

# MULLAN CHRONICLES

Volume Two

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Number Two



## The Mullan Road Commentaries

**H**istorians follow whatever path the research reveals. Sometimes the path leads to a dead end, sometimes a short cut, and sometimes to another serendipitous fork in the road. But always the historian goes to the road builder or the original source for information. In Mullan's case that is handwritten notes which are sadly largely illegible. Or the field notes which I haven't had the time to read thoroughly. The next best source, although more prone to error, are the works of contemporary sources. I propose to make these Mullan Road Commentaries a regular feature of the newsletter until we have exhausted all the sources we have found. This will give you readers a fuller understanding about how we historians do our research and give you also a more rounded vision of that time period. The first installment is from the Olympia (WA) *Pioneer and Democrat*, published from 1858 to 1861. This article was published on page 2 of the May 21, 1858 issue.

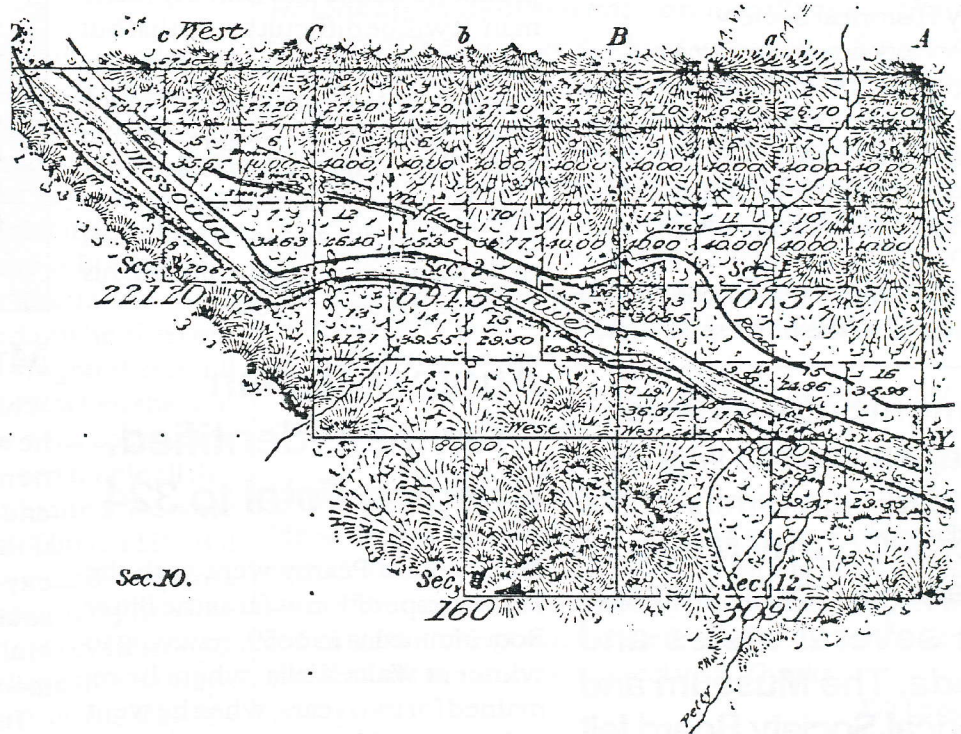
—Deb

### Important Military Road In Washington Territory

From Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton,  
On the Upper Missouri

Gold Discoveries  
in Washington Territory

The following letter, published in the *New York Journal of Commerce*, in commercial and business matters one of the most reliable papers in the country, will be read with great interest at this time, as tending to confirm the reported gold discoveries in Northern Oregon and the British possessions, and also conveying intelligence of the Government's intention to construct an Immigrant Road over what is known as the northern route leading through "Mullan's Pass." In a conversation about Lieut. Mullan, who came on from Washington (D.C.) in the *Sonora*, we learn that official advices had already reached the Capitol of the existence of gold in these new placers, and that it is fair to presume a large population will soon be attracted



This portion of an 1894 U.S. Geological Survey map shows the Mullan Road running north of the Missoula River (now the Clark Fork) in eastern Mineral County. The site of present-day Alberton is just to the right of the center of the map, west and north of Petty Creek. See the letters (page 3) for a discussion of maps that show the route of Mullan Road.

to that region. This gentlemen, one of the most active and efficient officers in our army, proceeds to Oregon on the *Panama*, now awaiting the arrival of the *Columbia*, nearly due, before sailing. With the filling up of this vast realm at the north, and the construction of a wagon road over a route so eminently practicable, who shall say but the present improvement will be the forerunner of the Pioneer Railroad to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific!

