

# **LOST GARRISON of the CASCADES**



**BY ALVIN R. LEICHER**

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**Original Courthouse at Lower Cascades. It was used from 1854 to 1893, when the county moved their facilities to Stevenson. The Territorial Courthouse at Lower Cascades stood until 1921. The small lean-to in rear is the old jail. This was originally used by the Army as part of the Fort Cascades compound.**

The more I thought about it, the more I knew I had to find out if any of the treasures was left. A lot of years had gone by. Many people could have made a search in the meantime and some of them could have found what the first men had been unable to carry away — but had they?

I'm essentially a relic hunter — objects from the past are *my* kind of gold, and my friends are aware of this feeling. Three years ago a co-worker handed me a clipping from a Portland newspaper dated 1957. The reporter's name was not given but the article ran like this:

“In telling me (the reporter) of his search for pioneer relics, Mr. Abbet said, ‘On March 20, 1926, I was in my office in Portland when I received a telephone call from the late A. H. Marshall, nature lover, photographer, and conqueror of ten snow-capped peaks, who at that time was third trick operator at Vancouver, Washington. His duties were to answer his station call “MX” several times during his trick, most of which he customarily spent snoozing, hunched in his glass insulated railroad armchair, his ear quick to bestir him should his call sound

in the incessant clicking of the telegraph instrument. Marshall, who had the days free to roam his beloved mountain trails, said he had located the site of the Indian trouble of 1856 at Cascades, Washington, and would be glad to guide me there for purposed of exploration.

“The next day found us on the morning train eastbound, detraining at a point near the western end of the Columbia River rapids near the Cascade Locks on the Washington side.

“After a walk of about two miles through a sort of jungle, reputed to be a hide-out of rum runners, we located the grade of the old portage railroad which was constructed in 1851 to move the cargoes from riverboats above or below the rapids to be trans-shipped to other boats.

“This grade was easily discernible despite the growth in it of trees up to ten inches in diameter. We walked the six miles of grade on its semi-circular route to a point ending at the remains of what was the wharf at the east end of the rapids, just a few rickety pilings.

“Digging down through the thick turf on the railroad grade, we unearthed a cedar hand-hewed tie, in a remarkable state of preservation after its seventy-five years of service. In the same vicinity, we located the scene of Lt. Phil Sheridan’s headquarters, officers’ club, guardhouse and post buildings, all wrecked except the small guardhouse which was built exceedingly strong.

“This find thrilled us no little, especially as we dug up from under about ten inches of earth three times as many relics as we could carry the two miles back to the railway flag stop. Among these were a musket bullet mold, small, perfectly preserved bricks 1½ x 3 x 6 inches, implements, antique dishes, a brass tray designed to hang upon a wall, its homespun red yard string still attached and in fine condition, a thong laced pouch, brass army buttons and shoes.

“Recalling that history had recorded how on July 4, 1858, Sheridan’s infantrymen . . . had crammed the outfit’s small cannon with an overcharge of powder and fired it, the thought came to our minds that it might be possible to comb the brush and find the old cannon.

“An hour’s search rewarded us with the crumbling remains of a gun carriage, still bearing

its faded infantry blue paint; then suddenly my toe kicked something hard, which proved to be a large section of iron gun barrel, sufficient to show its bore of about 2½ inches and having one trunnion.

“We lugged it to the train and to Portland with one third of our stock of other relics, leaving the rest for a return trip which we never made. A systematic search of the area would have turned up the rest of the cannon, I am sure.

“The cannon fragment and other relics were turned over to Dr. Claude Adams, retired oral surgeon, historian and geologist, who has preserved them at his home museum at 2614 N. E. Bryce Street.”

That newspaper clipping was just not to be forgotten.

Following the close of the Indian War of 1856, a blockhouse called Fort Lugenbeel was constructed at the Upper Cascade. The blockhouse was located on a knoll overlooking the Bradford dwellings. At the Lower Cascades a garrison was built and it was this garrison that I was hoping to find.

Before another year would pass the perplexing problem of relocating the lost garrison was to leave me both eyesore and footsore. It would have been far easier to find the proverbial needle in a haystack.

With no previous experience in exploration, my partner and I set out on a hot Sunday in July to locate the garrison. The trip to Cascade Locks was just an hour’s journey from Portland. Crossing over the Columbia River at the Bridge of the Gods brought us into the State of Washington.

