

History of Walla Walla

On April 25, 1854, the Washington Territorial Assembly created Walla Walla County by setting aside 110,000 square miles from Skamania County. The boundary line ran from the mouth of the Deschutes River to the 49th parallel, then east to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, south along the crest of the mountains to the 46th parallel, and then west to the mouth of the Deschutes.

In 1859, the Washington Territorial Assembly began creating new counties out of the 70 million acre Walla Walla County.

On November 11, 1875, when Columbia County was established, (forming Walla Walla County's eastern border), the present day Walla Walla County boundary line (1267 square miles) was established. The southern border is the State of Oregon, and the Snake River separates the western and northern border from Benton and Franklin Counties.

Walla Walla County is located in the southeastern portion of the State of Washington and the 2000 census reported a population of 55,180. The incorporated cities in Walla Walla County are Walla Walla, College Place, Waitsburg and Prescott. The greatest population growth was experienced at the turn of the century and on November 7, 1859, the county commissioners gave the village Walla Walla its name, designated it as the county seat, and gave to it a town government.

Walla Walla County Firsts

-Walla Walla County was one of the first areas in the region between the Rockies and the Cascades to be permanently settled.

-Washington State's first constitution was ratified in Walla Walla County.

-The first Presbyterian Church west of the Rockies was organized in Walla Walla County in August 1838.

-The first bank in the State of Washington, Baker Boyer National Bank, established in Walla Walla in 1869, is still located at 2nd and Main Street in Walla Walla.

-The first savings and loan association established in the State of Washington is now known as Banner Bank.

-The Washington Statesman, now the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, began publishing in 1861, making it one of the first newspapers between the Missouri River and the Cascades.

-The area's first railroad service opened in 1891 as the Walla Walla/Columbia Railroad.

Historical Dates of Interest

1805 Lewis & Clark passed through Walla Walla County 1818 Fort Walla Walla was built 1836

Whitman Mission was established 1847 Whitman Massacre 1856 Fort Walla Walla becomes a military fort 1859 Walla Walla town becomes county seat Gold Rush 1867 First courthouse built 1870 Census 5,102 1875 Railroad came to area 1880 President Hayes visited Walla Walla County (Presidential Western Tour, Walla Walla, Washington Territory, October 5, 1880)
1910 Fort Walla Walla closed, cavalry gone
1916 New courthouse built, currently in use

The Walla Walla area has been known historically for its agricultural based economy; however, the influence of three hospitals, three colleges, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington State Penitentiary and urbanites fleeing the “big city” for a better quality of life have help stabilize the valley’s overall economy.

Agriculture is the dominant industry in the county. Wheat is the number one crop. A variety of other crops, including barley, corn, potatoes, asparagus, peas, soft fruit, onions, concord and wine grapes, vegetables, alfalfa hay and seed generate a significant part of the annual harvest.

One of Walla Walla County’s best-known agricultural products is the Walla Walla Sweet Onion developed specifically by Walla Walla growers. To be labeled a genuine Walla Walla Sweet, an onion must be grown within specific boundaries resulting a low sulfur content and high water content, thus providing its sweet flavor.

Within Walla Walla County are two of the world’s largest farms. The Snake River Vineyard has the distinction of being the largest Concord grape vineyard and Broetje Orchards is the largest apple orchard. These help provide the large diversity in the crops grown in the county.

Providing a stunning backdrop, the Blue Mountains frame a valley that is home to more than 90 wineries and as many vineyards, whose operators work hand in hand to produce world class wines of exceptional character. Excellent examples of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah have earned the Walla Walla Valley national and international acclaim. Other grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Semillion, Cabernet Franc and Sangiovese are also produced in the valley.

Sunset Magazine named Downtown Walla Walla as the best in the western United States in the March 2002 issue. The National Trust for Historic Preservation named Walla Walla as one of 2002’s Dozen Distinctive Destinations and Walla Walla is a 2001 Great American Main Street

Award™ Winner.

