

# History of Washington County



Washington County, Oregon takes up most of the Tualatin Valley, a basin formed by the Tualatin River, which slowly winds down into the Willamette River. It is bordered by the Coast Range to the west, the Columbia River to the north, and the basalt filled Tualatin Mountains (or West Hills) separate the valley from Portland.

The Tualatin River and Valley are named for the Atfalati band of Kalapuya that once owned this land. They camped seasonally throughout the valley and hunted game, traded for salmon, and gathered important trade plants like camas and wapato. The Atfalati used to meet at Chatakuin (or Five Oaks) to trade, marry and settle affairs. Sadly, diseases like measles and small pox devastated populations during the early explorer period and fur trade era (1770s-1830s).

By the time the first missionaries and early settlers began to start churches and schools in the region in the 1840s, most of the Atfalati survivors lived near Wapato Lake at Gaston. Many Native American women (nationwide) had played a role in establishing good trade relationships by intermarrying with mountain men and fur trappers, and starting mixed families, like the Meek, McKay, and Newell families. These families faced discrimination in the wake of white settlement, but they persevered and made their marks on local history.

Originally one of four counties formed into the Tuality District at the 1843 Champoege meetings, it didn't take long to begin to develop the valley. Settlers began to clear their new 320 to 640 acre Donation Land Claims of forestland and used the lumber to build homesteads and businesses. Justus Jones (and son) built a saw mill at Cedar Mill, damming the creek for logs and taking them by wagon into Portland for sale. The Hall brothers gristmill in Beaverton and the Denney sawmill on Fanno Creek also brought growth to the area.

As Washington County entered statehood in 1859, people needed a better way to transport their goods to market in Portland. Plank roads that followed all the old Indian trails proved muddy in rainy weather and almost impossible to navigate in wagons. Peter Scholl and John Taylor operated early ferries across the Tualatin River, while Jesse Boone built a cable



ferry across the Willamette near his claim in Wilsonville. Steam navigation made an impact at first, but the Tualatin River frequently jammed and had to be constantly dredged.

Villages began to grow into towns. Isaiah Kelsey donated land and David Hill sold forty acres and a log cabin (as a school and courthouse) to the county in 1849 for \$200. After David Hill's death, the area was remained Hillsboro and the town became the county seat of local government.

The O & C Railroad came to Hillsboro in 1871, opening up the Tualatin Valley to agriculture transport, along with the logging and lumbering industries. James and Ellen Smock founded Smockville in the 1880s (now Sherwood) and Samuel Galbreath founded Tualatin and built a bridge there, calling it Bridgeport. However, passengers didn't get rail transport until 1905 to 1912, when the Oregon Electric came through the county.



Most towns in the area were paved and early water systems installed after 1910. Washington County was a hub of agricultural production by that time, from hops to orchards, berries, wheat, and dairy. The Oregon Nursery Company (later the town of Orenco) became a huge producer of fruit trees and berries for local farmers, but the company went out of business during the 1929 stock market crash, so the land was sold

off and an urbanized town site now remains.

World War I & II both affected the region economically, as government contracts called for Spruce and Doug Fir lumber production by the millions of board feet. Latino migrant laborers took care of our farm fields while the American soldiers went out to fight. Companies like Reser Foods began in the 1950s, as a response to the new frozen food industry, and have become large employment providers and community supporters.

The last industry to push Washington County forward was modern technology. Tektronics was founded in 1951, and then a galaxy of other tech companies followed suit. Intel arrived in 1974 and now has five campuses and frequently sends volunteer groups out to help in the community. Nike World Headquarters came to Beaverton in 1990 and has provided thousands of jobs and amazing athletics products worldwide.

Washington County has more of a proud and diverse history than many people realize! This condensed version does not provide as much information as we could absolutely include. So, we look forward to providing our members with more information as we add new subjects to our newsletters each week. Keep reading to hear the old stories and learn

about people long forgotten. They have impacted us in more ways that we can ever understand and they deserve to be remembered!

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