

INDIANS RESTORE FORT KNOWN TO WARRIORS OF OLD

Ft. Simcoe to Stand as Shrine of Bravery

Men and Machines Lift Sagging Face of Historic Landmark; Wilbur's Tree Remains as Fitting Memorial

Out at the foot of the pine hills, in an oak grove by the trickle called Agency creek, men and machines are lifting the sagging face of old Ft. Simcoe.

With tractors, shovels, hammers and saws, youths of the Indian CCC--descendants, some of them of warriors who parleyed with the soldiers that marched over the hills in 1856 to build the army post--are smoothing away the wrinkles of age and neglect.

Minor repairs, clearing up of debris and general improvement of the spacious grounds have been under way since December 1 as the preliminary phase of an ambitious project aiming at complete restoration of the frontier stronghold, one-time Indian agency and educational center.

M. A. Johnson, superintendent of the Yakima reservation, is pleased with the showing of the winter's activity.

The Yakimas, to whom the fort property belongs, are following the process of rejuvenation with more than mild interest. Sentimental, if tactiturn, redmen who learned their ABCs at Simcoe boarding school, look forward to the time when the historic landmark shall appear as it used to be.

Fear voiced by some that the restoration might be coupled with a move to take control of the place away from the Indians is without foundation, Johnson has assured the tribal council. The sole purpose of the project is to preserve the fort in its original quaint charm for the edification of present and future generations, to maintain it as a living monument to brave men and romantic days long gone.

In line with the wishes of the Indians and in keeping with the program to re-create the atmosphere of four score years ago has been the removal of the decaying agency orchard from the central square where blue-jacketed soldiers drilled during the brief period of military occupancy.

One tree, the noblest of them all, was spared. A spreading, vigorous apple tree--Father Wilbur's tree--was planted, legend tells, by the Rev. James H. Wilbur of the giant frame, the square jaw, the indomitable will. Over in the very southwest corner of the parade ground it stands, protected by a neat new fence. The tree is a fitting memorial to the famous Methodist missionary and Indian agent whose 20 years of shepherding left such impress that today when Ft. Simcoe is mentioned the name of Father Wilbur instantly is linked to it.

Scraped and patted flat, the parade ground has been seeded to hardy tufted wheat, insuring a rippling green sward grateful to the eye, soft to the tread. And while martial maneuvers never may be held there again, the expanse will lend itself to tribal gatherings somewhat like the Yakimas enjoyed on that very spot long before the soldiers came.

As far back as tradition goes, the site of Simcoe was a favorite council place, and from far and wide the moccasined people were wont to assemble there to discuss more or less weighty problems and to gamble and laze in the shade of the acorned oaks.

Mool-mool, they've always called it, the place of the bubbling water.

Chill and crystal clear, the springs still gurgle from the earth, the birds still sing in the oak trees and the sun still smiles on Mool-mool. The grandfather times the old people tell about cannot be brought back, yet the vision of Simcoe restored is something to fill the hearts of the Yakimas.

Their paradise at Mool-mool is almost regained.

With the orchard gone there is an unobstructed view across the 400-foot square campus of what was once officers' row--four trim white dwellings in the southern colonial manner. Warded by lofty oaks and primly ensconced behind a dainty white picket fence, recently repaired, that runs the length of the street, they face eastward, toward the sloping reservation plain.

In the fretful fifties the three smaller houses were captains' quarters. The fourth and largest, imposing with its gables, was the home of the commandant and, after him, of the succession of Indian agents.

Built to endure, stock-brick buildings, as they would have been called in the old South because of their brick walls masked by weatherboarding, each residence is a gem of architectural simplicity.

Antiquarians feast fascinated eyes on the long, small-paned windows, iridescent from 80 years of soaking up the sunlight, gaze delightedly on the sooted fireplaces (there's one in every room), point rapturously at wide floor boards that are fastened down with square headed nails, praise the craft of an unsung carpenter whose artistry is revealed in little details and by Gothic touches here and there.

Thicknesses of paint on woodwork and layers of paper on the boardpanelled inside walls hint at the taste of the various occupants through the changing years. Exciting game it is for those who like to delve and contemplate to hazard guesses at the original color scheme. Superficial examination of recesses and scratched away patches in the gabled mansion indicates that a warm yellow wash, happier treatment than the final coat of somber gray, was the initial application to the walls.

