

COMPETING CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Chapter 7

Historical Overview

Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries represented the fourth migrational flow into the Pacific Northwest. The missionary period was very brief, lasting from 1834 to 1847. It began with Jason Lee's mission near Salem and ended with the Whitman Massacre on November 29, 1847. The tragic killing of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, prominent Protestant missionaries in the region, ended this period, but opened a 30 year period of violent conflicts between the Native Americans and the settlers of the Pacific Northwest. However, the missionary era brought a degree of civilization to the region that resulted in an ever increasing flow of pioneers who became permanent settlers.

Prominent Missionaries

The missionary movement never involved very many missionaries. In 1840, there were only 13 Methodists, six Congregationalists, and three Roman Catholic priests living in the Pacific Northwest. No matter their numbers, these early missionary settlers played an important historical role in the early settlement days of the region.

Perhaps the best known and most influential of the Protestant missionaries were Jason Lee, Daniel Lee, Henry and Eliza Spalding, the Whitmans, and Elkanah and Mary Walker. The most important Roman Catholic priests were Father DeSmet, Demers, and Blanchet.

These and other missionaries constructed historic missions at Lapwai, Waiilatpu, Tshimakain, Cataldo, Lee's Mission, Willamette, the Dalles, Nisqually, Colville, Sacred Heart, and many other mission sites (refer to map 7-1). These early missions were located throughout the region. Many of today's prominent communities and major cities were established near these missions.

Reasons for the Missionary Period

Why did the Christian missionary era begin in the Pacific Northwest? There are several important reasons.

Originally, early explorers brought priests and ministers to meet their own spiritual needs as Christians. Fur trappers and fur traders appreciated the spiritual support of these men and women who endured the same hardships in that hostile environment.

Although these fur traders and trappers were not particularly religious, many of the French Canadians were devout Roman Catholics. In a signed agreement (1821), the British owned, Hudson's Bay Company was obligated to provide for the religious demands and needs of the residents living within areas the company controlled. In reality, few religious services were provided.

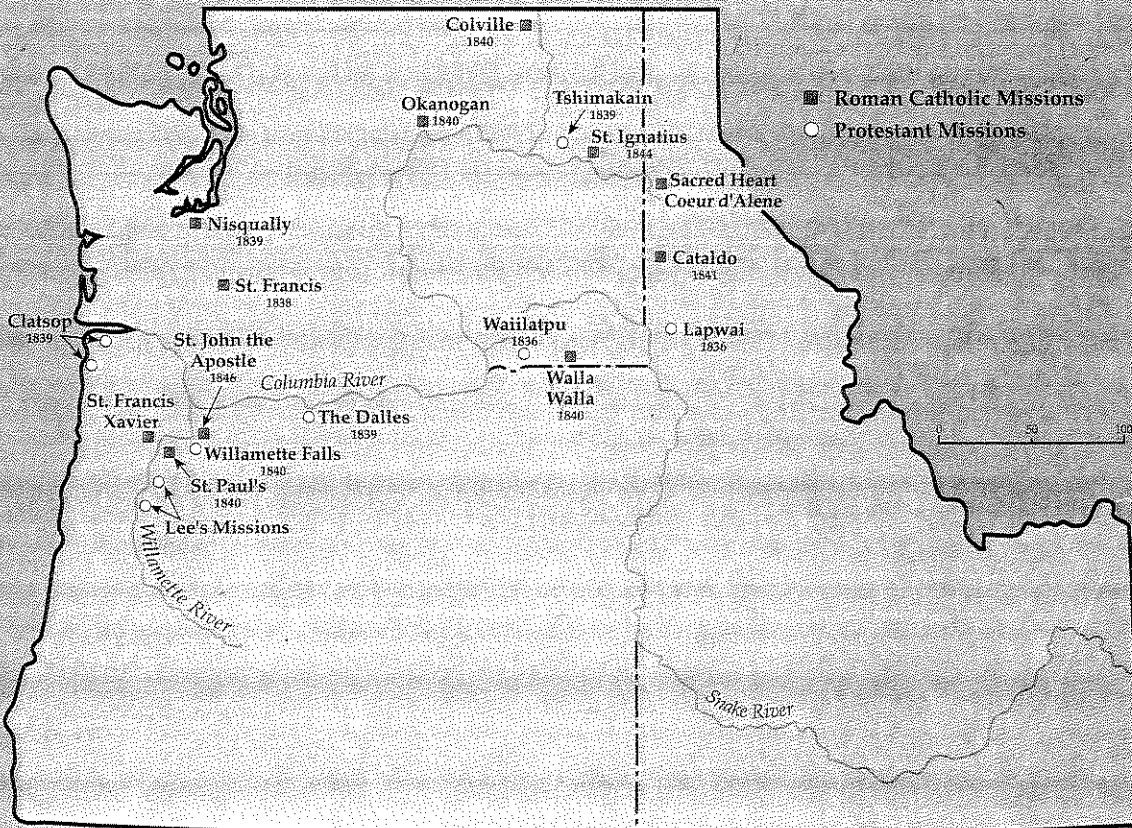
In many ways, it was Native Americans who really sought the "word of God." A few Christianized Iroquois worked to Christianize some Native Americans located in the northern Rockies from 1812 until 1821.

