's son, Edward, same age, and a man by the name of McClellan, 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 Doake, a young man who could not swim, held on to a feather bed until overtaken and rescued. W. Parker and my son Elisha, then 12 years old, after drifting through whirlpools among craggy rocks for more than a mile, rescued themselves by catching hold of a large rock a few feet above the 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 scene not to 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 our boats over the rocks, reloaded and proceeded on our way to Vancouver, ascended the Willamette river to the falls, there made another portage around the falls, reloaded again, ascended the river twenty-five miles, to a place called Campoo, 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 1st day of December, 1843, entered one of the old buildings to remain for the winter.

"Previous to this, we had been in the rain most of the time for 20 days. Oh, how we could have enjoyed our hospitable shelter could we 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 pelting 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 could possibly afford the time.

"So in 1846, after making arrangements for the subsistence of our families during our absence, we organized a company to undertake the enterprise, composed as follows: Levi Scott, Henry Boygus, Jesse Applegate, John Owens, Robert Smith, Moses Harris, Benit Osborn, John Scott, Lindsay Applegate, Benjamin Birch, John Hones, Samuel Goodhue, David Goff, William Sportsman and William Parker. Each man had his pack-horse and saddle horse, making 30 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.' The idea of opening a wagon road through such a country at that time, was counted as preposterous.

"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 Bay company's forts and falling a prey to Indian tribes which were under British influence."

"On the morning of the 20th of June, 1846, the expedition was under way. On the morning of June 29th they passed over a low range of hills from the summit of which they had a splendid view of the Rogue River valley, which is described as a great meadow interspersed with groves of oaks, which appeared like vast orchards.

"As they made their way through the Rogue River valley they were constantly followed by the Indians and had to be on guard day and night. When they had to pass through heavy timber and brush they dismounted and led their horses, carrying their guns across their arms ready to fire. The Indians were armed with bows and poisoned arrows, the pioneers with the old time muzzle loading rifles. They made their way through the valley, crossed the Cascade mountains into the Klamath country, and thence east to the Humboldt river. Here they met a train of immigrants. They brought back with them 150 people, the pioneers traveling ahead and making a road over which the wagons could pass. This train was taken through to the Willamette valley.

"Here I shall again quote from the account of the expedition, when on the return trip:

"No circumstances worth of mention occurred on the monotonous march from Black Rock to the timbered regions of the Cascade chain; then our labors became quite arduous. Every day we kept guard over the horses while we worked the road, and at night we dared not cease our vigilance, for the Indians continually hovered about us, seeking for advan-

age. By the time we had worked our way through the mountains to the Rogue River valley, and then through the Grave Creek hills and Umpqua chain, we were pretty thoroughly worn out. Our stock of provisions had grown very short, and we had to depend, to a great extent for subsistence, upon game. Road working, hunting and guard duty, had taxed our strength greatly, and on our arrival in the Umpqua valley, knowing that the greatest difficulties in the way of the immigrants had been removed, we decided to proceed at once to our homes in the Willamette. There we arrived on the third day of October, 1846, having been absent three months and thirteen days. During all this time our friends had heard nothing from us, and realizing the dangerous character of our expedition, many believed in the news which some time before reached them, that we had all been murdered by the Indians."

"It is a fact that a great proportion of the population of Oregon entered the state by this route laid out by the 15 pioneers in 1846.

"We have living here in this valley today people, who came into Oregon over this Old South Road, or as it was usually called 'The Old Immigrant Road.'"

"The road was free to all, a work of humanity, the only compensation to the builders was a consciousness of duty nobly done.

"All the members of this road party returned in safety to their homes except Henry Boygus, a brave and handsome youth, who was probably murdered by the Indians near Fort Hall."

"In closing, I will quote again from the Applegate manuscript:

"Perhaps few companies of men ever performed such a campaign without repeated quarrels and even serious altercations, but the members of the Old South Road company bore together the trials and privations of the expedition with a forgiving and forbearing spirit, and their mutual burdens and the dangers to which they were exposed, continually devel-

oped and strengthened their friendship. A reunion of them, were such a thing practicable, would be a season of peculiar joy, one to be remembered by the veteran survivors with

pleasure, until they, too, shall pass away into the great unknown."

Since the account of the road expedition was written, all members of the party have passed into the great

unknown. But their memory should be kept green by those who were so greatly aided and benefitted by their labors and unselfish sacrifices. May their brave souls rest in peace.

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