Spring 1984

The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla Road: A Forgotten Passage To Puget Sound

Richard Perko
*Carroll College, Helena, MT*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses](https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses)

Part of the [United States History Commons](https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses)

**Recommended Citation**


[https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses/58](https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses/58)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Carroll Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Carroll Scholars. For more information, please contact tkratz@carroll.edu.
THE FORT STEILACOOM-WALLA WALLA ROAD:
A FORGOTTEN PASSAGE TO PUGET SOUND

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with honors to the Department of History at Carroll College, Helena, Montana

Richard Cramer Perko
April 2, 1984
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of History.

Dr. Robert Swartout, Director

Mr. Dennis Wiedmann

Rev. Jeremiah T. Sullivan

April 2, 1983
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Maps</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Transportation in the Trans-Mississippi West in the Mid-1800's</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Pacific Northwest Wagon Roads</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Initial Planning of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla Road</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Construction and Early Travel on the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla Road</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Epilogue and Conclusion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table of Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Principal Wagon Roads of the Trans-Mississippi West in the 1800's</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Principal Wagon Roads in the Pacific Northwest in the Mid-1800's</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla Road</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vicinity Map: Naches Pass Tunnel Highway</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The idea for this thesis stemmed from my interest in the development of early transportation networks throughout the Trans-Mississippi West. My focus was quite often directed toward the area of the Pacific Northwest, where I have spent my entire life. I discovered the existence of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road in a little-known history book, a discovery which immediately intrigued me and spurred me onward. I was fortunate that my interest was supplemented by ample research material, thus making this topic a viable one.

Fortune, however, was not the only force which has enabled me to complete this thesis. I wish to acknowledge the following individuals and institutions who have contributed greatly to this thesis: Dr. Robert Swartout for his encouragement, patience, and criticism; Judy Bisson for her support and excitement in my project; Robert Dorroh for his support; the staffs at the University of Washington library and the Montana Historical Society for their research, help, and ability to understand my continued harassment; my History Research Seminar classmates for their valuable critiques; and Susan Binette for her typing, compliments, and overall support.
INTRODUCTION

No Wagon Roads have yet been made from the Columbia or elsewhere, to the interior of the territory and hence wholly inaccessible except by water: and all the commerce of the North being monopolized by the Hudson Bay Co., there was no inducement for American Vessels, hence no means of conveyance as the Company Vessels were never allowed to carry an American Citizen.

That there is now about three thousand Souls North of the Columbia yet it is impossible for them to prosper in commerce, or advance one step in the improvement of Roads & Highways.

Today, Puget Sound represents one of the most important and prized harbors in the United States and the world. Yet its development has taken place rather recently. In 1850, when ports like San Francisco and New York were thriving, Seattle was a small Indian village, and its potential as a great harbor was barely realized. Of course, the Northwest was also one of the last geographical areas in the continental United States to be developed.

Puget Sound was not considered the sole possession of the United States until 1846, when Great Britain and the United States settled the so-called Oregon boundary dispute. In fact, possession of Puget Sound was the major issue in settling this boundary dispute. (A lesser concern had to do with control of the Columbia River.)

It was not only the lure of a great harbor, however, that attracted pioneers to Puget Sound. Farmers, traders,
and various entrepreneurs gradually came to reside there. As the population grew, the need for inland transportation links grew likewise. Goods needed to be transported, settlers needed to travel, and the military needed to protect and patrol the region. Most importantly, inland transportation links were needed to bring settlers to the area. A struggling, growing community settling around Puget Sound in 1850 needed people--people to give a settlement validity. Mail service, merchants, medical personnel, a justice of the peace, and such were needed.

Those who originated settlements around Puget Sound had a hearty interest in keeping their settlement alive. Recruiters for settlements near Puget Sound spoke of coal, timber, and farmland, but not of the Sound, a harbor whose potential was not yet realized. That is, Puget Sound was not a forerunner to population drifts to the Pacific Northwest and it did not draw the first settlers to the Northwest. It became, instead, a welcome discovery and was used as a means of convenience. Only gradually was its potential realized.

Even though settlers were primarily responsible for road building in the mid-1800's, little of it would have been satisfactorily completed without military concern and assistance. In this case, Fort Steilacoom, situated at the southeast portion of Puget Sound, provided the funding
rationale for the development of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road. On the whole, military involvement in the Pacific Northwest was necessary. Soldiers were needed to protect settlers from the "Indian Threat" and to "construct" military roads.

However, the major catalyst to road building in the mid-1800's in the Trans-Mississippi West was a movement led by countless pioneers and called Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny, initiated by President James K. Polk in the mid-1840's, was a political move. This concept stated that it was a God-given right of Americans to acquire and develop the land of the west. It was the American peoples' destiny. To settle the land, of course, roads were needed. The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was one of the early transportation links which helped settle and develop the Pacific Northwest and Puget Sound, both parts of the West.

The development of this road occurred for two reasons. First, the military forces of the United States saw a need to strengthen control over a new region and develop that region economically. Secondly, the new pioneers around Puget Sound needed other pioneers in order to keep a growing community alive. Eventually, the second motive for building this road took precedence. Thus, the development and completion of this road resulted from the desire of pioneers, whose personal interests outweighed
that of the United States military forces. In this case, military interests were not directly related to the well-being of settlers or the area. Thus, as we shall see, military involvement in the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was limited and nearly useless.

Ultimately, it was the determined efforts of the original white settlers themselves which led directly to the construction of this now-forgotten passage to Puget Sound. In carrying out such a task, these early pioneers demonstrated their commitment to turn Puget Sound into one of the richest commercial districts of the entire West Coast.
CHAPTER 1

TRANSPORTATION IN THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI WEST
IN THE MID-1800'S

Transportation was at a premium in the United States from the early 1800's until the late 1800's. In the early 1800's, the United States was a great expanse of territory, barely accessible for travel in many areas, especially west of the Mississippi. The first improvement in transportation in the United States was the canal. It was primarily used in the Northeast, especially in New York and the Great Lakes region. With the Panic of 1837, however, many financers of canals went bankrupt, and the canal building era began to decline.

Around 1830, the steamboat came into national focus, and attention turned further west to the valleys of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers. Trade and commerce were greatly enhanced with the use of the steamboat: the farm producing areas of the Ohio Valley could now transport their goods in a more expedient fashion, and the fur industry of the Far West also benefitted greatly. By the early 1850's, the steamboat, augmented by the railroad,
came to be one of the most important means of travel, although the railroad would soon take precedence.

