

*** Date: February 18, 1839 ***

*** Author: Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Mrs. Elvira Perkins ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 114 ***

*** The original document starts below this line ***

Wieletpoo, Feb. 18th, 1839.

My Dear Sister: – I received your letter last week, although written in Dec. We had some time ago the pleasure of reading of your husband's visit to the Willamette, in an account which he gives the particulars relative to the protracted meeting there. Be assured we rejoiced with you and angels in heaven at such a glorious display of the power of our God, and stretch out our hearts to desire a like blessing upon ourselves and our heathen neighbors.

I am much interested in the people at Vancouver, and am pleased to hear of the ladies' improvement, and earnestly hope the good work may extend to that place also, and that your determination there may result in great good to many souls.

The Lord will take care of those Roman priests there. It is doubtless for some wise purpose he has permitted them to enter this country. May we be wise and on the alert, and show ourselves as true, faithful, energetic in our Master's work as they do, and we shall have no cause to fear, for there are more for us than against us. I trust it has had some influence upon us, their presence in this country; at least we feel it our duty to use every possible effort to obtain the language of the people, and not having as good an

opportunity amid the cares of our family as we could wish, we, husband, self and little Alice, left our dwelling and went about sixty-five miles to a camp of Indians, in January, and was gone nearly three weeks, and received much benefit. Previous to this, husband had been over to Brother S.'s to attend a protracted meeting, held at the same time with yours at the W. And now we are on the eve of another departure. We expect to-morrow morn to start on a visit to Brother S.'s to attend a meeting of the mission, and also another protracted meeting with the Indians, when it is expected that nearly all the Nez Perces will be present. We feel deeply anxious for our people, and it seems sometimes as if the blessing was almost within reach for them, but it is withheld, and doubtless because the Lord sees that we are not prepared to receive it. O, for that deep humility, strong faith, repentance and union of soul in prayer which was the secret of success in your meeting, and which characterizes every revival of religion. But I must be excused from writing more at this time. Shall want to hear from you just as soon as you shall have arrived home. Should judge from sister Walker's letter from you that the dear little babe, Henry Johnson, had got considerable hold of its mother's affections already. Precious trust, that, dear sister – an immortal mind to rear for Eternity. The Lord bless you and give you grace and wisdom to train that child for His glory, both in this world and hereafter, and make you feel continually that, what ever you do for him, you do it as belonging to the Lord, as given to Him and only a lent blessing to you, to train up for Him. But more of this another time.

With kind regards to your husband and Brother Lee, who we hope is again cheered with the society of his fellow associates by this time, and a kiss for the little one,

I am your affectionate sister,

N. Whitman.

P. S. – Mrs. W. will tell you her story herself as she has more time than I at present.

N. W.

Rev. Mrs. Perkins,

Wascopum.

Care of

Lieut. P. C. Pambrun,

Fort Walla Walla.

*** End of the original document from February 18, 1839 ***

*** Date: March 23, 1839 ***

*** Author: Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Mrs. Elvira Perkins ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 116 ***

*** Comments: The transcriber for the “Transactions” said that Mrs. Gray’s son was
“Capt. J. H. D. Gray, of Astoria.” (Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 118) ***

*** The original document starts below this line ***

Wioletpoo, March 23, 1839.

My Dear Sister: – Yours of the 8th inst. I received the evening of my return to this place from Clearwater. It had been waiting me but a day or two, I believe. I am happy to hear that you are once more so near us again. I received a hint from Sister White in her last letter that yourself and husband were on the way, or soon would be, to pay us a visit. I fear my last letter informing you of my absence has discouraged your coming. Had I received the least intimation that it were possible for you to visit us while our sisters were all here, I would have been at home without fail. The open winter and spring has made it more favourable for them to leave for the upper station much earlier than was expected. They left the first of March just before I returned. We met them, however, on the Palouse, after they had been out five days. All was well; the babe was enduring the journey as well as could be expected. I hope you will still think of coming this season. We shall be happy to see you.

I visited Mrs. Pambrun on Monday of this week – found her in much better health than I once feared she ever would be again. She certainly talks English very well. I found myself able to obtain all the information concerning Vancouver I could wish. Maria has been with me a short time, and for her sake I would have been happy to have had her remain longer; but she could not be persuaded to stay from her mother any longer. We have a daughter of Mr. McKay's with us now – for little more than a year. She improves very much and promises to make a valuable person if she can be kept long enough.

You wished me to write something about my little girl. I do not know what to tell you than to say she is a large, healthy and strong child, two years old the 14th of this month. She talks both Nez Perces and English quite fluently, and is much inclined to read her book with the children of the family, and sings all our Nez Perces hymns and several in English. Her name is Alice Clarissa. You dreamed of seeing her, you say. I hope it will be a reality soon, for I am very anxious to see young Henry Johnson, too. I am glad he learns to bear the yoke so well, not in his youth, but in his infancy. Exposures in journeyings in this country appear to be a benefit rather than an injury to our children. I have taken several with Alice, and they have generally been in the winter. When she was nine months old we went to Brother Spalding's to attend upon our sister at the birth of their child. It was in November, and we returned in December by way of Snake river, in a canoe. It was a tedious voyage, but we neither of us received any injury.

