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From Frontier Tent-Town To Crucial Trading Center: The Economic Growth of Walla Walla, Washington, From 1858 to 1900

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FROM FRONTIER TENT-TOWN TO CRUCIAL TRADING CENTER:
THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF WALLA WALLA, WASHINGTON,
FROM 1858 TO 1900

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FOR GRADUATION WITH HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

ELIZABETH J. ZIMMERMAN

HELENA, MONTANA
SIGNATURE PAGE

These signatures certify that I, Elizabeth J. Zimmerman, have completed an honors thesis in the Department of History for graduation with honors from Carroll College.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute an analysis of the historical events that led to economic growth and development of Walla Walla, Washington, from the early 1800s to 1900. Various factors helped Walla Walla become established as an influential city in the Pacific Northwest. In this thesis, three major events that guided Walla Walla were studied. The first of these events came from the military influence of Fort Walla Walla, which helped set the foundations for the future city. The second event was the mining rushes through Washington, Idaho, and western Montana. Walla Walla stood as a key trading center for the region during the first two periods. In the late 1800s, Walla Walla experienced the last major event, the coming of the railroads to the Pacific Northwest. The railroads would change the course of Walla Walla’s fate as it entered the twentieth century. This thesis explores the influence Walla Walla had on the Pacific Northwest as the area grew from unorganized lands to territories and finally into the states of today. It also examines the city’s economic growth through each of the three events as it developed from a tent village into a recognized and historically significant city.
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Writing this thesis has been a unique experience. It has allowed me to expand my knowledge about my hometown of Walla Walla, Washington. I now have a deeper appreciation for my town because I more fully understand its origins and nineteenth century development.

There are many people who helped make this thesis possible that I would like to thank. First, I wish to thank Dr. Robert Swartout for acting as my thesis director and for extending to me his knowledge of the Pacific Northwest. Also I want to thank Dr. Jeanette Fregulia, who as a reader provided continuous encouragement when I just wanted to give up. I am also very appreciative to Professor Julia Mull, who agreed to come in as a reader with very little notice but great enthusiasm.

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Lastly, I wish to convey my deepest thanks to my family, who always accepted me no matter how long I talked about 19th century Walla Walla.
Introduction

Throughout the United States, there are thousands upon thousands of cities and towns. Some have a history from the very first European settlers who crossed the Atlantic Ocean to find a new home. Even today, new towns and cities develop, though in a much different way than in the past. Still, these places did not just appear out of thin air. Something or someone triggered a movement, leading to a departure from a settled area to a place unknown.

But what is it about an area that draws people to stop and begin a new life? And what is it that allows one town to survive and grow through time while others fade away? Each of these questions can be answered with a general economic response. For some, it was the rich soil that allowed a prosperous agricultural center to develop. Others had the draw of precious metals and other natural resources that encouraged people to stay. And others would grow around military bases because it offered settlers a sense of protection from the native inhabitants. Still more would develop because of where the railroads were constructed. But the general answers can often skip by the unique aspects of a town. Looking deeper into an individual area creates the opportunity to gain a richer understanding.

Walla Walla, Washington, is just one of the many small towns in the United States. Yet it has its own unique history as a result its economic growth and development. Chapter One of this thesis looks at the early history of the Washington Territory and the role the military played in its settlement. This chapter analyzes how Fort Walla Walla and the creation of the Mullan Road were key aspects to the beginning of Walla Walla. The Mullan Road provides a connection to Chapter Two, which explores the effects of the
gold-seeking miners traveling up into the interior of Washington Territory. In this chapter, Walla Walla experiences rapid growth as it looks to cater to the thousands of miners traveling through the area and settling in previously unsettled places. The third and final chapter studies the effects that the railroads had on Walla Walla’s status as a major trading center. Chapter Three shows how Walla Walla attempted, with Dr. Dorsey S. Baker’s railroad, to enter into the railway era and how ultimately the town lost its status as the major trading center of eastern Washington.

Walla Walla started out as a humble settlement, but grew to become a regional commercial center. Many different factors have contributed to Walla Walla’s ability to sustain itself for nearly 150 years. The development that transpired in Walla Walla during the nineteenth century would lay the foundation for the community’s continual growth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
Chapter 1
Walla Walla’s Growth into Establishment

The expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century created an opportunity for new towns to emerge. As people moved westward and settled in the lands beyond the Continental Divide, rich agricultural lands and natural resources enticed settlers to stay. Many of the developing areas grew up around military strongholds, where settlers felt protected from the supposedly dangerous Native Americans. In the early 1850s, the Washington Territory was formed and with it came economic growth. Towns began to form in certain areas, especially near the Pacific Coast and along the famous Oregon Trail. One such town that developed into a prominent part of the Washington Territory was Walla Walla.

The town of Walla Walla grew from the various changes occurring in the Washington Territory during the 1850s. Initially “a half-way-to-Hell town,” Walla Walla accommodated the soldiers and wandering miners with various saloons and gambling halls, which were “as common as ‘blackberries in bear time.’”¹ By providing for first the soldiers and then the miners, Walla Walla played an important role in the direction of economic growth in the Pacific Northwest. As stated in the local newspaper, the Washington Statesman, on December 20, 1861, the “business men of Walla Walla [were] fortunate in their . . . location for prosecuting their various branches of industry, and they need[ed] . . . exercise of common prudence and economy to make their business successful and prosperous.”² The town’s economic development depended on the merchants’ ability to provide settlers with the supplies they desired. From 1858 to 1862,
Walla Walla experienced significant economic growth. This town’s foundations grew from the needs of the military base, Fort Walla Walla, and the access to Mullan Road.

**Early History of the Washington Territory**

During the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of “Manifest Destiny” swept across the nation, encouraging people to head out west toward the Oregon Country. To understand the economic growth of Walla Walla and the events that facilitated the growth, one must first examine the early history of the Pacific Northwest.

In the early 1800s, Great Britain and the United States jointly controlled the Pacific Northwest. Each country realized the value of having jurisdiction over the region because of its natural resources. Great Britain quickly gained prominence in the area when it began monopolizing the fur trade with first the North West Fur Company and later the Hudson’s Bay Company. These two companies helped build various forts in the area to promote the movement of goods. One such fort was Fort Nez Perce, which was built in 1818 at the connection of the Walla Walla River and the Columbia. In 1821, the Hudson’s Bay Company gained control over the northwest fur-trading industry. It had merged with the former rival, the North West Company, taking over the business’s territory. One site the Hudson’s Bay Company inherited and continued to use for many more years was Fort Nez Perce, later known as Fort Walla Walla. For the British, this fort was crucial to opening up the area for movement of furs from the Rockies to the coast. With the increase of potential income came the first movement of people to the West.

Following in the footsteps of the fur companies, some of the first permanent settlers began arriving. American missionaries, such as Marcus Whitman, traveled in

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* Manifest Destiny was a belief that it was America’s divine duty to expand westward across North American continent to the Pacific Ocean.
1836 to what would soon become the Oregon Territory. Marcus Whitman hoped to bring the Protestant religion to the Native Americans. He decided to settle in the Walla Walla Valley to work with the Cayuse Indians. This was one of the first major settlements within the Walla Walla Valley. The Whitman Mission would later become a popular resting spot for the pioneers heading for the Pacific Northwest during the early 1840s. Marcus Whitman even travelled back east in 1843 to lead the first large group of nearly nine hundred white settlers to the Oregon area.

The 1840s saw the start of a swift movement westward due to settlers seeking new land. This was the time of Oregon Trail. From 1840 to 1860, nearly fifty-three thousand used the Trail to complete the journey to Oregon. This rapid influx of white settlers to the area worried the Cayuse Indians living near the Whitman mission. The Cayuse realized the settlers wished to stay and would encourage more whites to follow. By 1847, almost five thousand settlers had passed through the area, confirming the Cayuse nation’s fears. Although the Oregon Trail did not pass straight by it, the Whitman mission was a well-known place to take those who were ill. This brought measles and smallpox, which were deadly to the Native Americans. When the Cayuse noticed that their children, treated by Marcus Whitman, were dying while white children survived, the Native Americans took action. On November 29, 1847, two leaders of the Cayuse went to the mission and killed Marcus Whitman, his wife and eleven others, and destroyed the mission buildings. This massacre drastically affected the destiny of the Pacific Northwest and spurred the start of white and Native America conflict. The massacre became the prelude to the first Indian War fought in the new territory.
In 1846, Great Britain and the United States decided to divide the Oregon Country along the forty-ninth parallel in what was known as the Oregon Treaty. With so many people coming to Oregon and looking for a place to settle, combined with the massacre at Whitman mission, Congress was compelled to create the Oregon Territory in August of 1848. The Oregon Territory included the present-day states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and western Montana. It covered a total of 350,000 square miles. The sheer vastness of the territory, the quickly growing number of white settlers, and the emergent conflicts with the Native Americans soon pushed for the creations of another territory.

