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Hydroelectric Power, Irrigation and Human Initiative

Relating to

Wahluke Slope, the Upper Columbia River upstream from its confluence with the Snake River, and adjacent land now being brought into focus by the Priest Rapids Project of the Grant County Public Utility District No. 2.

(Highlights, skimmed)

The thousands of acres of underveloped land overspreading the broad miles of southwastern Grant County were called the Great Plain by the first white men who visited it to look upon it with scientific eyes in 1841 and 1853. The Grand Coulee was mapped and landmarked then. Little attention was paid to the land to the south, other than it was a region through which travellers had to pass.

It was not until later this area was called the Wahluke Slope or merely "the Slope." And it would probably have remained nameless for many other years had not it been known to the original occupants of the region.

White men did not know the region as Wahluke until nearly half a century after the fur traders passed up and down the Columbia or followed the old Hudson's Bay Trail from old Fort Nez Perce (Fort Walla Walla) later Wallula, northward to Fort Colville, the Okanogan and the branch that led to Fort Spokane.

When the gold excitement still dazed the west after the days of '49 in California, there were other rushes to the Idaho, Colville and the Fraser in British Columbia. The excitement of gold dust findings along nearly every bar of the Columbia River brought eager miners to the Priest Rapids country. It also brought the first navigation other than that of

I dian dugout canoes and voyageur bateaux. But the diggings and siftings of the bars, now so diligently screened by arrowhead hunters, was not rich enough for white miners in a world set aflame by the word,"gold." There was just enough dust for the patient and hard working Chinese who lingered in the wake of the onrushing horde.

Then the excitement wore down and the lang began to unfold to settlement.

There were those who thought in terms of cattle and horse herds, of homesteads and land. Some dreamed of irrigation and orchards and they brought water onto the rich portions of land by the crude methods of waterwheels and other devices, known for thousands of years.

Some dreams were realized but most were born too early for the time, although the land and the water were already there. The know-how was to come with time and the development of electrical power.

This new dawning helped the younger dreamers realize their ambitions.

Then also came scientists with the knowledge which created a new era, the atomic age.

When World War II broke upon the United States, the government and scientists sealed off a vast region, a part of which is called the Wahluke Slope, and here plutonium was concocted.

Here now another era is unfolding.

This is what is known of the origin of the word, Wahluke.

Wahluke is spelled Wahluk in Edmond Meany's Origin of Washington Geographic Names, an exceedingly scarce book, published in 1923 by the University of Washington. Whether the spelling was a typographical error(and the book contains several) has never been determined.

Meany wrote:

"Wahluk, a town on the Columbia River in the southern part of Grant county, has an Indian name. The name of Wahluke (sic) was found here when the white men first came. The present day Indian say it was here always. It seems to mean a watering place. It is just at the beginning

of White Bluffs and is the last place where the herds can get down to the water for several miles."(Meany cites F.C. Koppen in Names MSS,Letter 110). To compile the book it was his custom to send out letter and card inquiries to postmasters and local residents. Postal spelling is acceptably correct, a standard.

U.S. Postal Guides for 1928 and 1936 spell it Wahluke.

Wahluke is not shown on Washington territorial maps or earlier maps, but these seldom listed small places.It does not appear on any military correspondence of the region, 1853-1885, which I have seen. It begins to "crop up" in old newspapers of the region as a townsite name and not until more recent years was it used in reference to the region.

The original inhabitants of that region along the Columbia define Wahluke to mean, Soaring up Like Birds, or like a Long Rise. This was the definition of Puck Hyah Toot, Jim Looney, John Tomanawash and others long accustomed to the word in conversation.

Wahluke, known as a post office, was located on the north bank of the Columbia and was in later days a small town of ~~little~~ consequence. The Indians knew Wahluke for the rising slope back from the river.

The Wanapum Indians said the place which others called Wahluke was known to them, since time immemorial, as Wanuke, meaning like going on Foot up a Hill.

Wahnuke is at the head of the White Bluffs and an old trail from Yakima ~~[illegible]~~ led into the Wahluke.

"Now known as the Wahluke Slope, the(principal)area included in the Atomic Energy Commission's holdings until withdrawal for development, consists of 88,000 acres or one hundred and thirty- seven square miles. Five miles east of Wahluke , on the old Wanapum trail that led to the Palouse country and Soap Lake, was Wateelkas, a place name for a pass.

"The place on the Columbia across from Wanuke was called Yanuke (Float

in by Boat to Land) by the Wanapums. (Martha Johnny, Puck Hyah Toot and other Wanapums, source)

"Homesteaders called Wahluke Slope Columbia Flats fifty years ago..." Drummers and Dreamers, nomenclature section, pp. 306, Caxton Printers, 1956.

Historic writings include numerous references relating to the men who visited the land, riding by horseback as members of military-scientific parties. Other writings told of those who travelled by the river route, aboard stern or side wheel river steamers; of those who settled in the region, dreaming far ahead of their time and of those for whom the curtain is finally pulled aside and they may now clearly see ahead.

Steamboat landings along the river became hamlets. Here cargoes were landed because the boats could go no further upstream because of the 11-mile stretch of Priest Rapids

The Priest Rapids townsite was laid out in 1863, the Portland Oregonian of July 10 of that year noted briefly and that is about all known about the "original" townsite

The reason for the first settlements along the river is reflected in the intensity of the gold rush and such advertisements as appeared in The Dalles Journal, Aug. 19,1859:

"Wanted Teams and Pack trains to transport freight from Priest Rapids to Colville. Steady employment given. Apply to Thompson & Co."

