



Department of Special Collections and University Archives

**Captain John Mullan, Jr. (July 31, 1830-Dec. 28, 1909)**

In 1852, John Mullan graduated from the U.S. Military Academy and served in the Northern Pacific Railroad Survey, where he explored portions of Montana and Idaho, including the Mullan Pass. Under his leadership, a construction crew built the Mullan Road, 1859-1860, which became the first road across the Rocky Mountains. Its route connected Fort Benton, Montana, on the Missouri River through the Mullan Pass to Fort Walla Walla (now Walla Walla), Washington State, on the Columbia River, now principally followed by Interstate Highways 15 and 90. For his extraordinary engineering feat, Mullan was promoted to Captain in 1862.

In 1863, Mullan married Rebecca Williamson, and after a failed ranching attempt near Fort Walla Walla, he practiced law in first San Francisco and then Washington, D.C., 1878-1883. Thereafter, he succeeded General Charles Ewing as Catholic Commissioner for Indian Missions (later the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1883-1884). Mullan also raised a step-son, Peter Mullan (1855-unknown), who was of Native American heritage from Montana. John Mullan died in Washington, D.C., and was buried at St. Mary's Cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland.

A portrait of Mullan is available online in the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Digital Image Collection, image no. 10880.