The Washington Territory was carved of the original Oregon Territory in 1853. The Oregon Territory was restricted to its present-day state lines, while the Washington Territory would include present-day Washington, Idaho and western Montana. (Figure 1) Isaac Stevens became the first territorial governor. Stevens, the territorial legislature, and the United States government “carved this spacious and well-nigh empty domain into sixteen counties, among which was the county of Walla Walla.” Initially, Walla Walla County included all of eastern Washington and parts of present-day Idaho and western Montana. Later in the early 1860s, the territorial legislature would shrink the county down to a smaller, more manageable size. When this occurred, both the Oregon and Washington territories wished to control Walla Walla County.

In 1855, Oregon tried to expand its northern state line to follow the Snake River. By doing this, Oregon would have gained control of the Walla Walla Valley. While politicians fought over which territory would control Walla Walla, the inhabitants of the area remained neutral. In years to come, Walla Walla County grew close to the city of Portland, which was “the business center of the lower Columbia.” But, for the most part,
The land destined to become Idaho formed the eastern part of Washington Territory in the early 1860s.
Courtesy: Special Collections Division, U of W Libraries, N873.5

Map of Washington Territory in 1860s,

Courtesy of David Rumsey’s Collection,

http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~2065~120063:Map-Of-Oregon,-Washington,-And-Part
many settlers in Walla Walla would not have strong opinions, since they were new to the area.\textsuperscript{14} Even with the possibility of various loyalties, Walla Walla remained within the Washington Territory. These political aspects of the territory arose from the need to create order within the area, which was difficult to accomplish with the multiple Native American conflicts.

Continuous disputes with Native Americans also came with the creation of the Washington Territory. In 1855, in order to prepare the tribes for an influx of white settlers heading north to a possible gold site, Governor Stevens made a hasty attempt to create treaties with the Indian tribes in present-day eastern Washington. While some tribes, like the Nez Perce, were open to negotiations, tribes such as the Walla Wallas and the Yakimas wished to maintain their autonomy.\textsuperscript{15} The first of the treaty negotiations took place in May of 1855, but failed to resolve the issues, even with Governor Stevens’ promise for large reservations. The Yakima tribe violently attacked settlers moving through their territory and started a brutal war in Walla Walla County.

Due to the Indian conflict in 1855, an order went out to close all of the eastern Washington Territory in 1856.\textsuperscript{16} General John Wool, who was in charge of enforcing the order, urged “all whites to leave the upper interior country, setting the Cascade Mountains as the eastern limit of white settlements.”\textsuperscript{17} Settlers ignored the command and continued to pour into the area. Stevens, worried that Indians would rally in the Walla Walla area in order to retaliate for the continuous influx of white settlers, pushed for a second attempt to negotiate with the Indian tribes in 1856.\textsuperscript{18} This time Governor Stevens came with the military support of Colonel E. J. Steptoe to negotiate. The meetings with the Native Americans again failed.\textsuperscript{19}
The last major Indian dispute took place in 1858, when tribes of the Columbia basin joined to stop the movement of white settlers into their land. Most of the fighting with the tribes did not transpire near the town of Walla Walla, but rather all over the Washington Territory. Colonel George Wright led six hundred men through eastern Washington, mercilessly defeating the tribes and hanging twenty-four chiefs in what would be called the Yakima War. The battles and failed negotiations with the Native Americans in the same vicinity created a decline in the settling of the Walla Walla County. In 1858 after the major battles, General N.S. Clarke, who took over General John Wool’s position, opened up the entire area east of the Cascades for settlement. The need for land and trade encouraged the change. The opening of the area created a chance for new growth in the economy to take place and this started at the Fort Walla Walla.

The Crucial Role of Fort Walla Walla

Fort Walla Walla played a critical role in the economic growth and development of the town of Walla Walla. The location of Fort Walla Walla moved several times within the region due to the various Native American conflicts from 1855 to 1859. As stated earlier, Fort Walla Walla (also known as Fort Nez Perce) started as a fur trading post for the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1820. When the British left the Washington area in the 1840s, the United States military took over the Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Walla Walla, but later abandoned it in 1855 with the occurrence of Indian disturbances in eastern Washington. In 1856, Colonel Edward J. Steptoe built a military base twenty-six miles outside of the present-day city of Walla Walla. (Figure 2) He named this base Fort Walla Walla in remembrance of the previous fort. The last repositioning of Fort Walla
Figure 2

Drawing of the third US Army Fort Walla Walla circa 1857

Courtesy of Fort Walla Walla Museum website,

http://www.nps.gov/whmi/historyculture/the-many-fort-walla-wallas.htm
Walla occurred in 1859, after the territory was reopened to settlers.\(^{23}\) This relocation placed the fort within what is a present-day Walla Walla city limit. The movement of the fort from the edge of the Columbia River down southeastward almost forty-five miles into the Walla Walla Valley came from the U.S military’s attempts to keep the Native Americans under surveillance and provide protection to the white settlers. While the movement did this, it also created an opportunity for economic growth.

According to W.D Lyman in *Lyman’s History of Old Walla Walla County*, the placement of Fort Walla Walla played a large role in where the city would be located and what types of businesses sprung up near the fort.\(^ {24}\) Since the fort needed a way to provide supplies for its garrison, men looking to make a quick profit set up near the base. Even when the territory was temporarily closed in 1856, merchants and traders still received licenses to set up near the fort. Therefore, a few crude shops appeared around the military base.\(^ {25}\) William McQuirk ran the first established store in a tent. He sold general merchandise to the fort and any other emigrants and prospectors in the area.\(^ {26}\) As the need for more goods increased, so did the need for those who could provide them. Slowly, the tent stores turned into “buildings . . . of split logs driven into the ground and . . . covered with canvas or clapboards.”\(^ {27}\) The growth from simple canvas tents to actual buildings showed that there was some economic benefit to staying near Fort Walla Walla.

On October 29, 1858, the eastern part of the Washington Territory reopened to white settlers.\(^ {28}\) With the increased population moving through the territory, “various rude buildings appeared in 1858, some for residences, some for saloons.”\(^ {29}\) Then “by 1859, a mongrel collection of tents, cabins, and shack . . . dotted the landscape adjacent to the fort.”\(^ {30}\) This steady growth from canvas tents to actual buildings illustrated the need
for goods and services. With the increase of settlers, merchants could provide goods not only to the soldiers in the fort, but to pioneers as well. According to Lyman:

The two essentials of a city seem to be: first, a location in a region of such resources as to attract and provide industries for the maintenance of an incoming and increasing population; and, second, such a location as will be a natural point of exchange of commodities with more or less distant centers of production. . . . Four towns were started . . . in the early sixties which were to stand these tests of a city location. They were Walla Walla, Umatilla, Wallula, and Lewiston.³¹

The placement of Fort Walla Walla provided the initial attraction for settlers and therefore for the merchants and traders. It also set up a structured center for the movement of goods.

The fort represented a vision of safety and security for many pioneers, which provided the encouragement needed to move to the area. Throughout 1858 and 1859, pioneers, including entrepreneurial businessmen, settled in the area with their families. These businessmen quickly turned the small tent-town into a steadily growing town with streets and actual buildings. It must be noted that even with the influx of pioneers and growing businesses, Walla Walla was not an officially incorporated town.

Encouraged by the fort’s presence, settlers moving up from the Willamette Valley into the Walla Walla Valley provided a tie with Oregon, and especially with the city of Portland. The creation of a tie with Portland allowed Walla Walla to connect with a large city that had access to the ocean. This would allow merchants in both areas to move goods and make a profit. In a news article printed in the Washington Statesman on December 20 1861, a writer mentioned that many of the advertisers for the Washington Statesman were in Portland. He wrote that “many of the business men of Portland have caught the spirit of up-country enterprise and are not behind in the times in seeking to
share in the general activity.”32 This hints that as the town of Walla Walla began to grow, the merchants and traders in Walla Walla noticed an increased interest in their small town by the merchants in Portland. In fear of too much competition, the local stores took out their very own advertisements in the Statesman. The writer thanked the businessmen for providing patronage to the paper, believing that it showed “their appreciation of the press in their midst, and giving evidence that . . . they are desirous of the prosperity of the town as well as of their individual success.”33

Even with the fort’s presence and the growing economy, Walla Walla County did experience some difficulties. In the beginning, Walla Walla County could not only depend on the pull of untouched land to gain new settlers. For many farmers, a main issue was that “there was, practically, no market for farm products . . . outside of the garrison, its employees, and dependents.”34 The lack of an access to markets strained the settlers’ income. Early farmers and businessmen had to rely on the fort and the soldiers living there to provide a demand for their products.

