

# MULLAN CHRONICLES

Volume Five

Fall 1994

Numbers Three and Four



## Descendants Shed Light on Sohon

**W**e had an interesting visit this summer with Julian and Nancy Sohon descendents of Gustavus Sohon, artist, linguist and explorer, who was a member of the Stevens Expedition in 1853 and the Mullan Expedition in 1859-60.

As a result of this visit with these charming folks, we increased our knowledge of Sohon and the Mullan connection with materials they provided to us. One document given to us is a jewel. It was compiled by John C. Ewers, an associate curator of ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, in 1948, and published by that agency on November 26 of that year. This publication, known as Publication 394I, is called *Gustavus Sohon's Portraits of Flathead and Pend D'Oreille Indians, 1854.*

Ewers, who we understand still puts in part-days at that institution, gave us more



*Gustavus Sohon*

Portrait courtesy Sohon descendants and Smithsonian Institution

information on Sohon than we, and his family, have been able to find elsewhere. Ewers wrote about this elusive person the following:

"Gustavus Sohon was born in Tilset, Germany, Dec. 10, 1825. His daughter, Dr. Elizabeth Sohon, recalled that he used to speak of having attended "University," and Hazard Stevens, who knew him in 1855, called him "well-educated." When he came to America at the age of 17, to avoid compulsory service in the Prussian Army, which was distasteful to him, he spoke English, French and German fluently. Whether Sohon ever had any formal instruction in art is not known.

"Little is known of his life in Brooklyn during the decade following his arrival in this country. His daughter

(See "Sohon" on page four)

## Young Mullanite Andy Benson Wows Crowd With His Impression of Sohon

Thanks to all of our good friends who supported the annual John Mullan Day event in Superior, May 14.

We had many of the regular supporters and some new faces among the small gathering. It was a pleasure seeing all of you again, or for the first time. It was a crazy day for me (Deb). My daughter's graduation from college at Bozeman was in the morning, fol-

lowed by a wild drive home to the gathering so I'm not sure I had all my marbles, but, as always, it was fun.

Andy Benson of Coupeville, WA, accompanied by his father, Tom Benson, gave his presentation of Gustavus Sohon that he wrote and performed himself, originally as a school project. I was sorry I missed it, but

(See "Mullan Day" on page 6)

### *Inside this Issue*

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# Sherman Travels Final Leg of Mullan



*Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman*

On Sept. 23, 1877, Sherman continued his narrative:

“... by universal agreement the best road (west) is by way of the Coeur d’Alene mission ... the road was much traveled ... but being neglected, it has become so obstructed by washes and by fallen timber that for years it has not been traveled by wagons at all, and reverted to the condition of a mere pack-

trail. In and about Missoula we found many persons who had crossed by this route, all of whom thought we could not possibly come with wagons over to Walla Walla without infinite labor; still I thought the attempt necessary, and, therefore, arranged to take our (three) wagons along ... Two dozen axes and half dozen picks and shovels were procured, and, with 18 days’ provisions, we

started on the 4th of September.

“... The road leads directly across the grand plateau from (Fort Missoula) to the bridge which spans the main river (Deer Lodge) at the town, and thence down the valley on its north or east side

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***Two dozen axes and a half dozen picks and shovels were procured, and with 18 days’ provisions, we started on the 4th of September.***

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for 18 miles to “Frenchtown,” all the way passing good farms with fields of wheat, oats, and garden vegetables. Frenchtown is so called by reason of its founders and chief occupants being Canadian French, with a sprinkling of Americans, Chinese, &c., and is a thriving town with good saw and grist mills, stores, shops, &c. From Frenchtown, settlements—save at long intervals—ceased; the valley closes in and space for farms in the valley proper is very scant. The pine forest up to this point usually kept on the mountain tops and side ravines, but from there it invaded the valley, though the trees were open, i.e., far apart, so as not materially to interfere with the road, but wherever the pine grows the grasses are thin and unsuitable for grazing. The valley also becomes so narrow that the river, here swollen into stream too deep and with a current too strong to be forded, forces the road over high hills and mountains to avoid the canyons. In the first three days of travel we made 72 miles, and had two heavy mountains or “grades” to pass; but the Mullan road here was plain, comparatively good, needing little repairs to make it practicable.

