

Fort Simcoe was planned as a four company post and became a dot on the military map in 1856 . Selection of Mool-mool as the location by Col. George Wright, ninth infantry, at the close of his summer pacification campaign that took him from Ft. Dalles to the Wenatchee river and back.

Personal reconnaissance convinced him, he reported that it was the most desirable position for a station for the winter.

The principal Indian trails united there, the climate was warmer than the valleys to the north, there was an abundant supply of the best pine timber accessible with wagons, plenty of grass for the horses and sufficient good land for gardening.

The name Simcoe was chosen by Wright, some say, to honor Maj. Gen. John George Simcoe, a lieutenant governor of Ontario, Canada. Others contend, and with substantial reason that Wright merely appropriated a Yakima Indian name, Sim-co-ee, meaning a low gap or saddle applied by the Indians to a saddle in a ridge a short distance north of Mool-mool.

In August 1853, Lieut. George B. McClellan had mapped what is now known as Simcoe creek as Simkwee creek. Sim-ku-ee with accent on the second syllable closer approximates the Indian pronunciation.

Under direct orders from Col. Wright and in pursuance of instructions from Brevet Maj. Gen. John E. Wool, commanding the department of the Pacific in Benicia, Cal., Maj. Robert Seldon Garnett began construction of the post on August 8, 1856 with companies G and F of the ninth infantry.

Maj. Garnett had won something of a reputation as a fighting man. Graduated from West Point in 1841 and commissioned brevet second lieutenant fourth artillery he was brevetted twice for gallantry in action in the war with Mexico from which he emerged a major.

While Garnett rushed completion of temporary quarters of hewed pine logs, Capt. Frederick Dent, brother-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant (who had served an uneventful year as a lieutenant at Ft Vancouver in 1852) directed the building of a wagon road over the Simcoe mountains to link the infant post with Ft. Dalles.

Lively at times had been in the Ya ima valley in the fall of 1856 when the Yakimas trounced Maj. Granville O. Haller and his 100 men on Toppenish creek, a scant three miles from the site of Simcoe and subsequently eluded a punitive force led by Maj. Gabriel J. Rains, no angry powder was burned in the valley in 1856, thanks to Wright's peacemaking.

Nothing happened in 1857 to draw the fort builders from their labors although progress was delayed in the month of May due to many of ~~them~~ the men being on sick list to shirk work, old reports show.

In 1858, the year of the final Indian roundup when Col. Wright smashed Indian resistance forever at the battle of Four Lakes on the Spokane Plains Maj. Garnett conducted a simultaneous campaign from Simcoe against a war party that had attacked an expedition of gold hunters at the mouth of the Wenatchee river. Success of the venture which resulted in the capture of some of the hostiles and the shooting of 10 adjudged guilty of murdering miners was marred by the death of Second Lieut Jesse K. Allen.

Leading 15 mounted men in a surprise attack on an Indian camp near the mouth of Swauk creek at 3 o'clock in the morning of August 15 Allen fell, mortally wounded. His body was conveyed to Simcoe by his company commander and close friend, Capt. John W. Fraser and laid to rest in a level plot just east of the fort, the burial place also of Nathan Olney who was sub-Indian agent at The Dalles during the war and was a pioneer of the Yakima country.

In his official report of the affair Maj. Garnett expressed the opinion that Allen "was shot accidentally by one of his own men

in the darkness of the hour/

Save for occasions when he was absent on leave, Jan^o Maj. Garnett was in command at Simcoe from the day the first spadeful of earth was turned until October 14, 1858 when he relinquished the post to Capt. John J. Archer who continued in charge until the fort was evacuated the next spring.

Son of the south, Maj. Garnett heeded the call of his mother's state, Virginia, in 1861. He resigned from the army on April 30 to become brigadier general of the Confederate States and on July 13 was killed by a Yankee bullet while trying to rally his men at Carricks Ford in Virginia.

Union officer who witnessed his death was Gen. (then Col. R.H. Milroy. Twenty-one years later when Gen. Milroy was Washington territory superintendent of Indian affairs visited Ft Simcoe he learned from Father Wilbur that Garnett was the builder of the post.

And a few years afterward when Milroy succeeded Wilbur as agent for the Yakimas he took up residence in the house his former foe had occupied. The general's son, R.B. Milroy, veteran Yakima superior court commissioner, recalls that his parent more than once commented on that twist of fate.