In 1831, a band of ten Flatheads and Nez Perce Indians traveled to St. Louis, Missouri. They were attempting to meet William Clark. They sought the "White Man's Book of Heaven," which they believed was an instrument of the non-Native Americans' power. As a result of this attempt, several Christian leaders quickly reacted. The Christians interpreted this gesture as a sincere desire of the Indians to learn about and be converted to the Christian faith, albeit Protestant or Roman Catholic. Perhaps they were too optimistic.

In any case, shortly thereafter, several missionary groups in the eastern United States began organizing missionary expeditions to the Pacific Northwest. These missionaries would go to the Pacific Northwest, construct missions, and attempt to teach and convert the local Native Americans to Christianity.

EVENTS OF THE MISSIONARY ERA — 1834-1847

DATE	PEOPLE/PLACE	P/C	HISTORICAL EVENT
1834	Lee's Mission	P	Jason and Daniel Lee arrive in Willamette Valley
1836	Lapwai	P	Spaldings work with Nez Perce in Idaho
1836	Waiilatpu	P	Whitmans with Cayuse in southeast Washington
1838	Jason Lee	P	Appeals to Congress and Methodist Board
1838	St. Francis	C	Fathers Blanchet and Demers – Cowlitz Landing
1838	Walla Walla	C	Catholic mission – Walla Walla, Washington
1839	Tshimakain	P	Walkers and Eells work with Spokane Indians
1839	Nisqually	C/P	Dr. Richmond starts mission near Tacoma
1839	The Dalles	P	Large group of Indians Christianized
1839	Fort Clatsop	P	Two Protestant missions along Pacific Coast
1840	Willamette Falls	P	Jason Lee's headquarters in Willamette Valley
1840	St. Paul's	C	Father Blanchet builds mission at French Prairie
1840	Colville	C	Mission near Fort Colville (Hudson's Bay Co.)
1840	Okanogan	C	Built near Ft. Okanogan, Columbia River
1841	Cataldo	C	Father DeSmet with Coeur d'Alene Indians
1842	Marcus Whitman	P	Whitman goes East to keep mission
1843	Great Migration	-	Hundreds of settlers; first Oregon Trail crossing
1844	St. Ignatius	C	Longest continuous mission service – Spokane
1846	St. John Apostle	C	Near Willamette Falls; seat of Catholic efforts
1847	Waiilatpu	P	Whitman Massacre



Map 7-1

Map created by Beryllium Projects

Protestant Mission Objectives

The main reasons for building Protestant missions were: 1) to Christianize the Native Americans; 2) to civilize the Native Americans – in accordance with the accepted social and economic ways of the settlers; 3) to develop an economic base to support the missionaries, their families, and other settlers; 4) to provide religious services for the settlers and fur traders; 5) to strengthen the claim of the United States to the Oregon Country; 6) to spread the Protestant religion to Native Americans before the Roman Catholic missionaries did; and 7) to educate both settler and Native American children living in the Willamette River Valley.

