

MULLAN CHRONICLES

Volume Three

March 1, 1992

Number Two



More mystery of Mullan's "curious little town"

The following is the second part of report of findings made by Duane Hampton and Thain White during an excavation made near DeBorgia, Mont. in 1974. It was believed to be the site, or near the site, of Cantonment Jordan, the Mullan Expedition's winter camp during the first three months of 1860.

"Hampton and I did not expect to find the amputated leg bones of the poor soldier that had them taken off after the froze in 1860—perhaps the first operation in western Montana, that far west any way," White wrote later.

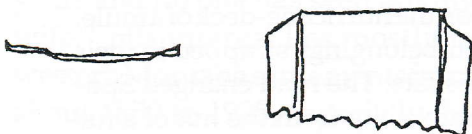
What they did find, however, were several metal nails and strapping and a brass trigger guard. White wrote:

"The nails are the square type, badly rusted except for one of the 16 pennys that has been in the old rotten log recovered from... (a) pile of rocks. (See tracings above right.)

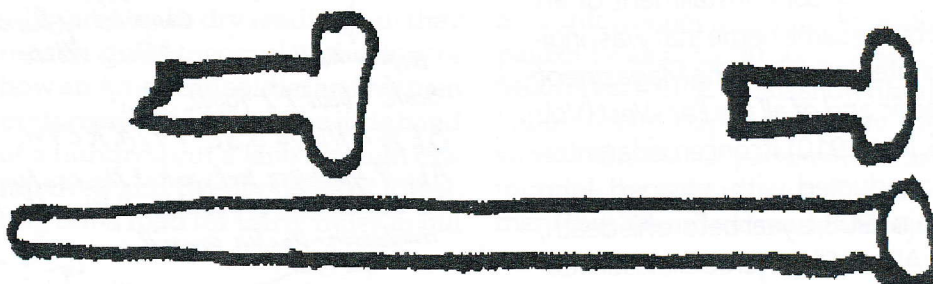
"We so know that Mullan made purchases of nails at fort Owen in the year of 1853 which was six years before he started Jordan. But I can find no reference to nails later than 1853...

Strap Iron Banding

"Also found at the site was a strip of light strap iron binding that was 16 3/4 inches long by 13/8 inches wide and about .025 thick with a crease on each edge. (See sketch.)



Iron banding



Badly rusted nails, 16d at bottom

I have never seen banding like this. One end is square cut and the other has the corners snipped off. It does not appear to have been in a fire."

about 1/8" by 3/64" at the base of the head.

"The other piece of banding has the same dimensions but is 93/4 inches

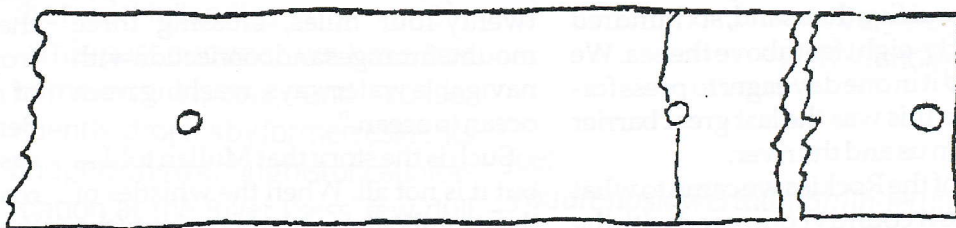


Cupped nail

"There are three pieces of heavier banding and all have been in a fire. One piece has one short square nail near one end and the nail is badly clinched over the hole as though when driven into the hole some sort of object was held on the offside and

long and broken at one end (see sketch below).

The holes appear to be punched, not drilled. Another piece of banding (13/16 inch wide and .030 thick) appears to have both ends broken off. It also appears to have been in a fire."



Broken banding

the nail curled upon being driven against it. One odd thing about the nail is that it has a cupped head much like the tacks used when a plumb bob is centered in the head of the tack—much the same as surveyors use.

Finally, the excavation uncovered a button, White recorded. He noted that it was a 20mm. "Scovell's & Co. Super Fine" without elaborating.

(Next time: the Brass Trigger Guard is discussed.)

The nail is about one inch long and

Building the M.R.—Part Three

In the December 1, 1991 issue of the *Mullan Chronicles* appeared the second installment of an article by the same name that was originally printed in *Sunset: The Magazine of the Pacific and of all the Far West* (Vol. 24, #6, June 1910). It concerned an interview conducted with an aged John Mullan in 1908, a year before his death, by Day Allen Willey. Here is the last installment of that article:

