

FORT **Simcoe**



**Frontier Army Post, 1856-59
Indian Agency and School, 1859-1923
Yakima Indian Reservation
South Central Washington**

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FORT SIMCOE AT MOOL-MOOL RESTORATION SOCIETY
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By H. Dean Guie
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In its native oak grove at the head of Simcoe Valley where the Toppenish plain meets piney foothills of the Cascade Range, Fort Simcoe seems delightfully remote—seven miles from White Swan and 38 miles southwest of Yakima.

Before the military came in 1856, the pleasant site was known far and wide among the tribes as Mool-Mool (Bubbling Water) for its gurgling cold springs. At the intersection of main trails it was a favorite camping place.

Fort Simcoe was one of two interior Washington Territory army posts established as a result of Indian hostilities that started in the fall of 1855 and ended in September, 1858. The other post was Fort Walla Walla.

Of the original military structures that framed Simcoe's 420-foot square parade ground, five remain—the commanding officer's gabled, two-story house, three dwellings that were captains' quarters and a hewn log blockhouse at the southwest sallyport.

Other fort buildings included lieutenants' quarters and troop barracks on the north and south sides of the parade; a storehouse, subsistence warehouse, guardhouse and hospital—on the east side; laundresses' quarters, and just beyond the southeast corner of the quadrangle a little mule-power sawmill.

The outside walls of the trim residences on officers row are bricked between the studs, and nogging likewise adds to the solidity of partition walls. All rooms have brick fireplaces. The bricks were made from soil on the grounds. High, wide board fencing enclosed the back yards and half the side yards.

Reconstruction includes two blockhouses at the eastern sallyports and a mast-type flagpole, next to which is a room of the post guardhouse, restored to its original site.

As related by Louis Scholl, supervising architect at The Dalles, Ore., for the army, "All doors, window sashes, mantels, bookcases, etc., for these far posts (Walla Walla and



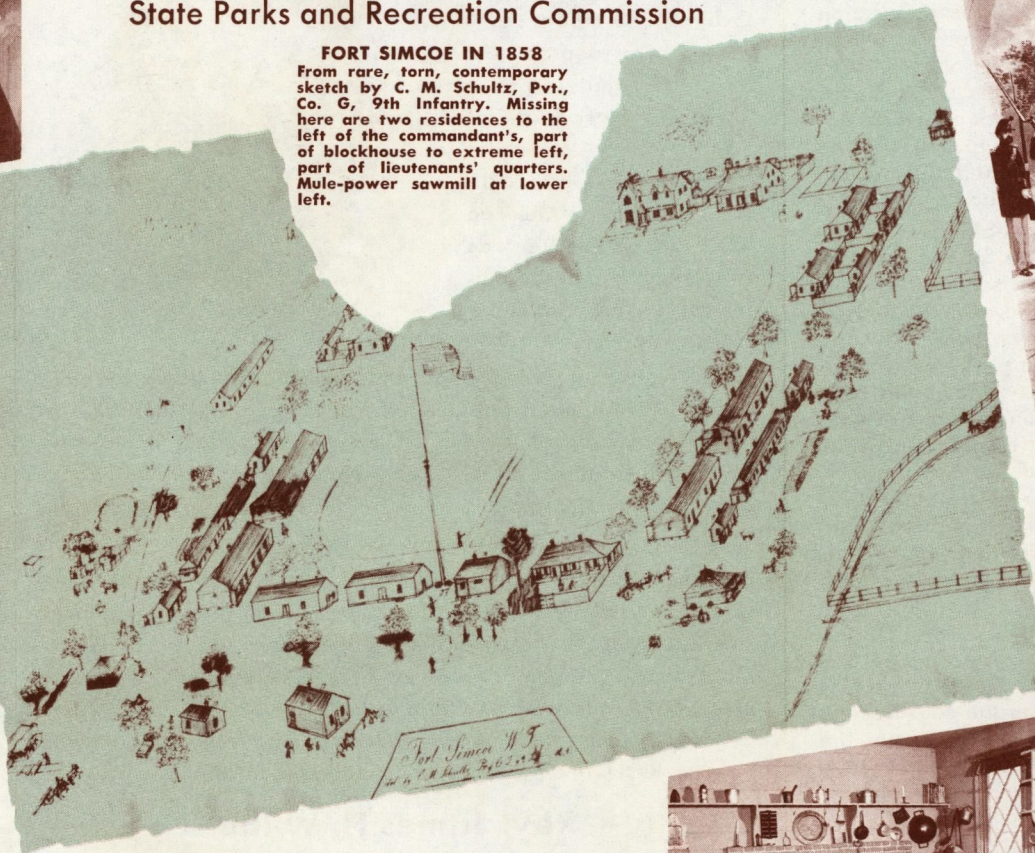
Noted Chief Moses of the Sinkuse, Superintendent Lewis T. Erwin (Agent 1893-97), Chief White Swan, Klickitat Tribe. Photo courtesy of Mrs. J. J. (Suzanne) Bartholet, daughter of Judge Erwin, and girlhood resident at Simcoe.

