

## ***Misinformation becomes Mythology becomes Miseducation***

*Dori Luzzo Gilmour*

For over one hundred and fifty years, a mythology about the history of the Pacific Northwest has been accepted. This myth has been debunked on many occasions and yet is still taught and believed. It is the foundation of the story of Washington's statehood. It is the myth of Marcus Whitman.

**VISIT THE MUSEUM AT  
TAMÁSTLIKT  
CULTURAL INSTITUTE**

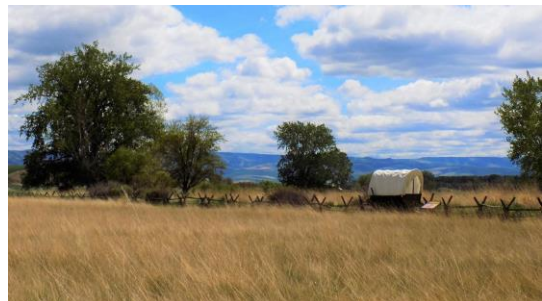
Bobbie Conners is Director of the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla's have built an eleven-million-dollar cultural center. With the Institute, Conners wants to share the that history of the people of the region, have lived here for over

ten thousand years. Conners explains that the information is available to people if they are willing to learn.



**“If they are not compelled to reexamine the narrative that has been popularized, the myth and the lies that have been written about. I don't know that there's anything I can say that can convince them to do that... our struggle, tribally is to remain strong is to recover from the last hundred and 50 years.”**

The mythology surrounding Marcus Whitman, his deeds, and his killing has been told and written in history books and continued to be taught to school children. This mythology was used to justify the taking of the native lands and the subsequent attempted erasure of the Native people. His murder at the Whitman missionary site is still used as an annual school trip tour site for 4<sup>th</sup> graders.



<https://www.nps.gov/thingstodo/whitman-mission-nhs-audio-tour.htm>

(Whitman Mission National Historic Site National Park Service Audio Tour)



(Grave marker from Whitman Mission NPS)

Connors said Confederated Tribes have worked with the state to improve the Whitman Mission site and provide a more accurate portrayal of the events that occurred there over 150 years ago. The killing of the Cayuse Five led to the Government moving natives to reservations and denying them of their tribal lands. But that was not the worst part, according to Connors.

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=9F681411-DE71-983C-550B747B9A0AE856>

(Whitman Mission National Historic Site National Parks Service)

**“ ...the notion that we are the murdering Cayuse. I am enormously proud of my ancestry as a member of the Confederate Tribes, as a citizen of my tribal nation. And I am proud that the men who tried to protect us from further depth during a pandemic.**

According to the Cayuse customs, a medicine man like Marcus Whitman, who could not prevent death in of people from sickness, was to be killed. Connors explained that the tribe had warned the Whitman’s many times to leave and after measles began killing tribal members and Whitman did not or could not prevent the deaths, the tribe killed him. Five members of the Cayuse tribe were then hung to satisfy the white settlers from further killing more of the Nation. Then the Tribes were forced from their lands and moved to reservations.

<https://www.tamastlikt.org/video-presentation-foreigners-in-native-homelands-lewis-and-clark-and-the-pioneers/>

(Tamastsklikt Cultural Institute Video Presentation)

Connors has said that teachers in Washington are able to choose to come to the Cultural Institute instead of touring the Whitman site.

<https://www.tamastlikt.org/teacher-resources-2/>

(Tamastlikt Cultrual Institute Teacher Resource Guide)

There have been several books written by white people to educate and change the narrative . Blaine Harden published *Murder at The Mission* in 2021. The book is about the lie that was invented by a presbyterian minister, Henry Spaulding, about 20 years after Marus Whitman was killed along with his wife and eleven other white people.

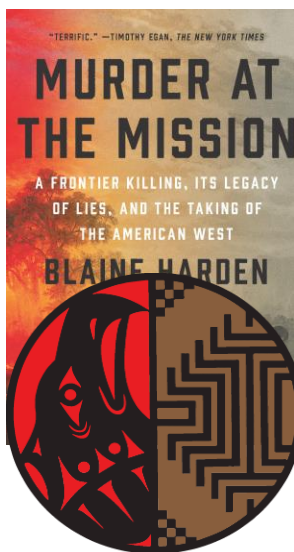
Harden talks about what he calls the lie, that falsely describes what Marcus Whitman did before he was killed.

**“He rode to Washington D.C. and burst into the White House and in effect saved the Oregon County from a nefarious plot by the British, the Catholic Church, and the Cayuse tribe to steal the entire northwest away from the United States.”**

Harden's book goes on to explain that Spaulding managed to convince Congress to print his inaccurate version of events in full in 1871 and it became the official history of the Pacific Northwest.

**“It was a big, self-serving patriotic hoax. That was clung to in the United States for many decades and more interestingly actually, clung to in the Pacific Northwest for more than an a century after it was made up. “**

It was a story that made sense to the new residents of the area and an opportunistic marriage of patriotism and religious fervor.



(Murder at the Mission, A frontier killing, its legacy of lies, and the taking of the American West. Out in Paperback April 26<sup>th</sup> from Penguin Books)

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/599591/murder-at-the-mission-by-blaine-harden/>

The history of Marcus Whitman is still being taught in schools in Washington State. A state law passed in 2005 and modified in 2015, now requires that school districts to begin using the tribally developed curriculum Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State.

(OSPI Office of Native Education logo created by Roger Fernandes, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe)

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/time-immemorial-tribal-sovereignty-washington-state>

This curriculum has been endorsed by all 29 federally recognized tribes. Each local school district works with the sovereign nation that has treaty rights in the district. School districts are required to adopt Since Time Immemorial when they do a curriculum review. There is no timeline on when they do a review, however.

