

The Petersons

When Robin and Kriss Peterson purchased the Smith farmstead just east of the Whitman Mission in 1990, they became interested in the old cabin sitting amongst the farm buildings.

Robin was the minister of the Collee Place Presbyterian Church, taught French at Whitman College, and was also an active farmer. His passionate interest led him to investigate the history and origins of the cabin back to the Prince, all of which he described in a paper he provided interested people and organizations, including the Frenchtown Historical Foundation. Robin's goal for the cabin was to move it to a more prominent location on their place and to restore it for use as a center of reconciliation.

Following Robin's death, in 2013 Kriss Peterson donated the cabin to the Frenchtown foundation on the condition that it be moved to the Frenchtown site to be restored and available for public display.



The Prince's Cabin, 2008, before moving and restoration at Frenchtown

Moving & Restoring the Cabin

During the more than 100 years the property was owned by members of the Smith family, shed roofs were added on both the cabin's north and south sides protecting it from deterioration. The east wall was also opened to allow farm equipment storage, and electrical wiring was added for its use as a playhouse and machine shop.

Moving & Restoring the Prince's Cabin. Beginning in 2008, the Petersons began efforts to prevent deterioration of the cabin, and to prepare it for moving.

To move and restore the cabin at the Frenchtown site, the Frenchtown Historical Foundation put together a team of contractors and volunteers. Although the upper floor of the cabin was intact, the partially dismantled and deteriorating lower walls were in six pieces. The first tasks were to prepare a new site for the cabin, to document the condition of the cabin and its contents before the move, and to decide how to move it without further damage.

In consultation with archaeologists, contractors, craftsmen, historians, tribal representatives, and movers, a decision was made to remove the remaining shed on the south side of the cabin, to move the upper story intact, to temporarily stabilize the lower wall segments instead of further dismantling them, and to move them separately—which proved to be a successful strategy.

The next tasks were to permanently stabilize and strengthen the lower walls by attaching them to steel posts set in concrete footings in order to firmly support the upper story, and then to restore missing pieces with newly hewn logs.

The final work of restoring the cabin consisted of repairing or replacing windows, chinking, interior walls, and roofing.

An interpretive sign has been installed by Walla Walla 2020 on Last Chance Road just north of the Walla Walla River overlooking the site of the cabin and the Prince's village. The cabin itself is now available for viewing at the Frenchtown Historic Site two miles west of the Whitman Mission seven days a week from dawn to dusk with no admission charge. More information can be found at www.frenchtownwa.org and at www.ww2020.net/historic-sites.

Thanks to Greg Cleveland, Jennifer Karson Engum, Robin Peterson, Mahlon Kreibel, Sam Pambrun, and others who contributed. More information can be found at www.ww2020.net/historic-sites, www.ctuir.org, and www.frenchtownwa.org.

Information on Walla Walla 2020's Historic Research & Plaque Project honoring individual buildings and properties is also available at www.ww2020.net/historic-building-research.

THE CAYUSE VILLAGE AT WAILATPU



Cayuse village in the distance seen from Whitman Mission grist mill, Artist: Rivers, NPS

*Including the site of
the Prince's Cabin*



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The Cayuse Village at Wailatpu

Before the first Euro-Americans settled in the Walla Walla Valley, a winter village of the Cayuse Indians was located for many years in the vicinity of what later became the site of the Whitman Mission.

When Marcus and Narcissa Whitman established their Presbyterian Mission in the valley in 1836, the Cayuse Pásxa winter village was located about a quarter mile east of it, clearly visible and an easy walk from the Mission grounds.

The current Whitman monument, a granite obelisk on the hill above the Mission, overlooks the site of what was once the Pásxa Village to the southeast. This was a village of equestrians who welcomed the Whitmans and made room for them on their ancestral grounds, which were rich and productive grazing lands of native perennial grasses. Nearby a thermal spring which still remains active and never froze, was a popular spot for watering horses, especially during hard winters.

A Cayuse winter village was a place of tule mat longhouses and temporary dwellings where equipment was constructed and repaired, and oral traditions were shared during the long winter months. In other seasons of the year, most of the village's inhabitants migrated to traditional upland hunting and gathering places, and to fish and dig roots in the spring, hunt and pick berries in the summer and fall, and occasionally cross the Rocky Mountains to hunt bison. The trek to the plains was recognized as an opportunity to expand trade to more interior peoples, and the Cayuse and Walla Walla became adept middlemen.