Fort Walla Walla was crucial to the town’s early growth. By offering protection to settlers during the conflicts with the Native American, the garrison encouraged economic growth. Without the fort nearby, people such as William McQuirk might not have stopped in Walla Walla County to start a shop. The need for a town would not have developed in 1860 if the garrison had fallen apart, for “few whites would have remained east of the Cascades.”35 Fort Walla Walla played a fundamental role in the early economic growth of Walla Walla County. It set the foundations for the town of Walla Walla, and provided an early and primitive market to begin economic growth. Once the
early businessmen had adequately supplied the fort, they looked for ways to access larger markets and so they turned to military roads throughout the Northwest.

**The Mullan Road**

To ensure the movement of goods to and from suppliers of forts, the military looked to build serviceable roads. To understand how the Mullan road came to be, one must look at the need for military roads. The first consideration was to connect the two major rivers of the West: the Columbia River and the Missouri River. In 1824, the first proposal for a road to connect the two rivers went before Congress, but no funds were made available for surveys for over twenty years. The lack of funds made it difficult for anyone to take action to promote the building of roads. By 1853, the Oregon Trail was the only overland road in existence. Any travels north of the Oregon Trail were restricted to water routes and Indian trails. When Congress appointed Isaac Stevens as the Washington Territory governor in March 1853, it entrusted him to find a suitable northern railroad route that would reach Puget Sound. This would create another overland route to connect the West Coast to the East. Stevens was allotted 40,000 dollars and told to investigate “the passes of the Cascade Range and of the Rocky Mountains . . . and of the Columbia and Missouri Rivers to transport, materials for the construction of the road.” The 40,000 dollars was to be split between the construction of two military wagon roads, one in southern Oregon and the other for the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road.

To complete his task, Stevens looked for civil scientists and engineers outside the military to create an accurate report on the best possible route. The report found that such a road was practical and would promote an increase in population. In 1853, Steven
chose Captain George B. McClellan to construct a road from the original Fort Walla Walla, along the Columbia River, to Fort Steilacoom. McClellan received one-half of the Congress’ funds to build a road suitable for emigrants to use during the fall. Due to poor time and money management, McClellan would fail to build the actual road. Instead, settlers such as Edward Jay Allen took the initiative in May of 1853 to start the road. The main goal was to inspire settlers to inhabit the Puget Sound area. If the motivated builders had had access to the money McClellan received, the road might have been properly constructed. After 1853, the poorly built Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road received little attention and few settlers chose to take that route, instead looking to the newly built road over Snoqualmie Pass further north. While the Fort Steilacoom-Walla Walla road did not become a major traveling road, it did serve two very important purposes. First, it would provide the town of Walla Walla with an access to the western side of the territory, allowing for a movement of goods westward. Secondly, this road would help provide insight on how to build other military roads in the future.

Unwilling to give up, Governor Stevens looked to find another man who could accomplish the task. The man chosen was Lieutenant John Mullan. It was through him that the construction of the Mullan road began. During 1853, Mullan led a party from present-day eastern Washington into the Northwest Rockies to look for possible railroad routes. From the beginning of the trip, Mullan saw the necessity for a wagon road. After staying for over a year in present-day Montana gathering weather data, and building relationships with the Native Americans, Mullan discovered a
successful route from the Bitterroot Valley †to Fort Walla Walla.⁴⁶ (Figure 4) Governor Stevens immediately looked to Congress for money to begin construction. Mullan went to Washington, DC, to speak on the behalf of the Washington Territory. The Territorial legislature found that Mullan’s surveys held enough evidence to support the need for a wagon road. With the support of the Territorial legislature, Mullan was able to approach Congress with his idea. In 1855, Congress provided a $30,000 allocation to build the road. However, the United States War Department would not allow the construction. The trouble with the Native Americans in eastern Washington during the mid to late 1850s caused a delay in the production.⁴⁷ John Mullan had the funds for his project, but had to wait before he could proceed with the building of his road.

Finally, in July of 1859, Lieutenant John Mullan left from Walla Walla to build a military road to Fort Benton, located in present-day Montana.⁴⁸ John Mullan chose Walla Walla because of its military post, and its established connection with the Columbia River and ports down to the Pacific Coast. He picked Fort Benton because of its connection with the Missouri River and the eastern United States.⁴⁹ Mullan physically wanted to create a road that could replicate the idealized Northwest Passage, which would allow for a continuous flow of goods and supplies from coast to coast.

The actual construction of the road did not start directly in the city of Walla Walla. Mullan decided to incorporate a section of the Oregon Trail called the Walla Walla Trail into his road.⁵⁰ The actual military road, which became known as the Mullan Road, started at the old Fort Walla Walla built by the Hudson’s Bay Company, near present-day

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† Bitterroot Valley is found in southwestern Montana. The boundaries cover from Horse Creek Pass north near the city of Missoula.
Figure 3

Portrait of Captain John Mullan,
http://www.3rd1000.com/history3/events/mullan.htm

Figure 4

Map of the Pacific Northwest in the 1860s, showing the Mullan Road,
By Dean Sharpio, Courtesy of Oregon Historical Quarterly,
Wallula. By using the formerly built road leading to Walla Walla, he ensured that the area would be connected to the future of the Mullan Road.

It took Mullan and his men a little over a year to complete the initial 624-mile road. Mullan had one hundred enlisted men and one hundred workmen in his group. The road passed by the Coeur d’Alene Mission, and over Sohon Pass in the Bitterroot Mountains. It then travelled to Hell’s Gate, eastward to the Deer Lodge valley, along the Little Blackfoot River, and finally connected with the Missouri River. From the river, it was an easy journey to Fort Benton. After the rough completion of the road, John Mullan went back over it, ahead of one of the first parties to use the road, to make additional repairs. Mullan would remain in the military until 1862. During that time, he continued to make improvements on the Mullan Road, for the long winters and springs often eroded the roadway in certain areas. All along the way, Mullan continuously looked for “possible economic developments which his new road might bring.” He realized that the Mullan Road had the potential to bring a new spurt of economic growth to the Washington Territory. Walla Walla, as the western termination of the Mullan Road, would also soon experience major change.

The original construction of the Mullan Road had been for military purposes. With major Indian battles occurring during the 1850s, the eastern Washington territory needed a well-secured route to the interior. Right after Lieutenant Mullan completed the road, a troop led by Major Blake traveled from Fort Benton down to Walla Walla in fifty-seven days. Many of Lieutenant Mullan’s supporters “hoped the road would serve as a highway for immigrants, an avenue for the easy transportation of troops into the Pacific Northwest, and a route over which supplies for the future northern railroad could be
moved.” Though only a few military units used the road, other people soon began to travel the route. The Mullan Road granted many people, such as traders, miners, and emigrants, a set passage from the Columbia River up into Montana. The town of Walla Walla benefited from the movement of people through its area.

John Mullan saw the potential economic growth that could happen as time passed. He wrote in his diary that nestled among the Blue Mountains, the Columbia River, and the Snake River lay “the beautiful valley of Walla Walla . . . . With its mild and general climate, with its rich soil, abundance of timber of 1st quality on the mountain tops and numberless streams. . . . and extent of land capable of fully cultivated. . . a population of 30,000. . . . What may we not anticipate from this valley as years shall fully develop this region and bring it to our nation’s notice.” Without the Mullan Road providing a connection to the interior of the Pacific Northwest, Walla Walla might have remained nothing more than a trading camp.

The Mullan Road served as a route for merchants to travel into Montana to start new stores. It allowed gold dust to move from the mines to towns such as Walla Walla and it was even used to transport mail back and forth from Walla Walla to Helena. In 1862, the first year of use, the Mullan Road generated considerable traffic, including, “an estimated 20,000 people, both settlers and Indians; 5,000 head of cattle; 6,000 horses and mules, most pulling freight weight; 52 light wagons; and 31 heavier immigrant wagons.” Some came from Fort Benton and moved down to the Walla Walla area, while others moved up into present-day Idaho and Montana.

