

WHITMAN

National Monument

WASHINGTON





Whitman

NATIONAL MONUMENT

Here, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman ministered to the spiritual and physical needs of the Cayuse Indians and immigrants of the Oregon Trail from 1836 until killed by the Indians in 1847.

WAIILATPU, the site of the mission founded in 1836 by Dr. Marcus Whitman and Narcissa Prentiss Whitman, his wife, was one of the landmarks of the Oregon Trail. The work of the Whitmans at this mission places them with the noblest of the pioneers colonizing the West. Their indomitable spirit, energy, and determination carried the American flag to remote regions and contributed to our national expansion. They brought the principles of Christianity to a primitive people. They taught these people rudiments of the white man's agriculture and letters. Kind and generous, they made Waiilatpu a haven to the traveler.

Whitman National Monument is a memorial to the self-sacrifice and devotion of these missionaries, who gave their lives in order that an enlightened people might survive them.

American Missionary Interest in Oregon

American missionary interest in the region west of the Rocky Mountains became active in the 1830's. In 1833 this interest was heightened by publication in the *New York Christian Advocate and Journal* of an account of the visit of Flathead and Nez Perce Indians to St. Louis seeking Christian teachers. The

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, supported by several Protestant churches, found candidates eager to enter this field. In 1835, the board sent Dr. Marcus Whitman and Rev. Samuel Parker to what is now western Wyoming to determine the potentialities for missionary work. Successful conferences with the Flathead and Nez Perce Indians at the fur traders' Green River rendezvous convinced these advance agents that the field was promising. It was agreed that Parker should continue the explorations while Whitman returned East to seek the American Board's authority and assistance in the immediate establishment of a mission. Approval was promptly granted. Arrangements were made to have Rev. and Mrs. Henry H. Spalding, W. H. Gray, and Miss Narcissa Prentiss, whom Whitman married on February 18, 1836, assist with the work.

Mission Activity at Waiilatpu

Convoyed by agents of the American Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, the missionaries reached the British post, Fort Walla Walla, in the Columbia Valley, early in September 1836. The journey became significant in the story of the Oregon Trail, for Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding were the first American women to reach the

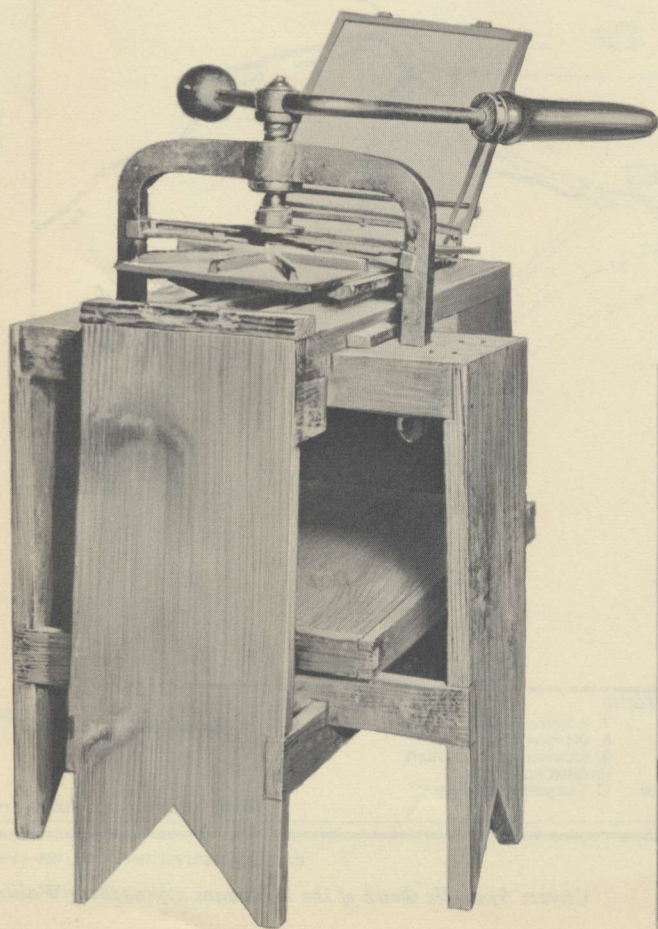
The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

Oregon country by the overland route. Also, the missionaries' wagon, reduced to a cart, was the first of such vehicles to be taken as far west as Fort Boise. After a brief visit at Fort Vancouver, the men ascended the Columbia to establish their stations. The women remained at the fort as guests of Dr. McLoughlin, the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. On December 10, 1836, Mrs. Whitman was escorted to her new home at Waiilatpu, about 25 miles east of Fort Walla Walla.

Waiilatpu means "Place of Rye Grass" in the language of the Cayuse Indians, among whom Dr. Whitman chose to establish his mission. The Spaldings established a similar station at Lapwai, near present-day Lewiston, Idaho.

Whitman and Spalding immediately set out to learn the language of the natives, and their wives assisted in the work by conducting Indian schools. Soon the language was reduced to writing, and books for use in the Indian schools were printed on the missionary press which had been brought to Lapwai in 1839. These books were the first to be published in the Pacific Northwest.