HISTORICAL RESTORATION PROJECT

State Parks and Recreation Commission

FORT SIMCOE IN 1858

From rare, torn, contemporary sketch by C. M. Schultz, Pvt., Co. G, 9th Infantry. Missing here are two residences to the left of the commandant's, part of blockhouse to extreme left, part of lieutenants' quarters. Mule-power sawmill at lower left.

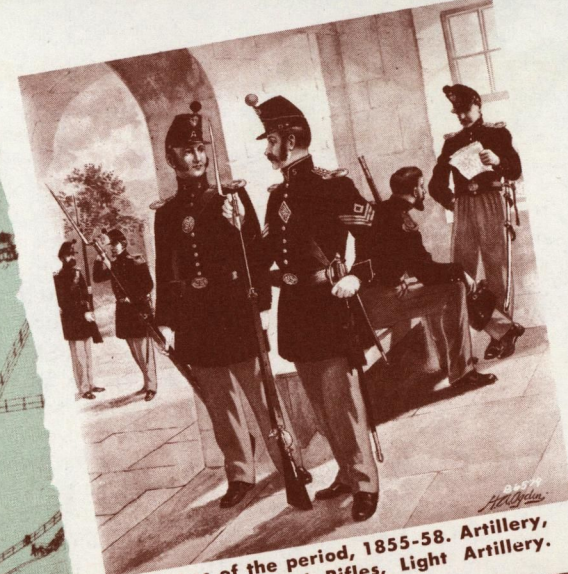


Simcoe) were transported, some by pack mule but mostly by large six-mule wagon trains." For two years, he said, "a pack train of nearly 50 mules moved between Fort Dalles and Simcoe." Scholl drew the working plans for Forts Dalles, Simcoe and Walla Walla and, in 1859, for Fort Colville.

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Simcoe, from the Yakima *Sim-ku-ee* or *Sim-kwee* (accent second syllable) is taken from the name of a "saddle" in a ridge north of the fort. *Sim* is descriptive of the female waist; *ku-ee* or *kwee* is spine or back. In 1853, Capt. George B. McClellan mapped nearby Simcoe Creek as *Simkwe*. Across the Simcoe Mountains, to the south, Capt. Frederick T. Dent, brother-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant, pioneered the Fort Dalles-Fort Simcoe military road (65 miles) in 1856.

Fort Simcoe Historical State Park—200 acres—at the western terminus of State Secondary Highway 3-B was established in 1953 with the assistance of the Fort Simcoe At Mool-Mool Restoration Society. The park, under 99-year lease from the Yakima Indian Nation, is administered by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.



Uniforms of the period, 1855-58. Artillery, Infantry, Mounted Rifles, Light Artillery. (National Archives)



Residence of Commandant and, later, Indian Agents. (James Rayner)



Kitchen, Commandant's House. (James Rayner)

Commandant's Office (Louis H. Martin)



Across Parade Ground to Officers Row (H. D. Guie)





As It Happened

Col. George Wright, 9th Infantry, chose the location for Fort Simcoe in August, 1856, as he was returning to his headquarters at Fort Dalles from a pacification campaign through the Yakima Valley and the Wenatchee country. Although the principal war chiefs — Kamiakin, Owhi, Skloom and Qualchan — had evaded him, Wright felt he had accomplished his mission. The Indians agreed to follow the path of peace.