By 1867, the people of Walla Walla saw the opportunities the Mullan Road brought to them. In the May 17, 1867 issue of the Walla Walla Statesman, formerly
known as the *Washington Statesman*, an article on the Mullan Road discussed how important and cost effective the road had become for traders. For farmers, the Mullan Road provided the ability to “load up at their own doors their surplus, products and drive through to Montana, where for several years they [might] expect to find their best markets.” No longer did the excess agriculture go to waste. Before, the farmers expected to sell their goods only to Fort Walla Walla and perhaps to their neighbors. The Mullan Road gave them access to greater markets. A writer from the *Walla Walla Statesman* interviewed a Mr. Ritz, who compared the costs of moving goods to Montana from the Columbia River or from St. Louis. In the article, the writer declared:

> Mr. Ritz is still confident that Montana must draw her supplies from the Pacific slope. He says that goods can be transported from New York to Virginia City or Helena, *via* the Columbia River cheaper than the same articles can be laid down by way of St. Louis. . . . Freight from New York to St. Louis costs $70 per ton, while the same goods can be put down in Portland for about $23. From St. Louis to Helena, by river and wagon road, is near 2,000 miles travel; from Portland to Helena, by river and wagon road, is about 740 miles.  

For merchants and traders in the late 1860s, the Mullan Road provided a quicker and cheaper way to move goods. The people of Walla Walla benefited from the use of the Mullan Road because they could gain access to goods coming from both the Pacific Coast and the east.

Even with the possibilities the Mullan Road opened to the city of Walla Walla, it did not come without its problems. Lieutenant Mullan offered a warning that merchants and capitalists in Walla Walla would have to remain energetic in their trading efforts with western Montana if they wished to compete as a supply center against St. Louis in the east. The city had to stay diligent in promoting the Mullan Road to encourage its use. If
settlers and traders did not use the Mullan Road, then supply routes would pass to other cities.

Even with its many advantages, the Mullan Road also had shortcomings. One main problem of the Mullan Road was its deterioration, which came from the normal wear and tear of multiple wagons traveling over the road. Soon after the completion of the road in 1862, the U.S. military decided that it had little need for it. The suppressed Native Americans in the area no longer posed a threat to the settlers. With the main reason for the construction of the road now gone, the route soon fell into disrepair. Also, the elements of nature, such as rain and run-off from melting snow, quickly caused erosion. This sometimes made it impossible for wagons to make the journey. The poor conditions of the road slowed Walla Walla’s possible growth. While the Mullan Road did play an essential part in helping to establish Walla Walla, a new era was about to begin, the commencement of the mining rushes.
Notes


6 Schwantes, 85.

7 Ibid., 88.

8 Ibid., 100.

9 Ibid., 119, 88-100, 124.

10 Lambert, 201.


12 Meinig, 169.


14 C. S. Kingston, 92, 94.

15 Maxey, 9-10.

16 Lambert, 207.

17 Maxey, 10.
18 Meinig, 163.

19 Maxey, 10.

20 Schwantes, 148.

21 Maxey, 10.


23 Maxey, 11.


26 Maxey, 11.


28 Meinig, 201.

29 Lyman, 1:115.

30 Maxey, 11.

31 Lyman, 1:124.


33 Ibid.

34 Lyman, 1:117.


Ibid., 200.


Prosch,119.

Ibid., 120.

Perko, 42-43.

Ibid., 47.


Colonel Elliot, 201.

McGregor, 2.

Fuller, 316.

Prosch, 125.


Colonel Elliot, 202.

Coleman and Leo Rieman, 27.

54 Coleman, and Rieman, 35.


56 Ibid., 25.

57 Ibid., 28.

58 McGregor, 6.

59 Coleman, and Rieman, 43.

60 Ibid., 170.


62 Colonel Elliot, 203.


64 Newell, “The Mullan Road.”

65 McGregor, 23.

66 Winther, 28-31.
Chapter 2
Walla Walla and the Mining Rushes of the 1860s

During the early 1860s, large groups of miners, mainly from California, moved up into the Pacific Northwest. With the discovery of gold, many people began to come up from Oregon, heading towards the Mullan Road, which would take them into the heart of the gold mining districts located in northern Washington, British Columbia, and throughout Idaho and Montana. It soon became apparent to the traders and merchants in Walla Walla that their profits would come from providing the miners with the goods and services they required and the town quickly turned to this profitable industry.¹

The Start of the Gold Rush

After the 1849 gold rush in California, one of the next regions to experience a major mining rush was the Pacific Northwest. During the 1850s, there had been recorded gold findings in areas such as the Fraser River in British Columbia and these findings provided the first pull to miners to head north. Another mining prospect sprung up in Colville, located in present-day Washington in the mid-1850s. While these mines in the north did provide the initial call for miners, the mines did not originally create a major economic boost for Walla Walla. The Colville mines were too small and the Fraser River mines could be easily accessed from the coast.² This did not give Walla Walla enough incentive to develop strong trading relationships with these areas in the 1850s.

Mines in the north did continue to draw attention during the 1860s. Various mines in the Cariboo, Kootenai, and Upper Columbia regions would appear and some were quite prosperous. In his narrative of his life as a trader in the mines, James W. Watt described that the “Kootenay was a very rich strike and the placer mines there were
worked for several years. Kootenay gold dust was very fine and was taken in at $18.00 an ounce. . . . The rate for carrying freight to Kootenay . . . from Walla Walla . . . ranged from 40 cents to 60 cents a pound."³ At the beginning of the rushes to the north, miners used the Mullan Road to start the journey north, but to reach the certain areas, they would have had to leave the route.

The mining occurring in the north often coincided with the major mining rushes in the southern part of Washington Territory. On February 20, 1860, Elias Davidson Pierce discovered the area that would create the best opportunity for Walla Walla. Pierce had left from Walla Walla and traveled into the Nez Perce reservation (what would become part of the Idaho Territory) with twelve other men. He discovered gold on the north fork of the Clearwater River.⁴ Pierce returned to Walla Walla to gather more men, but the settlers were worried about mining on the reservation, fearing that it might provoke the Nez Perce into war because of the increase of white settlers on Nez Perce land. So, with only eleven men, Pierce set out in August back to the Clearwater and after six weeks, the group returned to Walla Walla with a couple hundred dollars worth of gold dust. This stimulated interest in the area and in December another group of thirty-three men journeyed to a creek off the Clearwater called Orofino and built eight cabins. The success of the area became public knowledge in March when John Calhoun Smith and J. Davis snowshoed out of the area to Walla Walla with eight hundred dollars in gold dust.⁵ Pierce City, and the city of Orofino, grew from the impromptu mining camps, and from these towns came the initial spread of gold miners.⁶ This would lead to an unprecedented shift away from the Pacific coast back into the interior.
What made the Clearwater gold discovery critical to the Walla Walla Valley was that the only way to reach the area from the west was to travel through the Columbia Plateau, and Walla Walla was in the perfect spot to profit from this movement by providing supplies for the travelers. Mining activities in the Clearwater area quickly escalated. In 1861, new discoveries had been made on the south fork of the Clearwater River, which led to the development of Elk City. This would become the key town in the Clearwater district. By the fall of 1861, over 2,000 men had made claims in the area.

Another major mining district that Walla Walla looked to profit from was the Salmon River mines (also called Florence), which was located south and west from the Clearwater River mines. Again in 1861, a large gold rush occurred, pulling thousands of men into the area. An estimated 4,000 men stayed in Florence for the winter, but by 1862, many had moved on to a new strike. The Salmon River mines frequently made the news in the Washington Statesman newspaper. In one article received by the Washington Statesman from the Oregon Statesman, dated February 8, 1862, the writer described the good and bad benefits of mines near the Salmon River. In the article, he wrote:

> It is safe to estimate the number who will go from California en route to Salmon by the 1st July at 25,000 persons. Most, if not all of them will have money and will want such articles as your farmers are prepared to supply. The opening of these mines will be a great source of wealth to . . . Washington Territory. The great fear, however, is that the farmers will become infected with the fever, and desert their farms and flock to the mines. . . . But, on the other hand, those who produce for, and supply the mines with the necessaries and luxuries have claims which, in the long run turn out the heaviest purses of the “yellow metal.”

