

Artist's conception of Whitman Mission prior to its destruction.

# WHITMAN

## National Monument

*Washington*

# Whitman National Monument

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Harold L. Ickes, Secretary



National Park Service

Newton B. Drury, Director



The historic site where Dr. Marcus Whitman and Narcissa Prentiss Whitman ministered to the spiritual and physical needs of the Oregon Indians until massacred by them in 1847.

The monument is one of the most noteworthy landmarks along that great emigration corridor, known as the Oregon Trail, a highway over which flowed the indomitable spirit of the pioneers who, through their energy and determination, carried American civilization and the American flag to remote regions and thus contributed to our national expansion and present position as a world power.

By their life and martyr's death the Whitmans symbolize the noblest in the spirit and endeavors of the pioneers who colonized the West and welded it into a part of our United States. The monument embraces the site of the Whitman Mission and the grave of the Whitmans and other victims of the massacre of 1847, and is, because of their associations with the American occupation of Oregon, one of the West's outstanding historic sites.

## AMERICAN MISSIONARY INTEREST IN OREGON

Until the Treaty of 1846 finally resolved the differences of nations which

claimed the "Oregon Country" and extended the boundary along the 49th parallel to the Pacific, that region lying west of the Rocky Mountains and between Mexican California and Russian possessions to the north was legally a "no-man's land." In 1818 a treaty of "joint occupancy" left the country open to nationals of the United States and Great Britain. Soon thereafter Spanish and Russian claims were relinquished. **De facto** control of the region was early established by the powerful Hudson's Bay Company, but British influence was shortly overshadowed by the increasing number of American colonists who were attracted by the favorable reports from explorers, fur traders, travelers, and missionaries.

American missionary interest in the region west of the Rocky Mountains was spurred into action by the publication, in the New York **Christian Advocate** for March 1833, of an account of the visit of a delegation of Flathead and Nez Perce Indians to St. Louis, said to be seeking Christian teachers. This "Macedonian cry" was enthusiastically received. A Methodist-sponsored mission was established in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, under the leadership of

Jason and Daniel Lee in 1834. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, supported by the Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and the Associate Reformed Churches, also found candidates eager to enter this field. In 1835 Dr. Marcus Whitman, a graduate physician who offered his services as medical missionary, accompanied the Rev. Samuel Parker on a tour to determine the potentialities of the region. After conferences with Flathead and Nez Perce Indians at the fur traders' Green River rendezvous, these advance agents were convinced that the field was promising, and 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 and arrangements were soon completed whereby the Reverend and Mrs. Henry H. Spalding, W. H. Gray, and Miss Narcissa Prentiss, whom Whitman married on February 18, 1836, were to assist him.

## MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AT WAILLATPU

Convoys by the agents of the American Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, this little missionary band reached the British post, Fort Walla Walla, in the Columbia Valley, early in September 1836. The journey of the Spaldings, Gray, and the newly wed Whitmans, as related in Mrs. Whitman's writings, forms a romantic chapter in the ever-thrilling story of the Oregon Trail. Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding were the first white women to arrive in the Oregon country by the overland route. The missionaries' wagon, reduced to a cart, also rolled into history, being the first 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, while the women enjoyed the luxuries of civilization at Fort Vancouver, hospitably offered by Dr. McLoughlin, the Chief Factor of the British company. On December 10, Mrs. Whitman was escorted to her new home at