We intend to be very free from worldly cares this season, and apply ourselves entirely to the missionary work of studying the language and teaching. After our successful trial of last winter's encamping with the Indians husband feels he has no

excuse for not taking me again and again, and I can make no objection, notwithstanding it would be far easier for me to stay at home with my child, and perhaps better for her; but the roving habits of the Indians make it necessary for us to either do so, or else spend the greater part of our time alone, during their absence from the Station. Husband is appointed to commence an out-station on the Snake river at the mouth of the Tukanon, and besides spending some time there during the fishing season, we intend to go to Grand Round with the Kayuses.

Brother and Sister Smith will probably go somewhere in the heart of the Nez Perce country, beyond Brother Spalding's, in order to commence translating the Scriptures immediately. We find work enough to do for all hands, and our daily prayer is that God will pour out His spirit on these benighted minds and turn their darkness into light, and make them His.

I hope you will continue to write often and freely. I do not see how you get along and learn so many languages. What is the particular benefit? We hear many spoken, but we intend to learn only one, and make that the general one for the country. We are all enjoying good health. Received a letter from Sister Spalding saying that Sister Gray was happily the mother of a little son – had a remarkably short and easy sickness and is doing well. The babe weighed nine pounds.

Please give my kind regards to your husband and Brother Lee. Hope he finds the monotony of Wascopam much changed by the return of its former occupants, particularly when there is such a pleasing addition.

Yours in love,

N. Whitman.

Rev. Mrs. Perkins,

Wascopam.

*** End of the original document from March 23, 1839 ***

*** Date: May 17, 1839 ***

*** Authors: Dr. Marcus Whitman

Mrs. Narcissa Whitman

Ms. Alice Clarissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Ms. Jane Prentiss ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 118 ***

*** The original document starts below this line: ***

Wioletpoo, Walla Walla River, Oregon Territory,

May 17th, 1839.

My Dear Jane: – This is a late hour for me to commence my home correspondence. Yesterday Mr. Ermatinger, who commands the expedition instead of Mr. McLeod and McKay, left here, after spending a night with us, for the mountains. We have felt much uncertainty about letters sent this way reaching you, this year. There is some doubt in Mr. E's mind about his being able to go as far as the American Rendevous; if he does not, there probably will be no one to take them and bear them on, and it must be a known hand, too, for it is not safe to trust letters to those reckless beings who inhabit the Rocky Mountains. Besides this reason, we have been so much on the wing since the first day of January, that it has not been easy to write. If you have received my fall letters, they will show you where and how we were situated for the winter. In December, just three months after the arrival of the re-enforcement, Mrs. Walker gave birth to a fine son, here in our house. Mr. Smith had but just removed into the new house built last fall and

winter after my husband's return from Vancouver. She did not recover without three relapses; suffered much from sore breasts and nipples, and what to me would be the greatest affliction, no nipples at all. Her poor babe had to depend upon a foreign native nurse or milk from the cows.

Mrs. Gray had a son born in March, the twentieth – recovered in a short time.

I said to you that we had been on the wing. January the first day, husband started to go to Brother Spalding's to attend a protracted meeting; after the close, and on his return, he formed a plan of going and living with the Indians for the benefit of having free access to the language and to be free from care and company. He had no difficulty to persuade me to accompany him, for I was nearly exhausted, both in body and mind, in the labour and care of our numerous family. Accordingly we left home on the 23rd of January. It was about fifty miles from our place; we arrived on the third day; had a pleasant journey and quite warm for the season of the year; we slept in a tent and made a fire before the mouth of it. We had not been there but two or three days before it became very cold and snowed some. This with the smoke made Alice cry some, and we were obliged to put up a lodge around the fire at the mouth of the tent to prevent the smoke from troubling us. While there I attempted to write you about us, but was soon obliged to give it up. I will make one extract from what I did write:

"Sab. at Tukanon, Jan. 27, 1839. – This has been a day of peculiar interest here. Could you have been an eye witness of the scenes you would, as I do, have rejoiced in being thus privileged. The morning worship at daybreak I did not attend. At midday I was present. Husband talked to them of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; all listend

with eager attention. After prayer and singing, an opportunity was given for those who had heavy hearts under a sense of sin, and only those, to speak if they wished it. For a few moments all sat in silence; soon a prominent and intelligent man named Timothy broke the silence with sobs weeping. He arose, spoke of his great wickedness, and how very black his heart was; how weak and insufficient he was of himself to effect his own salvation; that his only dependence was in the blood of Christ to make him clean and save his soul from sin and hell. He was followed by a brother, who spoke much to the same effect. Next came the wives of the first and of the second, who seemed to manifest deep feelings. Several others followed; one in particular, while confessing her sins, her tears fell to the ground so copiously that I was reminded of the weeping "Mary who washed her Saviour's feet with her tears." All manifested much deep feeling; some in loud sobs and tears; others in anxious and solemn countenance. You can better imagine my feelings than I can describe them on witnessing such a scene in heathen lands. They had but recently come from the meeting at Brother Spalding's. We know not their hearts or motives of action, but our sincere prayer is that they all may be gathered to His fold as the children of His flock.

