



Fort Laramie—Old Bedlam



EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Paul Clifton & Mary Dunn Henderson

Biography

- Paul Clifton Henderson
Born: 1895
Died: 1979
- Mary Helen Dunn
Born: 1898
Died: 1988
- Married: 1923
- Railroad conductor (Paul); Homemaker (Helen)

Achievements

- Author, *Landmarks on the Oregon Trail*
- Impeccable lifetime study and mapping of the Oregon and Mormon Trails and other nationally significant trails.
- Instrumental in saving Fort Kearney, Fort Bridger, Fort Laramie and Fort Phil Kearny.
- Provided foundation for many others' trail research and documentation.
- Consultant for National Geographic Society and State of Wyoming

Paul and Helen Henderson are the Deans of Oregon Trail scholars, the spiritual forebears of OCTA, Oregon Trail scholars, and preservation advocates. The Hendersons worked as a team for more than 50 years to research, document, and map the Oregon Trail and other sites of western history. Most of their work was performed at personal expense, much of it during the Great Depression. Due to Paul's prodding, planning, and guidance, such notable trail sites as Ft. Phil Kearney, Ft. Fetterman, Ft. Bridger, Scotts Bluff National Monument, and Ft. Laramie were protected, restored, and expanded. Paul supervised the relocation of Joel Hembree's grave and facilitated the acquisition of South Pass City for the State of Wyoming.

Paul's *Landmarks on the Oregon Trail* stands alone as his only book, although he did contribute several articles to archaeological and historical periodicals such as *Nebraska History*. Yet, numerous trail scholars relied on the Hendersons' knowledge base, including government planners studying the feasibility of adding the Oregon Trail to the National Historic Trails System. Paul served more than eight years as a historic consultant for the Wyoming Parks Commission, despite being a Nebraska resident.

Their work continues to influence trail research today. Their records were donated to the Legacy of the Plains Museum in Gering, Nebraska, where researchers can study the hundreds of boxes containing nearly 375 diaries, letters, and journals, more than 10,000 slides and thousands of photos, clippings, correspondence, and numerous topographic, GLO, and personally drafted precise maps.