

Mr. Budd's Historical Expeditions

RANDAL O'TOOLE

IN 1925 AND 1926, the Great Northern Railway sponsored two trips unlike any rail tours before or since. In preparation, the railway erected six historic monuments that remain to this day, commissioned numerous papers on the history of the Northwest, convinced the U.S. Post Office to rename several places so as to reflect their history, and invited prominent historians, state governors, a former chief of staff of the U.S. Army, and a U.S. Supreme Court justice to give talks at various points along the way.

These tours were the brainchild of Great Northern president Ralph Budd. An Iowa farm boy who received his degree in civil engineering at the age of 19, Budd was a self-made intellectual with deep interests in history, literature, art, and technology, all of which he brought together for the railway's two historical expeditions.¹

Budd probably conceived the idea for the expeditions during a 1924 trip he and Great Northern chairman Louis Hill hosted for 29 eastern

newspaper publishers and writers. Though the ostensible purpose was to study agricultural conditions, the group passed the Chief Joseph Battlefield in Montana and spent time in Glacier National Park and Seaside, Oregon, giving Budd the opportunity to point out numerous historic sites along the way.²

While Glacier and Seaside offered unforgettable scenery, Budd realized that many travelers thought the Great Plains between Minneapolis and the Rocky Mountains had "nothing worth while looking at. . . . It would be quite an accomplishment if we could let the transcontinental traveler know that almost every inch of the way there is something that keeps the country from being dreary and uninteresting,"

he said. "The country distinctly has a past and a great many stirring things happened many years before what we call our present civilization came here at all."³ This was Budd's vision for the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition that would go from St. Paul to Glacier Park in July 1925, stopping at a wide variety of historic sites along the way.

Budd's objective, at least in part, was to attract passengers to his railroad. Competitor Northern Pacific had advertised at least since 1922 that it most closely followed the route "explored by Lewis & Clark in 1804-6." After its expeditions, Great Northern responded by featuring the monuments it had built, as well as other historic sites along its route, in its advertising.⁴

At the same time, Budd was projecting his own interests on the rail-



RANDAL O'TOOLE is a transportation policy analyst from Oregon. He has scanned and posted many of the documents from Great Northern's historical expeditions on his website, streamlinermemories.info.

ABOVE: Engineer, businessman, and intellectual Ralph Budd in his study, St. Paul, about 1930

"It would be quite an accomplishment if we could let the transcontinental traveler know that almost every inch of the way there is something that keeps the country from being dreary and uninteresting,"

road and its customers. A longtime member of the Minnesota Historical Society and other states' historical societies, he would sometimes call his historian friends and ask questions such as "Who was the first white man to see Montana's Flathead Lake?"⁵ These queries led to flurries of research that occasionally ended with publication in historical journals.

The Upper Missouri Expedition visited six major sites between July 16 and July 21, 1925: Fort Snelling, near St. Paul, sited by Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike in 1805; the tiny town of Falsen, North Dakota, where the French explorer Pierre Gaultier

de la Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye spent Christmas in 1738, as did British explorer David Thompson in 1797; Mondak, on the Montana-North Dakota border, site of Fort Union, the chief trading post for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company for four decades;⁶ the Chief Joseph Battlefield, located a few miles south of

the Great Northern line near Havre, Montana; Camp Disappointment, about 12 miles northeast of Browning, Montana, the northernmost point reached by a party of the Lewis and Clark Expedition; and Marias Pass, the lowest-elevation pass across the Rocky Mountains in the United States, which had been located for the Great Northern by engineer John F. Stevens in 1889.

To help explain the historic significance of each of these sites, the Great Northern published six elegant booklets: *An Important Visit: Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 1805*; *The Verendrye Overland Quest of the Pacific*; *Fort Union and Its Neighbors on the Upper Missouri*; *Chief Joseph's Own Story*; *A Glance at the Lewis and Clark Expedition*; and *The Discovery of Marias Pass*. In addition to giving copies to expedition members, the railroad provided them as reading material in its first-class lounges for several years afterward.

Grace Flandrau, author of three of these booklets, was previously known only for her fiction. Born and raised in the same St. Paul neighborhood as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Flandrau wrote satirical critiques of high society, much like Fitzgerald did. Her 1923 novel, *Being Respectable*, was a national

Dedicating the Astoria (Oregon) Column, the climax of the Great Northern's Columbia River Historical Expedition, July 1926. The spiral painting of Columbia River history on the monument's exterior was completed in October.



bestseller that Fitzgerald said was “better than Babbitt.” Yet after it was published, Flandrau fretted, “I’ve shot my wad.”⁷

Budd and Louis Hill came to her rescue, offering a free pass on Great Northern trains to visit historic sites, use of the caretaker’s cabin on Hill’s ranch near Glacier Park for writing, and \$100 a month (more than \$1,300 today) to write about the region. Intrigued by the opportunity to work with “the delectable and so fabulously intelligent Mr. Budd,” Flandrau eventually authored 11 booklets for the railway, most of them related to the historical expeditions, and went on to a new career in nonfiction books and magazine articles.