"O, my dear Jane, could you see us here this beautiful eve, the full moon shining in all her splendor, clear, yet freezing cold, my little one sleeping by my side, husband at worship with the people within hearing, and I sitting in the "door of the tent" writing, with my usual clothing except a shawl, and handkerchief on my head, and before me a large comfortable fire in the open air. Do you think we suffer? No, dear Jane; I have not realized so much enjoyment for a long time as I have since I have been here. I know mother will say it is presumption for them to expose themselves and that child to the

inclemencies of such a season. We are all much better prepared to endure and secured from the cold than any we see about us, and ought not to say we suffer; and besides, Alice's health has improved since she left the house. But the advantages we expect to derive from associations with and benefiting them will more than compensate us for the little inconvenience we now experience. The meeting is closed and I write no more."

I was not able to write more after this. We stayed into the third week and were necessarily called home sooner than was expected. We had been home but just a week when husband was called to attend the meeting of our mission. I was permitted to accompany him. We started on Tuesday noon in a rainstorm, and reached there on Friday a little after noon, making 110 miles in three days on horseback, Alice riding with her father. This was in Feb. In March we returned, but not in the same way. Here I think I must stop, for if I should go into particulars it would take more time than I can command at present.

Mr. Hall and wife have arrived from the Sandwich Islands. They have come for the benefit of Mrs. H.'s health; brought a printing press, which is stationed at Mr. S's, and next week husband expects to go there to make arrangements for the benefit of Mrs. H.'s health. She is affected with a spinal irritation and appears just like L. Linsley; sits up but very little; was carried there in a boat up the Snake river. He thinks he can cure her. He has had several cases since he has been here, all with good success. Others write us if Mrs. Hall is benefited, they will probably come. We feel closely united to that mission. Our number of correspondents increase. Mrs. Judd and Mrs. Whitney write to me.

The Indians we encamped with were Nez Perces. The most of them were not so hardened in sin; or, rather, they were not so proud a people as our people, the Wioletpoos, are; the most of ours have been absent during the winter, and returned just the time we returned from Tukanon. Husband spent more than usual time in worship and instructing them, and instead of yielding to the truth they oppose it vigourously, and to this day some of them continue to manifest bitter opposition.

You know not how much we are expecting Brother and Sister Judson, and if we do not see him in July by the ship, I shall feel that he is coming across the mountains with Brother Lee. We need help very much, and those who will pray, too. In this we have been disappointed in our helpers last come, particularly the two Revs. who have gone to the Flatheads. They think it not good to have too many meetings, too many prayers, and that is wrong and unseemly for a woman to pray where there are men, and plead the necessity for wine, tobacco, etc.; and now how do you think I have lived with such folks right in my kitchen for the whole winter? If you can imagine my feelings you will do more than I can describe. To have such dampers thrown upon us when we were enjoying such a precious revival season as we were when they came, is more than I know how to live under. This, with so much care and perplexity, nearly cost me a fit of sickness; and I do not know but it would have taken my life had it not been for the journey I was permitted to take the last of the winter. What I write here had better be kept to yourselves lest it should do injury.

We have just this moment received the news that the ship from England has arrived, but has brought no letters for us from our dear friends, because the ships had not arrived from the States to the Islands when she passed. We know not when we shall hear

from home. I do not know where to send this because you say you visit Onondaga next summer. O, how I long to hear about them there. O, that you would all write me, and each take a different subject, so as to tell me all the news you can.

With much love from husband, Alice and myself to you all and all with whom you are concerned, adieu,

Your sister, in haste,

Narcissa Whitman

P. S. – A. C. talks much, sings much, loves to read her book, and every morning at worship repeats her verse as regularly as morning comes; and appears to take a part in the worship, especially in the singing, as if she was as old as her mother; and often is very much disappointed if we do not give the tunes she is acquainted with; and she and her mother often talk about her relatives in the States. I might write half a sheet about our dear daughter, but have not time. Mr. Hall says much to us about the evils of allowing her to learn the native language, as well as our correspondents there. I can assure you we feel deeply for her. We know not what is our duty concerning her. In order to prevent it it appears that I must take much of my time from intercourse with the natives. I cast myself upon the Lord. I know He will direct in every emergency, and so farewell. Pray for us and the heathen. We hope and pray for a revival of religion. If our own hearts were united and right we should see it soon, and a general one, too.

M. W.

N. W.

A. C. W.

Miss Jane A. Prentiss,

Quincy,

Illinois.

*** End of the original document from May 17, 1839 ***

*** Date: June 25, 1839 ***

*** Author: Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Mrs. Elvira Perkins ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 123 ***

*** The original document starts below this line ***

Wieletpoo, June 25th, 1839.

My Dear Sister: – Your letter of April inst. I received but a few days ago, or it would have been answered much sooner. You make some important inquiries concerning my treatment of my precious child, Alice Clarissa, now laying by me a lifeless lump of clay. Yes, of her I loved and watched so tenderly, I am bereaved. My Jesus in love to her and us has taken her to himself.

