



## John Mullan, William H. Wallace, and Idaho's Territorial Boundaries

Had John Mullan had his way, northern Idaho would be part of Washington. Instead, the United States Senate approved an alternate version created by William H. Wallace and on March 4, 1863, the House agreed with the Wallace version. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Idaho territorial act with the Wallace boundaries on the same day. That version influenced the shape of Idaho as we know it today.

In the winter of 1862-63, Lieutenant John Mullan had just returned from the West, where he had successfully supervised completion of the first engineered highway in the Northwest, the Mullan Road, stretching for 625 miles from Walla Walla to Fort Benton—today traced by Interstate 90 in Idaho. But he really wanted to get back to the West, as governor of a new territory being considered in Congress that session, one that would be named Idaho.

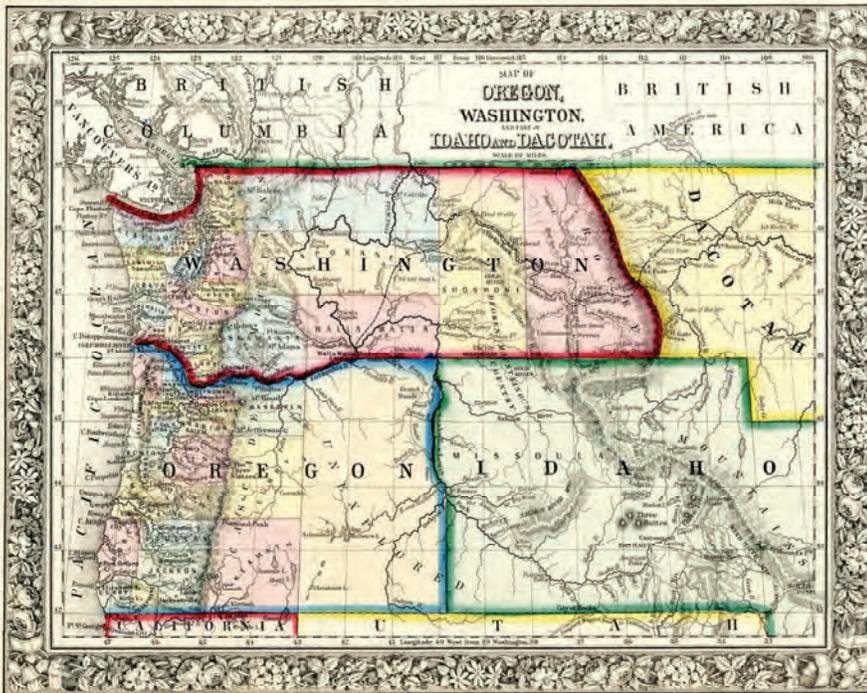


*Lieutenant John Mullan*

In 1863, Representative James Ashley of Ohio sought out Mullan's assistance in drawing Idaho's boundaries. To understand the map Mullan drew at Ashley's request, you have to know something about the politics of the Northwest in the 1860s.

Since the time it became a territory in 1853, Washington's population base centered in Puget Sound. Having a capitol in Olympia suited those residents just fine. With the discovery of gold in the early 1860s in what became Idaho—but was then part of Washington—the territory's population base moved further east. Suddenly, Walla Walla proved a more geographically centered for a capital than Olympia, and it boldly staked a claim.

John Mullan knew Walla Walla; his road started there; he owned property there. He fulfilled Walla Walla's wishes by drawing a boundary for Washington that included the Idaho panhandle, conveniently making Walla Walla much more central in the newly defined territory. The land south of the Salmon River would become Idaho and northern Idaho would be part of Washington. That came very close to happening when the House of Representatives approved the Mullan boundaries in February 1863.