After the discoveries near the Salmon River came multiple other strikes including the Boise Basin mines in 1863. (Figure 5) The primary town in the Boise Basin mines was Idaho City, originally known as Bannock City and Walla Walla provided the area
Figure 5

Check Mate Mine, Pearl, Idaho

Miners outside mill building circa 1903,

Courtesy of Idaho State Historical Society Digital Collections,

with most of its supplies. Again, Watt provided a description of the sheer quantity of goods that traveled from Walla Walla to the Boise Basin. He told of 2,000 mules filled with supplies that would leave Walla Walla to head to the mines. During each of the summer months from 1863 to 1867, ten to twelve pack trains with a minimum of 100 pack animals would regularly arrive at the mines. The bulk of the supplies provided to these mines came out of Walla Walla.

The last critical mining area that would affect Walla Walla’s trading was in western Montana. A strike at Grasshopper Creek in July 18, 1862 ushered in the mining boom in what would become southwestern Montana. The city that arose from the miners movement was called Bannack. One year later, another prosperous mine strike happened seventy-five miles to the east at Alder Gulch. This led to the creation of Virginia City.

In 1864 strikes occurred at Last Chance Gulch in present-day Helena, Montana. Many miners had moved up from Idaho into Montana, hoping to be the first to find the strike in the many gulches that surrounded Last Chance. This would be where the last main attempts at mining occurred, and it would last through the late 1860s. Throughout the mining rushes, there would constantly be the need to supply the men with provisions; it was just a matter of how to get the supplies to the mines.

**Movement Through the Area**

Movement of the supplies across the Washington Territory was not an easy task. In order to freight the goods to the interior Columbia Plateau, merchants would send provisions from Portland up the Columbia and Snake Rivers to land at either Wallula or Lewiston. Various provisions for the mines had to be packed in from Walla Walla. Many merchants and traders took advantage of this high demand for goods. Some of the
merchants would even leave Walla Walla, loaded with supplies, and head off to start their own supply store in mining towns. Such was the story of Francis L. Worden and his partner, Christopher P. Higgins. Worden arrived in Walla Walla in 1858 and started “Worden and Company” as a general mercantile store. In 1860, he became partners with Higgins. After staying in Walla Walla for a while, they decided to try their luck in the new mining districts. Worden and Higgins headed to mining camps in Montana to start a store at Hell Gate. Worden described what he and Higgins packed into Montana on seventy-five horses. After setting off from Walla Walla for the Bitter Root Valley, they “arrived. . . the latter part of August (1860) with about $7,000 worth of goods and some $4,000 worth of horses and cattle.” The store was very successful, as miners kept moving up into Montana from the Idaho mines in search of new gold strikes. Not every merchant would just pack up and head out for the mines. And even if he did, these small supply stores relied on another very important aspect of early 1860s Walla Walla: pack trains.

Mule pack trains were the predominant way to bring supplies into the mining districts during this time. (Figure 6) Railroads had not made it into the interior of the Washington Territory, so that left animals as the only way to move supplies to the miners. One narrative of the impact of the pack trains was left by James W. Watt. When he went to work for the pack train ran by D. M. Jesse & Co. in 1861, Watt described both the growth of the town and the cost of goods. In his words, “the miners estimated that there were all of twelve thousand people in the Pierce City or Oro Fino Mining camp by the end of July 1861. Oro Fino itself was already quite a town. . . . About four hundred houses and tents had been erected in Oro Fino by August 1861. . . . There were some
Figure 6

Dyer Mine Leadville mule skinner and ore packer,

Courtesy of Alexander Martin

fifteen to sixteen different stores. . . about eighteen or twenty saloons.” This illustrates
the tremendous growth in just a few couple of months.

Watt also described how quickly the prices of good could change. He was in
charge of overseeing the movement of goods from Pierce City down to Orofino and noted
the price change in supplies from the summer to the fall of 1861. At first, Watt told of the
reasonable prices of food. For example, flour at the beginning of the summer in Orofino
sold for 16 to 18 cents a pound, but then the sudden news of the Salmon River mines and
Florence motivated even more miners to travel down to the new mines. Watt was sent
down to the area to start a new branch supply center for D. M. Jesse & Co.. What started
out as a camp of 200 to 300 miners quickly rose to thousands. The price of flour in
Florence rose to 100 dollars to 125 dollars per hundred pounds. That was one dollar per

Through his narrative Watt provided insights into the miners’ and merchants’
world throughout the 1860s.

With gold strikes occurring throughout central and southern Idaho, western
Montana, and northern Washington, Walla Walla found that it sat at the perfect spot. For
anyone looking to build their fortune in trading with the miners, Walla Walla was very
attractive. The old Oregon Trail gave Walla Walla a direct connection to the mines in
southern Idaho. Another route was the Mullan Road, which led prospectors straight into
Montana and the northern panhandle of Idaho that was apparently teeming with gold and
perspective fortunes. The use of the Mullan Road came as an unanticipated benefit.

Soon, Walla Walla’s involvement with the mines created “a boom of dizzying
proportions . . . transforming it from a village clustered around a newly established
military post into the largest city in Washington Territory.” The mining rush was
exactly what needed to happen for Walla Walla. It provided the next economic boost required to make sure that the town did not slowly die away. The city worked quickly to offer the supplies needed by the various settlers and prospectors moving through the town. The streets of Walla Walla swarmed with mules and horses ready to take supplies off to the distant mine camps. Stagecoaches continuously came and went, bringing even more people, which shows that the town had many opportunities to grow. Walla Walla sat at the connection point of a successful trading area.

Walla Walla profited greatly from the incoming miners. The prospectors bought their needed supplies from Walla Walla and sent back their findings of gold through Walla Walla to Portland’s banks. Miners relied on the connection between Walla Walla and Oregon. Without the connection, miners would have struggled to get their gold to the safety of banks. During 1862, “the yield of gold…reached $7,000,000” in the Cascades and much of this traveled down through Walla Walla. Walla Walla also benefitted from mining in another way. Throughout the Pacific Northwest, miners saw Walla Walla as “a winter haven.” During the winter season, the prospectors would move down from the virtually uninhabitable wild lands they mined in to find shelter in a sociable place.

William Armstead Goulder described the seasonal timeline of miners. October was often the beginning of the end to the mining season. As the season progressed, gradually mining operations begin to be suspended or greatly restricted. Many of the miners, particularly those with homes and families in the Walla Walla, Willamette, and other valleys in the lower country, begin to gather their ponies form the neighboring “horse ranches” and prepare to abandon their camp until the following spring, when they would return to their claims and their labors. By early November, all who have elected to leave the camp for the winter have departed.
In Walla Walla, the miners’ “hard-won fortune [became] fair game for the merchants who ran the city’s numerous saloons, hotels, restaurants, and stores.”24 As these economic changes took place, Walla Walla began to grow out of its tent-village status.

Walla Walla’s growth from a “half-way-to-Hell”25 tent village to a consistently growing town is reflected in the United States 1860 federal census. According to the 1860 federal census, 1,051 people lived in the town of Walla Walla. Of these 1,051 residents, 319 people lived in the garrisons in Fort Walla Walla. In Walla Walla there were 840 men and 211 women living in the town, a ratio of 4 to 1.26 The town would continue to grow throughout the coming years.

The year 1862 became a critical point in Walla Walla’s history. Due to the increased movement of people and goods from the mines in that year, Walla Walla petitioned to the territorial legislature to become an incorporated city. This petition passed in November of 1862.27 Once Walla Walla officially became a city, it realized that it needed to raise money to support the city’s growth. The town council started to look at some of its main revenue sources, the saloons. At the time of the mining rushes, saloons were Walla Walla’s most successful type of business.28 When looking at how to raise city revenues, the town council decided on certain taxes, licenses, and fines related to the saloons. In the first six months, Walla Walla’s total revenue was $4,283.00 and within this, “licensing of liquor sales and gambling tables amounted to $1,875.00. Taxes amounted to about $1,430.”29 The amount of money raised just by licensing liquor sales and gambling tables, compared to the overall revenue, shows how critical the gambling aspect of miners was to the town and its growth.
In 1862, the town of Walla Walla had grown from tents and log shacks to fifty buildings with thirty more to come. An article in the *Washington Statesman* from February 14, 1863, recorded that “despite the predictions of the county builders . . . that Walla Walla would go down with the rise of other points, its march in the scale of improvement has been constantly onward.” Through economic growth, Walla Walla had “doubled its number of inhabitants and its businesses.” The writer mentioned that some people believed the miners would pass over Walla Walla in favor of other areas. Yet in all actuality, Walla Walla “received a full share of the mining trade, and . . . has shared in all the prosperity . . . and experienced none of the adversities.” Walla Walla was fortunate in its location at the crossroads for much of this mining activity. From 1860 to 1862, the changes Walla Walla experienced were related directly to the movement of prospectors and settlers.

