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Federal Road Construction (F. W. Lander And James H. Simpson) That Affected Emigrant Traffic Past City Of Rocks

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Major improvements for Oregon and California Trail routes came with substantial federal construction projects that affected City of Rocks, which became a primary division point in F. W. Lander's Fort Keary, South Pass, and Honey Lake wagon road. One section was built from South Pass west over a new, more direct northern route to Blackfoot River and Fort Hall. West of Fort Hall, local improvements provided slightly better access to City of Rocks. Another section was constructed or improved from Honey Lake (a California terminal) to City of Rocks. Aside from digging out a superior grade directly below Granite Pass, not much work was required to reach City of Rocks from that western approach. Completed in time to serve emigrant traffic in 1859, Lander's Road attracted about 13,000 wagons that year. City of Rocks thus retained its importance at a time when travel by Salt Lake had been disrupted by Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston's notable Utah expedition.¹

Yet another federal military road, however, offered an option that could divert California Trail traffic away from City of Rocks. Johnston arranged to have Lansford W. Hastings' unsuccessful route west of Salt Lake improved and made practical for wagon traffic. Some variants in that potential trail were essential, and in 1859 James H. Simpson managed to survey and develop that possibility in time to serve traffic in 1860. A year later, Simpson's Road served as a notable Pony Express route to California.² Since Absolom Woodward and George Chorpensing had already noticed that a Granite Pass road could not serve winter postal and express carriers, that Salt Lake option did not deprive City of Rocks of activities that could not have been routed there anyway. Any further emigrant wagon traffic from Salt Lake to California no longer would come by City of Rocks and Granite Pass, but Lander's Road gave City of Rocks an advantage over Fort Bridger and Salt Lake.



Then a gold rush to Boise Basin commenced in 1862, attracting heavy wagon traffic from Salt Lake via City of Rocks on a scale that compensated for loss of other service. By 1860, a new era had begun, but City of Rocks was not deserted.

ENDNOTES

¹W. T. Jackson, *Wagon Roads West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 193-196, 208-210, 214.

²*Ibid.*, 149-152.