



HISTORY/HISTORICAL

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RICH HERITAGE AND HISTORY MINGLE WITH MODERN LUXURIES, SOPHISTICATION AND AMENITIES IN WALLA WALLA

(WALLA WALLA, Wash.)—To tell the story of Walla Walla’s history is to tell a story that combines geologic marvel, ancestral inhabitants, early settlers, tremendous wealth, agricultural riches, and a diversified economy. The relevant history of the region dates back tens of thousands of years, when the geologic foundation of the Walla Walla Valley was laid. This was followed by the arrival of the region’s first Native American inhabitants, the region’s first explorers – the Lewis & Clark Expedition in 1805, and the first settlers in the 1830s. From there, Walla Walla’s history spans a variety of agricultural, economic, and cultural growth, culminating with today’s Walla Walla – an economic driver for southeast Washington, a home to more than 33,000 residents, and a popular wine region and tourist destination.

Geologic marvel

About 15,000 years ago near the end of the last ice age, the great ice dam holding Lake Missoula broke and flooded the lands of the Columbia River Basin from Eastern Washington to the Willamette Valley. This cycle of refreezing and flooding would recur approximately every 50 years for the next 2,000 years, and left behind were the rolling hills of the Palouse and the agriculturally rich Walla Walla Valley. The topsoil is more than 20 feet deep in most places, resulting in one of the most productive agricultural areas in North America.

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Ancestral inhabitants

Long before early explorers and settlers set foot in the Walla Walla Valley, Northwest plateau Indians including the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla inhabited the region known to them in their native Sahaptin language as Walla Walla, or “place of many waters” due to an abundance of rivers, lakes and streams. Here, the geology and climate were conducive to crop growing, and coupled with the abundant wildlife provided a bounty of food. The tribes’ first contact with the outside world came in 1806, when the Lewis & Clark Expedition passed through the area on their journey to the Pacific Ocean.

Early settlers

Following an 1805 visit by the Lewis & Clark Expedition, the Canadian North West Fur Company established the first trading post in the area, Fort Nez Perce, in 1818. Subsequent early settlers included a population of largely French fur traders and trappers, many of who took Native American brides and settled the community of Frenchtown, not far from present day Walla Walla, in 1823. Shortly after, missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman established the Whitman Mission in 1836, providing religious instruction and medical services to the local Cayuse Indians. Whitman Mission would serve as a wayside for migrating settlers along the Oregon Trail until 1847 when the Whitmans and 11 other settlers were killed and the mission was burned down.

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Tremendous wealth

Due in large part to the nearby discovery of gold, and to the region's agricultural prowess, Walla Walla was a booming town in its early days and was once the largest city in the Washington Territory. Walla Walla's prosperity spawned tremendous wealth, and the Territory's first bank, Baker Boyer Bank, opened in 1869. Once slated to become the capital of Washington State, much of Walla Walla's historic wealth is still evident today in the form of the Marcus Whitman Hotel and numerous historic mansions near downtown.

Agricultural riches

The aforementioned geologic events that deposited vast amounts of fertile soils in the Walla Walla Valley created one of the most productive agricultural areas in America. Long the domain of dry wheat, the Walla Walla Valley produces a diverse range of crops including the famous Walla Walla Sweet Onion, apples, asparagus, strawberries and many other commercial crops. More recently, Walla Walla has evolved as one of the finest wine producing areas in the world.

A brief history of Walla Walla

- 1805 The Lewis & Clark Expedition passes through Walla Walla on its way from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean
- 1818 Fort Nez Perce built by Hudsons Bay Trading Co.
- 1836 Marcus & Narcissa Whitman arrive and establish Whitman Mission
- 1855 Treaty of 1855 signed with the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla Indians
- 1856 U.S. Military Fort Walla Walla established
- 1861 The Washington Statesman, the first newspaper between Missouri and the Cascade Mountains, debuts in Walla Walla
- 1862 Walla Walla incorporated as a City on January 11

- 1869 Washington's first bank, Baker Boyer Bank, established in Walla Walla
- 1882 Whitman College founded
- 1887 First inmates arrive at Walla Walla penitentiary
- 1900 First Walla Walla Sweet Onions seeds brought to Walla Walla from the island of Corsica by Pete Pieri
- 1907 Walla Walla Symphony conducts its first performance
- 1948 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District established
- 1952 Port of Walla Walla established
- 1978 Leonetti Cellar produces Walla Walla's first commercial premium wine
- 2001 Downtown Walla Walla receives Great American Main Street award
- 2007 Walla Walla Sweet Onion becomes Washington's official state vegetable
- 2011 Walla Walla named "America's Friendliest Small Town" and "Best Small Town for Food"
- 2015 Walla Walla recognized as one of three finalists for America's Best Food Town in the inaugural Sunset Travel Awards

About Walla Walla:

As the unofficial capital of Washington wine country, Walla Walla is home to more than 130 wineries, a nationally recognized culinary scene, access to an abundance of outdoor recreation, and an arts & entertainment scene that rivals cities many times its size. This community of just over 33,000 residents is known for many things, including its friendliness and hospitality, the quality of its wine, and of course the famous Walla Walla Sweet Onion. An easy and scenic four-hour drive from Seattle, Portland, or Boise, Walla Walla can also be accessed via Alaska Airlines daily non-stop flights from Seattle. For more information and to begin planning a trip to Walla Walla, visit www.visitwallawalla.com.