

FROM THE RENDEZVOUS TO FORT VANCOUVER

A messenger had been sent ahead from Independence Rock to the trappers and Indians who were impatiently awaiting the coming of the caravan at Green River to inform them when it was expected to arrive. The messenger also passed on the exciting news of the presence of missionaries, including women, with the caravan. Many of the trappers had not seen a white woman for years and it is doubtful if any of the Indians had ever seen one.

A self-appointed welcoming committee rode out to greet the incoming caravan and to give a mountain-style welcome to the missionaries. Gray tells what happened: "Two days before we arrived at our rendezvous and some two hours before we reached camp, the whole caravan was alarmed by the arrival of some ten Indians and four or five white men, whose dress and appearance could scarcely be distinguished from that of the Indians. As they came in sight over the hills, they all gave a yell, such as hunters and Indians only can give; whiz, whiz, came their balls over our heads..."¹ For a few minutes the missionaries were alarmed, thinking that they were about to be attacked by hostile Indians, but then their attention was directed to a white flag flying from a raised gun. As the welcoming party rode down one side of the caravan and up the other, they were greeted by wild shouts from the men of the caravan

and by more firing of guns. Finally the excitement died down, and the missionaries were given a warm personal welcome.

After the mission party had made camp, two of the Indians were invited to join them for supper. They were Tackensuatis,² whom Whitman and Parker had met at the Rendezvous the previous year, and Ish-hol-hol-hoats-hoats, better known as Lawyer.³ Chief Lawyer has already been mentioned, as it was he who had heard Spokane Garry read from his Bible and had carried back the story of what Garry had told of the white man's religion to the Nez Perces. As has been stated, Lawyer later told the Rev. A. B. Smith that he was the connecting link between Spokane Garry and the Nez Perce delegation which went to St. Louis in 1831 to get teachers and more information about Christianity.

Lawyer's exact age is unknown but circumstantial evidence places his birth in 1802, which was also the year in which Whitman was born. Since Lawyer had some knowledge of English, he was able to communicate directly with the missionaries. Gray, in his comments on the evening meal with the two Indians, wrote: "Of this feast, these sons of the wilderness partook with expressions of great satisfaction. The Lawyer, twenty-seven years after, spoke of it as the time when his heart became one with the *Suapies* (Americans)." ⁴

One of the members of the welcoming committee was Kentuc, who had accompanied Parker on his exploring tour of the Pacific Northwest in 1835. He delivered a letter from Parker to Whitman dated May 10, 1836. Parker stated that "his way was hedged up" and hence he had decided not to return to the States by the overland route, but would return by sea.⁵ This was a great disappointment to the Whitmans and the Spaldings, especially as Parker had left no directions and had given no advice regarding possible locations for mission stations.

Whitman was loath to write any letter of complaint regarding Parker, and it was not until he learned of Parker's criticism of him that Whitman on May 10, 1839, wrote to the American Board sharply criticizing Parker for many things that he did or did not do. In this letter we may read: "We cannot say how much good Mr. P's tour will do others, it has done us none, for instead of meeting us at Rendezvous as he agreed, he neglected even to write a single letter containing any information concerning the country, Indians, prospects, or advice of any kind whatever."

Parker spent the winter at Fort Vancouver as a non-paying guest of the Hudson's Bay Company. He visited the upper Columbia River country in the spring of 1836 going as far as Fort Colville. When he thought of the long journey overland, his heart failed him. "We cannot avoid the conclusion," wrote Whitman to Greene, "that he preferred to go home by way of England in the Company's ship as he said he had the offer of a free passage." Parker sailed from Fort Vancouver on June 12 for Hawaii. He was obliged to wait there until November 14 when he was able to obtain passage on a ship bound for New London, Connecticut.⁶ During a wearisome voyage of five months around Cape Horn, when at times he had to subsist on salt meat, dried vegetables, and stale biscuits infested with weevils, Parker wished that he had returned overland. He landed at New London, on May 18, 1837, after an absence from the United States of two years and two months and after having traveled about 28,000 miles.

In 1838 Parker published the first edition of his *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* at Ithaca, New York. This book with its map of the Old Oregon country, one of the first to be made available to the public, became immensely popular, especially among those who dreamed of migrating to that far-away land. The *Journal* ran through five American and three European editions. Parker's son, Samuel J., estimated that at least ten thousand copies were sold in the United States and another four thousand abroad.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS

Among those who took a leading part in giving the mission party such a boisterous welcome was twenty-six year-old Joseph L. Meek, 1810-1875, one of the most colorful of the mountain men.⁷ Meek first went out to the Rockies in the spring of 1829 when only nineteen years old. Many of his fantastic adventures are told for us in Frances Fuller Victor's book, *River of the West*. Meek had been at the 1835 Rendezvous when he first met Whitman. He was especially impressed by Narcissa Whitman, who was not only in better health at the time than was Eliza Spalding, but who was also by nature more vivacious and sociable. Meek never lost an opportunity to be in her company. During the ride to the Green River Rendezvous after leaving the Big Sandy on the morning of July 5, Meek rode at Narcissa's side and regaled her with his "bar" (bear) stories.

The mission party escorted by Meek, Tackensuatis, Lawyer, Kentuc, and others, arrived at the Rendezvous on Wednesday evening, July 6. Gray tells us that about one hundred American trappers were there that year, about two hundred Nez Perces and Flatheads, and also several hundred Indians from other tribes including a few Cayuses.⁸ All joined in giving the missionaries a heart-warming welcome. "As soon as I alighted from my horse," wrote Narcissa, "I was met by a company of native women, one after the other, shaking hands and saluting me with a most hearty kiss. They gave Sister Spalding the same salutation" [Letter 27].

The two white women were at once the center of a "gazing throng" as Narcissa described it. Tackensuatis and Lawyer brought their wives and introduced them. "It was truly pleasing," commented Narcissa, "to see the meeting of Richard and John with their friends. Richard was affected to tears, his father is not here but several of his band and brothers. When they met each took off his hat and shook hands as respectful as in civilized life." Both Richard and John remained with the mission party until it reached Fort Walla Walla.⁹

Whitman in his letter to Greene written from the Rendezvous said that the Indians "were greatly interested with our females, cattle, & wagon." They called the wagon a "land canoe." Although vivacious Narcissa made the greater impression of the two women on the white men, it was Eliza who appealed to the natives. Eliza was obliged to remain in the tent much of the time the party was at the Rendezvous because of illness,¹⁰ but even so she began at once learning the Nez Perce language. Evidence indicates that she was the first among the missionaries to become proficient in the use of this tongue.

The mountain men were likewise attracted by the women. Gray noted: "The rough veteran mountain hunter would touch his hat in a manner absolutely ridiculous."¹¹ Some of the men manifested a sudden interest in religion and attended the morning and evening devotions of the missionaries. Hearing women's voices raised in song was a new and thrilling experience for a Rendezvous gathering. Some asked for Bibles; regarding this, Narcissa wrote: "This is a cause worth living for—Wherever we go we find opportunities of doing good—If we had packed one or two animals with bibles & testaments, we should have had abundant opportunity of disposing of them to the traders & trappers of the mountains who would

have received them gratefully... We have given away all we have to spare.”

Among the mountain men at the 1836 Rendezvous were two who turned author and in their respective books told of the impression the white women had made on both the trappers and the Indians. The first was Osborne Russell whose *Journal of a Trapper; or Nine Years in the Rocky Mountains, 1834–1843*, was published posthumously in 1914. Russell wrote: “The two ladies were gazed upon with wonder and astonishment by the rude Savages, they being the first white women ever seen by these Indians, the first that had ever penetrated into these wild and rocky regions.”¹² According to Dr. George H. Atkinson, a pioneer Congregational minister in Portland, Oregon, Russell was “converted while reading his Bible in his lonely hunter’s cabin in the Rocky Mountains.”¹³ It may be that he was one who received a Bible from the missionaries at the 1836 Rendezvous.