Historian Verne Ray has identified seventy-six traditional Cayuse Village sites, most temporary, seasonal sites. The extent of the Cayuse territory was vast. The Cayuse maintained villages on the Tucannon, Snake, Touchet, and Walla Walla Rivers in Washington, and the Umatilla, Grande Ronde, Burnt, Power, and John Day Rivers in Oregon as well as on several Washington and Oregon Creeks. Ray identified five separate villages in the Walla Walla Valley and seven Cayuse Bands scattered throughout Eastern Oregon and Washington. The Walla Walla River Cayuse Band was called the Pa'xapu.

The Prince

The Prince was a younger brother of Umtippe, the head man at the Cayuse village just east of the Whitman Mission.

The Prince and Umtippe shared ownership of lands surrounding and including the Whitman mission. The Prince had been a local leader of considerable influence among the Cayuses until he became involved in a dispute with Pierre Chrysologue Pambrun of the Hudson's Bay Company over prices for furs and horses.

About 1834, the Prince, Looking Glass of the Nez Perce, and Young Chief, or Tautau, of the Cayuse, are said to have seized Pambrun, thrown him down and beaten him severely. As a result of this incident, the Hudson's Bay Company cut off trade with all three leaders and their families.

The dispute apparently ended in 1837 with the gift by Pambrun of a cabin to Young Chief and one to The Prince, whose cabin is referred to in a January 1844 letter from Narcissa Whitman. Though The Prince was thought to be difficult to deal with previously, following these events it is said that he lived quietly up the river from the Whitman mission.

During a council with Indian Agent Elijah White in 1842, the Prince is reported to have said, "Perhaps you will say it is out of place for me to speak, because I am not a great chief. Once I had influence, but now I have but little...yet, I am from honorable stock. Promises which have been made to me and my fathers have not been fulfilled...But it will not answer for me to speak, for my people do not consider me their chief."

In about 1845, en route to the buffalo country the Prince was slain by members of another tribe.

The Site of the Prince's Cabin

The presence of a cabin owned by the Prince was confirmed in a letter written by Narcissa Whitman in January 1844 telling of the December move of an immigrant family from the Mission to "the Prince's house up the river."

According to oral accounts, the Prince's Cabin had been moved from its original location "across water" to the place where it was identified in the 1990s by Presbyterian pastor Robin Peterson on his farm east of

the Whitman Mission. The presence of a cabin there was confirmed in the first official survey of the area in 1860.

This moving legend was troublesome until an 1858 map was discovered showing that Marcus Whitman had rerouted Garrison Creek into an old channel of the Walla Walla River as a mill race for his grist mill. This could have put the Prince's house "across the water" from the Pásxa Village, and could explain the move that has survived as oral history.

After the 1847 killing of the Whitmans and the beginning of the Cayuse War, both the village site and the cabin were abandoned. Following a U.S. treaty with the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla Indian Tribes, the site of the cabin was homesteaded and settled by Albert and Elizabeth Blanchard in the 1860's.

After 175 years of farm use, the cabin was owned by Robin and Kriss Peterson. In 2013, it was donated to the Frenchtown Historical Foundation to be moved and restored at the Frenchtown Historic Site.

French-Canadian Cabin Design

The Prince's cabin displays the prominent characteristics of homes of French-Canadien/Metis design in the early to mid-1830s. French-Canadien houses were normally one and one half stories and were built with hand-hewn, squared logs, joined by dove-tail corners.

In comparing this cabin with the elements outlined in "Culture Built Upon the Land: A Predictive Model of Nineteenth-Century Canadien/Metis Farmsteads" by James Michael Hebert, it corresponds in a variety of ways with the design predicted for Canadien and Metis construction of that era. These include its size, original door hinges, door size, paint color in the interior, its "piece sur piece en queue d'arronde" horizontal squared log construction with dove-tail corners, and other features such as the design of the interior wall.

An additional element is the manner in which the first "piece" or log was secured to the "sole" or sill, which is with a dowel pin or "cheville" as shown in the photo below, along with the 45 degree angle of the each dove-tail plank to help preserve the cabin by causing water to run off to the exterior.