Improvement made through the winter include the building of a stout wire fence enclosing about 20 acres of the fort property to keep out livestock, laying of graveled walks to replace rotted wooden sidewalks that menaced unwary pedestrians, razing of unsightly outlying sheds of no historical significance, re-shingling of woodsheds in back of the officers' quarters, grading of streets, planting of locust trees to screen the anachronistic sheet metal garage at the eastern approach, and the installation of a temporary water system.

Where the road enters the grounds will be an impressive ornamental portal of peeled fir and pine logs, to be constructed soon. Persons desiring to explore the establishment will leave their cars outside this gateway, in a parking space now in course of preparation.

Planned as a four-company post, Simcoe became a dot on the military map in 1856. Selection of Mool-mool as the location was made 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 in the valleys to the north, there was an abundant supply of the best of 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 Simkwe 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 as times had been in the Yakima valley in the fall of 1855, 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 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, 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 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 Colonel) R. H. Milroy. Twenty-one years later when Gen. Milroy, as 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' row.

Prize find about a year ago deep in national capital files was the original drawing of the design for the fort, bearing the identification, "Plan of the Post of Fort Simcoe, Yakama 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 were 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 klin, marked by piles of slag, was rediscovered last fall a short distance east of the fort and agency building,

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in a clump of tall sagebrush. The bricks for the fireplaces 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 14 and 15, 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 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, Numbers 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.

STORY OF FORT SIMCOE

The so-called Indian wars of 1855 and 1856 resulted in the bringing of troops to the Yakima Valley, and the determination of the Government to establish a military fort within this territory. A site for the fort was selected at the place known by the Indians as "Mool," or "Babbling Spring," which became known then as Simcoe. The blockhouses were constructed in 1856, and immediately thereafter work was commenced upon the various Fort Simcoe buildings at a total cost of \$300,000. Most of these original buildings are yet standing.

The Treaty of 1855 with the Yakimas had provided that an Indian Agency should be established, and it was quite logical that the agency should be placed at Fort Simcoe.

Various stories have been told as to the procurement of materials for the construction of Fort Simcoe, such as the story to the effect that the buildings were prefabricated in the East and conveyed around Cape Horn on shipboard to The Dalles, and brought overland to Fort Simcoe by mule train. There is no doubt but that the major portion of the finished lumber was brought overland from The Dalles, but also it is quite well established that a portion of the construction material was milled in the old mill on Toppenish Creek, and that the bricks lining the walls of the buildings were fired in the old brick kiln near Fort Simcoe.

Contrary to a story sometimes told, Fort Simcoe was not named after a military officers of the United States, but is derived from an Indian word, "Sem coee."

In 1869 the Rev. James H. Wilbur, of the Methodist Church, who had established a mission near the Fort, was named Indian Agent and stationed at Fort Simcoe. Under the leadership of Father Wilbur, as he was affectionately known by the Indians, the Fort prospered and became a haven for all of the Yakima Indians. Schools were established and practically all of the old longhairs now living attended the

Fort Simcoe school during their childhood. Fort Simcoe became a place of beauty, with a large parade ground, surrounded by many fine trees, and with the buildings surrounded by nice lawns.

The Indian school at Fort Simcoe was operated by the Government until early in the 1920's, when the Indian Agency was moved to Toppenish as a result of the continued effort of the businessmen of that community.

The construction of Fort Simcoe had actually been ordered by Colonel George Wright in 1856, with work being in charge of Brevet-Major Robert S. Garnett. Garnett remained in command of the Fort from August, 1856, until October, 1858, when he returned to the East. Later Garnett joined the Confederate Army and was killed in action. The United States Army abandoned Fort Simcoe as a military post in 1859, and turned the Fort over to the Indian Service to be used as the agency. The first Indian agent was R. S. Lonsdale, who took charge in 1860.

The architecture of Fort Simcoe is southern type, following the plans laid down by Major Garnett, who had come from the south. In addition to the original four blockhouses at each of the four corners, Fort Simcoe contained fifteen buildings, including the various cottages for the officers and including the brick jail which is still standing.

It can be truly said that it was largely by reason of the efforts of Father Wilbur that the Yakima Indians remained a rather peaceful tribe, and more or less cooperative with the white men, in making the Yakima Valley a modern agricultural paradise.