And in the same newspaper, Aug. 19,1859:

"The new stern wheel steamer Col. Wright, Capt. L. White with superior accommodations for freight and passengers, will hereafter make regular weekly trips between Deschutes, Walla Walla & Priest Rapids."

Small sailing craft plied the Columbia from the mouth of the Des Chutes to Fort Walla Walla and "from the Des Chutes, navigation is to be had to the foot of Priest Rapids, about eighty miles above old Walla Walla (Fort Nez Perce) and it is thought by many that steamers can soon stem these rapids and ascend even to the Kettle Falls at Fort Colville," Col. Wright reported in a Congressional Document,

35th Congress, 2d Session No. 32, in 1859)

"...The estimated distance from Des Chutes to the mouth of Fort Walla a distance of 119 miles has been navigated for the last three years by small sailing craft of from 25 to 60 tons. From March to Novemver there is a strong wind blowing up the Columbia almost daily and from November to March the wind blows downstream..."

A river steamer, named the Col. Wright after the military leader who subdued the Central and Eastern Washington Indians at the Battle of Four Lakes and Spokane Plains in the Indian Wars of 1855-58, was launched in the spring of 1859, the first steamer to operate in the Columbia upstream from the Deschutes.

Lawrence S. Coe, who came to Oregon from New York in the early '50s with his father, Nathaniel Coe, the first government official of the post office service in the Northwest, started in business on the Middle Columbia with sailboats between the Cascades and The Dalles. Later he built the little steamers Mary and Wasco which operated downstream, to Portland.

He and R.R. Thompson built the steamer Venture at the Cascades. She was to have gone into service upstream and was to have been taken to The Dalles and then overland to Celilo . On the trial trip, however, she was wrecked at the Cascades. The Venture was sold, her name was changed to the Umatilla and she was taken to the Fraser during the mining excitement of 1858, earning much money for her owners.

Coe and Thompson then built the Col. Wright, after receiving a contract to transport army supplies to Fort Walla Walla.

The Wright was not an imposing ship, being a half house below and carrying her freight in the hold. She had a cabin and dining room, all in one and built in seats that could be opened and made into beds. There were two staterooms opposite the galley for ladies. Her competitor was a steamer called the Spray. Passengers paid $20 each for the upriver trip to Fort Walla Walla, representing a passenger toll of around $1,300.

It was Coe and Thompson who organized the Oregon Steam Navigation Company which in later years dominated Columbia River transportation.

The Col. Wright, commanded by Capt. Len White, carried a huge square sail which proved of material advantage during the season of winds that were regular trade winds up the river. No picture of the vessel has been found in various Northwestern archives.

Ferguson County was created in 1863 , the predecessor of Yakima County. The creating act was repealed, January 18,1865, and Yakima County was established.

The act stated:

"An act, establishing and organizing the county of Yakima...

"...Section 1...That the territory heretofore embraced in the county of Ferguson, lying and being south of a line running due east from a point two miles above the lower steamboat landing at Priest 's Rapids on the Columbia River..."

So it would appear that the townsite was scarcely more than a river boat landing.

The steamer,George Wright, had already travelled to thefoot of the rapids when in June,1863 (Walla Walla Statesman,June 6,1863) announced that the Cascadella had gone to Priest Rapids with a cargo for the Columbia River mines. The paper also announced that Oregon Steam Navigation Co. line steamers would make regular trips from Wallula to Priest Rapids, stopping at the White Bluff mines.

White Bluffs and Ringgold City came into existence in the late 1860s.

The gold discovery in Central Idaho in 1860 diverted attention from the Columbia for a time.

The Dalles Mountaineer, May 19,1863, reported "good diggings struck about six miles below Priest Rapids," and that six miners were making $20 by hand working at night, so the location of their find could not be detected.

Gold from the Ringgold area was taken to San Francisco on the steamer, Sierra Nevada that same year. (Daily Alta California, Aug. 28,1863).

That summer, also, digging was going on along bars between Priest Rapids and Pend Oreille, about 200 miles distance, and the take ran from $4 to $12 a bar.(Portland Oregonian, June 19, quoted in San Francisco Evening Bulletin, June 29,1863).

Three years later Louis Schoel, the architect civilian employe who designed the commandant's and other buildings at Fort Simcoe and Fort Dalles, surveyed at White Bluffs. He was living at Fort Dalles. Plans were made to raft logs down the Snake River and tow them to White Bluffs. The steamers , Nez Perce Chief, Yakima and the Owyhee were unloading building materials at the little river towns.

In 1866 there were two buildings and numerous tents at Ringgold City, and 16 lots were "taken."

When the gold excitement subsided, the early towns virtually died,and riverboats, finding their journeys without profit, gave way to packers and freighters. The day of the cattleman was beginning, and some of them were occupying the deserted houses.

The Dalles Mountaineer reported in 1876:

"Stock are to the co ntry what the mines used to be and more. Everybody talks of stock and nearly everybody owns stock. This is and will be for a long time the principal source of wealth. Bunch grass is the mine that can be worked with the least labor and expenses and with the greatest profit."

Middlewestern and Montana cattlemen came to the Northwest to trail drive herds across country to abundant grazing land and market in larger cities. The trail drives required a winter layover on the way. Many large herds were driven out of the Priest Rapids and White Bluffs country which had fattened on the Wahluke Slope.

After the winter kill of 1880-81, when many cattlemen were driven out of business, some turned to horse raising. When another ~~era~~ era opened, the railroad.

