

Historical Notes and Reminiscences of Early Times in Oregon

In a series of articles. Maritime and Land Expeditions.

the First Civilized man, etc. etc. by Rev. F.N. Blanchet. 1883 (N.P.)

(Page 13)

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Its Importance in History.

Navigation by steamboats puts aside the First Manner of Navigation and
Exposes important spots and places to be Lost to History and Posterity.

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2-Taught by a hard and severe experience their survivors and successors were by no means deterred from traveling and beating on the dangerous Columbia , this being for them a delightful and a charming exercise. Thus, fond of paddling the whole day, of rambling and changing of place everyday, fond of running to the shore making fire, preparing breakfast and supper; fond of sleeping on the bare ground; in a blanket and in open air; fond of starting in the morning with invigorated vigor of visiting with much pleasure the famous spots which their glorious pioneer ancestors had baptized with French names; fond of singing during the day and

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3-This first manner of traveling on the Columbia waters was put aside about 30 years ago by the steamer's navigation. In this new system of navigation a number of spots and places of some importance, being visited no more, as formerly, were in danger of being forgotten and lost to history and posterity. Hence the object of the following lines for their preservation.

4-"Chute" is a French word which means "falls" in English. That these are "Chutes", (falls) in and across the Columbia river 7 or 8 miles above Colville, is a fact and one of these spots and places which to my knowledge has never been mentioned by the newspapers, and which appear to be ignored by all. Nevertheless these "chutes" (falls) exist and were always an obstacle which obliged the Hudson Bay Company men to make a full portage of baggage and boats, ingoing up and coming down the Columbia.

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item of the year 1861 or 1862, which has a proper place at the end of this article:

12-"Navigation of the Upper Columbia River- The readers of the Oregonian will remember an article in its columns a few months since giving the index of a proposition of Captain Len White to place a steamer on the Columbia river above Kettle Falls and stating that he had already started on his tour of observation. We are pleased at being able to record his safe return to our city with the most flattering prospects of success in the great undertaking. The country has been thoroughly explored and the most satisfactory results obtained, and Captain White seems to think that ere long the route to the head waters of the Columbia will be from Portland via Dalles to White Bluffs by steamer and railroad, 290 miles, or by teams from Dalles to the latter point via Klickitat and Yakima 65 miles less. Thence by teams to Spokane, Pinkney City and Little Dalles, 172 miles. Thence by steamer again to the head of navigation, the distance as given by Captain White's journal being as follows:

Little Dalles to the Hudson Bay Company's Fort Sheppard to the mouth of Kootenai river 20 miles; from the mouth of Kootenai to Columbia Lakes, 5 miles. There are two lakes, joined by a few miles of good river and together furnish 160 miles of navigation in a northerly course. The river is then navigable some 60 miles above the Lakes, making about 260 miles of continuous communication above Little Dalles. Here the "Rapid des Morts," will prove an obstacle, but above this point the river is navigable 60 miles, which leaves the final terminus of steam navigation 800 miles above Portland, at "Boat Encampment," where the river branches off in different directions. (That is a mistake; Cane's river, coming from the north, and Portage river, coming from the east, are not branches, but very small tributaries at Big Bend--Ed.) The Dalles below the second lake was selected as the place Page 16 to build the steamer, the lumber for which is now being sawed at that place by a Mr. Douglas, owner of the mill. Captain White says Pinkney City, near the United States

Fort Colville, is a thriving village, has three flouring mills, two saw-mills, some forty buildings including two good stores of Olmstead & Company and Ferguson & Co. a tannery, harness shop and brewery. "Everybody¹ appears to be elated with the idea of having a steamer on the upper waters of the Columbia. He found a few who were rather skeptical about the practicability of navigating the river above Colville, which, however, did not tend to throw a damper on the enterprise. We should like to give a description of the country traversed by Capt. White, but must forgo the pleasure at present, promising as the stillness of that wilderness is broken by the march of civilization, from time to time, to make suitable notice of it."

