

THE GRAVES AT WAILLATPU

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During the visitor center dedication at Whitman Mission National Historic Site in 1964, the audience watched with interest while an Indian girl placed a wreath of yellow roses on the Great Grave. This marble vault, that is the mass grave of the martyrs killed at Waillatpu in 1847, is one of the better known historic sites in the Pacific Northwest. Its fame has tended, however, to overshadow the other graves at Whitman Mission, most of them long since forgotten and lost. Yet the stories of the people buried there and of their deaths tell much about the earlier days of the Oregon Country.

The massacre of 1847 was the terrible climax of death at Waillatpu. But burials go back to the beginning of the mission in 1836, back to the first few weeks the Whitmans were in the Oregon Country. Even while the missionaries were driving to complete a crude shelter, before the arrival of the first winter's storms, death came to Waillatpu.

The first person to die at Marcus Whitman's mission was Hines, a Negro. On December 5, 1836, Narcissa Whitman wrote that Hines was "a colored man who came with us from Rendezvous on account of his health, being far gone with dropsy."¹ Hines probably had been associated with the Rocky Mountain fur trade and, when the missionaries had arrived at the fur rendezvous, had sought out Dr. Whitman for treatment. Since Whitman was the only practicing doctor west of Independence, Missouri, Hines would have been eager for his assistance. Whitman already had a good reputation among the mountain men for just a year earlier he had successfully removed a stubborn arrow ^{head} from Jim Bridger's backbone. X

The doctor was able to do little for the man, but Hines apparently won Whitman's sympathy. At any rate, the Negro traveled westward with the missionaries.

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Until his death that autumn, Hines made himself useful at the new mission by cooking Whitman's meals while the doctor built his first house on the bank of the Walla Walla River.

Neither of the Whitmans ever mentioned where Hines was buried. Yet it is possible that his grave established the location of the mission cemetery -- a cemetery that was to increase steadily in size during the next eleven years at Waiilatpu.

Except for the great grave of the massacre victims, all surface traces of the mission cemetery have long since disappeared. However, this burial place is important to the story of the mission and to Pacific Northwest history, for in it lie the remains of Alice Clarissa, the Whitmans' only child and the first offspring of United States citizens to be born in the Oregon Country. Today, many thousands of visitors to Whitman Mission express their interest in this child's burial place, a grave that has not yet been identified with any certainty.

In the late 1940's and again in the early 1960's, National Park Service archeologists made limited excavations based on the historical evidence that was then known in a search for the location of Alice's' burial place and of the mission cemetery. Although these excavations did not disclose the whereabouts of the graves, they did show where the new visitor center and other structures could be safely located without destroying any of the physical evidence. It would have been a tragedy for the region's historical heritage had a building or a road been constructed over the forgotten graves.

To discuss the story of burials at Waiilatpu with some order, it is perhaps advisable to arrange the incidents of death into several successive groups:

1. Indian burials both before and during mission days.
2. Deaths at the mission, 1836-1847.
3. The first, second, and third Great Graves.
4. The pioneer cemetery

of the 1860's and '70's. These deaths involved Negroes, whites, Hawaiians, and Indians. This diversity of races will be of value to tomorrow's archeology in identifying any remains that may eventually be found.

Indian Burials

Long before the Whitmans came to Waiilatpu, the Cayuse Indians had used the bottom slope of Memorial Shaft Hill, particularly ~~on~~ the gentle slopes at the bottom of the north and west sides, as a burying ground. Although archeologists have excavated only a small part of this area, they have uncovered pre-Christian burials. In the fall of 1960, for example, a National Park Service archeologist located the grave of an adult Indian female. The remains had been buried in a typical flexed position. Earlier archeological projects and the work of road crews have located other pre-historic burials in this general area.

The Cayuses continued to use this site for burials after the mission was established. However, the mission cemetery, located on generally flat ground, and the Indian burials, concentrated on the lower slopes of the hill, were generally kept separate although adjacent to each other. Chief Tiloukait, one of the killers of Marcus Whitman, told Peter ~~Shreve~~^{Skene} Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company at the time the captives were released in 1847, "the whites have shown us convincing proof of their attachment to us by burying their dead long side of ours."²

Although the Whitmans had but little success in converting the Cayuse Indians to Christianity, the Cayuses were agreeable to having their dead buried in the Christian manner. One of the earliest known incidents of this occurred in the fall of 1839. Shortly after Alice Clarissa's death, Dr. Whitman had to leave Waiilatpu to pay medical calls at Lapwai and Tshimakain. Narcissa was

alone in her grief for the first time since her daughter's funeral. In a letter to her mother she described the death of two Indian girls aged five and ten in a nearby lodge. Despite Marcus' absence, she arranged for their funerals. "On Monday," she wrote, "we made a box large enough to put them in and buried them."³

A few months later, in the spring of 1840, much sickness spread among the Indians of the Walla Walla valley. Dr. Whitman wrote that ten deaths had occurred in the neighborhood of the mission.⁴ Narcissa noted that "some of them were our finest friends."⁵ Although neither commented on the method of burial of these Indians, their remains were likely placed in coffins. There is some evidence for this in the 1961 archeological discovery of the grave of an adult Indian male buried in a wooden coffin near the base of the west side of Shaft Hill. This Indian had been wearing at least some items of white clothing as was shown by the buttons found in the grave. Henry Spalding made further note of the missionaries' assistance when he wrote that making coffins for Indians was a customary thing at Waiilatpu.⁶

References to Indian deaths and burials at or near the mission are sprinkled throughout Waiilatpu's correspondence. When Mary Walker was still a newcomer, she wrote in her diary for September 22, 1838: "Attended an Indian funeral for the first time."⁷ In 1841, Whitman reported the death of Untipi (I-um-tipi), a troublesome chief.⁸ And in her diary for August 5, 1842, Mary Gray made this entry: "This afternoon our attention was arrested by the cry which the Indian women make over their dead. We, Mrs. W^hitman self & children, went to the lodge & found that a very old man had just breathed his last." The next day she added that "the old man was buried this morning -- very few people here."⁹

It was in the fall of 1847 that the Indian cemetery filled up rapidly. The emigrants of that year brought the measles, and within a short time the

disease threatened the entire tribe.¹⁰ It is not clear how many Cayuses died that autumn; the lowest estimate is fifty, and the highest is a least two hundred, or one-half the entire tribe. Not all died at the mission and only a few were buried by the missionaries. Nevertheless, Dr. Whitman was kept busy both attending the sick and performing funerals. On the morning of the massacre itself, he buried three Indian children.¹¹

It is not possible to arrive at even an approximate number of Indian burials along the base of Shaft Hill between 1836 and 1847. But, from the historical evidence and the limited archeological excavations, the Indian burial place was an extensive one.

