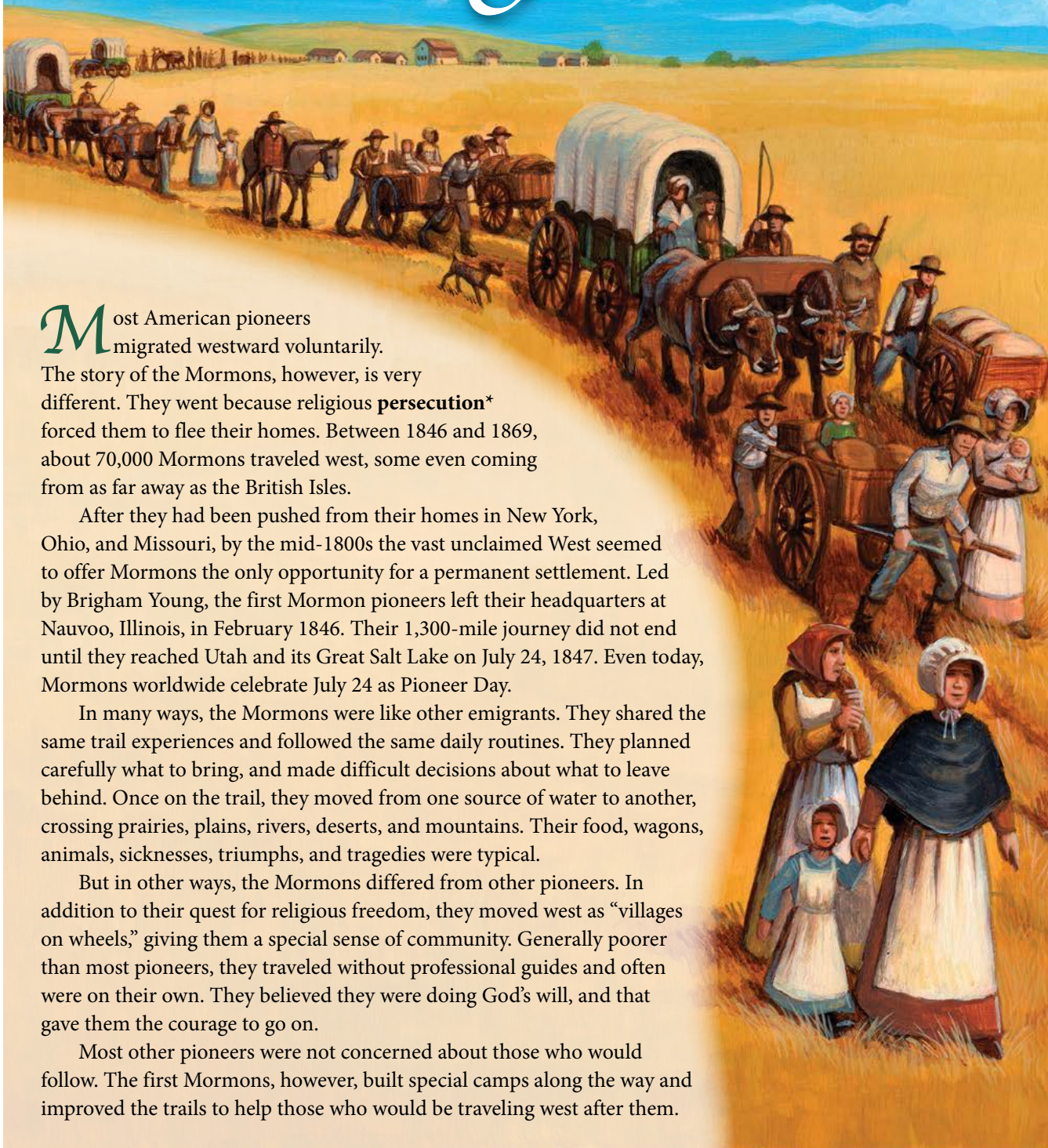


# Mormon Migration



**M**ost American pioneers migrated westward voluntarily.

The story of the Mormons, however, is very different. They went because religious **persecution\*** forced them to flee their homes. Between 1846 and 1869, about 70,000 Mormons traveled west, some even coming from as far away as the British Isles.

After they had been pushed from their homes in New York, Ohio, and Missouri, by the mid-1800s the vast unclaimed West seemed to offer Mormons the only opportunity for a permanent settlement. Led by Brigham Young, the first Mormon pioneers left their headquarters at Nauvoo, Illinois, in February 1846. Their 1,300-mile journey did not end until they reached Utah and its Great Salt Lake on July 24, 1847. Even today, Mormons worldwide celebrate July 24 as Pioneer Day.