National railroad surveys were financed by acts of Congress in the early 1850's in an attempt to connect east with west. In 1852, in response to national pressure, the 32nd Congress "was almost entirely devoted to a discussion of railroad projects and related problems." The results of the 32nd Congress included a $150,000 allotment in the Army Appropriation Bill for a survey to "Ascertain the most Practicable and Economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean."

This survey included four parts. A northern division was to operate between the 47th and 49th parallels from St. Paul to the Columbia River. Another survey was to operate between the 38th and 39th parallels from the headwaters of the Arkansas River to the Great Salt Lake. A third was to extend along the 35th parallel from Fort Smith, Arkansas to southern California. The most southerly survey was the fourth, which was to explore the Tulare and San Joaquin valleys for passes along the 32nd parallel that might connect with the 35th parallel route.

The railroad was the quickest means of transportation from east to west and was certainly a leading cause in "civilizing" the West. However, the first trans-continental railroad was not completed until the spring of 1869, and then only through such central states as Nevada.
and Utah. Therefore, travel from east to west before 1869 was largely done on wagon roads and trails. Even until the 1890's, there were many areas of the West not connected by rail.

Many believe most wagon roads were carved out by rugged pioneers who pawned their last possessions to finance a trail to their "promised land" in the West. According to many historians, that was not the norm. Rather, it was the federal government, specifically Congress, which financed, surveyed, and built many of the wagon roads of the West, mainly for military purposes. In this sense, the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was an exception to the rule, since it was constructed largely through local pioneer efforts.

By 1850, all of the major trails heading west were completed and frequently travelled. The major trails included the Oregon Trail, the Mormon Trail, the California Trail, the Pony Trail, and the Santa Fe Trail.⁵

The Oregon Trail was created by countless pioneers' wagon ruts, which began in Independence, Missouri, and concluded at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. The first year designated as open to heavy travel was 1843, and in the succeeding years travellers amounted to nearly 5000.⁶ It was from the last leg of the Oregon Trail, at Fort Walla Walla, that the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road
originated.

The Mormon Trail ran east to west from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Salt Lake City, Utah. In 1847, Brigham Young started his fellow Mormons across the Plains on this route. The Mormon Trail was heavily used by pioneers, and contributed to the great movement westward. Most travelers used this route as a link to the Pony Trail, which led them to the California gold fields.

The California Trail and the Pony Trail were routes used in the California gold rush in the late 1840's. The California Trail was a cut-off from the Oregon Trail near Fort Hall, located in present-day southeastern Idaho. The terminus of this route was Sacramento. The Pony Trail was an extension of the Mormon Trail and connected Salt Lake City with Sacramento, in a more southerly route than the California Trail. This trail was the one attempted by the famous Donner party in 1846, which was caught in the snow of the Sierras, with many of the party perishing and the others forced into cannibalism. Roughly 35,000 gold seekers travelled these routes in 1849. Although lured by the potential for a quick fortune, many of these people became permanent settlers and helped California to gain statehood in 1850.

The Santa Fe Trail was created in 1821, as various American entrepreneurs flocked to that portion of Mexico when the Mexicans freed themselves from Spain.
Pe Trail reached from Leavenworth, Kansas, to Santa Fe, Mexico. In 1846, though, that part of Mexico became American soil, and more and more pioneers began to travel this southerly route to settle. In the late 1840's, some used this route as a first leg to the California gold fields.

It is evident that the "well-known" routes were travelled heavily by 1850. By 1850, these major trails served as thoroughfares for many lesser trails which branched off. Major trails were no longer sufficient to carry all settlers to specific and often obscure places. This major migration of settlers to the Trans-Mississippi West on these important trails was the continuing enactment of the concept Manifest Destiny. Thus, a federal road program developed. Emphasis was placed upon national defense to justify the financial costs, and these projects were assigned to the Secretary of War, making the United States Army the nation's road builder.¹¹

The Thirty-second Congress, which assembled in 1851, played the first major role in the nationally announced plan to aid transportation in the West. In this session, there was aid given to transportation in the territories ceded to the United States from Mexico in 1846. Likewise, there was aid given to the newly established territories of Minnesota and Oregon. Joseph Lane was the delegate from the Oregon Territory and part of the funds he secured
financed the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road.\textsuperscript{12}

The Thirty-third Congress, 1853-1855, was even more generous in aiding transportation in the West than its predecessor. Military roads were financed in every territory in the Trans-Mississippi West. This necessitated the establishment of a west coast Military Road Constructions office in San Francisco. Financial support for federal wagon roads at this session totaled $564,000.\textsuperscript{13}

Strong financial backing for wagon roads continued in the Thirty-fourth Congress, but slacked off tremendously in the Thirty-fifth Congress, 1857-1859. After intense debate, the Thirty-fourth Congress approved nearly $800,000 in aid to transportation in the Trans-Mississippi West. At the commencement of the Thirty-fifth Congress, however, in 1857, there was a different aura about transportation. Minnesota was excluded from discussion because she was a state. Utah was given little attention by Congress because of strong anti-Mormon sentiments at the time. The territories of Washington and New Mexico were allotted a meager sum of $50,000 to be split between the two. The lack of road building funds allotted by the Thirty-fifth Congress was partially tied to poor management displayed by many road superintendents in the West.\textsuperscript{14}

During the Civil War, Congress placed road building on the back burner. Congressional concerns were deflected toward other matters, such as preserving the Union.
However, when Congress convened in 1865, after the Civil War, it emphasized road building again and appropriated $140,000 for a series of roads running through the Pacific Northwest.

The period from 1846 to 1869 was marked by renovations in engineering. Engineers laid routes "that were to become avenues of migration, communication, and commerce... The emigrant interest was always of paramount importance to the military road builders as well as to the civilian contractors." While this characteristic was present in the development of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road, it was soon overshadowed by the participation of the local settlers themselves.
Chapter 1 Endnotes


2 U.S., Congress, Senate, Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascerta in the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean S. Doc. 78, 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1855.


5 Ibid., p. 476.

6 Ibid., p. 472.

7 Ibid., p. 477.


9 Ibid., p. 484.

10 Ibid., p. 445.


12 Ibid., p. 321.

13 Ibid., p. 322.

14 Ibid., p. 325.

15 Ibid., p. 326.
No Wagon Roads have yet been made from the Columbia or elsewhere, to the interior of the territory and hence wholly inaccessible except by water; and all the commerce of the North being monopolized by the Hudson Bay Co., there was no inducement for American Vessels, hence no means of conveyance as the Company Vessels were never allowed to carry an American Citizen.