*San Francisco Times*  
*Washington, March 31, 1858*

The Secretary of War has issued orders to Lieut. John Mullan, U.S.A., to proceed immediately to the Columbia River and organize a force to commence at once to work of opening a wagon road from Fort Walla-Walla, on the Columbia River, to Fort Benton, on the Missouri. Lieut. Mullan will, in pursuance of those orders, leave in the California steamer of the 5th and proceed with all possible dispatch to the field of operations. He will reach the Columbia by the first of May, and expects to have his force organized so as to commence work by the first of June. His

plan of operations will be to push forward with a train of wagons as rapidly as possible, so as to reach Fort Benton by the 1st of October, when, after reporting progress, he will return over the same route, and thence proceed home via San Francisco and Panama, and reach Washington (D.C.) in January, 1859.

The intention of the preliminary operations is to demonstrate the perfect feasibility of the route, and to open a summer trail for emigrants. The road will be systematically completed, it being the intention of the Government to make it a first class road.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The Second Annual John Mullan Day is scheduled for May 11. Details next issue.

The Merrimans grace us with another fascinating letter.

Joel Overholser of Fort Benton has brought forth a labor of love titled *FORT BENTON, World's Innermost Port*.

## Second Mullan Day Slated in May

The second annual John Mullan Day event has been scheduled for Saturday, May 11, 1991, according to Kay Strombo, secretary for the Mineral County Historical Society.

The society is now working on contacting speakers for the annual event which will be held in Superior, Montana on that Saturday. The event will be held in the 4-H Building, the same hall where the meeting took place last year.

John Mullan Day was started last year as a result of all the interest generated

**The night before the dedication, a reception was held for the Mullan family at the Mineral County Museum with attendance by persons from several states and Canada. The Museum and Historical Society Board felt so positive about the response that it started the *Mullan Chronicles*.**

in July 1989 when the Mullan statue in St. Regis, 13 miles to the west, was rededicated in its new location in the town square.

The keynote speaker at the event was Dr. Hugh Mullan of Washington, D.C. who is the great-grandnephew of John Mullan. The night before the dedication, a reception was held for the Mullan family at the Mineral County Museum with attendance by persons from several states and Canada.

The Museum and Historical Society Board felt so positive about the response that it started the *Mullan Chronicles*. But the need to share information in person spurred the movement one step further, hence the start of the John Mullan Day.

In 1990 Mullan Day festivities were highlighted by a video presentation about the Mullan Road hosted by its producers Bernie and Dorothy Merri-man. It will be difficult to top that but every effort will be made to bring quality speakers and information to our Mullanites. More details will appear in the next (May) *Mullan Chronicles*.

So mark your calendar for a May 11 visit to Superior and join the annual ruminations about John Mullan, his men and the Mullan Road.

## Another Mullan Crewman Identified, Bringing Total to 324

Mr. Edmund Percy went with the Mullan expedition as far as the Bitter Root Mountains in 1859, returning to winter at Walla Walla, where he remained for two years, when he went to Lewiston, Idaho.

Percy was born 1832 in Bedford Co, Virginia. He came overland to Sonora, California, with a drove of cattle in 1853. Leaving the cattle in the San Joaquin Valley, he went to Oregon, settling in Multnomah County, where he had three brothers. In 1856 he removed to Scott County, California, to mine, with James, one of his brothers. On their return James was killed by Indians at Grave Creek Hill. Another brother, Nathan, also lived in the Portland (Oregon) area.

He married Mrs. Jennie Davis in 1881, and was living in Oneida Co., Idaho, in 1889.

With the addition of Edmund Percy, there are now 324 known crew members of the expeditions between 1859 and 1862. Information about him was found in the 31st volume of the Bancroft series of western history. We hope you will let us know if you can identify any others.

## Coming in May

- o Speakers and times for the second John Mullan Day.
- o The Mullan Road Commentaries: Extracts from the *Olympia Pioneer and Democrat*.
- o A sure cure for rattlesnake bite included whiskey, brandy, blue mass. Medicine on the frontier as practiced by Dr. James Mullan and company.

## Mullan Miscellany

Whatever John Mullan lacked in size—he was reportedly only five feet tall—he made up in ambition. Toward the end of the first road-building expedition in 1860, an officer of the Blake expedition that traveled up the Missouri River to Fort Benton to meet Mullan wrote that Mullan “is quite monomaniac about his road.”

The only black person to accompany the first road-building group was Thomas D. Lowza, a 25-year-old Jamaican. The 1860 census of the Colville Valley says his occupation was either a painter or printer—the writing is unclear.

## Time to Renew

It's time to renew subscriptions. Because all work is done by volunteers, the money is used only to publish and mail the *Mullan Chronicles*.

As a reminder, there will be a happy face beside your name if your subscription is due for renewal, plus one of these numbers that identifies the month your subscription expires:

- 1 means November
- 2 means February
- 3 means May
- 4 means August

We value all our fine friends. We appreciate your support in the past, and look forward to a continuing exchange of ideas and information.