The Northern Pacific, the pioneer northernmost transcontinental, built out from Minneapolis, also westward along the Lower Columbia and eastward from near Pasco at Ainsworth. The connection established a line to tidewater.

In 1884 the Northern Pacific pushed through the Yakima Valley and the Yakima Indian Reservation, reaching Yakima City, now Union Gap, around Christmas, 1885 and continuing northward into the Kittitas Valley on an additional link that was to eventually cross Snoqualmie Pass.

North Yakima, now Yakima, was born almost overnight when the railway platted the new town on less-marshy ground, four miles north, offering free lots to those who would relocate in the newly-founded village. Most did.

Until the railway came, the increasing population throughout the inland benefitted fr steamboat traffic.

One was the alternate route from the Kittitas Valley, opening the steamboat connection at Priest Rapids by freight teams from Ellensburgh later spelled Ellensburg, and Kittitas. So in 1882 a new townsite was laid out near Priest Rapids and was called Grainville. There was a large warehouse built there. Kittitas was a grain producing section. Until the railway connection was established, the grain was hauled down Hansen Canyon to the warehouse, to await down-river movement by steamer.

Lewis & Dryden's Marine History of the Pacific Northwest, another rare book, recounts that the John Gates, built at Celilo and joining the Oregon Steam Navigation Company's Upper River Fleet in 1878, was the first steamboat to navigate Priest Rapids.

The John Gates not only was taken up through Priest Rapids but over Rock Island and Cabinet Rapids in 1884, to determine that the river was navigatable.

North Central Washington mines set off another rush, unreachable by railways, and this sm encouraged steamboat navigation in 1888.

The City of Ellensburgh was built at Pasco and taken up river. She was owned by Thomas H. Nixon of Tacoma and was piloted by Capt. A.W. Gray. The 120 foot boat carried passengers and 45 tons of freight on her July 1888 trip through the rapids. The ascent was accomplished by "lining."

An article in the Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Dec., 1914, written by Fred Lockley, gives Capt. Gray's account of that trip.

"At Priest Rapids" Gray recalled," we attempted to lay a line along the shore and fasten it above the lower riffle and attach it to the boat below. I found we couldn't carry the line clear of submerged reefs."

(A line was laid by sinking a "dead man" and laying the line through a rough channel between the reefs)

"...As we lined the steamer into the rapids the water poured over the buffalo chocks. Next day we arrived at Rock Island Rapids..."

In a later recollection Capt. Gray wrote:

"Later the City of Ellensburg was taken six miles up Okanogan River and made two trips over Priest Rapids and five trips up and down through Rock Island Rapids with freight and passengers for the Okanogan mines. Wenatchee was a one_ room shack when I was there and we had to cut fuel for driftwood along the bank. (Pasco Herald, Oct. 25,1920).

The City of Ellensburg figured in news accounts in those days.

"The steamer, City of Ellensburg has been tied up in a secure harbor two miles above Rock Island." (Ellensburg Capital, Dec. 20, 1888.)

"The steamer, City of Ellensburgh struck a reef in the Columbia above Rock Island the other day and is now laid up for repairs."(Yakima Herald, Dec. 5,1889).

"The City of Ellensburg was newly refitted and was making two trips a week from Port Eaton to Bridgeport, 100 miles".(Yakima Herald,May 12,1892).

The river boats, in their hey_dey, especially on the Lower Columbia or from Celilo to Walla Walla, made $1,500 to $4,000 in passenger fare on one trip and $18,000 in freight revenue. Bar privileges ran as high as $1,800 a month.

Navigation was receiving more serious consideration by 1892, when a federal appropriation to clear obstructions from the Columbia at Rock Island was exhausted and the work boats were taken through Priest Rapids to Pasco.

A new townsite was located on the Columbia in Douglas County near the Navaree ferry crossing. "It has been named Fruitvale and is a government townsite and anybody can have a lot by complying with the legal requirements of residence and improvements."(Yakima Herald,May 18,1892).

There were many other riverboats on the Middle Columbia and upstream all playing their part in the development.

And before the Columbia, the pathway of migration was developed, the back reaches along the river like Wahluke Slope were explored by military scientific parties.

One of these was Lt. Johnson of the Wilkes Naval expedition of 1841. Then came Second Lieut. Richard Arnold of the Railway Surveys of 1853, the commonly called Stevens' surveys to determine a practicability of a railway from the Mississippi to the Pacific. Stevens was assigned to one section and was named Territorial Governor of Washington. Lt. Arnold's is contained in the large Vols., I and II, 1853-54.

In October of 1853, with six men, an Indian guide and 18 pack animals, he set out from Colville, following the general course of the old Hudson's Bay Trail or the military road. He referred to the southern part of the region as "...the Grand Plain of early explorers...the route followed by Lt. Johnson of mid-June, 1841..."

Basalt rocks, the coulees and the abundance of artemisia (sage) drew his attention.

He followed what he called the Northern Trail to Colville and then by line of the Columbia River to Walla Walla. The country was described as "...one Grand Plain which near the Columbia divided into coulees and sloping generally to the south."

The word, Wahluke, was not mentioned. All of the early travelers, however, identified the northern region as the Grand Coulee.

The trail which Lt. Arnold followed,"struck the Columbia 10 miles north of the mouth of the Yakima (river)"

In another part of the report he wrote:

"The trail again approaches to within 12 miles of the Columbia about forty five miles north of the mouth of the Yakima. It crosses a track of drifting sand hills four miles wide, and which extend westward as far as the eye can distinguish...the gorge through which the Columbia flows being visible the whole distance. From ten miles above the mouth of the Yakima to the mouth of the Snake River the country is level, low and sandy, and banks of the latter river for a mile up the stream are not more than 10 to 30 feet high. The distance across the plain from north to south is from ninety to a hundred miles on all the routes traversed."