The Mission Cemetery

Two years after the death of Hines, Sarah Hill, a young Indian girl who was a member of the Whitman household, died. Narcissa had taken this girl into her home just the year before. Along with Margaret McKay, the young half-breed daughter of a trapper, Mrs. Whitman had taught Sarah the ways of white culture. The girls, in turn, had helped with the household chores. In the spring of 1838, Narcissa wrote home that Sarah, whom the Whitmans had named after a Methodist missionary, "has been a great comfort to me so far." But how long this arrangement would last she did not know for "her father is a very wicked, troublesome man. How long he will be content to have her stay, I know not."¹²

The matter was taken out of both Mrs. Whitman's and the father's hands that summer: "My little Indian girl, that had been living with me for little more than a year, was taken sick with a lingering sickness, and died August 11th, much regretted by us all." Dr. Whitman was away at the time, but Pierre Pambrun, the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Fort Walla Walla, "came up to assist about the

burial. Had a general attendance."¹³ There is no indication whether Sarah was buried in the Indian cemetery or near Hines' grave. She was Indian; but she was also a member of the mission household.

"I prepared a shroud for her during the day." With these mournful words Narcissa Whitman recorded the death of her only child, Alice Clarissa, in June 1839. The girl's death was a great shock to the missionary couple; and it took many years to erase even the ragged edges of the hurt.

One of the earliest, but most confusing, descriptions of Alice Clarissa's grave is from Henry Spalding's diary for June 30, 1839: "In the afternoon the funeral was attended not by a great retinue nor with a splendid equipage [sic], but by a few sincere mourners, the parents, Mr. Hall, Mr. Pambrun, Mrs. Spalding and myself with a few domesticks. I spoke from 2 Kings IV:26. After, the corps was interred east of the house, the first of our little one who found a grave in these dark regions."¹⁴

Spalding was mistaken about her grave being to the east of the mission house. In a letter dated May 2, 1840, Narcissa Whitman described the new mission house and enclosed a sketch of it. On the north side of the house plan she placed the symbol "S" and wrote that it "is in the direction of her little grave. Farther off than is represented in this view."¹⁵ The letter and the drawing are explicit that the grave lay to the north and not to the east of the mission; however, the initial "S" is another of Wailatpu's mysteries.

From two accounts we learn that the grave was in sight from the mission buildings. In the fall of 1839, Mrs. Whitman wrote, "Although her grave is in sight, every time I step out of doors, yet my thoughts seldom wander there to find her."¹⁶ Many years later, Catherine Sager Pringle, writing of her arrival at the mission, quoted Mrs. Whitman's response to the wagon captain's query if

she had any children of her own: "Pointing to a grave at the foot of the hill, not far off, she [Narcissa] said; 'All the child I ever had sleeps yonder.' She added that it was a great pleasure to her that she could see the grave from the door."¹⁷

Catherine made more than one contribution to the location of this grave. Besides saying it was "at the foot of the hill," above, she wrote William H. Gray in 1882, enclosing a drawing of Memorial Shaft Hill and the mission cemetery. This sketch clearly identifies the bench of land at the northwest corner of the hill as the burial place, the same site that today contains the vault of the Great Grave of the massacred.¹⁸

Additional evidence concerning the location of the mission cemetery will be discussed further on. It must be noted at this point that the assumption is made that Alice Clarissa's grave, if not Hines' or Sarah Hall's, established the location of the cemetery. That this was so, may be seen by the next death to occur at Waialatpu.

Joseph Mahi had come to the Oregon Country from Hawaii. Marcus Whitman had hired him from the Hudson's Bay Company to help with the field work on the small farm Whitman had begun to cultivate. The Whitmans had become quite attached to Joseph and his wife, who were both Christians and members of the mission church. His death was a grievous loss to the missionaries. Whitman wrote to Boston in the fall of 1840 that Mahi "was again taken with inflammation [sic] of the bowels.... He died August 8th leaving us to mourn a Brother and fellow laborer."¹⁹

The grave of Joseph Mahi presents the earliest definite evidence that a mission cemetery had been established. In 1843, Gustavus Hines, author of Oregon: Its History, Condition and Prospects, visited Waialatpu. Dr. Whitman had not yet returned from a journey to the United States, thus Hines was not able to question him about the two graves he noticed, "one of which was inclosed in

a picket." He asked an unnamed informant "who was buried there, my attendant replied, 'The grave inside the picket is that of the only child, a little daughter, of Mr. and Mrs. Whitman, who was drowned in that creek which passes near the house. That on the outside incloses the remains of Joseph, the Hawaiian, who lived with Dr. Whitman."²⁰

The next death at the mission is enshrouded in mystery. It would have passed unnoticed in the historical record had not William H. Gray written a newsy letter to Elkanah Walker early in 1842: "In relation to the Indians about us all has been quiet since Mr. E. [ells] left us -- except a little uneasiness caused by Browns woman hanging herself soon after Mr. E. was here."²¹ Probably because she was a suicide, Brown's woman passed unwept in the mission correspondence. Gray added, "comparatively little was said or done about it and it has now all dropped." Other than his presence at Waialatu, little is known about Brown, and nothing is known about his wife. Gray told Walker that "Brown and Campbell have both left for the falls or some other place, where I hope they will do better than they have here, for themselves and their employees [-ers?] -- they did not finish their job of sawing."²² Brown apparently was a wanderer on his way to the Pacific Slope, hired by Whitman temporarily as a sawyer. His wife may have been Indian or white. In which cemetery her remains may lie is unknown.