Last Sabbath, blooming in health, cheerful and happy in herself and in the society of her much loved parents, yet in one moment she disappeared, went to the river with two cups to get some water for the table, fell in and was drowned. Mysterious event! we can in no way account for the circumstances connected with it, otherwise than that the Lord meant it should be so, Husband and I were both engaged in reading. She had just a few minutes before been reading to her father; had got down out of his lap, and as my impression, was amusing herself by the door in the yard. After a few moments, not hearing her voice, I sent Margaret to search for her. She did not find her readily, and instead of coming to me to tell that she had not found her, she went to the garden to get some radishes for supper; on seeing her pass to the water to wash them, I looked to see if

Alice was with her, but saw that she was not. That moment I began to be alarmed, for Mungo had just been in and said there were two cups in the river. We immediately inquired for her, but no one had seen her. We then concluded she must be in the river. We searched down the river, and up and down again in wild dismay, but could not find her for a long time. Several were in the river searching far down. By this time we gave her up for dead. At last an old Indian got into the river where she fell in and looked along by the shore and found her a short distance below. But it was too late; she was dead. We made every effort possible to bring her to life, but all was in vain. On hearing that the cups were in the river, I resolved in my mind how they could get there, for we had not missed them. By the time I reached the water-side and saw where they were, it came to my recollection that I had a glimpse of her entering the house and saying, with her usual glee, "ha, ha, supper is most ready" (for the table had just been set), "let Alice get some water," at the same time taking two cups from the table and disappearing. Being absorbed in reading I did not see her or think anything about her – which way she went to get her water. I had never known her to go to the river or to appear at all venturesome until within a week past. Previous to this she has been much afraid to go near the water anywhere, for her father had once put her in, which so effectually frightened her that we had lost that feeling of anxiety for her in a measure on its account. But she had gone; yes, and because my Saviour would have it so. He saw it necessary to afflict us, and has taken her away. Now we see how much we loved her, and you know the blessed Saviour will not have His children bestow an undue attachment upon creature objects without reminding us of His own superior claim upon our affections. Take warning, dear sister, by our bereavement that you do not let your dear babe get between your heart and the

Saviour, for you like us, are solitary and alone and in almost the dangerous necessity of loving too ardently the precious gift, to the neglect of the giver.

Saturday evening, 29 – After ceasing effort to restore our dear babe to life, we immediately sent for Brother Spalding and others to come to sympathize and assist in committing to the grave her earthly remains. Tuesday afternoon Mr. Hall reached here. Mr. S. and wife took a boat and came down the river to Walla Walla, and reached here Thursday morning, nine o'clock, and we buried her that afternoon, just four days from the time her happy spirit took its flight to the bosom of her Saviour. When I write again, I will give you some particulars of her short life, which are deeply interesting to me, and will be to you, I trust, for you, too, are acquainted with a mother's feelings and a mother's heart.

Probably we may return to Clearwater with Brother and Sister S., as it is necessary for my husband to go on business for the mission. Dear sister, do pray for me in this trying bereavement, for supporting grace to bear without murmuring thought, the dealings of the blessed God toward us, and that it may be sanctified to the good of our souls and of these heathen around us.

O! on what a tender thread hangs these mortal frames, and how soon we vanish and are gone. She will not come to me, but I shall soon go to her. Let me speak to you of the great mercy of my Redeemer toward one so unworthy. You know not, neither can I tell you, how much He comforts and sustains me in this trying moment. He enables me to say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed, ever blessed, be the name of the Lord."

Sister Spalding sends love to you and will write you soon.

In haste, as ever your affectionate, but now afflicted sister in Christ,

N. Whitman.

Rev. Mrs. H. K. W. Perkins,

Wascopum.

*** End of the original document from June 25, 1839 ***

*** Date: July 26, 1839 ***

*** Author: Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Mrs. Elvira Perkins ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 21st reunion, 1893, p. 126 ***

*** The original document starts below this line ***

Wioletpoo, July 26th, 1839.

Very Dear Sister: – You know not how like an angel's visit your dear husband's presence has been to me, now in my truly lonely situation, for my dear husband has been absent for a week. This added to the death of my precious Alice has almost overcome me. He proposes to leave early in the morning; I would gladly detain him if I could till my husband's return. I thought I must write a few lines to endeavor to persuade you to undertake a visit to us when he comes to go to the general meeting. I think I have removed all his objections and made it appear easy for him to carry your dear babe. Now if you knew how easy we get along in traveling with children, you would not hesitate for a moment. I need not say that I want to see you very much and shall expect you will come, and we will go together to brother Spalding's. Do come; it will do you good; it will do us all good to meet together and mingle our prayers and tears before the throne of grace.

I have been talking to your husband much about Alice. When I see you I can tell you all. I am not able to say anything about her now for want of time. It would do me much good to see little Henry, and I shall feel that you will come and will have no

occasion to regret or feel that you have lost time by it. We shall expect to have a meeting of our National Association, which we anticipate will be interesting to us all, especially mothers.

You will excuse this hasty note, I trust. I will write more next time, if you do not come.

Believe me ever your affectionate sister in the Lord.

N. Whitman.

P. S. – I ought to have said before this that your kind and sympathizing letter was a cordial to my afflicted heart. Remember me to Brother Lee and kiss the babe for me.

N. W.

Rev. Mrs. H. K. W. Perkins,

Wascopum.

*** End of the original document from July 26, 1839 ***

*** Date: September 30, 1839 ***

*** Author: Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Honorable Stephen Prentiss ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 19th reunion, 1891, p. 120 ***

*** The original document starts below this line ***

Wieletpoo, September 30, 1839.

