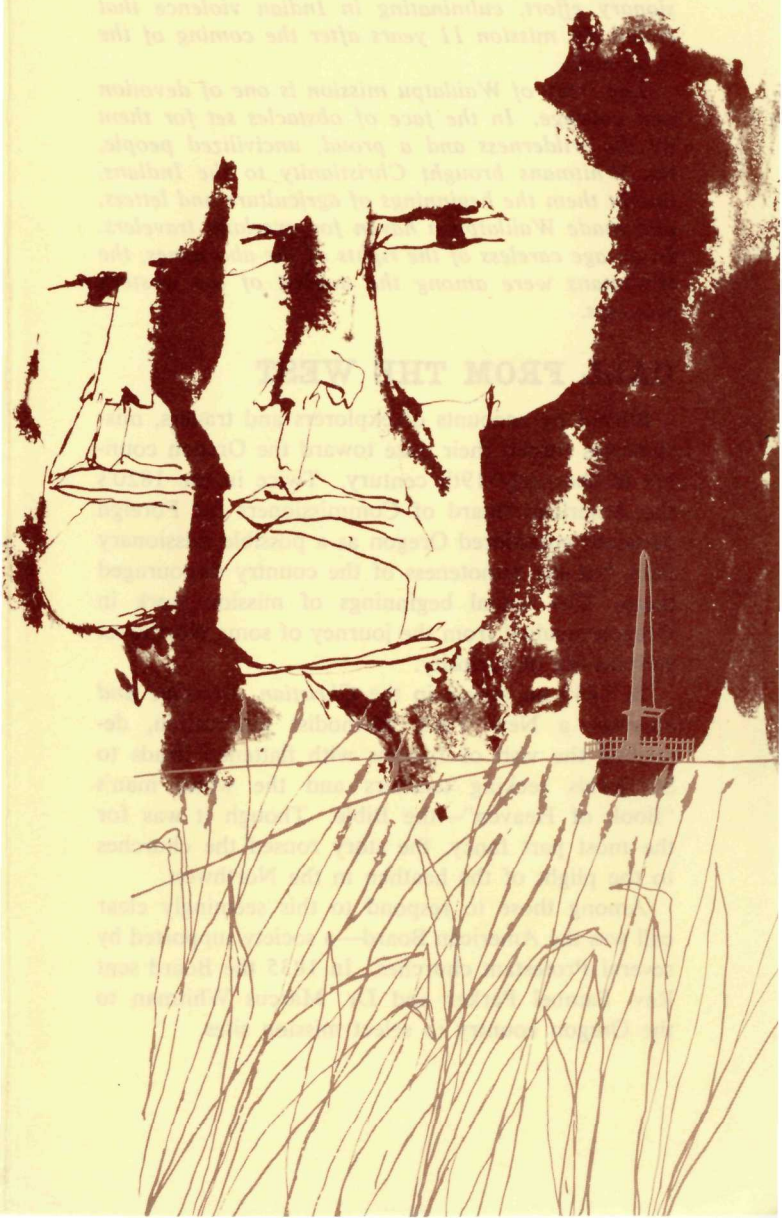


WHITMAN MISSION

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



WASHINGTON



WHITMAN MISSION

Waiilatpu, "the Place of the Rye Grass," is the site of a mission founded among the Cayuse Indians in 1836 by Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. As emigrants moved into the Pacific Northwest in increasing numbers in the 1840's, the mission also became an important station on the Oregon Trail. Inevitably, deep cultural conflicts marked the missionary effort, culminating in Indian violence that ended the mission 11 years after the coming of the Whitmans.

The story of Waiilatpu mission is one of devotion and courage. In the face of obstacles set for them by the wilderness and a proud, uncivilized people, the Whitmans brought Christianity to the Indians, taught them the beginnings of agriculture and letters, and made Waiilatpu a haven for overland travelers. In an age careless of the rights of the aborigines, the Whitmans were among the noblest of the western pioneers.

CALL FROM THE WEST

Stirred by accounts of explorers and traders, missionaries turned their gaze toward the Oregon country in the early 19th century. Twice in the 1820's the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions considered Oregon as a possible missionary field, but the remoteness of the country discouraged them. The actual beginnings of mission work in Oregon resulted from the journey of some Northwest Indians out of curiosity.

In 1833 an article in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, a New York Methodist publication, described the visit of Indians with flattened heads to St. Louis seeking teachers and the white man's "Book of Heaven"—the Bible. Though it was for the most part fancy, the story roused the churches to the plight of the heathen in the Northwest.