In the autumn of 1845, the emigrant wagons brought Joseph S. Finlay to the mission door. Finlay, a young man of 32, was already far gone with tuberculosis. His brother, traveling with him, went on to the Willamette valley; but Finlay moved into the Whitmans' home to be treated by the doctor. He lived until March 1846, and won a place of high esteem in the Whitmans' minds. His death was particularly dramatic. Just before the end came, he seemed to be in communication with whatever lies beyond the real world. This experience left the Whitmans and the other witnesses very much shaken. Another grave was added to the mission cemetery.

Prior to the day of massacre in 1847, at least two more white deaths occurred at the Whitman mission. On November 14, 1847, Mrs. Jacob Osborn, ill with the measles, gave birth to a girl in the mission house. The baby died the same day and was buried the next. Compounding the sorrow of the Osborns, their six-year-old daughter, Salivijane, died on November 24, just five days before the Indian attack.²³

By the eve of the massacre, at least these eight deaths had occurred in the mission household. The remains of some may lie elsewhere than in the mission cemetery -- there are still questions about "Brown's woman" and Sarah Hall -- questions that may never be answered. Yet, it would seem that these deaths firmly established the mission cemetery, a cemetery that was to play an even more dramatic role at Wailatpu:

Hines, Negro	Autumn, 1836
Sarah Hall, Indian	August, 1838
Alice Clarissa Whitman, white	June, 1839
Joseph Mahi, Hawaiian	August, 1840
Brown's woman, race unknown	----- 1841
Joseph S. Finlay, white	March, 1846
Baby Osborn, white	November, 1847
Salivijane Osborn, white	November, 1847

In addition to the evidence already presented, the existence of the mission cemetery was further confirmed by Cyrus Walker. Cyrus, who as a boy attended school at Wailatpu during the winter of 1845-6 and who visited the mission site periodically over the years, drew a map of the place from memory in 1919. Although his memory suffered from the passage of time, Walker's map is surprisingly accurate when compared to the actual site. To the north of the mission, in the immediate vicinity of the northwest corner of Shaft Hill, he drew the "graveyard" and a path leading to it.²⁴ Also, in a speech a few years earlier, Cyrus had referred to the mission cemetery. It is worth noting that neither Walker's speech nor his map made any reference to a separate burial place for Alice Clarissa. As far as he was concerned, her remains lay with the rest -- in the mission cemetery.²⁵

The Great Graves

The deaths of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and their associates have captured the interest of writers countless times. An account of the massacre is not essential to a discussion of the "great grave" of the victims. Buried and reburied three times, their remains today lie in a large marble vault on which are inscribed the names of fourteen people. An examination of the historic event, however, gives rise to the question of how many of the victims are actually buried in the present great grave -- which has not been opened since its dedication in 1897.

At the very most, twelve of the fourteen dead are buried there. More likely, there are fewer than ten. Jacob Hall, whose name appears on the marble slab, lost his life somewhere along the Columbia River after successfully escaping the Cayuses' attack on the mission; no one ever located his remains. Another of those listed, James Young, Jr., fell dead not at the mission but a mile or two away. He was taking a load of lumber from the sawmill in the Blue Mountains to the mission on that fateful day. Unaware of the tragedy already in progress, he fell victim to the Cayuses before he reached Wailatpu. He was buried at the ^{now} unknown spot where the Indians killed him.

The ten persons killed at Wailatpu on Monday and Tuesday, November 29 and 30, 1847, were buried on Tuesday afternoon by Joseph Stanfield.²⁶ Himself a captive, ~~Sanders~~ ^{Stanfield} was one of the few male survivors who was both capable and willing to undertake the gruesome task. Father J. B. A. Broillet, the Catholic missionary at St. Ann's mission on the Umatilla River, came to the mission and performed the burial service. In later years he was to receive little thanks for this sorrowful duty from the martyrs' fiercely Protestant friends.

Mary Saunders, one of the few adults at the mission to leave an account of the massacre, described the mass burial: "Pretty soon the old chief Toloquevet (Tiloukait) came with a bolt of white cotton cloth which he told the women to make

to winding sheets for the dead. When this had been done, Father Brovillet, his half-breed interpreter Snods, Joe Stanfield, Mr. Finley [another half-breed living near the mission], Chief Beardy and the two Walla Walla Indians helped to bury our dead [including her husband]. They dug a trench six feet long, twelve wide and four feet deep, and the poor victims were laid side by side and the priest read the burial service over them."²⁷

Catherine Sager, twelve years old at the time, wrote a more detailed account of the mass funeral in later years. In 1882, she wrote William H. Gray that at first the Cayuses would not let the survivors bury the dead; but on the day following the initial attack, the Indians changed their minds. Joseph Stanfield dug the great grave "on the foot of the Hill near where Dr. Whitman's child was buried." Catherine recalled that the excavation was only "two to three feet deep and wide enough to lay the bodies side by side." She recalled that Father Brovillet arrived but she thought that the funeral was on Wednesday rather than Tuesday. She described the preparations:

The dead were lying where they fell. Domestic had been brought over from [The Emigrant House]... and we were busy sewing it into sheets to wrap the corpses in. Jo Stanfield was washing the dead and as soon as we had a few sheets done the young women and girls took them over and, as Jo wrapped them around the corpses, they sewed them with needle and thread.

After the bodies were prepared, Stanfield placed them in an ox cart "and hauled [them] to the grave yard but not till after a run away of the team." She described the order in which they were placed in the shallow grave: "1st Mrs. W. then the Dr., Mr. Rogers, [her] Brothers John and Francis. Then the others." Still later, Catherine wrote a similar description of the funeral in a letter to the editor of the Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Washington, October 24, 1897, just before the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre. She added the detail

at Mrs. Whitman's body was placed on the west side of the grave.²⁸

A week later, the Cayuses killed two more at the mission, Crockett Bewley and Amos Sales. These young men had been ill in bed with the measles since before the first attack. Once again Joseph Stanfield prepared a burial place. From Elizabeth Sager we learn that Bewley and Sales were buried separately from the first ten. In an interview with Fred Lockley many years later, she recounted that a few days after this second burial she had visited the graves in the company of Stanfield. She "noticed that Joe had buried Crockett Bewley and Mr. Sales in another place. I asked him why he had buried them in a different place than the others. He said, 'Because it is easier digging there.'"²⁹

Even today there is a layer of hardpan underlying parts of the mission site including the lower slope of Shaft Hill. Although Stanfield is often given blame for digging a shallow great grave, he did the best he could when the condition of the soil is considered. It is not surprising that he selected a spot with easier digging for the graves of Bewley and Sales.