My Dearest Father: – I never have found it so trying to commence writing to my friends home as at this time, simply because of the late afflictive dispensation of Providence towards us, which renders me almost incapable of writing, from excessive feeling, the moment my thoughts return to the subject.

You will, doubtless, before this reaches you, have heard, through the Board, of the melancholy death of our *most precious and only child, Alice Clarissa*. That we loved her most ardently is true, and it is no less true that we feel keenly the severe pangs of a separation from *her*, who was so much the joy and comfort of our hearts in our lonely situation. Yet, it is the Lord that hath done it, and he has dealt with us as a tender parent deals with the children whom he loves. O, how often have I felt and thought what a privilege it would be, if I could see and unburden to my dear parents the sorrows of my broken and bleeding heart, since we have been bereft of our dear, sweet babe. Although deprived of this inestimable consolation, yet, dearest father, I desire to ask you to unite with us in praise and gratitude to God that He has so mercifully sustained me, and that, when crushed to the earth because His hand lay heavily upon me, His grace was manifest

to preserve and sustain my soul from murmuring or repining at His dealings with us. This unspeakable consolation is ours, that our daughter is at rest in the bosom of Him who said: "Suffer the *little children* to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." We rejoice, too, that we have been permitted to become parents, and that she has been spared to us as long as she was, and for the pleasure we had in witnessing the development of her ardent, active mind. Young as she was, we could plainly see a manifest relish and enjoyment in singing and worship, and the last month of her life she commenced learning to read, and improved rapidly. Mrs. Judd's little daughter had just sent her one of Gallaudet's Mothers' Primers, with which she was much pleased, and had learned to the eighteenth page, the whole of which she read twice the day she was drowned.

But I must haste to give you the particulars of her sudden, mysterious flight. In letters previous, I have spoken of the situation of our house on the bank of the Walla Walla river, a large and rapid stream emptying into the Columbia. We had often thought of the danger to which she was exposed in our being so near the water, when she should run about, and have watched her most carefully, and used every precaution to make her fear going near the brink, and, till then, thought we had succeeded. But, unfavorably for us and her, she had lost that timidity from seeing children who had been here on a visit, with their parents, just a week or two before, playing about the water and seeing others of the family going to that place for water. Friday afternoon, before she fell in, we were in the garden weeding, and she was with us, diverting herself in trying to assist us, as she often had been, and just as we were about to go to the house, her father pulled up a radish and threw it down. She took it and was out of sight in a moment, and we supposed she

had gone to the house. We came along directly, and husband stopped at the river to wash his hands, and found her there, washing the radish, which both frightened and surprised us, as we had never known her to venture there before. Her father first thought to put her into the water, all over, but feared the effect upon her reason, it being so easy to frighten her. Although we were horror-stricken at seeing her there – it being the first time – we did not inflict any punishment upon her, but talked to her seriously of the consequence to her if she should fall in, and concluded, in our minds, if we ever saw her near there again, to take some course to make her fear to approach the forbidden place. But, when the next time came, it was too late. While conversing with her that evening, we told her that if she should fall in the water she would die, and then father and mother would have no little Alice. She had, a few weeks before, seen her father drown a little dog that she used to play with, because it was sick and we feared it would injure her; and she seemed to realize what it meant when we told her that she would die, like Boxer, and mamma have no Alice. Some minutes after, while sitting in my lap, she appeared to be in deep thought, and said to me, with inquiring looks, “Alice fall in water, Alice she die like Boxer – mamma have no Alice.” I then repeated my commands, and talked to her for some time, but it soon passed from her mind, as the event of her death will show.

I would describe to you, if I could, her bright, lively appearance on Sabbath morning, the day of her death. She had always slept with me until just a week before her death, and that night she proposed, of her own accord, to sleep on the mat on the floor. This gave me a very strange and singular feeling, for I never could persuade her to lie away from me, not even in her father’s arms, before, and I could not divest myself of the feeling that she was laid away for the grave. It being very warm, and because she

preferred it, I let her sleep on the floor all night – but did not sleep much myself. Ever after this, I made up a bed for her up by the side of mine, where I could lay my hand upon her. When I used to take her into the bed with me, she would lie a little while and then wish to go back again. Thus she gradually went out of my arms to the grave, so that I should not feel it so severely as if torn from them at once.

Sabbath morning, as she lay sleeping, I kissed her; she immediately awakened, stretched up her arms and put them about my neck and hugged and kissed me for a long time. I then told her I would go and get some water in a tub, to wash her, and went out. While I was gone, I heard her calling to me, and her father, who was sitting in the room, said she appeared to be reasoning with me, trying to persuade me that it was not best for her to be washed, and when I came for her, she said she did not wish to have me wash her in the tub. The manner of her talking, and her objecting to be washed, was so singular and unusual that I did not know how to understand it. I did not yield to her, but put her into the tub and washed her. She mildly submitted, but there was something so plaintive in her entreaties with me that I have since been sorry that I did not listen to her. I did not know but that it was the Sabbath that made her feel so reluctant about it, for it had been my usual practice to wash her on Saturday.

