

WHITMAN VOLUNTEERS FOR OREGON

No seer could possibly have foretold a connection between a missionary meeting held in a small one-room country church at Wheeler, Steuben County, New York, on a raw November evening in 1834, and the action taken by Congress in August 1848 which made Old Oregon¹ a territory of the United States. The fact that these two events were related is clearly evident from contemporary documents. The one who tied them together during that span of fourteen years was Dr. Marcus Whitman and this is the story of what happened.

First, let us look at that small and at the time rather insignificant meeting held in the Presbyterian Church of Wheeler—its locale, the speaker, his message, and especially the key person in the audience, Dr. Whitman. About midway along the tier of New York counties bordering on Pennsylvania is Steuben County with Bath as its county seat. The town or township of Wheeler, in the central part of the county, and the village of Wheeler, received their names from one of the original settlers, who is reported to have been one of the patriots who took part in the Boston tea party of 1773.²

The village of Wheeler is located about nine miles north of Bath and seven miles south of Prattsburg. It had a population of not more than twenty-five families when Dr. Whitman settled there early in 1832. His medical practice took him throughout the township, including such

neighboring places as Prattsburg. Roads were poor and carriages expensive. People, especially men, usually traveled on horseback. The discovery of Dr. Whitman's saddlebags in the attic of an old house in Wheeler in 1936 gave mute evidence of his method of travel.³

When Dr. Whitman first settled at Wheeler, he lived in the home of Thomas Aulls, one of the elders of the Presbyterian Church. This church had been organized in 1824 with twenty-three charter members, but at the time of Whitman's arrival in 1832, was practically defunct. It had no building, no pastor, and no Sunday services. Whitman took an immediate interest in reviving the congregation. Under his initiative, a building, which measured 32 x 40 feet, was erected; it was dedicated on January 10, 1833. The church was reorganized with nine members. Whitman was elected a trustee on December 29, 1832, and joined the church on the following February 10 by letter of transfer from the Congregational Church of his home town, Rushville, New York. He was ordained an elder on Sunday, June 1, 1834.⁴ The church records, still extant, show that he was active in the Sunday school, in temperance work, in the local branch of the American Bible Society, and in the official boards of the church. He was a generous contributor to the church's budget and to special needs, as the following minute in one of the record books testifies: "Recd. fifteen dollars from Doctor Whitman to pay M. H. Brown for balance due on stove & pipe for Meeting House."

The revitalized congregation called the Rev. James H. Hotchkin, 1771-1851, who had served as pastor of the Prattsburg Presbyterian Church from 1809 to 1830, to become its pastor in February 1833.⁵ His salary was paid in part by the American Home Missionary Society, the domestic counterpart of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, as the little congregation was not strong enough to be self-supporting.

Both of these mission boards enjoyed the support of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations at that time. While at Prattsburg, Hotchkin had received into the church Narcissa Prentiss, who in 1836 was to become Mrs. Marcus Whitman, and Henry Harmon Spalding, who was destined to be associated with the Whitmans in the Oregon Mission of the American Board throughout its eleven-year history. Thus Hotchkin had the distinction of serving as the pastor of three of the most important members of that Mission.

Sometime during the latter part of November 1834, the Rev. Samuel Parker, 1779–1866, visited Wheeler and spoke before a small gathering in the Presbyterian Church in behalf of a proposed mission to far-away Oregon. Parker, who had visited St. Louis during the summer of 1834 on an exploring mission for the American Board, was then sent by the Board to tour western New York in order to solicit funds and recruit missionaries for the projected mission.

But of all places to visit for such purposes, could there have been a more unpromising place than Wheeler? Financially, the little congregation was still struggling to pay for its new building and to raise its share of its pastor's salary. As for finding someone in that small community who would volunteer to go to Oregon as a missionary—who would have dared suggest such a possibility? Yet this is exactly what happened.

It may be that bad weather had prompted Parker to lay over for a day or two in Wheeler, since he commented in a letter to his family dated December 5 on “the very bad state of the roads.”⁶ Moreover, Parker and Hotchkin were old friends. Each had served Presbyterian churches in the same general area for about twenty years and each had a connection with the American Board. Parker was then one of its agents and Hotchkin had been made an honorary member.

Parker had a thrilling story to tell. His enthusiasm for the proposed mission to Oregon was contagious. As a result, there in that small rural church at Wheeler, where Parker first met Whitman, a decision was made which had far-reaching consequences. Dr. Marcus Whitman volunteered to go as a missionary to Oregon! A few days later, on Tuesday, December 2, 1834, Whitman wrote to the American Board in Boston: “I have had an interview with the Rev. Samuel Parker upon the subject of Missions and have determined to offer myself to the Am. Board to accompany him on his Mission or beyond the Rocky Mountains.”⁷

THE AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

The American Board played so important a role in the life of Marcus Whitman that a brief review of its early history and its objectives is necessary. During the first ten or fifteen years of the nineteenth century, a spiritual awakening pulsed through the nation, which resulted, among other things, in the rise of camp meetings on the western frontier,

for example in Kentucky, and in the establishment of theological seminaries and mission boards in the East.

Such institutions of higher learning as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, which had been founded primarily for the training of a Protestant ministry, had by 1800 become secularized. As a result such denominations as the Congregational and Presbyterian found it necessary for their continued existence to establish theological seminaries. Andover Theological Seminary, founded at Andover, Massachusetts, by the Congregationalists in 1808, was the first institution of this kind in America. Two years later the Presbyterians established their first seminary at Princeton, New Jersey.

Another result of the spiritual awakening which swept through the New England states during the early years of the nineteenth century was the establishment of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. This arose out of an incident which took place on the campus of Williams College in northwestern Massachusetts in 1806. According to a commonly accepted story, the anti-religious feeling was so strong in the college that the Christian students found it best to retreat to a nearby grove in order to find privacy for their devotions. The leader of this band was the dynamic Samuel J. Mills, later active in such organizations as the American Colonization Society and the American Bible Society. He became one of the founders of the African Republic of Liberia.

One day in August 1806, five students at Williams College under the leadership of Mills met in the grove to discuss the proposition that the great commission of Jesus to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature was binding upon their generation. At that time there was not a single denominational foreign mission board in the United States. A sudden thunderstorm interrupted the prayer meeting and sent the five young men scurrying for cover. Unable to reach the shelter of a college building, they took refuge in the lee side of a haystack where they continued their discussions. There, under the leadership of Mills, the group solemnly dedicated themselves to the cause of foreign missions. They accepted the proposition that the great commission was binding upon them.

Several of these students, including Mills, enrolled at Andover Theological Seminary where they continued to crusade in the cause of foreign missions. Others, such as Adoniram Judson, who in 1812 was to

become the founder of the Baptist Mission in Burma, joined them. The zeal of this group induced the Congregational Association of Massachusetts to establish in 1810 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, often referred to as the A.B.C.F.M. Other Congregational Associations soon joined, and in 1812 the Presbyterians began their cooperation with the Board.

Thus from the incident of a prayer meeting held in a haystack came the germinal idea that resulted in the founding of the first foreign missionary board in the United States. The site of the haystack on the campus of Williams College is now marked by a pedestaled monument bearing a globe and the inscription: "The Field is the World. Birthplace of American Foreign Missions, 1806."

Since work with any non-English speaking people in the United States was classified as being foreign missions by most Protestant denominations throughout the nineteenth century, it was logical that the newly organized American Board should have become interested in the American Indians. The Board began its Indian work in 1816 when a few missionaries were sent to the Cherokees. Beginnings of missionary work with five other tribes had been made before Parker urged the Board to send him on an exploring tour to Old Oregon.

SAMUEL PARKER

Samuel Parker was the connecting link between Marcus Whitman and the American Board and also between Whitman and Old Oregon. Parker was born April 28, 1779, at Ashfield, a village in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, about twenty-five miles southeast of Williamstown, the site of Williams College.⁸ His education was somewhat delayed; he was not graduated from Williams College until 1806, when he was twenty-seven years old.

Although a fellow student of Samuel J. Mills, there is no record of him being on the campus at the time of the haystack prayer meeting. After teaching school for a year, Parker began his theological studies under the tutelage of a Congregational minister and was licensed in 1806. He then served as an itinerant home missionary in the western part of New York State; this took him into such counties as Steuben, Allegany, and Cattaraugus which he was to revisit in the late fall and early winter of 1834.

Parker was a member of the first senior class at Andover Theological Seminary, 1810–11, but it does not appear that he was graduated. His associations at Andover with such enthusiasts for foreign Mission as Mills and Judson may have accounted for his lifelong interest in this aspect of Christian endeavor which was then beginning to challenge the attention of the Protestant churches.

Parker was ordained by the Congregational Church at Danby, Tompkins County, New York, in December 1812 when he was thirty-three years old. Later he became a Presbyterian minister, but throughout his life felt free to serve churches of either denomination. In 1812 he became pastor of the Congregational Church in Danby where he remained for fourteen years. He was married in 1815 to Miss Jerusha Lord; to this union three children were born—Jerusha, Samuel J., and Henry.