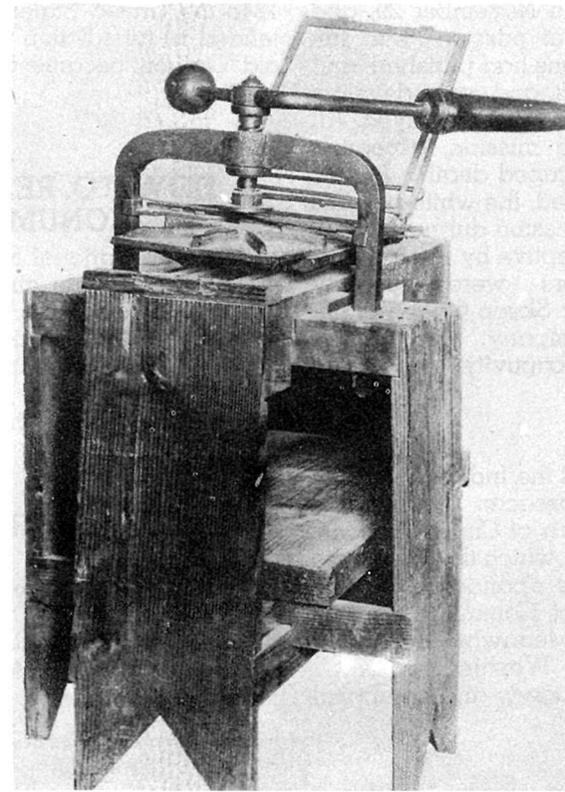
Waiilatpu, about 25 miles east of Fort Walla Walla, where she found a log cabin had been erected, the first home of white Americans in that region. The birth of Alice Clarissa Whitman on March 14, 1837, gave added significance to this home, as she was the first American white girl born west of the Rockies. Her accidental death by drowning in 1839 was one of the first tragedies of Waiilatpu.

Waiilatpu means "Place of Rye Grass" in the language of the Cayuse Indians, among whom Whitman chose to labor. Whitman and Spalding immediately set out to learn the natives' language, and their wives ably assisted them in conducting Indian schools. The language was reduced to writing, and the books printed on the missionary press brought to Oregon in 1839 were the first example of the "Art preservative of all arts" in the Pacific Northwest.

Whitman soon realized that the teaching of agriculture and industrial pursuits was an essential preliminary to the Christianizing of these Indians, who were so much "on the wing" in their seasonal expeditions to buffalo country, camas meadows, and salmon fisheries. Grains, garden seed, and potatoes were generously provided by the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, and soon Waiilatpu's fields were producing food for the mission members, as well as seed for the Indians. In the course of time a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a new adobe mission house, and a dwelling which functioned as an apartment house to accommodate associates and travelers were built.

Progress in spiritual matters, the primary objective of the missionaries, was slow. Religious worship, schools, and books were indifferently accepted by most of the Indians who were less

The first printing press in old Oregon was used by the missionaries in printing textbooks for their Indian schools.



Old mill pond levees near site of Mission Grist Mill.



eager for spiritual teachings than the early reports had implied. Conflicting reports from the Oregon Mission field and financial difficulties of the American Board caused them to order the closing of the station at Lapawi and Waiilatpu and the transfer of the Whitmans to Spokane. As a result of these unwelcome instructions, Whitman volunteered at a meeting of the Oregon missionaries in late September to return East and present their case before the American Board officials.

### A DEPOT ON THE OREGON TRAIL

Whitman's winter journey, which began on October 3, 1842, was a heroic and historic ride. With a sole companion, A. L. Lovejoy, he followed a route which took them by way of Fort Hall, Idaho; Taos, N. Mex.; and Bents Fort, Colo. Despite blizzards and ice-choked streams, Whitman reached St. Louis, Mo., and proceeded to Washington, New York, and Boston, where he appeared before the sponsors of his mission, who rescinded the unwelcome orders. While in Washington he called upon the Secretary of War and later submitted recommendations to him regarding the Oregon country. On his return trip he joined the immigration of 1843 and rendered much assistance to the immigrants, serving as pilot on the latter part of the journey.