That there is now about three thousand Souls North of the Columbia... yet it is impossible for them to prosper in commerce, or advance one step in the improvement of Roads & Highways.

This opinion, voiced by a delegate to the August 20, 1851 Cowlitz Convention in the Oregon Territory, clearly exemplified the attitudes of many toward transportation in the Pacific Northwest. This convention was dedicated to improving transportation in the Pacific Northwest and creating a separate Washington Territory out of the Oregon Territory.

Although the Cowlitz Convention of 1851 was one of the major catalysts for improving transportation in the Pacific Northwest, the original impetus occurred in June 1846 as a result of the Anglo-American Treaty. In 1846 Congress gave President Polk authority to terminate the
joint occupation agreement with Great Britain in the Oregon Country as outlined in the 1818 convention. Then, Lord Aberdeen, the chief negotiator for Britain, and Polk transacted a boundary settlement along latitude 49° N, giving the United States undisputed claim to the Pacific Northwest south of the forty-ninth parallel.

The first area developed in the Oregon Territory was the Willamette Valley, a fertile farming area extending narrowly about 150 miles south of the Columbia River and about fifty miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. Its geographic location was optimum since its fertile farmlands connected easily with the Columbia and the Pacific Ocean to help ensure successful commerce.

Before the mid-1850's, in Oregon, most road building was privately funded by individuals interested in making a profit. By the mid-1850's, though, the United States Congress began to appropriate funds for road building, mostly for a military purposes. Congress was pressured by citizens from the Oregon and Washington territories in the late 1840's and early 1850's because road building was very important to the region's development. Thus, private enterprise and federal backing were the two primary means for road building in the mid-1800's in the Pacific Northwest.

By the 1840's, the Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory was booming, with small communities arising in
Map 2. Principal Wagon Roads in the Pacific Northwest in the Mid-1800's

Oregon

Washington

Bellingham Bay

Fort Steilacoom

Fort Vancouver (Columbia City Barracks)

The Dalles

Fort Walla Walla

Salem

Astoria

Grande Ronde

Umpqua River

Myrtle Creek

Rogue River

Umpqua Valley

Camp Stuart

Wagon Roads

Oregón
many locations. It quickly became necessary to construct transportation lines within the Willamette Valley and the remainder of what is present-day Oregon. "That transportation loomed large in the minds of Oregon's officialdom is evident from the fact that between six and seven hundred documents in the form of bills, amendments to bills, legislative enactments, and petitions are found among records of the provisional government, 1843-1849." \(^2\)

Among the most important roads built in Oregon in the mid-1800's was a wagon toll road across the Cascades, completed in 1846, named the Barlow Road. This was a road that operated as a private business from its construction in 1846 until 1912. \(^3\) Another important privately financed road was likewise built in 1846, connecting the Rogue River and Umpqua Valley with the Oregon Trail at a place in the vicinity of Fort Hall.

The citizens of the Oregon Territory were interested in affording emigrants easier means to travel to Oregon. But more importantly, they were interested in making money. The Barlow Road was only one of several toll roads that existed in Oregon at the time. The emigrant road connecting the Rogue River and Umpqua Valley with the Oregon Trail was constructed partly to raise real estate values in that area in southern Oregon. Furthermore, most roads were of plank construction—built with Oregon timber, to enhance that industry. The various entrepreneurs who funded these
roads always looked for a return on their investment. They envisioned plank roads to connect the whole of the Oregon Territory, and across the continent as well.\footnote{4}

When Samuel R. Thurston was elected congressional delegate for the Oregon Territory in 1849, the federal government was beginning to offer assistance for internal improvement in territories. Although his initial attempts failed to secure funds, by the early 1850's Oregon was busy constructing roads with federal monies. At this time, the federal government relented to help fund roads, but only in the case where military justification could be established.\footnote{5}

The initial funds secured from the federal government financed two principal routes: the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road (the major focus of this paper),\footnote{6} and a route from Camp Stuart, near Jacksonville in the Rogue River Valley, to Myrtle Creek, a tributary of the Umpqua River. Each route received an appropriation of $20,000.\footnote{7}

Another allotment of $30,000 was made to Oregon in 1854 by the Thirty-third Congress to construct a road from Astoria to Salem in northwestern Oregon. Soon after construction began, it was determined that additional finances would be needed. Therefore, Joseph Lane was sent to Washington to secure those finances. Many senators were opposed to expending more monies because the Astoria-Salem road was principally a settler road. After bitter debates,
Lane proved the road was a military one, and secured funds, but not until January 1857. More funds were needed in the next few years to open the road, but congressional delays were again forthcoming. By the outbreak of the Civil War, the Salem-Astoria road was still not completely open to wagon use.

The Salem-Astoria road is extremely characteristic of many territorial roads built during the 1850's: Congress was not lenient with its monies, even in the case where military use could be established. Furthermore, Congress had little knowledge of the time involved and constantly expected roads to be completed much sooner than they were, creating an angry group of senators and representatives who became more selfish with federal funds. It will be evident that the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road is extremely characteristic of territorial roads built during the 1850's.

On March 2, 1853, the Washington Territory was created by the Thirty-second Congress. From that point, its leaders became responsible for the territory's own internal developments. As noted earlier by Winther, roads and communication were of primary importance to settlers. As a result, there were many roads constructed in the Washington Territory in the 1850's--some with territorial backing and some financed with military of county funds.
Not only was the Puget Sound area struggling to maintain its own existence, but it also had to compete with the Willamette Valley. Eventually, the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road provided a valuable early transportation link to Puget Sound for those coming west on the Oregon Trail and helped this area to develop as an economic rival of the Willamette Valley.

In the Washington Territory's first legislative session in 1854, an act "Relating to the Construction and Maintaining of Roads," was passed. This act "provided that all county roads should be under the supervision of county commissioners." If a man needed a road, he could draw up a petition and have twelve householders sign it. Then the petition would be presented to the commissioner, who appointed three neutral householders to examine the proposed route. If the road examiners approved of the route, it would be surveyed and made a road. However, if an examiner disliked the proposed road, for whatever reasons, there would be no construction. A proposed road could also be negated by a neutral household if he was to draw up a petition.

Territorial roads were much the same as county roads. These roads were to be located by commissioners who were appointed by the legislature. These men were to survey and mark out a road in an identical manner to a county road. Territorial roads were to "be opened and worked by the
counties through which it may be laid out, as county roads are, and such road may be altered or changed in any county, in the same manner as county roads are altered.  This clause created some conflict, in that the territorial legislature could approve a proposed road, and the county would have to construct it, whether it wanted to or not.