Among those to respond to this seemingly clear call was the American Board—a society supported by several Protestant churches. In 1835 the Board sent Rev. Samuel Parker and Dr. Marcus Whitman to the Oregon country to select mission sites.

At the fur traders' Green River rendezvous that year the two men talked to some Flathead and Nez Percé and were convinced that the field was promising. To save time, Parker continued on to explore Oregon for sites, and Whitman returned east to recruit workers. Arrangements were made to have Rev. Henry Spalding and his wife, Eliza, William Gray, and Narcissa Prentiss, whom Whitman married on February 18, 1836, assist with the work.

The outward journey of the 1836 caravan was a notable one in the story of the Oregon Trail: Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding were the first American women to cross the continent overland, and the missionaries' wagon, reduced to a cart, was the first vehicle to travel as far west as Fort Boise. The trek was to inspire many families to follow.

Escorted by traders of the American Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, the missionaries reached the Columbia River on September 1, 1836. After a brief visit at Fort Vancouver, the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department headquarters, the men returned up the Columbia to establish their missions. The women remained at the fort as guests of Chief Factor John McLoughlin.

Already other mission societies were active in Oregon at this time. In 1834 Methodists under Jason Lee began missionary work in the Willamette Valley. Fathers Blanchet and Demers from Canada established Catholic missions along the lower Columbia in 1838. And farther east in the Rocky Mountains, Jesuits under Father DeSmet founded several missions.

THE MISSION AT WAILLATPU

Whitman established his mission among the Cayuse at Waiilatpu, and Spalding began his work at Lapwai among the Nez Percé, 110 miles farther east, near Lewiston, Idaho.



William H. Jackson's conjectural painting of the mission.

A first task in starting educational work was to learn the Indians' languages. The missionaries soon devised an alphabet and began to print books in Nez Percé and Spokane on a press brought to Lapwai in 1839. These books were the first published in the Pacific Northwest.

For part of each year the Indians went away to the buffalo country, the camas meadows, and the salmon fisheries. Whitman soon realized that the mission could not fulfill its purpose if the Indians remained nomadic. He therefore encouraged them to begin farming, but with limited success.

The mission expanded gradually. Other missionaries arrived, and new stations were established. At Waiilatpu the large adobe house, a grist mill, a sawmill, and a blacksmith shop were built. Gray built a house for himself that later served as a dwelling for travelers.

But progress in spiritual matters was slow. The Indians, less eager to learn than supposed, were indifferent to religious worship, books, and school. Reports of dissension and the lack of money caused the American Board in 1842 to order the Waiilatpu and Lapwai stations closed. The Spaldings were directed to return home and the Whitmans to go to the Tshimakain mission, established near present-day Spokane by the Reverends Elkanah Walker and Cushing Eells. Convinced the missions should remain open, Whitman volunteered to return east to plead their case before the Board.

THE RIDE EAST

Whitman's return is one of the memorable overland journeys in American history. Accompanied by Asa Lovejoy, he left Waiilatpu on October 3, 1842. Pushing through blizzards and fording icy streams, they traveled by way of Fort Hall, Idaho; the Uintah Mountains of Utah; Taos, N. Mex.; and Bent's Old Fort, Colo., where the exhausted Lovejoy stopped to rest. Whitman reached St. Louis by March 9, 1843, and not long after Washington, D.C., New York, and finally Boston. There the American Board, moved by his arguments, agreed to rescind its orders.

On his trip back to Oregon, Whitman joined the Great Migration of 1843 and gave valuable assistance to the wagon train as physician and guide. Perrin, his nephew, accompanied him. Upon reaching

Waiilatpu, the emigrants replenished their supplies from Whitman's farm before continuing down the Columbia.

STATION ON THE OREGON TRAIL



the first large group of emigrants to travel to the Oregon country over the route stopped at Waiilatpu for rest and supplies. From that time on the mission was an important station on the Oregon Trail. Although the main trail bypassed the mission after 1844, those who were sick and destitute turned their wagons toward the mission, and the Whitmans treated these exhausted people with great kindness. Of the 74 persons at Waiilatpu in November 1847, more than 50 were newly arrived emigrants.

THE MASSACRE

For 11 years the Whitmans had worked among the Cayuse. Although at times some Indians threatened the missionaries and destroyed mission property, not all the Cayuse showed an unfriendly attitude. Despite setbacks and occasional hostility, the Whitmans refused to abandon Waiilatpu. Their best efforts, however, failed to prevent an increase in jealousy, distrust, and unrest, which ended in an outbreak of violence in late November 1847.