In 1882, the son, Samuel J. Parker, M.D., then sixty-four years old, wrote an article of about 75,000 words in answer to the question: “By whom were the missions of Dr. Whitman and others established and what was the influence of this movement on the history of the United States?”⁹ In it he gave the following description of his father: “...a man some five feet six or eight inches high; blue eyes, slightly sandy hair, a little over weight, but not fleshy; and with mild features, light complexion... He was not an eloquent speaker in the pulpit; but earnest... He was an active man.”¹⁰

Parker resigned his pastorate at Danby in 1826 and during the following eight years moved frequently from one church or position to another. In 1830 he built a house, which is still standing, at 404 East Seneca Street in Ithaca, New York. For a time Parker taught school in that city. During the early part of 1832, he accepted a call to be pastor of the Congregational Church in Middlefield, in west central Massachusetts. While living there, the March 1, 1833, issue of the *Christian Advocate* and *Journal* and *Zion's Herald*, a Methodist paper published in New York, came to his attention. This carried what Parker considered to be a truly amazing account of a pilgrimage made by four Indians “from west of the Rocky Mountains” to St. Louis to get information about the Christian religion and possibly, also, some missionaries.

THE WISE MEN FROM THE WEST

Nearly one-half of the front page of the *Christian Advocate*, a periodical with the page size of the *New York Times*, was devoted to a feature article under the caption: "The Flat-Head Indians." The heart of the report was a letter from William Walker written from Upper Sandusky, Ohio, on January 19, 1833, to Gabriel P. Disosway, a Methodist merchant in New York City. Walker, who was part Wyandot Indian and also a Methodist, had visited St. Louis in the fall of 1831 to discuss with General William Clark, then in charge of Indian affairs west of the Mississippi River, the possible exchange of some land the Wyandots held in Ohio for a new location in the Indian Territory.¹² This was the Clark who with Meriwether Lewis had made the exploring tour into the Pacific Northwest in 1805–06.

According to Walker's letter, while in Clark's office, "...he informed me that three chiefs from the Flat-Head nation were in his house, and were quite sick, and that one (the fourth) had died a few days ago. They were from the west of the Rocky Mountains." Prompted by curiosity, Walker stepped into the room where the sick men were staying. He was attracted by the deformed skull of one of the Indians and sketched his picture showing the wedge-shaped malformation.

Walker's letter continues: "Gen. C. related to me the object of their mission... It appeared that some white men had penetrated into their country, and happened to be a spectator at one of their religious ceremonies, which they scrupulously perform at stated periods. He informed them that their mode of worshipping the supreme Being was radically wrong, and instead of being acceptable and pleasing, it was displeasing to him; he also informed them that the white people away toward the rising of the sun had been put in possession of the true mode of worshipping the great Spirit. *They had a book* containing directions how to conduct themselves in order to enjoy his favor and hold converse with him; and with this guide, no one need go astray."¹³

After returning to his home in Upper Sandusky, Walker, for some reason, waited for more than a year before writing to Disosway. He enclosed a copy of the drawing he had made of the Indian's deformed head. Disosway was so moved by the letter and the drawing that on February 18, 1833, he forwarded both to the editor of the Methodist *Christian Advocate* with comments of his own. This was the basis of the article which captured the attention of Samuel Parker.

Both the letter from Walker to Disosway and the latter's letter to the editor contained references to the Indians as being from west of the Rockies. Parker saw a parallel between the New Testament story of the wise men from the East who traveled westward seeking the Christ child and this delegation from the West going eastward to St. Louis to get the "book" which would tell them how to obtain the Great Spirit's favor. In a letter addressed to the American Board, dated April 10, 1833, Parker wrote: "Since I saw... what was stated under the head 'The Wise Men from the West,' I have asked myself the question, am I doing my duty with reference to those who are perishing without the gospel... ?" ¹⁴ Actually the *Christian Advocate* carried no such caption. In Parker's imagination, "The Flat-Head Indians" became "The Wise Men from the West."

OREGON INDIANS IN THE RED RIVER MISSION SCHOOL

Since the publication of the Walker-Disosway article in the *Christian Advocate* was directly responsible for both the Methodist Missionary Society and the American Board to send missionaries across the Rockies into Old Oregon in 1834 and 1835-38, we can well ask: What were the circumstances which inspired the Nez Perce Indians to make the journey to St. Louis to inquire about the white man's religion?

In 1812 the Hudson's Bay Company settled a colony of Scottish families at Red River where Winnipeg, Canada, is now. There followed many retired employees of the Company, then referred to as "servants," with their native wives and half-breed children. Most of the Scotsmen were Presbyterians, but the "servants," being French Canadians, were Roman Catholics. In 1821 the Anglican Church Missionary Society of London, with the approval of the Governing Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, sent the Rev. John West, an Anglican, to the Red River colony. West has the distinction of being the first Protestant clergyman to settle in what is now western Canada.

Shortly after his arrival, West began to agitate for the establishment of a school for Indian youth.¹⁵ In this project he had the enthusiastic support of two important members of the Company's Governing Committee in London, Nicholas Garry and Benjamin Harrison. As a result, the Church Missionary Society on January 27, 1822, authorized the establishment of the North-West American Mission at Red River with West as its superintendent. West returned to England in September

1823 and was succeeded by two more Anglicans, the Rev. David T. Jones and the Rev. William Cochran, both of whom were to play minor roles in the early history of Protestant missions in Old Oregon.

One of the most influential officials of the Hudson's Bay Company was Governor George Simpson, 1787–1860, who was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1841. Beginning in 1820, when Simpson was only thirty-three years old, and continuing for nearly forty years, he was the all-powerful administrator of a great commercial empire in what is now western Canada and the Pacific Northwest.

A second important Company official was Dr. John McLoughlin, 1784–1857, who in 1824 was appointed to take charge of the newly established Columbia Department. McLoughlin was both a physician and a fur trader. He was a handsome man, standing six feet four inches and wearing his white hair long so that it touched his shoulders. Deeply religious, Dr. McLoughlin was a man of great moral integrity.

When Simpson first heard of the Rev. John West's desire to establish a school for Indian youth at Red River, he expressed his disapproval. Writing to Andrew Colvile, a member of the Governing Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, Simpson on May 20, 1822, ridiculed the proposal by saying that West "...takes a very sanguine view of this scheme which is to diffuse Christian Knowledge among the natives from the shores of the Pacific to those of [Hudson's] Bay." Simpson prophesied that the project "will be attended with little other good than filling the pockets and bellies of some hungry missionaries and schoolmasters and rearing the Indians in habits of indolence... I have always remarked that an enlightened Indian is good for nothing."¹⁶

In the early summer of 1824, when Governor Simpson was preparing to make his first journey into the Oregon country, he received a communication from the Church Missionary Society asking him to find some Indian boys from west of the Rockies who could be sent to the Red River Mission school. By this time Simpson had become aware of the great interest that Benjamin Harrison and others of the Company's London Committee were taking in the proposed school. Even though Simpson two years earlier had ridiculed the idea of trying to educate the natives, he was above all else a practical man. He was under orders, and if his superiors in London wished him to find some Indian boys in Oregon and take them back to Red River to be educated, this he would do.

In a letter addressed to Harrison on August 1, 1824, Simpson wrote: "While in the Columbia I shall endeavour to procure a few children... for the Missionary Society School."¹⁷ And at about the same time, Simpson wrote to West and gave him the same assurance. Simpson had made a complete about-face.

Dr. John McLoughlin accompanied Simpson on his journey into Oregon in the spring and summer of 1824. McLoughlin was then ready to assume the duties of Chief Factor of the Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company to which he had been appointed. The two men arrived at Fort George [present-day Astoria, Oregon] on the south bank of the Columbia River on November 8, 1824. Since the Company then had reason to believe that all territory south of the Columbia would probably come under the jurisdiction of the United States, both Simpson and McLoughlin felt that the site for a new trading post should be selected on the north bank of the river. Hence Fort Vancouver was established in a beautiful location near the mouth of the Willamette River. There McLoughlin remained when Simpson returned to Canada the following spring.

As Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, located about one hundred miles from the mouth of the Columbia River, McLoughlin ruled Old Oregon as an uncrowned king from 1825 to his retirement in 1846. The establishment and continuation of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic missions in Old Oregon would have been impossible without the help of the Hudson's Bay Company and Dr. McLoughlin's sympathetic cooperation.

Before leaving Fort George to return to Red River, Simpson wrote a letter of some two thousand words on March 10, 1825, to Benjamin Harrison in London.¹⁸ Whatever his private views regarding the wisdom of educating Indian boys may have been at that time, certainly this letter betrays no contrary spirit. Indeed, Simpson discreetly played the role of an advance agent for an evangelistic missionary society. "No part of North America that I have visited," he wrote, "presents advantages and facilities towards civilization equal to this coast; the population is numerous, settled in villages, peaceable and well disposed... the missionary society could not therefore fail of success if the subject were taken up with that interest which it merits and fit and proper persons selected for the mission." Simpson even suggested some places along the lower Columbia where stations could well be established and figured out the

approximate cost for each missionary per annum.