TO DESIGN the monuments that would be dedicated during the expeditions of 1925 and 1926, Budd hired New York architect Electus D. Litchfield, whom he had met a decade before when the architect designed the St. Paul Public Library and the connecting James J. Hill Reference Library. The Italian Renaissance Revival style Litchfield used for the libraries provided a hint to the historic forms he would employ for most of these monuments.⁸

For the first one, in what became Verendrye, North Dakota, Litchfield was more creative. To represent David Thompson’s role as a geographer, he designed a granite globe, five feet in diameter, scored with longitude and latitude lines, and resting on a large granite slab. This imposing memorial would greet expedition members as they got off the train.⁹ Litchfield’s design for most of the other monuments was less inspired; for example, a simple obelisk similar to (but smaller than) the Washington Monument marked the spot near Camp Disappointment, Montana, visited by part of the Lewis and Clark expedition.



Author Grace Flandrau, St. Paul, about 1910

Budd also lined up a long list of distinguished speakers, most of them historians, to lecture at various stops along the route, and he persuaded the state historical societies of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana to cosponsor the programs. In June 1925, the railway sent elaborate invitations to 5,000 historians, politicians, writers, artists, and other notables. Probably due to the short notice, only about 75 people accepted the invitations.¹⁰

A brochure about the expedition indicates that the round-trip fare from St. Paul to Glacier Park was \$47.70, plus \$12.75 for a berth in a Pullman sleeper. This was the normal cost of travel to Glacier Park, even though the expedition would entail four nights on the train—two more than the usual trip on the *Oriental Limited*. Expedition members would also have to pay for three nights in the Glacier Park Lodge at rates starting at \$6.50 per night (including three meals), as well as several meals on the train. In all, a traveler could join the expedition for as little as \$90—about \$1,250 in today’s money—though most probably spent more to get private baths at the hotel, drinks, and other amenities.¹¹

THE EXPEDITION BEGAN July 16 with a luncheon Budd hosted at the exclusive Somerset Club near St. Paul. Participants then took a tour of Fort Snelling, where the railway gave them copies of *An Important Visit*, its booklet about Pike’s 1805 expedition to what became Minnesota, which included some of Pike’s notes about the Fort Snelling region, comments by historian Elliott Coues, and excerpts from Pike’s treaty with the Dakota Indians to acquire the land. After the tour, the group went to St. Paul’s new Union Depot to board the *Upper Missouri Special*, which included Pullman cars, a diner, and a special library car featuring books on Northwest history.

The next morning, the train arrived in Falsen, a central North Dakota town of about 75 people. Budd had persuaded the Post Office to rename it Verendrye after the French explorer and his two sons, the first Europeans to enter the Dakotas (1738).¹² As the Great Northern Employees’ Band of Minot played, expedition members got off the train to find Litchfield’s granite globe dedicated to Thompson, who had explored the region for the British in 1797 and 1798. Coincidentally, Thompson and the Verendryes had each spent Christmas, 59 years apart, practically within sight of this location.

The ten-ton monument rested on a piece of railroad right-of-way that Budd conveyed to the governor of North Dakota. After that ceremony, the gathering heard lectures on La Vérendrye by Canadian historian Lawrence Burpee and on Thompson by Washington State historian T. C. Elliott. Expedition members could also read the Great Northern booklet *The Verendrye Overland Quest of the Pacific*, which contained a translation of part of the explorer’s journals and a 15-page essay by Grace Flandrau.¹³ Each also received a replica of the



Invitation, blank and unsent, from the Great Northern Railway's copious documentary files, 1925

lead tablet the Vérendryes had buried near what is now Pierre, South Dakota, to claim the territory for France. (Schoolchildren discovered the original plate in 1913.) After a picnic lunch, the expedition continued on to Minot, North Dakota, where participants enjoyed a banquet and talks by South Dakota state historian Doane Robinson, then promoting his idea

for the Mt. Rushmore monument, and several other historians.

The next morning, the train arrived at the site of Fort Union, the American Fur Company's main trading post from about 1828 to 1867. The fort had been replaced by a town called Mondak, but the Great Northern persuaded the Post Office to rename it Fort Union. Budd toyed with

the idea of rebuilding the original fort but decided the cost was too great. Instead, the Great Northern erected a flagpole near the location of the original fort's flagpole. The railway also gave its travelers a copy of its booklet *Fort Union and Its Neighbors on the Upper Missouri*.¹⁴

To entertain passengers, the railway arranged an Indian Congress—a gathering of 400 members of 11 tribes: Arikara, Assiniboines, Blackfeet, Blood, Ojibwe, Crow, Gros Ventres, Hidatsa, Mandan, Piegan, and Dakota. This was the first meeting of the different tribes since they had been herded onto reservations in the late-nineteenth century.

Budd brought this group together over the objections of the eight U.S. Indian Field Service superintendents in the Dakotas and Montana, who stated that encouraging people “to show off their old time dances and customs in their old time finery” would interfere with the government’s “five-year program” to turn the Indians into farmers. Further, the superintendents argued that allowing “old time customs” was “absolutely inimical to the religious welfare of the Indian”—that is, the federal attempt to suppress Native religion and culture in favor of Christianity.¹⁵

Ignoring these concerns, the railway provided the Indians with food, horses, materials for building lodges, and other goods, such as Montana pipestone for making pipes. The Indians were reportedly happy to attend because it gave them a chance to engage in activities forbidden by Indian agents and to meet with friends and relatives from other reservations.¹⁶

Maj. Gen. Hugh L. Scott, a former U.S. Army Chief of Staff who had served at posts in Dakota Territory earlier in his career and was currently on the Board of Indian Commissioners, gave a speech in English and sign language.¹⁷ Six chiefs responded,

thanking the Great Northern but also imploring the audience to persuade the federal government to treat Indians fairly and abide by treaties—requests that largely fell on deaf ears, even though the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the chair of the House Committee on Indian Relations were there to listen and speak.

