

DR. PENROSE'S TRIBUTE TO DAVID THOMAS LENOX  
MONUMENT IS DEDICATED TO CAPTAIN OF FIRST WAGON TRAIN  
The following address was delivered July 4, 1924 by Dr. Stephen B. L. Penrose,  
President of Whitman College  
at the newly marked grave of  
Captain David Thomas Lenox (1802-1873) at the Kees cemetery near Weston.

Almost all that I know about David Thomas Lenox is derived from the interview with his son, Edward H. Lenox, which I published in "The Whitman College Quarterly" of June 1898. The interview was given in Oakland, Calif. on April 11, 1898, and contains the recollections of the man, who as a boy sixteen years old in 1843 drove the first wagon train down the Blue Mountains in the [great migration of 1843](#).

From 1843 to 1898 is fifty-five years, and recollections after so long an interval are apt to be hazy and unreliable. But the recollections are so clear and the material which they contain is so interesting that they have an unusual value. Some of the recollections of a boy of sixteen are vivid and deep. They contain the wearing portions of the years end although they need to be used with caution, they cannot be rejected as if they had no value for history. When contemporaneously written documents are not available, the memory of the survivors of great events must be used, even though cautiously.

My knowledge of Dr. Whitman's great ride and the explanation of his purpose and his achievement in that ride is derived from the personal recollection of his nephew, Perrin B. Whitman, who as a boy about sixteen years old accompanied his uncle on his return trip from the east at the head of the great wagon train of '43. The recollections of this boy were given to me personally many years after the events and conversations described, but they had the clearness of recollections long dwelt upon and told, and they, too, cannot be dismissed as of no value for the purpose of history. When I was told that Dr. Whitman had no patriotic purpose to going east in 1842 and that he played no conspicuous part in guiding the wagon train of '43, I feel that I know better because of my conversation with his nephew, who told me what his uncle had said and done.

The statements of this other sixteen year old boy, Edward H. Lenox, have all the marks of trust-worthiness They are simple, natural, direct and unassuming. Their clearness and consistency justify their acceptance. I feel that I know David Thomas Lenox, the father, and his connection with the immigration of '43 because of what his son, Edward H. Lenox, told me twenty-six years ago. I quote what the son said.

"We were in camp waiting for the start to the Columbia river. My father, David Thomas Lenox, was a contractor mar Fort Levenworth, Missouri. One day he took me with him, to hear Peter H. Burnett, a lawyer in Platt City, speak from a dry goods box to the people about Oregon.

"He had spoken often, but on that day he said he was going to open books and take the names of all who would agree to go to Oregon. My father was the first man to respond, and as he put his name down Burnett said: 'All right, Davy, I know who I've got to tie to if you are going.'"

"I first saw Dr. Marcus Whitman about May 15, 1843. We never heard of Dr. Whitman until we were in camp three miles from Westport, Missouri. One day as we were in camp -- 292 of us -- Dr. Whitman and, I think, his nephew came into camp. Father seemed to get about the first news of him and said: 'There is a man here who has been twice over the road into the Columbia river valley and he will pilot us across the country.'"

"I remember his riding into camp, dressed neatly in buckskin, ready for mountain travel, a fine looking man, who attracted the attention of everybody. He said he had been to Washington city to persuade the government not to dispose of the Oregon Country."

"The company had already engaged a pilot, Mr. Gantt, an old mountain trapper, as far as Fort Hall, but no further."

"Father put in for Dr. Whitman to stop with us and pilot us to the Columbia river. Father put more confidence in Whitman than in Gantt. Whitman consented to do so, and we raised a purse of four hundred dollars among the leaders of the party, paid it to him as far as I know, for piloting the party over. Gantt also stayed with us and there was no friction between them except, perhaps with a regard to traveling on Sunday. Dr, Whitman and my father, who had been elected captain of the company, said it was better to rest Sunday; better for the cattle and horses and better for all; so we did that."

"We were all very glad, especially the women, that we had a man with us who lived on the Columbia and who had passed twice over the road. Mother, sisters and all rejoiced and said: 'Now we are all right. We shall go safely.'"

"Father and all put perfect confidence in Dr. Whitman, and father and he were much together, riding side by side in the saddle in front of the company and planning the camps and the routes along the way."

There is a boy's recollections of his father's leadership and of his friendship with Dr. Whitman, that much discussed figure of history. He adds: 'The Doctor was a man of few words, of striking appearance, straight-forward and one who would inspire confidence anywhere-a man of manifest candor and reliability.