But it was nearly thirty years before a military exploration brought to official light the region through the eyes of a first lieutenant of the Corps of Army Engineers. He was Thomas W. Symons, chief engineer of the Department of the Columbia.

During September and October , 1881, under orders of Brig. Gen Nelson A. Miles, commanding the Department of the Columbia, he reported:

"...I made an examination of the Columbia River to determine its navigability and the advisability of putting steamboats on it to be used in the transportation of troops, stores, supplies, etc.

"...(I) traversed the river in a small boat from Little Dalles, Kettle Falls and Grand Rapids...near the mouth of the Colville River, to the mouth of the Snake River...the report embraces a description of the portion of the river examined and the lands in its vicinity...I have sought to show the economical relations of the Columbia to the surrounding country... and have endeavored to give a clear idea of the fertile and extensive basin of the Columbia...I submit this report with the request it be published and that 300 copies may be furnished for use in the Department

of the Columbia..."

This would indicate the relative rarity of the document, 47th Congress, 1st Session, Senate, Ex. Doc No. 186.

Excerpts from it follow:

"...p. 11-The country about the Columbia and its tributary streams is rapidly filling up with settlers and attaining an importance which it has never before had, and this influx of people is certain to continue for a long time to come, while there are large tracts of fine land available for settlement..."

"...p. 48..We emerge with a shout of joy from the eleven miles of Priests Rapids...At this point on the Columbia, at the lower end of Priest Rapids must surely be located a town of considerable importance as it will for a long time be the head of navigation on the river. It is the most convenient place from which to reach the Yakima and the Kittitas valleys which now communicate with the lower country by a wagon road over the Simcoe mountains to the Dalles. The rapids will furnish a splendid water power and in all probability here will be located flour and saw mills, as well as warehouses and stores. Logs can be brought ~~to the~~ down the Columbia to be here sawed into lumber and distributed to the surrounding agricultural regions. The rapids are centrally located for many fine valleys and much promising country, and are easily reached by wagon roads from many directions.

"..p.49...On Saturday, October 8, we left our camp below Priest Rapids and pulled down the river...came to the well known White Bluffs... having a nearly vertical wall of frome one hundred to six hundred feet in height...numbers of cattle and some horses are seen which graze on the plateaus along the river, to which they come down for water...

"...we passed during the day several camps of Indians engaged in salmon fishing....in one camp were nineteen lodges...a little after eleven o'clock we passed the old military depot camp at White Bluffs, where the storehouses still stand...

"...back from the river, especially to the east, the soil is good, though light, and the only drawback to its successful cultivation is the lack of rains in the summer and the facility with which it becomes dry and powdery..."

Navigation of the Columbia

"...p. 55 At the Cascades the obstruction to navigation is complete... The Dalles is another complete and total obstruction to navigation... with these two serious obstacles removed there would be continuous navgation...to Priest Rapids, a distance of 409 miles from the sea, and by the Snake River to the Grand Ronde River 30 miles above Lewiston, a distance of 516miles...this would throw open to competition the river transportation demanded by the great grain belt between the Cascades and the Bitter Root mountains south of the forty_seventh parallel...

"...Once in a while a steamer makes a trip to Priest Rapids but the business is not sufficient at present to cause one to be sent with any regularity...

"If Priest Rapids could be improved it would give navigation thence to Cabinet Rapids, a few miles below Rock Island Rapids. The splendid valley of the Kittitas and upper Yakima would have an easy and short outlet to the navigable river...

"On the other side of the river the fine country composing Badger Mountain would be benefited and would be settled and its produce taken to the tidewater by the river boats...

"...The amount of country to the west of the river which would be benefitted by the improvement of Priest Rapids is about 1,300 square miles, of which a large portion is arable and grazing land of excellent quality...on the east of the river there is an area of about 400 square miles, a great part of which is the finest quality of agricultural land. This of course is the area to be directly benefited; indirectly all of the country up the river would be benefited, as well as all portions

below which need lumber and fuel..."

(The cost of making Priest Rapids, Rock Island Rapids, Foster Creek, "Kalchien" and Makin Rapids navigable was estimated at $3,000,000 and several plans were presented, one being for a portage railway at Priest Rapids)

"...p. 72.."We ran the rapids with our bark canoe, and camped at Ringgold bar, about 40 miles below the mouth of the Snake river..."

"p. 74..Drainage areas

"Columbia above the Snake, 30,360 square miles (in Washington Territory). Columbia drainage area: Oregon,Washington and Idaho, 244,959 square miles..this is an area larger than all the New England and Middle States with Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia combined.

"Great Britain and Ireland, 121,230 square miles; France, 201,900; Germany, 212,091; Austria_Hungary, 226,406; Italy, 112,677; Spain,182,758.

(Geglogically)

"...The Nachess Pass has an elevation of 4,900 feet...there have been several very large local outflows of lava from thispart of the main range. Several of these go to make up the eastward stretching ridges forming the Simcoe Mountains. One of these lava flows extended to the east just south of the forty_seventh parallel crossing the Columbia river and forming Saddle Mountain which extended to the eastward and is lost in the general surface of the Great Plain.

"...The base of this Saddle Mountain outflow has been all worn away by the Yakima and Naches systems of waters and by the glaciers which must have come down scooping out the valleys of these rivers. Where the Columbia cuts through the outflowjust north of Priest Rapids the bluffs are close togethe and stand out very prominently, viewed both from the north and south. The name of the Sentinel Bluffs was bestowed upon them...