The Indians spent much of the day entertaining the crowds with a variety of dances, races, and competitions for such things as best old-time costume, best tribal dance, and best Indian lodge. These events attracted some 10,000 local residents, who drove to Fort Union in 3,000 automobiles.¹⁸

Budd could not have known it, but this gathering helped spur the American Indian movement of today. What the Great Northern viewed as entertainment and public education, the Indians saw as an act of defiance. Moreover, the gathering of people from so many tribes for the first time

To entertain passengers, the railway arranged an Indian Congress—a gathering of 400 members of 11 tribes. This was the first meeting of the different tribes since they had been herded onto reservations in the late-nineteenth century.

since 1898 created an opportunity to work together toward common aims.¹⁹

AFTER THE INDIAN Congress, the Upper Missouri Special journeyed overnight to Havre, Montana. From that point, expedition members made an auto trip to the site of the 1877 Battle of Bear Paw, between the Nez Perce and the U.S. Army, about 15 miles south of the Great Northern line. This battle ended one of the most dramatic epics in the Old West, in which a band of

about 800 peaceful Indians, led by Chief Joseph, resisted removal to a reservation by fleeing their homes in northeastern Oregon, traveling nearly 1,200 miles. After their capture, the army, under the command of Gen. Nelson A. Miles, roughly relocated the surviving Nez Perce to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Joseph unsuccessfully appealed to be allowed

Fort Union Indian Congress, July 1925 (from left): Chiefs Owen Heavy Breast and Mountain Chief (both Blackfeet), Guiding Star (Miss Glacier Park, no tribe given), Maj. Gen. Hugh L. Scott, and Mrs. Scott



to return to Oregon in a moving statement published in the April 1879 issue of *North American Review*, one of the nation's leading monthly magazines.²⁰ The Great Northern distributed a reprint of Joseph's statement, retitled *Chief Joseph's Own Story*, to expedition members.

At the site, the group heard speeches by Maj. Gen. Scott, who had served on the periphery of the Nez Perce campaign (not in any of the major battles), and Charles Smith, one of the battle's participants under Gen. Miles, who urged Congress to designate the site a national monument. While Americans in 1925 respected Joseph for his courage and tragic experience, they had little sympathy for Indians in general. As Agnes C. Laut later wrote of the chief in her chronicle of the Upper Missouri Expedition, "It was as inevitable that he must be defeated as it was right that he should be."²¹

After the group returned to Havre, the train left for the small village of East Glacier Park, where expedition members settled into Glacier Park Lodge. The next morning, the *Upper Missouri Special* backtracked about 27 miles eastward to a rail station originally called Bombay, but which the Great Northern renamed Meriwether. Four miles north of this spot was Camp Disappointment, so called not because Meriwether Lewis failed to find Marias Pass over the Rocky Mountains (as Great Northern literature hinted) but because he was disappointed that the Marias River did not go farther north, allowing the United States to claim land up to the 50th parallel as part of the Louisiana Purchase. To commemorate this northernmost camp of the Lewis and Clark party, the Great Northern erected the obelisk designed by Litchfield next to its rail line. Inscribed on one side is "Furthest point west on Captain Lewis trip up the Marias River," implying,



with "west," that Lewis was trying to find Marias Pass.

As in Verendrye, the railway donated this land to the state; Montana's governor John Erickson was on hand to accept the donation. In addition to hearing noted historians lecture on the epic journey, expedition members could read Grace Flandrau's booklet *A Glance at the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, which the railway gave to all.

The next morning, the *Upper Missouri Special* traveled to the railway's summit at Marias Pass on the southern boundary of Glacier Park. Great Northern was proud of having the lowest-elevation route of any American railroad across the Rocky Mountains, and it credited this feat to engineer John F. Stevens, who located the pass on a freezing December day in 1889. Grace Flandrau dramatized the story in *The Discovery of Marias Pass*.

Litchfield had proposed to commemorate the site with an irregularly shaped sandstone block. Instead, Budd commissioned New York artist Gaetano Cecere to sculpt a larger-than-life statue of Stevens. Then just 31 years old, Cecere went on to pro-

duce sculptures for the U.S. Capitol, Smithsonian, and 1939 New York World's Fair.²²

People rarely erect statues to living persons, but Stevens was Ralph Budd's mentor and, in a real sense, Budd owed his current job to the senior engineer. The two had met in 1903 when Budd was a fledgling civil engineer working for the Rock Island Railroad and Stevens, 26 years older, became the Rock Island's chief engineer. Two years later, when Theodore Roosevelt asked Stevens to take over construction of the Panama Canal, he brought Budd along. While Stevens was fighting disease-spreading mosquitoes and deciding to build a high-level canal with locks instead of one at sea level, Budd oversaw reconstruction of the Panama Canal Railroad, which was essential to build and maintain the canal.²³

After leaving Panama, Stevens was hired by James J. Hill to finish construction of the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway. Stevens put Budd

to work building that road's subsidiary Oregon Trunk from the Columbia River to Bend and surveying a line from there to California. Impressed with Budd's abilities, Hill brought the young engineer to St. Paul to be his assistant. Shortly before he died in 1916, Hill told Great Northern board members that they should make Budd the railway's next president, which they did in 1919. Just 40 years old, he was the youngest railroad president at the time and one of the youngest in history.