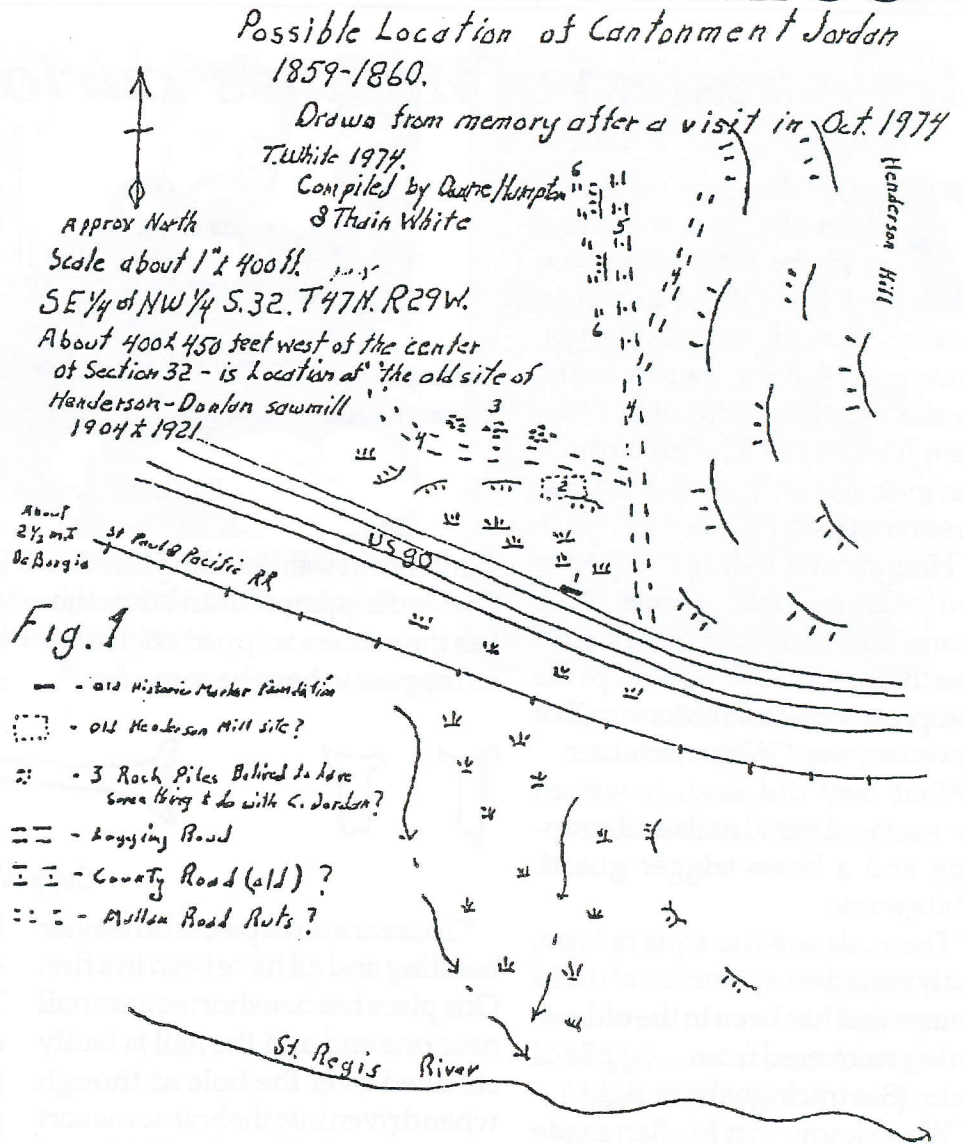
Next came the Blackfoot river, where the boat-wagon came into services, and by the middle of summer, we had reached the foot of the main divide of the Rockies. Hearing that the Flatheads had crossed by a pass in the vicinity, I took one of the tribe named Charlot, who said he had been over it, for a guide, and made a little exploring tour ahead of the rest. As in other cases where I had dealt with the tribes of the Northwest, I found that the redskin had told the truth. The pass was much easier of ascent than the one we had found in the Coeur d'Alenes. I rode through it and returned with the news to where the roadmakers were at work. An instrumental survey showed that the highest point of the pass through on the main divide of the Rocky mountains, was about five thousand, six hundred and forty-eight feet above the sea. We crossed it in one day eager to press forward as this was the last great barrier between us and the river.

East of the Rockies we came to what was a new country compared with the wildness and desolation of the region in which we had spent nearly a year. Reaching the Sun river on July 28th, we ended our roadbuilding, for the fifty-five miles from the river crossing to Fort Benton is rolling prairie where the way need only be marked. When we reached Benton we had completed a route over which a loaded wagon could

journey a distance of six hundred and twenty-four miles, crossing three mountain ranges and connection with navigable waterways, reaching from ocean to ocean."

