

# OLD FORT WALLA WALLA ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER

## The Beginning of the Mullan Road



Old Fort Walla Walla, John Mix Stanley, 1853

Fur traders began coming to this area after the 1804-06 Lewis & Clark Expedition. In 1818, the Canadian North West Company established Fort Nez Perces, the first trading post in the area, near a tribal village and ancient gathering ground at the confluence of the Walla Walla and Columbia Rivers at Wallula. In 1821, the post became the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Walla Walla when the two fur companies merged. Fort Walla Walla was a major supply headquarters and rendezvous point for the HBC's extensive operations in the Pacific Northwest.

The Nez Perce trail used for millennia by regional tribes ran from the Columbia at Wallula east to the Blue Mountains, where it turned northeast to the Clearwater country. This route became an early part of the Oregon Trail where Marcus Whitman led the first wagon train to his Protestant mission at Waiilatpu just west of Walla Walla in 1844.

In the Indian War of 1855 the fort was abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company and was sacked and burned by Walla Walla tribesmen. In 1856, a military Fort Walla Walla was established by the U.S. Army in what is now the city of Walla Walla.

At Wallula, a steamship dock and the beginning of a village were built near the ruins of the old fort in 1859, and the first steamship to navigate the waters of the upper Columbia River arrived, the Colonel Wright. The town of Walla Walla was established near the new fort the same year.

Because the wagon road used by the Oregon Trail already ran from Old Fort Walla Walla east to the new Fort, the actual construction of the Mullan Road leading to Fort Benton began at the new Fort in the town of Walla Walla.