*Mullan's Map— 1863*

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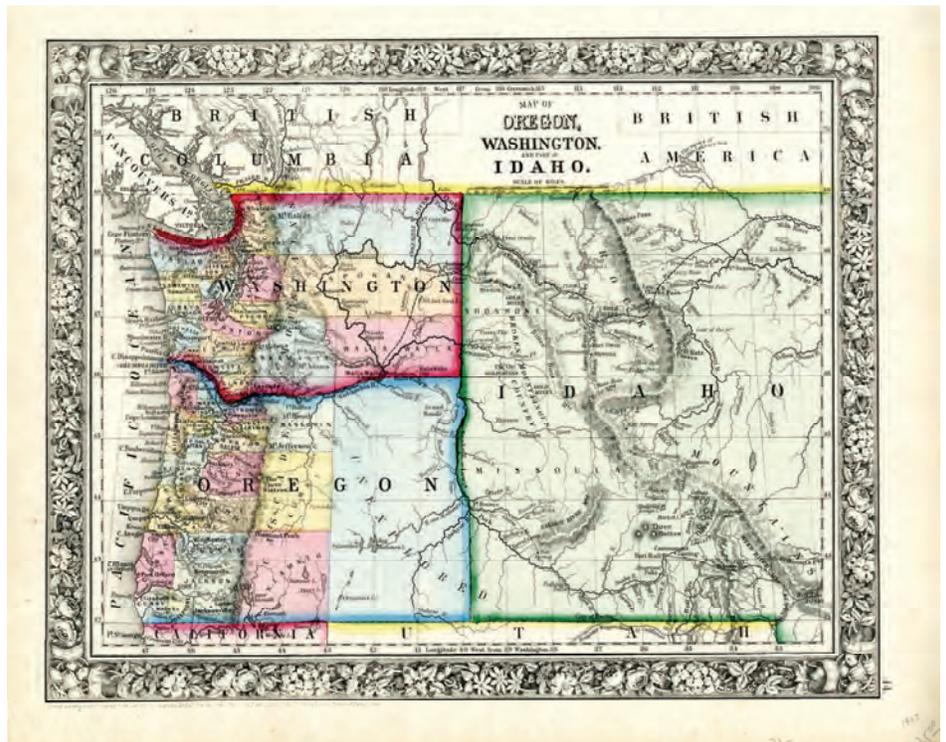
At the same time, William H. Wallace, Washington’s territorial delegate to Congress, was quietly working with the Senate on a map with very different boundaries. Wallace was a political rival of John Mullan and a resident of Puget Sound. He recognized that new boundaries along the lines Mullan drew would all but assure the capitol’s move to Walla Walla from Olympia.



*William H. Wallace*

Wallace’s bill passed the Senate late on the last night of the 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, gave Washington its current boundaries, and retained Olympia. It also created a huge new territory called “Idaho” that included not only all of present-day Idaho, but also Montana and virtually all of Wyoming.

Over the vigorous protests of Ashley, the House approved the Senate version of the boundary, allowing Congress to adjourn well after midnight on March 4, 1863. Later that day, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Idaho territorial bill—with the boundaries drawn by William Wallace.



*Wallace’s Map — 1863*

Wallace had outmaneuvered Mullan. Mullan hoped to become governor of the new Idaho territory, and despite the fact that he and President Lincoln were of opposing political parties, he might have won that post had his boundary proposal passed. Mullan was willing to concede the panhandle to Washington. His vision for Idaho had been a territory Mullan knew much better than Wallace. Mullan would stake his claim to become governor based on that knowledge.

Still, on the very day that Lincoln signed the bill creating Idaho, Mullan wrote the president, seeking the position. An impressive number of politicians supported his appointment.

But, having lost the fight over political boundaries, Mullan entered the contest for governor as a wounded candidate. As the boundaries were drawn, William Wallace had a significant number of supporters in what became Idaho.

But Wallace also submitted his application to become the first territorial governor of Idaho, with an equally impressive list of supporters. And Wallace had the strongest advantage of all: he knew the president and they were in the same political party. On March 10, 1863, Lincoln appointed him as Idaho’s first territorial governor.