Labor on the road was not a paid job. It was a tax. This first law provided for a road tax of three days' labor on the road to be performed by every male between the ages of eighteen and fifty, except ministers, persons who were unable to work, and public charges. In addition there was a tax of an additional day's work for each and every thousand dollars' valuation of all taxable property... Everyone notified to labor on the roads had to be there at seven o'clock in the morning with such necessary tools, horses, and wagons as the supervisor directed.

It is obvious that "the tendency was toward turning the making and care of roads over to the local units of government--the counties and townships. There were many roads constructed in the previous manner, generally connecting county seats. Most roads were built west of the Cascade Mountains, which was the most populous area of the Washington territory.

In Washington in the 1850's there were fewer roads constructed with military backing than by legislative enactments. The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was the first road to be given federal backing in the Washington Territory. However, it was not until March 1853, when
Washington gained territorial status, that those south of the Columbia were excluded from development of the road.

In addition to the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road, there were many other roads funded by the military in the Washington territory in the 1850's. An appropriation of $30,000 for the famous Mullan Road, connecting the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, was made in 1855. Construction was initiated in 1856 under Captain John Mullan. Mullan was supported by road engineer W.W. DeLacy, surveyor Conway P. Howard, and 100 soldiers. Another appropriation of $100,000 was given for the road in 1858. The Mullan Road was completed in 1860, making it only the second continuous route into the Pacific Northwest, years behind the development of the Oregon Trail.

In 1855, the Thirty-third Congress allocated $25,000 for a road connecting Fort Vancouver to The Dalles, along the Columbia. Another appropriation of $30,000 was made for a road from Fort Vancouver to Fort Steilacoom. Because there were so many military roads being constructed in the 1850's in the west, the War Department was forced to open a separate Pacific Coast Office of Military roads in San Francisco under Major Harman Bache.

Other military roads during this period included one from Columbia City Barracks to Fort Steilacoom, another from Columbia City Barracks to The Dalles, and a third from Fort Steilacoom to Bellingham Bay. In the late 1850's,
Washington delegate Isaac Stevens consistently pleaded with Congress for additional funds for roads, but his pleas fell on the deaf ears of the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Congresses. Only with the close of the Civil War in 1865 would the federal government once again take an active role in the construction of Northwest transportation routes.
Chapter 2 Endnotes


6 The route which the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road followed was initially contained within the Oregon Territory. However, when Washington gained territorial status in 1853, the route fell under its jurisdiction. The southern boundary separating Oregon and Washington is the Columbia River.

7 U.S. Statutes at Large, vol. 10, p. 151.


10 Clark, The West in American History, p. 298.


13 Ibid.

14 Jackson, Wagon Roads West, p. 106.
CHAPTER 3

INITIAL PLANNING OF THE FORT STEILACOOM-WALLA WALLA ROAD

The original impetus for the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was the 32nd Congress which allotted $150,000 in the Army Appropriation Bill for a survey to "Ascertain the most Practicable and Economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean." As noted earlier (see p. 6), the survey was divided into four parts.¹

A northern division of this project was appropriated $40,000 and placed under the control of Isaac I. Stevens, who also resigned his army commission in 1852 to become the first governor of the Washington Territory. This northern expedition was split into two distinct segments. An eastern segment headed by Stevens commenced from St. Paul on the 8th of June, 1853, nearly one month after the planned date of departure. This placed a severe strain on the eastern half of the expedition since there was great concern in crossing the Rockies and the Cascades before the snow became too deep. The main purpose of this segment of
the expedition was to explore "the passes of the Cascade Range and of the Rocky Mountains from the forty-ninth parallel to the headwaters of the Missouri River... and supply all the facts which enter into the solution of the particular problem of the railroad.²

Thus, the eastern segment appeared to have little influence upon the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road. On September 24, 1853, as Stevens's party crossed the Rocky Mountains,³ an important message arrived many miles behind them at Fort Benton on the Upper Missouri from Secretary of War Jefferson Davis—an order to stop the Northern Railroad Survey, and for Stevens to disband his command and return to Washington, D.C.⁴ However, the message was never received by Stevens's party, and the survey continued. Davis had always been sympathetic to southern needs, and this order was no exception. The future president of the Confederacy was in favor of a central or southern railroad route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific coast which the southern states could take full advantage of.

It was indeed a blessing that the northern division of the survey was not disbanded, because its western segment included a plan to construct the military road from Fort Steilacoom to Walla Walla.

The western segment of the surveying party was placed under the command of Captain George B. McClellan.
In this semi-independent assignment, McClellan was given two undertakings. "The First and most important point to which your attention is to be directed will be the exploration of the Cascade Mountains. You will fully explore this range... obtaining full information in relation to the range in general." The second undertaking, likewise written by Isaac I. Stevens in a letter dated May 9, 1853, instructed McClellan that "Pending this examination, you will endeavor to examine the line of the proposed road from Wallah-Wallah to Steilacoom, and to start its construction."  

Clearly Governor Stevens placed a greater emphasis on the exploration of the Cascade Range than on the proposed military road. In his letter of instruction to McClellan, nowhere is it stated that McClellan urgently confront the problems of building the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road. As the expedition drew near, perhaps Stevens became more aware of the importance of his role as commander of the northern division of the railroad survey. He may have decided to leave the problem of the road to those men who had fewer responsibilities. In fact, one of these men, Colonel J. Patterson Anderson, the newly appointed United States Marshall for the Washington Territory, was instructed by Stevens to begin work on the proposed military road. In a letter to Anderson, dated April 18, 1853, Stevens urged Anderson to
confer with the most influential and sensible men as to the best route for the road, the assistance which the citizens themselves would be willing to render, and the best course to be pursued to get it done. The problem is to have a road, which emigrants can get through. If we succeed in accomplishing this and within the means, we shall be able to get means from Congress for additional roads.6

The man who directed the railroad surveys on the national level was Jefferson Davis, who remained in Washington, D.C. Davis differed from Stevens in that he placed more emphasis on the proposed "military" road. A military road constructed in the Washington Territory in 1853 posed little threat to southern dominance, while a northern trans-continental railroad would have. In a letter dated May 9, 1853, Davis urged McClellan "that this road should be opened in season for the fall emigration; you will, therefore, use every exertion to do so." Davis went on to explain that should it be possible to accomplish this, you will, at least, endeavor to fix the line of the road, especially through the Cascade Mountains, and to perform such work on the most difficult portions as will enable the emigrants to render the route practicable by their own exertions. . . . In any event, you will so arrange your operations as, first, to secure a practicable wagon road between the extremeties of the road; devoting the remainder of the funds at your disposal to the improvement of the more important points, always endeavoring to make the whole road a good one.

