

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

## OREGON AND IDAHO EMIGRANT ROAD ALTERNATES THAT CAME BY CITY OF ROCKS

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Several problems with Willamette Valley access confronted Oregon Trail emigrants, particularly prior to 1846. Getting across Oregon's Blue Mountain segment could prove difficult. Then after emigrant wagons reached The Dalles, their road came to a halt. Until 1846, emigrants had to build rafts there for a Columbia River float trip made extra difficult in some stretches of cascades eventually surmounted by Bonneville Dam. Even when Sam Barlow established a bypass toll road around Mount Hood in 1846, his option posed severe problems for travelers with wagons.

So in 1846, Jesse and Lindsay Applegate opened an Oregon emigrant road that followed Joseph R. Chiles' California Trail route past City of Rocks and Granite Pass. Using as far west as a Humboldt River junction near later Winnemucca, they identified a potential road northwest to Upper Willamette Valley. Their road had a severe barrier in High Rock Canyon, but even that was less formidable than Columbia River obstacles west of The Dalles.<sup>1</sup>

Promoting their new road at Fort Hall in 1846, they gained considerable help from Richard Grant, who managed that Hudson's Bay Company post.<sup>2</sup> Grant always had felt that trying to take wagons over anything close to his fur trade route to Fort Vancouver was absurd. (He knew that a number of stretches of his supply trail to Fort Vancouver were completely impassable for wagons, and while variants could be employed for some portions, he still showed concern for serious difficulties. Initial wagon drivers in some of those places concluded that he was correct.) So from 1846 on, an Applegate Road to western Oregon came by City of Rocks.

After 1862, when a Boise Basin gold rush attracted wagons that came from Utah, an Oregon Trail option from Salt Lake to City of Rocks and Lyman Pass to later Oakley and Rock Creek also served emigrant and freight wagons. This route gained prominence after 1869 as a road from Kelton to Boise. Most of its traffic came from its rail connection at Kelton, Utah.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mildred Baker Burcham, "Scott's and Applegate's Old South Road," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (December 1940), 41:416-420.

<sup>2</sup>*Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City), June 25, 1846. Jesse Applegate left a notice, August 10, 1846, that Grant used to show Oregon-bound emigrants that they would do better to use his new route.

(This information has not been edited.)

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