The second mountain man who turned author was Isaac P. Rose who, in 1884, published his *Four Years in the Rockies*, from which the following is taken: “Mrs. Whitman was a large, stately, fair skinned woman, with blue eyes and light, auburn, almost golden hair. Her manners were at once dignified and gracious. She was, both by nature and education, a lady, and had a lady’s appreciation of all that was courageous and refined; yet not without an element of romance and heroism in her disposition strong enough to have impelled her to undertake a missionary’s life in the wilderness. Mrs. Spalding, the other lady, was more delicate than her companion, yet equally earnest and zealous in the cause they had undertaken. The Indians would turn their gaze from the dark haired, dark eyed Mrs. Spalding to what was, to them, the more interesting golden hair and blue eyes of Mrs. Whitman, and they seemed to regard them both as beings of a superior nature.”¹⁴

Whitman in his report to the American Board of his 1835 visit to the Rendezvous had given a summary of the different Indian tribes of the area and had mentioned “the Napiersas¹⁵ [i.e., Nez Percés] and Kiusas [i.e., Cayuses].” Parker had visited the Cayuse Indians when at Fort Walla Walla in May 1836 and stated in his report to the Board that he had attempted to give them some instruction in the Christian religion. He wrote: “Here is a promising field for missionary labours.”¹⁶ In all probability Parker told the Cayuses of the possible coming of Whitman that summer with associates and may have suggested that a mission station might be established in their midst. If this were the case, then the Cayuses would have had time

to send some of their number to the Rendezvous to make known their desires. There is no contemporary evidence that Parker ever promised the Cayuses any payment for land to be used as a mission station as has been claimed by some of Whitman's critics.

A strong spirit of rivalry developed at the Rendezvous between the Cayuses and the Nez Perces in regard as to where the missionaries were to settle. The members of each of these tribes had come to feel that they would reap many benefits if the missionaries would live with them. Of this Narcissa wrote: "This reminds me of a quarrel among the [Indian] women while... at Rendezvous. The Nez Perce women said we were going to live with them, and the Cayuses said, No, we were going to live with them. The contradiction was so sharp they nearly came to blows" [Letter 34].

It is well to emphasize the fact that the missionaries did not force themselves upon unwilling natives. Both the Cayuses and the Nez Perces were quick to promise full cooperation. Undoubtedly the Indians had mixed motives in their desire to have the missionaries settle among them. There is evidence of a sincere desire to learn more of the white man's religion. On the other hand, as A. B. Smith pointed out in a letter he wrote to the Board on August 27, 1839, regarding the Nez Perces: "They have manifested a great desire for missionaries, but there is no doubt but that much of this desire has been the hope of temporal gain."¹⁷

Whitman, in his letter to Greene written at the Rendezvous and dated July 16, 1836, stated that he and Spalding had decided to go through to Fort Walla Walla and thence to Fort Vancouver. This meant that the Flatheads would be by-passed in favor of the tribes that spoke the Nez Perce language, which included the Cayuses. Commenting on his decision to take women over the Rockies, Whitman wrote: "I see no reason to regret our choice of a journey by land." During their travels across the plains, they had enjoyed excellent weather. Whitman reported that they had had but one shower "that gave us any inconvenience." He said that Mrs. Spalding had suffered some from a change of diet but that his wife had endured the journey very well.

Spalding also wrote to the Board from the Rendezvous. In his letter of July 8, he reported: "We travelled 1,700 miles to Liberty mostly by water; 1,300 from Liberty to this place, all by land, and have yet 600 miles to make. Our living since we reached buffalo country, 300 miles from the mouth of the Platte, on the first of June, has been nothing but

buffalo meat and the poorest kind of buffalo are very scarce this year.”

Whitman, in his letter of July 16 to Greene, reported that when he was about to leave the Rendezvous, he went to Captain Fitzpatrick and asked for his bill to cover many favors received including the shoeing of the horses of the missionaries, supplies of meat, etc. Fitzpatrick then asked Dr. Whitman for his bill for medical services rendered to men of the caravan. Whitman replied: “I have no bill.” “Then,” said Fitzpatrick, “neither have I.” Whitman wrote: “We have received nothing but favour and kindness from this company while with them.” This incident is reminiscent of Fontenelle’s attitude when Whitman parted company with him at Fort Laramie in July 1835, when Fontenelle also refused to submit a bill to Whitman. Surely there would have been no mission party with women going overland to Old Oregon in 1836, under the escort of the American Fur Company, had not the way been prepared by Whitman’s medical services to the men of the 1835 caravan who had been stricken with cholera.

After having parted with the Fur Company’s caravan, the mission party was faced with the serious question as to an escort for them from the Rendezvous to Fort Walla Walla. The Nez Perce Indians, as though fearful of losing their new-found friends, were eager for the missionaries to go with them by the northern route to Fort Walla Walla. This is what Parker had done in 1835, and it took him forty-five days to make the journey. This route was very mountainous. It crossed and recrossed the Continental Divide four times.¹⁸ Whitman was warned by well-informed mountain men that it would be impossible to take the Dearborn wagon that way and also that such a trail would be most difficult if not impossible for the cattle.

The alternative route would be along the Snake River across the desert of what is now southern Idaho. Lawyer and Tackensuatis promised to accompany the mission party as far west as Soda Springs. Whitman and Spalding decided that with the help of their two Indian boys and Goodyear, they could make the journey in safety. Dulin who had been with them since leaving the frontier left them at the Rendezvous. John Hinds, a Negro, who was ill with “dropsy” joined the party in order to get medical help from Dr. Whitman [Letter 39]. As early as July 8, only two days after their arrival at the Rendezvous, Spalding in his letter to Greene stated that they had decided to take the Snake River route.

An unexpected and most welcome development came on July 12; a small party of Hudson's Bay men under the command of John L. McLeod and Thomas McKay arrived at the Rendezvous to take part in trading. The Company had purchased from Nathaniel J. Wyeth the fort which he had built in 1834, known as Fort Hall, near present-day Pocatello, Idaho. Wyeth was on his way back to the States and had traveled with McLeod and McKay to the Rendezvous. Parker, learning of the intention of the Hudson's Bay Company to acquire Fort Hall, had sent a second letter to Whitman by McLeod and McKay in which he advised the mission party to travel under their protection. The missionaries looked upon this as another token of divine favor and hastened to make their plans accordingly. On Thursday, July 14, they moved to the encampment of McLeod and McKay which was about ten miles from the main Rendezvous. Since the Nez Perces had also decided to travel with the Hudson's Bay Company's party as far as Fort Hall, they likewise moved their camp to be near McLeod.

Narcissa described the warm reception given them by the Hudson's Bay men: "On our arrival Mr. McL. came to meet us, led us to his tent & gave us a supper which consisted of steak (Antelope), broiled ham, biscuit & butter, tea and loaf sugar brought from Wallah Wallah. This we relished very much as we had not seen anything of the bread kind since the last of May. Especially sister Spalding who has found it quite difficult to eat meat [for] some time." McLeod gave his guests glowing accounts of the abundance of fresh vegetables and food supplies at Fort Walla Walla and Fort Vancouver. This was good news!

Years later, Spalding looked back upon the first meeting of the mission party with McLeod and McKay and remembered how "The shrewd McKay as he met our little party leaving Green River to join his camp said, referring to our ladies, 'There is something that Doct. McLoughlin cannot ship out of the country so easy.'" ¹⁹

Although the contemporary writings of Whitman, Spalding, and Gray do not indicate that any of them appreciated the significance of their feat in taking the first white women over the Rockies, Tom McKay was one who did. As the stepson of Dr. John McLoughlin, he was well acquainted with the firmness with which the Doctor, as Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, conducted the business of his company. Dr. McLoughlin could outbid, outsell, and outmaneuver any threatened rival in the

fur trade. But larger issues were arising than those involved in the fur trade which would give the Hudson's Bay Company and the British Government increasing concern.

One of these issues was the location of the boundary in Old Oregon which would determine which part of that vast territory would come under the jurisdiction of the United States and which would go to Great Britain. Tom McKay saw in the presence of two white women at the Rendezvous, on the west side of the Continental Divide, a development which challenged England's dominance in Old Oregon.

Only two white women at the Rendezvous! This was an epoch making event with far-reaching consequences for the political future of Old Oregon. Their very presence proved that the Rocky Mountains were no longer a barrier to American emigration. The two women riding horseback, on side-saddles, through South Pass had opened the mountain door to Old Oregon to countless thousands of women to follow. Where two women could go on horseback, other women could follow in covered wagons, wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. The coming of families meant the establishment of homes, schools, churches, and inevitably the formation of a civil government under the jurisdiction of the United States. In a flash all this was made clear to Tom McKay who saw that the focal point of competition between Great Britain and the United States was no longer to be centered in the fur trade but rather in the growth of a resident white population in Old Oregon. Hence the remark: "There is something that Doct. McLoughlin cannot ship out of the country so easy."