The day before these two men were killed, still another death occurred in the mission family. On Sunday, December 5, Louise Sager, the second youngest of the seven Sager orphans, died from the measles. She had been ill since before the massacre and possibly would not have survived even had Dr. Whitman been alive to give her treatment. Daniel Young, who by then had come down from the sawmill to find out why his brother had not returned, built a coffin for the little girl.

On Thursday, December 9, the final death at Wailatpu that bleak autumn took place when Helen Mar Meek died from the measles. Helen Mar, the half-breed daughter of mountain man Joe Meek, had arrived at the Whitmans' home in 1840 and had become a favorite of the missionaries. Her burial was not recorded in detail. Perhaps Daniel Young built her coffin, and perhaps Joseph Stanfield dug her grave.

Catherine Sager later said that the bodies of both Helen Mar and Louise were buried by the side of Mrs. Whitman," thus implying that they too found a place in the mission cemetery. ³⁰

The first great grave quickly proved to be inadequate. Wolves soon discovered it and dug into the covering of earth. While the survivors were still the captives of the Cayuses, they witnessed the ghoulish scene. Catherine described how early one morning an Indian woman came to the door of the Emigrant House "and in great distress began to tell me something." Catherine could not understand her and called to Eliza Spalding, who knew the Nez Perce language, to translate for her. "The woman said that wolves had dug up the Dr. and his wife." Several of the survivors hurried to the graveyard where "the sight we beheld struck us with horror." Catherine had been ahead of the other women and clearly saw the ~~grizzly~~^{grizzly} work of the wild animals before the men, who had proceeded ~~er~~, quickly covered the torn bodies.

At another time, Catherine recalled even more graphically the sight: "Mrs. Whitman's leg was dragged out and the flesh eaten off to the knee. We reburied it. Before we left [the mission, in late December] the remains were again dug up, and morning after morning we would see the wolves ... and hear their snarling." She said, too, that "no effort was again made at burial while we were there." ³¹

On December 29 the Hudson's Bay Company secured the captives' freedom from the Cayuses. The survivors made the slow journey to the safety of Fort Walla Walla by ox-cart. Waillatpu lay quietly under the winter moon; all was quiet in the valley of tears.

When the Oregon Volunteers arrived in the spring of 1848 to punish the Cayuses, they found the great grave very much disturbed. Reverend Elkanah Walker,

o was also there wrote that "the bones and hair of the Missionary and wife with others had been scattered over the plains by the wolves."³²

One of the more detailed descriptions of the destruction caused by the wolves is found in Robert Newell's diary: "The hair of Mrs. Whitman was brot in. I have saved Some of it. The Boddies of the diseased [sic] have been taken up by the Wolves." Catherine Sager, whose future husband was one of the Volunteers, wrote that "some of Mrs. Whitman's hair was picked up by Wesley Howell a mile or more from the grave."

Catherine also mentioned that the few bones still to be found "were gathered up and placed in the original pit, and a wagon box turned over them." Later developments make it important to note at this point that Catherine had no doubt but that this "second" great grave was in the same location as the first. Newell, however, confused the event by writing that "Dr. Whitman and Wife were laid together with a paling around them nicely done. A board fence was also put around the rest. They was put in the ground together."³³ If, as Newell said, the bodies of the Whitmans were buried by themselves at this time, the question should be asked if they were reunited with the others at the time of the third burial, in 1897. Also, Newell's diary leaves unanswered the question of whether or not the remains of Bewley and Sales joined the others at this time. Since these two were buried more securely, it is quite possible their grave had not been molested and that the Oregon Volunteers saw no cause to move them. Perhaps their remains still lie in their own plot -- outside the former mission cemetery.

During the next few years, visitors, such as Indian Agent Anson Dart, pioneer James Longmire, and soldier Lawrence Kip, came to the site and were moved to record their emotions. But few of these travelers shed any additional light on the appearance of the grave. All but forgotten, Waiilatpu lay uneasily with its memories until the late 1850's.

In the summer of 1859, Cushing Eells, another of Whitman's co-workers, visited the mission site. During his pilgrimage, he decided that he would move to Waiilatpu and begin a college in memory of Marcus Whitman. When he looked for the great grave he could find very little. The fencing that Newell had described had long since disappeared. The only evidence remaining was a depression in the earth. In 1860, he again visited and this time placed a few stakes around the grave and fastened some rails to them.³⁴

By 1862, the Eells family had moved to the mission site and had built a home there. During the next few years, Cushing and his sons, Edwin and Myron, worked occasionally at improving the great grave's appearance. In 1863, Myron threw up a mound of earth over the grave, accidentally striking the wagon bed that the Oregon Volunteers had placed there. The earliest known photographs of the grave were taken about this time. They show Myron's mound of earth. From landmarks visible in the picture, the location of the great grave may be firmly established as being in the area formerly designated as the mission cemetery--on the bench of land at the northwest corner of Shaft Hill.

Myron's mother, Myra Eells, contributed to the evidence that the great grave and the mission cemetery were in the same place. In an 1862 letter to her friend and former associate, Mary Walker, she brought Mrs. Walker up to date on the appearance of the place, neither woman having seen it since their retreat from Tshimakain mission in 1848. "About this place," Myra said, "nothing but the hills look natural. That cuts off the view from town [the new town of Walla Walla]. The brow of the west side is still used as a burying ground. There have been three interments since we came here. No part is enclosed except the great grave and that only with rails, much as when we passed in '48."³⁵ The important word in this letter is "still." It implies that Mrs. Walker would know what used to be the mission cemetery when they were all missionaries together -- the bench of land at the northwest corner of the hill.

By the middle of the 1860's, Whitman Seminary was established in the town of Walla Walla. With the encouragement of one of their more dynamic presidents, A. J. Anderson, the Seminary students raised funds to purchase lumber and to build a picket fence around the great grave in 1884. This fence lasted until the establishment of the third grave in 1897.