For many years efforts have been made to preserve and restore Fort Simcoe. In 1935 the National Park Service investigated the feasibility of setting aside the Fort as a national monument. At that time, however, the Service decided against the project. Various efforts of restoration have been carried on since, and I quote

hereiwith from an editorial in the Yakima Daily Republic:

"The idea, recently noted in a letter to the editor, that the Yakima Indians are opposed to the preservation and restoration of Fort Simcoe is erroneous.

"The Yakima tribal council, in June, 1938, unanimously approved a proposal to repair and restore the historic army post. The work was started in December, 1938, with an Indian civilian conservation corps crew, and was carried on until late in the spring of 1939, when the force was required for road and trail building and other jobs in the forested areas of the reservation. Additional work was done on the fort property in 1940 and 1941. The project was discontinued upon the outbreak of World War II.

"But for the work performed by the skilled Indian carpenters and mechanics under the sponsorship of the department of the interior and the tribal council, Ft. Simcoe would be in an even worse state of disrepair today. The provements included new foundations, new roods, new coats of paint for the one-time officers' quarters, new glass for shattered windows, and, in the commandant's residence, removal of modern flooring in two rooms and the laying of especially milled, wide floor boarding to match the original style in the other rooms. In addition, the CCC constructed a stout fence around the fort to keep out wandering livestock and put up a water tower for fire protection.

"The tribal council again declared its desire for complete rehabilitation of Ft. Simcoe, in a resolutuion, passed unanimously on May 25, 1949. The resolution, however, was not accepted by the bureau in Washington,

and was returned for re-drafting because it contained "condition" assertedly disliked by the bureau. As far as we could tell from the document, there was little or nothing therein to warrant the bureau's action. The council has not seen fit to present a revised resolution.

"We understand the bureau is still "cold" toward a restoration program. Perhaps it could be warmed up by the Washington delegation in Congress, backed up by the people of the Yakima Valley and the state.

"It cannot be said, in view of the record, that the Yakima tribal council has opposed the resolution."

The late L. B. McWhorter, Yakima historian, assisted by H. Dean Guie and Mrs. Frederic E. Swanstrom was largely responsible for the early interest taken toward the restoration of Fort Simcoe. At the present time the work is being carried on by the Yakima Advisory Committee, and it is still our hope that Fort Simcoe may yet be made a national monument.

Simcoe..Geology:

Satas ridge..I have adopted this name for the prominent east and west ridge of basalt separating the drainage of Satus creek from that of Topinish creek.

The highest peak on the ridge is named Satas peak on the maps published by the North Transcontinental Survey and has an elevation of 3,000 feet above the adjacent valleys.

Satus ridge is very similar to the west arm of Horseheaven fault and begins at the west in the rugged basaltic region separating the drainage of Yakima river from that of Klickitat creek. The ridge crosses this rugged, deeply dissected region, the general trend of which is north and south, at right angles, forming an east and west ridge which at once attracts the attention of being different from the surrounding topography due to the erosion of an upheaved mass that is without any well defined form.

The great fault scarp on leaving the highlands is prolonged into the valley to the east and divides it like a wall. The ridge holds its characteristic form for 25 miles and ends in a low point which passes beneath the level sage brush covered plain, close to the Yakima river and about five miles from a short, sharp uplift known as Snipes mountain, in the center of the valley.

Satas ridge is monoclinical with an average dip at the crest of 8 or 10 degrees. The dip soon decreases to the eastward and the strata merge with the gently tilted rocks in the deeply dissected region drained by Satus creek. The north side of the ridge is steep and bold and is formed of the broken edges of the inclined basaltic strata. In all of its principal features it agrees with the Horseheaven and Rattlesnake uplifts, already described.

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The uplift is there really a fold which has been partially broken down by weathering. The outer layer of soft beds have been mostly cut away leaving an interstratified sheet of basalt variously inclined and in places standing in relief. South of the wagon pass the interbedded basalt arches over the top of the ridge from the east and forms a flat table on the summit with light colored lake beds beneath it. A sketch section of the ridge at this locality is shown.

Farther east the covering of lake beds and of interstratified basalt has been more completely removed but occurs at intervals all the way to the end of the ridge, either on the gentle southern slope or at the base of the steep northern escarpment.

If weathering had not taken place the ridge would be a long, narrow, monoclinical uplift formed by the upheaval and tilting of the south side of a great fault which decreased in throw toward the east and changed to a monoclinical fold before disappearing beneath the plain. The weathering of this uplifted ridge and the falling of landslides from its steep northern face has produced the secondary topographic features which now give variety to the primitive form.