# from the mail pouch



## Memo from Merrimans

Enjoyed the November 1990 issue very much and were interested in the Munholland query about Joseph Mullan. It's been so many years since we corresponded with Elsie Harlow about him that our memories are clouded, but I seem to recall mention that he was a great nephew or some such. Now, please don't quote this or let it become engraved anywhere, as fact. I just don't know. But, down in the cellar (behind the axe) or up in the attic under a trunk are boxes and boxes of letters and one day when I get out from under wrapping presents for all the grand-kids, I'll get into the search for Elsie's information when she sent me the clippings and we'll let you know what connection, if any, there was. Bernie's health has been fragile all this past year and so our voyaging has been limited. We were therefore doubly delighted when Carl (Cliff) and Dr. Bill (Trueblood) stopped in a few weeks back and we spent a delightful afternoon looking at their photographs of the Prickly Pear Medicine Rock Mountain area in their ongoing mapping of Mullan's Road. We believe that perhaps more than anybody they are nosing out the true way. It's always interesting in historical research to find divergent opinions and apparent anomalies. As you go along, the past recedes away, getting dimmer and erroneous opinions become etched in absolute surety. One must constantly keep peeling away at the onion-skins of the truth. Bernie and I have often laughingly wondered if John Mullan himself wouldn't be a bit at sea if set down in some modern tangle of roads and rails and mountain passes and asked to point out his exact route. So it was understandable to hear about Carl and Bill and Mrs. John Baucus' disagreement about the road through the Sieben Ranch.

*Mullanites, we are so fortunate to have the Merrimans who are long-time steeped in Mullan in our group. What a resource! I hope Dorothy does not get put out with me for mentioning Joseph Mullan, possible link with the family. Remember folks, it is not engraved in stone, but the possible relationship to John might get someone excited enough to follow it up from another angle. And that is what we are trying to do with the Mullan Chronicles—get people excited.*

*As far as the location of the road through the Prickly Pear Medicine Rock Mountain, it is not unbelievable that Mullan took the more difficult route. As we all know, the same thing happened in what is now Mineral County.*

*He took the route over what we now call Lookout Pass instead of the passage north of us which is far more temperate in weather. It just so happened that when he scouted the northern route, it was spring and during the high-water period. Because of that, the route was briefly impassable. And it is because Mullan scouted this area on the Stevens expedition so thoroughly and designated it the main route during his own expedition (attended by the extensive geological, meteorological and astronomical surveys his men did), that Interstate 90 travels through this area now.*

*The puzzle—and I believe that is the charm of historical research—does continue.*

—Deb

## Linse Looking for Maps

Please keep your newsletter coming—I enjoy reading each one. Can't find a whole lot here on the Mullan Road. Found one reference book at our library, but nothing more. I'm looking for some good, detailed, small scale maps. Can you lead me to some. I'd appreciate it. Thanks.

Bill Linse  
1109 N 34th Ave  
Yakima, WA 98902

*This has to be the most frequent request. To begin with, the maps that accompanied Mullan's report to Congress are quite interesting; they should be viewed first, in my opinion, and compared with modern maps of the route. The Mineral County Museum (our agency) has those maps and are available (in pieces, we can't photocopy the whole map) for the price of photocopying. Next, you can acquire maps (for a fee) from the U.S. Forest Service or the state land office for state lands and possibly private lands.*

*But the best source I have found is USGS maps. When I acquired the ones I have, I requested the earliest maps that showed in the greatest and closest details in specific section of particular township and ranges. One map I received from them dated 1894 (see map on page 1) covers Section 6 of Township 14 North, Range 23 West and shows the Mullan Road running adjacent to the Missoula (now Clark Fork) River. These are the most detailed maps I found and when I purchased them several years ago they were \$1.00 each. I don't know what they would cost now. These maps also reflect the contour of the terrain and show and name many towns, ranches, creeks, trails and etc. If anyone else has suggestions of what maps are available and where they can be located,*

—Deb

## Book Review—

***FORT BENTON, World's Innermost Port*, by Joel Overholser**

It must have been a labor of love that was behind the delightful, studious, and remarkable book written by the

### *California Yields A New Mullanite*

Congratulations to Jeanne and Van Wolverton of Alberton, Montana on their first grandchild, Christopher Michael Wolverton, who was born December 12, 1990 in Santa Cruz, California. Grandpa Van is the computer wizard who does the layout and publishing of the *Mullan Chronicles*. Good wishes to him and Jeanne and thanks for a beautiful job!

Fort Benton historian Joel Overholser.

From fur trading post to western terminus of the Mullan Road to shipping port (hence the title), Fort Benton is the only fur post to survive, the oldest continuously occupied place in Montana.

This tome is full of facts, tonnage, passengers, history of the people, and the geography. It is written in a style that keeps you thinking, "just one more page" before putting it down. It has an extensive index and a bibliography listing a host of Montana histories.

If your local book store doesn't have this excellent book in stock, please ask them to order it:

*FORT BENTON, World's Innermost Port*  
Joel Overholser, 1987

LoC # 87-90710, ISBN 0-937959-27-8

Joel Overholser

Box 69, Ft. Benton, MT 59442

I was told to ask Joel if the story about a certain cask that contained heads is true. Is it?

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Cathryn Strombo and  
Deb Davis, Editors.

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