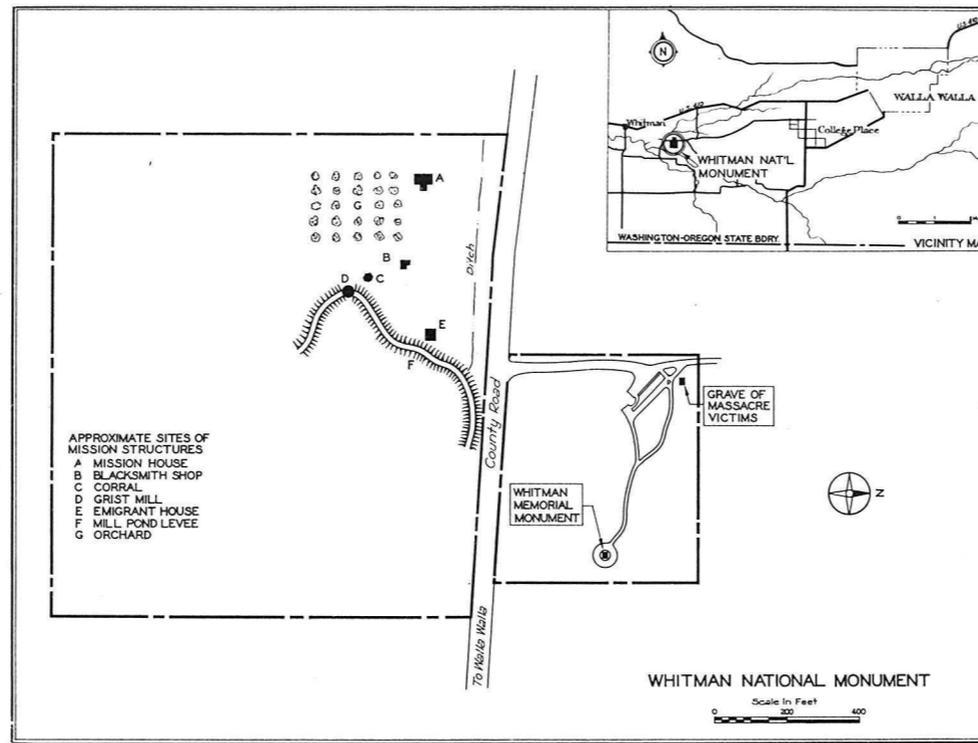
Although Waiilatpu had served as a depot of supplies for earlier travelers, succeeding caravans sought out more direct routes which bypassed the mission. Needy and destitute immigrants, however, continued to seek the hospitality offered by the Whitmans. Seven Sager children, orphaned by the death of their parents during the overland trip of 1844, together with David Malin and the daughters of Jim Bridger and Joe Meek, two famed mountain men, lived in the Whitman home. In November 1847 the mission community, including recently arrived immigrants, totaled 74 persons, besides Indians.

### THE MASSACRE

Protestant missionary work among the Oregon Indians was abruptly terminated by the Indian outbreak that began at Waiilatpu on November 29, 1847. On occasions Dr. Whitman had been treated insolently by the Indians. Some Cayuses wanted pay for teaching their language to the whites. Others misinterpreted discussions as assurances that they would be paid for the land upon which the mission was situated. At times Dr. and Mrs. Whitman were threatened, and mission property was destroyed. This ingratitude was not evidenced by all of 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.

Indian jealousy and distrust were, nevertheless, increased by the ever-growing number of westward bound American immigrants and by stories of the white man's domination, as told by eastern Indians and mixed bloods engaged in the fur trade. Whitman's inability, or failure, to conceal his personal belief that the country was destined to be taken over by the whites probably did not allay this suspicion on the part of the Indians.

Causes of the violence which resulted in the death of the Whitmans and 12 of their fellow men can be traced to the differences in the habits and beliefs of the races contending for the land. The violence was precipitated by an epidemic of measles attributed to the immigration of 1847. Among the Indian children, who had built up little or no immunity to white men's diseases, the malady proved virulent. Even those Dr. Whitman attended died, and it was rumored that he was poisoning the Indians to make way for the whites. Cayuse tribal custom permitted relatives of a deceased person to seek revenge by taking the life of the medicine man, and Dr. Whitman was a physician.



Map of Whitman National Monument.

