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THE BLALOCK HOUSE c. 1900

253 Marcus Street

Nelson G Blalock started his illustrious careers, one in business and one in medicine, as a poor married student selling nuts and apples to help defray his school expenses. After graduation from Jefferson Medical School in St. Louis in 1861, he joined the 115th Illinois Volunteers serving as Regimental Surgeon during the civil War. He remained with his regiment until 1863 when ill health compelled his resignation and he returned to Mt Zion, Illinois to practice medicine. A year later, his wife, Panthea, whom he had married in 1858, died leaving a son, Yancy. In 1865, Dr. Blalock married Miss Marie Greenfield and they lived in Mt. Zion until 1872.

That was the year he left Illinois alone on horseback to scout a trail to Washington Territory, hoping it would help him regain his health. He was so impressed with the Walla Walla Valley on that trip, that immediately on his return, he started making arrangements for the move west, convincing his brother, James, to join him.

With three spring wagons plus a 4-horse wagon to carry feed and other freight, a group of four families left for Washington Territory on May 29, 1873. On October eleventh, when they finally came in view of the "great Walla Walla Valley", the men fired a salute. They had made it to Washington Territory after a long, hard trip.

Dr. Blalock practiced medicine in the area, but in the beginning he made his living by freighting between Wallula and Walla Walla, getting goods from river boats and selling to the stores in town. With his first earnings, he established a mill on the edge of town. As there were no roads, he next had a flume built to float logs down stream from the Blue Mountains.

By 1876, he was able to purchase 160 acres two miles west of Walla Walla for \$2.50 an acre and began planting apple and pear trees, the beginning of his large orchards. In 1893, he shipped two carloads of fruit to the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago. He also bought a considerable amount of dry land six miles south of town for which he paid ten bushels of wheat per acre instead of cash. In 1881, he harvested 50,000 bushels of wheat from 1,000 acres of this dry land that had been deemed worthless. Dr. Blalock was a pioneer in arid land wheat farming. He also promoted legislation for the eventual building of the Celilo Canal which would open the Columbia River for navigation from the Pacific to Lewiston, Idaho.

In order to manage all his business affairs while continuing his widespread medical practice, in 1897 he formed the Blalock Fruit Company to operate his large fruit growing business and the Blalock Wheat Growing Company for his farmlands.

In addition to being a very busy doctor, Nelson Blalock was a business man, an orchardist, a wheat farmer, and an active and valued member of the community. He served two terms as mayor, was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1889, president of the Northwest Fruit Growers Association, and for thirty years served on the Board of Trustees at Whitman College.

He gave land to both Whitman and Walla Walla College and is remembered in college Place by Blalock Pond and Blalock Avenue.

In 1900 a new pioneer organization, the Inland Empire Pioneer Association, named Blalock its first president. His group is still operative as the Walla Walla Valley Pioneer and Historical Society.

In 1905, Dr Blalock moved from his large three-story house on 109 North Second Street to the smaller house at 253 Marcus Street. This is a Queen Ann Style house with a steeply pitched roof. The projecting dominant front gable with an oval window in the triangle crowns a second story bay. This has a triad of windows with a rectangular framed pane above each one. Ionic columns on decorative piers support the one story porch, framing the entrance and defining the corners.

By 1994, when Kay Fenimore-Smith, a Whitman professor, and her husband George Smith, a contractor, purchased the house, it was a weathered, boarded-up eyesore. They have completely restored it, inside and out. The result is a charming, livable, historic home that Walla Walla's 20-20 honored with a major award in 1997.

Dr. Blalock died in 1913. He is buried in the old part of the Mountain View Cemetery with a plain Civil War marker showing only his name and his regiment.

A private residence.