In many ways, the Mormons were like other emigrants. They shared the same trail experiences and followed the same daily routines. They planned carefully what to bring, and made difficult decisions about what to leave behind. Once on the trail, they moved from one source of water to another, crossing prairies, plains, rivers, deserts, and mountains. Their food, wagons, animals, sicknesses, triumphs, and tragedies were typical.

But in other ways, the Mormons differed from other pioneers. In addition to their quest for religious freedom, they moved west as “villages on wheels,” giving them a special sense of community. Generally poorer than most pioneers, they traveled without professional guides and often were on their own. They believed they were doing God’s will, and that gave them the courage to go on.

Most other pioneers were not concerned about those who would follow. The first Mormons, however, built special camps along the way and improved the trails to help those who would be traveling west after them.

\***Persecution** means oppression or ill treatment based on religion, race, or beliefs.



**FAST FACT**

By the spring of 1847, the Mormons had built more than 80 sprawling farm towns throughout southwestern Iowa.

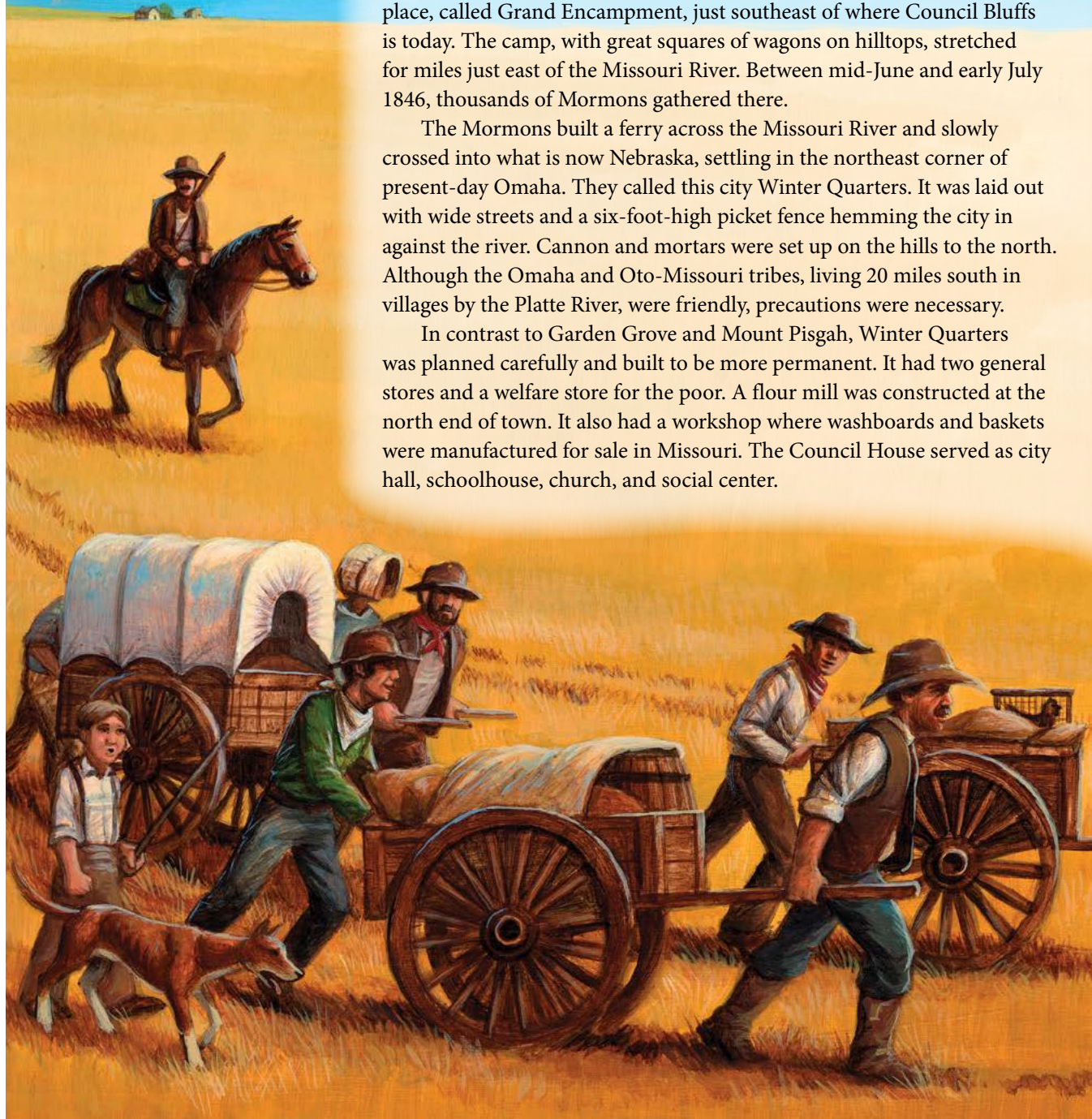
In south-central Iowa, for example, the Mormons established two rest and supply stations, Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, 33 miles apart. They planted more than 2,000 acres of crops and built log homes at these stations, which saved the lives of many later Mormons who had accidents or fell sick while crossing Iowa.