There is no hint in this letter from Simpson to Harrison that American missionaries might ever preempt the territory. Simpson apparently assumed that just as the Hudson's Bay Company was enjoying exclusive privileges of the fur trade along the Columbia, an English missionary society would inherit the same favored position. Simpson had not forgotten his promise to take some Indian boys from the Oregon country back to the Red River Mission school. He told Harrison that he had tried to find some lads from the Chinook tribe but those suggested were "too young and delicate" for the long and difficult journey, so he had refused to take them.

On his way up the Columbia, Simpson stopped at the Company's Spokane House, a post which had been established in 1810 by the North West Company and which was closed in 1826 when Fort Colville was built.¹⁹ The site of Spokane House is on the Spokane River, ten miles to the northwest of the present city of Spokane, Washington. There Simpson met Alexander Ross who had just returned from leading an expedition into the Snake River country in behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company. Simpson had offered Ross the position of teacher in the Red River Mission school at a salary of £100 per annum which offer Ross had accepted. He returned with Simpson that summer to Red River.

Ross in his *Fur Hunters of the Far West* tells how Simpson induced two chiefs of the Spokane area to let their sons go with him to the mission school. At first the proposal was rejected with scorn. According to Ross, one chief asked Simpson if they "were looked upon as dogs—willing to give up their children to go they knew not whither."²⁰ Simpson pointed out that the boys would be placed in the care of a "Minister of Religion to learn how to know and serve God." A chief of the Spokane tribe and another of the Kootenai (or Kutenais) each agreed to let a son go. According to Ross, one of the chiefs said: "We have given you our hearts—our children are our hearts; but bring them back again to us before they become white men—we wish to see them once more Indians..." Ross added: "They were about ten or twelve years old, both fine promising youths of equal age."

A surprising entry appears in Simpson's Journal for April 12, 1825, written while on his way eastward over the mountains: "Baptized the Indian boys, they are Sons of the Principal Spokan and Coutonais War

Chiefs, men of great Weight and consequence in this part of the Country; they are named Coutonais Pelly and Spokane Garry.”²¹ What did Simpson mean by writing that he had baptized the two Indian boys? Possibly he meant that he was christening them, giving them names. In each case he attached to the name of the tribe from which the individual came the last name of an important Hudson’s Bay Company official, thus setting a precedent which was followed in later years when other Oregon Indians were sent to the Red River school. John Henry Pelly had served as Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company from 1822 to 1852, and Nicholas Garry as Deputy Governor from 1822 to 1835.

The ecclesiastical records of the Red River Mission, now in the archives of the Hudson’s Bay Company, show that “Kootaney Pelly, an Indian boy of the Kootaney Nation” was baptized by the Rev. David T. Jones on June 24, 1827, and on the same day, “Spokan Garry, an Indian boy of the Spokan tribe.” These were the first natives, not only from the Old Oregon country but also from the entire Pacific Coast of what is now the United States, to receive baptism by a Protestant minister. The fact that Jones administered this sacrament indicated that either Simpson had not formally done so, or, if he had indeed baptized the boys, the act was not recognized by the Anglican clergy.

In 1828 Governor Simpson made a second journey into the Oregon country. The following is recorded in regard to a speech he made to the Indians at Kamloops in what is now British Columbia in that year: “He, of course addressed them, and at some length, adverted to the propriety of behaving well among themselves, and exhorted them never to be guilty of theft, murder, or of any inhuman deeds towards the whites. To strengthen this argument, he produced, read, and translated to them two letters sent by the Indians at the Red River Settlement Missionary School to their parents at Spokan and the Kootanais country.”²²

From this we learn that Spokane Garry and Kootenay Pelly had each written a letter to his parents, and that Simpson was carrying them. It seems highly probable that the practical minded Simpson had not only suggested that the fifteen-year-old boys write such letters, but also told them what to say about how their people should treat white men.

The two lads made good progress at the school and by 1829 were able to read, write, and speak English fairly well. They returned to the Spokane country by going with the westward bound Hudson’s Bay express,

as the overland caravan was called, in the summer of 1829. The two youths, then about sixteen years old, carried back an enthusiastic report of their experiences at the mission school. Commenting on this, a western historian, J. Orin Oliphant, wrote: "Pelly and Garry were cast for a role deeply significant: they were to receive at the Red River an education that would serve as a *linguistic key* to open the door for the entrance of Christianity among their tribes."²³ No doubt their return, after an absence of four years, created a great sensation in their respective tribes. Spokane Garry seems to have exerted the greater influence.

The archives of the Hudson's Bay Company contain only a few fragmented sections of what was once an extensive series of journals of each of the Company's forts in the Old Oregon country. The only extant part of the Fort Colville journal covers the period April 12, 1830, to April 3, 1831. During this time Francis Heron was Chief Trader. His journal entry for April 14, 1830, carries the following reference to Spokane Garry: "Last evening all the Indian Chiefs about the place were admitted into the Gentlemen's Mess Hall and a speech was made to them, repeated by Spokane Garry in a satisfactory manner. The chiefs of the following nations were present: Spokain, Nez Perces, Coeur d'Alenes, Kootenais, Penderails, Cinq Pois [or San Poils], & Kettle Falls."²⁴ This is the first known instance of any of the Indian boys who had been educated at the Red River Mission school being used as an interpreter. The significance was noted by Heron.

When Spokane Gary and Kootenai Pelly returned to Red River in the spring of 1830 with the Company's eastbound express, five more Indian youths from four different tribes accompanied them.²⁵ As was the case with Spokane Garry and Kootenai Pelly, each of the five was given the name of a Hudson's Bay official. The eldest of the group was Nez Perce Ellice [later written as Ellis], age nineteen or twenty.²⁶ He was named after Edward Ellice, a member of the Company's Governing Committee in London, 1824–27. The other four were probably Cayuse Halket, age eleven, named after John Halket, also a member of the London Committee, 1829–48; San Poils Harrison, age eleven, a namesake of Benjamin Harrison, who served as Deputy Governor, 1835–39; Spokane Berens, age eleven, named after Joseph Berens, Jr., Governor of the Company, 1812–22; and Cayuse Pitt, age unknown, named after another Company official, Thomas Pitt. Other Oregon Indians may

have been sent to the mission school after 1830 but only these seven had any direct or indirect influence on the Nez Perce delegation which visited St. Louis in the fall of 1831.²⁷

These seven came from five tribes and from three different linguistic groups. The Spokanes and San Poils spoke Salishan languages; the Nez Percés a Sahaptin tongue. The Cayuses had originally belonged to a different linguistic stock, but were already forsaking their own language for Nez Perce at the time of first contact with white men. The Kootenai language was quite different from any of these. Surely this diversification of tribes and languages among the seven youths sent to the Red River school was not accidental. Here again we see the guiding hand of profit-conscious Simpson who realized the value of having interpreters in as many different Oregon tribes as possible.

From various documented sources, such as the mission school's baptismal and burial records, the ages of six of the seven youths mentioned above can fairly well be determined at the time of their first departure for the school. Four of the seven died while at Red River but the causes of their deaths are unknown. The dates of their burials are: Kootenai Pelly, April 6, 1831; San Poils Harrison, January 18, 1832; Spokane Berens, July 21, 1834; and Cayuse Halket, February 1, 1837.²⁸

The fact that these four died while at the school was not forgotten by the Indians of Old Oregon. As will be mentioned later, the death of Cayuse Halket became a subject of controversy between the Cayuse Indians and Dr. Whitman in 1845. The three youths who lived to return to their respective tribes (not including Halket and Pelly who returned to Oregon for a time and then went back to Red River) were Cayuse Pitt, Nez Perce Ellis, and Spokane Garry.

Little is known about Cayuse Pitt. Three references to his being back with his people have been found in the correspondence of Dr. McLoughlin for 1836, 1837, and 1838.²⁹ Narcissa Whitman, writing to her sister Jane on February 2, 1842, stated: "A young Nez Perce [sic] that had been to the Red River school died last summer."

The two educated at the mission school, who later played important roles in their respective tribes, were Nez Perce Ellis and Spokane Garry. Ellis remained at the school for about four years, long enough to acquire a good command of English. He was appointed the first Head Chief of the Nez Percés in 1842 by Dr. Elijah White, the first Indian Agent to be

assigned to Oregon by the United States Government. The important role that Spokane Garry played in the establishment of Protestant missions in Old Oregon will subsequently be told.

THE 1831 NEZ PERCE DELEGATION TO ST. LOUIS

The delegation of four Indians from west of the Rockies who visited St. Louis in the fall of 1831 were Nez Perces (one half-Nez Perce and half-Flathead) and not Flathead Indians as mistakenly identified by General Clark. The Flathead Indians, from what is now western Montana, made two attempts to send delegations of their people to St. Louis to obtain information about the white man's religion before 1831. This is evident from a letter sent by Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, the pioneer Catholic missionary to the Flatheads. He wrote to the Hon. J. C. Spencer on March 4, 1843: "It is now about 24 years since the Indian nation of the Flat-heads acquired a slight knowledge of the civil institutions of Christianity through the means of four poor Iroquois Indians³⁰ who had wandered beyond the Rocky Mountains. Anxious to obtain instructions, they sent about 20 years ago [i.e., in 1823] a deputation of three of their chiefs to St. Louis. They were carried off by sickness. As their Deputies did not return, they appointed five others who were massacred in passing through the territory of the Sioux. In 1834 a third delegation arrived, an Iroquois accompanied it... In 1839 they deputed other missioners to communicate their wishes. It was on this occasion that I was requested to accompany the deputies on their return."³¹

Father DeSmet traveled widely through the Old Oregon country during 1840-46 and, in the fall of 1841, founded St. Mary's Mission for the Flatheads in the Bitter Root River Valley.

