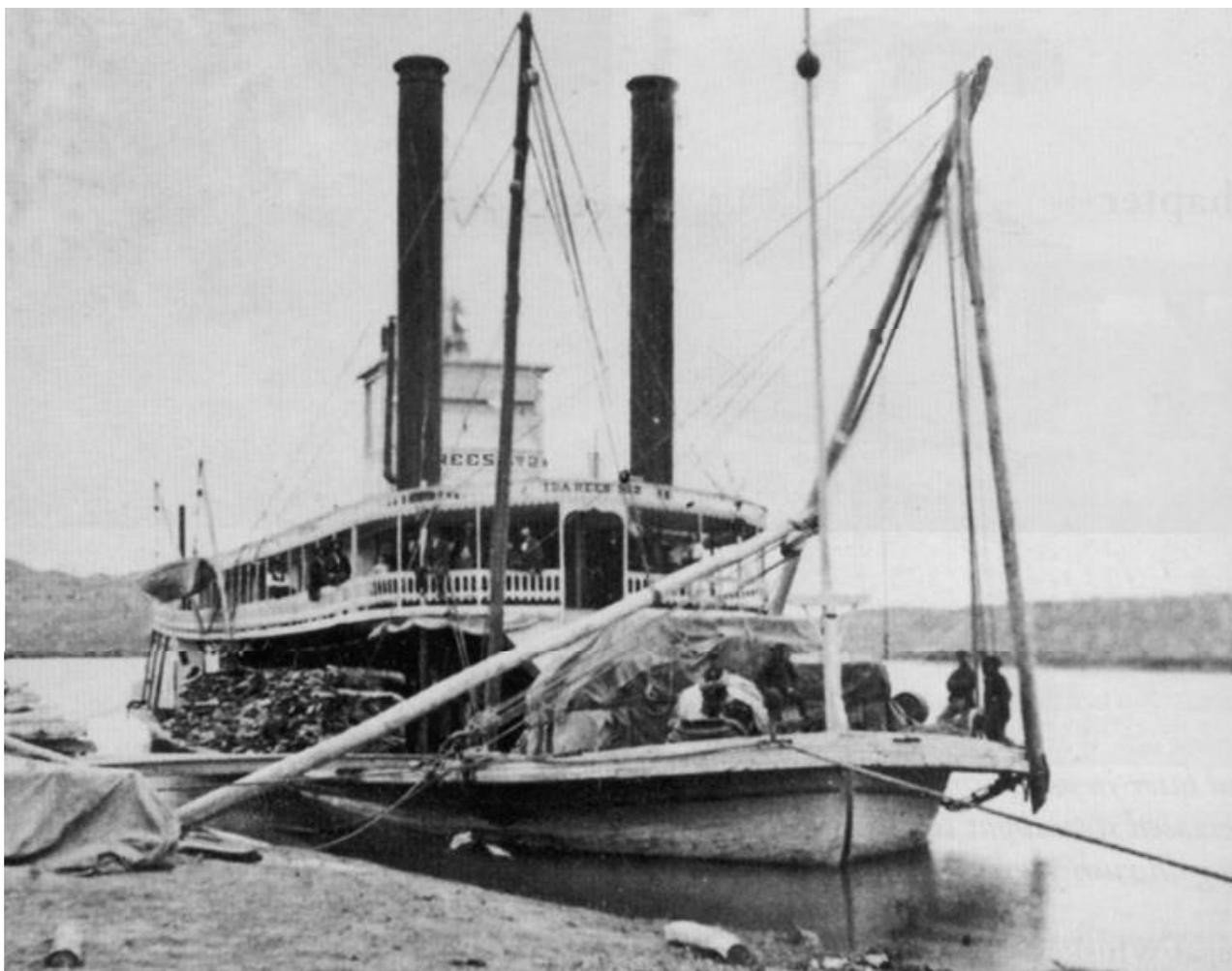


FORT BENTON

The End of the Road—Or the Beginning



The steamboat "Ida Rees No. 2" unloading freight at Fort Benton levee, c. 1869-71 SOURCE: Lepley, *Packets to Paradise*,

On August 1, 1860, Mullan and his crew arrived at Fort Benton on the Missouri River. The first steamship to reach Fort Benton had arrived on July 2, delivering 300 federal troops with four months' supplies from St. Louis, in preparation for the trip to Walla Walla on the Mullan Road to join companies stationed in Eastern Oregon and Washington.

Lt. Mullan was pleased that the first planned use of his historic Road would have the benefit of subduing what he saw as “the turbulent disposition of the Indians, transforming, while en route, recruits into soldiers, affording protection to the emigrant, security to the pioneer settler and tiller of the soil, and giving a practical test of the value of a route, which from the days of Jefferson, who initiated the project of opening a north Pacific communication, has had zealous friends and advocates.”

Turning over his wagons to the new recruits, Mullan and his party began the return to Walla Walla on August 5 with their equipment on pack animals. Making repairs to the road as needed, the Mullan party completed their journey home by early October, just after the arrival of the recruits.

Following the initial construction of the road in 1859-60, on May 13, 1861, Mullan set off again from Walla Walla to Fort Benton to make repairs and alterations to the Road. This work included a new crossing of the Snake River at the mouth of the Palouse where Lyons ferry had begun operating, and also a new route across the Spokane River and north around Lake Coeur d'Alene to avoid the wet and mucky character of the southern route. The crew also built bridges and made minor route changes in order to eliminate many required fordings of streams.

Mullan and his crew arrived at Fort Benton on June 8, 1862, and left for their return to Walla Walla on June 12, again performing repairs, minor rerouting, bridge replacement before completing their journey and their final road work in late August. They learned en route to their satisfaction that four steamers had arrived at Fort Benton since their departure with three hundred and sixty-four emigrants from St. Louis headed for Walla Walla and other points along the Road.