The massacre began with an attack on Dr. Whitman on November 29, and before the "burst of passion" had run its course, 14 persons had perished, and buildings, orchards, and other developments at Waiilatpu were destroyed. All the women at the mission, excepting Mrs. Whitman, escaped death. But for the few who escaped, the white persons who were at the mission during the outbreak were held captive by the Indians. Fifty-one survivors were speedily ransomed by Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company. Two young girls had died in captivity.

Relatively few of the Indians had participated in the massacre. Some made requests for a return of Christian teachers, but the work in which the Whitmans had persisted was abandoned by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Meanwhile, Joe Meek had been sent to Washington, D. C., with news of the tragedy and an appeal

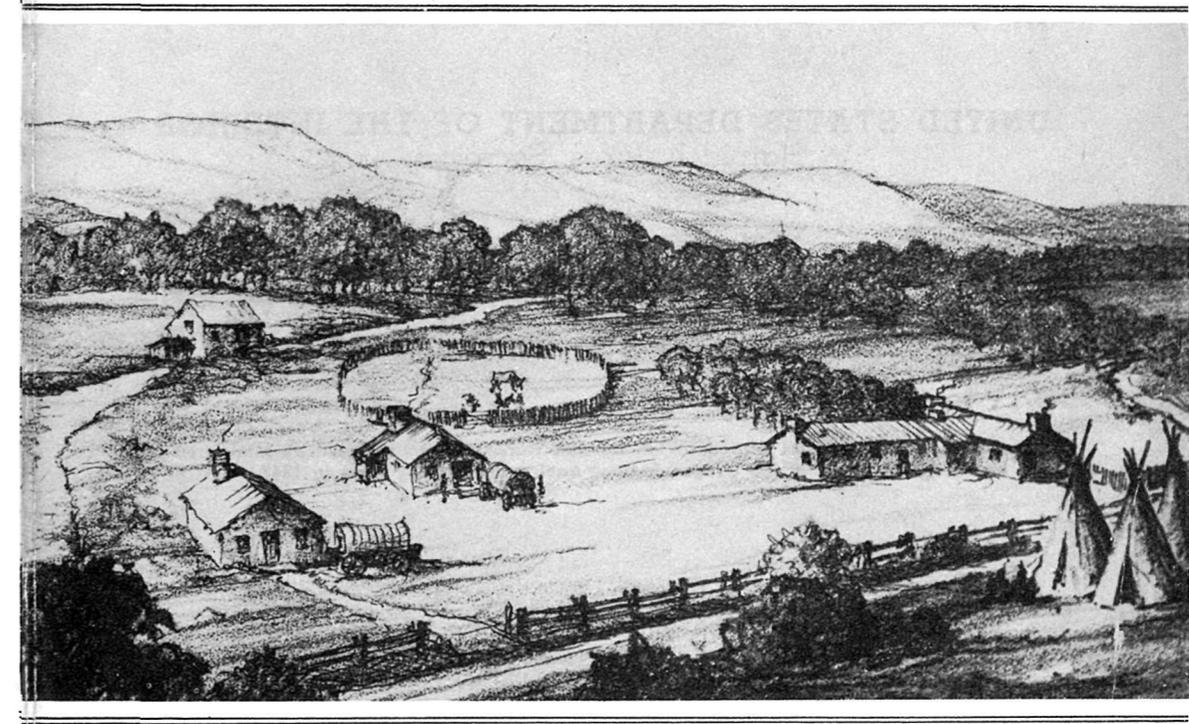
for aid. By the Congressional act of 1848 the United States Government extended its jurisdiction to the region, and old Oregon became the Oregon Territory.

### HOW TO REACH THE MONUMENT

Whitman National Monument, whose establishment was authorized by Congress in 1936, is reached by following U. S. Route 410, 6 miles west of Walla Walla, Wash., and turning left on a marked county road which leads 1½ miles to the monument.

### ADMINISTRATION

The monument is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. Written inquiries about the area should be addressed to the Superintendent, Mount Rainier National Park, Longmire, Wash.



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