FROM THE RENDEZVOUS TO FORT BOISE

The Hudson's Bay party with the missionaries and some two hundred or more Nez Percés started for Fort Hall on Saturday, July 16. While crossing the plains, the Fur Company's caravan made two "camps" [i.e., marches] a day, stopping for a two-hour period at midday for rest and refreshment. The Indians, however, made but one camp a day. They did not stop after they got started in the morning until they were ready to camp for the night. McLeod, his men, and the mission party found it best to accommodate themselves to the Indians' custom although the

women found it most trying and were glad to resume their former schedule after parting with the Indians at Fort Hall.

NARCISSA WHITMAN'S DIARY

After leaving the Rendezvous, the missionaries had no opportunity to send letters back to their homes until they arrived at Fort Vancouver. Narcissa, who had been writing a series of travel letters to her family, decided to keep a diary instead. Judging from the evidence, she first made rough notes along the way in a pocket notebook. After arriving at Fort Vancouver, she wrote the first draft of her diary from these notes and from memory. This first draft is so uniform in its writing and in the flow of ink, that it could not have been written at irregular intervals along the trail. Then Narcissa made a copy for her mother and also one for her husband's mother. Thus there are the rough notes, the original diary, and two copies, all extant.²⁰

The copy that Narcissa sent to her parents was published in some local paper shortly after it had been received. This displeased her. Writing to her sister Jane on September 18, 1838, Narcissa said: "I regret you should have it printed, or any [part] of it, for it was never designed for public eye." Yet by a queer irony of fate, nothing written by a member of the Oregon Mission of the American Board has been reprinted as often as Narcissa's charming diary.²¹

NARCISSA TELLS THE STORY

Narcissa in her diary gives the following description of their travel experiences:

We commenced our journey to Walla Walla July 18, 1836, under the protection of Mr. McLeod & his company... On the 19th did not move at all. 20th. Came twelve miles... over many steep & high mountains... the 22nd was a tedious day to us, we started about nine o'clock a.m., rode until half past four, p.m. Came twenty one miles. Had two short showers in the afternoon which cooled the air considerably. Before this the heat was oppressive. I thought of Mother's bread & butter many times as any hungry child would, but did not find it on the way. I fancy pork & potatoes would relish extremely well. Have been living on fresh meat

for two months exclusively. Am cloyed with it. I do not know how I shall endure this part of the journey.

On Sunday, July 23, Narcissa's thoughts turned to her home and to her parents. She wrote of praying for them: "Earnestly desired that God would bless them in their declining years, & smooth their passage to the tomb; that in the absence of their earthly comforts, he would fill their souls with his more immediate presence, so that they may never have cause to regret the sacrifice they have made for his Name Sake." Here she is referring to her departure from the family circle for Oregon.

On July 27, Narcissa wrote:

Our cattle endure the journey remarkably well. They are a source of great comfort to us in this land of scarcity, they supply us with sufficient milk for our tea & coffee which is indeed a luxury... Have seen no buffalo since we left Rendezvous. Had no game of any kind except a few messes of Antelope which John's Father gave us. We have plenty of dry Buffalo meat which we purchased of the Indians & dry it is for me. I can scarcely eat it, it appears so filthy,²² but it will keep us alive, and we ought to be thankful for it. We have had a few meals of fresh fish also, which relished well... Found no berries. Neither have I found any of Ma's bread. (Girls do not waste the bread, if you know how well I should relish even the driest morsel, you would have every piece carefully.) Do not think I regret coming. No, far from it. I would not go back for a world. I am contented and happy notwithstanding I sometimes get very hungry and weary.

McLeod gave the missionaries some rice he had obtained at Fort Walla Walla; this was greatly appreciated.

Narcissa refers several times to the light wagon which Whitman was determined to take with him to his future mission station. As has been stated, this wagon was not the first to have been taken over the Continental Divide, but it was the first to have been taken across what is now southern Idaho as far west as Fort Boise. Narcissa repeatedly mentioned the great difficulties the men, and especially her husband, faced in their endeavors to take the wagon over terrain never before crossed by a wheeled vehicle. On July 25, she wrote:

Husband has had a tedious time with the wagon today. Got set in the creek this morning while crossing, was obliged to wade considerably in getting it out. After that in going between two mountains, on the side of one so steep that it was difficult for the horses to pass, the wagon was upset twice. Did not wonder at this at all. It was a greater wonder that it was not turning a somerset continually. It is not very grateful to my feelings to see him wear out with such excessive fatigue as I am obliged to... All the most difficult part of the way he has walked in his laborious attempt to take the wagon over.

On July 28 after traveling through some "very mountainous" country, Narcissa reported: "One of the axle trees of the wagon broke today. Was a little rejoiced, for we were in hopes they would leave it and have no more trouble with it. Our rejoicing was in vain, however, for they are making a cart of the hind wheels this afternoon & lashing the forward wheels to it, intending to take it through in some shape or other. They are so resolute & untiring in their efforts, they will probably succeed." This incident occurred two days before the party arrived at Soda Springs.

On July 30, the missionaries rode ten miles out of their way in order to see an unusual phenomenon of nature just west of present-day Soda Springs, Idaho. Here two springs, called Steamboat Springs and Beer Springs, emitted hot water heavily saturated with soda and some form of gas which killed birds and insects in the immediate vicinity. In recent times, these bubbling springs have been inundated by the Soda Point Reservoir.

After leaving the mountainous country, the trail entered a flat desert where the thermometer often rose above 100°. On August 2, Narcissa wrote: "Heat excessive. Truly I thought 'the Heavens over us were brass, & the earth iron under our feet'." Narcissa's quotation from Deuteronomy 28:23, so appropriate in describing the weather, reveals her thorough knowledge of the Bible.

The missionaries arrived at Fort Hall on Wednesday morning, August 3, where they were cordially welcomed by Captain Joseph Thing, the Hudson's Bay Company's official in charge. The fort was located on the south bank of the Snake River about twelve miles from what is now Pocatello, Idaho. Thing provided rooms in the fort for the two couples.

This was the first time that the Whitmans and the Spaldings had been able to sleep within a building since leaving the Missouri frontier.

Thing proudly showed his garden, which was the beginning of agriculture in what is now Idaho. His turnips were excellent; his corn had been frostbitten; his crop of peas and onions was not promising. That evening the missionaries had the pleasure of dining on “turnips & fried bread” as a supplement to their dried buffalo meat and for dessert, they had tea and stewed wild serviceberries. Narcissa noted: “We had stools to sit on.”

Instead of following the Snake River across what is now southern Idaho, the Nez Perces with the few Cayuses who were traveling with them turned north at Fort Hall. “The whole tribe are exceedingly anxious to have us go with them, use every argument they can invent to prevail on us to do so, & not only arguments, but stratagem. We all think it not best.” The missionaries were convinced that the route the Indians were planning to take would be longer and consume more time. “To go with them would take us two months or more,” wrote Narcissa, “when now we expect to go to Walla Walla in twenty-five days, or be there by the first of September. When we get there, rest will be sweet to us.” Chief Tackensuatis, his family, Kentuc, and a few other Indians decided to stay with the mission party.

One who did not remain with the missionaries was Miles Goodyear. According to Gray: “Miles Goodyear, the boy we picked up two days from Fort Leavenworth, who had been assigned to assist the Doctor, was determined, if the Doctor took his wagon any further, to leave the company. He was the only one that could be spared to assist in this wild, and, as all considered, crazy undertaking.” Goodyear was given two horses and “the best outfit” the mission party could give him.²³

The McLeod party with the Missionaries, their Indian helpers, and Hinds, left Fort Hall on Thursday, August 4, for Fort Boise.²⁴ Since they were no longer with the main body of the Nez Perces, they could travel at a more leisurely pace and make two camps a day. “I feel this to be a great mercy to us weak females,” wrote Narcissa in her diary, “for it was more than we could well endure to travel during the heat of the day without refreshment.”