Her appearance at worship in the family was deeply interesting. She had been in the habit of selecting the hymn she wished us to sing, for some time, and that morning her choice was “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” a hymn which she has been delighted in singing for some time. O, if dear father and mother could have seen with what animation she sang, and how her sweet voice soared above ours! When we had completed the verse, she arose out of her little chair and said, “Mamma, should my tears forever flow?”

as if to remind me which verse came next, and when we commenced it she sat down and sung on, as usual. Our worship with the Indians was about noon. There being but four or five here, the camp having left the week previous, we had them come into our house. Her appearance was solemn and attentive, and, to close, husband requested the same hymn to be sung as at family worship. She united with us again, with a clearness and distinctness we shall never forget, and with such ecstasy as almost to raise her out of her chair. And no wonder, for what words could have been more appropriate to her mind than these: –

“While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death;
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

Dear father, when you sing this hymn, think of me, for my thoughts do not recur to it without almost overcoming me, and bringing fresh to my mind how she appeared when she last sang it with us. She had begun to talk about her grandparents, uncles and aunts, considerably, and I had hoped she would live to see them before she died, or at least some of them.

Little did we think that young breath was so fleeting, or that those sparkling eyes would so soon be closed in death, and her spirit rise to worlds unknown, and that to

behold on His everlasting throne of glory, Him who once said, "I will be a God to thee, and thy seed after thee."

This was the last we heard her sing. After this she read her lesson to us, and then her father took her out into the garden and picked a stalk of pieplant for her, which she was very fond of. She called it apple. She ate a part of it, and then threw the rest down. We both of us were sitting near the door, and she was diverting herself in and about it, and Margaret had been ordered to set the table, and get supper. The moment I ceased to hear her voice, or to see her, I sent Margaret to find her, and so it had always been. I never felt easy the moment she was out of sight, and I did not hear her, or know her father had the care of her, and so it was this time. I sent M. for her, but she did not look for her but little, and then went into the garden for radishes and lettuce for supper, but she did not come and tell me that she could not find her.

This letter must answer for all of our friends, for it will be impossible for us to write all we could wish. I have been engaged in copying a dictionary for two or three weeks, besides attending to our school, which is a great reason why I cannot write more, and my eyes trouble me very much.

N. W.

*** End of the original document from September 30, 1839 ***

*** Date: October 9, 1839 ***

*** Authors: Dr. Marcus Whitman

Mrs. Narcissa Whitman ***

*** Recipient: Mrs. Clarissa Prentiss ***

*** Source for this document: Transactions – 19th reunion, 1891, p. 124 ***

*** Original text starts below this line ***

Wioletpoo, Walla Walla River, Oregon Territory,

October 9, 1839.

Dearest Mother: – I have written a whole sheet to father talking about our dear little daughter, and have just arrived to the scene of her death. It was half past two when we gave directions for supper, thinking to have it some earlier than usual because husband had not eaten anything since breakfast, when I sent Margaret to look for her. Mungo went out with her at the same time and went to the river, but came back immediately and said there were two cups in the river. This startled us at once and as I made the inquiry, “How did they come there?” husband said “Let them be and get them out to-morrow, because of the Sabbath.” I asked again how they came there and what cups they were. He said “I suppose Alice put them there,” and immediately went out and took some poles to get them out. Why I was not alarmed in an instant is to me astonishing. It was doubtless owing partially to my confidence in the girl I sent for her, because she did not come and tell me she could not find her. I trusted she had and had taken her with her to get radishes, etc. I looked to see if she was with her, husband at the

same time going to see about the cups. I went to the other side of the house and inquired for her, but no one had seen her. Then it was pretty plain in my mind where she was, and by the time I got to the river's brink, it flashed across my mind like a dream, that I had had a glimpse of her, while sitting and reading, entering the house and on seeing the table set for supper, she exclaimed with her usual animation, "Mamma, supper is almost ready; let Alice get some water." She went up to the table and took *two cups* that set by her plate and Margaret's (for we drank water instead of tea) and disappeared. This was like a shadow that passed across my mind, passed away and made no impression. Strange as it seemed to myself, I did not recollect it until I reached the place where she had fallen in. And now where is she? We thought if we could find her immediately she would not be dead entirely, so but that we could bring her to again. We ran down on the brink of the river near the place where she was, and, as if forbidden to approach the spot, although accessible, we passed her, crossed a bend in the river far below and then back again, and then in another direction, still further below, while others got into the river and waded to find her, and what was remarkable, all entered the river below where she was at last found. Dear mother, you cannot tell what our feelings were at that time, neither can I describe them to give you any adequate idea. By this time all hopes of her life were given up for she had been in the water too long now to think of saving her. As we were coming towards the house, we saw an old Indian preparing to enter the river where she fell in. I stopped to see him swim under water until he passed me, and just a little below me he took her from the water and exclaimed "She is found." I ran to grasp her to my breast, but husband outran me and took her up from the river, and in taking her into his arms and pulling her dress from her face we thought she struggled for breath, but found