Bugles sounded for the last time at Simcoe in May, 1859. In April Companies C and I of the ninth were ordered to join the northwest boundary commission as an escort and the following month Company G was transferred to Ft Dalles. The department of Indian affairs took over and in 1860 the first agent, R.H. Lonsdale moved his civilian effects into the big house on ~~officers'~~ officers' row.

Prize bid about a year ago deep in the national capital files was the original drawing of the design for the fort bearing the identification, "Plan of the Post of Fort Simcoe, Yakima Country, Washington Territory."

Up in the left hand corner is written:

"It is proposed to build all the buildings except those marked 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of hewed pine logs. Those marked 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 are proposed to be built of wooden frame."

The buildings marked 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were ~~up~~ put up last fall for the winter shelter of the troops as far as they would go by crowding them. There is a mule-power sawmill already at the post and pine timber is abundant within five miles of it. There is no rock that can be used for chimneys but the soil makes an indifferent brick which may be made to answer the purpose."

)The location of the brick kiln, marked by piles of slag, was rediscovered last fall (1938) a short distance east of the fort and agency buildings in a clump of tall sagebrush. The bricks for the fire places and chimneys, the walls of the officers' houses and for the front walk--now overlaid with cement--of the commandant's residence evidently were made there)

Undated the drawing which shows the ground plan on a scale of 30 feet to the inch apparently was made early in 1857. Whether it was followed out in detail is a matter of conjecture.

Of the five log buildings put up in the late summer and fall of 1856 only one, the 25 by 60 foot barracks for Company I marked 11 on the original plan, remains.

Facing north at the southeast corner of the parade, it is disguised by white painted siding applied in after years. Directly opposite, at the northeast corner of the hollow square stood a like-sized barracks for Company F (no. 12) A 30 by 30 foot guardhouse, rather appropriately labeled No. 13 on the plan, about half way between the two barracks, faced west on the campus. Numbers 13 and 14 designed as lieutenants' quarters were in line with and 120 feet west of the respective barracks.

Of the four 25 by 25 foot blockhouses of hewn logs erected in 1857 to command the sallyports, the one on the bare knoll to the south southwest still stands.

Among the buildings projected at the time the plan was sketched were the commandant's house, No. 1, marked field officers' quarters, and the flanking captains' quarters, No. 2, 3, 4 and 5. Nothing remains to show that No. 5, the last house on the north of the row actually was built although Judge Milroy remembers that a dwelling occupied the site when he, a boy, accompanied his father to Simcoe in 1873.

Its walls concealed by red-painted sheet iron No. 6, the quartermasters's storehouse stands at the extreme south of the sites of now destroyed buildings that formed the east row looking west on the parade ground. Between this building and the guardhouse was the ~~subsistence~~ subsistence storehouse, No. 7.

North of the guardhouse was the powder magazine, and adjacent, forming with Company F barracks the northeast angle of the square, was the 25 by 50 foot frame hospital as contemplated by Maj. Garnett. Two additional barracks, for Companies C and G were specified and it is known that at least one of them was built.

Through the decades of use as agency headquarters and Indian school the establishment was enlarged so that its appearance today is quite different than in the days of army rule. Yet enough of the basic pattern survives for the picturing, with the aid of Garnett's plan, of the place as it was when lads in blue rolled out at reveille.

CARR TO PRESERVE SIMCOE BLOCKHOUSE

Indian Agency Superintendent Says He Will Repair Relic of Early Days

Standing as an isolated reminder of the days before the railroad came and when all goods were freighted in over the military road from The Dalles, the old block house at Simcoe has been gradually crumbling till now it is almost gone. Erected in 1856 and in 1857, according to Jay Lynch, the blockhouse is all that is left of the old stockade with its four corner blockhouses which was put up at the close of the Indian war of 1855, and in which Maj. Haller was defeated when he met the red man in great numbers on the banks of Toppenish creek, about 4 miles away from the stockade.

Don M. Carr, superintendent of the agency, has determined to do all that is possible to preserve one of the earliest and most picturesque structures erected by the white man in the early days. He has arranged to have the blockhouse, for which the logs were cut from the nearby hillsides and the finished timbers sent from the East, repaired. The woodwork for the blockhouse was shipped around the Horn, then up the Columbia river and finally freighted in from the Dalles.

Maj. Garnett is the only military man to command the fort, Mr. Lynch says, as at the outbreak of the Civil war the fort was transferred from the war department to the department of the interior. Maj. Garnett fought under Gen. Milroy in the Civil war after he had been transferred East from his far western post, and then, at the close of the war, Gen. Milroy, as a member of the department of the interior, was assigned to Simcoe.