Fossils..

On the crest of the ridge near Fort Simcoe there are large stumps of fossil oaks and pines projecting three or four feet from the surface of lapilli which showered down about them from some neighboring volcano and buried them in the position in which they grew. They stand at right angles to the gently sloping surface in which their

roots are inclosed. The stumps are now exposed at the surface owing to the removal of several hundred feet of John Day beds with in erstratified sheets of basalt from above them and are relics of a great forest as similar fossil trees are found at about the same horizon in the rocks at points scores of miles apart throughout central Washington.

During the intervals between the eruptions of the various thick sheets of Columbia lava the surface of the previously formed layer was disintegrated sufficiently to form a soil on which forests grew, only to be buried beneath the next succeeding shower of volcanic ashes and lapilli; this layer in turn became buried beneath subsequent lava flows. Heated waters percolating through the rocks dissolved the woody tissues and replaced them, atom by atom, with silica. In this way the grain of the wood, as well as the knots and even the most minute pores and ducts, has been accurately reproduced in stone. When sections of the fossil wood, ground down until they become thin enough to be translucent are examined under the microscope, the minute structure is as faithfully shown as if a thin shaving had been taken from a living tree. Millions of years have passed since the fossil wood was formed and the species which it represents no longer live.

On the steep northern escarpment of Watas ridge there have been many landslides caused by the breaking away of portions of the face of the fault scarp. Two of these are of large size and of such a recent date that the scars they left are fresh in appearance and unclothed even with lichens. These breaks seem to have been formed within the past few years, but on inquiring of the Indians living in the adjacent valley, I found that they did not know when they were formed and had no traditions concerning them.

The larger of the slides referred to is situated about five miles southeast of Fort Simcoe and will be called the Simcoe landslide,

the smaller is some 15 miles further east and may be plainly seen by travelers over the Northern Pacific railroad after passing Topinish station in going east and will be called the Topinish landslide.

Simcoe landslide--The mass of rock which broke off from the face of the ridge and formed the Simcoe landslide is about half a mile long and ploughed out onto the plain for a distance of nearly a mile. At the foot of the steep broken scarp left on the face of the ridge there is a deep narrow valley, bounded on one side by the mountain and on the other by the backward slope of the mass which fell.

In this basin there is a lake about two acres in extent without surface outlet. The mass which fell is broken and exceedingly irregular, but slopes from the steep ridge near the base of the mountain down to a thin edge at its outer margin.

The tract of country covered by the fallen mass is rudely semi-circular, but somewhat pointed at the center of the curve. About its outer margin and forming a rude semicircle of irregular hills, looking like the terminal moraine of a small glacier, is the material pushed ahead of the mass which fell. These hills are from 200 to 250 feet high with very steep outer slopes. The material ploughed up is composed of loose rocks, volcanic lapilli and lake beds. In this material the trunks and branches of fossil trees occur in considerable number. The singular topographic forms produced by the slide have been but slightly modified by erosion, as the rain falling on the disturbed tract finds its way out through the loose rocks and forms springs about its lower margin. A valley, which existed previous to the landslide was obliterated by it, but is still clearly marked below the outer, moraine-like hills.

The features described above may be recognized in the illustrations forming Plates III and IV. The first is a general view taken half a mile

in front of the pushed up ridge, over the top of which the surface of the fallen mass maybe seen; above this is the steep scarp left on the mountain face. Plate IV is a nearer view of the precipice left by the slide which is now largely covered by talus slope.

Topinish landslide-This is smaller than the one near Fort Simcoe and did not force up an outer moraine like ridge. The mass which fell is piled in confused heaps and ends in a low slope. A general view of the slide taken from the left bank of Topinish creek is presented in Plate V. Another view taken from above looking down on the confused piles of loose stones composing the fallen mass is shown in Plate VI. The scarp in the foreground in this view is the backward slope of the fallen mass. Topinish creek was turned from its course by the slide and now makes a broad bend in order to get around it.

Geological notes:

IN this section of the country practically all of the rocks are black compact Columbia lava and light colored sediment of Lake John Day which rests upon it.

The attention of the reader will be occupied principally in tracing the deformations by faulting and arching that the Columbia lava has undergone and in noting the results of erosion which has removed the John Day beds from the uplands and in many instances cut deep trenches in the lava beneath. The mountains are composed essentially of basalt and many of the valleys are still deeply filled with lake beds