

*Adventures on the American Frontier*

# Following the Frontier West

Part Five

Marcus Whitman Takes Wheels to Oregon



A Royal Fireworks Production

Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York



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This book features QR codes that link to audio of the book being narrated so that readers can follow along.

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Royal Fireworks Press  
P.O. Box 399  
41 First Avenue  
Unionville, NY 10988-0399  
(845) 726-4444  
fax: (845) 726-3824  
email: mail@rfwp.com  
website: rfwp.com



ISBN: 978-089824-942-2

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York, on acid-free paper using vegetable-based inks at the Royal Fireworks facility.

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz  
Editor: Jennifer Ault  
Book and cover designer: Christopher Tice  
Audio and narration: Christopher Tice





In 1835, news spread that a few years earlier, a trader named Captain Benjamin Bonneville had taken wagons on the Oregon Trail all the way to the Green River Valley in western Wyoming. It was the first time someone had gone through South Pass—the mountain passes through the Rocky Mountains—in wagons.



Dr. Marcus Whitman was happy to hear the news. "If wagons can go that far," he said, "then surely we can travel all the way to Oregon with them." He had already made a journey to Oregon and back on horseback.

In those days, "Oregon" meant all of the northwestern part of the United States north of California and west of the Rocky Mountains, and even up into Canada. No one was quite sure who owned it, for England and the United States both said they did. No one lived there except some fur traders



and Native Americans until Dr. Whitman and a missionary named Samuel Parker went there to open a mission in 1835.

Dr. Whitman had come back East, but not to stay. In 1836, he married a young woman named Narcissa who wanted to be a missionary, too, and he was planning to head back out to Oregon with her, this time using wagons.

“You aren’t going to take Narcissa out to that wilderness to live, Marcus? Surely you wouldn’t do that!” his friends said.

“That’s exactly what I’m going to do,”  
Dr. Whitman said, and two days after the  
wedding, they were on their way west with  
another couple, named Reverend Henry and  
Eliza Spalding, and a few other people.

A few weeks later, out on the Nebraska  
plains near the Platte River, a young man  
of nineteen stood staring at a small group  
of people who were sitting on the ground  
around some kind of a sheet spread out near  
their campfire. It looked as though they  
were sitting around a tablecloth, but who



ever heard of such a thing on the plains?

The young man walked a little closer. Yes, they were eating, and two of the people were women. A breeze brought the smell of a good stew to the young man's nose, and his mouth watered. He'd had nothing to eat for two days.

As he watched, he saw a stocky man start walking toward him. The young man stood still, waiting. The older man peered out from behind bushy gray whiskers and called, "Who are you? What do you want?"