

(No date; no source)

BONNEVILLE OF 100 YEARS AGO VISIONED

Dam Locale Scene of Some Romantic History

CASCADES TO DISAPPEAR

Historian Suggests View of Old River Landmarks Before They Are All Submerged.

By Charles H. Carey, President, Oregon Historical Society; Author
Carey's "History of Oregon."

The locality selected for the great Bonneville dam in the Columbia river gorge is picturesque, but it is not for this that the dam is to be built there. The region has a background of romantic history, but the engineers have not been influenced by that fact. When the great structure is completed, and the waters behind the dam are raised sufficiently to satisfy the ideals and aspirations of engineering, many picturesque and historic features of the site will be submerged, perhaps forgotten by all but a few dry-as-dust antiquarians.

Let us take a last look before the Cascades have disappeared, and while some of the features of the historic portage can still be identified. Time makes changes, but engineers have a way of hurrying old man Time, and enterprise transforms as if by magic. There will be no Cascades when the contractors have finished the job.

Fur Trading Period Recalled

Picturesque canoes paddled by French-Canadian voyageurs, or by skilled Indians, furnished the only efficient means of transport in the first half century following discovery of the Columbia river. For rivers were the only highways, and the Columbia furnished a water-grade through the mountain barriers. Early writers loved to describe the swift annual express of the fur companies, usually several large canoes traveling together for greater protection, carrying dispatches and officials across the continent with marvelous speed. There were obstructions at the Cascades and likewise above The Dalles, where the brigade, as it was called, had to land and carry canoes, cargo and firearms, generally by relays, until smooth water was reached.

The portage at the Bonneville site was often contested by the natives who had their villages and encampments in that vicinity, and

Page Two

many is the story of the dangers there encountered. The north bank was the favorite. The necessity of dividing the traveling party, with some of the men assigned to guard duty at the points of landing and of embarkation, while others were carrying heavy loads along the trail where foothold was precarious, made the problem of effective defense difficult at best.

Whites Not Always Fair

In general, conflicts were largely due to the failure of the white men to understand the Indian point of view which was that a reasonable toll in the shape of tobacco, ammunition, utensils or supplies should be paid for use of the portage. But there is no doubt that these natives were a particularly thieving lot, and were hard to deal with. They were mostly Klickitats and Chinooks, but in the fishing season numerous others, including some who came from long distances, were there for fishing and trading. In fact, the Cascades district was the place of exchange between the tribes, east and west, and here, as well as at the Celilo portage above The Dalles, there was much barter and trade, and no little gambling.

In time, under the beneficent rule of Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay company, the portage Indians were satisfied with the compensation given for their services in rendering aid and protection, and during his regime of some 20 years even small parties could go through without danger.

Pioneer Period Reviewed

But when settlers began to come in considerable numbers the Indian population throughout the northwest became restless. They justly viewed with anxiety the prospect of having their lands taken, and of being deprived of their accustomed places of hunting and fishing. At the Cascades, early in the fifties, white settlers began the construction of a portage tramway on the north bank, extending several miles, from opposite Bonneville as far east as the smooth water at the head of the upper Cascades.

A sawmill, store, several houses and a wharf were built at the eastern end of this tramway. A military fort or block house was constructed by Captain Wallen of the United States army at the middle

Page Three

Cascades, and a wharf boat was located opposite Bonneville. In fact, a considerable number of white people were scattered along the route, some of whom were workmen engaged in building a bridge on the tramway, and a few were soldiers left in charge of the blockhouse.

The store and tramway belonged to Daniel F. and Putnam Bradford, brothers, who were pioneer steamboat men, and after whom the island that will be used in constructing the Bonneville dam, was named.

White Works Beseiged

March 26, 1856, Indians of the Yakima tribe, supported by local natives on the north side of the river, began a surprise attack at the upper landing. The opening shots were accompanied by war-whoops and terrifying yells. At the sawmill, three persons were instantly killed and scalped, and their bodies were thrown into the river. Another white man was wounded, but he succeeded in escaping to the river steamer Mary, which, with crew on board, was tied at the river bank. After much difficulty and with some loss of life, the steamboat managed to get under way and carry news of the assault to The Dalles.

Thus began a three days' siege and continuous battle, extending from the upper to the lower cascade landing. The Bradford store at the upper landing was successfully defended until rescue forces arrived, and the blockhouse further down stream protected a brave group. At the lower landing women and children were sent away in small boats to Fort Vancouver. The casualties among the whites were many, and although a number of Indians were killed or wounded, the besiegers had the advantage of operating in a district that afforded concealment and protection for their mode of warfare.

Army Post Sends Aid

Rescue came first from The Dalles military post, although there was some delay due to the fact that the commander and most of the garrison were already on the march to the interior. The steamer Mary, accompanied by the Wasco, another small vessel that had seen the beginning of the attack from its mooring on the opposite bank of the river, had carried the news, and both now returned, with a barge in tow, bringing men, munitions and dragoon horses. At the same time the small steamboat Belle came up the river from Fort Vancouver with

Page Four

all the soldiers and munitions that could be spared, and another steamboat, Fashion, made two trips from Portland to Bonneville with volunteers. Lieutenant Phil Sheridan, afterwards a famous general in the civil war, was in command of the forces from Vancouver and Portland.

The Indians were quickly dispersed after the military forces arrived. Some of the leaders were captured, tried and punished, including Chief Chenowith of the Cascades tribe. Seventeen whites had been killed outright or died of wounds, and 12 who were wounded subsequently recovered. The war with the Yakimas extended to the interior country, and an additional block house was erected on the bluff back of Bradford's store.

Portage Railroad Built

Another portage railroad was built on the south bank, and the tiny locomotive, the first used in the northwest, may still be seen in its present location opposite the Union station in Portland. It is the property of the Oregon Historical society. On the north side tramway the motive power was furnished by a small mule.

The portage railways cut a great figure in the 60s and 70s, especially during the gold rush to the Idaho and Montana mines, and the old Oregon Steam Navigation company that had acquired these railways and that operated the steamboats on the river during that period is reputed to have made fortunes for many of Portland's first families that were fortunate enough to have owned the capital stock.

In time the Oregon Railroad & Navigation company's line was built, now the Union Pacific, along the south bank, and after the new century began the Spokane, Portland & Seattle railway, in spite of opposition and much litigation by rival interests, was constructed on the north bank. And it may be added that airplanes find the pass through the Cascades a convenient route.

Site Named For Soldier

The Union Pacific station, Bonneville, from the location of which the dam gets its popular name, was so called in honor of Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville, who had an honorable career as a soldier in the United States army, and as an explorer in the west. He was brevetted brigadier-general for distinguished services at the

Bonneville of 100 Years Ago VisionedPage Five

close of the civil war, and while he was never stationed at the place that now bears his name, he was for a time in command of the military post at Fort Vancouver. His western explorations in the early 1830's were principally in the Rocky mountain region, but he reached the Columbia, and is said to have been the first white man in the Wallowa country. A mountain in that region has been named for him.

Old timers will remember the picnic grounds and famous railroad eating house at the railway station at Bonneville, where excellent meals were served before the days of dining cars. A passenger train was snowed in near that place in the 80s, and passengers were unable to get through to Portland for three weeks. The Warren fish wheels and cannery, the sliding mountain that made so much trouble for railway maintenance, the government locks, and the state fish hatchery may be mentioned to stir the recollections of some of the survivors of times that may be broadly designated as "before the war."