

SAM HILL MEMORIAL

State Department of Highways  
Public Information Office

June 12, 1964

At approximately one o'clock on the afternoon of Friday, June 19, Washington's Governor Albert D. Rosellini will unveil a memorial plaque dedicating the new Columbia River Bridge at Biggs Rapids to the memory of a railroad man who was largely responsible for the beginning of the Good Roads movement in the United States.

When the veil is lifted, it will reveal the profile of Samual Hill, an individual who in the late 1800's and early 1900's strode through the Northwest with Bunyonesque steps. "Fabulous" is the most appropriate adjective that applies to the man who, on September 14, 1899, convened the first meeting of what was to become the Washington Good Roads Association. It was the first such group to be formed in the United States, and today is the oldest such organization to have maintained a continuous existence and identity. It also became the pattern and forerunner for the National Good Roads movement and for similar organizations in most other states.

Hill was born in North Carolina in 1857, the son of a doctor who answered the call of the West by moving his family to Minnesota. It was in 1898 that Samual Hill came to the Pacific Northwest. In the 41 years before making that decisive move he had become head of his own family after his father's death; educated himself at a small

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Minnesota College; became the protege of James "Jim" Hill, founder of the Great Northern Railway; studied law at Harvard; graduated with an advanced degree from the University of Munich; married the boss' daughter and established a law practice in Minneapolis.

When that first meeting of the Good Roads group convened in 1899, it was only three years from the time that Henry Ford had added a gasoline engine to a buggy and called it an automobile. Motoring was something that brought jeers rather than cheers. Dobbin reigned supreme on the existing roads and his supremacy appeared to be certain and long-enduring.

Long distance transportation was dominated by the railroads and every town wanted to be along the main line of at least one railroad. Roads were the responsibility of the counties and primarily served farm-to-town traffic. Mud and dust on the roads were accepted as a necessary adjunct to the short trips that were made on them.

It was in this unlikely atmosphere that Sam Hill emphasized the need for road improvement. Like many of his ideas, this one was labeled "visionary", "impractical", "damn foolishness" and other, less complimentary designations.

The first few years of the new organization were rocky. Interest in and attendance at the annual meetings was limited. The whole concept was looked on with suspicion by most business and civic leaders.

Interest in the Association picked up when it recommended "central authority" in the area of road construction and maintenance. County officials were up in arms and 44 new members of the Good Roads Association attended the 1910 meeting and voted down the resolution on State responsibility for roads. A year later the resolution was adopted.

From these unlikely beginnings developed a force that in the 75 intervening years has moved consistently and persistently in the cause of providing motorists with the best roads that it is possible to provide. Its effectiveness is measured in the many

highway programs that were initiated in Washington and later adopted throughout the country. An example is the commission form of highway administration, advocated by the Association in 1909.

Sam Hill's dream has become a reality far beyond those dreams. Today Washington motorists and most Americans enjoy an unparalleled freedom and mobility because Sam Hill was foolish enough to think that good roads would someday be vital to America. More important, he acted on his convictions and initiated the action that made them become a reality. Today's highways are the seven league boots that permit Americans to take their own Bunyonesque strides across the country.

## "MISSING LINK" HIGHWAY

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On June 19, at 11:30, Governor Albert D. Rosellini will pull together the two ends of a broken chain and insert a connecting link tying them together. The ceremony will take place at the picnic grounds of the Maryhill Museum in Klickitat County and will mark the completion of a highway construction program that began 109 years ago. Public officials, highway boosters' groups, and pretty girls will take part in the celebration, undeterred by the fact that site of the event is located in a relatively remote area of the State.

The first progress on the construction of a highway along the North Bank of the Columbia was signaled by the appropriation of \$25,000 by the United States Congress in 1855. The provisions of the federal legislation were that the Pacific Coast Office of Military Roads was to construct a "military road" for 95 miles between Fort Vancouver and Fort Dalles. A young army officer, Lieutenant George H. Derby was put in charge of the project.