**Results of the Growth in the 1860s**

The quickly growing economy of the city created a political turmoil within the Washington Territory. Most of the settlement within the territory happened in eastern Washington due to Walla Walla. This caused a considerable movement away from the Pacific coast counties and into the interior of the territory. Walla Walla’s growing population helped it become the third largest county among the Washington Territory’s nineteen counties. Western Washington looked on with trepidation as Walla Walla grew from just a small trading outpost for goods from Portland to a leading city whose popularity grew to rival that of other cities.

With the new economic power of this rising city, people began to think of dividing the Washington Territory. Various newspapers claimed that Walla Walla was
the most logical and suitable choice as the capital for the Northwest interior.\textsuperscript{36} This caused anxiety on the western side of Washington, for the people there did not want to lose the valuable Walla Walla Valley. The political strife showed how economically important Walla Walla had become to the entire Pacific Northwest in the 1860s.

Then, in 1863, a change took place that would transform the Washington Territory forever. James Watt described this change in his narrative as “the utter inability of officials in distant Olympia to keep track of these transient mining camps, or enforce laws.”\textsuperscript{37} In March of 1863, the Washington Territory was split to create the new Idaho Territory. And not a year after Idaho’s formation, the Montana Territory was established in 1864.\textsuperscript{38} This effectively changed the outlook of the Washington Territory because now most of the large population that Walla Walla had access to was located in the Idaho and Montana territories. Again, Watt gives an idea of just how large the population had grown and where most of it was located. He found that from

1861 up to the spring of 1863 all these mines of Oro Fino, Pierce City, Salmon River, Boise Basin, Bannock Idaho, Bannock Montana, Virginia City, Helena were in Washington Territory, and the territorial population had suddenly expanded from 11,000 or 12,000 to over 60,000 people. Probably 25,000 of those were in what is now Idaho and a like number in what is now Montana.\textsuperscript{39}

This change in the structure of the Washington Territory, with the loss of the Idaho Territory, affected the significance Walla Walla would play in the future. Yet for the rest of the 1860s, the city would remain prominent in trading and supplying the area around it, and it would not stop the city’s growth right away.

In the \textit{Washington Statesman} on August 16, 1862, a writer noted that “a number of new business housed of various kinds have lately been established . . . Our merchants seem to have enough to do in supplying their customers . . . the streets are crowded
during the day. . . and in the evening, the crowd in the saloon [are] evidence that the town is fast filling up.”\textsuperscript{40} Walla Walla did not start out with endless economic possibilities. The area had to overcome drastic changes that faced many other cities. Walla Walla was lucky to endure.

Yet Walla Walla did much more than just prosper and grow. It influenced the entire eastern territory. One historian claimed that “the foundations of business in the commercial center of the Bitter Root valley were laid by the people who emigrated from the Walla Walla valley.”\textsuperscript{41} This shows that the economic growth of Walla Walla reached out beyond the city. Towns in Montana prospered and grew from their connections with Walla Walla. But to create this kind of growth, Walla Walla needed a push. The town could not have influenced so many others without a steady and increasing economy. This economy was supported by the mining rushes, which created the need for merchants, farmers, pack freighters, entertainers, and saloon-owners. Merchants hoped to find their niche and sell their goods to the sometimes rich and always needy miners. It was these entrepreneurial men and women who were “confident that their more certain rewards were better than attempting to grasp the gigantic prize won by only a few lucky miners.”\textsuperscript{42}

The interior Northwest mines had encouraged the quick growth of Walla Walla, making it a permanent and influential city. However, the mines would not last forever. If Walla Walla was to remain prominent in the Inland Empire and continue its economic growth, it would need to form connections with other cities. To build these links, Walla Walla depended on the coming of the railroads.
Notes


4 Schwantes, 128.


8 Patera, 11.

9 Pater, 13.


11 Watt, 27.


15 Watt, 10.

16 Watt, 11, 15.

17 McGregor., 21-22.
18 Schwantes, 131.

19 Ibid., 131-133.

20 Ficken, 86.


22 Schwantes, 133.


24 Ibid., 133.

25 Ficken, 63.


28 Lyman, 1:148.

29 Ibid., 148.

30 Ibid., 148.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ficken, 58.

35 Ibid., 63.

36 Ibid., 68-69.

37 Watt, 26.
38 Schwantes, 134.


42 Greever, viii.
Chapter 3
Laying the Tracks to the Twentieth Century

By the late 1860s, the citizens of Walla Walla recognized that in order to stay prominent in the area, they would need to expand their markets. The earliest means of transportation came from steamboats traveling up the Columbia River and stagecoaches, which would freight the goods into and out of Walla Walla. Soon monopolies were created around those two modes of transportation and the price to move goods skyrocketed. One such company that monopolized the steamboat industry along the Columbia was the Oregon Steam Navigation (O. S. N.). While for many years the companies played an important role for Walla Walla, it was not too long before people started to realize that they could not rely on just the river and stagecoaches to handle the amount of supplies coming to and from Walla Walla. Goods had to be moved quickly to reach more markets. Thus, the merchants and farmers began to take the first looks into developing a railway system.

The Beginning of the Walla Walla Railroad

The main railroad lines had not reached into the Washington Territory by the 1860s. But in 1862 came the first local mention of a railroad to connect the city of Walla Walla to the Columbia River. Many of the merchants and farmers who had prospered during the first mining rushes wanted to continue to grow. Some shrewd businessmen recognized the need to cut costs and move their goods faster in order to gain a greater profit. On May 3, 1862, in the Washington Statesman, a writer commented on Walla Walla’s past three years of success. The writer believed Walla Walla was “an example of rapid progress and thrift seldom surpassed and as it is fast become a center of supply and
an avenue of trade. . . . [The residents of Walla Walla should] put one more step forward and facilitate by every means in our power its progress and development, and thereby secure [its] permanency.”

Walla Walla needed to expand its power of trade. In the same article, the writer prompted the townspeople to follow what the rest of the country was doing and invest in a railroad. He stated that while building a railroad might cost the city anywhere from $750,000 to a million dollars, Walla Walla would earn back that amount in the next ten years with the increase of trade.

While a railroad was not built at this time, the idea began to grow inside many different minds. Yet it would not come to realization for some time.

Various new mining towns, which had appeared during the early 1860s, relied on Walla Walla for both their wheat and cattle. By 1864, Walla Walla had flourishing grain and cattle economies. From the city’s rich soil and plentiful grazing land came many of the mines’ primary supply of meat and flour. But starting in 1865, Walla Walla experienced a drastic change in its main trading outlets. At this time, the major mining rushes came to a hasty halt and with that came a decline in the need for supplies. This decline immediately hit the grain economy and is shown in the price of wheat, which plummeted from $1.25 a bushel in 1865 down to $0.30 in 1867. The small mining towns no longer required large herds of cattle or large amounts of flour. Instead, these towns began to become self-dependent and raise their own crops and cattle. For many areas, such as the Boise Valley, people began to depend on farmers living in that area to supply the local market. They did not want to pay the exuberant prices to freight in the goods from Walla Walla. Farmers were faced with overproduction as Walla Walla started to
lose its interior market, which it had relied on for so long. This was a sign that Walla Walla needed to look for a new outlet for its local products.

In 1867, Walla Walla farmers looked west to ship their crops. They began to compete with the Willamette Valley farmers by shipping grain down the Columbia to Portland, where the wheat would then travel all over the world. Sending goods down the river should have been the way Walla Walla farmers minimized the decline in the city’s economy. But as stated earlier, the O. S. N. controlled the Columbia River and was able to charge the farmers high rates for shipping the grain. The businessmen in Walla Walla realized that they needed to look more actively for a new way to transport their goods.

One man led the way in finally creating a railroad for Walla Walla. This man was Dr. Dorsey S. Baker. (Figure 7) He was a man of considerable fortune who was continuously looking for new ways to help his community grow. After living in Portland and traveling down to the gold rushes in California, Dr. Baker arrived in Walla Walla in 1860 to begin his medical practice. But medicine was not the only area of business Dr. Baker dabbled in through his life. He also became involved in the riverboat business for a time and started a general store, D. S. Baker and Company. This became known as Baker and Boyer Company when he went into business with his brother-in-law, J. F. Boyer. Dr. Baker and Boyer even started the very first bank in the whole Washington Territory in 1869. It was named Baker-Boyer National Bank of Walla Walla. And after 140 years it is still in business in Walla Walla today.