The basic tactic of the Protestant missionaries was to build a mission at a central location and to attract people, both settlers and Native Americans, to live and work at the mission. It was therefore necessary for the Native Ameri-

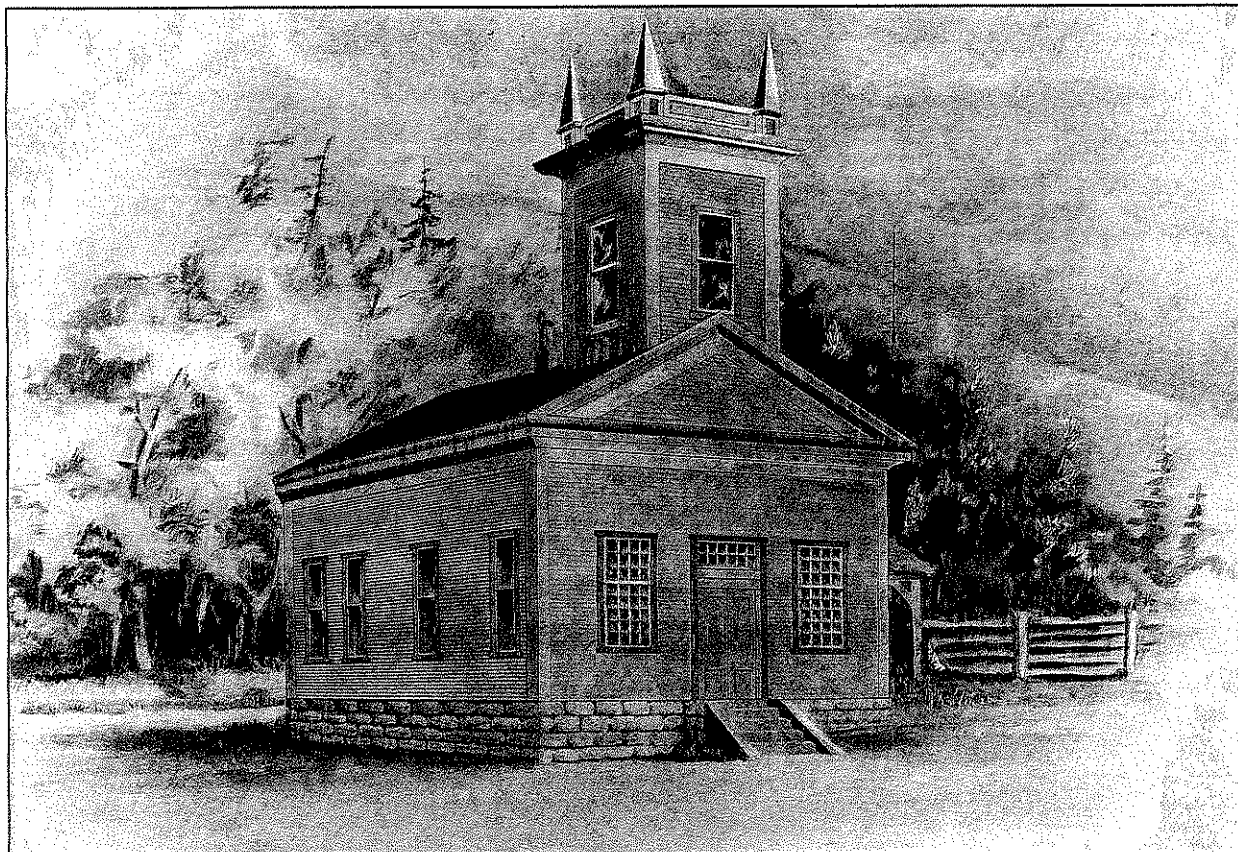
cans to change their way of life; conforming to the settlers accepted standards. The missionaries accomplished many of these objectives, thus making a significant contribution to the region's growth and prosperity.

Protestant Missionaries

Lee's Mission

The Methodist Church sent its first missionaries, Jason and Daniel Lee, to Oregon in 1834. Jason Lee wanted to establish a mission in the region inhabited by the Nez Perce Indians. Dr. John McLoughlin and Fort Vancouver residents argued against this because of the frequent wars between the neighboring Flathead and Blackfoot tribes. The Lees, following Dr. McLoughlin's advice, chose a mission site ten miles north of present-day Salem, Oregon, in the Willamette River Valley where the Native Americans had been ravaged by the measles epidemic from 1828-1832.

