

FORT WALLA WALLA  
TRAIL GUIDE



WallaWalla  
HERITAGE



Reviewed by the Historic Resources  
Coordination Committee



## FORT WALLA WALLA WALK

**T**here are three sites recognized as locations of Fort Walla Walla: the first was at an unknown site on Five Mile Road; the second on Mill Creek at the corner of First and Main Streets; and the last on what are now the grounds and buildings occupied by the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center. This last fort was established by Bvt. Lt. Col Edward J. Steptoe and the Ninth Infantry in 1858.

Of the many buildings constructed during the fort's 52 year existence, 1858 to 1910, fifteen remain on the VA grounds, and two others on property deeded to the City of Walla Walla. The fort originally occupied 640 acres, much of which has been sold or deeded away over the years until the present 84 acres remain.

Troops stationed at Fort Walla Walla participated in various Indian Wars, including actions against the Spokane, Yakama, and Nez Perce under Chief Joseph. Casualties of those actions are buried in the Fort Walla Walla Cemetery located next to the Museum in Fort Walla Walla Park, west of the VA grounds.

The regular troops were transferred to other stations in 1861, and the post was occupied at various times by California and Oregon militias, and Washington Territory Volunteers until 1867, when troops were withdrawn and the post placed in the care of a Quartermaster's Agent. The fort was re-garrisoned in August 1873 by troops returning from the Modoc War, and was continuously in service until permanently decommissioned September 28, 1910. The military briefly occupied the fort during WWI, when the 146th and 147th Field Artillery Brigades received part of their early training under the command of General Paul Weyrauch, who had been a Second Lieutenant stationed at the fort when it was decommissioned.

The fort buildings were occupied briefly by the Public Health Service in 1920, and were transferred to the Veterans Bureau in 1921 when that agency was established to coordinate the services provided veterans by a collection of independent government agencies.

The fort was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on April 16, 1974. In 1996 the VA renamed the facility the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center, in recognition of the birth of that famous WWII general, born at the fort August 23, 1883 during his father's assignment there.

### Begin the Walking Tour

The original fifteen fort-era buildings which remain on the VA grounds are located in two general areas; the upper plateau containing the officers' quarters and troop barracks, and the lower level with outbuildings associated with maintenance and storage. The fort-era buildings each have a bronze plaque identifying its date of construction; those built by the VA do not. To visit the fort, enter the compound by traveling west on Chestnut Street until it becomes Wainwright Avenue, the VA's drive. Continue up the drive and crest the low hill, where you will see the parade grounds with a statue of General Wainwright at the flagpole. The officers' quarters are on the left, and two, two-story brick barracks are on the right. Follow the drive to the rear of the three-story brick building (86) at the west end of the compound, and park in the lot located there.

### Walking Portion Distance: Approximately 1/2 mile

Begin your walking tour by heading east on the sidewalk in front of the white wooden buildings. The first you will encounter is **Building 7**, built in 1858 as a NCO's quarters that was relocated to its present site and modified by the VA in 1930. This building is presently used as the VA Police Headquarters. Next to it is **Building 49**, a single family officer's quarters built in 1888, as was its neighboring twin, **Building 48**. Both are in the Second Empire style, and have Mansard roofs. The two fort buildings deeded to the city (52 & 53) are directly behind (south) of these, and also built in 1888 as NCO quarters.

The next historic building in Officers' Row is **Building 5**, the first of four duplex officers' quarters built in 1858, the year the fort was established. This, and **Buildings 2, 3, 4, and 7** are probably the oldest buildings in Walla Walla. **Building 5** is 1 & 1/2 stories, and was modified over the years of occupation by the mili-

tary with box-like, single-story rooms added to both the east and west ends. Continuing past **Building 5**, the next three **Buildings, 4, 3, and 2** are all 1858 duplex officers' quarters. Each of these buildings originally sported adobe walls, which were later covered with board & batten siding, then recovered with the present ship-lap. An adobe brick removed during a construction project in **building 3** is displayed in the medical center's library. The 1 & 1/2 story roofs of **2, 3 & 4** were raised to 2 & 1/2 stories, chimneys extended, and dormers added to both front and rear second stories, all during the fort era. Each has a front porch, with that on **2** extending around the east side.

Passing **Building 2**, the last and largest in Officers' Row is **Quarters 1**, built in 1877 as the Commanding Officer's residence. This features a grand, central staircase, and a room large enough to entertain the fort's cadre of junior officers. Proceeding around the perimeter of the Parade Grounds and now heading west, **Buildings 68 and 69** are the two identical U-shaped brick structures facing officers' row. These were built in 1906, at a cost of \$60,955 each, as Infantry barracks. They have been used over the years by the VA as patient wards and administrative offices. Both buildings have been modified by enclosing the upper and lower porches, removing the chimneys, and modifying their front entries.

The remaining fort-era buildings are located to the north of the parade grounds and below the knoll on which the officers' quarters and barracks sit. The easiest way to see these is to return to your vehicle and drive down the street behind **Building 86** and past the Chapel. Beside the Chapel and to the north sits a small brick **Building 40** constructed in 1883 as the fort magazine. Notable is the fact this once stood in the parking lot behind **Building 86**, and was relocated to its present site without disintegrating!

At the bottom of the hill, adjacent to the Little League ball fields, are **Buildings 63 and 65**. **Building 65** was built in 1904 and served the fort as the oil house, where 10,000 gallons of mineral oil used for illumination was stored. The building now serves as the VA's carpenter and paint shops. **Building 63**, originally the

fort's ordinance storehouse, is now the VA's plumbing shop. Both **Buildings 63 and 65** were relocated to their present sites sometime after 1920, and **Building 65** has been added to over the years. Use the adjacent parking lot to turn around.

Backtracking to the intersection and turning right towards the Poplar Street exit (north), the remaining two fort-era buildings can be seen. To the left (west), adjacent to GESA Credit Union, is **Building 31**, built in 1859 as a Quartermaster's stable, where animals were taken for care rather than billeted. A wing which contained 12 stalls has been removed, and the building is now used to garage tractors and lawn care equipment. A hand-hewn ceiling beam, joined to its upright support with wooden pegs, is visible within.

The last building is to the right (east) of the drive. This is **Building 41**, built in 1888 as the fort's granary. As a cavalry post, there were numerous mounts and draft animals at the fort, and the granary was capable of storing 500,000 lbs of grain. The building sits on 168 pilings, and has four cupolas on its roof, all to ensure adequate air circulation and prevent spoilage of its contents. The VA uses this for a storage building.

If you wish to see more of Walla Walla on foot, see [The Downtown Walk](#), [Up Boyer](#) and [to Pioneer Park Walk](#), and the [Historic Homes Walk](#) which are described in separate brochures.

Robert L. Stevenson  
*Fort Walla Walla  
Museum*

Richard J. Bernave  
*Walla Walla Bicycle and  
Pedestrian Advisory Committee*

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