"I am certainly pleased that Mr. Carr has decided to preserve the old fort," says Mr. Lynch, who has always been greatly interested in the relics of pioneer days. "It is a pity that the stockade and other blockhouses are gone, but the one that is standing should be kept."

"In early days the fort was the great center of the valley. All goods were freighted in from The Dalles along what was known as the military road. Apples were freighted in a rare treats in those days. Practically all supplies were brought in by the military road until the N. P. came through in the early eighties. After that the miliary road became a matter of history."

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SIMCOE SKETCH

Drawing Hidden in University Archives to Be Basis of Restoration Work

Hidden, no one knows how long, among miscellaneous papers in the archives of the University of Washington library, a detailed pen and ink sketch of Fort Simcoe as it looked in the summer of 1857 or 1858, during the period of military occupancy, will serve as the basis for the complete restoration of the frontier military post when that project is undertaken.

The drawing, made, as is inscribed thereon, "by C. M. Schultz, Prv. of Co. I, 9th Inf., U. S. A.," is believed to be the only one in existence of the fort at the time it was occupied by the soldiers. It is the first, at least, that has been found.

Bird's Eye View

Brought to light recently by a university scholar engaged in digging for something else, the sketch was photographed and copies of it supplied to Mrs. Frederick E. Swanstrom of Seattle and Yakima, a leader in the movement to have the historic post preserved. Additional copies are being made by the Indian department in Washington, D. C. The department, using Indian CCC crews, already has done some work at the fort, including the re-roofing of several houses, removal of the agency orchards from the parade ground and the cleaning up of trash and debris.

Taking a bird's-eye view of the post that was built under the direction of Maj. Robert Seldon Garnett, Private Schultz showed not only all the buildings, large and small, but activities of its inhabitants. Sentries are walking their beats, men are chopping wood, a blacksmith is shoeing a horse tied to a tree near the northeast sallyport blockhouse which was in use as a smithy, a woman carrying two buckets is walking toward a cow, another woman is pushing a go-cart near the

officers' quarters.

Identification Made

A mule-power sawmill is operating just east of the blockhouse at the southeast sallyport and directly across the road is depicted one of the springs for which the site was locally famous. In the foreground is an Indian family-- a brave with bow and arrow and his wife, carrying a papoose on her back and apparently admonishing youngster in front of her. Floating proudly from a tall staff at the eastern end of the parade and directly opposite the commandant's residence is Old Glory. Its 32 stars are in alternate rows of six and seven.

As indicated by numberals by each building, Private Schultz left a key to his sketch, but that has been lost. However, a ground plan made by Mrs. Swanstrom in old military files at Washington three years ago contains information adequate for identification of most of the log and frame structures.

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COLONIAL DAMES PLAN TRIP TO CHECK ON SIMCOE WORK

Detailed plans for the complete restoration of Fort Simcoe have been announced by Mrs. F. P. Greene of Seattle, president of the Society of Colonial Dames for Washington.

CCC workers are already busy with the preliminary restoration work with the historic sites group of the department of the interior furnishing technical advice and doing the historical research work. It is the intention of this group to restore the fort and its four blockhouses, of which only one is now standing, the officers' homes at Simcoe, the mess house, the clubhouse, the carriage house and to construct a fire proof building which is to house the Simcoe museum.

Credit for the coming restoration goes almost entirely to Mrs. F. E. Swanstrom of Seattle, who has been interested in the project for six years. Her father, Eugene Semple, was one of the territorial governors of the state, and his term ended in 1889, so she has a personal as well as general interest in Washington's early history. She has made two trips to Washington, D. C., to further the project and was present when the federal committee unearthed the original plans for Fort Simcoe, which will be used as the basis of the restoration work. Fort Simcoe was built in 1856, when Maj. Robert S. Garnett was the commanding officer and Capt. Frederick Dent in charge of the road building to the fort. Later the fort buildings were used as an Indian school.

The restoration plans include use of the proposed museum for housing Indian relics, military paraphernalia of the early day, and some of the early documents. Even the old kiln where bricks were made in the first occupation days will be restored and the old flower gardens will be reproduced. An attempt will be made to obtain as many as possible of the original fixtures with the idea that the whole fort area,

inside and out, shall be as it was back in the sixties. It is the intention of the Colonial Dames to make Simcoe a sort of Williamsburg of the west, where the life of the pioneers of the westward migration may be visualized as the life of the colonial period is in the Virginia shrine.

Members of the Colonial Dames society are planning a pilgrimage to Fort Simcoe in the spring, at the time when the blossoms are out.

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