At least three of the 1831 delegation were Nez Perces as is evident from the following facts: (1) The first Indian to die in St. Louis and to be buried by the Catholic priests on October 31, 1831, is listed in the cathedral records as being a Nez Perce;³² (2) The two survivors were passengers on a steamer which left St. Louis on March 26, 1832, for the ascent of the Missouri as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Aboard was the artist, George Catlin, who painted their portraits. Catlin called them Nez Perces.³³ The second Indian who died in St. Louis, who was buried on November 17, 1831, is identified in the cathedral records

as being a Flathead. However, a strong Nez Perce tradition claims that his mother was a Flathead and his father a Nez Perce.³⁴

There is a direct connection between the Oregon youths who attended the Red River Mission school and the Nez Perce delegation to St. Louis of 1831. The Walker-Disoway correspondence, which appeared in the March 1, 1833, issue of the *Christian Advocate*, undoubtedly provided the initial stimulus for the sending of the first missionaries into the Old Oregon country. This news-story, however, has been subject to much adverse criticism. As early as 1844, two of the Methodist missions to Old Oregon—Rev. Daniel Lee and Rev. Joseph H. Frost—called Walker's account "high-wrought."³⁵ Writing in 1850, the Methodist bishop, Osmon C. Baker, called it "in a high degree, apocryphal."³⁶ And as late as 1950, the author of the *History of Methodist Missions* referred to the *Christian Advocate* account as being "a highly romanticized, largely fictitious account of a comparatively simple event."³⁷ We need, therefore, to examine the Walker-Disoway account carefully.

The fact that four Indians from west of the Rockies visited General Clark in St. Louis in the fall of 1831 is indisputable. They had accompanied the Rocky Mountain Fur Company's caravan when it returned from the 1831 Rendezvous held in the Rockies to St. Louis.³⁸ The caravan was under the command of Lucian Fontanelle, a Roman Catholic, who took a special interest in the four Indians and evidently had taken them to the Roman Catholic Cathedral in St. Louis where he had introduced them to some of the priests. According to Walker's letter to Disoway, he called on Clark sometime between the deaths of the first and the second Indian.

On December 31, 1831, Joseph Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis, in a letter to a Catholic publication in Lyons, France, referred to the presence of the "four Indians, who live on the other side of the Rocky Mountains," in St. Louis for the purpose of seeing General Clark. Bishop Rosati reported that the four had visited the Catholic Church "and appeared to be exceedingly well pleased with it; unfortunately there was no one who understood their language."³⁹ When all became ill, they were visited by one or more of the priests, who reported that the Indians made the sign of the cross, an indication that they knew something of the Christian faith. Bishop Rosati made no mention of any request that the four might have made for missionaries or for the Bible.

There are two aspects of Walker's report which may have been embellished. The first is the drawing of the deformed head of one of the Indians that appeared in the *March 1, 1833*, issue of the *Christian Advocate*. In the early days of the history of Old Oregon, some of the natives along the Columbia River would depress the foreheads of newly born infants by tying a board over the forehead in such a manner as to make the upper part of the skull wedge-shaped. "You may form some idea of the shape of their heads," wrote Walker, "from the rough sketch I have made with the pen, though I confess I have drawn too long a proboscis for a flat-head." Before sending Walker's letter to the editor of the *Christian Advocate*, Disosway redrew the sketch. He explained: "From the outlines of the face in Mr. Walker's communication, I have endeavored to sketch a Flat Head for the purpose of illustrating more clearly this strange custom. The dotted lines will show the usual rotundity of a human head." Since we do not have Walker's original sketch, we cannot know how much Disosway altered it.

A second possible embellishment to be found in the Walker letter is in his statement regarding the extent of religious instruction that Clark gave the four Indians. Walker, who was a devout Methodist and well informed on doctrine, was no doubt aware that Clark was an Episcopalian. According to Walker, Clark gave the inquiring natives: "A succinct history of man, from his creation down to the advent of the Saviour; explaining to them all the moral precepts contained in the Bible, expounding to them the decalogue. Informed them of the advent of the Saviour, his life, precepts, his death, resurrection, ascension, and the relation he now stands to man as a mediator—that he will judge the world, etc." How could Clark have given this outline of Christian theology to the Indians if there was no one in St. Louis who understood their language, as Bishop Rosati said? In all fairness to Walker, let it be said that Clark's interpreter may have been unknown to the bishop.

Spokane Garry, the Connecting Link

After the errors have been corrected and the myths exposed, there remains a body of well-documented facts in the story of the Nez Perce delegation of 1831. Ample evidence is available to prove that Spokane Garry, the twelve-year-old boy who went to the Red River Mission school in 1825 and who returned to his people in 1829, was the connecting link

between the school and the delegation. The first to give a contemporary account of the Indians' explanation as to why the four Nez Perces went to St. Louis was the Rev. Asa B. Smith, a member of the 1838 reenforcement of the American Board for its Oregon Mission. Asa and his wife Sarah opened a station at Kamiah, in the upper Clearwater River Valley, in May 1839 where Asa studied the language under the tutelage of an intelligent native called Lawyer.

Smith's letter to the American Board dated August 27, 1839, contains the following: "I have recently been making inquiries of the natives concerning the origin of their notions concerning the christian religion & of the object of those who went to the States as it was said, in search of Christian teachers... About ten years ago a young Spokane, who goes by the name of Spokane Garry, who had been at the Red River School, returned. My teacher, the Lawyer, saw him & learned from him respecting the Sabbath & some other things which he had heard at the school. This was the first time he had heard about the Sabbath & it was called by them *Halahpawit*. He returned & communicated what he had heard to his people. Soon after wh[ich] six individuals set out for the States, in search as he says of Christian teachers. Two of this number turned back in the mountains & the other four went on & arrived at St. Louis when two died, one died soon after having left that place & one alone returned to tell the Story & he is now dead."⁴⁰

Since Lawyer referred to the return of Spokane Garry as having taken place "about ten years ago," this confirms the 1829 date of Garry's first return from the Red River school. Since Lawyer is reported to have had a Flathead mother and a Nez Perce father, he was bilingual and could, therefore, communicate directly with Spokane Garry. Although Heron, in the entry made in the Fort Colville journal for April 14, 1830, quoted above, did not mention by name any of the chiefs present that day, he did indicate that there was at least one from the Nez Perce tribe. In all probability that one was Lawyer. Spokane Garry, and not Kootenai Pelly, served as the interpreter for Heron at the April 1830 meeting with the chiefs as he was able to speak the language understood by five of the seven tribes represented. How natural it would have been for the sixteen or seventeen-year-old Garry to demonstrate to those present how much he had learned at the mission school by reading from the white man's Bible.⁴¹

Although the primary inspiration for the departure of the Nez Perce delegation to St. Louis in 1831 to get information about the white man's religion seems to have come from Lawyer's contact with Spokane Garry, yet the Nez Percés could have learned something about Christianity from one or more of the following four sources before Garry's return in 1829 from the mission school.

In the first place, several of the early explorers, trappers, or traders who were in the Old Oregon country prior to 1830 are known to have carried their Bibles with their guns. Among these were David Thompson, who established a trading post on Lake Pend Oreille in what is now northern Idaho in 1809, and Jedediah Smith, who spent a month, November 26 to December 20, 1824, at Flathead Post in what is now western Montana. It may be assumed that such Christian men would have spoken of their religious faith to the natives as opportunities afforded.

Secondly, many of the Indians of Old Oregon, including the Nez Percés, had contacts with American trappers and traders beginning about 1824, some of whom must have been Christians. They, too, could have told the natives about the white man's religion.

Thirdly, most of the "gentlemen" or officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, who served at the several forts or trading posts along the Columbia River after 1824, were Anglicans or Presbyterians, although a few were Roman Catholics. Most of the employees or "servants" of the Company were Roman Catholics.

Writing in her diary on January 2, 1837, Narcissa Whitman commented: "The Cayuses as well as the Nez Percés are very strict in attending to their worship which they have regularly every morning at day break & eve at twilight and once on the Sab[bath]. They sing & repeat a form of prayers very devoutly after which the Chief gives them a talk. The tunes & prayers were taught them by a Roman Catholic trader. Indeed their worship was commenced by him." Narcissa referred to Pierre Pambrun, a half-breed French Canadian, who had been placed in charge of Fort Walla Walla, a Hudson's Bay Company's post, as early as 1832.⁴² And finally, some of the Roman Catholic Iroquois Indians, who had been taken into the Old Oregon country as early as 1818 by fur traders, could have passed on information about their faith to the Oregon Indians.

