

IMPRESSIONS AND OBSERVATION OF THE JOURNAL MAN

By Fred Lockley
1-2-27

A survivor of the Whitman massacre recounts the tragic tale in an article to appear in three installments

Nancy A. Jacobs lives at No. 293 East 34th street with her daughter. When I interviewed her recently, she said:

“I was born in Warren county, Illinois, May 24, 1840, I was the fourth child and the first girl in the family. My father, Josiah Osborn, was born in Connecticut, May 1, 1809, and was a mechanic and millwright. My father’s mother’s maiden name was Annie Lyon. Her cousin, General Nathaniel Lyon was killed at the battle of Wilson’s Creek, near Springfield, Mo. I was named Nancy Anna, after my father’s mother. During the summer and autumn of 1845 father became interested in the Oregon country from reading articles in the papers that described the free land there, with its abundant timber and water, its fine climate, its fish and game and berries, so he took the ‘Oregon fever.’”

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“We started on April 12, 1845, from our home in Henderson county, Illinois. We had four oxen, Tom and Dade were the wheelers. Tom was a bright red ox, while Dade was black and white. Tom, our wheeler, was so badly injured in a stampede at Ash Hollow that father had to kill him. The Indians tried to stampede the cattle, and in the stampede, Tom was crippled.

“On the night of August 4, we camped near the summit of the divide in the Rocky mountains. That night my mother gave birth to a 12-pound boy. Mother named him Alexander Rogers. Alexander went to California, while his brother Andrew stopped at the Whitman mission and was employed as teacher there and was killed by the Indians. The next morning after my brother was born, we noticed the water was running west, so we knew we had crossed the divide.

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“On the Snake river we met Dr. Elijah White. He told us we could get supplies of Dr. Whitman at the Wailatpu mission. Two men were sent ahead to secure supplies. Dr. Whitman furnished them with provisions for our wagon train and asked if there was a millwright in the train, as the Indians, while fishing, had set fire to some straw and his mill had been burned. Dr. Whitman, learning my father was a millwright, sent word that we would like to have father come to the mission to rebuilt the mill. At the foot of the Blue mountains, near Cayuse Station, we parted from t-----he wagon train and started north for Dr. Whitman’s mission. Our first camp was on the site of what was later Centerville, now called Athena. Two other families spend that winter at Whitman Station. Their names were Cornelius and Summers. Andrew Rogers, a young man of our wagon train, taught school at the mission. I went to school to him. Mrs. Whitman taught the Sunday school, which a also attended. The first lesson she gave was to learn the 23d

Psalm.

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“Next spring we started on for Oregon City. Father helped build a flatboat at The Dalles. The men folk put three wagons on it - the ones belonging to the Rinearson’s, the Cornelius’s and our own. Peter and Jake Rinearson and a young man named Hibbard drove the cattle down the Indian trail while father steered the boat and Mr. Rinearson pulled the sweeps. At the head of the Cascades we got out and walked to the lower Cascades, while the men portaged our goods. They turned the flatboat loose and the Indians caught it below the Cascades, where they loaded the wagons on again we re-embarked on the flatboat.

“At Oregon City father worked in Dr. MacLaughlin’s mill. We soon became acquainted with Governor George Abernathy, Dr. Forbes Barclay, Dr. McKay, William McKinley and the other pioneers there.

“In the fall of 1846 we moved to Salem. Father worked for Judson and Mr. McClane. Father took up a claim on the Calapooia, Dr. Whitman bought the mission at The Dalles from the Methodists, Mr. Hinman and Dr. Whitman’s nephew stayed there.