In 1868, Dr. Baker incorporated the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad. He was joined in this venture by A. H. Reynolds, I. T. Reese, A. Kyger, J. A Lasater, J. D. Mix, B. Scheidman, and W. H. Newell in the hopes of creating a railroad that would
Figure 7

Portrait of Dr. Dorsey S. Baker,

Courtesy of Baker Boyer Bank website,

http://www.bakerboyer.com/content/about_us/our_founders
connect Walla Walla to Wallula and consequently the Columbia River. This railroad would be an expensive task. An article in the editorial of the *Walla Walla Statesman* in April of 1868 stated an approximate cost of $750,000.\(^\text{11}\) The cost was very large and the city had yet to receive permission from Congress to begin to build the railroad. Thus, another year would pass before the idea of building a railroad was considered.

For nearly nine months, the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad stood at a standstill. The lack of finances and materials for the railroad, the need for permission from Congress, and disgruntled townspeople all added to the tense situation. On February 23, 1869, the House of Representatives Bill Number 1041 granted to Walla Walla County the ability to issue bonds in order to raise $300,000 to help pay for the railroad costs if it was approved by a county election. The bill also granted the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad one hundred feet of land on either side of the tracks.\(^\text{12}\) While it was a huge accomplishment that Congress passed the bill, when it came to the county to confirm the decision the voting was delayed for a number of years.

During the wait, a survey team from the Northern Pacific Railroad came to Walla Walla in order to decide if the area was suitable for a branch of the rail line. The leader of the survey team, Thomas H. Canfield, spoke to the citizens about the possibility that the Northern Pacific could choose Walla Walla as a stopping point.\(^\text{13}\) It appears that people of Walla Walla took that as a promise that the Northern Pacific would come soon, so the city did not feel rushed to build their own small line. This idea could have been influenced by the success of the larger railroads occurring in other parts of the nation at this time. For example, it was in 1869 that the Union Pacific and Central Pacific rail lines joined together at Promontory, Utah, to create the first transcontinental railroad.\(^\text{14}\) This
alliance created the assumption that soon a northern transcontinental line would be built by its obvious leader, the Northern Pacific Railroad. The chance that Walla Walla could connect to this transcontinental line seemed to push the need for a small line out of most peoples’ minds, except that of Dr. Baker. Thus the 1860s ended with little progress in the development of a new transportation system.

**Moving Forward**

Walla Walla entered the 1870s still holding a prominent position in the Pacific Northwest. In the early part of the decade, Walla Walla acted as a gateway to the richest grain belt in the Pacific Northwest. It reached from the Umatilla River in the south to the Palouse River in the north. Local merchants had turned their full attention to providing for the farmers in the area. Soon, the prosperity of agriculture drew families to the area. According to the 1870 census, Walla Walla County had a population of 5,102 people and in the city of Walla Walla lived 1,600 citizens. Walla Walla had grown from the increase of settlers moving to farming land in a way very much like the mining rushes in the previous decade. (Figures 8) Walla Walla used this movement of people to its advantage and continued to promote the city to immigrants and farmers as a starting point to gather supplies before heading out to the new farming lands. Walla Walla not only provided supplies for the farmers, but acted as a mid-way point for the shipping of the goods to larger markets. The grain in Walla Walla traveled as far away as Europe, and from 1869 to 1870, when the Montana wheat crop failed, the people in need turned to Walla Walla. But while Walla Walla still experienced new rushes and growth, it continued to be plagued by the same problem: transportation and high freight charges. Walla Walla could not experience greater changes until the railroad came.
Figure 8

Picture of 1st and Main Street in Walla Walla circa 1886

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http://contentdm.whitman.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/arc&CISOPTR=735&CISOBBOX=1&REC=2
Finally, on September 18, 1871, the county of Walla Walla decided to vote on Bill 1041, which would allow the city to start building the railroad. The incorporators of the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad, and especially Dr. Baker, had been waiting for this time to come. But sadly, the news they received was not what they had hoped to hear. The county did not pass the bill with a two-thirds majority; it had lost by eighteen votes. Dr. Baker could no longer stand the indecision and hesitation of the city, so he decided to build the railroad using his own personal money. After the city failed to pass the bill, Dr. Baker took control of the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad and selected new members to help lead this project. Dr. Baker was appointed president and W. Stevens, I. T. Reese, L. McManis, H. M. Chase, H. P. Issacs, B. L. Sharpstein, O. Hull, and his brother-in-law, J. F. Boyer, joined him. These men gave Dr. Baker the support he needed to begin his new enterprise.

In May of 1871, Dr. Baker obtained a survey from General James Tilton, a civil engineer, on the costs to build the railroad. The survey had been conducted in order to get a detailed description of the land the railroad was to travel over. General Tilton found that the distance from the city of Walla Walla to Wallula, which was to be the stopping point of the railroad, was thirty-two miles long. In the survey, General Tilton seems confident that if Walla Walla could build a railroad out to Wallula, then it would be able to connect with the Pacific Northern Railroad when it finally came through the area. General Tilton predicted that Walla Walla would experience a “rapid and permanent development as soon as [people] can have cheap and rapid transportation. . . . By the way of Columbia river, the Northern Pacific Railroad, and by means of your own branch road, I have known no region of similar extent on this coast of superior advantages or promise, to the
present and future inhabitants.” By the end of the survey, General Tilton found that the cost of the completed road would be around $674,000.

After Dr. Baker gained control of the company, he immediately started to construct the railroad. By December of 1871, actual construction began. Dr. Baker pushed his workers to move quickly because he did not want Walla Walla to continue on without a railroad line to transport goods. By April of 1872, eighteen miles of the road had been graded. In the years of 1872 to 1873, the company experienced various problems, especially when the Columbia River was too low to move the logs, needed to build the grade, down to the workers. Finally, in 1873, the actual tracks were laid and every day at least one third of a mile of track was completed. It took a full year to lay sixteen miles of track. By 1874, the railroad had reached the small town of Touchet. From the Touchet station, the train began to haul wheat down to Wallula and Dr. Baker contemplated stopping the tracks at Touchet because Walla Walla had failed to show support of the incoming railroad.

In order to dredge up support to bring the railroad all the way into the city, the local newspaper, Spirit of the West, encouraged the citizens of Walla Walla to offer support to Dr. Baker. On August 28, 1874, a published article reminded the people of the high prices for transportation of goods that they suffered because of the O. S. N. In the article, the writer stated that

The people of Walla Walla are now afforded an excellent opportunity to rid themselves of the odious monopoly known as the Oregon Steam Navigation Co., a corporation of Portland capitalist who have been squeezing the very life-blood out of our Eastern neighbors for nearly a score of years. . . . Now is the time for effort. . . . Will the people of the finest agricultural district on the Pacific Coast – and probably equal to any on the continent – allow themselves to be bottled up and set away to mature by age?
Walla Walla could not afford to stay at a stand-still if it really wanted to grow economically. The newspapers in the city helped promote the railroad, and Dr. Baker intended to use the publicity to gather funds to finish the project.

Dr. Baker lacked the personal funds to finish the railroad all the way to Walla Walla. To complete the last twenty miles of track, he needed money to pay for the cargo of steel rails traveling to Walla Walla. In January of 1875, he came to the city with a proposition. Dr. Baker wished for the city to purchase $75,000 worth of stock from the Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad. But the people did not see the stock as a good investment and offered to pay only $20,000. After negotiations, Dr. Baker received $25,000 and three acres of land to build a station. Overall, the railroad cost Dr. Baker $356,134.84. Finally, after fifteen long years, Walla Walla had built a railroad line that connected the city to the Columbia River.

The Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad proved to be very successful. In the first year after the completion, the O. S. N. picked up 16,766 tons of freight from Wallula. Out of this 15,266 tons came by rail, while only 1,500 was hauled by pack animals. The O. S. N. also delivered 4,054 tons of goods to Walla Walla, only 513 tons of which was not transported by the railroad. Overall, from the years 1874 to 1878, the railroad exported 83,614 tons of grain and wheat to the Columbia River and imported 26,174 tons of merchandise. Dr. Baker’s railroad strengthened Walla Walla’s importance as a regional gateway to the rich farmland and it helped the city continue to grow during the 1870s. The Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad was the first step in building a rail system in Washington. (Figure 9) But the line was only a small fragment of the system.
that was needed and soon the larger transcontinental railroads challenged Walla Walla’s status as the region’s trading center.