The Methodist Episcopal Church in Oregon City, Oregon was built in 1843. It was the first Protestant church in America west of the Rocky Mountains. The architecture and carpentry were exceptional.



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(Above) Daniel Lee, Jason Lee's nephew, after several years with the Coastal Indians, concluded that the missionaries would fail. (At right) Henry Spalding wanted the Nez Perce to give up their hunting life for one of farming.

Those Coastal Indians who survived the epidemic were considered peaceful. With the success of Lee's Mission, soon many settlers moved into the Willamette Valley of Oregon. In 1836, Dr. Elijah White brought women for Jason and Daniel Lee to marry, as well as a few other families.

In 1840, fifty-two settlers arrived, resulting in two additional missions in the valley. Missionaries and settlers came to the Willamette River Valley, not to extract resources and then leave, as so many others had, but to become permanent residents. The foundation for the region's future growth was laid by the 1830s and early 1840s by these courageous and futuristic missionaries.

American Board Missionaries

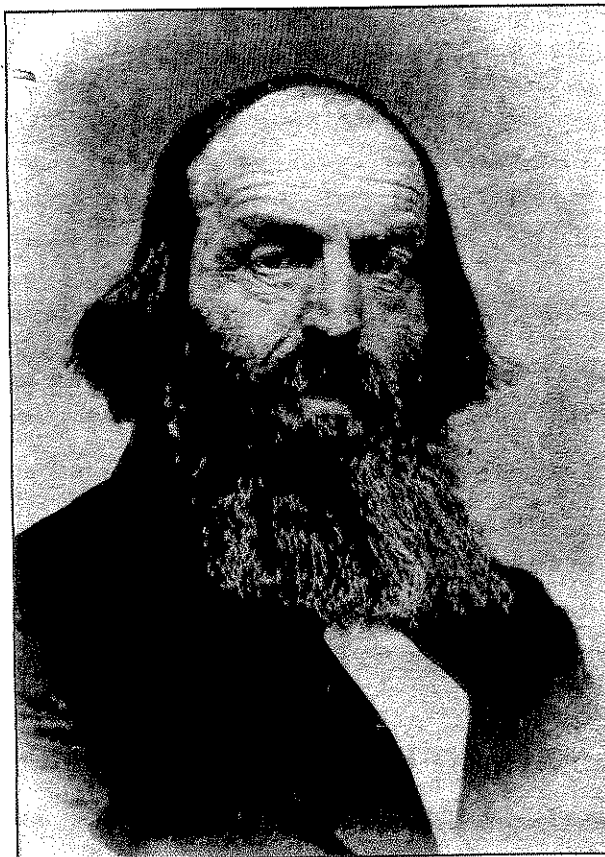
Soon, other Protestant missionary groups organized expeditions to the Pacific North-

west. One such group was the American Board of Commissioners for the Foreign Mission, a group of Congregationalists, Dutch Reformers, and Presbyterians.

In 1836, this board selected five missionaries to go to the Oregon Country. They were William Gray, Henry and Eliza Spalding, and Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. After a long and difficult overland journey to Fort Vancouver, they returned to the interior region of the Oregon Country. Whereas Jason and Daniel Lee had settled in the peaceful and pleasant Willamette River Valley; the Whitmans, the Spaldings, and William Gray built their missions in the central area of the Columbia Plateau.

The Spaldings

Henry and Eliza Spalding and William Gray selected a mission site among the friendly Nez Perce Indians. The mission site was near the confluence of the Lapwai and Clearwater rivers. The Lapwai Mission was one of the most successful missions, lasting from 1836 to



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1847. Because of the Cayuse War between 1847-1850 and the Indian Wars of the 1850s, Henry Spalding closed the mission until his return to Lapwai in 1871.

The Spaldings and William Gray were successful because of the friendliness and adaptability of the Nez Perce, their own ability to communicate with Native Americans, their ability to teach, and their good relations with the other mission residents.