Whitman soon realized that the mission could not fulfill its purpose if the Indians remained a more or less nomadic people. For a goodly portion of the year they were away on seasonal expeditions to the buffalo country, the camas meadows, and the salmon fisheries. He, therefore, decided to teach them agricultural and industrial pursuits. In the course of time, a gristmill, a blacksmith



The first printing press in the Northwest, used to print books at Lapwai Mission for the Indians at Waiilatpu. Courtesy Oregon Historical Society.

Ryegrass still grows on the mission Indians called Waiilatpu, "Place of



shop, and a new adobe mission house were built. A dwelling that functioned as an apartment house for associates and travelers was also constructed.

Progress in spiritual matters, the main objective of the missionaries, however, was slow. The Indians were indifferent to religious worship, books, and schools. They were less eager for teachers than the early reports had implied. Conflicting reports from the Oregon Mission Field and financial difficulties of the American Board caused the board in 1842 to order the closing of the stations at Lapwai and Waiilatpu. The Whitmans were to be transferred to Tshimakain Mission, established by the board in 1838, near present Spokane. The missionaries objected to the closing of these stations, and Whitman volunteered to return East and present the case before the officials of the American Board.

The Winter Journey

Whitman's journey to the East, which began on October 2, 1842, was a heroic and historic ride, fraught with hardship and danger. With one companion, A. L. Lovejoy,

he followed a roundabout route by way of Fort Hall, Idaho; Taos, N. Mex.; and Bent's Fort, Colo. Pushing through blizzards and fording icy streams the men reached St. Louis. From there Whitman proceeded to Washington, New York, and Boston, where he appeared before the sponsors of his mission. The unwelcome orders were rescinded. On the return trip in 1843 Whitman, accompanied by his nephew, Perrin, joined an immigration party, and rendered valuable assistance as a physician to these travelers. On the latter part of the journey to the Oregon country Whitman served as pilot.

A Depot on the Oregon Trail

Although Waiilatpu had served as a depot of supplies for earlier travelers, succeeding caravans sought out more direct routes which bypassed the mission. Needy and destitute immigrants, however, continued to seek the hospitality offered by the Whitmans. In November 1847, the mission community, including recently arrived immigrants, totaled 74 persons, besides Indians.

site, which the
the Rye Grass."

The small white building, center, is a temporary museum where artifacts found during archeological excavations are displayed. Paths from this building lead to foundation ruins at the sites of the mission buildings.



The Massacre

Whitman in his missionary work had endeavored to be a friend to all the Cayuse, but some of the Indians were unfriendly and insolent. At times the Whitmans were threatened and mission property was destroyed. This ingratitude was not shown by all the Indians, however, and when it was proposed to abandon Waiilatpu, Dr. Whitman refrained from doing so because of the friendly disposition of the majority of the tribe.

Nevertheless, jealousy, distrust, and unrest increased among many Cayuse and culminated in the outbreak of 1847.

On November 29, Dr. Whitman, his wife, and 12 others were massacred, and the buildings, orchards, and other developments at Waiilatpu were destroyed. All the women at the mission, however, escaped death, except Mrs. Whitman. Fifty-one captives, mostly women and children, were speedily ransomed by Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company. Two young girls died while in captivity.

The Whitman massacre abruptly terminated Protestant missionary work among the Oregon Indians. It also led to an Indian war, waged largely by Oregon settlers to punish those responsible for the crime.

The Indian attack on Dr. Whitman and Waiilatpu may be traced to several causes. The increasing number of American immigrants to the Oregon country and stories of the white man's domination were certainly disturbing factors. The immigrants of 1847 brought measles in epidemic form. Among the Indian children, who had little or no immunity to the white man's diseases, the malady proved virulent. Whitman's medicine failed to help them, though it kept white children alive. The belief that the missionaries were poisoning the Indians to make way for the whites precipitated the outbreak of violence.

Relatively few of the Indians near Waiilatpu, and none of the Christian Indians, participated in the massacre. Some made a request for return of Christian teachers, but the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions decided to abandon the project.

In the meantime, Joseph L. Meek carried the news of the tragedy to Washington. The story aroused general sympathy for the isolated settlers on the Columbia.

On August 13, 1848, the bill creating the Oregon Territory was approved, and the United States Government extended its jurisdiction to the region.

The Site Today

Whitman National Monument, which comprises almost 46 acres of the mission grounds, was established in 1940. It contains the "great" grave, where the victims of the massacre were interred; the Whitman Memorial Shaft, dedicated in 1897; and the foundation ruins of the mission buildings. A small temporary museum houses artifacts uncovered by archeological excavations of the site.

About Your Visit

Whitman National Monument is 6 miles west of Walla Walla and 3 miles west of College Place, Wash. It is reached directly by county road from these communities or by a connecting road three-quarters of a mile south from U. S. 410.

You may visit the monument daily, without charge, from 8 a. m. to 4:30 p. m. Guide service is available during the summer. For the rest of the year you may make arrangements with the superintendent for guided trips.

Administration

Whitman National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Walla Walla, Wash., is in immediate charge.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

■ Conrad L. Wirth, Director



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