Budd asked Supreme Court Justice Pierce Butler, who had built his early career working for James J. Hill, to give a speech presenting the statue. Butler noted that Stevens's location of Marias Pass "shortened the proposed line to the Coast by over one hundred miles, afforded far better alignment, much easier grades, and much less rise and fall."²⁴

After Stevens's grandson unveiled the statue, the engineer himself "graciously and gracefully" responded: "It is a common truism that corporations have no souls. But I think that you will all agree with me that one corporation has a soul, and that it is wonderfully shown here today, and besides soul, this one has lasting memory."²⁵ That soul, of course, belonged to Ralph Budd.

Following the dedication, western artist and expedition member Charles M. Russell hosted a reception at his cabin near Lake McDonald. After dinner at Lake McDonald Lodge and another night at Glacier Park Lodge, most participants boarded the train for St. Paul.²⁶

The Upper Missouri Expedition generated more than 1,200 favorable newspaper stories for the Great Northern.²⁷ Historian Agnes Laut wrote and Charles Russell illustrated a 271-page book, *The Blazed Trail of the Old Frontier: Being the Log of the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition*. Published in



The engineer himself: John F. Stevens at the unveiling of a larger-than-life statue of himself, Marias Pass, July 1925

1926, it was clearly prepared with the Great Northern's cooperation as, in addition to Laut's flowery prose, it contains significant excerpts from many of the lectures and speeches, as well as trip photos by railroad photographers and a fold-out map identical to the one in the expedition program.

EVEN BEFORE the 1925 journey ended, Great Northern officials were talking about a trip to "the old Oregon country" in 1926 and a "James J. Hill Memorial Expedition" in 1927. On the very morning of his return from Glacier Park, Budd outlined to his staff a plan for the 1926 expedition from Chicago to the Oregon coast.²⁸

For this trip, Budd had Litchfield design three more monuments. He also persuaded the Franco-American Chapter of the American Good Will Society to sponsor oratorical contests on "The French Pioneers in America" for high-school students across the nation. The 39 winners, plus five students who won similar contests in France, would be expedition guests.²⁹

Grace Flandrau produced five new booklets for 1926: *Red River Trails*; *Frontier Days Along the Upper Missouri*; *Koo-koo-sint the Star Man* (about David Thompson); *Historic Northwest Adventureland*; and *Astor and the Oregon Country*. She also added several pages to 1925's *A Glimpse at the Lewis and Clark Expedition*; the booklet was reissued as *The Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

Budd asked Minnesota Historical Society museum curator Willoughby Babcock to turn a Great Northern baggage car into a museum car. The result housed a diorama showing a fur trapper's camp, including a cabin with fireplace, balsam-bough bed, traps, and furs. A mannequin wearing buckskins stood outside by a canoe, bullboat, and dogsled. The car also showcased mementoes of Native Americans, trappers, pioneers, and cowboys. Close to 12,000 people toured the rolling museum when it was opened to the public at stops along the way.³⁰

Invitations specified that the 13-day trip, including all meals, hotels, transportation, and a lower berth in a Pullman car, would cost \$290

(nearly \$4,000 today). Including the students and lecturers, the expedition attracted about 160 participants, enough so that the *Columbia River Special* was divided into two trains for most of the journey. Paying members ranged from a Bemidji schoolteacher to Charles S. Pillsbury, president of Pillsbury Flour Mills Company.

Except for Fort Union, the Columbia River Historical Expedition itinerary was almost completely different from the 1925 trip; the main sites were Chicago, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Great Falls, Montana, Bonners Ferry, Idaho, Spokane and Wishram, Washington, and Seaside and Astoria, Oregon. Though the trip ended with a stay at Glacier Park, the train passed the Camp Disappointment obelisk at night and barely slowed down as it went by the Thompson and Stevens monuments.

THE EXPEDITION started in Chicago on the morning of July 15. Echoing the subject of the students' oratory, Chicago Historical Society librarian Caroline McIlvaine gave a lecture about French pioneers in Illinois. The group visited the Chicago Art Institute, Field Museum, and Lincoln Park before boarding a train at Union Station. An overnight trip brought the expedition to St. Paul, where travelers spent a brief two hours at the Minnesota Historical Society and a few other points of interest before hastening on to North Dakota.³¹