Several travelers who visited the Pacific Northwest before the arrival of the missionaries reported that some of the natives observed Sunday

by remaining in camp and not engaging in hunting. This emphasis on Sunday observance indicates a Protestant rather than a Roman Catholic influence. It is significant that, in his conversation with A. B. Smith, Lawyer stated he first learned about the Sabbath from Spokane Garry. The importance of observing Sunday would have been stressed at the Red River Mission as this was under the sponsorship of the Church Missionary Society, an evangelical organization within the Anglican communion.

Another interesting entry in the Fort Colville journal, mentioned previously, reflects the influence that Garry and Pelly had upon the Indians of that locality. Under date of January 11, 1831, which was at least eight months after these two, together with the five other Indian boys, had left with the eastbound Hudson's Bay express for Red River, the following entry was made: "The Indians on the ground formally renounced in full council their ancient superstitions, doctrines, such as conjuration, medicine &c. and acknowledged themselves to be, and ever to continue, true and faithful Christians."⁴³

Since Francis Heron, then in charge of Fort Colville, hailed from North Ireland and was a Protestant, it is likely that he was a Presbyterian. The question can be asked: Could such an amazing action have been taken by the natives in "full council" had not Spokane Garry and Kootenai Pelly, both sons of prominent chiefs, first told them about the white man's religion?

The fact that five more Indian youths from the Oregon country accompanied Garry and Pelly on their return journey to the mission school in the spring of 1830 also reflects the extent of the influence that the two had made upon their own and adjoining tribes.⁴⁴ Contemporary testimony from the Rev. David T. Jones of the Red River Mission confirms this judgment. The following is a quotation from one of his letters written sometime during the first months of 1831: "In the Summer of 1839, two Youths from over the Rocky Mountains—Kootemey and Spogan—went to visit their friends and relatives; and returned again... bringing with them five more Boys for education, all of whom are Chief's Sons, of much importance in their ways. This shows, evidently, the confidence placed by the natives there in the good faith of the White People, and also the value which they attach to Christian instruction." According to Jones, the impression that Garry and Pelly made upon their own and neighboring tribes "seems to have been very great." Even

though he made this report to the Church Missionary Society in London with understandable jubilation, yet he added a word of caution: "Of course, this will be evanescent for want of a permanent and definitive system of instruction."⁴⁵

The question has been asked: If Lawyer heard Spokane Garry at Fort Colville on April 14, 1830, why did the Nez Perces wait more than a year before sending a delegation to St. Louis? The simple answer is that Lawyer did not have enough time to return to his home, consult with other leaders of his tribe, select a deputation, and for them to get to the Rendezvous in time to go with the returning caravan to St. Louis.

Walker in his letter to Disoway stated that "a national council" had been held by the Indians at which time the four chiefs were selected "to proceed to St. Louis to see their great father, Gen. Clarke, to inquire of him, having no doubt but he would tell them the whole truth about it." This account is confirmed by a statement made to the author by Corbett Lawyer, a grandson of Chief Lawyer, to the effect that Nez Perce tradition holds that those who went to St. Louis had been selected in the spring of 1831 when the Flatheads and the Nez Perces were camped together in the buffalo country of what is now western Montana.⁴⁶

According to a statement made by Lucien Fontanelle, who was in charge of the caravan which escorted the Nez Perce delegation to St. Louis in the summer of 1831, four Nez Perces and three Flatheads composed the original party but that one Nez Perce and two Flatheads turned back.⁴⁷

And still another question has been asked: If curiosity regarding the white man's religion had been aroused by Garry and Pelly, who had spent about four years in the Red River Mission school, why did not the Nez Perce delegation go to Red River for the information they wanted rather than to St. Louis?

Among the explanations given to account for the Indians' choice of St. Louis is that made by Thomas E. Jessett: "It is my opinion that they were seeking the Church of England Mission at the Red River but got lost and were diverted by American trappers to St. Louis."⁴⁸

The logical answer, however, to this question is that the Nez Perces were accustomed to travel by horseback and not by canoe. A journey to Red River would have meant going most of the way by water. Moreover, the Hudson's Bay Company was not inclined to take passengers with

them on their overland express, so it was not likely that the Indian delegation could have gone that way even if they had so desired.⁴⁹

It should also be noted that the Nez Perces and Flatheads had much closer relationships with the American fur traders in the buffalo country and at the Rendezvous than with those of the Hudson's Bay Company. And finally, as stated by Walker, the Nez Perces remembered William Clark, who with Meriwether Lewis had visited their country nearly thirty years previously, and they wanted to see him. His headquarters were in St. Louis. It was most logical, therefore, for the Indian delegation to head for St. Louis rather than for Red River.

Some have also asked: If the Nez Perce delegation's visit to St. Louis was so important, why did not General Clark make note of it in his writings?⁵⁰ An indirect reference to the visit of the Indians has been located in General Clark's writings. In his "1830 Report on the Fur Trade" written from his St. Louis office on November 20, 1831, Clark stated: "Yet surrounded as I am by hundreds of Indians, some emigrating from the North East, & for whom a home is to be provided here others from *West of the Rocky Mountains visiting me.*"⁵¹ William Walker came from Sandusky, Ohio, or from the "North East" seeking a home for the Wyandots somewhere west of the Mississippi. The reference to the Indians coming from west of the Rockies could well apply to the Nez Perces.

PROTESTANT CHURCHES STIRRED BY THE NEZ PERCE APPEAL

Dr. Ray Billington, who is today one of the best known authorities on the history of the American frontier, wrote: "In all American history no single letter accomplished such impossible wonders as that penned on January 19, 1833, by an educated Wyandot Indian named William Walker to his friend, Gabriel P. Disosway, a New York merchant interested in the Methodist Missionary Society. For that letter set off a chain reaction of events which added the Pacific Northwest to the United States."⁵² The whole westward thrust of the Protestant missionary movement into the Old Oregon country was inspired by the Walker-Disosway article in the March 1, 1833, issue of the *Christian Advocate*.

The dramatic appeal of the Nez Perce delegation stirred the imaginations of the Protestants of New England, that seedbed of so many altruistic and benevolent movements. Never before had a delegation

visited the United States from a non-Christian land or people, then referred to as “pagan” or “heathen,” asking for missionaries and the Bible. But here was a party of four Indians who had made the long journey from beyond the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis for that express purpose! The incident pricked the consciences of many church members. Writing from St. Louis on April 17, 1833, the Rev. A. M’Allister, a Methodist minister, commented: “How ominous this visit of the Chopin-nish [i.e. Nez Perces] and Flat Head Indians! How loud the call to the missionary spirit of the age!”⁵³

The article in the *Christian Advocate* was reprinted or reviewed in several other religious publications. Letters of inquiry were sent to clergymen and others in St. Louis asking if the incident were true and if so, requesting more details. On May 10, 1833, the *Christian Advocate* featured the story for the second time and reprinted the sketch of the dying Indian’s deformed head. Along with this article were letters from three St. Louis residents which confirmed the essential facts of Walker’s report. One of the writers, the Rev. E. W. Sehon, in his letter of April 16 stated: “Gen. Clark informed me that the publication which appeared in the *Advocate* was correct.”⁵⁴

Sehon inquired of General Clark regarding the reasons why the Indians had made such a long journey. “He informed me,” Sehon wrote, “the cause of their visit was the following: Two of their number had received an education at some Jesuitical school [sic] in Montreal, Canada, had returned to their tribe, and endeavored as far as possible to instruct their brethren how the whites approached the Great Spirit.” Here is a clear reference to Spokane Garry and Kootenai Pelly but Clark was mistaken when he said that they had attended some “Jesuitical school in Montreal.”⁵⁵

So great was the impact of the Walker-Disosway article in the *Christian Advocate* that within the seven years, 1834–40, the Methodist Missionary Society and the American Board sent ninety-one men, women, and children to Old Oregon. When the five couples, who went out to Oregon in 1839 and 1840 on an independent basis, are added to this number, the total including children, but not counting those born in Oregon, comes to 101.

By a curious coincidence this number almost equaled the passenger list of the *Mayflower* which carried 102 Pilgrims to Cape Cod in 1620.

Indeed the parallel was not lost upon many New Englanders of that generation, as several references may be found in the missionary literature of that period to the new “Plymouth Colony” on the Pacific Coast. The influence of that small band of Protestant missionaries on the religious, social, economic, and political history of Old Oregon was deep and lasting. In this unfolding drama, Dr. Marcus Whitman was destined to play an important role.

THE METHODISTS SEND JASON LEE TO OLD OREGON

The first denomination to respond to the Nez Perce appeal was the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1834 it sent the Rev. Jason Lee; his nephew, the Rev. Daniel Lee; a schoolteacher, Cyrus Shepard; and two hired laymen, Philip L. Edwards and Courtney M. Walker, overland to Oregon. Altogether the Methodist Missionary Society, during the years 1834–39, sent seventy-five men, women, and children to its Oregon Mission. With the exception of the first party in 1834, all went by sea around Cape Horn.⁵⁶

Jason Lee was appointed “missionary to the Flathead Indians” on July 17, 1833. Because of ignorance on the part of the Missionary Society regarding the location and names of western tribes, the term “Flathead Mission” was used by the Methodists until October 1835 when it became the “Oregon Mission.” Jason and Daniel Lee spent the winter of 1833–34 making preparations for their westward journey. Fortunately for them, the explorer and fur trader, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, returned to his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in November 1833 after making his first journey to the Rockies. Since he was planning to return to the mountains in 1834, he invited the Lees to accompany him that far. Thus the first party of Protestant missionaries to go overland to Oregon was assured of protection and a qualified guide for the first part of their journey.