Henry Spalding developed a written alphabet for the Native Americans' languages and printed parts of the Bible for them to read. Nonetheless, the Spaldings might have suffered the same fate as Marcus and Narcissa Whitman if it were not for the protection of the Nez Perce during those turbulent years.

The Whitmans

Dr. Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, founded the Waiilatpu Mission. The mission site was located about 25 miles (40 km) east of Fort Walla Walla. It was located only six miles west of the present-day city of Walla Walla, Washington.

The Whitmans chose to perform their missionary work with the less friendly Cayuse and Walla Walla tribes of southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon. The Waiilatpu Mission was located along the Oregon Trail, which eventually became the main overland route from Independence, Missouri to Fort Vancouver and the Willamette River Valley. The Whitman's mission was an important stop and resting point along the 2,000+ mile Oregon Trail. Between the Waiilatpu mission construction in the fall of 1836 and its destruction November 29, 1847, virtually every immigrant to Oregon visited the Waiilatpu Mission and the Whitmans.

Marcus and Narcissa Whitman worked hard to establish a successful mission. Marcus, a doctor, was helpful to all residents of the Waiilatpu Mission, both settlers and Native Americans. His ability to treat diseases and injuries was an important service only he could provide. However, local Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Indians saw Dr. Whitman as a medicine man, or shaman.

Smallpox, measles, and cholera epidemics killed many non-Native Americans and even more of the less-naturally immune Native Americans. Ill feelings resulted from those tragic epidemics. The Pacific Northwest Native Americans would commonly kill a tribe's shaman if they believed the shaman had lost his mystical powers.

It was this factor perhaps more than any other that led to the Cayuse attack on the Waiilatpu Mission on November 29, 1847. On that historic day, the Cayuse Indians killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and 13 other Waiilatpu Mission residents.

The three main benefits of the Whitmans' work ironically became the three basic causes for alienating the Cayuse. These factors were: 1) Dr. Whitman's medical knowledge and aid; 2) Waiilatpu's location on the Oregon Trail and its attraction to immigrating settlers; and 3) the Whitman's attempt to convert the Native Americans to Christianity and making them fit the white American mold.

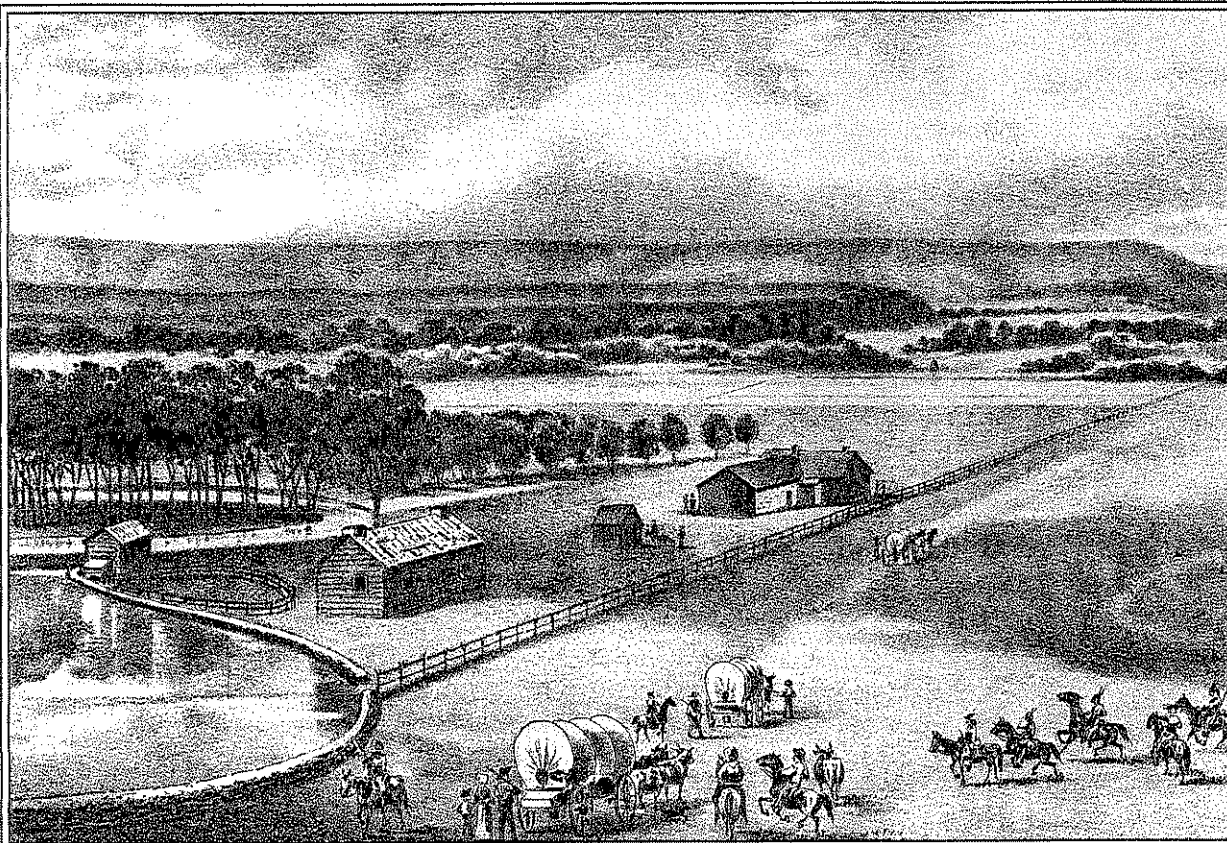
An additional factor which caused violence towards the Whitmans, and their mission was Narcissa's negative and aloof attitude toward the local Native Americans. She was distrusting of the Cayuse; they neither liked nor respected her.