But before then, in 1881, Catherine Sager Pringle, on a visit to Walla Walla, learned that Whitman's former co-worker, William H. Gray, was raising funds for a monument to the massacred. Catherine wrote Gray asking for the details of his plans. She was alarmed for she had learned from the owner of the land that Gray was considering moving the remains to the top of the hill and reburying them there. She scolded Gray that "my sisters and myself will enter a protest to this." She added that they "certainly have some interest in the matter as our Brothers are among them."³⁶

Poor Gray, who had left Waiilatpu more than two years before the Sager orphans had arrived, had no idea who Catherine was. He answered her letter, apparently asking what her relationship to the mission was. Catherine wrote back, explaining her family's history, and that she was the sister of the two boys, Francis and John, who had been killed in 1847.³⁷ She argued too that the owner of the land containing the great grave would never dare to till the land where the graves were -- as Gray had suggested might happen. Catherine admitted that she was not a lawyer, but she felt sure that public sentiment would prevent any such desecration. Furthermore, she argued, on her recent visit she could find no trace of the graves of her sister, Louise, or of Helen Mar Meek, or of the Osborn children. If the great grave's remains were moved, what would happen to these others?³⁸

For the time being, little happened. Gray continued, with limited success, to raise funds for a monument. Catherine, although retaining reservations about

moving the graves, contributed to these funds by giving talks about her life at the mission to audiences in different parts of the Pacific Northwest. Gray, already in his seventies, did what he could and, to a large degree, came over to Catherine's view concerning the graves. However, the funds required for a fitting memorial were slow in coming. Gray died in 1889, his task still unfinished.

The year before his death, in 1888, the Presbyterian Church in the Pacific Northwest, established by Marcus Whitman and his associates in 1838, observed its fiftieth anniversary by holding ceremonies at the old mission. During the three-day event, August 17-19, visitors rode out from Walla Walla on an excursion train. They held their impressive ceremonies under a canvas canopy erected next to the great grave.³⁹ Among those present were Gray himself, aged 78, Perrin Whitman, Marcus' nephew who had come out to the Oregon Country in 1843, and Myron Eells, who as a boy had been a member of the mission family and who was now a minister himself. Participants offered prayers and read addresses. The U. S. Army band from Fort Walla Walla furnished the music.⁴⁰

Before the anniversary came to a close, at a meeting held in Walla Walla, "a goodly number of ladies and gentlemen" resolved to remove the remains of the Whitmans "from the lonely spot of their interment" to Whitman Seminary, which would be a living monument to ~~his~~ ^{their} memory. These resolutions were signed by Miles C. Moore, R. R. Rees, and P. B. Johnson. The chairman of the meeting was B. L. Sharpstein. Catherine's letters to Gray had by now taken effect and the old pioneer now stood up to announce that the Oregon Pioneer and Historical Society had already obtained a deed to two acres at Waiilatpu -- presumably the area containing the grave -- and had taken steps to fence the cemetery. He objected to any plan to remove the remains to Walla Walla.

Miles Moore then took the floor and, in support of the proposed move, announced that the Moores "owned a granite quarry on Snake river ... and that they would

donate the material for the monument." Dr. Dorsey Baker, of railroad fame, allowed it to be said that he would "make the title to the Whitman Seminary grounds absolute, if assured that the monument would be erected on the grounds." 41

Catherine's younger sister, Matilda Sager Fultz, then living at Farmington, Washington, heard about these proposals. She also heard the mistaken story that the great grave had already been opened and the massacre victims moved. Angrily, she wrote a public letter blaming Perrin Whitman for taking such precipitous action. She demanded "where he got the power to authorize the removal of the others, whose ashes are comingled with those of Dr. Whitman and wife in that common grave ... and among them is the dust of my brothers, John and Frank Sager." Matilda said that she had heard "that a clique intended to remove the remains ... whenever they found the friends and relatives off their guard." She said that "Perrin Whitman knew that I and my sisters were decidedly opposed to any disturbance of our sacred dead, and he should have had at least manhood enough to withhold his consent until he could notify us of the intention of the church and college authorities."

In this letter, Matilda gave still another, and important clue concerning the whereabouts of Alice Clarissa's grave: "The traitor [her firm opinion] Stanfield, when sent to dig the grave that was to be the resting place of the martyrs, had respect enough for parental love to dig it beside that of little Alice, where the parents and their only child would lie side by side in their last long sleep, and when he placed the bodies ... the father lay next to little Alice, then her mother, and then John and Frank Sager. When he came back he said the family were all together."⁴²

The Sager sisters' protests and the action of the Oregon Pioneer and Historical Society carried the argument. The dead remained at Waiilatpu.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre approached, Protestant church circles and many people whose lives the Whitmans had touched began to talk of a fitting memorial at the mission site. This time there was no discussion about moving the remains to Walla Walla. Instead, a committee of the town's principal citizens formed to plan fitting ceremonies.⁴³ The committee proceeded to order a memorial monument, that would grace the top of the hill, and a permanent vault for the massacre victims, in the mission cemetery.

The decision to excavate the new grave in the same location as the existing one disturbed Catherine Sager Pringle very much. After the grave was opened and the remains moved to Whitman College for temporary safekeeping, Catherine bitterly wrote to an editor: "Had the grave remained undisturbed, the public would never have known but that all the remains of the victims reposed there." From her memories of wolves tearing at the grave in 1847, she had known that little was left.⁴⁴

Catherine's long-secret worries now became a reality. Two doctors, J. E. Bingham and E. E. Shaw, recorded the results when the remains were unearthed. Of the ten or so people buried in the common grave in 1847, only the skulls of four adult males and one female, and a few miscellaneous bones, were found. The doctors' report read:

First - Skull of man, mature adult, comprising all the bones of the cranium, in about the following condition:

All the ... right side in good state of preservation The left parietal bone is about one-half gone. The superorbital prominences are very marked. On the vertex, close to the medium line, is an oblique incised fracture of the skull, evidently made with the corner of a small axe. One inch in front is a small fracture. These wounds are well defined, the instrument acting like a wedge in splitting the skull beyond the seat of the wound On the left side of (the) occipital bone is a hole in the skull about three inches long, and one and one-third inches wide. Along the upper part of this bone is a fine edge to the border of the bone ... showing that the incised surface was evidently made by a

sharp cutting instrument, the blow striking the head either from above downward while the man was in an erect position, or being a horizontal [sic] blow while the man was lying face downwards. * * * The jaw is fairly well preserved, with the mental process strongly developed. The posterior molar tooth on the left side contains a gold filling, and is worn more than the teeth on the opposite side The seat of muscular adjustment shows a strong, well-developed man.