Wyeth (called Captain since he was in charge of his caravan), the mission party and a company of about sixty men with some two hundred horses, mules, and cattle left Liberty, Missouri, on April 26, 1834. The animals belonging to the missionaries included ten horses, four mules, two cows, and a bull.⁵⁷ The Wyeth caravan traveled independently of that of the American Fur Company although each was bound for the annual Rendezvous to be held that year on the Green River, a few miles

to the west of South Pass in the Continental Divide. South Pass, first opened in 1824, became in time the great gateway to Oregon and also to northern California. The Wyeth party rode through the pass on June 15.

Because of the shortage of grass, the Rendezvous that year was shifted to Ham's Fork, a tributary of Green River. On July 2, Captain Wyeth and his men, together with the mission party, left the Rendezvous for the Snake River country. On the 14th, Wyeth selected a site, near present-day Pocatello, Idaho, where he established a trading post called Fort Hall. Two years later the Hudson's Bay Company would secure title to this fort. There at Fort Hall, on Sunday, July 27, Jason Lee conducted the first Protestant service ever held by an ordained missionary in the vast interior of the Old Oregon country.

The Lee party left Fort Hall on July 30 and traveled with Thomas McKay and his Hudson's Bay Company's brigade to Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River, where they arrived on September 1. The distance from Liberty, Missouri, to Walla Walla was about 1,900 miles. The missionaries continued their journey down the Columbia River and arrived at Fort Vancouver on September 15, where they were warmly welcomed by Dr. McLoughlin. The brig, *May Dacre*, which carried supplies for the mission around Cape Horn, arrived in the Columbia the following day. The timing was perfect.

The Methodist Missionary Society had commissioned Jason Lee and his associates to open a mission among the Flatheads or Nez Perces, but on the recommendation of Dr. McLoughlin, they selected a site for their work at French Prairie on the Willamette River about sixty miles up from where it emptied into the Columbia. Here a log house was erected, into which they moved on October 29. The Methodist Society sent out by ship a reenforcement of twelve and another of seven, both with women and children, in 1837. In 1838 Jason Lee returned to the States by the overland route in order to get still more reenforcements. On his way East, he visited the Whitmans and the Spaldings at their stations in the upper Columbia River Valley. The significance of that visit will be told in a later chapter.

SAMUEL PARKER AND THE AMERICAN BOARD

Although the Methodist Church was the first to send missionaries to Oregon, actually the first person who offered to go in response to the Nez Perce appeal was the Rev. Samuel Parker, then pastor of a Congregational church at Middlefield, Massachusetts. Deeply moved by the article in the *Christian Advocate* about the “Flatheads,” Parker in a letter to the American Board dated April 10, 1833, wrote: “From my first entering the ministry, I think I have had some of the missionary spirit... and I have come to the conclusion to offer myself to go beyond the Rocky Mountains to establish a mission among the Flathead Indians, or some other tribe.”

The missionary spirit to which Parker had been exposed while a student at Williams College and at Andover Theological Seminary was now asserting itself. The more he thought about it, the more determined he became. He became convinced that God had called him to go to Oregon as a missionary.

PARKER’S APPLICATION REJECTED

Within the structure of the American Board at that time was, which we might today call an Executive Committee, the Prudential Committee. The very name suggests the caution with which the Board spent its limited funds. Parker’s surprising offer to go as a missionary to Oregon was referred to this Committee. In his letter of application, Parker suggested the possibility of making an exploration trip and then “after a few years to return to my family, who will reside in Ithaca where I have a house.” In reply one of the secretaries of the Board, writing on April 15, inquired as to Parker’s age and the number and ages of his children. He also asked: “Have you conferred with your wife, & what are her feelings on the subject?”

Making allowance for the slowness of the mails in those days, we note that Parker lost no time in replying. Writing on April 27, he stated that he was fifty-four years old. He had a daughter, sixteen; a son, fourteen; and another son, ten. As far as his wife’s attitude was concerned, he wrote: “She, as well as myself, thinks the object an important one, and although it will require much self-denial, yet we are willing, committing ourselves to God, our Redeemer, to meet it.”

Parker’s letter arrived at the Board’s offices in Boston on May 3,

just before a scheduled meeting of the Prudential Committee, and, therefore received prompt attention. A reply was written by the Rev. David Greene, 1797–1866, an assistant secretary in charge of the Board’s Indian work. Judging by his letter to Parker of May 4, there was much shaking of heads by members of the Committee when they learned of his age and his family responsibilities. The oldest missionary ever appointed by the Board up to that time, according to Greene, was ten years younger than Parker. Greene asked: How could one of his age hope to acquire a strange language? Having a wife and three children was a serious objection. Kindly but firmly, Greene told Parker that the Board could not appoint him.

PARKER WINS APPOINTMENT BY THE AMERICAN BOARD

A common characteristic of a visionary is persistence. Certainly this was true of Samuel Parker. Replying to Greene’s letter on May 17, Parker sought to answer the various objections which had been raised. He stressed his conviction that this was God’s will. “I think the call for the gospel beyond the Rocky Mountains,” he wrote, “is a plain intimation of providence.” He stated that he was ready to serve without salary, provided the Board would give his family four or five hundred dollars a year for their support during his absence, and he urged a reconsideration of his application.

Greene replied on August 21 and reaffirmed the decision of the Prudential Committee. His appointment was not expedient. Moreover, a new factor had entered the case. “The Methodists have long since claimed this field,” wrote Greene, “and it is reported that their missionaries are about proceeding to their labors.” From this it is evident that the American Board was aware of Jason Lee’s appointment. Greene explained that the Prudential Committee was guided by the principle of comity and therefore did not wish to enter any mission field occupied or about to be occupied by another denomination. Actually this argument was not valid; the Oregon country was so vast and there were so many different Indian tribes in it, that the presence of one church would mean no real competition or overlapping for another. Undoubtedly the Board felt that Parker was too old to be appointed for such a distant and unknown field.

Parker resigned his church in Middlefield sometime during the summer of 1833 and moved his family to their Ithaca home. He accepted

a position as a schoolteacher for that fall and following winter. Monday, January 6, 1834, was observed by the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca as a day of fasting and prayer. Parker was present at one of the meetings held in the church's session house. In a letter to the Board dated January 16, Parker told what happened. "My strong feelings on the subject of the West again arose. I proposed to the church and those present that day, and others in this village and town who might be disposed to join them, should furnish the men... and support a missionary station beyond the Rocky Mountains." Parker spoke with such conviction and enthusiasm that those present appointed a committee of five to see what could be done. "Three young men," wrote Parker, "of fervent piety, good talents, and acquirements, and of more than ordinary promise offer themselves for the work." He informed the Board that he had no doubt but that the full amount of money needed to support the mission could be raised. He then asked: "Will the Board accept our offer."⁵⁸

As secretary Greene happened to be out of the city when Parker's letter arrived, he did not reply until February 20. Since Parker had raised the money and had found volunteers to go with him, the Board reluctantly reconsidered his application for an appointment and authorized him to proceed with his plans to go on an exploring tour to Oregon under the Board's auspices. Later the Board agreed to pay \$450.00 annually for the support of Parker's family for one or two years. Instead of finding three assistants, Parker succeeded in enlisting only two—the Rev. John Dunbar and Samuel Allis, Jr., both Presbyterians.

THE PAWNEE INDIAN MISSION FOUNDED

Both the American Board and Samuel Parker were ignorant as to how a mission party could travel hundreds of miles across the plains and the mountains to Oregon and not be molested by thieving or even hostile Indians. Seemingly, they had no information about the necessity of traveling under the protection of some fur company's caravan. Jason Lee was better informed. He and his associates were on the frontier in plenty of time to leave with the Wyeth party on April 26, 1834. Parker and his two companions did not leave Ithaca until May 5,⁵⁹ and did not arrive in St. Louis until the 23rd, nearly a month after both the Wyeth party and the Fur Company's caravan had left for the Rendezvous. In a letter written to Greene from St. Louis on May 27, Parker bemoaned the

fact that they were “too late to go with any safety to the Oregon Territory that year.”

After some consultations in St. Louis with Major John Dougherty, U.S. Indian Agent for the Pawnee, Oto, and Omaha Indian tribes, it was decided that Dunbar and Allis should begin mission work with the Pawnees in what is now Nebraska while Parker would return East for reinforcements and make a second attempt the next year to go to Oregon.