Such is the story that Mullan told—but it is not all. When the whistles of the steamboats and the booming of the postguns greeted the arrival of the adventurers at Benton, and the ending of their task, a new era in the West had begun. It has been linked with the East by another transcontinental route over parts of which has since been flowing a human tide. Before these pioneers had passed the mountains, the hunter and home-seeker began coming up the Co-

lumbia and through Walla Walla into the Inland Empire, and later the miner from California came this way in quest of riches. From steamer and barge at Benton were landed people from the east of the Mississippi who struck the road in search of a new home. When the news went forth in the '80's that northern Idaho was a vast chamber of mineral wealth, the route was alive with humanity, hastening the new El Dorado, in wagons, on horseback and some on the hurricane-deck of a mule, all their belongings strapped in their saddles kits. The road changed Spokane into a city from the hut of a fur trader, and long before the mountain



Building the M.R.—Part Three

canons echoed back the rumble of the train, the farmer, the timberman and the ranchman were peopling the Spokane country.

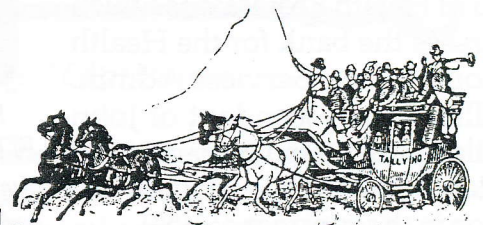
The first travelers to go Westward were the roadmakers, for his work ended, Lieutenant Mullan must return to Vancouver with his men. After him, came a command of three hundred soldiers, the first military expedition to march across the mountains north of the South Pass. That was nearly a half century ago, but to this day he who chances along the way will meet droves of sheep and horses, occasionally the wagon of the homesteader, for though not on the map, still it is a route by which men go here and there in the Northwest, as in older years. True, the builders of the metal highway have long since bolted together the links of steel, but they could find no better route. So it was that when John Mullan, as guest of honor, saw Henry Villard drive the golden spike that completed the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883, the

car which bore him passed over the prairie, amid the forests and through some of the hill gaps where he had led his sturdy followers years before.

Figures make dry reading, but they must be given to complete the story of how an American soldier and his men performed their duty. The little band of a hundred cut a lane through one hundred and twenty miles of forest, dug out a road for thirty miles in hill

and mountain, bridging streams where necessary, literally fighting their way for every mile. And when it was ready for use of the nation the total amount of money the United States had paid out was just \$230,000, or less than \$400 for each mile. This is shown by the yellow rusty papers carefully treasured in the War Department at Washington—the only records of achievement that has indeed made history.

from the mail pouch



September 9, 1991

Dear Deb Davis:

A belated thank you for the videotape of the Second Mullan Day meeting. I have just ordered from Jim Dullenty of Mountain House in Hamilton a reprint of John Mullan's "Report on the Construction of the Military Road From Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton." Guess I just couldn't resist adding to the thick Mullan files.

This past summer we have had numerous visitors, and, consequently, drop ins by former residents and persons wanting historical information at the River Press, few dull days. Several descendents of Alexander Culbertson turned up. I'm just mailing today the contents of the Culbertson file. I'm not sure whether he was of the original or of a nephew Robert who came to Fort Benton in time to be on the 1870 census.

One day I had ... a descendant of Jo-

seph LaBarge, one of the leading steamboat captains (have had 4 or 5 over the years); a descendent of I.G. Baker, who conducted an immense trade with Canada and the contract with the Canadian Mounted Royal Police 1874-83. There went that day!

Your program was, of course, interesting to me and the sending of same appreciated. Sorry for the time I took before acknowledgement.

Very truly,
Joel Overholser

Joel,
You are no slower than I am in getting your letter into the MC, or answering your question about one of the 1991 speakers. It was Dr. G. Thomas Edwards who spoke last year about Walla Walla as a Gateway into the Interior Northwest, 1860-1885. Dr. Edwards is a professor of history at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. Deb

ADOCTOR AND HIS CAMERA

Dr. Richard Buswell, uncle of our own Carl Cliff, recently had an exhibit of his photographs of homesteads and ghost towns of Montana at the Paxson Gallery in Missoula. The exhibit called, "Echoes: A Visual Reflection" contained 31 photos on display for the first time at the University of Montana.

Buswell said, "It's something I've been working on for 20 years and no one has seen but my wife." His interest lies mostly in western Montana settlements from about 1850 to 1925, especially the "remote and undescribed."

Fitzhugh Mullan Featured in American Medical News

In an article updating physician-members of the American Medical Association on the progress of the National Practitioner Data Bank, the Dec. 16, 1991 issue of the American Medical News quoted Fitzhugh Mullan, MD, concerning the data bank: "This is a new part of the health care landscape," Mullan, director of the federal Bureau of Health Professions which oversees the bank for the Health Resources and Services Admin. Mullan is a descendent of John Mullan and visited Superior and St. Regis for the Mullan statue dedication in the summer of 1989.



FITZHUGHMULLAN, MD carries on the family medical tradition in the federal public health system.

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**Cathryn Strombo and
Deb Davis, Editors.**

MULLAN CHRONICLES

Mineral County Museum
Post Office Box 533
Superior, MT 59872

**Don't forget
Third Annual Mullan Day
Convention**

Saturday, May 9, 1992
1:00 p.m.
4-H Building
Superior, Mont.