The skull has been mutilated by being cut in two, the cut commencing at the nasal bones and extending back to the seat of the front wound. Marks of the saw are well defined on each side of the saw incision, where the instrument evidently slipped in the hands of the operator. The skull had not been opened by this cut, which seems to have been made for some other definite purpose than of opening the skull. The sawing was done unskillfully, probably when the body was lying on the ground face upward.

Nos. 2 and 3 -- Two other well preserved skulls, both adults, one apparently of a man 35 years old, the other of a man about 60 years old....

No. 4 -- A skull of moderate capacity of a man of about 25 years of age. It is three pieces, probably produced by a blow in recent times. * * * This individual probably had a very prominent bridge to his nose, which must have been the Roman type. The cranium and jaw both are peculiarly thick.

No. 5 -- A woman's skull of ordinary size, thin. The sutures would indicate a person from 35 to 40 years of age. * * * The right superior marcella is well preserved and when placed in position shows a woman who must have had very large eyes. This skull has been sawed in precisely the same manner as No. 1.⁴⁵

When Catherine learned these particulars, she quickly denied that any of the skulls was Dr. Whitman's: "I would sooner think that skull No. 1 belonged to Crockett Bewly [sic] or Amos Sales." She thought the 60-year-old skull was probably that of Walter Marsh, the mission miller. She added, "one probably is [Joseph] Hoffman, and one Gilliam [Isaac Gilliland], the tailor." Since the only woman had died, the female skull had to be Narcissa Whitman's. Even so, Catherine had her doubts: "It may be that of one or the other of the Sager boys."⁴⁶

Considering the known circumstances of the attack on Marcus Whitman, skull no. 1 would appear to be his. A major mystery, beyond solution, is the sawing of the two skulls thought to be those of the missionaries. At first, Catherine

was most upset about the peculiar marks. In a long letter to the Spokane

Spokesman - Review, she wrote:

If the bones have been sawed, I assure you it was not done by Indians. They knew but little if anything of the use of a saw. * * * As I saw the corpses before burial, I know there were no such wounds as described.... I think there is a mistake about the saw cuts, as I do not think the volunteers [one of whom she was to marry] who buried these bones would have perpetrated the act. Had the natives wanted to make openings in them, they would have used their tomahawks.... The Cayuses were superstitious about the dead and would never have picked up one of these skulls to saw it.

She reflected upon those killed and decided that skull no. 1 was that of Judge Saunders, the school teacher: "He was an eastern man, so probably had gold fillings in his teeth."⁴⁷

One year later, Catherine thought she had found the answer to the puzzle. She wrote S. B. L. Penrose, president of Whitman College, that the sawing of the skulls was the work of Joe Lewis, a shadowy figure at the mission who apparently had encouraged the Cayuses' attack. Catherine expanded on her theory by saying that Father Brouillet and Joe Stanfield were witnesses to the deed, despite the fact that Brouillet was not at the mission at the time Catherine said Lewis had done the sawing -- the night of November 29. Catherine added that she could not "divulge the source of my information but I am satisfied of the truth in it."⁴⁸ Sometime later, without publicity, she changed her mind about the identity of skull no. 1. She wrote in her scrapbook that she had "seen the skulls above described and recognized one as being that of Dr. Marcus Whitman."⁴⁹

Dr. J. E. Bingham; one of the examiners of the remains, developed a different theory concerning the saw marks. He recalled "an old Indian superstition that when a great man or woman dies, the head was opened and the spirit of the departed would enter the body of the operator."⁵⁰

The ceremonies on the fiftieth anniversary did not go exactly as planned. The schedule called for the reinterment in a great marble vault and for the dedication of a memorial shaft high on the hill overlooking the grave. The Whitman Monument Association had taken up William H. Gray's work and had succeeded in raising the necessary funds. In October 1897, work began on the vault which was to be located at the same spot where the great grave had been. A Mrs. Picard, an undertaker in Walla Walla, presented a fine metallic coffin for the recently disinterred bones. Then, at the last minute, the organizers learned that the marble slab for the top of the vault would not arrive by November 29.

The day came cloudy and wet, much as that earlier November 29 had been. The participants crowded into the Walla Walla opera house that evening. It was a night of great oratory and singing. Nine survivors of the massacre, including the three Sager girls, Catherine, Elizabeth, and Matilda, were present. Others in attendance included veterans of the Indian Wars, the GAR, and the student body of Whitman College. In the boxes sat the faculty of the college and their guests. The college trustees and a sixty-voice choir occupied the stage. Several ministers and professors spoke, including Rev. Samuel Green, son of the Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions who had sent the missionaries to Oregon in 1836. Before the evening was over, some of the orators rekindled into flame the belief that Roman Catholic priests and the Hudson's Bay Company were somehow responsible for the massacre. At the conclusion, the audience participated in an informal reception on the stage to meet the survivors.⁵¹

On the following day, despite continuing bad weather, the participants paraded on Main Street, Walla Walla, then rode on special trains to the mission. The 4th U.S. Cavalry from Fort Walla Walla formed on three sides of a hollow square, in the center of which stood the speaker's stand, with the great grave directly

in front of it. The band of the 4th Cavalry provided the music; and a brief ceremony was observed. Catherine, the oldest survivor of the Sager family, "made a brief and touching address ... which moved many to tears."

Vivid memories must have passed through her mind as she thanked "the people of Walla Walla and the Northwest for their presence here, for their kindness in burying our dead, and for their royal entertainment." She forecast the future in saying that "these acts of kindness will be told to our children's children and be carried down to the future generations in grateful remembrance, as each recurring anniversary passes."⁵² The observation went smoothly. The only incident was the absence of the marble slab, which "proved a great disappointment" for the 3,000 people present.⁵³

The marble arrived in January 1898 and, on the 29th, "a burial service was conducted by ... [the] pastors of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches of Walla Walla; the coffin was placed in the vault, and a massive slab of marble, weighing two tons, was lowered to its place and sealed."⁵⁴ The great grave has remained closed ever since.