“On the fourth day we crossed the river by a good ferry boat kept by a white man, who said we were the first wagons for this year—only one last year. He said he had a charter procured of Congress by Lieutenant Mullan, and though re-



# Road From Missoula to Walla Walla

peatedly stampeded and driven off by Indian scares, he clung to his ferry, which is really an excellent one, with a good wire rope, and capable of crossing 15 or 20 horses at each load. All our party crossed in a couple of hours. From the point we turned due west into a dark pine forest, and the work of cutting trees began. The road still remains plain, but all bridges have been swept away by winter avalanches, and is obstructed by fallen trees. In some instances we could work our way around trees, but the forest became more and more dense, so that the logs had to be cut and moved aside or bridged.

"For 30 miles from the ferry the road ascends the valley of the Regis

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***For 30 miles from the ferry the road ascends the valley of the Regis Borgia, crossing it some 40 times. [The troopers] kept ahead with axes and handspikes to cut and remove logs.***

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Borgia, crossing it some 40 times. (The troopers) kept ahead with axes and handspikes to cut and remove logs. At the source of the Regis Borgia the road crosses the summit of the mountains. Descending this mountain by a very steep pitch, the road plunges into a similar dark forest, and follows the Coeur d'Alene River, similar in all respects to the Regis Borgia, only **more so** . . . By perseverance we reached the mission in five days from the ferry . . . all in good order.

"This mission is one of those Catholic missions established in early days for the conversion of the heathen; the church stands on a hill close to the river, and round about it are the huts or houses built in regular order by the (about 500 Coeur d'Alene) Indians themselves. Up and down the valley are gardens and fields well fenced and well cultivated...

Nearly all the Indians are already gone, and the priest, Diomedi, was in the act of starting to establish a new church. . . I believe they will have no difficulty in doing so, provided we will do something toward reopening and encouraging travel on this (Mullan's) road.

". . . the next morning (we) resumed our journey. The road leaves the valley at the mission and bears to the north over very broken ground so as to pass the north end of the lake. We found less fallen timber, but a road made difficult and hard to cross with wagons, by reason of following the bed of mountain torrents with hard and massive boulders. We had about 30 miles of such road, but made it safely and debouched at the north end of the lake... From the end of the lake to Spokane Bridge, 12 miles, the road is perfect. At the bridge we came to the first mail-station on this side of the continent, and from there had the choice of three good roads to Walla Walla.

"Captain Winters chose the most direct one, by way of the Texas Ferry across Snake River, and we traveled by it 160 miles in five days. All (the local Indians) were agitated by the recent Nez Perce outbreak, for they are of the same type and class; are intermarried, and have common grievances. All see the whites are rapidly occupying the best farming lands, and that they are in danger of starvation . . . I think by moderation and a show of justice we can prevent any further extension of trouble...

"I have not the time or space to describe fully the geography and peculiarities of this country, but merely state that it is vast in extent . . . Walla Walla is the key-point and center . . . Another post intermediate is necessary . . . The Indian Bureau cannot manage these Indians. They never have and never can. The military can and must. . . The settlers have but one mind, that the Indians are lazy, thieving set of vagabonds, they ought to be exterminated. The Indian agents are powerless, and the consequence is was . . . costing much life, property, and money. There is and

can be no impartial umpire; but the officers of the Army are the least prejudiced, and having soldiers to sustain them, can often defend the Indians against manifest wrong, and may some-

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***I have not the time or space to describe fully the geography and peculiarities of this country, but merely state that it is vast in extent . . .***

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times interpose before war is inevitable.

"In any event the Army must do what it can to prepare the way for the emigrant, and to keep the peace as far as possible during this epoch.

"Walla Walla is a beautiful town, has a narrow-gauge railroad ... 32 miles long to Wallula, whence an excellent line of boats daily come to Portland, transferring freight and passengers around The Dalles, 14 miles, and the Cascades, five miles, by railroad.

"There is no help for it. The Indian must conform (to the white man's ways) or be driven ... but if left as now, wandering about hoping to restore the old order of things, an Indian will be a curiosity here in 20 years.

"Forts Vancouver and Walla Walla are well-built posts, needing nothing. We ought to spend something at Colville, say \$20,000, and we should begin the new post at Coeur d'Alene Lake next spring ...

"I do not think any change is needed on Puget's Sound, but there will be time enough for that when I reach Washington ...

"My party is in splendid condition, with appetites that leave little profit to the landlord.

"With great respect, yours truly,

W.T. SHERMAN, General



*Sohon, from page 1*

understood that he had made some wood carvings for sale, and a son, the late Henry W. Sohon, wrote that 'he engaged in the photography business.' However, upon his enlistment, he gave his occupation as 'bookbinder.'