From the very beginning of the survey, then, McClellan was given confusing instructions from two men
whose orders he had to try to obey. McClellan chose to acknowledge Stevens primarily, and explore the Cascades, although most of his survey proved a failure. Perhaps he followed Stevens's orders because Davis was 3000 miles away and undoubtedly concerned with more pressing matters.
Chapter 3 Endnotes

1 U.S., Congress, Senate, Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, S. Doc. 78, 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1855.


CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTION AND EARLY TRAVEL ON THE FT. STEILACOOM-WALLA WALLA ROAD

Captain McClellan ultimately delayed his arrival to the Washington Territory to the extent that the settlers decided to take matters into their own hands. Earlier in the year, an issue of the Columbian portrayed the military as "large bodies [which] move slowly." Furthermore, it was suggested that

governmental pet functionaries, exported from the Atlantic cities... would be likely to know as much about "mountains" and "military roads" as they know about the "man in the moon." Unless an immediate application of this appropriation [$20,000] be authorized by Congress...[we] might as well conclude to make a road of [our] own during the coming summer..."

Finally in May, Edward J. Allen, the man most responsible for building this road, persuaded some workers that even though the stakes were high, it would mean much to every settler if emigration could be diverted to Puget Sound. Not only did Allen and Nelson Sargent, another pioneer engineer, encourage the construction of this road, but the Columbian (Olympia, Washington), the territorial
newspaper, also lent its support. On May 21, 1853, the paper printed an article which stated, "There is not a white man in Pierce county who will not come readily and cheerfully forward, and with a hearty, manly 'good will' place his 'shoulder to the wheel,' and with all his might assist in 'putting the thing through.'" The settlers saw "no reason 'under heaven' why it should not be accomplished in time for this years' emigration." Support from the Columbian and the citizens alike was rampant because "there was not a man in the Washington Territory, . . . who cannot see the advantage of 10,000 people to our . . . sparse population. . . ."

Captain McClellan did not arrive at the Columbian City barracks (Fort Vancouver) until June 27, yet he somehow still hoped to accomplish his two-fold task before the winter snows set in. In the meantime, a committee headed by Allen had been formed by the settlers in May 1853 as a "viewing out" party to see whether a road from Walla Walla to Fort Steilacoom was practical. Finally, after waiting more than a month without hearing from McClellan, the settlers collected money from the generous citizens, chiefly of Pierce and Thurston counties, to finance construction of the route. In donations ranging from $5 to $100, the total amounted to about $1,200. Others gave provisions, animals, and tools. The party set out on July 9, immediately following a Cascade road meeting. The road meet-
ing had been organized to hear a report from a committee instructed to confer with Captain McClellan. But the committee had no report to offer because "McClellan had not yet arrived," and it "suggested that the citizens proceed at once to open said road." Those attending the meeting then passed a motion stating:

"Resolved, That we, the citizens of the Washington Territory, proceed at once to open a wagon road across the Cascade Mountains in time for the present immigration." As the May 21, 1853 issue of the Columbian correctly reported, "All consider this an enterprise of vital importance to both settler and immigrant."

The party was split into two groups. One, composed of Nelson Sargent and others, began work from the eastern or Walla Walla side of the road. The other group, headed by Allen, and consisting of fourteen men, began a remarkable undertaking. With nothing heavier than picks, axes, and shovels, Allen's men carved out a wagon road from Fort Steilacoom through Naches Pass and across the Cascades. It was a difficult and wary venture for these men because many of them gave up their jobs with no promise that they would be paid. To make matters worse, rumors reached the party that emigrants coming to the west coast that year had been persuaded to go to Oregon, as the Cascades were impassable by the fall. Word also reached the workers that McClellan had approved another route across the mountains instead of
Map 3: The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla Road
the one they were building. It is truly remarkable that Allen was able to persuade his fellow workers to remain on the job.\textsuperscript{10}

The \textit{Columbian} kept constant watch over the progress of the road for the myriad of concerned citizens. Allen reported to the \textit{Columbian} on August 7 that his workers were "going to it like fire, making good time." In an optimistic observation, the paper added: "The 'eleventh hour' has come, not a moment longer can be lost, and they have decided to open the road on their account, rather than risk losing the emigration of the present year."\textsuperscript{11} On the 15th of October the road was reported to be completed and the goal of luring emigrants to the Puget Sound became a reality. On this day the \textit{Columbian} reported that "the Cascades, or Emigrant road from Walla Walla over the mountains is FINISHED."\textsuperscript{12} This was a road which for 234 1/2 miles cut through virgin forests, wound its way over mountains, reaching an elevation of 5000 feet, and crossed the Naches River sixty-eight times.\textsuperscript{13} It is worth noting that the urgency of the road in this case far outweighed the practicality of providing a well-planned, well-constructed, and well-routed road. Upon their return to Olympia, Allen and the other road makers were received with joy and feted for days.\textsuperscript{14}

McClellan truly blundered by not taking advantage of Allen's road-building skills. Under the urgency impressed
upon him by Jefferson Davis, McClellan could have easily
cooperted with Allen and his associates, employing, pay-
ing, and directing them. He would have been credited with
the completion of a road under the specified time allotment
and it would have been a blessing to the settlers. With
military financing, the road also could have been con-
structed with more concern for precision, but McClellan
clearly avoided this opportunity.

After his arrival to Fort Vancouver on June 27, 1853, McClellan spent three weeks in organizing his party
of sixty-five men. Supplies for 100 days were packed on
horses and mules in preparation for the exploration of the
Cascade Range. The expedition proceeded northeast toward
the heart of the Cascades in a leisurely fashion from Fort
Vancouver on the Columbia River. Eventually McClellan
ascended to Naches Pass where his party made observations.
According to one specialist in western transportation his-
tory, McClellan "was quickly convinced that it was the best
pass over the Cascades for both railroad and wagon road." Despite Indian encouragement, McClellan's party made no
attempt to explore a northerly divide named Snoqualmie
Pass, even though it had great potential for a railroad.

McClellan's party eventually came in contact with
Allen's party only because A.W. Moore, the civilian super-
intendent of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road, visited
the federal expedition at a time when both parties were
engaged in the Cascades. McClellan's attitude indicated that he knew almost nothing about the road, despite receiving detailed written and oral instructions from Stevens and Davis. McClellan noted in his journal on September 12, "I determined to afford a little assistance to the road cutters for what yet remains to be done on the western portion of the road--subject to the approval of the governor." McClellan finally agreed to pay twenty workers $2.50 a day for up to three weeks' work and to provide all provisions during the same period. Aside from his limited involvement in this instance, McClellan proved to be useless in the construction of the road.17

From the Cascade Range McClellan's party eventually travelled northeast to Fort Colville where he met Governor Stevens and his party coming from the east. They parted on October 29, each taking a separate route to Fort Walla Walla.