Their trail led along the south bank of the Snake River which the missionaries had seen for the first time at Fort Hall. This tributary of

the Columbia River is the seventh largest river in the United States in volume of water carried. On August 5 Narcissa wrote: "We came through several swamps & all the last part of the way we were so swarmed with musquetoos as to be scarcely able to see, especially while crossing the Portneuf [River] which we did just before we came into camp. It is the widest river I have forded on horseback. It seemed as if the cows would run mad for the musquetoos."²⁵

Some indication of the dangers the women faced when riding sidesaddle, with only the left foot in the stirrup and with the right leg hooked over a horn on the saddle, is found in the following entry from Eliza's diary for August 6: "Yesterday my horse became unmanageable in consequence of stepping into a hornet's nest. I was thrown, and notwithstanding my foot remained a moment in the stirrup, and my body dragged for some distance, I received no serious injury." This was the second time that Eliza had had such an experience.²⁶

Narcissa described the terrain over which they rode as being nothing more than a barren sandy desert were it not for the sage. "In some places," she noted, "it grows in bunches to the height of a man's head, & it is so stiff and hard as to be much in the way of our animals and wagon." Whitman, still determined to take the wagon with them, often found it difficult to get it either around or over the sage.

On Sunday evening, August 7, Narcissa wrote: "Came fifteen miles without seeing water, over a dry parched earth, covered with its native sage as parched as the earth itself. Heat excessive." Whitman later wrote: "Imagination can hardly equal the barrenness of the Snake River [country]" [Letter 31]. On Monday, the 8th, the missionaries were provided with some fresh elk meat, the first they had eaten, and on the 12th they got fresh salmon from some Indians at Salmon Falls. Narcissa wrote regarding the fish: "Had we been a few days earlier, we should not have been able to obtain any fish, for they had but just come up." Since the falls were too high for the salmon, this was the limit of their spawning run up the river.

There follows in Narcissa's diary for August 12, one of the most quoted passages of her writings, often referred to as the soliloquy to her trunk:

Friday Eve. Dear Harriet, the little trunk you gave me has come with me so far & now I must leave it here alone. Poor little

trunk, I am sorry to leave thee. Thou must abide here alone & no more by this presence remind me of my Dear Harriet. Twenty miles below the Falls on Snake River. This shall be thy place of rest. Farewell little Trunk. I thank thee for thy faithful services & that I have been cheered by thy presence so long. Thus we scatter as we go along.

[Narcissa's entry for August 12 continues:] The hills are so steep and rocky that Husband thought it best to lighten the wagon as much as possible & take nothing but the wheels, leaving the box with my trunk. I regret leaving anything that came from home especially that trunk, but it is best. It would have been better for us not to have attempted to bring any baggage whatever, only what was necessary to use on the way. It costs so much labor, besides the expense of animals. If I were to make this journey again, I would make quite different preparations. To pack & unpack so many times & cross so many streams, where the packs frequently get wet, requires no small amount of labour, besides the injury done to the articles... The custom of the country is to possess nothing & then you will lose nothing while traveling. Farewell for the present.

On the next day, Narcissa wrote in her diary that McKay had "asked the privilege of taking the little trunk along so that my soliloquy about it last night was for nought." Possibly McKay later returned the trunk to her but nothing was said of this in her diary.

In order to take a shorter route to Fort Boise, McLeod decided to cross the Snake River at a place near present-day Glens Ferry, Idaho. There several islands break the swift flow of the river making fording on horseback possible. Narcissa mentioned in her diary for August 13 that the crossing was made where there were two islands.²⁷ She wrote: "The packs are placed upon the top of the highest horses & in this way crossed without wetting. Two of the tallest horses were selected to carry Mrs. S. & myself over... The last branch we rode as much as a half-mile in crossing & against the current too, which made it hard for the horses, the water being up to their sides." Few men today would ever attempt such a crossing but the women accepted the experience, no doubt riding side-saddle, as matter-of-course. "I once thought," wrote Narcissa,

“that crossing streams would be the most dreadful part of the journey. I can now cross the most difficult stream without the least fear.”

Whitman had a most difficult time in getting the cart across the Snake River. Narcissa described the event: “Both the cart & the mules were capsized in the water and the mules entangled in the harness. Both the cart and mules turned upside down in the river.” After a desperate struggle the cart and the mules were landed on the north bank. Here again we see Whitman’s determination to take the wagon through at all cost.

After reaching the north bank of the river, McLeod and his men pushed on ahead of the missionaries who found their progress delayed by the cattle. The trail led in a northwesterly direction across the desert to the Boise River which was then followed to its mouth on the Snake River where Fort Boise was located. This fort had been established in the summer of 1834 by Thomas McKay, and he remained there after his return from the Rendezvous of 1836.

The mission party arrived at Fort Boise, which Narcissa called “Snake Fort,” on Friday noon, August 19. On Saturday morning, she wrote in her diary: “Last night I put my clothes in water & this morning finished washing before breakfast. I find it not very agreeable to do such work in the middle of the day when I have no shelter to protect me from the sun’s scorching rays. This is the third time I have washed since I left the states, or home either.” McLeod, who was planning to escort the mission party to Fort Walla Walla, was ready to leave that Saturday but after finding the women busy with their washing kindly offered to wait until Monday. “This, I can assure you,” wrote Narcissa, “was a favour for which we can never be too thankful for our souls need the rest of the Sab. as well as our bodies.”

Whitman had to face some harsh realities at Fort Boise. Aware that the horses, which had been pulling the wagon reduced to a cart through the sage, were physically exhausted, and learning that the trail which lay before them over the Blue Mountains was far more difficult than any yet followed, he reluctantly decided to leave the wagon at the fort.²⁸ Even though Whitman failed to take the wagon through to the Columbia River, his accomplishment in getting it as far west as Fort Boise is worthy of acclaim. He had proved that it was possible for a wheeled vehicle to cross the desert which lay between the Rockies and the Blue Mountains.

A long section of what came to be the Oregon trail, stretching for some four hundred miles west of the Rendezvous, had been opened to vehicular traffic. Seven years later, when some one thousand Oregon-bound emigrants with their wagons were told at Fort Hall that it was impossible to take wagons any further west, it was Whitman who stepped forward and assured them that it could be done, as his experience had proven.

Time is needed to give perspective so that the significance of passing events can be appreciated. Even as members of the 1836 mission party had not at the time recognized the significance of white women crossing the Rockies, neither did they appreciate the importance of their feat in taking the wagon as far west as Fort Boise. Gray called it a “crazy undertaking.” It was not until November 1843 that we find Whitman taking justifiable pride in the part he played in “establishing the first wagon road across to the border of the Columbia River” [Letter 142].

FROM FORT BOISE TO FORT VANCOUVER

The mission party crossed to the west bank of the Snake River on Monday morning, August 22. The women were taken over in a rude Indian canoe made out of rushes and willow branches. After crossing the river, the missionaries were in what is now eastern Oregon. Their trail led in a northerly direction. They crossed the Malheur River at noon on the 23rd and by the evening of the 24th had reached Burnt River. Nowhere along their entire journey had they encountered such mountainous and difficult terrain as along Burnt River. After crossing a divide, they came into Powder River Valley on the afternoon of the 26th. By this time McLeod was getting restless. Fort Walla Walla was about four days' march away. He suggested, since they were no longer in hostile Indian country, that he push on ahead with the Whitmans and Gray, leaving the Spaldings to follow with the cattle. Chief Tackensuatis was now able to guide the Spaldings. The tent was left with them as McLeod turned his tent over to the Whitmans. Narcissa's diary mentions many favors which McLeod extended to them. A good instance is recorded in her diary for August 27 when McLeod succeeded in shooting twenty-two wild ducks and gave nine of them to the Whitmans.

The trail led from Powder River over another divide into Grande Ronde Valley, which was a favorite place for a part of the Nez Perce tribe. On the 28th, Narcissa wrote: “We descended a very steep hill

coming into Grande Ronde at the foot of which is a beautiful cluster of trees... Grande Ronde is indeed a beautiful place. It is a circular plain, surrounded with lofty mountains & has a beautiful stream coursing through it, skirted with timber, quite large timber." After traveling for so many weeks on the treeless prairies and the barren deserts, riding through forests was what Narcissa called, "a very agreeable change."

On Monday, August 29, while crossing the Blue Mountains, Narcissa gave the following vivid description of her experiences: "Before noon we began to descend one of the most terrible mountains for steepness & length I have yet seen. It was like winding stairs in its descent & in some places almost perpendicular. We were a long time descending it. The horses appeared to dread the hill as much as we did. They would turn & wind in a zigzag manner all the way down. The men usually walked but I could not get permission to, neither did I desire it much. We had no sooner gained the foot of the mountain when another more steep & dreadful was before us."

