

## Collins Overland Telegraph Line Through Josephine County, Oregon: 1864

**Western Union Company** The Western Union Company began thinking about the unsuccessful trans-Atlantic cable project after its successful transcontinental telegraph line had been built across the lower 48 in 1861. A rival company, the Cyrus West Field's Atlantic Telegraph Company, had been trying to build the trans-Atlantic cable project for several years, and many thought it would never be successful.

The Russian American Telegraph also known as the Western Union Telegraph Expedition and the Collins Overland Telegraph was an \$3,000,000 undertaking by the Western Union Telegraph Company to lay an telegraph line from San Francisco, California to Moscow, Russia. Perry McDonough Collins was the visionary behind the project which was an economic alternative to the trans-Atlantic cable project. The route was intended to travel from California via Oregon, Washington Territory, the colony of British Columbia and Russian Alaska, under the Bering Sea and across Siberia to Moscow, thus creating a line of communication with the rest of Europe. The project was abandoned in 1867 after a successful trans-Atlantic line.

In 1864 the American president, Abraham Lincoln, granted the company a right of way through California and Oregon. In Oregon this line followed the stage line route from Sacramento, California to Portland, Oregon. The Western Union was in a hurry to build this line because if they got beat by a successful trans-Atlantic cable line project, they would have to shut its own effort down. It was a rush job and in some places the line went tree to tree. Telegraph companies used galvanized steel a lot in the 1870s for telegraph wire. In 1864, the Collins Line dream worked its way north through Southern Oregon.

## Galvanized Steel Telegraph Wire

There were three types of insulators known to have been used on the Collins Line in Southern Oregon.

1. CD 736
2. CD 723 "Wade" with wooden top.
3. Wood-Block Rams Horn Insulator



CD 736

The CD 736 threadless glass insulator was embossed with NY. & E.R.R. The embossing referred to the New York & Erie Rail Road. The railroad had nothing to do with the project; the insulators just happened to be used on the line.



*Howard Banks Inspecting Galvanized Steel At Sexton Mountain's Applegate Trail*

The Wade CD 723 is an insulator with a threadless pin and wooden cover to protect it from damage that the Western Union had used on the trans-continental telegraph line (title page). They started making the CD 723 in the 1850s and were still making and using this style until the late 1860s. One purpose of the wooden cover was to protect the glass insulator from Indians shooting them. The Wade Insulator was used in southern Oregon as one was found in the Hugo area by a hunter.

## More Information

**Wood-Block Rams Horn Insulator** The Collins Line also used the Wood-Block Rams Horn Insulator. This is an insulator with a block of wood and a metal insulator screwed into this block. The metal insulator had a hook on it which is why it is called a rams horn. It was inexpensive to make, but their insulating value was questionable, particular in the rainy northwest.



*Wood-Block Rams Horn Insulator*

**Insulator Brochure Series** This brochure is number five of several in the "insulator" series numbered 1 through 11. Most importantly, the insulator series is all about Josephine County, Oregon, insulators. The series will be continued with adventures in the field.

1. Insulators of Josephine County
2. Crown Jewels Of The Wire
3. Anatomy Of An Insulator
4. Insulator CD Numbers
5. **Collins Line**
6. Oregon & California Railroad
7. Postal Telegraph Company
8. AT&T Long Distance Telephone Lines
9. Local Phone Service Lines
10. Power Lines
11. First Insulators of Hugo Neighborhood

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## Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society's Mission

This information brochure is one of a series of documents published by the Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society (*Hugo Neighborhood*). It is designed to be shared with neighbors for the purpose of helping protect our rural quality of life by promoting an informed citizenry in decision-making. The *Hugo Neighborhood* is an informal nonprofit charitable and educational organization with a land use and history mission promoting the social welfare of its neighbors.

### Land Use & History

The *Hugo Neighborhood's* land use mission is to promote Oregon Statewide Goal 1 — Citizen Involvement, and by preserving, protecting, and enhancing the livability and economic viability of its farms, forests, and rural neighbors. It will act, as requested, as a technical resource assisting neighbors to represent themselves.

Its history mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and research its local history and to encourage public interest in the history of the Hugo area.

Membership dues are \$10.00 annually and due in January. They are used for paper, ink, envelopes, publications, and mailings. Make checks to the *Hugo Neighborhood* and send them to our Treasurer.

*Hugo Neighborhood*

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Collins Line



Brochure 5 in Insulator Series



CD 723 "Wade" With Wooden Top

March 19, 2006

by

**Hugo Neighborhood Association &  
Historical Society**

&

**Crown Jewels Of The Wire**

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