Shouldering our packs and with walking sticks in hand we set forth to find the old portage railroad grade. Following the mighty Columbia River westward from the Bridge of the Gods to Fort Rains fire-fighting station we found absolutely nothing. We inquired at the fire station about the old railroad grade, but found that none of the men had ever come upon it while building fire roads in this timbered area. The first day passed swiftly with nothing accomplished. We both realized that more research would be necessary if we were to have any hopes of success.

On arriving home I checked the local phone directory for the names of the parties named in the article. I found a listing for a "C. Adams." Mrs. Claude Adams answered the phone, and in our conversation about the article I learned that her husband, Dr. Claude Adams, and Mr. Marshall had both passed away. However, her brother, John Abbet, who had been interviewed for the article, was still living. I called Mr. Abbet and made an appointment to visit him the following day.

He turned out to be a warm, kindly gentleman. In his apartment were many artifacts which he had collected over the years. In the course of our conversation about the old garrison, Mr. Abbet revealed that no buildings remained at the site, but that didn't deter me from wanting to continue the search.

My next course of action was to obtain topographical maps of the area. These proved invaluable and I would advise anyone else to do the same when looking for lost treasure or pioneer relics.

Meanwhile, my partner had also been busy. He had searched and made notes of his findings concerning the Indian trouble at the Cascades. However, he failed to make a copy of a map showing the route of the old portage railroad. Subsequent visits to the library proved fruitless. The book he had obtained the information from could not be found. Later, we learned that the librarian had taken it with her to the Skamania County Fair at Stevenson, Washington.

In mid-August we resumed our search. Time was running out, the leaves had started to change color and we knew that winter would be upon us in another few months. If we were to come up with anything definite, it would have to be very soon.

From the Bridge of the Gods, we decided this time we would walk in an easterly direction. Approximately 100 yards from the bridge, Gus Slaughter, my partner, noticed a rocky ledge projecting outward toward the river. We noticed black smudges on the overhanging rock where someone at some time had taken shelter at this location and built a fire — how long ago, we could not determine.

Climbing up about ten feet from the river's

edge we stood beneath the over-hanging rock. This seemed an ideal place to look for relics. I assembled the metal detector and began a systematic search. It wasn't long before I received a clear sharp tone in the earphones.

Gus started digging, and brought up pieces of metal and old buttons. We were doing fairly well when suddenly a swarm of bees attacked us. I dropped the detector and my partner threw down his shovel. We both went flying down the embankment to the river with the bees right behind us. Fortunately for us, the bees soon disappeared, allowing us to return and retrieve our gear. Another try at digging would have to be made at this location, but not without a flint gun.

Gus and I climbed twenty feet above the projecting rock into an area covered with brush and trees. We searched for a quarter of a mile east of the bridge, and on this level found what appeared to be a man-made embankment. Impressions left by railroad ties could be seen plainly on the moss-covered ground. The metal locator was again used and picked up a strong reading. It turned out to be a very small railroad spike imbedded in an old cedar tie. Now we were getting somewhere, we thought, but the day ended with nothing to show for our labor but the spike and a few buttons.

Things were getting very discouraging, when one day it occurred to me that perhaps the National Archives might have an early map of the Cascades area. Within a few short weeks after my request, the Department sent a profile survey map of the Columbia River through the Cascade Range. The map itself was executed in 1874 by Major N. Michler and upon it, described in minute detail, were the Oregon Steam and Navigation Company's upper and lower landings, the lower garrison, middle and upper blockhouses, and the entire course of the portage railroad.

Armed with our new information, we returned to the location where we had uncovered the old railroad spike and cedar tie. From this point we walked east along a steep embankment paralleling the river. Shortly we came to a bluff which dropped off to the river some fifty feet or more below us. Here we found a very old iron pipe, about two inches in diameter, coming up

from the river's edge. We were to learn later that the pipe was used to supply water to a stagecoach relay station.

Unable to find anything more of importance, we walked back toward the bridge. Here we spotted a twenty-foot section of iron rail lying deep in the river. How we had missed it coming up we couldn't figure out. Within a few hundred yards from this spot, a three-and-a-half foot section of iron rail was found. Close by, several fish plates and more small railroad spikes were found. This section of the old rail weighed fifty-nine pounds. It was quite a load to pack back to the car.