Other Protestant Missionaries

Not all Protestant missionary work in the Pacific Northwest was done by the Lees, Spaldings, and Whitmans. Other prominent missionaries included Reverend Samuel Parker, Cyrus Shepard, Phillip Edwards, and Courtney Walker.

In 1837, William Gray left the Spalding's Lapwai Mission to return east. Gray persuaded the American Board to send eight more missionaries to the Pacific Northwest. Of these eight, two were recently married couples; Elkanah and Mary Walker and Mr. and Mrs. Cushing Eells. The Walkers and Eells built the Tshimakain Mission, where they lived and worked with the Spokane Indians.

It is very important to recognize the significant contributions of the women who married these prominent Protestant mission-



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THE WAILATPU MISSION

Dr. Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa (at right), founded the Waiilatpu Mission. The mission site was located about 25 miles east of Fort Walla Walla. It was located only a few miles west of the present-day city of Walla Walla, Washington. Waiilatpu means "place of rye grass."

The big T-shaped building (in the picture above) was the Whitman's house and the mission. The other large building was an immigrant station for Oregon Trail travelers. The small structures were a blacksmith shop and a grist mill.

The Cayuse Indians attacked the Waiilatpu Mission on November 29, 1847. On that fateful day, the Cayuse killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and thirteen other Waiilatpu Mission residents. (Refer to Chapter Eight — pages 146-147 for additional information on the Whitman Massacre.)



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MARY RICHARDSON WALKER

The American Board sent newlyweds Mary and Reverend Elkanah Walker with William Gray in 1838. They were to establish additional missions in the Pacific Northwest. The Walkers stayed with Marcus and Narcissa Whitman at Waiilatpu Mission during the bitter cold winter of 1838-1839. By March, 1839, Elkanah had constructed the Tshimakain Mission. It was about twenty-five miles (40 km) northwest of present-day Spokane, Washington. The Walkers set up housekeeping, began teaching, and introduced the Spokane Indians to Christianity. Their annual salary was \$300.00.