The Whitmans had an exciting experience late that afternoon. They rode out to a vantage point at about the 5,000 foot level where a beautiful landscape burst into view. Below them and somewhat to the right were the valleys of the Umatilla and Walla Walla Rivers. A little further away flowed the mighty Columbia. They were highly favored in having a clear day for they could see two hundred miles across what is now eastern Oregon to the snowy peaks of the Cascade Mountain Range. "It was beautiful," wrote Narcissa that evening. "Just as we gained the highest elevation & began to descend, the sun was dipping his disk behind the western horizon. Beyond the valley, we could see two distinct mountains, Mount Hood & Mount St. Helens. These lofty peaks were of a conical form & separate from each other by a considerable distance. Behind the former the sun was hiding part of his rays which gave us a more distinct view of this gigantic cone. The beauty of this extensive valley contrasted well with the rolling mountains behind us & at this hour of twilight was enchanting & quite diverted my mind from the fatigue under which I was labouring."

Tuesday, August 30, was spent in camp because of some difficulty McLeod had with some of his pack animals. Early the next morning, McLeod rode on ahead to notify those at Fort Walla Walla of the approach of the missionaries. On the 31st, the Whitmans rode about thirty

miles over dry hills, which are now devoted to wheat fields, and camped for the night on Walla Walla River about eight miles from Fort Walla Walla. In the course of their travels that day, they rode past the site which was to become their home. Whitman did not then know that the mission party would have to go to Fort Vancouver for supplies. For the time being, Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia was considered to be the terminus of their travels as they felt sure that they would find a location somewhere near that place. The missionaries of the American Board arrived at Fort Walla Walla just two years to the day after the arrival of the Jason Lee party.

The site of Fort Walla Walla is now covered by the waters of the Columbia River which have been backed up by the McNary Dam, completed in December 1953. The fort was located on a sandy elevation on the east bank of the Columbia near the mouth of the Walla Walla River and was originally called Fort Nez Perce. At the time of the arrival of the 1836 mission party, a French Canadian, Pierre C. Pambrun, was the Hudson's Bay official in charge. Narcissa's account of their arrival at the fort in her diary for September 1 pulsates with the excitement she felt as they ended their long overland journey.

"September 1st, 1836. You can better imagine our feelings this morning than I can describe them. I could not realize that the end of our long journey was so near. We arose as soon as it was light, took a cup of coffee and eat of the duck we had given us last night, then dressed for Walla W. We started while it was yet early, for all were in haste to reach the desired haven." Marcus was riding an Indian pony which did not know how to pace as did the horse Narcissa was riding, so they had to gallop all the way to the fort. "The first appearance of civilization we saw," wrote Narcissa, "was the garden, two miles this side of the fort. The fatigues of the long journey seemed to be forgotten in the excitement of being so near the close."

Seeing the approach of the Whitmans and Gray, McLeod, Pambrun, and a naturalist who happened to be at the fort, John K. Townsend, rode forth to greet them. "After the usual introductions and salutations," added Narcissa, "we entered the fort & were comfortably seated in cushioned armed chairs." They were served breakfast: "...fresh salmon, potatoes, tea, bread & butter." While at breakfast, a rooster placed himself on the door sill and crowed. Even such an insignificant incident stirred

Narcissa to write: "Now whether it was the sight of the first white female or out of compliment to the company, I know not... I was pleased with his appearance."

After breakfast the three missionaries were taken on a tour of the fort and the grounds. Narcissa mentioned seeing chickens, turkeys, pigeons, goats, and "the largest & fattest cattle & swine I ever saw." The Whitmans were given a room in the west bastion of the fort "full of port holes in the sides but no windows, & filled with fire arms." The room even had a "large cannon." Narcissa wrote that she was so pleased to be sheltered from the scorching sun that she paid no attention to the armaments.

Later in the morning, Pambrun treated his guests to some muskmelons. According to Narcissa, one was "eighteen inches in length." This was a real treat. Dinner was served at 4:00 p.m. The very fact that Narcissa listed the various items on the menu is an indication of how much she appreciated the change of diet: "...pork, potatoes, beets, cabbage, turnips, tea, bread & butter." The privations of the trail were over and they were back in civilization again. The missionaries met Mrs. Pambrun, a native woman, who spoke some French but very little English.

Townsend, who had gone out to Old Oregon with the Wyeth party and the Methodist missionaries in 1834, has given us the following in his journal under date of September 1, 1836: "I have had this evening some interesting conversation with our guests, the missionaries. They appear admirably qualified for the arduous duty to which they have devoted themselves, their minds being fully alive to the mortifications and trials incident to a residence among wild Indians, but they do not shrink from the task, believing it to be their religious duty to engage in this work. The ladies have borne the journey astonishingly; they look robust and healthy."²⁹ From this it is evident that Eliza Spalding's health was better at the end than it had been at the beginning of her overland journey.

On September 2, the day after their arrival at the fort, Narcissa noted in her diary that her husband had decided to go to Fort Vancouver, a six days' voyage by boat down the Columbia River. Whitman wanted to see Dr. McLoughlin. By this time he had learned that he would not be able to get all supplies needed at Fort Walla Walla and that he would have

to get them at Fort Vancouver. Narcissa decided to go with him rather than remain at Walla Walla. McLeod and Townsend left for Vancouver the 3rd with heavily loaded boats. Since Pambrun was also planning to go to Vancouver a few days later, the Whitmans decided to travel with him.

The Spalding party with the pack animals and the cattle arrived at Fort Walla Walla on the afternoon of the 3rd. The Spaldings were given the same cordial welcome as had been extended to the Whitmans and Gray. Only eight head of the original herd of seventeen (including perhaps two calves born en route) cattle survived the long trek. Two had been butchered en route; two calves were lost; and five had to be left at Fort Boise because of their sore feet. The missionaries were glad to have these eight as they knew it was not the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company to sell cattle to settlers or to missionaries. Evidently the Company gave the missionaries five head to replace those left at Fort Boise, as Whitman, in a letter to Parker dated September 18, wrote: "We shall have five cows, seven heifers, and one bull." The missionaries had left the Missouri frontier with fourteen head of horses, including the two that Whitman had left the year before at Bellevue, and six mules. Eight of the horses were taken through. The letters of the missionaries do not tell the fate of the mules.

At Fort Walla Walla the missionaries met Charles Compo³⁰ who had served as Parker's interpreter the previous year. Compo complained to Whitman about the treatment he had received from Parker; he had given up his chances of trapping in the fall and winter of 1885-36 in order to go with Parker, and had received only \$18.00 worth of Indian goods for his services. Whitman asked Greene: "How could so small a compensation be right?" [Letter 62]. Compo spent the winter with the Nez Perce Indians hoping to return to the Rendezvous with Parker in the spring of 1836. When Parker failed to make that journey, Compo entered the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Walla Walla where he remained for two years.

The five missionaries left for Fort Vancouver with Pambrun on September 6. Gray described the boat which carried them down the Columbia as being "about 30 feet long and 8 wide in the center, coming to a point at each end, propelled by 5 oars and a steersman, of sufficient depth to early 2,500 pounds."³¹ A trip up or down the Columbia River in those days involved several portages because of dangerous rapids or falls.

This meant that all occupants of the boats would have to walk the length of the portage; in some places this exposed them to the flea infested terrain. This came as a surprise to Narcissa who in her diary tells of her unpleasant experiences. Once she had seated herself in the shade of a large rock when suddenly she became aware of insects crawling on her neck. She soon discovered that she was covered with thousands of fleas!

“Immediately,” she wrote, “I cast my eyes upon my dress and to my astonishment found it was black with these creatures all making all possible speed to lay siege to my neck & ears. This sight made me almost frantic.” Narcissa shouted for help but no one was within hearing at the time. She began climbing up the rocks and finally attracted her husband’s attention. “I could not tell him,” she wrote, “but showed him the cause of my distress. On opening the gathers in my dress around my waist, every plait was lined with them. Thus they had already laid themselves in ambush against a fresh attack. We brushed & shook & brushed for an hour, not stopping to kill them for that would have been impossible.” After returning to the boat, the Whitmans learned that every one else in the party had been likewise afflicted. They found no relief until they were able to camp for the night and change their apparel.