On November 5, Stevens tried to persuade McClellan to explore Naches Pass and the Cascades again as the "emigrants got thru 48 wagons [that is, 36] in September [October]."18 McClellan's demeaning attitude toward the exploration of the Cascades once again prevailed as he stated, "I object so strongly to such a performance that I think it is now abandoned--forever as I hope."19

Stevens, therefore, recruited Frederick W. Lander, a civilian engineer, to accomplish the task assigned to
McClellan. Lander accepted the assignment, but never ventured to the Cascades after receiving an alarming note on November 8. The note carried the surprising but false news that an Indian had just arrived at Walla Walla bringing "word that the Emigrant wagons were abandoned in the pass due to snow with the loss of all the animals." After conferring with McClellan, Lander decided to give up the survey despite no official orders. Stevens controlled his anger and left an urgent message for Abiel W. Tinkham to run the survey as soon as he arrived from exploring Marias Pass.

Tinkham left Walla Walla on January 7, 1854 and arrived in Seattle on January 26, 1854, after just twenty days of travel. He took careful observations as to the depth of the snow, something which had always frightened McClellan. Tinkham found snow to be no problem and after making careful examinations, decided that Snoqualmie Pass was the most favorable route for a railroad line. This decision was one that would later mark the downfall of the Ft. Steilacoom-Walla Walla road, since the proposed railroad line running through Naches Pass was then abandoned.

It seems puzzling that Governor Stevens would be so concerned about completing the Cascade Range survey before spring. But he was so optimistic about the potential of Puget Sound, given adequate transportation routes, that he could not wait. His optimism was manifested in a letter
Stevens wrote to James Campbell, the Postmaster General of the Washington Territory, on December 6, 1853. This letter alluded to the

thousand miles of inland transportation the Sound offers unrivalled [sic] in any part of the world, the inexhaustible supplies of lumber, extensive and valuable coal mines, valuable and inexhaustible [sic] fisheries of salmon & cod, great varieties of soil, suitable alike to grazing and the raising of produce, and a climate which is superior perhaps to any in the world.22

Stevens's optimism seems well-founded, but perhaps he overstated the qualities of Puget Sound to spur on his various surveyors to hasten the completion of their work, and thus begin to develop this area. Certainly, the citizens in and around Puget Sound were excited by, and even shared, the optimism of Stevens. The settlers knew how important it was to their livelihood to secure outside transportation links with the rest of the United States.

At the time McClellan's men left the Cascades and marched toward Fort Colville, the first emigrant train was crossing the Cascades. On October 12, 1853, the Biles-Longmire party crossed the Cascades23 and stood at the door of Puget Sound, completing their trip before the Columbian "reported" the road was finished, on October 15.

The emigrant train, consisting of 163 men, women, and children, originated from many different points in the nation.24 The Longmire family, for example, started for the "Oregon Country" from Attica, Fountain County, Indiana,
on March 16, 1853. The train made the decision to go north from the Oregon Territory to Walla Walla, and then across the Cascades, sometime in the middle of August. This decision was influenced by Nelson Sargent, who awaited the arrival of the wagon trail at Grande Ronde, some 100 miles south of Walla Walla.

James Longmire recalled this inspiring event:

At Grande Ronde a happy surprise awaited us. Nelson Sargent, whose father was in our party, had met John Lane, who had arrived in advance of us with the welcome news that a party of workmen had started out from Olympia and Steilacoom to make a road for us through Naches Pass over the Cascades, ours being the first party of emigrants to attempt a crossing of the Columbia north of The Dalles.

From Grande Ronde, the emigrant train, consisting of 36 wagons, struck out for Walla Walla and the beginning of the trip across the Cascades.

By September 8, the party was ready to depart Walla Walla for Fort Steilacoom. They crossed the Yakima River, and ascended to Wells Springs where a canyon afforded considerable trouble. (The party became lost here when they took the wrong trail of the two offered them by Indian guides.) Then, "on the 18th day of September, as well as I remember, we crossed the canyon, . . . for a mile of the roughest travel I ever experienced and came out on a beautiful plain." From this point, the emigrant train travelled along
Coal Creek for two days before coming to the Selah Valley on the upper Yakima River. The travellers crossed the Yakima and followed Wenases Creek for ten miles, arriving at its source. Here they came to the Naches River, which was followed for four days, and crossed numerous times. After leaving the Naches,29 "we were a week getting to the summit of the Cascades, this being the hardest part of our journey." The Biles-Longmire party arrived at the summit of Naches Pass, situated twenty-five miles north of Mount Rainier, on September 28.30

At the top of Summit Hill, James Longmire recalled an uplifting experience. His wife, some other ladies, and some children walked ahead and encountered a white man.

This man was Andy Burge who had been sent out from Fort Steilacoom with supplies for the road makers, who had already given up the job for want of food which had arrived too late for them, but in time for us, as our stores were coming alarmingly low.31 Burge tried to persuade the party that it was impossible for them to make their way to Puget Sound but he failed to convince them and distributed his supplies before leaving. On his return trip to Fort Steilacoom, however, Burge provided his most valuable service. He marked a trail, "blazing trees as he went and leaving notes tacked up giving what encouragement he could and preparing us in a measure for what was before us."32

There are different variations of the journey from
the summit down to the lower elevations of Naches Pass. This being an extremely difficult part of the journey, the perils were perhaps exaggerated by many. Mr. Van Ogle, however, described this sequence in the most believable terms. He wrote that:

leaving the summit, we went about six miles on a backbone, steep slopes on each side. . . . All the wheels were roughlocked with chains. One hundred and eighty feet of rope was attached to the hind axle of the wagon and passed around a stout tree. Two men gradually let out the rope. The oxen braced their feet and slid down hill the length of the rope without lifting a foot. All the teams came down this way. . . . Thirty-eight wagons came over that hill that way. 33

Leaving the Cascades, the emigrants were faced with numerous crossing over the Greenwater and White rivers, which were accomplished without incident. The emigrant train worked on the road every day as they travelled, this being their only means of continuation. 34

They arrived at Clover Creek near Puget Sound on October 12, 1853, which was determined as the end of their journey since the whole party would no longer camp together. 35