The Mormons also were careful to kill animals only for food, not for sport, and they were mindful of the environment, refusing to chop down scarce trees and avoiding overgrazing. They made an effort to treat fairly the Native Americans they met along the trail. Because of this, they seldom had any trouble with the tribes.

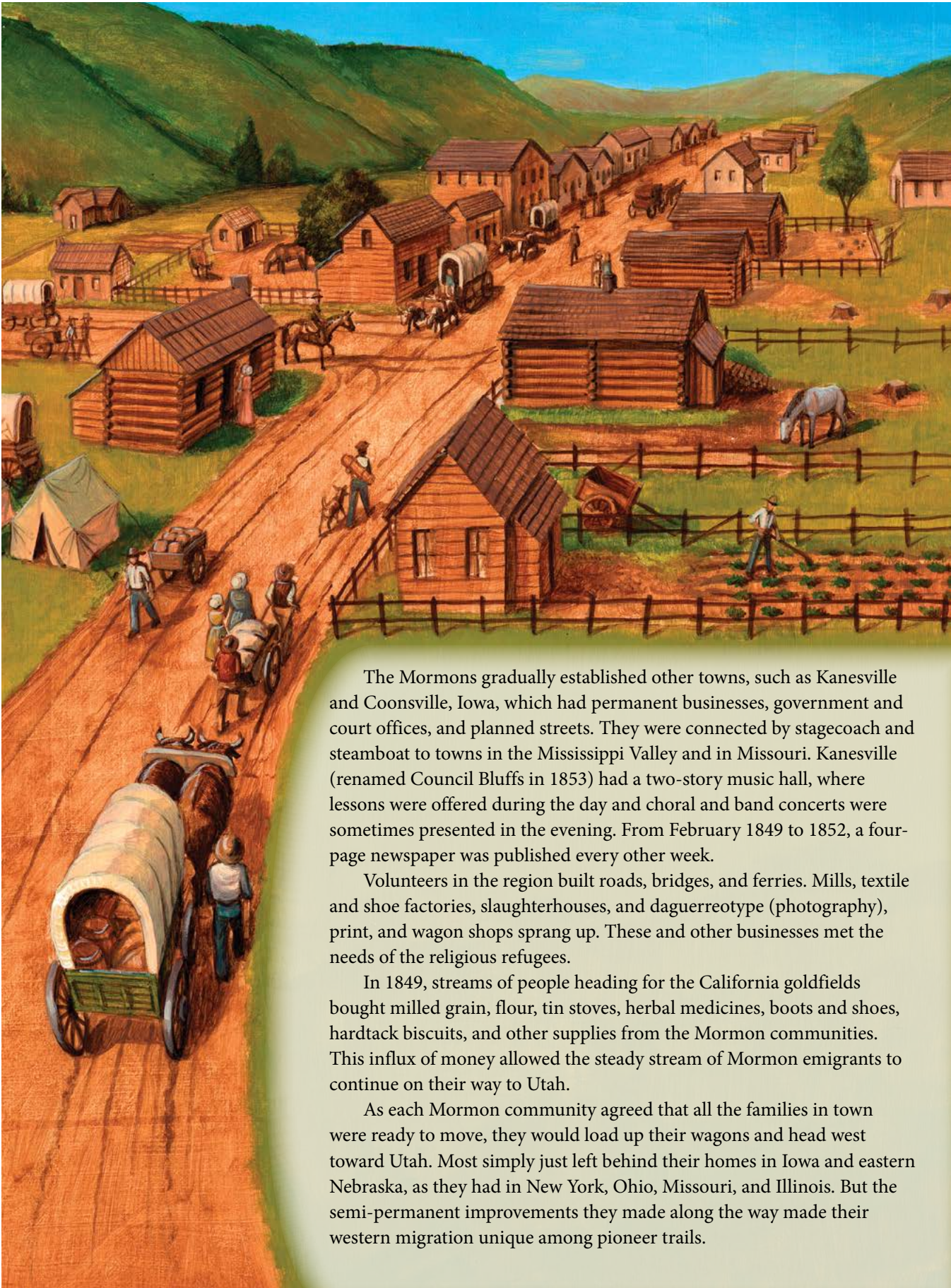
As they moved farther west in Iowa, the Mormons clustered in one place, called Grand Encampment, just southeast of where Council Bluffs is today. The camp, with great squares of wagons on hilltops, stretched for miles just east of the Missouri River. Between mid-June and early July 1846, thousands of Mormons gathered there.