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In the fall of 1847 father went to Salem to get supplies. While there he met Dr. Whitman, who was in Salem on business. Dr. Whitman offered father \$1.50 a day with free rent if he would come up to the Whitman mission to take charge of the work there so Dr. Whitman could have more time to devote to his other duties. He offered father a two-year contract, which father accepted. One of the reasons father accepted was that Dr. Whitman said we children could go to school without expense and he would furnish father not only with free rent, but provisions so that he could save practically all of the wages he received. We drove from our place on the Calapooia to Oregon City by ox team, where we took a bateau furnished by Dr. Whitman and which was operated by a crew of Indians. Elias, an old Indian, did the steering. Another Indian, called Captain John, had charge of the oarsman. The Indians landed us at fort Walla Walla, which was in the charge of McBain. Father sent word by a Frenchman who was going to the Whitman station that he had arrived there and the Indian crew was waiting for supplies so they could go down the river. We were out of provisions, Mr. McBain said he had no authority to furnish us provisions, but he gave us some corn, which we parched. For some reason the Frenchman failed to tell Dr. Whitman till the following day that we were at the fort. Dr. Whitman at once sent Crocket Bowley, who was killed five weeks later, with a wagon and ox team to take us from Fort Walla Walla to the Whitman mission, a distance of about 30 miles.

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“Anticipating our coming, Dr. Whitman had taken up the floor from the Indian schoolroom in the adobe building in which he himself lived, and had put a new floor down. He had put in some new sleepers and raised the floor somewhat which latter

circumstances seemed almost providential, as it was the cause of saving our lives. A considerable number of emigrants' families stopped over at the Whitman mission to spend the winter there. Some of the children of the emigrants had measles, which the Indian children took. The Indian method of treating measles was to take a sweat bath in one of their sweat houses and then jump into the ice-cold stream. Naturally, this treatment resulted in the death of most of the victims of the disease. My mother took up the measles and nearly died. We buried her little baby on November 14th, about two weeks before the massacre. Another sister, who was 6 years old, died on November 24, a few days before the massacre.

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“Dr. Whitman and his wife got but little sleep during November, as they were caring for the sick and the dying. A few days before the massacre, Rev. H. H. Spalding, the missionary at Lapwai, brought his little daughter Eliza, 10 years old, to go to school at the Whitman mission. He brought with him a train of packhorses loaded with wheat to be ground into flour. He left the Whitman mission on the morning of November 29, a few hours before the massacre occurred.”

The second installment of Mrs. Jacobs' story of the Whitman massacre here appears. It covers that day of disaster and a short period following immediately

The Whitman massacre occurred on November 29th 1847, nearly 80 years ago. Two survivors of the Whitman massacre are still living in Portland - Mrs. Gertrude Hall Denny, widow of Judge O. N. Denny, and Mrs. Nancy A. Jacobs. A few days ago I interviewed Mrs. Jacobs at her home at No. 293 East 34th street here in Portland. In telling me of her experiences during the massacre, she said:

“School had been closed at Dr. Whitman's mission on account of so many of the children having the measles. The school reopened on November 29. Mr. Saunders was the teacher. Three of the men at the mission, Mr. Kimball, Hoffman and Canfield, were dressing a beef. Father went out to get a bucket of water. When he came in, he said ‘There are more Indians about than usual. I guess it's because a beef has just been killed.’ My mother had been sick in bed with the measles for three weeks. This was the first day she had been able to walk across the room. She went in into Mrs. Whitman's room, next to ours, to see some children who were sick. Dr. Whitman, who had been up night and day taking care of sick Indians and the others who were sick, was sitting by the stove, reading. He was called into the kitchen to give some medicine to a sick Indian.

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“Suddenly we heard some guns fired. The children began to scream. Mother said, ‘Mrs Whitman, what is the matter?’ Mrs. Whitman said, ‘The Indians are going to kill us all.’ Mother came into our room. A moment later Mrs. Whitman came in to get some water for a man who had been wounded. A moment or two later she came back

crying, and said, "My husband is dead; I am left a widow." As she started back into her room she said, "That Joe, that Joe - he has done it all." She went to the window of her room to look out when someone on the outside shot through the window, shooting her through the right breast.

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"Joe Lewis who was a half-breed Indian and who had been staying at the Whitman mission, and an Indian name Cup-Cup, came around the house to the window in our room which they broke in with the butts of their guns. Mrs. Whitman and the others in her room had gone upstairs. The Indians began breaking the door down with an ax. I said to father, 'Let's get under the floor.' He didn't answer me, so I said again, 'let's get under the floor.' As the door in the next room was splintered from the blows of the Indians' axes, father pulled up some boards from the floor and we all crawled under the floor and father replaced the boards. A moment or two later a number of Indians came through the door and came into our room. They started to go upstairs, but when they saw a gun from upstairs pointed at them they decided not to go on up. Joe Lewis and the others said, "We are going to burn the house down; you had better come on out." When Mrs. Whitman and the others had left the house, the Indians killed three of them.