It was a difficult journey for the emigrants on the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road for various reasons. First, the road was in poor shape, after being hacked out in haste by settlers to accommodate the emigrants. Second-ly, they had no guide to direct them and were forced to
spend much of their time exploring and improving the road so as to permit their continuation. Most importantly, it was the end of a long journey and they were faced with conquering a road (in less than joyous spirits) that had never been travelled. David Longmire, nine years old at the time, summed up the feelings of the emigrants concerning the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road when he stated, "It is hard to head off a sturdy pioneer." 36

After the Biles-Longmire journey, residents in the southern Sound became convinced that their passage "will prove the feasibility of that route for a military and wagon link with Walla Walla. They feel that the Longmire party's success will put an end to agitation from Seattle, a small settlement about fifty miles north of here to have a road cut through Snoqualmie Pass." 37

No additional work was done on the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road between the time the emigrants arrived at the Sound, in the fall of 1853 and the spring of 1854, when Lieutenant Richard Arnold was assigned to carry out a reconnaissance of this "military road." Having been ordered by Jefferson Davis to complete this road, Arnold "organized a small party and left Steilacoom on the 23rd of May 1854." According to Lieutenant Richard Arnold's "Report on the Military Road from Wallah-Wallah to Steilacoom," he travelled the road opened the previous season
wherever it was passable, and made a reconnaissance of the entire route to Wallah-Wallah for the purpose of deciding upon the general location, and ascertaining how much of the road cut by the citizens during last season could be adopted.\(^\text{38}\)

Arnold described the road at length, from the beginning of his journey at Fort Steilacoom to the terminus of the road at Walla Walla.

Departing Fort Steilacoom, the road passed through a ten-mile open prairie called Nisqually Plains and then rose through thick timber for six miles to a high ridge bordering the valley of the Puyallup River.

Beyond some crossings of the White Water River, prairies extended for seven miles. Arnold recommended these prairies as a good resting spot. After crossing the White Water six more times, the road entered the Green River Valley and began its ascent to the Cascades. At this point, a peak named La Tete provided the gateway to the Cascades from the west.

Ascending the Cascades, the first hill was initially an unbroken slope of 33 degrees for a height of 800 feet before it was reduced to a practical grade. This hill, which Arnold thought to be the most difficult any road passed over in the Northwest, was undoubtedly the one in which the emigrant's wagon wheels had to be roughlocked.

Leaving the mountain, the road crossed the Naches River sixty-eight times, in contradiction to Arnold's re-
port of forty-four times. At that point in his survey, Arnold's appropriation had nearly been expended and it was getting late in the year. Accordingly, he adopted the route of the previous year. From Naches River, the road meandered to the Yakima River and then into some rough country broken up by ridges before reaching the Columbia. From the only fording of the Columbia

... to the terminus of the route opposite Walla Walla, the road passed over a continuous level of slight alluvial character, very disagreeable during the summer months, on account of the violent winds that blow up the valley of the Columbia.

Before closing his report, Arnold strongly recommended that an additional $10,000 be budgeted to improve the road, as it was the only one which enabled overland emigration to travel from the east directly to Puget Sound.

Arnold also recognized the importance of the civilian work in the construction of the road. His closing lines stated, "But for this [settler involvement], I do not believe the work could have been carried forward as satisfactorily." Arnold went so far as to suggest that the amount expended by the citizens be refunded, but it never was. 39

Arnold's description of the road elaborately displays to the reader the difficulty of the settlers in conquering the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road. Arnold used his funds in places requiring the most attention. How-
ever, the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was still crude. Arnold's work to improve the road that season had not yet been completed before the second emigrant train had crossed Naches Pass and descended to Puget Sound.

The second group of emigrants was known as the Ebey party. They set out from Walla Walla on September 11, 1854, and arrived at Fort Steilacoom on October 5. This journey lasted twenty-four days, ten fewer than the Biles-Longmire party needed to reach Puget Sound the year before. The Ebey party undoubtedly took advantage of the work done by the first emigrant train, and the follow-up work completed by Arnold and his crew. They secured passage in an incredible time, probably astonishing Arnold, whom the Ebey train encountered near the summit of Naches Pass on September 26, 1854.40

Arnold's improvements on the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road were to be the last official work on this route. After 1854 few emigrants ever travelled this route; its narrowness, the fording of the Naches River some sixty-eight times, and the scarcity of grass along the Green and White rivers led to its abandonment. In addition, 1854 was the last year the government allotted money for the development of the road.41
Chapter 4 Endnotes

1Columbian, February 1853.


3Columbian, 21 May 1853.

4Mahlberg, "Edward Allen," p. 159.


7Columbian, 16 July 1853.

8Columbian, 16 July 1853.

9Columbian, 21 May 1853.

10Mahlberg, "Edward Allen," p. 159.

11Columbian, 13 August 1853.

12Columbian, 15 October 1853.


15Prosch, "Military Roads," p. 121.

16Jackson, Wagon Roads West, p. 91.


18Stevens to McClellan, November 5, 1853, in "Notes
and Documents," p. 322.

19 Overmeyer, "George B. McClellan and the Pacific Northwest," p. 49.

20 Frederick W. Lander to McClellan, November 8, 1853 in "Notes and Documents," p. 324.

21 Hazard, Companion of Adventure, p. 87.

22 Stevens to James Campbell, December 6, 1853, in "Notes and Documents," p. 324.


24 Ibid., p. 24.


27 Ibid., p. 56.

28 Ibid., p. 59.

29 Ibid., p. 59.


32 Ibid., p. 138.

33 "Van Ogle," p. 270.


37 Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 1975.

39 Ibid., p. 538.


41 Ibid., p. 81
The road across Naches Pass was never popular with emigrants. After 1853, population shifted rapidly toward the northern portion of Puget Sound, especially Seattle. To accommodate this shift, residents in Seattle urged the construction of a road across Snoqualmie Pass. This road, as much as anything, contributed to the deterioration and disuse of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road across Naches Pass.¹

Between 1854 and the mid-1860's, one might speculate that the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was infrequently used. But it may have served as an emigrant and supply road for those few souls who decided to settle in the southern portions of Puget Sound rather than the expanding Seattle area to the north.

Apparently, the younger men who arrived on the first emigrant trains still believed that the Fort Steilacoom area had much to offer in the 1860's. By the mid-1860's, the road across Naches Pass was being improved and redone in some areas, with the hopes that this might afford some
emigrants the luxury of travelling to southern Puget Sound. Foremost of these younger men was Mr. Van Ogle, who years earlier in 1853 had recorded and participated in the Biles-Longmire party's historic first crossing of the Cascades.