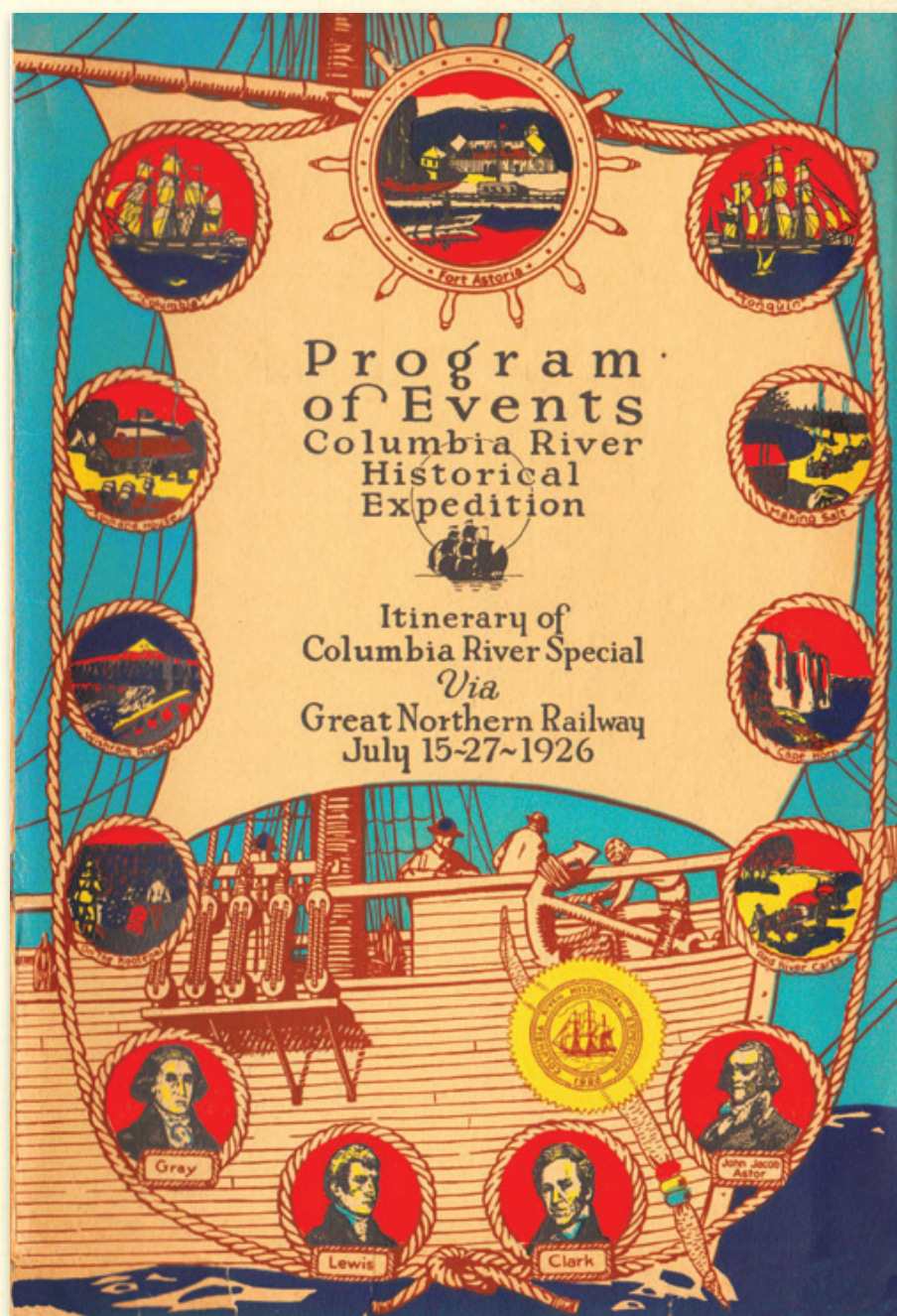
The real excitement began at Grand Forks, where the Great Northern staged a pageant of transportation history featuring Indian travois, Red River ox carts, and the railway's oldest locomotive, the *William Crooks*, with two historic passenger cars looking tiny next to the 1926 train. Potter Margaret Cable showed ceramics made from North Dakota clays and

gave each expedition member a hand-cast replica of the Astor medal, which American Fur Company employees had given to Indians as a token of friendship.

That evening, participants enjoyed a salmon banquet followed by several lectures on the history of the Red River Valley, famed for the grain production that was critical to the Great Northern's success. Using the latest technology, aging Canadian historian Charles N. Bell talked about his early

days in the region via radio from his home in Winnipeg.³² He was followed by one of the French students speaking on "The French in the Heart of America."

An overnight trip across North Dakota brought the group to Fort Union for a second Indian Congress. Members of the Cheyenne tribe joined the 11 others that had participated in 1925. After celebrations, ceremonies, and competitions similar to those of the year before, the trains



continued to Fort Benton, where the expedition spent a morning with the Society of Montana Pioneers before riding 42 miles to Great Falls for the afternoon. There, the travelers viewed waterfalls and other sights once seen by Lewis and Clark.

Passing Glacier Park at night, the *Columbia River Special* arrived in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, to dedicate a monument to the explorers who first crossed that region. The names on the monument include Americans as well as some curious choices: French Canadians who migrated to Oregon in 1839–41, partly with the goal of securing the territory for Britain, and Henry Warre and Merwin Vavasour, who were essentially British spies seeking the best ways to invade and capture the Oregon country from the United States.³³

Next, the expedition proceeded to Spokane, where participants took a trip to Mount Spokane, heard lectures about missionaries and fur traders, and enjoyed a picnic supper. An overnight train ride put them in the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway town of Fallsbridge, Washington, on the Columbia River. To mark the occasion, Budd renamed the town Wishram after an Indian village formerly nearby (generating a minor controversy among Indians who feared that relocating the name would change their treaty rights).³⁴ Participants dedicated a monument “To the memory of those dauntless pathfinders and pioneers who followed the great thoroughfare of the Columbia at this place.” Designed by Litchfield, the memorial consisted of several columns of basalt mined from a nearby cliff and a plaque listing 43 people who journeyed down the Columbia between 1805 and 1841.³⁵

From Wishram, expedition members could gaze across the river and see the Oregon Trunk Railway. Ralph Budd had overseen its construction

up the Deschutes River 15 years before, and he probably pointed this out with special pride to another budding engineer, his son John, an 18-year-old student at Yale.³⁶

After an auto tour from Portland to Multnomah Falls on Oregon’s new Columbia River Highway, the group reboarded the trains for a trip over the Spokane, Portland & Seattle line to the Oregon coast and the Seaside Hotel, built by stagecoach magnate Ben Holladay in the early 1870s. The next morning, the travelers walked a short distance from the Holladay train station to the beach where members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition had spent the winter of 1805–06 tending fires that boiled seawater to make salt. To help protect the site, the Great Northern paid for an ironwork fence around the salt works.