On the evening of September 9, a day when the party remained in camp because of contrary winds, a band of Indians visited them. Narcissa noted: “Every head was flattened. These are the first I have seen so near as to be able to examine them.” It was the picture of a deformed head said to be of one of the four Indians who had visited St. Louis in the fall of 1831, with the accompanying appeal for missionaries, which had attracted the attention of Samuel Parker when he read the March 1, 1833, issue of the *New York Christian Advocate*. Now the missionaries were seeing the custom in reality. Two days later while making the portage at the Cascades, Narcissa had a better opportunity to observe the flattening process. “I saw an infant here,” she wrote, “whose head was in the pressing machine. This was a pitiful sight. Its mother took great satisfaction in unbinding & showing its naked head to us.” The infant was only three weeks old and the bones of the skull were still pliable. Narcissa learned that the infant’s head would usually be kept under pressure for three or more months. “There is a variety of shapes among them,” she wrote. “Some are sharper [i.e., more wedge-shaped] than others. I saw a child about a year old whose head had been recently

released from its pressure, as I suppose from its looks. All the back part of it was of a purple colour as if it had been sadly bruised.”

The custom of flattening the heads of infants was common in that day in the lower Columbia River country, and there is evidence that a few of the natives in the upper country also practiced it. By 1836 the custom was beginning to die out.

AT FORT VANCOUVER

Pambrun's boat with the five missionary passengers arrived at Fort Vancouver on Monday morning, September 12. The first to greet them was the naturalist, J. K. Townsend, who escorted them to the main gate of the fort. Dr. McLoughlin and others, hearing of their arrival, hastened to greet them. He gave a warm welcome to the missionaries who had come to the end of a seven-months journey across the continent. Dr. McLoughlin was quick to appreciate the significance of the achievement of the women in crossing the Rockies and, according to Spalding, called upon "his powers of invention to confer upon them some title of honor due to their heroism."³²

McLoughlin presented his wife, Margaret, to the missionaries. She was the daughter of a Swiss merchant in Canada and a Cree Indian woman and is described by those who knew her as being intelligent and capable. She was the widow of Alexander McKay,³³ when Dr. McLoughlin married her, and already the mother of four children including Tom McKay. Among those at Fort Vancouver at the time of the arrival of the mission party was twelve-year-old William McKay, son of Thomas, who later was sent East on the advice of Dr. Whitman to study at the Fairfield Medical College.

In the welcoming party was Sir James Douglas, Dr. McLoughlin's chief associate and later his successor, and Dr. William Frazer Tolmie, a young Scottish physician who had been sent to Fort Vancouver in 1833 to relieve Dr. McLoughlin of his medical cares. Douglas also had a half-breed wife. Another couple who was introduced to the missionaries were the Rev. and Mrs. Herbert Beaver, who had arrived from England on the *Neriade*, then in port, only six days before the arrival of the American Board missionaries. Beaver, an Anglican clergyman, was to be the chaplain of the Fort. Another English woman at the Fort was a Mrs. Capendel, the wife of one of the employees of the Company. "This is

more than we expected,” noted Narcissa in her diary, “that we should be privileged with the acquaintance & society of two English ladies.”

Now that the “unheard of journey for females” was completed, what was the verdict of those who were directly involved? Was Marcus Whitman, the first who believed that such a journey for women was possible, to be censured for promoting so foolhardy an undertaking or was he to be commended for his sound judgment? Great risks were taken. Mrs. Satterlee, who had accompanied her husband to the Missouri frontier, had died at Liberty. Mrs. Spalding was ill several times along the way. After the trying experience of crossing the desert of what is now southern Idaho, Spalding wrote to Greene on September 20: “I can never advise females, notwithstanding, to venture a route over the mountains so long as a passage to this country is so easy by sea.

Narcissa agreed with Marcus in recommending the overland route. Writing to Mrs. Parker from Fort Vancouver on October 24, Narcissa said: “Do you ask whether I regret coming by land? I must answer no! *by no means*. If I were at home now, I would choose to come this way in preference to a seven months voyage” [Letter 35]. No one was better qualified to judge the relative merits of an overland journey as compared with a sea voyage than Samuel Parker, for he had gone both ways. In a letter to Elkanah Walker, who was thinking of taking his bride overland to Oregon, Parker on February 19, 1838, wrote: “By all means go across the continent by land. I would rather go across the continent three times than around the Cape once... A lady can go with far more comfort by land than by water.”³⁴

THE WOMEN AT FORT VANCOUVER

What a delightful place this [is],” wrote Narcissa in her diary. “What a contrast this to the rough barren sand plains through which we have so recently passed. Here we find fruit of every description, apples, peaches, grapes, pear, plum, & fig trees in abundance.” In the extensive gardens, she saw: “...cucumbers, melons, beans, peas, beets, cabbages, tomatoes, and every kind of vegetable too numerous to be mentioned.” The missionaries were taken on a tour of the barns and fields on the afternoon of September 14. Narcissa was greatly impressed. “They estimate their wheat crop at 4,000 bushels this year, peas, the same,” she wrote. “Oats & barley between 15 & 1,700 bushels each. The potato & turnip fields

are large and fine. Their cattle are numerous, estimated at 1,000 head in all their settlements, also sheep & goats, but the sheep are of an inferior kind. We find also hens, turkeys, pigeons, but no geese." The Company also had three hundred hogs.

They inspected the dairy where between fifty and sixty cows were being milked. The Company had a gristmill run by horse power at Vancouver and another powered by water at Fort Colville. Their storehouses were filled with all manner of merchandise. Regarding this Narcissa informed her family on November 1:

The Company lets us have goods as cheap as can be afforded & cheaper probably than we can get them from the States. They only charge us a hundred per cent more than the prime cost, or England prices. All their goods are of the best quality & will be durable. Husband has obtained a good [heating] stove of Mr. Pambrun of W.W. & we take up enough sheet iron for the pipe. My tin ware has all been made within a week past of the first rate block tin. I have six large milk pans, coffee & tea pots, candle sticks & molds. Covered pails & a baker... and besides this the blacksmiths have all been employed in making our farming utensils &c... There are a few deficiencies in the cloth line. No provision is made for bedding except blankets & these are dear. No sheets, nothing for shirting except striped or calico. I have found a piece of bleach linen which I take for sheets, the only one in the store, price 75 cents per yard. We see now that it was not necessary to bring anything because we find all here [Letter 38].

Narcissa noted one exception—religious books and papers.

Dr. McLoughlin's hospitality to the two missionary couples knew no limits. He invited them to dine at his table along with his wife and daughter Maria. Others who were also included in that select circle were Sir James and his wife and possibly Dr. Tomie [Letter 26]. The Beavers were not so honored nor was Gray. Since protocol was an important aspect of the social life at Fort Vancouver, and since Gray was known to be the "mechanic" for the mission, Dr. McLoughlin did not consider him as having the same status as the two couples. Gray never forgot what he considered to be the discourteous treatment he had received at the Fort and this may have been the basis for his anti-Hudson's Bay Company

attitude so evident in his book.³⁵ Dr. McLoughlin's dining-room furniture, including his china and some of his silver, are now on display in the McLoughlin house at Oregon City, Oregon. These items give evidence of a culture and an elegance that only the chief factor of an important trading post of the Company could afford.

Narcissa commented on the abundance and variety of food served. On September 23 she noted: "There is such a variety I know not where to begin. For breakfast we have coffee or coco. Salt Salmon & roast duck, wild & potatoes. When we have eaten our supply of them, our plates are changed & we make a finish on bread & butter. For dinner we have a greater variety. First we are always treated to a dish of soup, which is very good. Every kind of vegetable in use is taken & chopped fine & put into water with a little rice & boiled to a soup." The menu always included a variety of vegetables and of meats— "roast duck... boiled pork... fresh Salmon..." Following the main course would come the dessert—a rice pudding or apple pie and fruit and cheese. "The gentlemen frequently drink toasts to each other," wrote Narcissa, "but never give us the opportunity of refusing for they know we belong to the teetotal Society." Undoubtedly many a glass was lifted by the gentlemen of the Company in honor of their guests and especially the two women. Never before had the Whitmans and the Spaldings been so well feasted and honored.