Just when Parker arrived back in Ithaca is not known. Since the archives of the American Board do not contain any letters from him for the fall of 1834, it seems probable that Parker journeyed to Boston in order to make a personal report to Secretary Greene. The Board’s *Annual Report* for 1834 carried a brief notice of Parker’s return and about his intention to find new associates and make another attempt to go to Oregon the following year. “This,” the *Report* stated, “has been approved by the Committee.” Evidently the assurance of continued financial support from the Ithaca church and Parker’s unbounded enthusiasm induced the Prudential Committee, somewhat against its better judgment, to rescind its former action and to endorse Parker’s second attempt to go to Oregon. According to this 1834 *Report*, the Board spent \$471.01 that year to cover the expenses of Parker, Dunbar, and Allis “on their exploring tour to the Indians west of the State of Missouri” [see Appendix 2]. Undoubtedly all or most of this money came from the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca.

MARCUS WHITMAN AND NARCISSA PRENTISS VOLUNTEER FOR OREGON

Heartened by the action of the Prudential Committee, Parker turned enthusiastically to his task of raising more money and finding associates for his Oregon mission. Actually, judging by the receipts of the Board which were credited to him, Parker was much more concerned about finding someone to go with him to Oregon than he was in raising money. Surprisingly, instead of visiting the larger churches in the cities where larger gifts could possibly be secured, Parker made a tour during the fall of 1834 in the counties of Steuben, Allegany, and Cattaraugus in western New York. Reporting to the Board on December 24, 1834, Parker frankly stated: “...almost all the churches in the counties are small and feeble, and are assisted by the H.M.S.”⁶⁰

One reason why Parker turned to this area was that there he was on familiar territory. They were the counties where he had begun his ministry after his licensure in 1808 as an itinerant home missionary. He knew the churches, many of the people, and some of the pastors. Another factor worked to Parker's advantage. Throughout the history of Protestantism in the United States, the small rural churches have always been a fruitful source for the recruitment of ministers and missionaries. So it was that late in November 1834, Parker drove his horses, hitched to a light wagon, over muddy roads into the little crossroads village of Wheeler where he was welcomed by his old friend, the Rev. James H. Hotchkin, pastor of its small Presbyterian church. Thus the stage was set for an event which took place in that one-room country church which was destined to have far-reaching effects in later years in distant Oregon.

Although we have no copy of the message Parker delivered in Wheeler, we need but little imagination to summarize what he had to say. Drawing upon the several articles which had appeared in the *Christian Advocate*, Parker retold the story of the visit of the four Nez Percés to St. Louis in the fall of 1831. He surely told of his own visit to St. Louis during the previous summer where, possibly, he had had an opportunity to interview General Clark. Although Parker may never have heard of the Red River Mission school, or of Spokane Garry, or of Chief Lawyer, yet he had enough documented facts to present a moving appeal. Dr. Marcus Whitman, who heard Parker speak that evening, was stirred. When Parker climaxed his address with a plea for someone to go with him to Oregon the following spring, Whitman volunteered.

After leaving Wheeler, Parker traveled about forty-five miles west to a little settlement on the Genesee River then called Amity but now known as Belmont. There Parker repeated his message in the Presbyterian Church and made another plea for missionaries. Somewhat to his surprise, Narcissa Prentiss, daughter of judge and Mrs. Stephen Prentiss, offered herself. Since the American Board then rarely sent "unmarried females" into the foreign mission field, and since work with the American Indians was then considered to be a part of foreign missions, it appears that Parker gave her little encouragement.

Writing to his family on December 5, Parker reported: "My labours have been fatiguing owing to the very bad state of the roads. My success has been as good as I expected. The collections, though small, have been

greater than have ever been taken up on any other application of like nature. I have found some missionaries. Dr. Whitman of Wheeler, Steuben County, New York, has agreed to offer himself to the Board to go beyond the mountains. He has no family. Two ladies offer themselves, one a daughter of judge Prentiss of Amity..."⁶¹

We often need the perspective of time before we can appreciate the significance of events which at the time of their occurrence may appear to be insignificant. So it was with the Rev. James H. Hotchkin when his most influential layman decided to go as a missionary to the Indians of Oregon. According to the requirements of the American Home Missionary Society, which subsidized Hotchkin's salary, he had to submit a quarterly report of his work. The only reference to Whitman located in these reports is the following which appeared in the one dated January 12, 1835: "...one of our elders expects shortly to leave us to join the company of Missionaries to go beyond the Rocky Mountains." When Hotchkin submitted his report for the summer months of July, August, and September, 1835, when Whitman was with Parker on their journey to the Rockies, he wrote: "Nothing has occurred in the congregation during the quarter."⁶²

Whitman returned in the fall of 1835 bringing with him two Nez Perce youths and some thrilling news. He and Parker had met a large party of Nez Percés at the Rendezvous in the Rockies and had found them eager for missionaries. Jason Lee and his associates had by-passed that tribe and had settled in the Willamette Valley. Whitman had observed that it was possible to take women over the Rockies, hence he could return, be married to Narcissa Prentiss to whom he was engaged, and take her with him to Oregon.

Another married couple would have to be found to go with them. Parker and Whitman had separated at the Rendezvous—Parker to continue with the Nez Percés on an exploring tour of Oregon; Whitman to return home for reinforcements and then to go out to the Rockies again in the summer of 1836.

The significance of these important events seems to have escaped the attention of Whitman's pastor at Wheeler. In his quarterly report dated January 7, 1836, Hotchkin, commenting on the events of the previous fall, wrote: "Nothing peculiar has taken place."

- 1 The term "Old Oregon" is commonly used to indicate the area which lies west of the Continental Divide and north of the present-day California-Oregon border. Prior to 1846 this 42nd parallel was the Mexican border. Following the settlement of the border question with Great Britain in 1846, the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and the western parts of Montana and Wyoming were carved out of Old Oregon. Unless otherwise stated in the text of this work, the use of the name "Oregon" refers to Old Oregon as here defined.
- 2 From a letter to the author dated April 6, 1969, from Harold G. Shults of Prattsburg, N.Y.
- 3 These saddlebags are now in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
- 4 See article by S. W. Pratt, "The Making of Whitman," *Sunset Magazine*, vol. XXIII (August 1909), pp. 185-8, and his original notes in Coll. Wn. Pratt, who belonged to an old Prattsburg family, made a special effort to interview people who knew the Whitmans and the Spaldings. Several of his articles appeared in local newspapers in New York State. He is also the author of *History of the Presbyterian Church of Prattsburg*, 1876.
- 5 Hotchkin, *History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York*, gives much information about the Presbyterian churches of Wheeler and Prattsburg.
- 6 *W.C.Q.*, II (October 1898), p. 12.
- 7 Whitman Letter #5. Hereafter all references to Whitman letters listed in Appendix I will be by number in brackets inserted in the text, unless such letters are identified by date when written.
- 8 *W.C.Q.*, II (October 1898), pp. 3 ff. contains a biographical sketch of Parker by Myron Eells. See also article by Henry Parker, *Church at Home and Abroad*, March 1895, and manuscripts by Dr. Samuel J. Parker mentioned below in fn. 9.
- 9 Original ms. in Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y. Dr. Parker made copies for Yale University Library; Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and the University of Washington Library, Seattle. Myron Eells made a copy for Whitman College, Walla Walla, Wash. These copies do not agree with each other. In his old age, Dr. Parker displayed a bitter anti-Hudson's Bay Company and also an anti-Roman Catholic attitude; hence his writings must be critically examined for accuracy. Many of his comments about the Whitmans and his father are reliable since, as a seventeen-year-old youth, he met Marcus and Narcissa Whitman shortly after their marriage in February 1836 and also had access to his father's papers.
- 10 Parker ms., Ithaca.
- 11 Hereafter referred to as the *Christian Advocate*.
- 12 Francis Haines, "The Nez Perce Delegation to St. Louis in 1831," *P.H.R.*, VI (1937), pp. 71-8, maintained that Walker was not in St. Louis at the time of the visit of the four Indians and that he was "spinning a traveller's yarn" in his letter to Disosway. J. Orin Oliphant, "Francis Haines and William Walker, a Critique," *P.H.R.*, XIV (1945), pp. 211-16, answered Haines. The November 25, 1831, issue of the *Christian Advocate* mentioned the fact that Walker headed a delegation of six Wyandotes who went that fall to see Gen. Clark in St. Louis.
- 13 The letters of Walker and Disosway have been reprinted in Hulbert, *O.P.*, V: 87 ff. The italics used here are the author's.