Oregon Historical Society president Frederick Holman spoke about Lewis’s and Clark’s experiences on the Oregon coast, and then the party split up for the rest of the day, with some members enjoying the beach in Seaside and others playing golf or attending Astoria’s Spirit of the West

parade. After a round of golf, Budd, Holman, and several others visited the site of Lewis’s and Clark’s Fort Clatsop, about 15 miles from Seaside. On behalf of the expedition, Budd had donated the funds to install a 90-foot flagpole and brass marker there. After dedicating this marker, the party traveled to Astoria for the night.

The climax of the Columbia River Expedition was July 22, when the group spent the morning dedicating the grandest monument yet, the only one not immediately adjacent to a rail right-of-way. Standing 125 feet tall on Coxcomb Hill high above the city, the Astoria Column has a 164-stair spiral staircase inside leading to a viewing platform near the top. Litchfield modeled the structure after Trajan’s Column in Rome. On the exterior is a spiral painting portraying the history of the Columbia by Attilio Pusterla, an Italian artist who immigrated to the United States in about 1900 and also did frescoes in the U.S. and Canadian capitol buildings.³⁷

Travelers and residents dedicating the Bonners Ferry monument, July 1926



Despite the positive publicity the expeditions had generated, the Great Northern decided not to run a third one.

A. Guthrie, the St. Paul construction company that was digging Great Northern's 7.9-mile Cascade Tunnel, built the column at a cost of \$27,000 (about \$360,000 today). This was more than the Great Northern was willing to spend, but the railway's largest shareholder at the time happened to be John Jacob Astor's great-grandson, Vincent, whom Budd persuaded to contribute most of the cost.

The city of 10,000 residents devoted three days to celebrating its new monument, and more than 8,000 people attended the dedication. Among the lecturers on the occasion was Margaret Aldrich, one of Astor's great-great-granddaughters, who told family stories about the man responsible for founding Astoria. The expedition then returned east as far as Longview, Washington, where its members helped dedicate a new bridge across the Cowlitz River. In the spirit of the expedition, Longview named the structure Pioneer Bridge.

After touring what was then the world's largest sawmill, the group returned overnight to Spokane and helped dedicate a monument to the 1858 Battle of Spokane Plains. This memorial, inspired by the Great Northern monuments, was built by the Washington Historical Society. On behalf of the railway, Budd contributed \$100 and a piece of right-of-way to the project.³⁸ More than 1,500 people attended the dedication, including numerous Native Americans who smoked a peace pipe with returned traveler Maj. Gen. Scott.

Expedition members then enjoyed another Indian meeting, this one sponsored by Spokane, whose mayor

had organized the city's first such event in October 1925, modeled on the Great Northern's Fort Union gathering. It proved so successful that 1926's convocation was timed to coincide with the Columbia River Expedition. Afterward, the travelers spent another night on the train before touring Glacier Park for two days. Then they returned east, reaching Chicago on July 27.

A 1927 JAMES J. HILL Memorial Expedition might have visited Duluth, Winnipeg, and Seattle, key parts of Hill's empire not included in the previous trips. Yet, despite the positive publicity the expeditions had generated, the Great Northern decided not to run a third one. A month before the Columbia River Expedition began, Budd wrote Grace Flandrau, warning, "It appears that crops through the Northwest may be poorer than the average," forcing the railway to "economize in the research work which we have undertaken in the past two or three years." In short, he terminated her contract. In place of an expedition, the railway sent the *William Crooks* and a number of Blackfeet Indians to the Baltimore & Ohio Centenary Fair, held in Maryland during September and October 1927.³⁹

Contrary to Budd's letter, Great Northern freight revenues grew every year from 1924 to 1929, but passenger revenues stagnated.⁴⁰ Though the railway tried to capitalize on its historic expeditions by featuring adventure and history in its advertising, any hopes that the trips would increase passenger business were doomed to disappointment in the face of

growing auto ownership. Various historical societies published many of the Columbia River lectures, but the railway did not attempt to have a second book, similar to *Blazed Trail*, published.

What remains are the monuments. "If it should so happen that the Great Northern Railway did not inspire the printing of another page of history," wrote University of Washington historian Edmond S. Meany, "an indelible record has already been made by the rearing of those permanent monuments and by the publication of the programs of the dedication ceremonies."⁴¹

Verendrye is a ghost town today, but the Thompson monument is in good condition, cared for by historical groups. Fort Union is now a national historic site managed by the National Park Service; the railway's flagpole has been replaced by a 1980s reconstruction of much of the original trading post, just as Budd had dreamed of doing. The Chief Joseph Battlefield became a part of Nez Perce National Historic Park in 1965.