In the fall of 1855, the Yakimas had defeated Maj. Granville O. Haller and a force of 100, musket-armed regulars in a two-day battle on Toppenish Creek, a scant three miles from Mool-Mool, and harried the command over the Simcoe Mountains half-way to Fort Dalles. Haller had taken the field to punish the Yakimas for the slaying of their special agent, Maj. Andrew J. Bolon, in the Simcoe Mountains by a few reckless braves, and the reported killing of several gold prospectors. Shortly after Haller's defeat, the Yakimas skirmished with a strong punitive expedition led by Maj. Gabriel J. Rains, and easily escaped following a noisy demonstration at Union Gap. Second Lieut. Phil Sheridan, commanding a detachment of 20 dragoons, and other officers chafed at Rains' extreme caution and voted the campaign a "wretched failure."

Maj. Garnett, with Companies G and F, 9th Infantry, started construction of Fort Simcoe on August 8. The first quarters were of hewed pine logs which were cut in the hills back of the post. All lived in tents until, in the cold December of 1856, the first barracks were completed under the direction of Capt. J. J. Archer. Garnett had gone East in the fall to claim his betrothed, Miss Marianna Nelson, New York City belle. He brought her to Simcoe on May 17, 1857.

Writing, April 29, 1858, to a friend in Lockport, N. Y., Mrs. Garnett told of their infant son, Arthur Nelson Garnett, "a nice, fat, happy and healthy child," the "very pretty and conveniently arranged" house and the wild flowers covering hills and fields.

Upon the renewal of Indian hostilities in the summer of '58, Col. Wright moved to smash the power of the Spokanes and Cover d'Alenes east of the Columbia River and Maj. Garnett struck north and west of the river.

Lieut. George Crook, who became one of the West's famed Indian fighters, was with Garnett's expedition, which resulted in the capturing of some Indians and the execution of 10 accused of murdering miners.

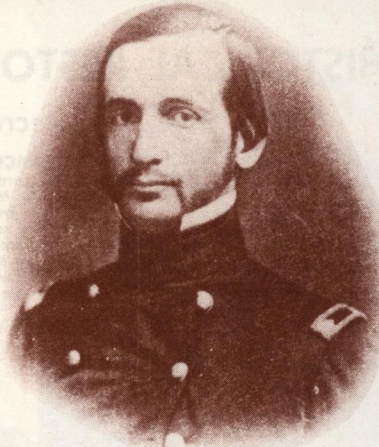
Second Lieut. Jesse K. Allen was mortally wounded in an early morning charge on an Indian camp on Swauk Creek. In his report, Garnett believed that Allen "was shot accidentally by one of his own men in the darkness of the hour."

Garnett marched his column 550 miles in 45 days. Within a day's return march of Simcoe, he received the stunning intelligence that his wife and son, age seven months and five days, had just died of "bilious fever."

The Major took the bodies of his wife and child to New York for burial. Capt. Archer moved into the Garnett house and continued in command until the post was turned over to the Department of Indian Affairs on May 22, 1859.

Maj. Garnett

Maj. Robert Selden Garnett, Simcoe commandant, of a prominent Virginia family, was a West Point graduate of 1841. He was aide-de-camp to Maj. Gen. Zachary Taylor in the Mexican War, in which he was breveted captain and major for gallant and meritorious conduct. In 1849,



he accompanied "Old Rough and Ready" from Baton Rouge, La., to Washington, D. C., for the latter's inauguration as twelfth president of the United States. In 1852-54, he was commandant of cadets at West Point. On March 27, 1855, he was appointed major of the newly organized 9th Infantry.

In 1861, he espoused the cause of the South. A brigadier general in the Confederate Army, he died from a Yankee bullet at Carricks Ford on the Cheat River, northwestern Virginia, July 3, 1861. The commander of the Union troops was Gen. McClellan, namer of "Simkwe (Simcoe) Creek." Col. (later Gen.) R. H. Milroy of the Indiana Volunteers saw Garnett fall. Some 20 years later, Milroy became superintendent of the Yakima Reservation and lived in Garnett's house.

Rev. James H. Wilbur

The Rev. James Harvey Wilbur (1811-1887), Methodist Episcopal minister and missionary, exerted a profound influence on the Yakima Reservation Indians for two decades. To the Indians, whom he ruled firmly, and to the white settlers, he was "Father Wilbur." Large-framed, powerful and fearless,

he brooked no flouting of his authority. With his efficient helpmate, Mrs. Wilbur, he dominated the reservation scene. Native of northern New York, he resided in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, in the 1840's and '50's. In 1860, he organized a school at Simcoe and in 1864 received his appointment as reservation superintendent from President Lincoln. Under his energetic guidance, the Indians began their progress from the old ways to the new.