"p. 110... The northern portion of the interior Columbia Basin, known as the Great Plain of the Columbia, may be described as that area bounded

on the west by the Cascade Mountains, on the south by the Blue Mountains, on the east by the Bitter Root and Coeur d'Alene Mountains and on the north by the mountains of the Moses and Colville Indian reservations.. this is about 145 miles by 155 miles in extent andcontains approximately 22,000 square miles or 14,080,000 acres...this section is also known in popular parlance as "Bunch Grass Country," from the fact that nearly all of the plains and hills throughout its extend are covered with this most hardy and nutritious grass.

"...Over nearly the whole of this Great Plain ...is now spread a rich and fertile soil varying in depth from a few inches to hundreds of feet. This soil has been produced by the grinding action of the ice and drift of the Glacial epoch, by the water wearing of the Champlain epoch and from the disintegration of the rocks during the last and present existing Terrace epoch; by the action of summer 's rain and heat, winter's frost and cold, and the chemical decomposition arising from exposure to the atmosphere...

"..An increase of moisture seems to come with the increase of cultivation and every acre that is planted, tended and harvested adds to the total agricultural acreage of the country and its capability. This has been abundantly proven in Nebraska and other sections east of the Rocky Mountains. After Fort Kearney was established in 1848 the government employed a skilled farmer for years to live there and try to raise vegetables for the troops and grain for thepublic animals. But agriculture was a complete failure owing to lack of rain. Now all about the old fort are thousands of farms on all of which abundant crops are raised. This change has been produced by the westward progress of settlements, carrying along an increased rainfall...

"The following account of my journey across two sections of the Great Plain is from my report to the Chief of Engineers in 1880:

(p. 122)

In August of 1879 I left Walla Walla and proceeded to Wallula and thence up the Columbia to White Bluffs. At the head of the long island, we left the river to look out for a practicable route for a wagon road to the military camp, then in the vicinity of the mouth of the Okinakane, on the supposition that it was to be permanently located there.

We reached the top of the bluffs, which are here about 540 feet high, by going up through a long gulch greatly beaten by cattle. The soil is dry and is ground to powder by the feet ofthe cattle wherever they make a path and is not well suited for a road. We however found a short distance down the river a gulch up which the ascent to the top of the bluffs was easy and gradual.

From the summit the country spreads out gently rolling as far as the eye could reach, to thenortheast and east. To the north and northwest a small mountain chain devoid of timber stretched itself from east to west across our way. It is called Saddle Mountain. The country was covered with a luxuriant growth of bunch grass, with here and there a tract of sage_brush. The soil is of firm and excellent quality. Quite a large number of cattle were seen, all of which had to descend to the river for water.

Proceeding somewhat to the northeast, to skirt Saddle Mountain, we soon found ourselves getting into a country more sandy and more rolling, and our mules and horses had greater difficulty in getting along. In the afternoon being on the lookout for water, we made for a green looking spot off to the east, hoping it was a spring. In this we were disappointed and we continued our way until nine o'clock at night when not finding any water we unloaded and made ourselves as comfortable as possible without it. The next morning before daylight we took up our laborsome march through the sands of the desert and traveled until about two in the afternoon, when as our animals were suffering intensely from thirst, and as we were uncertain about what lay before us directly north, we concluded to strike

to the westward, as from all the indications it was more likely to give us a supply of water. About three o'clock we came to an old road, which gave indications of having at one time been well traveled, and we turned and followed it to thenorthward, trusting that it would take us to water.

At five o'clock our animals seemed utterly unable to carry their packs any further and so we unloaded them and piled up our baggage and kept on without it. About nine o'clock that night we came to a small alkali pond, which though vile as it was, seemed like nectar to us and to our poor horses and mules.

The country we had traveled was covered partly with sage brush, bunch grass and weeds and was uetterly waterless and lifeless. Not even the chee ful coyote lived there, for not one lulled us to sleep or molested our abandoned provisions and camp equipage. The next day we found the fine spring which feeds the alkali pond above mentioned. I afterwards learned it goes by the name of Black Rock Spring. Here the face of the country changes to a certain extent and becomes more broken up. Black Rock spring is at the head of a coulee which extends off to the south-west and probably as far as Moses Lake. From Black Rock Spring we kept to the north and in about nine miles came to Crab Creek, which is here quite a stream flowing through a rich bottom half a mile wide..."

The bravest among the young dreamers in those days did not wait for settlements and cultivation to bring the land into production.

They attempted to resort to irrigation. Water wheels and then gasoline engines were used in the Priest Rapids and White Bluffs areas and ambitious projects were conceived as early as 1890.

One of these was the Priest Rapids Company, capitalized at North Yakima at $300,000, to bring water from priest rapids onto arable lands.

E.H. Libby, a Yakima newspaper editor was one of the promoters. Another was Charles Francis Adams, one time president of the Union Pacific Railway, and another was named Wheeler. He was of the Wheeler-Barker Syndicate.

This plant was acquired through the Grant County Public Utility District No. 2 and its development of Priest Rapids Dam and was razed in 1958.

More skimming:

The Hanford Irrigation and Power Co. acquired 40,000 acres of land early in 1907. The company had been organized in 1904, consisting mainly of Tacoma and Seattle stockholders. There was capitol stock of $250,000 and a bond issue of $500,000 to finance the undertaking.

Land was acquired from the state and the Northern Pacific Railway company and tracts of 5 and 20 acres were sold, with the best soils bringing $300 an acre. The townsite of Hanford was platted as was one at White Bluffs.