"At dark the Indians left for their lodges. We could hear Mr. Rogers, who lay near us, groaning. We heard him say, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.' His moans became fainter and fainter until they finally ceased. We lay beneath the floor till about 10 o'clock that night. Father then raised the boards and we came out to get something to eat. Francis Sager was lying beside our door. I stooped down and put my hand on his forehead, but his forehead was cold. It was starlight when we came out of the house. We turned west, went through the field, and crossed the Walla Walla river near the mouth of Mill creek. Father made three trips to carry us across the river. My mother was so weak she could hardly walk. Finally mother gave out and said she couldn't walk another step. We hid ourselves in some bushes near the road. Presently some Indians passed by, laughing and talking as they were carrying things from Dr. Whitman's house to their lodges.

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We stayed hidden where we were till the following night, when we started to toward Fort Walla Walla, on the Columbia river, now known as Wallula. We walked a few miles, and once more mother gave out completely. She tried to persuade father to leave us and go to Fort Walla Walla to secure help. Father said, 'I cannot leave you, but I can die with you.' We stayed hidden all that day. Next night mother persuaded father to go to the fort to secure help. My little 4-year-old brother was sick and weak, so father decided to take him along.

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"I am not going to try to describe the parting when father left us, for he never expected to see us again, and mother expected that the Indians would find us and kill us.

When father came to the Walla Walla river he was nearly drowned. He thought he had crossed the river, but he came out the same side he went in, so he had to cross the river again near Wallula. He reached the fort just at daylight. He was given a cup of tea and some bread. He asked the agent, Mr. McBain, to send men with him at once to get mother and the children, but Mr. McBain said, 'Undoubtedly your wife and children are dead by now, and you had better not make the attempt.' An American artist named Stanley, who had been visiting Rev. Eells and Rev. Walker at their mission stations, came to fort Walla Walla that day, and when he found that Mr. McBain was unwilling to antagonize the Indians by helping father he secured a Walla Walla Indian as guide, loaned father his horses and what provisions he had and father, with the Indian guide, started back to where he had left mother and the children. Mr. Stanley took care of my little brother, for they would not keep him in the fort. Father was afraid that if they traveled by day they would meet the Indians and be killed, so they traveled that night, but when they came to where he thought he had left mother and the children, he could not locate us. Finally he called my mother's name and she answered.

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"Knowing that Mr. McBain would not let us stay at the fort, father and the Walla Walla Indian started to go to the Umatilla river, near where the town of Pendleton is now located. We stopped at the Hudson's Bay farm to get fresh horses. They told father the Indians had missed him and were hunting to kill him. Mother refused to go any farther. She said, 'Here is as good a place to be killed as anywhere else.' Our Indian guide took us into what is now called Vansycle canyon. Father decided that if the Indians were hunting us the best thing for him to do was to go to Fort Walla Walla and appeal to McBain to take us into the fort. When McBain saw us coming he said to father, "Why didn't you go to the Umatilla, as I told you to do?" Father responded, "My wife would not go there.' McBain let us come into the fort, but he said, "You will have to leave tonight.' Father said, "I will not go unless I can take my family with me, and if you turn me out I will die by the walls of your fort.' So McBain let us stay there.

Mrs. Jacobs here brings her story of the Whitman massacre to a close, narrating at the last the rescue of the survivors. To this Mr. Lockley adds briefly certain details of the Whitman affair.

