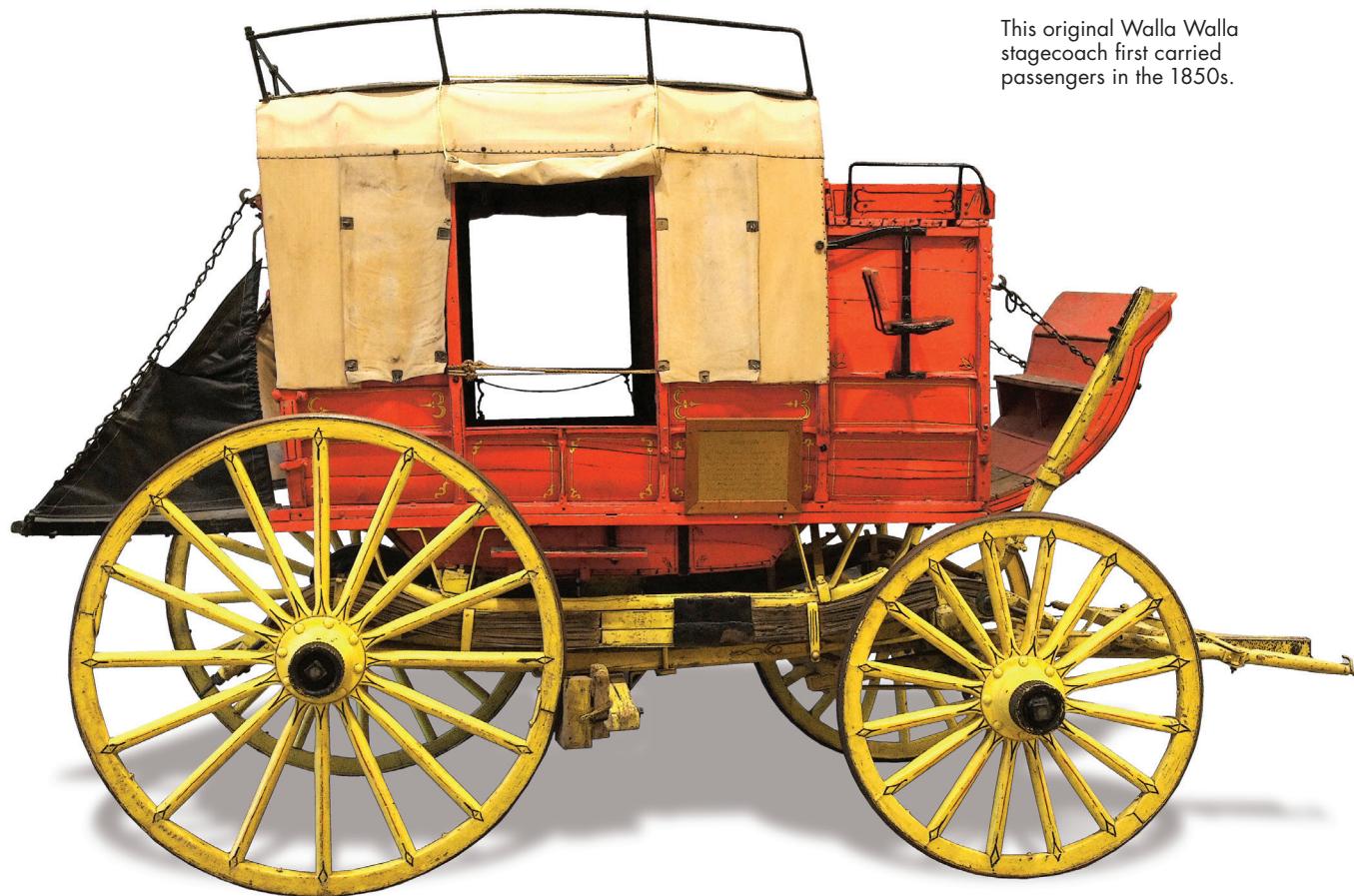


This original Walla Walla stagecoach first carried passengers in the 1850s.



WANDER AND WONDER AT FORT WALLA WALLA

THE HISTORIC PARK FEATURES A MUSEUM AND PIONEER VILLAGE **BY LINDA WOMMACK**

Visitors to Fort Walla Walla Park, in the southeast corner of Washington state, experience a double treat—a chance to wander through 15 frontier-era buildings from the region as well as a museum with five exhibit halls featuring interactive attractions. It's scarcely enough room to relate the region's rich history.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark passed through the region in 1806, and trappers and traders followed on their heels. In 1818 the North West Co. built a fur trading post named Fort Nez Perces in the lush valley. Three years later the North West Co. was subsumed by its bitter rival the Hudson's Bay Co. (HBC), which acquired the post and renamed it Fort Walla Walla, as it lay near the mouth of the Walla Walla River.