"Gustavus Sohon enlisted as a private in the United States Army in New York, July 2, 1852, at the age of 26. Routine Army records describe him at the time as dark-complexioned, hazel-eyed, black-haired, 5 feet 7 inches tall. He was assigned to Company K, Fourth Infantry Regiment. A few days later his Company was ordered to board the steamship *Golden West* for service on the Pacific Coast. After a brief stop at Benicia, Calif., Headquarters of the Military Department of the Pacific, Company K was ordered to the frontier military post of Fort Dalles in September 1852.

"Sohon went west at the momentous period in the development of the western United States. For several years there had been a nation-wide demand for a railroad to connect the growing settlements of the Pacific slope with the eastern states. However, strong rivalry existed in the East regarding the location of the route, and the choice of its eastern terminus. In 1853 Congress authorized the War Department 'to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.' Three surveying expeditions were organized to explore a northern, a central and a southern route. Gov. Issac I. Stevens of Washington Territory was placed in charge of the project to explore the northern route between the forty-seventh and forty-ninth parallels from the Mississippi River to Puget Sound.

"Gov. Stevens left St. Paul in early



*Governor Isaac Stevens*

Photo by Matthew Brady

June, 1853, at the head of an exploring and surveying party moving westward across the plains to meet a second party, surveying eastward from the Pacific under his assistant, Capt. George B. McClellan<sup>1</sup>. Stevens also ordered Lt. Rufus Saxton, Jr.<sup>2</sup>, acting assistant quartermaster and commissary of the expe-

dition, to proceed eastward from the Pacific side and establish a depot of provisions at the Flathead Indian village of St. Mary's west of the Rockies. Lieutenant Saxton, with an escort of 18 soldiers from the Fourth Infantry, left Fort Dalles with the supply train on

*See "Sohon" on page 5*



*Sohon, from page 4*

July 18, 1853. Sohon was one of the enlisted men assigned to duty with this party. They traveled eastward via the Columbia River, Lewis' Fork, Clark's Fork, Flathead Lake and up the Bitterroot Valley to St. Mary's village on the Bitterroot ... En route this caravan met a party of about 100 Pend d'Oreille Indians returning from a buffalo hunt on the plains east of the Rockies ... It was Sohon's first glimpse of some of the mountain Indians whom he was later to know well.

"Saxton's party also met the two Messrs. Owen, who had purchased the property of the Jesuit Mission of St. Mary's in 1850 and established Fort Owen, a trading post, on its site ... Saxton's party reached Fort Owen Au-

gust 28 (1853). They found it surrounded by a considerable village of log cabins. They were surprised to find cattle, chickens and growing crops of wheat and potatoes tended by Iroquois Indians. The Flathead Indians were absent on a buffalo hunt across the mountains.

Unfortunately, John Owen's Journals kept by him from 1850-1871 do not contain any notations for the period of Sohon's visit. In fact, they skip the year 1853 entirely.

"By fall Gov. Stevens was convinced that the critical problem confronting his survey was that of determining the most practical and economical route for the railway over the Rocky and Bitterroot ranges of mountains. Although the mountain region had been

known to fur traders for several decades, the only mathematical data and maps available were those compiled by the explorers Lewis and Clark in their hasty travels through the area a half century earlier. There was need for more detailed scientific information. Accord-

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***On Oct. 3, 1853, Stevens ordered Lt. John Mullan to take charge of these important investigations, and assigned 15 men to Mullan's command. Sohon was one of this little group.***

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ingly, Stevens decided to leave a small party in the Bitterroot Valley through the winter of 1853-1854 to make precise meteorological observations and to explore and survey the country between the Rocky and Bitterroot Mountains ... with particular emphasis upon the examination of the entrances to the mountain passes. On Oct. 3, 1853, Stevens ordered Lt. John Mullan to take charge of these important investigations, and assigned 15 men to Mullan's command. Sohon was one of this little group.

Owen's first entry concerning Mullan's group appears on June 11, 1854. Owen wrote, "Having remained in camp today to send back for one of Lieut. Mullan's mules that did not come up last night loaded with flour." Owen and his men were enroute back to Fort Owen along the St. Regis River Gorge when this entry was made. He continued, "Soon after sending the man (he returned) with mule without its pack. I sent back my Ind(ian) boys



*Sohon's sketch of Alexander, head chief of Pend Oreille Indians*

*See "Sohon" on page 6*



*"Mullan Day," from page 1*

everyone told me it was quite delightful. Andy took third place in his school which gave him the right to take his presentation to the state history finals. With period clothing and gestures Andy gave the group a pleasant look at Sohon and Mullan. Right On! Andy, keep up the good work.