At any rate, the men from the southern Sound were determined to fight for the merits of their land and location. For support, the citizens of the area appealed to The Washington Pioneer (initially The Columbian). In the July 29, 1865 edition of The Washington Pioneer, the editor commended the road workers: "We congratulate the people that they have at last the right kind of men engaged in the enterprise, with whom there is no such word as fail."2

The editor's optimism in the road was enhanced by Van Ogle, Director of the Naches Road, and Per Stevenson, civil engineer and clerk of the Naches Road, in the same edition of The Washington Pioneer. Van Ogle stated, "We are getting along finely. Have ten miles of the worst of the road done. . . . The road must go through. . . . The men work like niggers, and will do their part, if the people on the Sound will do theirs. We are doing more work for one-hundred dollars than has been done before for a thousand."3 Mr. Stevenson added,

Thus far, the work goes bravely on. . . . One would suppose, to see them swing the axe and roll the logs about that they were all on the marry and that the one who worked the hardest was to receive as his reward the prettiest
of the many fair ones who will come across the Natchess [sic] Pass this fall. . . . Where are the King county [Seattle] bachelors? We don't see any of them up this way. Perhaps they have "Snoqualmie on the brain."

Give everybody h---, and let the motto of your paper be: The Natchess Road--It must and shall be put through.  

The following year, in 1866, The Washington Pioneer printed another article concerning the Road. Optimism was certainly evident here as well: "When the whole sum contemplated by the end of the Legislature is expended, we will doubtless have as good a road as any section of equal length in the territory. . . . Much of the road is now in excellent condition, with abundance of grass along its entire length."  

For the remainder of the 19th century, there is little recorded use of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road. It was travelled occasionally by ranch hands driving cattle in the 1880's, but rarely by emigrants themselves. Those wishing to settle around Puget Sound could now arrive much faster by railroad, or on better roads by way of either the Willamette Valley or Snoqualmie Pass, or even by boat. It is no surprise, then, that the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road fell into disuse by the turn of the twentieth century. 

Portions of this old road were re-examined in the mid-1900's as a possible highway project to cross the
Cascades at Naches Pass. There were several serious attempts to finance a tunnel highway over Naches Pass by the Washington State Legislature between 1943 and 1973, but such a tunnel was never constructed.

According to a 1943 legislative report, a tunnel 1.85 miles long was to be bored through a granite formation, but the cost of $11,054,612 proved to be too much. Thus, the legislature decided to await further studies.

A 1952 study found that the necessary expenditure reported in 1943 was too low. Instead, a construction cost of $25,047,089 was estimated. The state legislature concluded "that this project is too costly to be financed as either a state highway project or as a toll revenue bond project at this time." More studies were done in 1958, 1959, and 1960. Although it was again decided that a highway tunnel project through the Cascades would be too costly at $28,000,000, the 1960 study did mention the need "for another low-level, all weather, Cascade Mountain crossing to provide additional traffic service between the Puget Sound area and the Yakima Tri-Cities area."

The most thorough legislative study on the Naches Pass Tunnel Highway was completed in 1973 by G. H. Andrews, Director of Highways. In his report it was stated:

we find no basis for making a favorable recommendation on this project. Benefits are minimal and lie mainly in the area of time
and distance savings and modest anticipated snowfall.
   . . . The project is far beyond the scope of normal funding.
   Challenges by environmental groups are almost certain to accompany any attempt to construct this route.9

When one views Naches Pass today, it becomes obvious that no work has been done for quite some time. The historic remains are few. There is a slightly marked trail that guides one for a few miles to the top of Naches Pass from the east. In addition, a sign modestly displaying the 1853 crossing of the Cascades lies miles off the highway at the foot of Naches Pass, accessible only by directions from the local tavern. Another sign, located a few miles up the trail from the east, displays the spot where "All the wheels were roughlocked with chains." But the trail has certainly eroded here and in many other spots, where there is scarcely room for two men to walk abreast, much less a wagon to travel on. Most people seem to have forgotten that Naches Pass is an important historical site: motorbikes ramble up and down the mountain and much of the timber has been carted away, leaving a barren, solemn appearance.

In its day the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road was extensively used, but that period lasted for only a few years. Nevertheless, the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road is historically important since it was the first road
constructed for wagon use to Puget Sound. It enabled the early settlers of that region to exploit and develop the resources of Puget Sound. Most significantly, development and use of Puget Sound led to the permanent establishment of Seattle and Tacoma, an event which has had a tremendous influence of the growth of the entire Pacific Northwest for the past 130 years. In addition, the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road acted as a catalyst for further road development to the Sound, including the road over Snoqualmie Pass. Although these further developments caused the ultimate demise of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road, the road itself had played an important—if limited—role in improving the area’s transportation network.

It is evident that the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road had an impact on the early development of Puget Sound, but the value of this road is found in another context as well. The Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road is a characteristic case study of wagon road development at both the regional and national levels.

Nationally, the United States in the 1850's was undergoing a tremendous advancement in road construction. Pressure was exerted on the government by settlers who sought to exploit new opportunities in the west. Congress funded large sums of money. Army officers were placed in charge of road construction. Projects were completed in the territories of Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, New
Mexico, Utah, and others during this period. Problems confronted during the planning and construction of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road were similar to those endured in road building in many other territories as well.

In the Pacific Northwest, the essence of communication was represented by the numerous roads constructed in the mid-1800's. Moreover, a study of the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road clearly reveals the various motivations and personalities of army personnel, road builders, and settlers—all of which were important considerations in road building. After all, the roads did not "sprout" of their own accord; they were the result of hard work and dedication on the part of the people who were willing to "put the thing through."
Chapter 5 Endnotes


2 Washington Pioneer, 29 July 1865.


4 Washington Pioneer, 29 July 1865.

5 Washington Pioneer, 1 September 1866.


7 Washington, Legislative Study, Appendix B-3.

8 Washington, Legislative Study, Appendix B-5.

9 Columbian, 21 May 1853.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Columbian (Olympia, Washington), February; 21 May; 16 July; 13 August; 24 September; 15 October 1853.


U.S. Congress. Senate. Reports on Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. S. Doc. 78, 33rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1853-1854.


U.S. Statutes at Large, vol. 10 (1853).

U.S. Statutes at Large, vol. 10 (1855).


Washington Pioneer (Olympia, Washington) 29 July 1865; 1 September 1866.

Secondary Sources

Barlow, Mary S. "History of the Barlow Road." Oregon Historical Quarterly 3 (March 1902): 72-79.

Bayo, Gerald. "Overland from Missouri to Washington Territory in 1854." Nebraska History 52 (Spring 1978): 70-84.