By the 1840s travelers and settlers were pouring into the Walla Walla Valley, prompting clashes with local Indian tribes. When raiders burned the fort to the ground in 1855, HBC abandoned the post. That site now lies beneath the Columbia River. The Army built a stopgap post the following year before establishing a more permanent Fort Walla Walla in fall 1858. Occupying a 1-square-mile parcel of land, the fort included officers' quarters, soldiers' barracks, a blockhouse, mess hall, hospital, stables and a cemetery. The garrison engaged in several clashes with area tribes in 1858 during the Yakima War and again two decades later during the Nez Perce War. Soldiers from Fort Walla Walla continued to patrol the valley until the Army closed the post in 1910. The Veterans Administration took over the property in 1921.

Today the site is preserved as a 208-acre park, encompassing recreational facilities, the Jonathan M. Wainright Memorial VA Medical Center and the Fort Walla Walla Museum [fwwm.org] and adjoining Pioneer Village. The 15 period structures and the historic post cemetery are on the National Register of Historic Places and offer an intriguing look at a bygone era.

Greeting museumgoers at the entrance to the main hall is an 1860s stagecoach built by the famed Abbott, Downing Co. of Concord, N.H. This light "mud coach" featured an early iteration of present-day seat belts—leather straps designed to hold passengers in their seats and absorb the bumps and dips of crude frontier roads. If frontier fashion has a greater hold on you, stroll along the Heritage Fashion Runway, showcasing a variety of women's dresses, bonnets, shoes, gloves and a range of period accessories.

Also within the main hall is the Military & Indian People Gallery. Military exhibits include a diorama of Lewis and Clark's 1806 passage through the Walla Walla Valley, as well as uniforms, weapons and personal items in the circa 1910 officers' parlor. Of particular note are a late 18th-century infantry officer's American eagle pommel sword and a 38-star (1877–90) garrison flag. The Lloyd Family Indian Artifact Collection centers on more than 250 items presented as gifts over the years to pioneer Albert G. Lloyd and family by area Palouse Indians. Featured are woven baskets and other containers, beadwork and moccasins.

Adjoining exhibit halls showcase one of the nation's largest collections of horse-era agricultural equipment, notably a pre-combine stationary threshing machine, a 1919 Harris wheat combine with replica 33-mule team, an 1896 Russell steam engine, a cook wagon and a cigar-shaped water wagon. Various other wagons, buggies and sleighs round out the displays.

Paths lead from the exhibit halls to the Pioneer Village, where markers delineate the boundaries of the old fort. Across the entrance road lies the post cemetery. The oldest gravesite, dated Feb. 3, 1859, holds the remains of Private Jacob Leonard, Company B, 9th Infantry. You'll also find three prominent monuments. One honors the 34 members of Walla Walla's 1st Cavalry killed during the bloody June 17, 1877, battle with Nez Perces at White Bird Canyon in Idaho Territory, while a second honors 1st Cavalrymen killed three weeks later near Cottonwood. The nearby Cannon Monument, centered on two World War I-era French 155s, honor the role Walla Walla soldiers played in the war. In 1917 local men volunteered for the 1st Battalion, Washington Field Artillery and mustered at Fort Walla Walla.

After advanced training at Fort Bragg, N.C., the soldiers shipped out for France on Christmas Eve 1917.

The village comprises period structures relocated here from the surrounding region. Among several pioneer homes are an 1877 cabin, complete with an outhouse, and another cabin that housed the family of Walla Walla scout and interpreter Illa-Poot-Mii, who assisted the Army during an 1855 treaty council. Displays include such common household items as butter churns, washtubs, even a spinning wheel and loom.

Businesses include a harness shop and blacksmith shop, each showcasing tools of the trade. The Union School and Toner School look ready for classes, while the Union also boasts an 1871 organ originally shipped to Washington via Cape Horn. Visitors can also tour a carriage house, a jail, a railroad depot and a doctor's office.

With so much to see, touch, explore and do, it's best to plan a full day's excursion. Call 509-525-7703 for more information. **WWW**



Top: The Lloyd Family Indian Artifact Collection includes this beaded satchel. Above: This detailed exhibit features a replica 33-mule team harnessed to a 1919 Harris wheat combine. Left: This early 20th-century photograph of an Indian elder and a young boy is inscribed on the back "Pasco Sam and Tony Lloyd Nesfilm."

ALL IMAGES: FORT WALLA WALLA MUSEUM COLLECTION