When Parker had spent the winter of 1835–36 at Fort Vancouver, he had been invited by Dr. McLoughlin to teach sacred music to the fifty or more half-breed children then enrolled in the school.³⁶ How natural, therefore, was it for Dr. McLoughlin to invite the two women to help in the school and especially for Narcissa to teach singing. Narcissa made three references in her diary to this experience. "I could employ all my time in writing, & work for myself if it were not for his [i.e., Dr. McLoughlin's] wishes," she once wrote. "I sing with the children every evening also, which is considered a favor." And again: "I sing about an hour every evening with the children, teaching them new tunes, at the request of Dr. McLoughlin." It is easy to believe that Dr. McLoughlin was present whenever possible for those informal concerts, for he, too, had succumbed to the charms of her sweet voice. At his invitation, Narcissa became a tutor for his daughter, Maria.

The Rev. Herbert Beaver, however, looked upon the presence of the women in the school as an infringement of his rights. So on September 30,

a little more than two weeks after the mission party had arrived, Beaver addressed a note to Dr. McLoughlin protesting the introduction of “various systems of instructions” and asked if the school “is under my sole superintendence?”³⁷ Dr. McLoughlin replied the same day and firmly informed Beaver that the school was under “my direction.” Even after receiving that clarification, Beaver wrote to “Mesdames Whitman and Spalding” on October 1 informing them that in England “it is unusual... for any person to take part, without his permission and request, in the parochial duties of the minister... He would, therefore, hope that after this explanation, the Ladies, whom he has thus presumed to address, will refrain from teaching, in any respect, the children of the School at Vancouver, over which he has charge in virtue of his office.”

Dr. McLoughlin was incensed when he learned of this letter. He requested his chaplain to call at his office on Monday morning, October 3. Beaver replied that he preferred to conduct business by writing letters and not by a personal interview. At 1:00 p.m. that day, Dr. McLoughlin sent another note to Beaver in which he stated that he viewed the letter sent to the two missionary ladies as “a deliberate insult to the Honble. [i.e., Honorable] Company.” McLoughlin was firm in stating that he expected “that necessary degree of deference to his wishes” from Chaplain Beaver that was required “from all other persons in the service under him.”

Beaver replied with another note dated “half past two” on that Monday. He claimed that he was greatly surprised to learn that his letter to the women was taken as an insult. “He would gladly state,” he wrote, “for their satisfaction, that not the slightest insult was intended.”³⁸ There the matter rested.

The women at Dr. McLoughlin’s insistence continued their work in the school. Beaver, who had been at Fort Vancouver for less than a month, found himself out of favor with the chief factor. He poured out his troubles in long letters to Benjamin Harrison, a member of the Governing Committee of the Company in London and one, as has been stated, who had been very influential in founding the Red River Mission school.

In Beaver’s letter to Harrison dated November 15, 1836, we may read: “With respect to private treatment, I might have characterized it as insufferable by any person accustomed to the contrary; and I might have affirmed, in general, that no Englishman, no gentleman, no Christian,

no clergyman, no married couple, could possibly remain here, without having their feelings daily outraged by every species of conduct offensive to their former habits.”³⁹ Already Beaver regretted his appointment to Fort Vancouver and wished that he had returned to England on a vessel that had but shortly before sailed from Fort Vancouver. In spite of the appropriateness of his name for a fur-trading post, Chaplain Beaver was not a success at Vancouver. He and his wife returned to England in 1838.

THE MEN AT FORT VANCOUVER

There is evidence which supports the theory that long before the mission party arrived at Fort Vancouver, Whitman and Spalding had agreed to establish separate stations. And so it was. The Whitman home at Waiilatpu, near Fort Walla Walla and among the Cayuses, was 120 miles from the Spalding station on the Clearwater River with the Nez Percés at a place called Lapwai, now known as Spalding, Idaho. Why did the two couples separate? Why, in view of the limited financial resources of the American Board, were two stations established, when common sense would dictate that they concentrate their energies in one station? Why should they have denied themselves the fellowship and support of each other when so far removed from civilization?

The answer to such questions seems to be that Henry, as has been stated, had proposed marriage to Narcissa and had been rejected. He had found a most loyal helpmate in Eliza Hart, but could never forget the humiliation and disappointment of being turned down by Narcissa. Possibly Whitman was aware of this when he begged the Spaldings to go with him and Narcissa to Old Oregon. If so, it may be that he felt that since Henry was married to Eliza, the old romance was no longer an issue. Narcissa’s father was doubtful of the wisdom of his daughter going to the same mission with Henry Spalding but, after having had a personal interview with Spalding, withdrew his objection.

Spalding, however, could not forget, and difficulties arose between him and Whitman on their overland journey to Oregon. Gray in a letter to Greene dated October 14, 1840, stated that the two men had quarreled three times on their way across the country: “...at the Pawnee village, at Fort Boise on the Snake River, and at Walla Walla on the Columbia.” Gray did not give the reasons for the disagreements. After the 1838 reenforcement arrived, Elkanah Walker asked Spalding why he had

gone so far from Waiilatpu to establish a separate station. According to Gray, Spalding replied: "Do you suppose I would have come off here all alone, a hundred and twenty miles, if I could have lived with him and Mrs. Whitman?"⁴⁰

The fact that the Whitmans and the Spaldings were sent to the same field by the same mission board did not mean that they were temperamentally suited to be bosom friends. Before they were missionaries, these four were human beings with the frailties to which we are all subject. Whitman and Spalding very wisely agreed, before they arrived at Fort Vancouver, to have separate stations even if this required some duplication of equipment and supplies. On the other hand, having two stations with work in two different tribes meant an expansion of their missionary influence.

In all probability Whitman and Spalding discussed with the Cayuse and Nez Perce Indians at the Rendezvous the desirability of having a station with each tribe. Narcissa noted in her diary for September 21, 1836, written at Vancouver: "Mr. Parker recommended a place on the Koos Kooske [Clearwater] river, six days ride above Walla W." This is the only known reference in the writings of the mission party of 1836 to any definite recommendation left by Parker to a possible site for a mission station. Parker had visited the upper Columbia River country in the spring of 1836. His reference to a six days' ride from Fort Walla Walla indicated the Kamiah country. It is possible that Parker left some verbal recommendations with Dr. McLoughlin, but Whitman claimed that Parker had left no written instructions. Evidence indicates that Whitman and Spalding, after consulting with Dr. McLoughlin, made their final decision to have the Whitmans settle among the Cayuses and the Spaldings among the Nez Percés when the two couples were at Fort Vancouver. Plans were then made accordingly.

After further consultation with Dr. McLoughlin, Whitman and Spalding decided that it would be wise for them to return with Gray to Fort Walla Walla, to select the sites, and possibly begin building while the women would remain at Fort Vancouver. Dr. McLoughlin expressed his willingness to sell supplies. A bill of goods amounting to £371-8-1 was purchased, which included household furniture, clothing, home and farming utensils, building supplies, Indian goods, books, stationery, and some provisions. Of this amount, Whitman assumed £188-7-2;

Spalding £172-13-1; and Gray £10-7-10 [Letter 42]. Gray's bill was the smallest as he was not planning to have a separate station and he was unmarried.

During the whole mission period of eleven years, 1836-47, financial transactions between the missionaries and the Hudson's Bay Company were on the basis of English currency. According to a letter that Henry Hill, Treasurer of the American Board wrote to Spalding on June 23, 1837, every £100 cost the Board about \$540.00. When the cost of purchases made at Fort Vancouver in the fall of 1836 is added to the \$3,273.96 incurred before the missionaries left the States, we find that the Board paid out nearly \$6,000.00 to establish the Oregon Mission. This sum does not include the costs incurred by Parker on his exploring tour [See Appendix 2]. Dr. McLoughlin assured Whitman that the expenses incurred by the 1836 mission party in going to Oregon, covering a period of about seven months, were less than the cost would have been had they gone by sea [Letter 88].

Both Whitman and Spalding were generous in their expressions of appreciation for the assistance rendered to them by the Hudson's Bay Company. Whitman made special mention of the warm reception given them by Dr. McLoughlin [Letter 42]. Without the help of this Company, especially in making supplies available and indirectly in keeping the natives peaceful, it is doubtful whether the American Board would ever have been able to establish and maintain its Oregon Mission.⁴¹

The North West Company, as early as 1813, had imported Hawaiians, sometimes called Kanakas, into the Oregon country as laborers, as the local Indians could not be depended upon to do manual work.⁴² The Hudson's Bay Company also found the Hawaiians useful and dependable. When Whitman inquired as to the possibility of getting such help, Dr. McLoughlin suggested that he write to the Rev. Hiram Bingham, head of the American Board's Mission in the Islands, and ask him to send some Hawaiians to aid in the Oregon Mission. McLoughlin also suggested that while writing, he ask Bingham for some sheep as it was contrary to the policy of the Company to sell any animals from their large flocks or herds. A letter was written to Bingham on September 19, 1836, which was signed by Whitman, Spalding, and Gray, asking for both Hawaiian laborers and some sheep.