A summary of the problems he encountered is contained in the book, WAGON ROADS WEST.

"The road along the North Bank of the Columbia was found good for the first 15 or 20 miles until the Cape Horn Mountains, a part of the Cascade Range, were reached.

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Here all prospects for a wagon road terminated. The range could not be avoided and its descent was impossible for wagons. Then came the Columbia bottoms, often flooded by the river rise of 12 to 15 feet in the spring, and a road could not be raised above the flood level because the mountains came down to the river. Halfway to The Dalles, the traveler encountered the Cascades, a 30-foot fall in the river within five miles. Around these rapids the Portage Road had been built, but for more than a mile it was impassable, and speculators had built a wooden trainway three feet wide to transport freight. The United States Army paid 20 cents for each pound handled here. Above the portage, the trail ascended the mountains, crossing the Columbia at Wind Mountain and continuing to The Dalles by a circuitous and rugged route along the South Bank. Lieutenant Derby suggested that it would cost about a million dollars to make a good wagon road from Vancouver to The Dalles."

Over the years, during the period of Washington's identity as a territory and then as a state, the road was built and improved. Much of the present road and most of the structures, bridges and tunnels, were constructed during the decade between 1930 and 1940. The road extended for 110 miles from Vancouver to Maryhill along a winding route up the Columbia River with some of the most magnificent scenery in America. Included along the highway were 23 bridges and eight tunnels. At one stretch of the highway there are five tunnels within five miles.

At Maryhill the highway turned north crossing Satus Pass into the Yakima Valley. To the east, a circuitous, narrow road wound its way through the mountains above the North Bank of the Columbia and came back to water level at Sundale. It was a test of driving skill and nerve for those who wished to use it to travel on up the Columbia.

In May of this year, work on the "missing link" between Maryhill and Sundale was completed to the point where traffic can now use the new route. For the first time since that initial appropriation 109 years ago, it is possible to drive along the North

Bank of the Columbia for its full length between the mouth of the Columbia to Plymouth at McNary Dam.

The project was a combined effort of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Washington State Highway Department. The construction of John Day Dam required that the existing tracks of the S.P. & S. Railway be moved higher up the river bank to make way for the reservoir that will be created when the Dam is completed. At the same time, a roadway for the new highway was built. Costs of the highway above and beyond those needed to build a highway at the existing water level were met by the Corps of Engineers as a necessary adjunct to the Dam construction. Washington appropriated an amount of money equal to the cost of construction at water grade.

The Lewis and Clark Highway ties together lower Columbia communities of Southwest Washington with the upstream communities of Central and South Central Washington.

The "linking" ceremony will begin in the morning with caravans departing from the Greater Vancouver area and from the Tri-Cities area. As they move toward Maryhill, additional units are expected to join the parade. They will rendezvous at the Maryhill Museum picnic grounds at 11:00 a.m.

Among the dignitaries who are expected to take part in the ceremonies, in addition to Washington's Governor, are: Ernest A. Cowell, Chairman of the Washington State Highway Commission; Charles G. Prah, Director of Highways; Ernest C. Huntley, President of the Washington Good Roads Association; Richard Schwary, President of the Lewis and Clark Highway Association. Representing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be Major Edwin J. Williams, Acting District Engineer for the Walla Walla District. He will represent Colonel James H. Beddow, who this month completed a three-year assignment as District Engineer for the Walla Walla District, and who has had a large share of the responsibility for work on the John Day Dam and the highway and railroad construction

along the Columbia River. State legislators, county commissioners, and civic officials of communities along the route of the highway are expected to be on hand.

Lending a note of beauty to the event will be Miss Wendy Walker, Miss Tri-Cities, representing Central Washington; and Miss Sandy Eckman, Miss Clark County, representing Southwest Washington. They will bring together the broken ends of the chain representing their respective regions and present them to Governor Rosellini to insert the thing link.