The Camp Disappointment obelisk has been vandalized, but the statue of John F. Stevens at Marias Pass stands proudly next to the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Obelisk that Congress commissioned in 1931. The monuments at Bonners Ferry, Spokane Plains, and Wishram remain in good shape but are seen by few people.

The iron fence around the Lewis and Clark salt cairn survives, but the Fort Clatsop flagpole was removed in 1955, when local residents built a replica fort to commemorate the Lewis and Clark sesquicentennial; the National Park Service now manages the site. The Pioneer Bridge across the Cowlitz River in Longview, Washington, did not survive even as long as the flagpoles: a flood washed it out in 1933.

"It is education, it is travel, it is conversation and good fellowship. It is a new art and more than an art."

By far the most popular of the expedition monuments is the Astoria Column, which receives some 400,000 visitors a year. In recent decades, the Friends of the Astoria Column spent \$3.5 million in private funds to restore it and the surrounding grounds, and in 2015 the group raised an additional \$1 million for the artwork and structure.⁴²

BYOND THE monuments, the tours left a strong impression on many people. At a banquet near the end of the second expedition, Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison rose to announce

I have received more education than I knew existed. I have learned much that I could never get from books. But I am at a loss to call it by a name. We speak of it as the Columbia River Historical Expedition, but that does not tell the story. It is history, to be sure, but it is more than that. It is education, it is travel, it is conversation and good fellowship. It is a new art and more than an art. To name it, we must coin a word, and I suggest that we do it now. I submit to you the new word, "Budducation."⁴³

Though everyone knew that Budd was the driving force behind the expeditions, he modestly remained in the background. He was perfectly willing to give speeches about freight rates, the future of passenger service, or other subjects within his exper-

tise, but during the trips he took the podium only briefly to convey deeds, preferring to leave most time for the experts. When, at the conclusion of the Columbia River Expedition, writer Sydney Greenbie requested an interview for a feature article on the railway president, Budd declined, saying the story was the railroad and the Northwest, not a single man.⁴⁴

In 1932 Budd became president of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, where his innovations included the *Burlington Zephyr*, the world's first stainless-steel, diesel-powered passenger train. (Budd took the name from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.) In 1939 he would win the John Fritz Medal for outstanding scientific or industrial achievement, mainly for his contribution to passenger-train technology.⁴⁵

After he left the Great Northern, the railroad's advertising department stopped mentioning historic sites in its literature, apparently deciding that potential passengers were more interested in scenery than history. Budd, however, never lost interest in the subject. As president of the Burlington, he hired Richard Overton, a Harvard PhD candidate in history, to be his assistant, essentially paying him to write a history of the railroad. He continued to support efforts at historic preservation, including donating Burlington records to Chicago's Newberry Library.⁴⁶ Today, the Astoria Column and other Great Northern monuments are as much memorials to Budd's career as the *Pioneer Zephyr* in Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. ▣