Construction started on the Priest Rapids plant, a pumping plant at Coyote Rapids and an irrigation canal about 1906. A transmission line was built from Priest Rapids to Coyote Rapids to power the irrigation pumps.

In one of the earliest developed areas near Priest Rapids, E.L. Stewart, in 1906, sold $6,223 worth of apples from six acres, profiting $4,313.

The Priest Rapids lands stretched along the river for forty miles, and the strip was one to four miles wide.

The original plant had two generators of 900 kilowatts each. One, later rebuilt increased its rating. In 1949 the plant was listed as the oldest power plant on the Columbia River.

Among the early difficulties, in 1908, one canal system experienced heavy leakage because of seepage. Orchardists who had set out trees were compensated when water could not be delivered and some hauled water in tank trucks the first year. Concrete lining was installed in 1909 and water was supplied to 32,000 acres of land.

The year, 1910, was marked by organization shakeups in which the Pacific Power and Light Company capitalized at $7,500,000 played an important part in the area's history. On Sept. 15,1910, the Pasco

Adams and his associates became so deeply involved at Lewiston and Clarkston, together with Libby (Clarkston Valley was once called Vineland) that Libby was compelled to drop his plans for the Priest Rapids Development when the anticipated transcontinental railroads through Lolo Pass and down Hell's Canyon failed to develop.

(We.E. Rockwood, Guy Sterling and E.H. Libby were named the incorporators of the project.."Yakima Herald, March 21,1895.

Later, the most ambitious undertaking revolved around the Hanford Irrigation and Power Company project, whose power plant was completed in 1908 just below present Priest Rapids Dam, and marked a new period in the river_side development.

Earlier, in 1897, J.W. Pitt was making plans with others to establish an electric irrigation power plant to water a large tract of land. The site was to be Priest Rapids, which the backers considered equal to Niagara Falls.

A newspaper article reported plans for connecting farms by electric wires so that by punching buttons a headgate would raise and water would flow.

"In connection with this will be another button, which will furnish everyone light that has an interest in the plant...This sounds almost fabulous but as millions of horsepower can be developed at the rapids with a very small amount of excavation, this proposition will be a cheaper way to obtain water than any other.

Farmers then were using what they called a dip wheel, suitable for small tracts, or patch land irrigation.

The later-day Hanford plant at Priest Rapids developed early agricultural areas below the rapids in Northern Benton County. It was taken over by the government in 1943, being leased in October of that year to the Pacific Power and Light Co. and in 1948 turned out 10,700,000 kilowatt hours of power.

Express announced sale of the Hanford project to Pacific . That year 16,000 acres were being irrigated by the Hanford project. The Priest Rapids plant had a capacity of 83 million gallons a day and the main canal which delivered water to lands was 19 miles long. It was 24 feet wide at the top, eight feet wide at the bottom. The Bureau ~~of~~ was selling land at $150 and $300 an acre with five year terms.

In 1911 there were widely reported stories that PP & L was planning to construct a $5,000,000 to $100,000,000 dam which would take eight years to complete. The dam was to be 75 feet high, equal to the drop of the stream in nine miles. A high line canal and a network of transmission lines would supply both water and power for much of Eastern Washington.

A bill, passed by Congress gave the company authority for locks providing navigation. Names of the Pacific Company, American Power Company and General Electric were mentioned in connection with the plans.

During the electric irribation development along the river, from 1904 to 1908, river boat traffic increased because of construction materials needed upstream. In 1909 the tonnage was listed at 11,712 but commenced to drop when the construction was completed.

The slow river boats made ~~eight~~ six to eight miles anhour. After departing from Kennewick the first stop was at Richland, then came Nagle's Landing in Franklin County, eight miles below Hanford. Afterwards was White Bluffs and then Wahluke. Not many of the boats traveled all the way to Priest Rapids when the construction there had been finished.

Cherries, apricots, peaches and apples, and some wheat and hogs were sent down river.Sometimes the river crew returned with salmon caught at Priest Rapids by the Indians and given to the crew. At times, on the up-river voyage, the boat brought Indian dugout canoes in which the Indians had gone down the river but which were too difficult to pole up-stream on the return trip.

Completion of the Milwaukee Branch line from Beverly to White Bluffs brought the Hanford Flyer on the scene in 1912 and the faster system of transportation than river boats could provide.

Three years before then, in 1909, C.O.Adams, a North Yakima civil engineer, returned from the Columbia after laying out the Mattawa townsite for Campbell and Sanderson of Spokane. This was three miles above the river and three quarters of a mile from the right of way survey of the North Coast railroad. He also made a preliminary survey for a 12 mile long ditch to carry water to the section from a 250 foot lift from the river.

In October the Rose Land company of North Yakima received bids for a pumping plant to irrigate 2,000 acres opposite the town of Beverly. The plant, costing $50,000, was planned with a capacity of 8,000 to 10,000 gallons of water a minute. The Rose Land Company also announced plans to lay out a townsite at the extreme southeast corner of Kittitas County to be "called Priest Rapids."

Also, in the fall of 1909, there were reports of government surveyors busy surveying for an irrigation ditch in "the Frenchman's Ridge and Quincy Flat country, the water to be carried down from some of the lakes to the north, advantage to be taken of natural wasteways a part of the distance..."

On November 11,1910, the Yakima Republic announced that "pursuant to the policy of the government in the withdrawal of power sites of the northwest from acquisition by corporations and individuals without cost, orders under date of Oct. 27 have been received at the local U.S. land office withdrawing the lands on the shore of the Columbia River surro nding the islands at the hedd of Priest Rapids from all forms of entry either by settlement, location or sale and reserving these lands on Columbia River Power Site withdrawal no. 154.

