



Whitman Mission

Portraits by Drury Haight from sketches by Paul Kane. Courtesy, estate of Clifford M. Drury.



EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Marcus & Narcissa Whitman

Biography

- Born:
 - Marcus Whitman: 1802, Rushville, New York
 - Narcissa Prentiss: 1808, Prattsburg, New York
- Died: 1847, Waiilaptu, Oregon Country
- Married: 1836, Angelica, New York
- Trail pioneers and missionaries

Achievements

- Emigrants 1836. Among first missionaries to the Northwest
- Narcissa was one of the first two Euro-American women to cross the Rockies
- Parents of first white child born in Oregon Country
- Marcus led first large party of settlers from Fort Hall to Oregon (1843)

After their 1836 marriage, Marcus and Narcissa Prentiss Whitman joined a fur traders caravan and crossed the plains to establish a mission near today's Walla Walla, Washington. Prior to their marriage Narcissa, a teacher, had wanted to travel west as a missionary, but single women were forbidden to do so at that time. Narcissa's much publicized journey and many letters helped open the way for other women to migrate west in later years.

Waiilaptu, the Whitman Mission, was established in Cayuse Indian territory and became an important stop on the Oregon Trail. Marcus, who was a doctor, farmed, ministered and provided medical care, while Narcissa established a school for Native American children. In 1843, Marcus helped lead one of the first large parties of wagons over the trail from Fort Hall, Idaho, helping establish a viable route for emigrant families.

In 1847 measles killed many of the Cayuse, who blamed the Whitmans. In what became known as the Whitman Massacre, the Cayuse killed Marcus and Narcissa and a dozen other settlers, leading to the Cayuse War. The site of the former mission is now preserved as the Whitman Mission National Historic Site.

In 1953 the State of Washington contributed a statue of Marcus Whitman to the National Statuary Hall in the US Capitol in Washington, D.C.