I made a call to John Abbet the following evening and told him of our find. He advised me to write to George Abdill who had written "Battle of the Cascades" for TRUE WEST in 1964, in regard to the old rail. On the 16th of August I sent off a letter to Mr. Abdill and received a reply within the week. He stated that our rail could possibly be a section of the first rail laid on the Oregon Steam Navigation Company's north bank portage road. The iron T-rail replaced the original wooden rail faced with strap iron, around 1865.

On Sunday, the 30th day of August, we planned to search in and around the Stevenson Co-Ply mill. Permission was granted to us to search the area. Down at the river's edge we saw some old pilings. On our 1874 map, the spot where we now stood was the upper landing for the Oregon Steam Navigation Company. From this point river traffic could move no farther westward downriver, due to the rapids. Goods were unloaded at this point and placed aboard the portage railroad to be transported the six miles overland to the lower landing.

We traveled along the river's edge through tall grass which was shoulder high. The going was rough and to use the metal detector in this region was an impossibility.

As we came out of the tall grass a natural clearing lay before us. Here was an ideal spot to use the metal locator. Not far from the river's edge I picked up a very strong reading. Gus



**The old portage railroad, operated originally by mules or horses pulling flat-bed cars around the Cascades on a semi-circular course of six miles. Rawhide was used at first to cover the wooden rails, but wolves would chew it off. Strap iron was then used until iron T rails were laid. Fort Rains is on the hill at right center. Photo taken prior to 1876.**

started digging. At about two feet he stopped and remarked, "Al, you must have gotten a bum reading." However, I asked him to dig farther and in two more feet he dug up metal.

It proved to be an old army canteen which measured seven and one-half inches in diameter. The canteen itself was badly dented and rusted. The neck of the canteen was made of pewter, and bore the following inscription: "J. H. Rohrma—NCO \*\* UNIT Dec. 29, '64." Further digging brought forth pieces of pottery and broken medicine bottles before darkness forced us to return home once again.

I reread Mr. Abdill's article, looking for information that might help us locate where the actual fighting took place, and on our next trip brought the magazine along.

Gus and I parked the car off the highway and began looking for landmarks which were in the early-day photographs. The terrain had changed considerable over the years.

It was then I spotted it — three draws coming down off the mountain on the Oregon side of the river. Those same draws could be seen on Abdill's photograph. Bradford's Store was shown, with several other dwellings, including the sawmill which had been reconstructed after the battle. The most important part of the old photograph was that it showed the blockhouse situated in the upper right hand corner. The blockhouse just had to still be there, because the water line today does not extend up that far.

We put on our packs and headed for the steep embankment just a short distance away. Climbing up twenty or thirty feet we reached the top and there before us lay whatever was left of the blockhouse. A foundation of large rocks cemented together with mud was all that remained. To our dismay we found that someone else had been there before us. We measured the foundation and found it to be seventeen feet wide and thirty feet long. Directly behind it lay another earth embankment which rose to a height of fifteen feet on the west side.

Some screening was done at the foundation site, but nothing developed from it. On the east slope below the blockhouse I found a hand-forged shovel badly rusted and partially broken. On our return to the foundation site the detector located an old hoe. I sincerely believe that those two items were used in laying the foundation of the blockhouse.

Walking down the slope toward the river we discovered additional rock foundations which had to be a part of the Bradford dwellings. Now we knew that we were on the right track in our search for the lost garrison and had high hopes that no one had beaten us to it.

In September my son, Jeff, had reached his tenth birthday and I decided to add a third member to our party. Our trip was delayed until November. This took us through North

Bonneville, Washington, and beyond the pioneer cemetery of Cascade we turned off the main highway onto a dirt road. We parked the car and unloaded our gear. From this spot we set out for the Columbia River in a southwesterly direction. As we passed through the timber, we came upon an old railroad grade which was banked up on each side with large rocks to a height of four feet.

We walked along the railroad grade, which in some areas were overgrown with brush and large cottonwood and fir trees. I swept the entire railroad grade with the metal locator.

Before reaching Hamilton Slough on the Columbia we had uncovered a hundred or more railroad spikes, along with an old iron frame which had held a wooden sign long since rotted away. The railroad grade ended abruptly at Hamilton Slough, which was partially dry at this time of the year. In the slough, we passed four huge mounds of rock spaced approximately 100 yards apart. Upon these mounds a trestle had once stood enabling trains to cross from the mainland to Hamilton Island during very high water. On the latter no traces of the railroad grade remained.

