

## FRENCHTOWN

Below is a very brief summary of a detailed history of Frenchtown delivered by Sam Pambrun in 2005 as part of the 150th Anniversary Observances of the Battle of Frenchtown. The full story may be found at [www.frenchtownwa.org/frenchtown](http://www.frenchtownwa.org/frenchtown).

We include this story because it paints a picture of past events in the territory through which the Yellowstone Trail traveler would go, perhaps unknowing of its history. It also makes the Whitman monument at mile 310 more understandable.

About 20 French Canadian Metís (people of mixed blood, Native American and non-Native American) and 20 Objiways, formed the nucleus of the Frenchtown settlement in the Walla Walla Valley about 1813. Frenchtown was not a "town" in the usual sense. It was an area, perhaps 50 miles square, from about present Wallula to near Walla Walla. It was called Frenchtown because French Canadians settled there and married Native American women.

The Canadian Metís who began settling in the Walla Walla Valley, recognizing they were guests of the Waiilatpu and Wallulapam (Cayuse and Walla Walla) Native Americans, sought permission to settle there, and some married into the local tribes. The community essentially became a French and Indian village scattered over 50 square miles with no main street, no saloons, no schools or city council, and land claims were casual. Frenchtown residents considered the Native Americans the governing body of the valley, not the missionaries.

White settlers did not get along well with their neighbors. The Northwest Company began building a post a few miles upriver from the mouth of the Walla Walla River in 1816. As a result of indiscretions by a white man, the Northwest post was attacked. Armed guards appeared and uneasiness prevailed.

When missionaries Dr. and Mrs. Whitman arrived in 1836, there were over a dozen Metís log cabins surrounding their mission. Although they wrote over 100,000 words in articles to their Bishop during their 11-year stay at Waiilatpu, they never once mentioned their Metis neighbors in writing.

This raises a question about their relationship with their neighbors. By 1847, the year that the Whitmans and others were massacred, there were well over 50 Metís families living in the Frenchtown area.

Washington Governor Stevens wanted to open more land for white settlement and so drew up the Walla Walla Treaty of 1855. He called into conference the Walla Walla, Umatilla, and Cayuse and granted these sovereign nations a reservation of 510,000 acres in northwestern Oregon. Those tribal nations had not met in conference with Stevens to be put into a reservation. Author Pambrun writes of the emotional arguments posed by the tribal nations at the conference.

There clearly was a great difference over the concept of "land ownership."

Shortly thereafter, Capt. George McClellan came riding through the Walla Walla Valley announcing that everyone but military must leave immediately, causing the ensuing December Battle of Walla Walla, the last battle between whites and natives in the Walla Walla Valley.

The Treaty also triggered a major war between many Oregon and Washington tribes and the government.

See the Frenchtown monument at WA-308.0. •