"...neither the Hanford power project on the west bank of the Columbia nor the Strahorn project on the east side of the river at Priest Rapids will be affected by the withdrawal by the government of lands in that vicinity from entry of any kind...The Strahorn canal will not require a dam but will take water from the river at the present level..."

And in the same issue the Yakima Republic reported:

"Right of way across his homestead at Priest Rapids has been sold by Ernest Schneider, a motorman on the Johnson's Corner line of the street railway company to the Pacific Power & Light Company...

"The consideration paid by the company is said to be about $10,000... the right of way is secured by the company for the canal which will carry water for the operation of its power plant which will probably be located in the neighborhood of Schneider 's land..."

There dreams which came true, in a manner for that period, and dreams which burst with a shatter as men worked out devious plans along the Columbia.

One heard the loudest was a project at Wahluke capitalized for $5,000,000 which went bankrupt in February of 1912.

The arrest of promoters who could be found followed. J.B. Fox of Spokane, with federal court authorization, set about to bring the project to life and the federal court ordered the Wahluke properties of the bankrupt Columbia River Orchards sold on July 15 unless creditors could raise $10,000 to finish the project, saving it for the investors.

The Pasco Express reported under date of June 21:

"W.E. DeLarm, promoter of the Columbia River Orchard Company and its allied corporations which sold $5,000,000 worth of bonds now worthless died at Placerville,Cal. last Friday Saturday. DeLarm was a fugitive from justice, having been indicted at Portland,Ore., for using the mails to defraud. The scheme was complicated,involving the sale of stock and re sale at discount.

The incident failed to stop the plans on the Wahluke.

Highlands landowners announced plans for a survey of the large plateau on the south side of Saddle Mountain, Highlands being used to describe the area later known as Wahluke.

This was for an irrigation venture, proposing to take water from the head of Priest Rapids to irrigate 150,000 acres of land. Some of the area had produced a record crop of dry land wheat in 1912. And persons on Royal Slope, the few there then, were discovering that sagebrush land was rich and prolific, if assured water could be obtained.

One foredoomed irrigation project was the Beverly Land and Development company which proposed to irri ate 5,000 acres of land. The concrete pumping plant, above the railroad bridge at Beverly, is a relic of that dream. In 1913 a small crop was raised; four cuttings of alfalfa were made the following year. What with railroad work and theland project with some 100men employed, Beverly prospered for a time.

In the spring of 1929 the Washington Irrigation and Development Co. was granted a 50-year franchise for development of the power potential at Priest Rapids. This appeared to be it, the final step toward a $100,000,000 power producer.

In newspapers that year appeared artist's drawings which depicted the dam, the area it wouldaffect, and even a city called Priest Rapids. Depicted, too, were the surrounding 100,000 acres, brought from sagebrush to green life, by arteries of irrigation canals.

The Pasco Express announced that working out of plans for passage of salmon over the dam had removed the final obstacle.

The paper told of plans for constructing a two and one half mile dam across the river. It would be 90 feet high and create a backwater 20 miles upstream, forming an enormous storage reservoir for irrigation. Turbines costing $17,000,000 would develop 400,000 horsepower at all river stages and high water would permit an additional 350,000 horsepower.

Envisioned in the plan was irrigation of 100,000 acres in Grant County, and the construction of factories. These would include nitrate plants, an aluminum factory with alumina clay from deposits in Eastern Washington providing material; and a magnesium plant, utilizing chloride shipped in from Utah.

Stated the article in the newspaper:

"A city is to be built at the scene of the development of 40,000 to 50,000 inhabitants."

John P. Duke of Seattle, a banker, on a visit to Spokane , reported that the company had spent $3,000,000 in surveys....

And these larger scale dreams also faded.

It remained for men with stronger dreams and more determination to bring them about. This came to pass with the years, modified by them to fit the times and the circumstances.

Harry J. Pierce was president of the Washington Irrigation and Development Company in 1924. Reported the Yakima Republic on May 2 that year:

"The Washington Irrigation and Development Company is controlled by the American Power &Light Company which also controls the Portland Gas & Coke Company and the Pacific Power & Light Company which supplies Yakima with electric power, gas and water." and the newspaper forecast lower electrical rates because of the development.

An article in the Republic, March 19, 1925, reported:

"...Fifty per cent of the 100,000 acres to be irrigated by the General Electric Company's $100,000 project at Priest Rapids is owned by Yakima valley and Seattle residents. The propertyowners organized as the Priest Rapids Landowners association include Harry Kohls, who has 600 or more acres; Frank Bartholet, J.L. Hughes, A.V. Stacey, J.F. Schriener and nearly 40 others. The townsite is said to be owned by Henry J. Pierce.

"George Arrowsmith, former manager of the Pacific Power and Light Company here, who is credited with bringing the feasibility of the project to the attention of General Electric never realized anytying materially for the tip that promises to materially change the hydro-electric map.

"Yakima cannot help profiting from the proposed development, O.C. Soots, Commercial club secretary, urged completion of a highway via Moxee Valley and Black Rock to the Columbia. There are already 320,000 acres of irrigated land in this valley..."

The magnitude of some of the produce from the White Bluffs area which was receiving irrigation water was shown in an article, published in 1919, History of the Yakima Valley, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co.