The three of us then hiked the entire length of the island. We thought we might find a few old cannonballs left there by Lt. Phil Sheridan and his men when they landed to repel the Indian uprising in March, 1856. All we found, however, were Indian campfires exposed by river erosion.

Winters in Columbia Gorge can become very severe; a sharp icy wind coming from the northeast funnels its way through the gorge and brings freezing rain. Highways are often like sheets of glass from December through February, so further explorations was put off until spring. We planned to devote the winter months to further research on the lost garrison.

From John G. Allinger, County Assessor at Stevenson, Washington, I learned that the Frank Estabrooks were natives of the Cascades area and that I could get in touch with them through their daughter, Mary Miller, who lived at North Bonneville, Washington. Her parents were living in Vancouver.

The following weekend my wife and I went to visit them. Frank Estabrook was very alert and agile for his ninety-two years, many of which



**Original Courthouse at Lower Cascades. It was used from 1854 to 1893, when the county moved their facilities to Stevenson. The Territorial Courthouse at Lower Cascades stood until 1921. The small lean-to in rear is the old jail. This was originally used by the Army as part of the Fort Cascades compound.**

had been spent in the Cascades area. Within the next hour I was to learn where the old jail and saloon had stood.

As a young lad he could remember taking refuge in the jail and sleeping there when caught out in bad weather. He had been told that a section of wall of the old jail was still standing. When asked about the blockhouse which stood at the lower landing, he said, "It was located on a point where the Columbia River makes a bend and enters Hamilton Slough." He saw it slide into the river in the flood of 1894.

It was with great reluctance that I told him goodbye. I am sure that had Mr. Estabrook had been a few years younger he would have enjoyed going with us to search for the garrison.

With the winter months behind us and with spring in the air, Gus, Jeff, and I once again resumed our search. We kept our eyes open for the old jail all the way to the end of the portage grade where it crossed Hamilton Slough, but we saw no trace of what might be a wall. Downhearted, we turned and headed back. Then approximately 1,500 feet from Hamilton Slough

we spotted a lilac tree in full bloom.

A lilac tree in this wilderness was very unusual, so we decided to investigate. After leaving the railroad we literally pushed our way through wild blackberry bushes to where the tree stood, and there before us lay the walls of the jail We'd found it at last. After almost a year of searching it took a lilac tree in bloom to show us the way.

The timbers of the jail were badly decayed, having lain out in the weather so many years. To determine the size of the jail was impossible, but it had been constructed of milled four by twelve timbers, held together by iron rods. In its day I am sure it had served its purpose very well.

We started to get results immediately from the metal detector. Several old picks, a grub hoe, more small railroad spikes, singletrees, horseshoes and muleshoes, and a brass buckle with the leather belt still attached, were recovered.

So far we had not turned up a single item, however, related to the old army garrison, nor any of the relics that John Abbet and Marshall had left behind some forty-odd years before.

It was on a Sunday in June when we were at the site again, that we picked up a strong reading on the north side of the jail. Gus brought up an old padlock, badly rusted. On the south side of the jail, a second padlock was found, much larger than the first. Both padlocks were heart-shaped.

To the east of the jail a black cooking pot with the handle still attached was uncovered. It had been buried beneath the bricks of what once had served as a fireplace hearth. It seemed a perfect place to hide away loot, but no coins were found.

The following weekend John Abett joined us. We thought this might be the jail to the old garrison and since he and Mr. Marshall had discovered the army relics in this region, his experience might be helpful. For a man in his eighties John proved to be a good hiker.

At the site of the old jail, John could not recall a thing. The area had changed too much since he had been here in 1926. Yet the day was not wasted for we did find some .40-60 brass rifle shells, and my wife came across a loaded shell marked "3-80 R.L." (In a letter from the Military and Records Service, I was told that this shell

was manufactured in Lowell, Massachusetts, and was used in the .45-70 Springfield breechloading rifle which was the standard service rifle during the period 1870 through the early 1890s.)

My wife had gone with me on this one occasion to see just what her husband was doing on these Sundays away from home. One day of digging was all she wanted, for that evening she came home with blisters on both hands.

Now that we had found the jail, it was time to search for the saloon which Frank Estabrook had told me about. To the south, east and west of the old jail were spaces of ground free of brush. To the north lay a patch of wild roses covering an area fifty feet square. I remarked to my partner that here could very well be the location of the old saloon. It was apparent that before digging could be done, we would have to remove the bed of wild roses and this job took us three hours. Had all our work been in vain? We were soon to find out. I dug down into the soft turf and heard the breaking of glass. Sure enough, it was a broken whiskey bottle.