- 14 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI:212. The old files of the American Board, referred to as Coll. A., are in Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- 15 For further information about the Red River school see Tucker, *Rainbow in the North*; Drury, "Oregon Indians in the Red River School," *P.H.R.* VII (1938): 55 ff; Oliphant, "George Simpson and Oregon Missions," *ibid.*, VI (1937): 237 ff; Jessett, "Anglicanism Among the Indians of Washington Territory," *P.N.Q.*, XLII (1951): 224 ff; and Jessett, "Christian Missions to the Indians of Oregon," *Church History*, XXVIII (June 1959): 147 ff.
- 16 Frederick Merk (ed.), *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal*, Cambridge, 1931, p. 138.
- 17 HBC Arch., D/4/3.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 The North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company joined in 1821 under the name of the latter. Fort Colville was named after Andrew Colvile, a member of the London Committee of the H.B.C. He spelled his name with only one "l" in the last syllable.
- 20 Alexander Ross, *Fur Hunters of the Far West*, 2nd edition, London, 1855, II: 156.
- 21 See fn. 16.
- 22 Malcolm McLeod (ed.) *Peace River. A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to Pacific, by the late Sir George Simpson, in 1828. Journal of the late Chief Factor, Archibald McDonald who Accompanied him.* Ottawa, 1872, p. 34. The quotation is from McDonald's Journal. McDonald was placed in charge of Fort Colville in 1836.
- 23 *P.H.Q.*, VI (1937):238.
- 24 HBC Arch., B/45/a/1.
- 25 Tucker, *Rainbow in the North*, p. 70. Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, p. 89, states that the party with the Indian boys left the Spokane country for Red River on April 30, 1830.
- 26 Allen, *Ten Years in Oregon*, p. 185, claims that Ellis was thirty-two years old in 1842 when he was made Head Chief of the Nez Percés.
- 27 Other Indian boys from Old Oregon mentioned as having been sent to the Red River school include William Collins of the Kootenais: see article by Dr. Wm. McKay, *Oregon Churchman*, Dec. 15, 1873; Boyd, *History of the Synod of Washington*, p. 231; Lewis, "The Case of Spokane Gary," *Spokane Historical Society Bulletin*, January 1917, p. 13, mentions a Jim Lion of the Nez Percés. Possibly these names refer to Indian boys sent to the Red River school after 1831.
- 28 HBC Arch., Records of the Mission School. Tucker, *Rainbow in the North*, pp. 73-4, states that Cayuse Halket "visited his friends on the Columbia River in 1834, but not being able to reconcile himself to their mode of life, he returned to reside with Mr. Cochran" at the mission school. William McKay, in the *Oregon Churchman*, December 15, 1873, wrote: "While Halket was among his people, he frequently held services, according to the Episcopal form among them." Writing in his old age on July 14, 1892, to Mrs. Eva Emory Dye, McKay made extravagant claims for Halket: "He held services every Sabbath on the Church of England form of worship and taught them the Christian Religion and sung hymns to them." Location of the original letter is unknown, if still extant. A friend of Mrs. Dye's gave the author a copy. McKay's evaluation of what a fifteen-year-old boy was able to do to evangelize the Cayuse tribe is very questionable. The Whitmans made no reference to this in any of their letters.

- 29 HBC Arch., McLoughlin to Pambrun, Nov. 2, 1836; April 14, 1837; and March 28, 1838. Nothing was said in any of these letters of any effort Pitt was making to spread Christianity among his people.
- 30 Catholic Iroquois Indians are known to have been employed by fur traders and taken into the Old Oregon country as early as 1818. Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, p. 55.
- 31 Original in Office of Indian Affairs, Oregon Superintendency, 1842–80, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- 32 Drury, *Spalding*, p. 74, gives the text of the burial records.
- 33 Original paintings are in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. See illustrations in this volume. George Catlin, *North American Indians*, Edinburgh, 1926, pp. 123 ff.
- 34 McBeth, *The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark*, pp. 30 ff. Miss McBeth, who was for many years a missionary among the Nez Percés and knew their traditions, wrote of the Indian whose sketch was drawn by Walker: “Ka-ou-pu (Man of the Morning or Daylight) . . . His mother was a Flathead, his father a Nez Perce.”
- 35 Lee and Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon*, p. 110.
- 36 William Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, New York, 1866–69, VII:794, in an article by Bishop Baker about Jason Lee.
- 37 Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, II:203. See also Appendix 3 of this work.
- 38 The caravan carrying supplies from the States would meet the trappers at some agreed upon place in the Rockies each summer from 1824 to 1839, called the Rendezvous. Most of these gatherings were held west of the Continental Divide. There the supplies would be exchanged for furs. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company was dissolved in 1834. Thereafter the caravans were sent out by the American Fur Company. See W. J. Ghent, *The Early Far West*, New York, 1936, pp. 20 ff, for a discussion of the fur companies and the annual Rendezvous.
- 39 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI:87.
- 40 Drury, *Spalding and Smith*, pp. 106 ff.
- 41 While gathering material for my biography of Henry Harmon Spalding, I visited the granddaughter of Spokane Garry, Mrs. Joe Nozer, at Worley, Idaho, on August 23, 1935. She showed me her grandfather’s Bible, his Anglican prayer book, a New Testament, and a small pamphlet with hymns in an Indian language. The Bible, octavo in size, was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. Later, I discovered in the records of the Red River Mission a reference to a shipment of Bibles from this Society to the school. In Spokane Garry’s Bible was an original letter from H. H. Spalding to Garry dated March 28, 1874. This letter is now in Coll. Wn. The discovery of Spokane Garry’s Bible gives further confirmation to the account that Lawyer gave Smith.
- 42 Since Mrs. Whitman was writing about four months after she and her husband had arrived in Oregon, this comment shows that the natives had been following these practices long before they came. See also, Washington Irving, *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, New York, 1837, III:7; W. A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, Salt Lake City, 1940, p. 75; N. J. Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals*, Eugene, Oregon, 1899, p. 192; Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour*, contains many references to the Nez Percés observing Sunday; and Elliott’s article, “Religion Among the Flatheads,” *O.H.Q.*, XXXVII (1936), pp. 1–8.

- 43 HBC Arch., B/45/a/1. The action of the Indian council was premature and futile. Old customs and superstitions continued as the missionaries who settled among them in 1839 testified. See Drury, *Walker*. The action taken by the council, however, is an indication of how some of the natives felt.
- 44 Garry returned to his people during the summer of 1831, following the death of Pelly on April 6 of that year. For a time Garry was zealous in his efforts to civilize and evangelize his people. However, the task was too much for an eighteen-year-old youth. According to W. S. Lewis, "The Case of Spokane Garry," in *Spokane Historical Society*, Bulletin, No. 1, p. 16: "Spokane Garry himself gradually abandoned his efforts at religious teaching, and when pressed for the reason, gruffly stated that he had quit because the other Indians 'jawed' him so much about it." When the Walkers and Eellses settled among the Spokanes in the spring of 1839, they were keenly disappointed by Garry's refusal to cooperate.
- 45 Oliphant in *P.H.Q.*, vi (1937):243, quoting from the *Church Missionary Record*, London, November 1831, p. 232.
- 46 See Drury, *Spalding*, pp. 72 ff, for further details about the Nez Perce delegation.
- 47 Whitman letter #11. Whitman, on his first journey to the Rockies with the caravan of the American Fur Company in 1835, inquired of Fontanelle regarding the personnel of the Nez Perce delegation.
- 48 Jessett in *Church History*, XXVII (1959): 150. Jessett stresses the Anglican influence of the Red River Mission on the Oregon Indians who studied there, and claims that when these youths returned to their respective tribes, they introduced Anglican forms of worship among the natives. Jessett maintains that this is the reason why Garry was reluctant to cooperate with the Congregational missionaries who opened a station among the Spokanes under the auspices of the American Board in 1839.
- 49 The Rev. Jason Lee applied for passage across Canada with the Hudson's Bay Express of 1838. McLoughlin denied the request by writing from Fort Vancouver on February 12, 1838: "It is not in our power to do ourselves the pleasure to accommodate you with a passage across the mountains." HBC Arch., B/231/b.
- 50 Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, p. 102: "The episode seems not to have been of unusual significance to the busy Indian superintendent."
- 51 While searching through the files of the Department of Indian Affairs in National Archives, Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1946, I found General Clark's report. This was published in *O.H.Q.*, XLVIII (1947): 33 ff.
- 52 From "A Letter to the Editor that Got Unexpected Results," *Together*, a Methodist periodical published in Chicago, November 1959.
- 53 Hulbert, *O.P.*, V:111.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 The Jesuit order was dissolved by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. The Jesuits did not begin their work in Canada again until 1842.
- 56 Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, II:200 ff. gives a detailed history of the Oregon Mission of the Methodist Church.
- 57 Although Robert Campbell, an American fur trader, had driven an ox or a cow over the Rockies to the Green River Rendezvous in 1833, the Lee party was the first to take cattle all the way to the Pacific Coast. Jason Lee's Diary appeared in *O.H.Q.*, XVII (1916).

- 58 A white marble tablet in the vestibule of the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, New York, bears the statement that there on January 6, 1834, “this Church resolved to send and support the Oregon Mission of Rev. Samuel Parker.” A monument to Parker and Whitman was dedicated on the church’s property on May 12, 1935.
- 59 The day that Parker, Dunbar, and Allis sailed from Ithaca on a Cayuga Lake steamer, Parker’s two sons, ages ten and fourteen, watched their departure. They then erected a pile of stones on the spot which were later cemented together into what was called the “Pilar of Faith.” This monument, now at 227 Willard Way, Ithaca, once bore an explanatory plaque which has been stolen.
- 60 The initials stand for the American Home Missionary Society, a parallel organization to the A.B.C.F.M. The files of the A.H.M.S. are in Hammond Library, Chicago Theological Seminary.
- 61 *W.C.Q.*, II (Oct. 1898): pp. 12–3.
- 62 A.H.M.S. files, Chicago Theological Seminary.