Pioneer Cemetery

Persistent reports still exist of many other burials in the vicinity of the great grave dating from the 1860's and '70's. These reports, most having escaped verification, note that for many years a number of wooden headboards stood near the marble vault. Yet, definite descriptions and photographs showing these markers are still missing.

There are two post-mission markers near the great grave today that suggest some degree of truth in these reports. One of them indicates the resting place of two small girls of the McElhaney family, members of which still live in Walla Walla. Rev. Cushing Eells buried these sisters in the early 1860's while living

at Waiilatpu. The McElaney family was a neighbor of Eells and on close terms with him. From Cushing's diary for that period, we catch a glimpse: "Nov. 7 1862, Julia McElhaney is so unwell as to cause anxiety. Mrs E [Eells] and Edwin are there tonight." Then, on November 9: "The remains of Julia McElhaney are committed to earth."⁵⁵ The other marker indicates the grave of another pioneer, a Dr. Stone, and his child.

Still one other monument needs to be noted. Next to the great grave today is a tall stone commemorating the graves of William H. Gray and his wife, Mary. Although these former members of the small mission family died and were buried at Astoria, Oregon, members of their family moved their remains to Waiilatpu in 1916. Whether or not this reburial destroyed traces of any of the now-unknown mission period graves is not clear. Today, the Grays lie next to their former colleagues, both sheltered by trees and the brooding hill.

From the foregoing accounts, there would seem to be little doubt but what the great grave was located in the mission cemetery, a graveyard that included the body of Alice Clarissa Whitman. There remain a few more bits of evidence to this effect that may be noted at this point. In 1855, an independent missionary to Oregon, Joseph Chamberlain, visited the mission site. According to his diary, the grave of Alice Clarissa was indeed very near the great grave: "Sept. 4. Started this morning for Whitman's valley -- enjoyed the ride very much, a very pleasant day. Just at sundown passed a very long, steep hill into the valley, a widely extended plain full of creeks. At the grave of Dr. Whitman it were proper I would pray that there might be a resurrection of that man's virtues to rest upon this feeble worm; that the mantle of Elijah may rest upon Elisha." This was before the Eells family returned to the site, and Chamberlain found "no marble, no

inscription, except written on a board, Alice Clarissa, Daughter of Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, drowned June 23rd 1839."⁵⁶

Catherine Sager also remembered the headboard at Alice's grave. Although her wording was slightly different, she recalled in an 1897 letter that "many times I have stood by the little grave and read the inscription upon her headboard -- Alice Clarissa Daughter of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman was drowned June 23, 1839 aged two years three months and nine days. Sleep little [daughter?] till Jesus bid you Rise."⁵⁷

Another person in a position to know a great deal about the graves was Myron Eells. Before the massacre, as a small boy living at the Tshimakain mission, he had been a regular visitor to Waialatpu. Then, in the 1860's, he lived there for a time with his parents. We have already noted his work on the grave site during this period. In his book on Marcus Whitman, Myron indicated that the great grave, the mission cemetery, and the grave of Alice Clarissa were all in the same area: "A day or two after the massacre, the bodies ... were ... buried in a common grave in the mission burying ground, a few hundred yards in front of the house, at the foot of the hill." He wrote that "when the volunteers reached the place the next year ... they then dug one large grave, placed all the remains in it that could be found, placed wagon beds over them.... They lay nearest to where Doctor and Mrs. Whitman's only child, Alice C., had been buried."⁵⁸

The green sod of Waialatpu today covers all traces of the original mission cemetery. The grasses yield no secrets. Traces of Alice's, Hinds', and all the others^{graves} await the tools of archeology so that they too may be marked to serve as reminders of some of the early history of this land.

1. Narcissa Whitman to her mother, Dec. 5, 1836, in Transactions of the ... Oregon Pioneers Association, 1891, p. 89. Hereinafter cited as TOPA. *Alvin M. Joseph, Jr., The Negroes and the Opening of the Northwest (New Haven, Yale University Press), p. 150, says this was John Hinder, who worked for Nathaniel Wyeth.*
2. American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Correspondence File, p. 475 in the typed copy at Whitman Mission National Historic Site. Hereinafter cited as ABCFM Corres. This profession of friendship may seem rather strange since Tiloukait was one of the two Indians who killed Marcus Whitman. However, when talking to Ogden, Tiloukait was attempting to enlist the Hudson's Bay Company's assistance in stalling off revenge by white settlers.
3. Narcissa Whitman to her mother, Oct. 9, 1839, in TOPA, 1891, pp. 127-28.
4. Marcus Whitman to the ABCFM, July 6, 1840, in ABCFM Corres., Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
5. Narcissa Whitman to her father, Apr. 30, 1840, in TOPA, 1891, p. 132.
6. Henry Spalding to the ABCFM, Feb. 22, 1848, in ABCFM Corres., Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
7. Clifford M. Drury, First White Women Over the Rockies, (3 vols., Glendale, Arthur H. Clark Co.), 2 (1963), p. 126.
8. Marcus Whitman to the ABCFM, Nov. 11, 1841, in ABCFM Corresp., Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
9. Drury, First White Women, 1, p. 259.
10. Ibid., p. 162.
11. Mary Saunders, "The Whitman Massacre," MS, typed copy at Whitman Mission NHS. Mrs. Saunders says these were the children of Tiloukait. She may have meant his own children or children from the band that he led. Catherine Sager Pringle, "My Story," MS, pp. 20-21, recalls that Whitman buried one of these children "in the graveyard."
12. Narcissa Whitman to her parents, Apr. 11, 1838, in TOPA, 1891, p. 102.
13. Narcissa Whitman to Mary Ann, Sept. 25, 1838, in TOPA, 1891, pp. 111-12.
14. Clifford M. Drury, The Diaries and Letters of Henry Harmon Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith (Glendale, Arthur H. Clark Co., 1958), p. 266.
15. Narcissa Whitman to her mother, May 2, 1840. Photostat at Whitman Mission NHS.
16. Narcissa Whitman to her mother, Oct. 9, 1839, in TOPA, 1891, p. 126.
17. Catherine Sager Pringle, "My Story," MS, p. 8. Typed copy at Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
18. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Jan. 4, 1882. Photostat of letter and drawing loaned by Mrs. Celesta Platz, granddaughter of Catherine.

