

## PROPOSED WAGON ROAD TO OREGON

One of the first, if not the first, suggestions of the feasibility of a wagon road from Missouri to the Pacific Northwest was made in an article which appeared in the *Missouri Gazette* late in the spring of 1813. The article was based upon an interview which the editor had with a party of men who had returned overland from Astoria with dispatches for John Jacob Astor. *Niles's Register*, vol. iv, p. 265 *et seq.* (June 26, 1813), reprinted the article, and it is from this version that the following extract is taken:<sup>1</sup>

"On the 29th [28th of] June, 1812, Mr. Robert Stewart, one of the partners of the Pacific Fur Company, with two Frenchmen, Messrs. Ramsey Crooks and Robert M'Clellan, left the Pacific Ocean with dispatches for New York. \* \* \*

"By information received from these gentlemen, it appears that a journey across the continent of North America might be performed with a waggon, there being no obstruction in the wheel rout [whole route] that any person would dare to call a mountain, in addition to its being much the most direct and short one to go from this place to the mouth of the Columbia river. Any future party who may undertake the journey, and are tolerably acquainted with the different places, where it would be necessary to lay up a small stock of provisions, would not be impeded, as in all probability they would not meet with an Indian to interrupt their progress; although on the other route more north there are almost insurmountable barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> This article has also been reproduced in full from the *Missouri Gazette* in Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, v, p. 224 *et seq.* The brackets which have been inserted above correct the article in accordance with the Thwaites reprint, it being supposed that the discrepancies between it and the *Niles Register* reprint were due to typographical errors.

Gabriel Franchere, *Franchere's Narrative*, in Thwaites, *op. cit.*, vi, p. 277, tells of the departure of this group from Astoria in the following words: "The necessary papers having been prepared anew [party which had set out previously was attacked by Indians and the papers were stolen], and being now ready to expedite, were confided to Mr. R. Stuart, who was to cross the continent in company with Messrs. Crooks and R. M'Lellan, partners dissatisfied with the enterprise, and who had made up their minds to return to the United States." In company with other parties bound for posts in the interior (Okanogan, Spokane and the Snake River region), Franchere continues, the flotilla quitted Astoria on June 30, having on board sixty-two. Alexander Ross, *Oregon Settlers*, p. 195, in Thwaites, *op. cit.*, vii, says that the party left Astoria on June 29, as does Ross Cox, *Adventures on the Columbia*, vol. I, p. 118.

July 29 the party arrived at Walla Walla. Two days later the transcontinental party, consisting of Mr. Stuart, Benjamin Jones, Andre Vallar, Francis Le Clerc, and Mr. Crooks and Mr. M'Lellan, set out for Missouri where they arrived safely, after enduring many hardships, on April 30, 1813.—Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 198, 228.

The *Missouri Gazette*, in which the foregoing article was first published, was the progenitor of the *St. Louis Republic* and the earliest newspaper published west of the Mississippi. The first issue appeared in 1808.—Thwaites, *op. cit.*, v, page 198, note.