Mrs. Nancy A. Jacobs of the Whitman massacre, which occurred on November 29, 1847, and during which she and her parents and thier other children hid under the loose floor boards in the house of Mr. Marcus Whitman, while the Indians were killing and pillaging. That night they escaped, and after several narrow escapes, reached Fort Walla Walla, now Wallula, where they stayed until Peter Skene Ogden came up from Vancouver and bought the white captives from the Indians and took them to Oregon City. In speaking of her experiences at that time, Mrs. Jacobs said to me:

"We stayed at Fort Walla Walla until Peter Ogden Skene came up and bought us from the Indians. He gave them 50 blankets, 50 shirts, 10 guns, 10 fathoms of tobacco, 10 handkerchiefs, 100 bullets and some powder, for us. For Rev. H. H. Spaulding and

family he gave 12 blankets, 12 shirts, 12 handkerchiefs, two guns, 200 balls and 200 charges of powder, 5 fathoms of tobacco and some knives. The night after the Indians received their pay they held a war dance in the fort. I never heard such bloodthirsty yells in my life.

“On January 3, 1848, we left the fort in bateau to go down the Columbia to Fort Vancouver and Oregon City. The ground was frozen and it was snowing when we left. We had not been gone an hour when an Indian runner came to the fort saying the volunteers were coming from the Willamette valley to recapture the prisoners and kill the Indians. The Indians wanted to pursue us and recapture us, but they were too late. Each night the boats had to be unloaded and drawn ashore to keep from freezing fast in the ice. At The Dalles we met some of the volunteers and we also met some at the cascades, who helped us make the five-mile portage. The boats were carried on men’s shoulders. Every child old enough to walk and carry a bundle did so. When we arrived at where Portland now stands, about 25 volunteers, with Governor George Abernathy stood on the sloping bank in front of the heavy forest about where Ash street dock now is, and as our boats came opposite to where they stood they fired a salute over us, took off their caps and gave three cheers. Myself and the other children cowered down in the bottom of the boats, scared to death. We had heard so much firing and seen so much killing that we thought we were going to be shot, after all. I will never forget seeing Peter Skene Ogden as he stepped ashore, shook hands with Governor Abernathy, and, staking out his official papers, handed them to the governor. Then he turned to us and said, ‘You are now a free people; you can go where you please.’

“Some time when you see Mrs. D. P. Thompson, ask her about the trip the plains. Her father’s name was Meldrum. The first time I ever saw her was on the plains in 1845. She was sitting on her father’s knee, wearing a dark-colored dress with short sleeves and a low neck. She was a cute little girl. Her sister Octavia and I were playmates when we were little tots. Lorinda Bewley, who was taken by one of the Indians to his lodge after Dr. Whitman had been killed, told me that it was Joe Lewis who shot my teacher, Mr. Rogers. She also heard Francis Sager say, ‘Oh, Joe, don’t shoot me.’ But Joe shot him anyway.

For a while after the Whitman massacre we lived next door to W. H. Gray. I played with Mrs. Jacob Kamm when she was a little girl. We moved to Waterloo, where father helped build the Kees mill. Father took up a place five miles above Brownsville on the Calapooia. Before he died he moved to Albany prairie. He died about 45 years ago.

“On July 31, 1860, I was married to Andrew Kees. We were married by Rev. Wilson Blain of the United Presbyterian church. We moved to Dry Creek, near Touchet, Washington Territory. We lost all our stock in the winter of 1862. We moved back to Lebanon. Later we moved up to Eastern Oregon. My husband died about 41 years ago, at Centerville, or Athena as they now call it. Among our neighbors there were Dave Taylor and his boys, Til and Jenks. Til was sheriff of Umatilla county for many years and was president of the Round-up. He was killed while trying to prevent some prisoners from escaping from the jail in Pendleton. His brother Jenks was killed some years later. Jenks’ wife used to work for me when I kept boarders in Umatilla county 50 years ago.

“My son Marion A. Kees, graduated; at Whitman college. He later took up the educational work of the Y. W. C. A. and was sent to China. He was stationed for a while

at Canton and later Shanghai. He is now connected with the Y. M. C. A. at San Francisco. My daughter Katie Dickey and myself live here together. After the death of my first husband, I married Mr. Jacobs. I am 87 years old, and Gertrude Hall Denny, who was also at Waiilatpu mission at the time of the massacre, is 91 years old. I guess we are the only survivors of the Whitman massacre.”

It is said that between 20 and 30 Indians were engaged in the massacre. Those who murdered Dr. Whitman and the others at the mission were Tilaukit, the Cayuse chief, on whose land the mission was located, and his sons Edward and Clark; Tamsuky, a sub-chief;