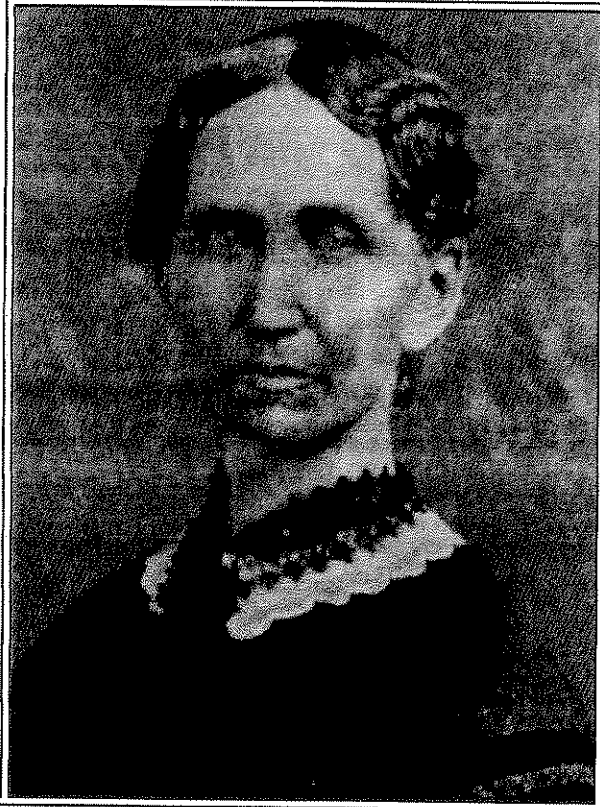
Mary was an intelligent and well educated woman. She had a special interest in botany (plant study). Her husband, Elkanah, was short-tempered and lacked character. Though often dissatisfied with his weaknesses, Mary was a devoted hard working wife. She bore six children in nine years at Tshimakain.

Despite the Walkers' valiant efforts, they failed to convert a single Indian to Christianity between 1838 and 1847. Ironically, in 1842 the American Board wanted to close Waiilatpu and Lapwai and keep Tshimakain open. Mary felt that Tshimakain should be closed. Their relations with the Indians were very

cordial, but conversion was futile. The Walkers moved to the Willamette Valley after the Whitman Massacre in 1847.

Mary Richardson Walker lived to be 95 in Forest Grove, Oregon.

Washington State Historical Society



aries. Active marriage partners included Mary Richardson Walker, Narcissa Whitman, Eliza Hart Spalding, Anna Marie Pittman Lee, Mary Augusta Dix Gray, and Tabitha Brown. Each wife supported their husbands' work, endured the rigorous life in the wilderness, raised their children, and made significant individual contributions to the region's history and future growth. In addition, these women's writings provided insight into the history of the times.

Roman Catholic Missionaries

During this era, the Roman Catholics also sent a number of priests to work with the Native Americans. These Catholic missionar-

ies established mission sites throughout the Pacific Northwest. Three important Roman Catholic missionaries were Father François Blanchet, Father Modeste Demers, and Father Pierre Jean DeSmet.

In most historians' opinions, the Roman Catholic missionaries were significantly more successful with the region's Native Americans than the better known Protestant missionaries for several reasons.

Missionary Success

Several possible explanations for the Roman Catholic missionaries success were:

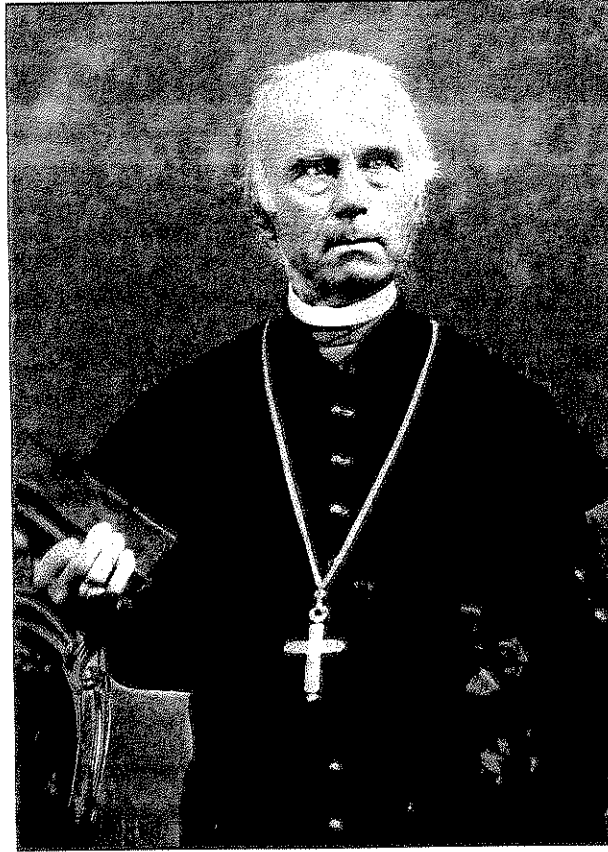
1. they did not encourage further immigration into the region;

2. their teaching effectiveness was enhanced by the Catholic ladder;
3. their rituals in church ceremonies were attractive to Native Americans;
4. their mission sites among Coastal and Plateau tribes were widespread;
5. they did not emphasize changing the Native Americans' behavior and way of life; and
6. they traveled among the Native American tribes rather than requiring the Native Americans to live at or near the mission.