"White Bluffs...An excellent weekly, the White Bluffs Spokesman of which E.J. O'Leary is editor, supplies news and an advertising medium for the district of which Priest Rapids in Yakima County and White Bluffs and Hanford are the business centers.

"We find in the Spokesman of November 8,1918, a series of items of value bearing on the agricultural and political conditions:

Milton Dam of Seattle,one of the owners of the Diamond D Ranch at Priest Rapids was in the valley this week looking after business interests. Mr. Dam had just returned from Washington , D.C. and says that the water power leasing bill is all ready for passage and will be enacted into law before December 1st and that actual construction work on the dam at Priest Rapids will be under way by Christmas. Mr. Dam has extensive real estate holdings around Priest Rapids and has worked incessantly for the last four years to secure the passage of some law through Congress liberal enough to tempt the power companies to develop the large power site there. The legislation in Congress seems to have developed into a race between a water power leasing bill and one that will permit the government to develop power sites.

...The Spokane Fruit Growers Association report their apple pack out at Hanford will be approximately 17,000boxes or twenty three cars; and at White Bluffs 19,000 boxes or approximately 25 cars...The Wenatchee Fruit Exchange reports a shipment of 16 cars of apples from Hanford and forty from White Bluffs. In addition there were about 27 cars shipped independently from White Bluffs, making a total of 131 cars of apples for the season from the valley.

H.W. Lemcke purchased from the Northern Pacific Railroad the section of land lying directly west of the Archie Brown homestead (Cold Creek) paying $2.75 per acre. Since the discovery of the artesian water in the Brown well the value of the land has been considerably enhanced.

The resources of the Wahluke Slope , held in storage, have only slightly been touched. News dispatches of recent years are of interest.

On Jan 21,1959, Chairman Earl Coe of the Columbia Basin Commission said that the Atomic Energy Commission's release of 62,000 irrigable acres of Wahluke Slope land has created a financial problem.

The action, Coe said, came after President Eisenhower had prepared his budget request for $8 million for Columbia Basin project construction work in fiscal 1960.

The release of the Wahluke Slope land means, Coe said, that 8 million budget will have to be increased by several million dollars to take Wahluke Slope lands into consideration.

In the same year, miles and minutes of driving time from the Yakima Valley to the Columbia Basin were reduced with opening of the Wahluke Slope section of Secondary State Highway 11_A.

In 1965 a Portland firm, the R.A. Heintz Construction Co. was low bidder at $2,899,599 to construct a 16 mile third section of the Wahluke Canal, from eight to 20 miles southwest of Othello.

Approximately 5,000 acres will be irrigated from turnouts of laterals directly from the extension. It was the prediction of farm experts that from one fourth to one_half third of the region of the Wahluke Slope will be developed into orchards and the rest into diversified farming.

The growing season for the region ranges from 180 to 200 days.

And it was in July,1965 that the Atomic Energy Commission advised congressmen that about 39,000 acres of AEC controlled land on the Wahluke Slope across the Columbia River from the nine Hanford production reactors will be made available for non_resident farming under controlled conditions.

A review of the control zone ar a north of the river was made by the AEC in view of the decision to shut down three of the Hanford plutonium reactors as part of the nation's curtailment of fissionable materials production in January, 1964.

There are 88,000 acres in the primary co trol zone which was established to keep the Hanford site isolated for safety reasons . In 1953 and 1958 the commission withdrew its objection to irrigation development of land totaling 192,500 acres which make up the secondary control zone.

The lands which were being made available for farming were initially included in the overall plans for the Columbia Basin Project but was subsequently deferred to meet AEC needs.

The Commission's decision to make the land available for farming was said consistent with the views of its advisory committee on reactor safeguards which reported that land 5 1/2 miles or more beyond operating reactors and one mile beyond shut down reactors not being maintained in standby condition could be made available for non resident farming without creating an undue hazard to the health and safety of the public.

It was announced the government will retain title to the leased land so that it can regain control if necessary because of program needs or some emergency.

An appropriate warning system will be installed in the area to warn

users of the land in the event of an emergency.

The 39,000 acres of land, including some public domain land reserved for AEC use, is mostly in the north and east portions of the control zone, across the river from the sites two easternmost reactors.

The major part of the land that will become available for farming is between Ringold, 12 miles north of Pasco, and the crest of the Saddle Mountain to the north. Some small pieces of land on the western side of the control zone will also become available.

The first opening of the Wahluke Slope permitted by AEC following World War II was in 1960 for the extension of Highway 24 from Vernita Ferry to Othello.

In 1965 the Vernita Ferry was replaced by a state highway bridge, further modernizing a farm to market route and a tourist route.

All of this is contributing to the ~~1966~~ value of agricultural produce, and is strongly reflected in Grant County, an October 7,1966 report by the United States Department of Commerce shows.

The report shows that Washington State Farms expanded to an average of 55.2 acres in size and $21,534 in average value in 1964 compared with 1959. According to the 1964 Census of Agriculture, just issued by the Bureau of the Census, the average size of farms in 1964 was 418.1 acres and the average value was $65,609.

The 45,574 total number of farms in Washington, the report stated, a 1964 figure, is a drop of 6,003 below the 1959 figures; all smaller size farms declined in number but larger farms of 1,000 or more acres increased in number.

Yakima County continued to lead in total value of all farm products sold in 1964 with $118,095,725, followed by Grant County with $63,088,996.

Two Columbia Basin counties, the Department of Commerce report stated, increased in number of farms in 1964 compared with 1959. These were Grant County, with 1,592 ~~acr~~ farms in 1964, up 95 farms, and Franklin County up 47 farms to a 1964 total of 789 farms.