That Daring Duo, Bill Trueblood and Cliff Carl Cliff, also presented a video they made in their travels of the Mullan Road. This particular sequence was a stretch of the road near Wolf Creek and in the distance, as they pointed out, the present road though Medicine Rock cutoff between the Sieben Ranch (Baucus Ranch) and Wolf Creek.

One of the issues I brought to the floor was to ask if there was interest in forming a board to oversee the development of a tri-state Mullan project to promote the road in a variety of ways. The reviews were mixed, mainly because there are so few of us to do the work. But we would like to hear from other Mullanites about the issue so please write to us and we will compile your responses for the next MC edition.

And, as always, we request your suggestions about topics to be explored in the MC and at the next Mullan Day which will be held in May 1995. We're always looking for fresh talent so if you have something you would like to speak about in relation to the road or John Mullan, please contact us.

And, I apologize for this issue being so late. Too many projects pulling at me from all directions. I keep saying I'm going to move away and not leave a forwarding address. All those other projects get me away from what I like to do best, including this project.

Best wishes to you, friends

Deb

*"Sohon," from page 5*

to hunt for the pack. They found it in the river where it had lain all night. Stript (sic) the Pouches off & put it out to dry."

In 11 days, Owen finally made it back to the fort where he welcomed Mullan and his party on June 26. He went on to Cantonment Stevens, about 14 miles south of the fort, the next morning. Throughout the rest of the summer, Owen records the travels between the fort and camp with the barest description.

Ewers, however, described Cantonment Stevens clearly as "a group of rude huts...served as a weather station, winter quarters and headquarters for the party's explorations of the intermountain region." It is a description that could be equally applied to Cantonment Jordan in the St. Regis River Valley built by the crew in the winter of 1859-60.

He continued, "Gustavus Sohon's services to Lieutenant Mullan in his explorations of 1853-54 were invaluable. A gifted linguist, Sohon learned to speak the Salishan languages of the Flathead and Pend d'Oreille Indians on the trails, mountains passes and general geography of the region. It was probably during this period that Sohon began the compilation of the Flathead-English vocabulary which is now in the manuscript collections of the Bureau of American Ethnology. It includes some 1,500 useful words and phrases.

"Sohon also accompanied Mullan on his extensive explorations of the intermountain region from Fort Ahll on the Snake River in the south to the Kootenay River on the north. They crossed the Continental Divide six times and measured snowfall in the passes. Sohon made a series of excellent landscape sketches depicting the character of the country traversed, important land-

marks, Cantonment Stevens and views of the party on the march which were valuable as a record of the explorations.

"Doubtless Sohon rendered valuable service also as a map maker and barometrical observer. If Sohon had had little experience in this work before, it is certain that he learned quickly. After a year of field work in the mountain valleys, Lieutenant Mullan led his party westward to make his report to Gov. Stevens. They arrived at fort Dalles on Oct. 14, 1854."

1 George Brinton McClellan (1826-1885) was to go on to become famous as a Civil War general and have the McClellan military saddle named for him.

2 Rufus Saxton (1824-1908) served in the Union Army and spent part of his military career helping former slaves become self-sufficient.

*(To be continued)*

## Road History Published

The history of Montana roads and bridges, including the Mullan Road, has been published by the Montana Department of Transportation.

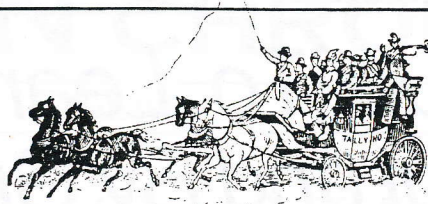
The Mineral County Museum received a copy of the two-volume series *Monuments Above the Water: Montana's Historic Highway Bridges, 1860-1956* and *Roads to Romance: The Origins and Development of the Road and Trail System in Montana* in November of 1993.

The books contain maps and photographs of the various bridge and road sites, plus graphics, and take the road and trail system from its inception.

More information about these booklets is available by contacting the Montana Department of Transportation, Helena, MT 59620.