From then on we cast our shovels aside, and proceeded more carefully with trowels. This was definitely the saloon site for the necks from whiskey bottles lay all around us. In a short time we started bringing up bottles which were whole.

Some of the names embossed on them were: H. H. H. Horse Medicine (dated 18680; The Great Dr. Kilmer's Discovery Root Remedy; Dr. King's New Discovery for Coughs & Colds; Charles T. Fletcher's Castoria; S. C. Skidmore Druggist 151 First Street, Portland; Woodward Clarke & Company Chemists, Portland, Oregon — plus other medicinal bottles. It looked like we had found the local drugstore or the local dump instead of the saloon.

Soon, however, whiskey bottles outnumbered the others, light and dark brown in color. There were also light and dark green brandy bottles, and clear glass whiskey bottles. Gus also uncovered some very heavy glass beer mugs. Reluctantly, we stopped digging as darkness was approaching.

Later on in the week, a telephone call to the Skidmore Pharmacy proved to be invaluable. I spoke with the present owner, Mr. Charles Harlocker, in regard to the age of the medicine





**Upper Cascades, W.T., taken from the Oregon shore by C. E. Watkins, 1867. Right center shows the mouth of Mill Creek where the sidewheeler “Mary” was tied up on the morning of the Indian Battle, March 26, 1856..**

bottle, which be verified to be from 101 to 107 years.

The next weekend found us back again near the saloon site. This time we dug up an old wooden block plane knife, hand forged axes, pearl buttons, knives, forks, spoons, leaden weights used for fish nets. old ink wells and a large sturgeon hook. Next to the portage railroad we found twenty-two horseshoes and mule-shoes, all in one great pile. Near this location the metal detector also picked up a small burro shoe, still in remarkably good condition. It was here we decided the blacksmith shop had stood. In one small clearing a reservoir for an old kerosene lamp was found. It had turned a beautiful shade of lavender from lying in the sun.

We had now visited the site periodically for five months and had always found something, but never anything related to the elusive garrison or the troops who were quartered there. Had we found the lost garrison? A certain doubt remained

in my mind, for what we had found lay to the north of the portage railroad, and according to Major Michler’s map, the old garrison lay to the south.

On the 31st of October, while visiting with Roy Craft, editor of the *Skamania County Pioneer* at Stevenson, Washington, my doubt was confirmed. Alongside the newspaper building lay a set of old railroad wheels and I asked Roy where they had come from. This was the story that he told me.

Three years before, the Army Corps of Engineers had cut out a large section of the embankment on the Washington shore just below Bonneville Dam. This was done to alleviate the swiftness of the current as it passed into the main channel. The cut was made where the Columbia River makes its turn and enters Hamilton Slough. The wheels were uncovered in this operation, and found to be a part of the old flatbed cars. These cars had been drawn by mules over the

wooden rails of the portage railroad back in 1851.

The engineers had made their cut in that section where the old army garrison had stood. It was then that I realized that the garrison was gone entirely, and that we were three years too late.

Since that was true, what had we uncovered? The location site we had been on was the lower end of the town of Cascades, Washington, founded during the late 1850s or the early 1860s. The town was built on the donation land claim held by Francis A. Chenoweth, and filed upon on April 10, 1850. Chenoweth, along with Daniel Bradford, was later responsible for the construction of the portage railroad around the Cascade Rapids.

Cascade was once the county seat of Skamania County and the first building used as a courthouse was a government structure situated outside the old army garrison. Directly behind it

was a small lean-to used as the jail. The town of Cascades remained the county seat until April, 1890. One night the records were stolen and transported over the portage railroad to Stevenson which since then has remained the county seat. A great deal of furor was created over the incident, but the culprits were never apprehended.

This then is what we found, a town that no longer exists except in the memories of pioneers or as a name on early-day maps. However, the region wherein it was built figured extensively in the Indian war of 1856, and the relics that we have found will be turned over to the Stevenson Historical Museum when it is completed.

There is one thing, though, that I shall retain, and this is the kerosene reservoir. This I have made into a lamp to remind me over the years of the many enjoyable weekends we spent searching for the lost garrison of the Cascades.



**Cascade Railroad Co.'s office at the Lower Landing on Hamilton Island.**

**(Oregon Historical Society Negative OrHi 38502.  
(Photo by C. E. Watkins, 1867.)**