



The Vision

No one knows the exact nature of the first exchange between the attorney/entrepreneur Sam Hill and the engineer Samuel Lancaster in 1906, but we can be fairly certain that it involved roads. Big roads, beautiful roads. Roads that would move passengers and commerce, yes, but roads that would also provide a moving experience for all who rode upon them. Their shared passion for the practical and prosaic possibilities of modern roads took the two Sams to Europe in 1908 for the First International Road Congress. Here, they were taken with the Axenstrasse in Switzerland, a landmark road along Lake Lucerne that was carved from the hillside and featured a 500-foot long windowed tunnel.



Such a road could be built back home, Hill declared. After commissioning Lancaster to construct experimental roads on his Maryhill, Washington, estate 100 miles east of Portland, Hill went to the state of Washington seeking support for a road along the Columbia Gorge that could accommodate automobile traffic. Support was not forthcoming from Washington, but parties in Oregon saw promise in the project. By 1913, Multnomah County had hired Samuel Lancaster to survey and design 20 miles of highway from Chanticleer Point to the Hood River County line, a highway with as much emphasis on form as function.

“There is but one Columbia River Gorge [that] God put into this comparatively short space, [with] so many beautiful waterfalls, canyons, cliffs and mountain domes...men from all climes will wonder at its wild grandure [sic] when once it is made accessible [sic] by this great highway.”



SAMUEL LANCASTER



The Axenstrasse, skirting the shores of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland, provided inspiration for Samuel Lancaster and Sam Hill in their quest to bring a spectacular road to the Pacific Northwest.