19. Marcus Whitman to the ABCFM, Oct. 15, 1840, in ABCFM Corres., Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
20. Gustavus Hines, Oregon: Its History, Condition and Prospects,
21. William H. Gray to Elkanah Walker, Jan. 24, 1842. Photostat at Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
22. Marcus Whitman also referred to Brown and Campbell in a letter to H. B. Brown at Waskopam (The Dalles), Feb. 1, 1842: "We lent Brown & Campbell a horse which they are to leave with you.... If in your care will you please send by the return of Mr. Grant's horses. If not please let me know where the horse is & what disposition they made of him." In 1841, Gray had hired 4 men to help build his new house at Waillatpu. It is possible one of these was Brown. If so, he came from either Missouri or California. See Marcus Whitman to the ABCFM, Nov. 11, 1841, in ABCFM Corres., Whitman Mission NHS.
23. Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and Martyr; (Caldwell, The Caxton Printers, 1936), p. 391.
24. Cyrus Walker, drawing of Waillatpu, 1919. Photostat at Whitman Mission NHS.
25. Cyrus Walker, "Occasional Address," TOPA, 1900, p. 39.
26. Dr. Whitman, Narcissa Whitman, John Sager, Francis Sager, Issac Gilliland, L. W. Sanders, Nathan Kimball, Jacob Hoffman, Andrew Rogers, and Walter Marsh.
27. Mary Saunders, "The Whitman Massacre," MS. Typed copy at Whitman Mission NHS.
28. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Feb. 12, 1882, and newspaper clipping from Spokesman - Review, Oct. 25, 1897, in her "Pink" scrapbook, both loaned by Mrs. Platz.
29. Fred Lockley, Oregon Trail Blazers (New York, 1929), p. 341.
30. Catherine Sager Pringle, letter, Jan. 15, 1882. Copy loaned by Mrs. Platz; and Miles Cannon, Waillatpu: Its Rise and Fall, 1836-1847 (Boise, 1915), p. 151. Cannon, who knew the surviving Sagers, also wrote that Louise was buried in the mission cemetery. He also said that Louise was buried near the grave of Bewley and Sales (see p. 153), a contradiction of both Catherine and Elizabeth, who wrote that the two men were buried in soft soil.
31. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Feb. 12, 1882, and to the Spokesman - Review, Oct. 25, 1897.
32. Elkanah Walker to the ABCFM, July 8, 1848, in ABCFM Corres., Whitman Mission National Historic Site.
33. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Oct. 25, 1897; Dorothy Johnston, ed., Robert Newell's Memorandum (Portland, 1959), p. 112.

34. This and the following material on the Eells family comes from :Myron Eells, Marcus Whitman, Pathfinder and Patriot (Seattle, 1909), and Ida Eells, "Mother Eells: A Story of the Life of Myra Fairbanks Eells, MS, Whitman College Library, hereinafter cites as "Mother Eells."
35. Myra Eells to Mary Walker, Nov. 27, 1862. Typed copy at Whitman Mission NHS.
36. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Dec. 25, 1881. Copy loaned by Mrs. Platz.
37. Unfortunately, only Catherine's letters have been located. It would seem clear from them that Gray was bewildered as to Catherine's identity upon receipt of her first letter.
38. Catherine Sager Pringle to William H. Gray, Jan. 15, 1882. Copy loaned by Mrs. Platz.
39. The Seattle Post - Intelligencer, Aug. 19, 1888.
40. Unidentified newspaper clipping in Catherine Sager's "Gray" Scrapbook. Loaned by Mrs. Platz.
41. Ibid.
42. Matilda Sager Fultz to the editor of the Walla Walla Daily Journal, Sept. 16 (published Sept. 19), 1888. Letter discovered by Larry Dodd while doing research in Walla Walla newspapers.
43. The committee's organization:
 - Arrangement -- Levi Ankeny, Dr. N. G. Blalock, S. B. L. Penrose.
 - Finance -- George Whitehouse, John Atheit, Dr. William Van Patten.
 - Press -- H. C. Gregg, Col. F. J. Parker, J. J. Schick.
 - Transportation -- R. Burns and F. W. Rogers.
 - Unveiling Monument -- John L. Sharpstein, H. S. Blanford, John Pedigo.
 - Program -- Ex. Gov. M. C. Moore, Col. C. E. Compton, Levi Ankney, Dr. N. G. Blalock, S. B. L. Penrose.
- Unidentified newspaper clipping in Catherine Sager's "Ping" Scrapbook. Loaned by Mrs. Platz.
44. Ibid., Catherine Sager Pringle to the editor, Spokesman - Review, Spokane, Wash., Oct. 22, 1897.
45. Ibid., Unidentified newspaper clipping, dated Walla Walla, Oct. 24, (1897?).
46. Ibid., Unidentified newspaper clipping.
47. Ibid., Catherine Sager Pringle to the Spokesman - Review, Oct. 25, 1897.
48. Catherine Sager Pringle to Dr. S. B. Penrose, Dec. 14, 1898. Copy loaned by Mrs. Platz.

- Catherine Sager Pringle's handwriting on the page in the "Pint" Scrapbook that has the doctors' report. (See note 45).
50. Ibid., Unidentified newspaper clipping dated Walla Walla, Oct. 24 (1897?).
 51. Ibid., Unidentified newspaper clipping dated Walla Walla, Nov. 28 (1897?).
 52. William A. Mowry, Marcus Whitman and the Early Days of Oregon (New York, 1901),
 53. Catherine Sager Pringle. Unidentified clipping in "Pink" Scrapbook.
 54. Mowry, p. 232.
 55. Ida Eells, "Mother Eells," MS, p. 62. Typed copy at Whitman Mission NHS.
 56. Extract from Joseph Chamberlain's diary in a letter from Mrs. (E. C.) Bertha Crockett Jenner, Seattle, to Superintendent William J. Kennedy, Whitman Mission NHS, Mar. 20, 1960.
 57. Catherine Sager Pringle to Eclectic Society, Dec. 3, 1897. Whitman College Library.
 58. Myron Eells, pp. 286-87.