"I like to picture to myself this honest contractor or Fort Leavenworth riding at the head of the wagon train with Dr. Whitman and opening his heart more and more in friendliness. Can there be a better tribute to his honesty, reliability and personal worth than the friendship which was found under the circumstances? Camp life always develops the understanding of camp mates, and the weighty responsibilities of leadership helped to deepen the friendship and understanding which sprang up between those two remarkable men. I value David Thomas Lenox more highly because so long ago Dr. Whitman found such value in him, and although he played no conspicuous part in the later history of Oregon it has won for all time a crown of distinction by his intimacy with Dr. Whitman during the trying and perilous months of the summer of 1843."

There are additional features of interest in the son's recollections of that great journey which throw added light upon the leadership of the father and his intimacy with Dr. Whitman.

"After we had camped two weeks there came quite a crowd from the southern part near Bonneville, called the Applegate company but they had so many cattle and were so hindered thereby, that we at length parted company with them and went on. A few days after the start Lovejoy joined us."

"Dr, Whitman stayed with us to Fort Hall, often riding on before. August 28th he received a letter from his wife, saying, the Indians had burned the mill and she did not know what they would do next, adding; 'Do hurry home.' "

"He came and said: 'Captain Lenox, I must leave you tomorrow morning at five o'clock. sit down with me and I will make you a waybill of all the camping places until I send you back a pilot who knows all about the way, I will send you a Cayuse chief named, Stickas, a Christian Indian, and he will pilot you across the Blue mountains."

"Dr, Whitman started, but reaching the Snake river he found the stream difficult and the ford more crooked than he had thought, so he waited there for us. Meanwhile, he had surveyed the ford and as we came up he rode before us and piloted us safely over the perilous river. "

"At Grand Ronde mountains the Indian pilot met us with Dr. Whitman's letter and piloted us to the Whitman station, When we arrived, Dr. Whitman was gone to see Dr. Ells or Dr. Spaulding and Mr. Geiger was in charge. We stayed one day and then moved on down the river to The Dallas. I never saw Dr. Whitman after that."

I know little about David Thomas Lenox's subsequent life. He settled in Oregon, near Hillsboro, and lived there honored and respected for twenty-seven years. What part he played in the developing life of the community others can tell better than I, but the man who had been captain of an immigrant company of nearly three hundred persons had been Dr. Whitman's friend and trusted associate and had won the confidence of all who knew him was no commonplace man. His influence for good would be strong in any community and I believe that the recollections of those who knew him in his later life would confirm what I have said concerning his character and his worth.

In 1870 he moved to Weston and bought the farm on which he lived for three years. He died in 1873 and was buried at this spot. The death of his near relatives caused his burial spot to be forgotten, and it is only recently that the piety and devotion of his grandsons have discovered his grave and sought to redeem his memory. Admirable devotion and family pride! I congratulate the discoverer of the forgotten grave and I congratulate yet more the grandfather long forgotten whose name has been made to live again and whose character has been brought into the light of history by the devotion of his grandsons.

We dedicated today this monument to the memory of a brave and honest and trustworthy, man who played an important part in the making of Oregon. What happier function has the historian than to rediscover the noble men and women who glorified the past? Happy omen for the future of our country when later generations recall the names and service of their grandsires and pause, as we do now, to revere the memory of one whose character shines brightly through the years! Never again shall be forgotten the name, the fame of David Thomas Lenox.

Dr. Penrose read a letter from the Oregon Baptist States Convention, dated Portland, Ore., July 1924, and signed by C. C. Wright, which he had just received special delivery. the text follows:

"I have just learned that a memorial service is to be held at the grave of David T. Lenox at Weston, July 4th. May I request that you bear the greetings of tribute to this good man from the Baptists of Oregon through the undersigned? Deacon Lenox is held in great reverence by Oregon Baptists because it was in his home and largely through' his influence the first Baptist church west of the Rocky Mountains was organized on May 25, 1844, at West Union, near Hillsboro. In our state offices we have placed in a prominent place the picture of the humble home, and photographs of

the Declaration of Faith adopted by the members who incorporated this church. Also, in our possession we have the records of the church, deeded to the Oregon Baptist State Convention by the West Union church. Some of these records are in Deacon Lenox's handwriting. At my suggestion a committee was appointed of which Mr. T. J. Lieuallen of Adams was chairman, to locate Deacon Lenox's grave, with a view of the Baptists of Oregon erecting a monument to this pioneer Baptist whom we all honor for the contribution he made to Baptist history on the Pacific coast.