End of the Missionary Era

The missionary era, officially, lasted only from 1834 to 1847. Even after 1847, following the Whitman Massacre, the missionaries contributed to the violent conflicts between the settlers and the Native Americans occurring from 1847 until 1877.

The Native Americans were confused and frustrated by the different teachings of Protes-



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(Above) Father François Norbert Blanchet arrived in Oregon in 1838. With Father Modeste Demers, he founded the St. Francis Mission in the Cowlitz Valley. (At left) A few prominent Christian missionaries came to the Pacific Northwest to convert the Native Americans. Father DeSmet was an early Roman Catholic Priest.



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tant and Roman Catholic missionaries. Another contributing factor was the spiritual conflict for the Native Americans between their animism versus the abstract concepts of the Christian religion.

Despite these problems, the Christian missionary era initially opened the whole Pacific Northwest region to further population growth and economic development.

Chapter Summary

The Christian Missionary era, from 1834 to 1847, was a short but important period. During the 1830s and 1840s Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries attempted to teach Christianity and convert various Native American tribes. Several Christian missionaries constructed missions in the Willamette

River Valley (Lee's Mission), Puget Sound Lowlands (Nisqually), eastern Washington (Waiilatpu and Tshimakain), and northern Idaho (Cataldo and Lapwai).

The best known Protestant missionaries were Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, Jason and Daniel Lee, and Henry and Eliza Spalding. Father Blanchet, Father DeSmet, and Father Demers were the prominent Roman Catholic missionaries.

Missionaries from both faiths were instrumental in teaching Christianity to the Native Americans. Besides their work and

teachings with the Native Americans, each missionary made major contributions to the recent Pacific Northwest human history.

Mission sites often became sites for settlements and future cities. In many cases, the missionary movement brought two culturally diverse groups together.

The most significant event of the Missionary Era was the tragic Whitman Massacre at the Waiilatpu Mission. It opened a violent thirty year period of conflicts between Native Americans and settlers from 1847 to 1877.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

A. Developing Vocabulary Skills

Each of the following terms is important to your understanding of the role of the missionaries in the Pacific Northwest. Define each term:

Basic Terms

alphabet
animism
Bible
Christianity
medicine man
mission
missionary

Enrichment Terms

abstraction
animosity
civilization
immigration
immunity
Protestant
Roman Catholic

William Clark
Father DeSmet
William Gray
Jason Lee
Henry Spalding
Mary Walker
Marcus Whitman
Narcissa Whitman

B. Developing Map Skills

1. Locate the major Protestant and Roman Catholic missions on a Pacific Northwest map (see map 7-1 on page 133).
2. Locate the various Native American tribes that were directly involved in the missionaries' efforts (see map 4-1 on page 84).

C. Understanding Concepts

1. Explain how and why the Pacific Northwest's Native Americans became interested in Christianity.
2. Describe the major contributions of each:
Father Blanchet John McLoughlin

3. If you were a missionary in 1835, where would you locate your mission? Why?
4. Explain why the Pacific Northwest Native Americans were confused about the proper teachings of Christianity. How had the missionaries' teachings confused the Native Americans?
5. How do animism and Christianity differ?
6. What were the main reasons for establishing missions in the Pacific Northwest?
7. Describe the problems shared by Dr. Marcus Whitman and Henry Spalding. Explain how their missions were successful; discuss how they failed.
8. Why was Marcus Whitman such an important figure in the early history of the Pacific Northwest?
9. In what ways did the Missionary Era benefit future settlement in the Pacific Northwest? How did it hinder future settlement?