2024-2026 TALKING HEADSTONES

Dick Moody, Sacajawea Chapter, DAR, presenting "Thomas Frost Narrative" Union Pioneer Calvary Cemetery. Tumwater, WA.

Thomas Frost - Land Surveyor Who Established The Washington Territory Puget Sound Meridian

I'm Thomas Frost. I was born in Boston, Massachusetts on December 2nd, 1828. After I graduated high school in 1845, I trained and worked in civil engineering or as a surveyor.

Washington Territory was established in 1853. Among the first tasks was documenting its boundaries north of the Oregon Territory.

After working as a railroad civil engineer in Massachusetts, Vermont, and Indiana, I was awarded a contract under the Washington Territory Surveyor General James Tilton to establish a new Puget Sound Meridian.

I traveled to the west territory by sea, taking the route around Cape Horn to Olympia, where I joined the office of James Tilton, Washington Territory's first Surveyor General. I worked as chief draftsman, survey examiner, then as deputy surveyor.

At this time, the Surveyor General Tilton knew the Oregon Territory Based Willamette Meridian when extended into the new Washington Territory ran through Puget Sound. Surveyor General Tilton awarded a contract to me that started with the Willamette Meridian for 24 miles, then "commence 'Puget South Meridian," marking the point of starting the new Meridian by erecting a "prominent and distinguishing monument." The new Meridian would, at a specific point, continue along the 6th standard parallel, " to Seattle and Puget Sound."

I was also instructed by Surveyor General Tilton "to provide yourself with seed of varieties not indigenous to the county such as apple, peach, locust, walnut, perennial evergreen sage, orange or other hardy trees and comply with the printed instructions relative to the depositing of the same at the Town and Sectional courses" of the newly surveyed region of what is now southwest Washington State.

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When my survey was sent to Washington, D.C., Surveyor General Tilton received an urgent reply posted there on July 18, 1855, ordering Tilton to not only invalidate my work to establish the Puget South Meridian, but to also destroy all survey markers on trees and posts that applied numbering of townships and ranges based on the new meridian.

Surveyor General Tilton was able to issue contracts to do so. He also issued survey contracts to extend the Willamette Meridian to the 6th Standard Parallel in 1855, and in spring 1857 further extend it to Whidbey Island, and, in 1859 to extend the Puget Sound Guide Meridian north to the international border between the United States and Canada.

I would never see these and other surveys that were based on my work because I died of typhoid fever on November 9,1855, just months after completing the Puget Sound Meridian. I was 27, just a few weeks prior to my 28th birthday on December 2nd.

My work in the Washington Territory was mostly lost as the Territory grew, became a state, and the established surveys marked townships and ranges. The population of the state grew from a population of about 5,000 in 1855 to over 8 million today.

Succeeding generations of surveyors recognized my work, and the Land Surveyors' Association of Washington Historical Society honored me with placing the bronze plaque you see below my headstone. You also see the round marker providing the exact surveyed location of my grave, including, in the lower left, the elevation of this site above the Puget Sound that was significant to my work in the Washington Territory.

Narrative written by Dick Moody.