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p. 26

(Pambrun)

XI

(Pambrun - correct spelling)

We arrived on Sunday morning, November 18 at Fort Walla Walla(now Wallula) built on the left bank of the Columbia a short distance from the little river called Walla Walla. Peter Chrysologue Pombrin, a French Canadian, was in charge of that most important post. He was born in the parish of Vandrenil District of M^tntreal and had been formerly a lieutenant in the "Voltigeurs Canadiens.." His excellent qualities had gained to him this post of trust. His good and excellent wife was absent being on a visit to Fort Vancouver with her three little girls, Maria, aged 12 years; Ida (French pronounciation Edaw) aged 2 years and Harried, aged 16 months. His two sons, Andrew Dominick, aged 17 years and ~~Andrew~~ Peter Chrysologue, aged 15 years had also accompanied their mother. The 18th of December next was for the ex lieutenant amost happy day, it being the day his wife and his little children were baptized and also the day his marriage was blessed by the Church at Fort Vancouver. The ex-lieutenant of the Canadian Voltigeurs received the missionaries and their traveling companions with great cordiality.

2-The French Canadians employed by the Northwest and Hudson Bay Company as traders, trappers and hunters had never ceased in their numerous relations with the Indian tribes to speak to them of their religion and ~~missionary~~ priests, "the black gowns" Hence among all the native tribes a great and most ardent desire to see the "black gowns" and their often inquiring "when shall they come?" Therefore as soon as the boat carrying the express to Fort Vancouver had announced to Colville, Okanagan and Walla Walla that two "black gowns" were coming the news spread like lightning. Hence a rush of the Indians to these places in order to see them and hear them speak of the great Spirit.

3-The missionaries found a large gathering of Indians at Walla Walla. A holy Mass was celebrated before them; they were struck with amazement.

The Mass being over the chiefs of the Cayuses and Walla Walla came with their people to see the "black gowns." The Cayuses were divided into two separate (Page 27) camps one of which living on the Walla Walla river known as Wailappu, formed the Presbyterian mission of Dr. Whitman established in 1836. The other camp, lying on the Umatilla river 30 miles hence, was under the command of Chief Tawatowe. The band of Wailatpu had been forbidden by the Dr. to visit the priests, but they came, notwithstanding. The day was passed in teaching them the elements of religion. They were glad to see the "black gowns," so long expected. We promised them to come and visit them again. There were three baptisms made at this post. In a subsequent visit by Father Demers in 1839 the young chief Tawatowe, brought his child to be baptized by the priest. Mr. Pombrin having consented to stand as his godfather; got a severe reprimand from the doctor. From that time the young chief and his band became Catholic preferring the prayer of the priest before that of the minister.

4-On Monday, Nov. 19 we left Fort Walla Walla accompanied by its excellent commander, Mr. Pombrin. The little river Walla Walla was soon passed on our left; it was followed by that of Umatilla on the same side. About seven leagues below the fort we leaped the "Grand Rapid" without accident. From thence we began to see the white summit of Mount Hood, which has the Cascade range for its base. On Tuesday, Nov. 20th our provisions becoming short, Mr. Pombrin (sic) bought two Indian horses for food, for which he paid \$10 apiece. The Columbia river being pretty low at this season of the year our boats touched the ground in running down the seventh rapid on that day. We saw and left the John Day's river on our left.

5-On Wednesday, Nov. 21st we saw "La Riviere des Chutes" (Des Chutes river) on the left shore of the Columbia; and crossing on the right shore we reached the Columbia chutes by a narrow canal. The portage of boats and baggage of the Columbia chutes cost us four hours of hard work.

(See paragraph 7 and 8 of art. VI for a larger description of the Columbia chutes.)

6-About 3 miles below the Columbia chutes we met "Les Petites Dalles, the Little Dalles, which are a mile long and 250 feet wide, walled on both sides with basaltic columns and projecting points and recess, forming a canal (a Dalle) through which the stream runs with the swiftness of a dart. We ran them down safely, but the danger came when out of them by our boat being caught by the current of a whirlpool was carried close to a rock where in striking it, it would have been broken endangering the lives of all on board.

