

The following letter is from the original account of Mary Marsh Cason's version of the Whitman Massacre. The copy of which I'm provided is by no stretch of the imagination easy to read. Please know that every effort has been taken to interpret the old handwriting to the very best of my ability. The copy was provided by, Court Duncanson of Salem, Oregon, a very dear friend who's now deceased wife, was an ancestor of Mary Cason. The story will be followed by two accompanying letters dated 1936 and 1951.

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"I was born in Springfield, Illinois [Sangamon County], in the year of 1836 [October 8th]. Soon after my birth my father moved from Springfield and opened up a farm in the big bend of the Sangamon river. We lived there until 1847 when there was a big rush for the Oregon Territory. My father sold out, so in April of 1847 - Father, Mother, Brothers and I started for Oregon, overland, a journey of near 3000 miles. It would take about six months to make the trip. A person that has never made such a journey cannot imagine the trials and hardships that they have to endure. I, myself, cannot realize them for I was too young. It was more of a pleasure trip for me. I can't remember many of the different places we passed, although I do remember Independence Rock. It is a very large rock - nearly as large as one of the small hills we see here. I went upon it and saw a great many names with dates carved upon it. One or two long drives had to be made, driving night and day for water. When Snake River was reached there was trouble in crossing. The wagon beds had to be propped up high. One wagon and team got into deep water and floated down- stream. My brother would not let me stay in the wagon but took me on a horse with him across the river - guided by an Indian. Before we got to Bear River my dear Mother took sick and when we reached Soda Springs - just a short distance beyond, she died. We had to bury her there on the lonely plain, no coffin to lay her in, not even a rude box - just wrapped in her bed. It was awful and a great many more shared the same fate. We journeyed on until we reached Dr. Whitman's Missionary Station in October. Father, being tired of travel, concluded to stop there until spring - then go on to the Willamette Valley. He got employment from the Doctor.

It was on the 29th of November, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon that the Indians broke out and murdered the Doctor and Mrs. Whitman and eight others. Six families were living in adobe (unk.) not far from the doctor's house. Father and I occupied an upper-room, where we cooked our meals and slept. He had come in and had his dinner, his last dinner, and had gone to work - attending the grist mill. That was the last time that I ever say my poor dear father.

I was washing the dishes when I heard the report of a gun. It was the gun that killed Gillion, the tailor. He was doing some sewing of some kind when an Indian stood in the door and shot him. At the same time the horrible work was going on outside. I and some others went upstairs where we could look from a window and see a part of the conflict near the Doctor's house. Three or four men were butchering a beef there. I saw them engaged with quite a number of Indians. Mr. Kimball was dealing hard with several, he having an axe to fight with. He fought desperately for awhile but they killed him at last. I saw Mr. Hall chased by an

Indian with an uplifted tomahawk (the Indian on a horse) but Mr. Hall made his escape. Meanwhile Mrs. Whitman had barred the doors and windows to keep them out of the house - but they broke in anyway. I saw them break into the house, led by Joe Lewis, the instigator of the trouble. There they finished their bloody work for that day. Mr. Sails and Beverly were sick and were not killed that day. A week later they were killed on their beds. Afterwards, I saw Beverly laying outside the house with his head almost torn from his body. He laid there all night. All of the dead bodies were buried in one grave by the four men who were not killed - Elam Young, his two sons and Mr. Smith. When the Indians killed the two sick men I was so frightened I ran to an Indian for protection - one who claimed to be friendly.

After the horrible work was done there were nearly 50 widows and orphans in captivity - expecting any time to share the same fate of the others, but we were spared - only to endure the fear, suspense and cruel treatment that an Indian is capable of inflicting. For one month the prisoners were kept well guarded and made to work. One old fellow put me to knitting for him a pair of long - legged socks. I got one nearly made when Governor Ogden of the Hudson Bay Company came to our relief and bought us from the heathens and took us away. We went in wagons to Fort Wallila (?). The first day there we were put in batteaux and started down the river. The batteaux were open boats with canvas to spread over the top to keep the rain out. Whenever a head showed up the Governor would holler, "duck that head." I, for one, suffered with the cold and I suppose the others did too, for we were so scant of clothing.

When we reached The Dalles the volunteers were there. My brother was one of them as he had gone on down to the Valley in the fall. We journeyed on down the Columbia and up the Willamette River to Oregon City. There we were turned loose with thankful hearts that we had escaped the merciless foe. Most of the children had their mothers but I was entirely alone among strangers. My brother being with the volunteers, so I was left to the charity of the people. You know how an orphan would fare among perfect strangers. They are soon not wanted any longer. In 1849 my brother went to California, but before he left he found me a home with Mrs. A.L. Lovejoy who was very careful of my welfare. There I remained until I was married to James P. Cason, son of F.C. Cason, who crossed the plains in '43.

When we arrived at Oregon City a lady gave me a piece of bread and mollasses. I did enjoy it for bread was not very plentiful those days. There was plenty of

salmon and sometimes boiled wheat for a change.

I do not know how many of the survivors of that massacre are living that are as old as I am. I have a picture of Doctor Whitman's buildings and of the neglected grave in which he and the others are buried."

[signed]

Mrs. Mary C. Marsh Cason

October 22, 1936 Pilot Rock, Oregon

Mr. Roy S. Melson  
c/o County Court  
Salem, Oregon

Dear Mr. Melson,

Am enclosing a copy of my Grandmother Cason's version of the Whitman Massacre, which my Mother, Mrs. John Cason, asked me to make and send to you. I am only too glad to do this for a member of the family - or anyone else who might be interested - for that matter.

Our family highly prizes the original of this story - and Mother also has the pictures which Grandmother mentions. I really think her story is very interesting and marvel that a child of eleven would remember as much as she did about the Massacre. Not a very pleasant thing to remember, either.

If there is anything more you wish to know about Grandmother's life history we will be glad to send you any information we can find.

Yours Very Truly -

Florence Cason Spurlock



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Eleanor Stephens, Librarian

23 February 1951

Mr. Aubrey Neasham  
Regional Historian  
National Park Service  
180 New Montgomery St.,  
San Francisco 5, Calif.

Dear Aubrey:

In accordance with your letter of January 30, 1951, I have talked to Mr. Marsh's great-grandson, Roy Melson of Salem, who loaned me a typed copy of his grandmother's memoris covering the Whitman Massacre and gave me his permission to forward them to you. A photographic copy is enclosed for the files of the Park Service. We also have made a copy. The original is in the possession of Mrs. John Casson of Heppner, Oregon, and is in very fragile condition. She might be willing to loan it to you. I suppose that it would be nice if it could be laminated. Mr. Melson is particularly motivated by a desire to have his ancestor's full name inscribed on the monument at the mission site, and if you are able to accomplish that project, he and his relations would be well rewarded. "Mary Marsh" appears in the 1850 U.S. Census as a resident at the home of H. Lawrence Lovejoy in Oregon City, and Mr. Melson told me that the Lovejoys treated her as a daughter. The brother went to California in the gold rush and disappeared. She always thought that he may have died there.

Yours sincerely,

David C. Duniway  
State Archivist

DCD:gbs  
Encl.

cc.: Mr. Melson

2nd Thank You, D. Duniway