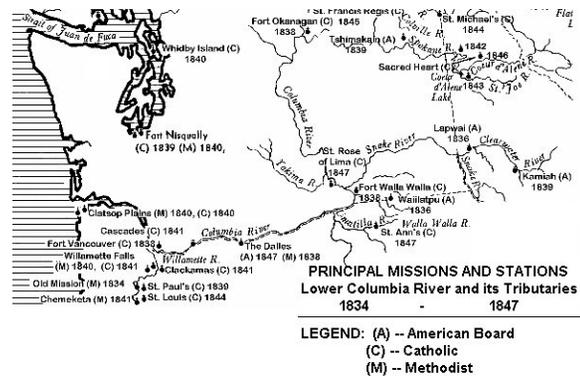


## Section 3 The Missionaries

### Missionary Facts

In 1831, two neighboring tribes west of the Rocky Mountains, the Nez Perce and the Flathead, sent a delegation of their tribesmen to St. Louis, Missouri to seek Captain Clark (of the Corps of Discovery - Lewis & Clark Expedition) and technology. Their desires were misinterpreted, and it was believed that they were seeking religion. Their understanding of Christianity was slight, but perhaps they equated it with the power and technology they saw among the Euro-Americans. Word spread quickly about these visitors from the west and within a matter of a few years missionaries were on their way to the Oregon Country.



This call from the West was immediately heard by various churches in the United States. Several missionary organizations became active in finding men and women to send to the Pacific Northwest as missionaries. Among them were the Missions Society of the Methodist Church; the Roman Catholic Order of the Society of Jesus, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, then supported by the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Dutch Reformed Churches.

The first to respond was the Methodist's Mission Society. In 1834 Jason Lee and four associates joined the Wyeth Expedition and headed for the Northwest. Lee selected a site in the Willamette Valley, and a mission was established close to present-day Salem, Oregon. Reinforced by 13 new workers in 1836 and 50 more in 1838, the Methodists began to build missions at The Dalles, the Clatsop Plains, Fort Nisqually, the Falls of the Willamette, and Chemeketa—now Salem. Their work among these coastal tribes was not very successful. New diseases brought by the whites were fatal to these tribes, and consequently the number of Indians along the Willamette and lower valleys was rapidly declining.

As early as 1834 French Canadian employees of the Hudson's Bay Company had petitioned the Catholic Bishop in western Canada for priests. At first the Hudson's Bay Company refused to help priests come to the Oregon country, but in 1838 it agreed to transport Catholic missionaries across the Rocky Mountains provided that no missions were established south of the Columbia River. The Reverend Blanchet became the vicar-general of the new area. He was joined at Fort Vancouver by Father Modeste Demers. The restriction of where they could establish missions was eventually removed and Catholic missions sprung up throughout the Oregon country.

In 1836, Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, the Reverend Henry and Eliza Spalding, and William H. Gray crossed the North American continent from New York state to a remote and largely unknown land called Oregon. They came to establish missions among the Indians. Dr. Whitman established his mission among the Cayuse at Waiilatpu, and the Reverend Spalding began his work among the Nez Perce near Lewiston, Idaho. The trail the Whitmans followed across the continent had been established by Indians and fur traders and later became the Oregon Trail.

Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding were the first white women to cross the continent, and the Whitmans' baby, Alice Clarissa, was the first child born of United States citizens in the Pacific Northwest. Narcissa's letters home were published, spreading the story of these two events. They inspired many families to follow, for they proved that homes could be successfully established in Oregon, a land not yet belonging to the United States.

In the fall of 1842 two important things happened: (1) The first large group of emigrants to travel to the Oregon country stopped at Waiilatpu for rest and supplies (they took wagons as far as Fort Hall in Idaho, repacked their belongings on horses and continued to the Willamette Valley on horse and foot).

(2) The American Board of Foreign Missions received reports of dissension among the missionaries. Dissension and lack of money caused the American Board to order the Waiilatpu and Lapwai Missions closed. So, in the winter of 1842-43 Dr. Whitman rode across the Rocky Mountains in a desperate journey to the east to save the missions from closure. He was successful.

On his return to Oregon, he joined the Great Migration of 1843 and successfully led the first wagon train of emigrants across the Blue Mountains. This event gave the final thrust for the western expansion of the United States. The Whitmans' Mission, throughout the rest of its existence, was a haven for the overland traveler. Those who came this way could get medical care, rest, and supplies.

The Whitmans worked among the Cayuse and Walla Walla Indians for eleven years. They tried to teach them the principles of Christianity, the rudiments of agriculture, and reading and writing. They also treated their diseases. Dr. Whitman's success as a missionary was limited. Even though the majority of Indians liked and respected him, some threatened the missionaries and destroyed mission property. Despite setbacks and occasional hostility, the Whitmans refused to abandon the mission. Their best efforts failed to prevent distrust and unrest among the Indians, and, on November 29, 1847, the mission effort ended in an outbreak of violence.

Several Cayuses led to the rising 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 the emigrants, 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 Cayuse attacked the Mission and killed Marcus Whitman, his wife and 11 others. The massacre ended American Board 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, fur trapper Joe Meek, whose daughter had died of measles while being held captive, carried news of the tragedy, along with petitions from the settlers, to Washington D. C.. The event spurred Congress into recognizing Oregon Territory in August of that year, thus forming the first American territory west of the Rockies.

As with the fur trade, and later Oregon Trail, the missions represented one last aspect of American expansion into the West.