On Wednesday, September 21, 1836, a heavily laden boat manned by eleven oarsmen left Fort Vancouver for Fort Walla Walla. Among the passengers, in addition to the three missionary men, were Pambrun and a Cayuse chief who had accompanied the mission party to Fort Vancouver. Spalding in a letter to Greene, which was begun on September 20, reported that before they left Fort Vancouver, Dr. McLoughlin had suggested that they seek God's guidance in prayer and joined his petitions with theirs. Narcissa and Eliza were reluctant to see their husbands leave. "One thing comforts me," wrote Narcissa, "they are as unwilling to leave us as we are to stay & would not, if it was possible for us to go now."

The boat party reached the Cascades on the Columbia on the 22nd where a portage was necessary. Another portage of about one-half mile was required at The Dalles. Indians native to the region were always willing to help carry the freight and the boats over the portage if given a little tobacco. Depending upon the size of the boat, from thirty to forty Indians were needed even when a boat was empty. The party arrived at Fort Walla Walla on October 2.

CHAPTER 9 FOOTNOTES

1 *Op. cit.*, p. 118.

2 Tackensuatis was not the father of Richard as erroneously stated in Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:84.

3 See Drury, "I, the Lawyer," in *New York Westerners*, VII (May 1960), No. 1. Lawyer's name is spelled Hol-Lol-Sote-Tote on the Lawyer monument, Whitman College campus, Walla Walla. Lawyer served as Head Chief of the Nez Perces, 1849-71.

4 McBeth, *The Nez Perces Since Lewis and Clark*, p. 25, states that the word means "crowned ones" in reference to the hats which the white men wore. Other explanations are given in Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, p. 38.

5 Spalding to American Board, July 6, 1836, Coll. A.

6 During the months in Hawaii, Parker gave an account of his explorations to the Rev. Hiram Bingham of the Hawaiian Mission, who wrote a series of articles on "The Introduction of the Gospel among the Aborigines of North America, West of the Rocky Mountains," which appeared in the *Hawaiian Spectator* beginning in 1838.

7 For sketch of the life of Joe Meek, see Hafen, *Mountain Men*, I:313 ff.

8 Gray, *Oregon*, p. 122.

9 For a time both youths were helpful as interpreters but on the whole, as Secretary Greene had prophesied, the experiment of taking the Indian boys East was not a success.

10 Gray, *Oregon*, pp. 118 & 123.

11 *Ibid.*, 123.

12 *Op. Cit.*, pp. 41 & 109. Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:68, and Drury, *Whitman*, 145, for references to some mountain men who sold packs of playing cards to unsuspecting natives who thought they were buying Bibles.

13 Mrs. Nancy Atkinson, *Biography of Rev. C. H. Atkinson*, Portland, 1893, p. 177. Russell became a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church of Oregon City, organized May 25, 1844.

14 James B. Marsh, *Four Years in the Rockies*, New Castle, Pa., 1884, p. 156.

15 Whitman's spelling of Nez Perce as "Napiersas" shows that he was trying to represent the French pronunciation which he had heard. The Anglicized pronunciation is now used "Nez Purse." Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI: 162.

16 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI: 117-8. This comment was made after Parker had visited the Cayuse country the second time, i.e., in May 1836.

17 Drury, *Spalding and Smith*, p. 107.

18 Stanley Davison, "Worker in God's Wilderness," *Montana*, Helena (Winter, 1957) has a map (p. 16) of the supposed route taken by the Nez Perces and Parker in 1835. See also Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, pp. 134 ff., for description of the probable route.

19 Spalding ms. file, #201, p. 7, Coll. W.

20 The original notes made by Narcissa while traveling, and from which the diary was later written, are in private hands, but they have been seen by a historian who vouches for their authenticity. The first copy of Narcissa's diary, made from these notes, is in W.S.H.S. See Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:71 ff., for a comparison of Diary A., which was sent to Narcissa's mother, and Diary B., which was sent to her husband's mother. In my *Whitman*, p. 148, fn. 16, I stated that the diary in

W.S.H.S. was not an original. This opinion was based on a picture of the first page which had been published and which was not in Narcissa's handwriting. I was not then able to examine the original document. Since then, I have had this privilege, and am now convinced that, with the exception of the first page, the diary is authentic.

- 21 In addition to the publication of her diary referred to by Narcissa, the text has appeared in *T.O.P.A.*, 1891; *Chronicle Express*, Penn Yan, N.Y., beginning January 8, 1891; *O.H.Q.*, XXXVIII (1937) in an article by T. C. Elliott, "Coming of the White Women," and in Drury, *F.W.W.*, I.
- 22 All quotations from Narcissa's diary in this section have been taken from Drury, *F.W.W.*, I. Spalding to Greene, September 20, 1836, Coll. A., claimed that the dried buffalo meat was ". . . sour, mouldy, & full of all manner of filth, such as I would not have fed to a dog."
- 23 Gray, *Oregon*, p. 133; and Hafen, *Mountain Men*, II: 179 ff.
- 24 An excellent map of the Oregon Trail through what is now southern Idaho, with explanatory notes, is to be found in a pamphlet issued by the Department of Highways, State of Idaho, *Route of the Oregon Trail in Idaho*, 1968 & 1967.
- 25 The mosquitoes and flies are still extremely annoying in some of the places visited by the missionaries. I was at the site of the 1836 Rendezvous in July 1960 and found them as described by Narcissa. Horses were plagued by the horse fly, the deer fly, and the botfly. Some of the insects laid their eggs in the nostrils of the animals while others stung them in the tender spot back of the ankle, just above the hoof. Such attacks often made the animals half crazy.
- 26 Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:195, fn. 32.
- 27 The picture of the two-island crossing in Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:83, does not show the correct site. The probable location is shown in *Route of the Oregon Trail in Idaho*, p. 8.
- 28 Farnham, *Travels*, p. 142, mentions seeing the wagon at Fort Boise in 1839. Perrin Whitman, *W.C.Q.*, II (June 1898), p. 36, also refers to seeing it in 1843. Cannon, *Waiilatpu*, p. 25, states that the wagon had been used to move the effects of the Fort to a new location early in the 1860s. This is the last known reference to the famous wagon.
- 29 John K. Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains*, in *Early Western Travels*, Cleveland, 1905, p. 355.
- 30 See chapter on Charles Compo, by Drury, in Hafen, *Mountain Men*, VIII: 87 ff.
- 31 Gray to Ambler, September 9, 1886, Coll. O.
- 32 Spalding to Greene, Sept. 20, 1886, Coll. A.
- 33 Alexander McKay lost his life on the ill-fated Tonquin which was blown up on the west coast of Vancouver Island in June 1811.
- 34 Drury, *Walker*, p. 62. For a more detailed discussion of the wisdom of taking women overland, see Drury, *F.W.W.*, I:114 ff., and III: 307 ff.
- 35 Gray, *Oregon*, p. 153, referring to himself: ". . . he was looked upon as a vagabond, and entitled to no place or encouragement . . . There was nothing but master and servant in the country." Gray was housed in "the quarters of the clerks." p. 149.
- 36 Parker, *Journal*, p. 171.
- 37 HBC Arch., B/223/b/ 14. See also *Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-1838*, Thomas E. Jessett (ed.), Champoege Press, 1959.

38 Jessett, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

39 HBC Arch., A/ 11/69, folder 23. Jessett, pp. 19 ff.

40 Original letter, Coll. A.

41 Gray became critical of the Hudson's Bay Company. See ante fn., 35. Gray wrote in his *Oregon*, p. 158: "To the disgrace of most of the missionaries, this state of absolute dependence and submission to the Hudson's Bay Company was submitted to and encouraged."

42 The Hawaiians were also called Owyhees. A county in Idaho bears this name. Drury, *Spalding and Smith*, p. 152, quotes from a letter written by Smith on August 1, 1840, in which he states that one Hawaiian could do more work than four Indians, and one American more than four Hawaiians.