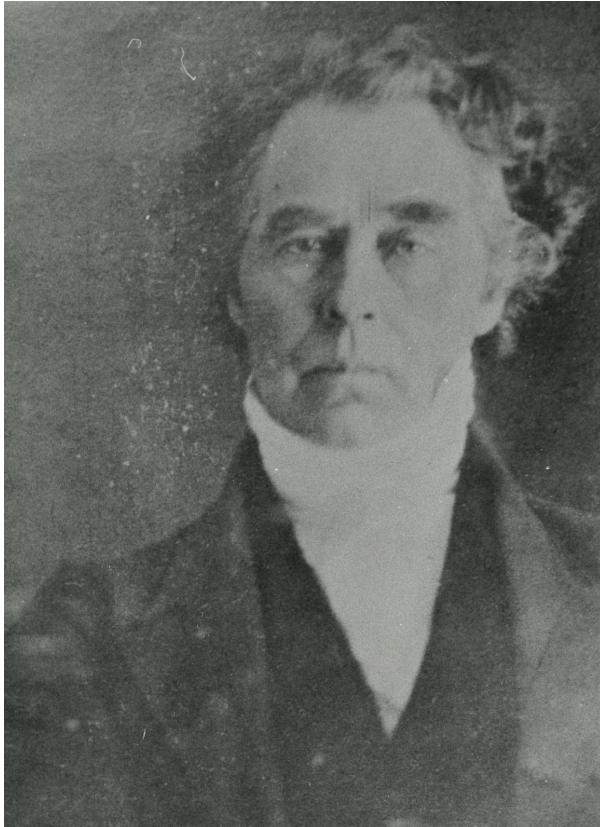




EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Robert Stuart



Biography

- Born: 1785, Callander, Scotland
- Died: 1848, Chicago, Illinois
- Married: Emma Elizabeth Sullivan, 1813
- Explorer, fur trader

Achievements

- Partner in John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company
- Leader of overland party that discovered crossing of Continental Divide at South Pass in 1812
- State and federal government official

Photo courtesy of Mackinac State Historic Parks Collection

As a partner in the Pacific Fur Company, Robert Stuart helped establish Fort Astoria in 1811. As the leader of an overland party traveling east from Astoria to St. Louis in 1812 he found a wagon-friendly crossing of the Continental Divide at South Pass in present-day Wyoming. Three decades later the pass, perhaps the most important landmark on the Oregon Trail, made overland migration to Oregon possible.

Scott migrated from Scotland to Canada in 1807. Initially employed by the North West Company, he later joined John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company and traveled to Astoria by sea around Cape Horn in 1810.

Astor planned to challenge the two English giants of the American fur trade, Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, by establishing a post at the mouth of the Columbia River and at promising points along its headwaters. Stuart was dispatched east to carry communications to Astor regarding affairs at the mouth of the Columbia.

Stuart was the first to find and follow a route from the Pacific to St. Louis that could be utilized by wagon trains. Those who preceded him followed routes that were impossible for emigrants transporting household goods and farm implements. Stuart's route—following various existing paths and relying on information gleaned en route—led to his finding South Pass, and then following the Platte to the Missouri.

Washington Irving's *Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (2 vols. 1836), was based in part on "Travelling Memoranda," Stuart's account of the expedition. His journals were later published in *The Discovery of the Oregon Trail, Robert Stuart's Narratives of His Overland Trip Eastward from Astoria in 1812-13*, edited by Philip Ashton Rolins (1935) and *On the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Journey of Discovery, 1812-1813*, edited by Kenneth Spaulding (1953).

From 1817 to 1834 Stuart lived on Mackinac Island, Michigan, where he was the Agent for Astor's American Fur Company. The fur trade declined in the 1830s and Astor sold his holdings. Stuart moved to Detroit in 1835, invested in real estate and moved his family there. He later served as Treasurer of the State of Michigan, federal superintendent of Indian affairs and Secretary of the Illinois and Michigan Canal Company.