afterwards that it was only the effect of the atmosphere upon her after being in water. We tried every means that could be used to bring her to life, for a long time, but to no effect. Her spirit had been called to rise to worlds before unknown, and I could only say, "Lord, it is right; it is right; she is not mine but thine; she has only been lent to me for a little season, and now, dearest Saviour, thou hast the best right to her; 'Thy will be done,' not mine." I cannot wish her back in this world of sin and pain; her tender spirit was of too delicate material to remain here longer and be subject to the ills of this cruel and unfriendly world. Jesus' love for her was greater than mine. He saw it necessary for our good and in mercy to her to take her to Himself. For a moment I felt all the horrors of the reflections that perhaps it might not be well with my precious child, and what was the horror at that moment to my soul. I immediately flew to the promises of God's holy word. I thought of his everlasting covenant in which he has permitted us, as parents, to enter, and the consciousness of an entire consecration of her to God, and to train her up to him, and that when I had been distressed to see in her a heart defiled by sin and in need of the cleansing efficacy of the Saviour's blood, and was led with earnest prayer to seek for her that salvation which is unto life, and knowing that God hears prayer, I felt that it must be well with her and it was well with me, and well with my husband. These circumstances, together with her thoughtfulness and relish for worship and particularly her own attempts at prayer have removed all doubts from my mind and I have the fullest confidence and the unspeakable consolation to feel and believe that she is at rest in the bosom of the blessed Jesus and has hid herself in Him as the everlasting "Rock of Ages cleft" for the salvation of her soul.

After we had ceased exertions to restore life, I washed her and prepared her for the grave, while husband wrote and sent immediately for Mr. Spalding and Mr. Hall to come and assist in burying her.

I have forgotten whether I wrote in the spring about Mr. Smith leaving us to go into the heart of the Nez Perces country to be better able to learn the language. He left in May and she was drowned on June 23^d, aged two years, three months and nine days.

I cannot describe what our feelings were when night came and our dear child a corpse in another room. We went to bed, but not to sleep, for sleep had departed from our eyes. The morning came, we arose; but our child slept on. I prepared a shroud for her during the day, and before evening Mr. Pambrun came, but was ignorant of her death until he arrived, although we had gone to inform him. Mr. Hall arrived on Tuesday evening, got the news Monday noon and started immediately. Mr. and Mrs. S. came down the river to Walla Walla because he had broken his ribs and was unable to ride. They arrived Thursday noon and we buried her that afternoon.

We kept her four days. She did not begin to change in her appearance much for the three first days. This proved to be a great comfort to me, for so long as she looked natural and was so sweet and I could caress her, I could not bear to have her out of my sight; but when she began to melt away like wax and her visage changed I wished then to put her out of my sight, and felt it a great privilege that I could put her in so safe, quiet and desirable a resting place as the grave – to see her no more until the morning of the resurrection.

Although her grave is in sight, every time I step out of doors, yet my thoughts seldom wander there to find her. I seem to not feel that she is there. I look above and

with unspeakable delight contemplate her as enjoying the full delights of that bright world where her joys are perfect and she does not now, as formerly, need the presence of her much loved parents to make her happy. Her little prayer used to be: "O Lord, bless little Alice; may she by Thy child, may she love Thee, and when she dies, may she go to heaven and live with Jesus, and sing his praises, forever and ever. Amen."

Dear mother, I know you will forgive me for occupying so much room for this one subject. I wish I had time to say much more, but must take a little time to tell you about our present situation. After the funeral it was thought best for us to go home with Mr. and Mrs. Spalding and the members of the Nes Perces Mission to meet at Mr. Smith's to confer about the alphabet, many of them not being satisfied with the one Mr. S. had settled upon. The Indians all being away we concluded to go, and after spending the Sabbath at Mr. S.'s, he, with Mr. Hall, went with us to Mr. Smith's, about fifty miles beyond. We stayed there nearly two days and then returned to Mr. Spalding's, spent the Sabbath and on Tuesday started for home and arrived Friday morning. In the afternoon we received a letter from Mr. Eells that his wife was sick and did not expect she would live and wished my husband to go immediately. She has a spinal difficulty and a weakness which was considerably aggravated in the journey across the mountains. He left that night and traveled almost night and day until he reached there, which was on Sabbath eve.

And now the trial was upon me which I had dreaded more than anything else – to have my husband go from home and leave me alone. It was then that I realized the full reality of my bereavement. Husband gone night after night, the cheering presence of that dear daughter taken from me which had always been my relief in such lonely hours. Add

to this the sickness and death of two interesting children of an Indian, and very sudden, too; the care of burying them and meeting with all the superstitious feelings and notions in regard to sickness and dying among the natives, and yet, dear mother, you can realize but a small part of the trying feelings to be endured under such circumstances. What I underwent at that time I cannot describe.

For a poor, weak female to spend the Sabbath alone among the heathen in ordinary circumstances and having them look to her for instruction and not to have the command of the language so as to converse satisfactorily with them in hardly the least degree, she would feel, unavoidably, a weight of responsibility almost insupportable. In addition to this, on this Sabbath after our return and husband's leaving – it being just four weeks from the day of the scene of Alice's death, and the first of my being at home – I could not divest myself of the impression that she was about me. I seemed to hear her voice – her footsteps near me all day long. Towards evening the news came that the little boy was dying. My feelings were such that I could not go to see him die. The next morning, as soon as I was up, the father came and told me his other little son had followed his brother in the night, and that without appearing much sick or being sick but a short time. Both had the dysentery. They both were sensible to the last that they were dying; – probably five and ten years of age. The youngest said, when told that he was dying, that it was not dying – this would be but for a little while and then he should always live. He said of his own accord, "I love God," and often repeated the name of God. His father asked him, "Is it true that you love God?" He replied, "Yes, I love Him more than anything else." He said again, "Is it true that you love God more than anything else?" He said, "Yes, it is true." When he had said this he drew his blanket up over him

as if he would go to sleep and *died*. These two little boys were members of husband's Sabbath school last summer when he taught them the Ten Commandments.

