

CAYUSE VILLAGE

Site of the Prince's Cabin

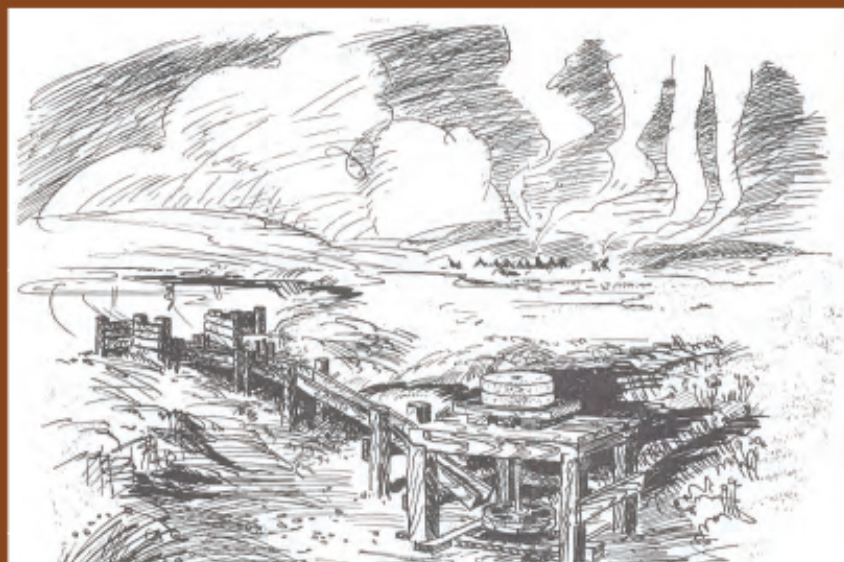
A winter village of the Cayuse Indians was located in this vicinity for many years before the first Euro-Americans settled in the Walla Walla Valley in the mid 1820's. When Marcus and Narcissa Whitman established their 1836 Presbyterian Mission just west of here, the Cayuse Pásxa winter village was located about a quarter mile east of it, clearly visible from the Mission grounds. The Whitmans' monument, a granite obelisk on the hill above the Mission to the northwest of here, overlooks the site of what was once the Pásxa Village. This was a village of equestrians who had welcomed the Whitmans and made room for them on their ancestral grounds, rich and productive grazing lands of native perennial grasses. Nearby a thermal spring never froze and was a popular spot for watering horses, especially during hard winters, and it still remains active.

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'exapu.

Narcissa Whitman confirmed the presence of a cabin owned by the Prince, a Cayuse leader, in a letter written 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 legend, the Prince's Cabin was moved from there "across water" to the place where it was identified on the official survey of 1860 on the Peterson farm just to the northwest of here. 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.

This house displays distinct French-Canadian architectural elements, and appears to be the oldest existing cabin in Washington State. In 2013, it was moved to the Frenchtown Historic Site two miles west of the Whitman Mission, where it is currently available for public viewing. The Frenchtown site is open seven days a week from dawn to dusk with no admission charge. More information can be found at www.frenchtownwa.org.



Cayuse village in the distance seen from Whitman Mission grist mill, Paul Kane, 1847



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