The Mormons built a ferry across the Missouri River and slowly crossed into what is now Nebraska, settling in the northeast corner of present-day Omaha. They called this city Winter Quarters. It was laid out with wide streets and a six-foot-high picket fence hemming the city in against the river. Cannon and mortars were set up on the hills to the north. Although the Omaha and Oto-Missouri tribes, living 20 miles south in villages by the Platte River, were friendly, precautions were necessary.

In contrast to Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, Winter Quarters was planned carefully and built to be more permanent. It had two general stores and a welfare store for the poor. A flour mill was constructed at the north end of town. It also had a workshop where washboards and baskets were manufactured for sale in Missouri. The Council House served as city hall, schoolhouse, church, and social center.







The Mormons gradually established other towns, such as Kanessville and Coonsville, Iowa, which had permanent businesses, government and court offices, and planned streets. They were connected by stagecoach and steamboat to towns in the Mississippi Valley and in Missouri. Kanessville (renamed Council Bluffs in 1853) had a two-story music hall, where lessons were offered during the day and choral and band concerts were sometimes presented in the evening. From February 1849 to 1852, a four-page newspaper was published every other week.

Volunteers in the region built roads, bridges, and ferries. Mills, textile and shoe factories, slaughterhouses, and daguerreotype (photography), print, and wagon shops sprang up. These and other businesses met the needs of the religious refugees.

In 1849, streams of people heading for the California goldfields bought milled grain, flour, tin stoves, herbal medicines, boots and shoes, hardtack biscuits, and other supplies from the Mormon communities. This influx of money allowed the steady stream of Mormon emigrants to continue on their way to Utah.

As each Mormon community agreed that all the families in town were ready to move, they would load up their wagons and head west toward Utah. Most simply just left behind their homes in Iowa and eastern Nebraska, as they had in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. But the semi-permanent improvements they made along the way made their western migration unique among pioneer trails.



**A Mormon family at their home in the Great Salt Lake Valley in 1869.**



**FAST FACT**

**Waiilatpu** is a Native American word meaning “place of rye grass.”

## *A Higher Call*

NARCISSA WHITMAN was one of the first women to make the difficult journey overland to the Oregon country in the early 1830s. She wasn't part of a wagon train, though. She and her husband, Marcus, were Presbyterian missionaries. They believed they were answering a call from God to bring Christianity to the Native Americans living in the “uncivilized wilderness.”

The Whitmans built their mission at **Waiilatpu**, near present-day Walla Walla, Washington. At first the local Cayuse Indians welcomed the Whitmans. The chief gave them land, and the Whitmans built a home and a schoolroom, planted a garden and an orchard, and held religious services for the Cayuse. The Cayuse were used to wandering in search of their food, but Marcus taught them how to plow and plant. Soon, the Cayuse began to see the value of staying in one place.

Over the next few years, a growing number of emigrants wound down the trail and stopped at the Waiilatpu mission. After the difficult journey over the Rocky Mountains, the travelers needed to buy food and repair their equipment. The mission became an important stop before pioneers continued on the last leg of their journey into the Willamette Valley. The Cayuse became angry at the steady stream of white people crossing their lands.

In the fall of 1847, a wagon train arrived, carrying many people sick with measles. Before long, all the children and some adults at the mission became ill. The disease spread among the Cayuse, who began to die in great numbers. They believed that Marcus was deliberately poisoning them so that he could take their land.

On the morning of November 29, 1847, a small group of Cayuse appeared at the crowded mission and killed the Whitmans and 11 others. Twelve people escaped, and 49 others were held captive for a month before being ransomed. The mission's days came to a close. But during the 11 years the Whitmans spent at Waiilatpu, some 13,000 emigrants had turned a trapper's path into the famous Oregon Trail.