**The Giants of the Age**

During the 1860s and early 1870s, Washington Territory, for the most part, was excluded from the huge railroad boom. By the 1880s, there were four major railroad companies in the process of expanding their operations to the West: the Union Pacific, the Central Pacific, the Great Northern, and the Northern Pacific. Out of the four, the Union Pacific and the Northern Pacific were the two major competitors in the Pacific Northwest for most of the 1880s. The Great Northern completed its own transcontinental line from St. Paul to Seattle by 1893. It would be the last major railroad construction in the Pacific Northwest. And at first, Walla Walla, with Dr. Baker’s railroad, was a desired location because in the 1880s it was the largest city in the territory. It had a population of 3,588, which meant the city had more than doubled in the past ten years. At that point in time, railroad companies saw Walla Walla as the city with which to build a connection.

In 1879, an eastern capitalist by the name of Henry Villard gained control of the O. S. N. and reworked it into the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company (OR&N). The company’s primary purpose was to move wheat from Walla Walla Valley and the Palouse region to Portland. During this same year, Dr. Baker sold sixth sevenths of his company to OR&N, which hoped to expand the Baker Railroad along the Columbia all the way to Portland. But OR&N was still vulnerable to the larger railroads – that is until in 1881, when Villard secretly gained control of the Northern Pacific. He wanted the
Figure 9

Courtesy of Whitman College Digital Archives,

Northern Pacific line to run down through Wallula. Villard extended the line down to Wallula through a newly incorporated town, Spokane.

Little did the people living in the area know that within the next ten years the small and unrecognized town of Spokane would become the regional railroad center for the interior Northwest. By 1883, Walla Walla lost its title as the largest city and the main trading center in the Washington Territory. Spokane provided a better rail service and connection point. But Spokane would never have as extensive of a reach as Walla Walla had once accomplished. Spokane, even though it was known as the Inland Empire’s Queen City, had to share its economic presence with other towns such as Walla Walla, Yakima, Lewiston, and Pasco. The loss of Walla Walla’s hope to attract a major railroad would begin a drastic change in the city’s growth.

During this same time, the Union Pacific Railroad company wanted to compete with the Northern Pacific for northwest markets. At this time, the Northern Pacific was faced with bankruptcy and was struggling to maintain its status. The Union Pacific noticed the struggles of the Northern Pacific and decided to take action. To tap into the Pacific Northwest and its growing resources, the Union Pacific had one of its subsidiaries, the Oregon Short Line (OSL), complete a railroad from southern Idaho to Portland. The OSL connected with one of the Union Pacific main lines in Utah and traveled up into southern Idaho through Boise. This rail line would then run along the southern part of the Columbia River all the way to Portland. It was completed in 1884, which was the same year that Villard’s empire that he built with the Northern Pacific and the OR&N fell apart and the two lines separated. The Union Pacific quickly picked up the OR&N line to
strengthen its route to Portland. When the Union Pacific took control of OR&N, a major change occurred throughout the area.

Then in 1887, the area around the Columbia River was divided. After reworking the company, the Northern Pacific started up again with the goal to regain territory in the Pacific Northwest. But it had lost its connection to Portland. The Northern Pacific decided to build its line through the Yakima Valley and across Stampede Pass to reach Puget Sound. It would take control of all areas north of the Snake River, including the upper part of the Columbia and the Palouse region. The Union Pacific received rights to the areas south of the Columbia River and most of southern Idaho because of its strengthened ties to Portland. But this division left Walla Walla unhappy. It could no longer depend on competition between the two lines to keep the rates low. Walla Walla was now caught in an area that held little appeal to the major railroad companies.

End of the Line

As Walla Walla entered the 1890s, it faced difficult circumstances as the rest of the territory rejoiced. At the end of 1889, Washington had gained statehood. The city had failed to become a central point with the railroads. While it had expected the Northern Pacific to choose Walla Walla as a main branch, instead that role landed with the town of Wallula. Walla Walla had also failed to connect with areas to the north, thus allowing Spokane to grow. Yet Walla Walla was not about to just fade away into the dust. By 1890, the city had a population of 4,709. The city was still surrounded by rich and well-developed farming land. It had two major banks, three daily newspapers, was chosen as the site for the state penitentiary, and was home to Whitman College, which
was the oldest educational institution in the state. While it had lost its prominent reputation as the main trading center, Walla Walla still retained its desire to grow.

Walla Walla would be one of the few areas that did not suffer drastically during the economic crash in 1893. During this time wheat prices plummeted, most of the railroad companies went bankrupt, and immigration numbers plunged. While many areas suffered, especially those that were involved in major wheat production, Walla Walla escaped without great loss. One thing that could have helped Walla Walla was its decreased dependence on mines and silver to ensure economic growth. Walla Walla was not as dependent on silver as the towns that were adjacent to the mines. For example, Spokane depended on the mines in Idaho to maintain its economic status. Walla Walla no longer supported that strong of a connection, so it did not face as hard of times as other areas around the Northwest. For the next four years, Washington state would experience some prosperous, but mainly hard, times. It was not until 1897 that the depression finally ended. Soon wheat prices began to rise, railroads refinanced and restructured themselves, and new people started to move west once again to search of land.

Walla Walla began to fade slowly from the limelight. No longer an area that people rushed to, the city lost its luster gained from its heyday. Walla Walla had always relied on the movement of goods, animals, and people to prosper and grow. Without a connection to the railroads, Walla Walla had no way to build a strong relationship with the larger cities. Walla Walla would now become a minor city in a state that turned its focus to its west coast.
Notes

1 Meinig 217
2 Ibid., 217
4 Ibid.
5 Meinig, 221, 225.
7 Ibid., 38.
10 Baker, 9.
11 Editorial, Walla Walla Statesman, April 12, 1868.
12 Weis, 8.
13 Ibid., 10.
14 Schwantes, 169.
15 Bennet, 78; Baker, 10.
16 Edwards, 39.
17 Meinig 241, 233.
18 Baker, 9.
19 Weis, 15.

21 Ibid., 6.

22 Ibid., 7.

23 Weis, 16-19.


25 Baker, 10.

26 Lyman, 1:169-170.

27 Baker, 11.

28 Schwantes, 188-189.

29 Ibid., 189.

30 Meinig, 248.

31 Schwantes, 186, 188.

32 Ibid, 240.

33 Edwards, 29.

34 Schwantes, 188-189.

35 Meinig, 270.

36 Schwantes 255.

37 Schwantes 235; Meinig 325-326.

38 Meinig, 365-366.

39 Schwantes, 264-265.

40 Meinig, 372.
Conclusion

While Walla Walla may have lost the public’s attention to the cities on the West Coast, this did not lead to the end of the town. It continued to influence the surrounding region, though not as it once had. Through Walla Walla’s process of economic growth and development, it was able to evolve into a town that would survive through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

From the 1850s to 1900, Walla Walla experienced its groundbreaking start. The first fifty years were filled with many events that helped the town establish itself in Washington. The three encompassing events—Fort Walla Walla, the multiple mining rushes, and finally the railroads—aided the town in establishing a strong base.

Walla Walla would not become a large city, such as Seattle, Denver, or Salt Lake; instead, the town took on a lead role for its region. Based on connections it built during the mining rushes the town became a regional transportation hub. While Walla Walla was not a major railroad center, it was still connected to the lines and that offered a chance to move goods from the nearby areas to the larger cities. Walla Walla also acted as a regional banking center. Baker-Boyer Bank, the oldest bank in the state, continued to provide its services to the entire region. The town also became an educational hub with the creation of Whitman College and Walla Walla University. The colleges drew in people by offering an excellent education. The town also continued to thrive with the presence of the government. Walla Walla would become the county seat for the region, as well as home to the state penitentiary. These ensured significant government funding and employment for Walla Walla. But the most crucial factor securing Walla Walla’s position to survive was its agricultural prominence. Walla Walla was situated in a vital part of the
area known as the “Banana Belt of the Northwest.” The climate of the Walla Walla Valley, which was not too dry or too wet, as well as the richness of its soil, would continuously provide farmers with a golden opportunity. Through agriculture, Walla Walla would endure.

All of these five major factors would add to Walla Walla’s ability to continue to grow, though just at a slower pace than before. The amazing changes that happened in those first fifty years were just the start. And perhaps the fact that Walla Walla did not become a major railroad hub enabled the town to discover its true importance. The town could focus on using its resources to gain prominence through agriculture. To this day, agriculture is key to Walla Walla’s economy. How would those farmers, who were planting thousands of acres of wheat in the nineteenth century, ever guess that Walla Walla would one day become the site of more than a hundred wineries, as it is today?
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