# from the mail pouch



Missoula, MT  
July 18, 1994

Dear Deb Davis,

I live in Missoula and I love to read. I am 92 so can't drive my car anymore—I can drive and have a permit but know I shouldn't. I read the *Montana Magazine* and in October 1993 they had an article about the Mullan Road written by Dave Walters. I have been tracing my ancestors. My grandfather, John Ashley, is buried in Alberton in an old cemetery along the Mullan Road. That cemetery is no longer used, it's alongside the old Mullan Road. We had to have a four-wheel drive car to get to it. It is cared for by a group of local people who volunteer to keep up the fence, etc.

Mr. Walter of the Montana Historical Society has kindly helped me trace my relatives. They came to Montana about 1882 and worked in the mines in Jefferson City. Mr. Walter gave me a list of helpful books about the Mullan Road in that article. Do you have books to sell about Mr. Mullan and his road. Do you print the *Mullan Chronicles*? Please tell me.

Very truly yours,

Anna M. Lukens

Dear Mrs. Lukens,

*Thank you for your kind letter. You should know that Dave Walters wife was the author of that Montana Magazine article, our inclusion of which we are grateful. Dave has also been very helpful to us since we started cultivation of Mullan information.*

*We don't have any books for sale about John Mullan or the Mullan Road, but, as you know by the Mineral County Pioneer that I sent you, we do have that publication about both available to the public. Also, the Mullan Chronicles, which is published four times a year, is available for a \$5.00 annual subscription. Please contact us at P.O.Box 533, Superior, MT 59872 for more information. We also have back issues available for sale.*

*One more word on this letter is that my cohort, Kay Strombo, is the "people person" and may be able to lend you a hand in your search. Thanks for your kind letter. -Deb*

*A NOTE FROM KAY: Mrs. Lukens, I do not have any record of your grandfather in my records and would like to get with you to get the information to do so.*

*-Kay*

## Statue of Capt. Mullan In St. Regis Listed In State Sculpture Survey

The Capt. John Mullan statue located in the St. Regis town square will be included in a survey being done of Montana outdoor sculpture.

The Save Outdoor Sculpture (SOS) program is surveying all Montana outdoor sculptures, both in public and private collections. The project is being sponsored by the Museums Association of Montana with the support of a \$25,000 Smithsonian Institution Grant. The survey is due to be completed in August.

Missoula artist Edgar S. Paxson was commissioned to design the monument under the patronage of William A. Clark Jr., son of the notorious "Copper King" of the same name. The half dozen monuments created were the result of an effort to honor Capt. Mullan after his death in 1909. The St. Regis statue, which is the same as those given to Mullan, ID, Missoula, MT, and Fort Benton, MT, was dedicated on July 4, 1917 in a ceremony "presided over by the Hon. Charles S. Warren, and oration made by that eloquent son of Montana, William L. Murphy, Esq., of Missoula."

### Wagon Ruts Into the Past

by Andrew Tarica

Next issue we hope to print the article on the Mullan Road done by Andrew Tarica (tar-ik-a) of Seattle, WA. He made the trip along the route with friend Scott De Simone, starting June 25, 1993, 134 years to the day, when Mullan and his party left Fort Walla Walla. While it took 55 days for early settlers and prospectors to traverse the entire route, Tarica and DeSimone took five.

It is an excellent piece and we are sure you will enjoy it.



# We Continue To Learn About More Works About and By Gustavus Sohon

Julian and Nancy allowed us to copy some newspaper articles that were printed in the *Spokesman Review* of Spokane, WA in January, February and March 1952 entitled "Pencil Artist in the Inland Empire of the 1850s."

We were excited to learn of another publication entitled *Northwest Chiefs, Gustav Sohon's Views of the 1855 Stevens Treaty Councils* printed by the Washington State Historical Society in 1986. A letter to that organization was replied with the information that the book is no longer in print and unavailable from them. Does anyone have a copy we

could copy for the museum? Please keep an eye out for one at used book stores and yard sales.

We have now had the pleasure of meeting two descendents of Gustavus Sohon, Marie Shirey of Washington, DC two years ago and now Julian and Nancy Sohon of Fairfield, CT. The Sohons have tried to locate and view the existant works of Gustavus and were excited to learn of two others at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. For all the works Gustav did, he never did any sketches or likenesses of any of his children, according to Nancy.

The *Mullan Chronicles* is published four times a year by the Mineral County museum and Historical Society, Post Office Box 533, Superior, MT 59872, a non-profit organization. Subscriptions are \$5 per year to cover printing and mailing. Computerized typesetting by Van Wolverton

Cathryn Strombo and  
Deb Davis, Editors.

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