On Monday we had a box made large enough to put them both in and buried them – all done principally by the members of our own family, there being but one family here besides the one afflicted. The mother was taken sick also, and one child, and they began to feel that they should all die, and many, on hearing of the sickness and death of the two boys, were afraid to come here, for fear they should die, too.

The suddenness of the death of the boy last taken was a great wonder to them – said perhaps it was the medicine I gave them (which was nothing but a small dose of salts). I had not dared to give them the least thing for fear of the consequences, knowing that they were always ready to take the advantage of everything. As it was, they were distracted with every false and superstitious notion they could think of, which is no small part of a missionary's trials. All these things together made me feel as I never felt before – I seemed to “sink in deep waters, where the floods overflowed me” – and at times lost sight of my Supporter, or rather had not strength to cast myself upon Him. Husband was gone until the next Saturday. Thursday evening Mr. Perkins, from The Dalles, came and spent the night and until Saturday morning, which was a great relief to me. Mr. Walker came home with husband.

The third week in August we were surprised with a call from two young men from the states, Mr. Geiger, formerly from Angelica, and Mr. Johnson, from New York, who were here to explore the territory. They stopped a few days with us and then went on to the Willamette.

The next week we had to go to Mr. Spalding's to attend the general meeting of the mission. Mr. and Mrs. Hall returned with us and will spend the winter here. We all came down the Snake river to Walla Walla and she was brought up the Walla Walla river to this place in a canoe to the lower part of our plantation, and the rest of the way she was brought on a hammock. They are interesting and lovely people and we find them a great assistance to us in encouraging us in our perplexing labors here.

Two missionaries from the Oberlin Institute have come here – I mean to Oregon – for the purpose of establishing a self-supporting mission. Rev. Mr. Griffin and wife, and Mr. Munger and wife. They will find it very difficult to get along, probably, upon that system. Mr. Munger has engaged to us to finish off our house – he is a carpenter and will make us a more convenient house than I ever expected to have here, or at least very soon. One room is already finished which will make Mrs. Hall very comfortable for the winter. Mr. Griffin and wife are at Mr. Spalding's and must labor for their food this winter.

Mr. Hall, when he came in the spring, brought us a printing press. I believe we wrote about it in our last. He has printed us a little book and we hope to have him do more for us before he leaves.

After our return from the meeting we commenced a school immediately. We have more than a hundred and twenty on the list, but they do not all attend at one time. Men, women and children all attend and appear much pleased with the new book in their language.

A Catholic priest has recently been at Walla Walla and held meetings with the Indians and used their influence to draw all the people away from us. Some they have forbidden to visit us again, and fill all of their minds with distraction about truths we

teach, and their own doctrine; say we have been talking to them about their bad hearts long enough, and too long – say we ought to have baptized them long ago, etc., etc. The conflict has begun – what trials await us we know not. We never had greater encouragement about the Indians than at the present time. Could they be left unmolested until their minds should become settled upon the great truths they have been permitted to hear about – our hope and trust is in the Lord – we desire not to be moved by all the opposition of earth and hell combined, but to stay our souls upon Him, and to labor faithfully and diligently and leave the event with him.

I have not received a single letter from home for more than a year except one from Cousin Jeremiah Butler, who is now at Oberlin, which these people brought. We have heard of the arrival of a box of clothing for us sent from Rushville. It is now at Vancouver.

I shall not be able to write more than this letter now, but shall hope to be able to write to you all to send across the mountains next spring, which will be received three months later than this, probably. I hope all who write me will be particular to mention what letters and the dates of all the letters they have received from us, so that we may know what letters you receive and what fail.

Dearest father and mother, farewell once more. I wish I had time to say more, for my heart is still burdened. Perhaps you will think we cast reflections upon ourselves for neglect, or as being the cause of dear Alice's death. We cannot do it, although we see now how it might have been prevented, could we have known or anticipated it. What I have to say more is, do pray for us. O, how I long to hear from you. I know not but that

you may be as deeply afflicted as we are. It will be but a few more days and then we shall meet in heaven. O, what a glorious thought! Again I say farewell.

We are, dear parents, your afflicted and bereaved children,

Marcus and Narcissa Whitman.

We send much love to you all who are beloved in the Lord. Pray for the poor Indians here who are at their wits' end to know which is the right way to worship – our hearts bleed for them for they know not what they do in rejecting Jesus Christ and His salvation.

N. W.

What would dearest mother say to us now if she should see us? I wish she would write me that I may hear her voice once more. How is it with her soul? is her faith and confidence strong in the Lord? O, I know my mother prays for us, and the Lord will reward her for it. I do not expect to see her again in this world, but sometimes I desire to very much. I used to want to have you all see Alice, but now that desire is taken away.

*** End of original document from October 9, 1839 ***