7-Four miles below the Little Dalles we reached "Les Grandes Dalles, the Grand Dalles, so called by the pioneer French Canadians on account of their length of four miles and called Wascopom by the Indians. The Columbia is here intercepted by a chain of solid rock through which (wonderful to see and say) the huge mass of strong and heavy waters has made a passage for itself. The "Grandes Dalles" are four miles long; they are impracticable all their length during the high water of May and June, but during the low waters of the Fall they are passable by boats a loge of passengers and baggage for the first two miles; and with passengers and baggage for the two last miles.

8-The first two miles of the "Grandes Dalles" are a canal of about 150 feet wide, walled on both sides with basaltic columns about 50 feet high ending with a platform 60 feet broad, which terminates with other basaltic columns 60 feet high. During the high water, the huge mass of water ~~reced~~ reaches and runs over the platform. During the low water it runs only through the lower canal, which contains projecting points and recesses forming waves and most dangerous whirlpools, even to light (Page 28) boats managed by eight men as explained before. (Six rowing, one at front, one at rear with guide oars.)

The first two miles were run down by our two boats in ten minutes; the two last miles were run down safely with passengers and baggage.

The middle water seas, said the men, is the worst for dangerous whirlpools. We were told that several years ago a boat being caught by one of these whirlpools soon disappeared in its large and deep funnel. Once out of the two last miles of the Grand Dalles we saw on the left shore, now Dalles City, the building of the Methodist mission for the Indians of the place, established in 1837.

9- On Thursday, Nov. 23, we passed away the "Great Rock of the Dead" which ~~was~~ the Indians use as a graveyard. Our navigation from Dalles City to the Cascades was most pleasant on the smooth and quiet waters of the Columbia bordered on both sides with ranges of picturesque mountains. On Friday, Nov. 23, we reached the Upper Cascades which intercept the navigation for five or six miles and require a portage of baggage for the two or three first miles on the right bank of the Columbia. We approached them with great precaution on account of the swift current drawing down the waters by a strong stream towards the rapids. We arrived there early enough in the afternoon to make the portage that day and go down and camp for the night at the Lower Cascades.

10- The Cascades are far from being what their name indicates. Cascade means a waterfall, the plural cascades means a series of waterfalls. Now, the Cascades here are not a series of waterfalls but simply a series of strong and dangerous rapids running down between the two contracted banks of the river and followed by a swift current and wavering waters along the left shore of the Columbia.

11- Our boats having been brought down a loge (light) with a line along the right shore for two or three miles were then partly reloaded and ran down with oars to the Lower Cascades.

12- On Saturday, Nov. 24 we started and came on with sail and oars. We passed on our right the high promontory of basaltic columns called "Cape Horn," by the early French Canadian Pioneers on account of the frequency meeting there of storms and high winds. We met and passed by a pretty large number of islands. While still at a distance from the fort

our boats made a stop and went to shore to allow the travelers to make their "toilet," and take best coats for the arrival. Resuming their course with great joy and courage, they soon landed at 5 o'clock p.m. on the bank of the Columbia where we were received and welcomed by an immense crowd of people. Thus ended the fourth and last part of the journey of the two Catholic missionaries from Iachine, Canada to Port Vancouver, Oregon.

13- The experienced cold from Colville to the Grandes Dalles. The cold was some days so severe as to form ice on the ears of our men. Some evenings when going on shore for the night, we found the ground covered with three or four inches of snow which we had to remove to make a place for our tents. Some nights the cold was nine degrees of Reaumur. Such nights as these passed in a tent at a distance from a scanty fire, on account of the ~~scarcity of~~ scarcity of ~~drift wood~~ drift wood to be found on shore, were far from being pleasant.

14- At Port Vancouver we were 50 leagues from the ocean; 20 leagues from the Cascades; 40 leagues from the Dalles City; 80 leagues from Walla Walla; 115 leagues from Okanagan; 209 leagues from Colville; 287 leagues from the "House of the Lakes," 312 leagues from Boats' Encampment and 355 leagues from "Punch Bowl" lake or the summit of the Rocky Mountains.

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