Astoria Column, restored, 2010

Notes

1. Richard C. Overton, "Ralph Budd, Railroad Entrepreneur," *The Palimpsest* 36 (Nov. 1955): 431.
2. "Personnel in Newspaper Men's Party," and "Revised Itinerary, Chairman's Special," June 1, 1924, both in Railway Advertising and Publicity Department records (hereinafter Advertising records), 133.H.4.4F, box 1, file 768-F, Great Northern Railway Corporate Records, Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS); Clark B. Firestone, "Newspaper Writers Journey to the Great Northwest," *Cincinnati Times Star*, June 10, 1924.
3. Budd speech at Two Medicine Lake, quoted in "Upper Missouri Historical Expedition," Advertising records, 133.H.4.4F, box 1, file 861.
4. "The Storied Northwest: Explored by Lewis & Clark in 1804–6 and Developed by the Northern Pacific Railway," 1922, <https://archive.org/details/storiednorthwest619nort>. On the GN's efforts, see, for example, photos of the monuments in Great Northern Railway, *Scenic Northwest* (St. Paul: GN, 1927) or the 1931 edition's map of the routes of La Vérendrye, Thompson, Lewis and Clark, and various pioneers.
5. Sidney M. Logan, "Who Was the First White Man to See Flathead Lake?" *Helena Independent*, Aug. 29, 1926, 1. (The answer, according to historian T. C. Elliott, who accompanied both historical expeditions, was David Thompson.)
6. John Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 38. The explorer's name is spelled Vérendrye, but the place name and some publications omit the accent.
7. Here and below, Georgia Ray, *Grace Flandrau: Voice Interrupted* (Roseville, MN: Edinborough Press, 2007), 81, 87, 94, 103.
8. W. Thomas White, "James J. Hill's Library: The First 75 Years," *Minnesota History* 55 (Fall 1996): 124; "Great Northern Monuments: General Investigation and Arrangement with Litchfield," President's files, 133.K.12.4F, box 530, file 11,269, GN records.
9. Unless otherwise noted, accounts of the daily activities of the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition are drawn from "Program of Events, Upper Missouri Historical Expedition," 1925, Advertising records, 133.H.4.5B, box 2, file 861-13.
10. For a photo of a blank invitation, see Advertising records, 133.H.4.4F, box 1, file 861-5.
11. "Round Trip Excursion Fares, Verendrye, North Dakota, Fort Union North Dakota, Meriwether," Advertising records, 133.H.7.9B, box 4, file 607.
12. Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 38.
13. The booklet was a reprint of an article by the same name, *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 26 (June 1925).
14. Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 38–39.
15. R. C. Craige et al. to Great Northern Railway Co., Feb. 1, 1925, Advertising records, 133.H.4.5B, box 2, file 861-7.
16. Lisa Blee, "The 1925 Fort Union Indian Congress: Divergent Narratives, One Event," *American Indian Quarterly* 31 (Fall 2007): 582–612.
17. On Scott, see www.history.army.mil/books/cg&csa/Scott-HL.htm; Agnes C. Laut, *The Blazed Trail of the Old Frontier: Being the Log of the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition* (New York: Robert McBride, 1926), 116.
18. Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, "A Confluence Country Centennial," tinyurl.com/zoat6th.
19. Blee, "1925 Fort Union Indian Congress," 582–612.
20. Chief Joseph, "An Indian's View of Indian Affairs," *North American Review* 128 (Apr. 1879): 412–34.
21. www.history.army.mil/books/cg&csa/Scott-HL.htm; Laut, *Blazed Trail*, 128. Bear Paw Battlefield is part of the Nez Perce National Historical Park, created in 1955 and managed by the National Park Service: www.nps.gov/nepe/planyourvisit/basicinfo.htm.
22. Blueprint, Aug. 15, 1924, Advertising records, 133.H.4.5B, box 2, file 861-16; Laut, *Blazed Trail*, 255.
23. Here and below, Overton, "Ralph Budd," 436–39, 442.
24. Laut, *Blazed Trail*, 255.
25. F. G. Young, "Upper Missouri Historical Expedition," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 26 (Sept. 1925): 279; Laut, *Blazed Trail*, 265.
26. Solon J. Buck, "Upper Missouri Historical Expedition," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (Dec. 1925): 390.
27. Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 42.
28. Buck, "Upper Missouri Historical Expedition," 391; G. Herrein to W. R. Mills, memo regarding meeting with Budd about 1926 expedition, July 23, 1925, President's files, 133.K.13.7B, box 547, file 11,620.
29. Gertrude Krausnick, "The Columbia River Historic Expedition," *Minnesota History* 7 (Sept. 1926): 242.
30. Willoughby Babcock, "The Museum Car," *Minnesota History* 7 (Sept. 1926): 248–49.
31. Unless otherwise noted, the account of the 1926 trip is based on "Program of Events, Columbia River Historical Expedition," 1926, Advertising records, 133.H.4.5B, box 2, file 874-A.
32. Krausnick, "Columbia River Expedition," 243–44.
33. Murray Morgan, "Henry Waree and Merwin Vavasour, British Spies," *Tacoma News Tribune*, Dec. 9, 1973.
34. Robert Ballou to W. E. Turner, president, SP&S Ry., May 24, 1926, President's files, 133.K.13.8F, box 548, file 11,620.
35. Ralph Budd to A. J. Witchel, Oct. 17, 1925; Electus Litchfield to Ralph Budd, Nov. 6, 1925—both in Advertising records, 133.H.4.6F, box 3, file 874-R.
36. Thomas W. White III, "John M. Budd," *Encyclopedia of American Business History and Biography* (New York: Facts On File, 1988), 53–55. After graduating with a degree in civil engineering in 1930, he worked his way up the ranks in the Great Northern, becoming its president in 1951. In 1970, when GN merged with the Northern Pacific and the railroads they jointly owned—the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Spokane, Portland & Seattle—into the Burlington Northern, Budd became its CEO.
37. Here and below, "History of the Column," astoriacolumn.org.
38. W. D. Vincent to Ralph Budd, June 28, 1926, Advertising records, 133.H.4.6F, box 3, file 874-Q.
39. Ralph Budd to Grace Flandrau, June 16, 1926, President's files, 133.K.14.11B, box 565, file 11,955. On the B&O fair, see Adolf Hungry Wolf, *The Blackfoot Papers*, vol. 3, *The Blackfeet in Glacier National Park* (Skookumchuck, BC: Good Medicine Cultural Foundation, 2006), 776.
40. Great Northern annual reports to the Interstate Commerce Commission, 1923–29, tables 302 & 309, Great Northern Railway Historical Society, Jackson Street Roundhouse, St. Paul.
41. Edmond S. Meany, "The Columbia River Historical Expedition," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 18 (Jan. 1927): 4.
42. See astoriacolumn.org; *Daily Astorian*, Sept. 11, 2015.
43. W. R. Mills, press release, July 23, 1926, Advertising records, 133.H.4.5B, box 2, file 874-G.
44. Sydney Greenbie to Ralph Budd, Sept. 14, 1926, President's files, 133.K.13.8F, box 548, file 11,620, recapping their previous correspondence.
45. Margaret Coel, "A Silver Streak," *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*, Fall 1986, 10–17; "Ralph Budd Receives Honor," *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, Jan. 19, 1941, 13. The American Association of Engineering Societies awards the medal.
46. Overton, "Ralph Budd," 481.

The photo on p. 15 is Oregon Historical Society #ba008461; p. 21, courtesy the author; p. 24, Jonathan James, IMG_8260, Flickr, <http://tinyurl.com/jonathanjames2>. All others are in MNHS collections, including p. 18, 19, 20, and 22 in the Great Northern Railway Corporate Records, Advertising and Publicity files. Invitation photograph by Eric Mortenson.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

Students and researchers

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

Teachers

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

About Illustrations

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).