Several causes led to the gathering Indian resentment. Increasing numbers of emigrants and stories of settlers taking Indian land elsewhere convinced the Cayuse that their way of life was in danger. Their fears grew as measles, brought in 1847 by white newcomers, spread rapidly among the Indians. The Cayuse had no resistance to the new disease, and within a short time half the tribe died. When Whitman's medicine helped white children but not theirs, many Cayuse believed that they were being poisoned to make way for the whites.

In a tragic and bloody attack, born of deep misunderstandings and grievances, a small group of su-

perstitious Cayuse attacked the mission on November 29 and killed Marcus Whitman, his wife, and 11 others. The mission buildings were destroyed. Of the survivors a few escaped, but 49, mostly women and children, were taken captive. Except for two young girls who died, this group was ransomed a month later by Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company. The massacre ended Protestant missionary work among the Oregon Indians. It also led to a war against the Cayuse, waged by settlers from the Willamette and lower Columbia Valleys.

In 1848 Joseph Meek, carrying news of the tragedy and petitions from the settlers, reached Washington, D.C. The massacre spurred Congress to create the Territory of Oregon in August of that year, thus forming the first formal territorial government west of the Rockies.



Tiloukaikt and Tomahas, leaders of the massacre.

ADMINISTRATION

Whitman Mission National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

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

A superintendent, whose address is Route 2, Walla Walla, Wash., 99362, is in charge of the site.

TRAIL GUIDE

Each stop on the self-guiding trail, which begins outside the visitor center, is numbered to correspond with the following paragraphs.

1. OLD OREGON TRAIL. From the Missouri to the Columbia the Oregon Trail spread across 2,000 miles of unsettled western land. Each autumn worn oxen pulled creaking covered wagons toward Waiilatpu. The weary, the lame, and the hungry received a welcome at this lonely outpost far beyond the frontier. Refreshed, the pioneers continued their journey of hardship to the new land beyond the Cascades.

2. AGRICULTURE AT THE MISSION. The mission's main irrigation ditch carries water from the millpond to the fields, as it did in the days when Whitman cultivated this rich land. The bountiful crops—wheat, potatoes, peas, and other vegetables—were enough to feed travelers of the trail and neighboring Indians. Besides his own farming, Whitman encouraged the Cayuse to grow wheat and helped them to start cattle herds.

3. RESTORED MISSION ORCHARD. Once again apples grow where the mission orchard stood. Narcissa Whitman was astonished and pleased to see orchards at Fort Vancouver when she arrived. She carefully saved all the peach and apple seeds she could find and planted them at Waiilatpu.

4. FIRST HOUSE. For his bride, Marcus Whitman hastily constructed a small log lean-to on this site in the autumn of 1836. The next spring he finished building this first house by adding the main section of sun-dried adobe bricks. A simple structure, it stood 36 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 1½ stories high. As additional missionaries arrived, the house proved much too small. After the house threatened to collapse after being damaged by the flooding river, Whitman built a larger mission house on higher, safer ground.

5. OLD CHANNEL OF THE WALLA WALLA RIVER. From here you can trace the horseshoe bend of the old river channel that flowed by this point in 1836. The banks were much steeper when Alice Clarissa drowned here in 1839. The only child born to Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, she was but 27 months old at the time of her death. This river that brought heartache to the Whitmans now passes about 500 yards south, beyond the trees.

6. GRIST MILL. Three mills stood here. The first was little more than a waterpowered set of iron burrs from a coffee mill. Later this mill was replaced by a larger mill with granite millstones. Set on fire by careless Indian boys, it burned while Whitman was on his ride east. In 1844 the third mill was erected and 40-inch millstones added. By the time of the massacre the Cayuse had become dependent on the mill. Of all the mission structures this was the only one they did not destroy.

7. RESTORED MILLPOND. Marcus Whitman had two purposes in mind when he built his millpond: to provide waterpower for the gristmill, and to irrigate the thirsty land. A long millrace from the river carried water to fill this pond. The dike in front of you, built by Whitman, needed little repair when the millpond was restored in 1961.

8. EMIGRANT HOUSE. Built as a residence by William Gray, the mission mechanic, this house sheltered weary travelers of the Oregon Trail after Gray moved away in 1842. The house, which was almost square, was built and white-washed in a manner similar to the mission house. Archeologists found it difficult to find the house outline because Gray did not lay a foundation: the adobe walls rested on the leveled ground.

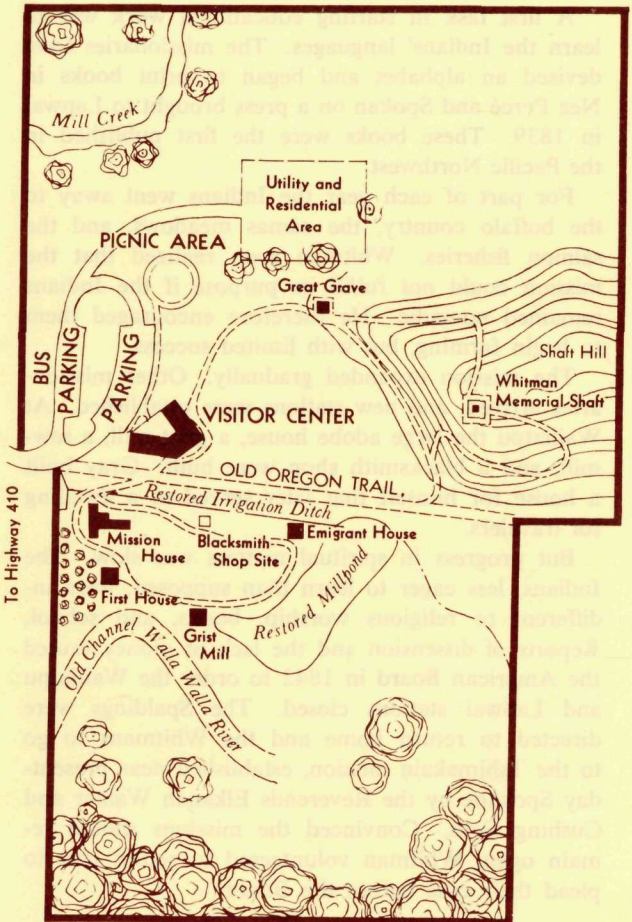
9. BLACKSMITH SHOP. Letters from the mission and archeological excavations tell us the shop stood in this vicinity. Many articles used at Waiilatpu were built or repaired here, and emigrants passing through mended worn equipment at the smithy. The shop was built in 1841 of adobe bricks taken from the first house. When the Indians attacked, eight people were living in this crude structure for lack of better space.

10. MISSION HOUSE. The Whitmans were much pleased with the improvement this house afforded over their first dwelling. Whitman began this large T-shaped building in 1838. The cross section, which was the main part, was 61 feet in length and 1½ stories high; the long section measured 99 feet. Tired travelers were surprised, after their seemingly endless journey through unsettled country, to see this building with its whitewashed walls, green doors, dark-gray woodwork, and yellow floors. Both Marcus and Narcissa Whitman died on this spot; the doctor in the living room, his wife in the north yard.

11. MEMORIAL SHAFT. Here, high above the quiet Walla Walla Valley, this 27-foot shaft was dedicated in 1897, the 50th anniversary of the Whitmans' deaths. On a clear day you can see the hills bordering the Columbia River to the west. On the east are the Blue Mountains and the cities of Walla Walla and College Place. The high ridge of hills to the south lies in Oregon.

Narcissa Whitman used to climb this hill to watch for her husband's return from his frequent trips of mercy. Perhaps you can picture her standing among the wildflowers and grass. To help preserve the hill in its natural state, please use the paved foot trails.

12. GREAT GRAVE. Two days after the attack a survivor placed the remains of the victims in a shallow grave just north of the mission. But the first grave was disturbed by wolves. When the Oregon Volunteers, made up of settlers, arrived 3 months later to punish the Cayuse, the soldiers reburied the remains near the present grave. In 1897 this marble vault was built and the remains were placed in it. On the slab are carved the names of the slain.



WHITMAN MISSION TODAY

Whitman Mission National Historic Site, containing 98 acres of the old mission grounds, was established in 1940. On view are the foundation ruins of the mission buildings, Whitman's dikes and millpond, the Great Grave, and the Whitman memorial shaft. A visitor center, housing artifacts uncovered by archeologists, tells the story of the mission.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The site is 7 miles west of Walla Walla and 4 miles west of College Place, Wash. A short connecting road leads south from U.S. 410 to the area.

Whitman Mission is open daily except for Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. Hours are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. the rest of the year. You will find lunch tables at the site, but camping and fires are not permitted.

AMERICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.



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