

Information regarding the origin of selected Oregon city names

Compiled by Lewis L. McArthur from Lewis A. McArthur and Lewis L. McArthur, Oregon Geographic Names, 7th ed. (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2003)

Amity, YAMHILL. This name was the result of an amicable settlement of a local school dispute. Amity was the name of a school, first applied in 1849 by the first teacher in a log building that was built by two rival communities that were seeking school advantages.

Arock, MALHEUR. This name was first applied in May 1922. It was suggested by the proximity of a large rock bearing picture writing, supposedly of Indian origin.

Astoria, CLATSOP. The name Astoria is full of historical significance, for about it is woven the story of the discovery, exploration, and development of the great Oregon Country. It was near here that Capt. Robert Gray discovered the mouth of the Columbia River and gave to the United States its claim to the title of the territory. It was near here that Lewis and Clark passed the winter of 1805–6, and it was here that the first commercial settlement of Americans was made on the Pacific Coast in 1811. This settlement was the direct result of the organization of the Pacific Fur Company in 1810 by John Jacob Astor of New York, and it was fitting that his name should be given to the company's initial enterprise.

Berlin, LINN. Berlin is about seven miles southeast of Lebanon. In the early days, pioneer families living in the vicinity were admirers of fine racing stock. The local residents began to hold races near the residence of Mr. Burrell. Burrell entertained all comers, but finally the attendance was so large that he was forced to make a charge for meals, and his home was referred to as Burrell's Inn. When the post office was established in 1899, it was consolidated to Berlin. Early in October 1944, residents of Berlin were astonished to learn that arrangements had been made to change the name of their community to Distomo for the place in Greece so horribly treated by the Germans. This change in name, to be accompanied by a blast of nationwide radio and other publicity, was said to be in the interest of democracy, but the promoters of the plan were not sufficiently interested in practical democracy to ask the local residents for their views about the business. These local citizens organized a democratic revolt, and the scheme was abandoned. A project to change all the names in this country so as to eliminate those commemorating places and people of nations with which the United States had at one time or another been at war would have surprising results.

Bly, KLAMATH. Bly was a word of the Klamath meaning up or high. White people appropriated the name and applied it to a town east of the Klamath Indian Reservation. On May 5, 1945, the community was the scene of the only World War II deaths in the contiguous 48 states. A Japanese balloon carrying incendiary bombs, designed to start forest fires, malfunctioned and landed without detonating. It was disturbed by a picnic group and exploded, killing one woman and five children. The authorities did not wish to inform the Japanese of their success, and the news was suppressed for several months.

Bonanza, KLAMATH. Bonanza is a Spanish word meaning prosperity. This place is said to have been named because of a number of fine springs in the vicinity. Good water is always a source of prosperity in a country that needs irrigation.

Bunker Hill, COOS. Bunker Hill is a neighborhood in the southern part of the city of Coos Bay and is remarkable for the fact that it was not named for the historic spot in Boston. Prior to 1900, it was just another timbered hill rising above tidewater near the mouth of Coalbank Slough. It was called Bunker Hill because of the coal bunkers nearby, and the application of the name came without formality.

Burnt Woods, LINCOLN. This post office was in the eastern part of Lincoln County, near Tumtum River, where the remains of forest fires are still much in evidence. It was established in June 1919, and a list of suggested names was sent to the Post Office Department. On the list was Burnt Woods, and this was the name chosen by the authorities.

Cape Meares, TILLAMOOK. Cape Meares, south of Tillamook Bay, bears the name of the most interesting of all the early explorers of the north Pacific Coast. Meares is well described in the following words by Prof. Edmond S. Meany in his *History of the State of Washington*: "John Meares, a retired lieutenant of the British Navy, was the most unconventional and interesting personality of all those figuring in these early marine annals. He sailed under double colors, he succeeded as fur hunter and geographer, he wrote a book, he precipitated a quarrel between England and Spain which came near embroiling also the new republic of the United States in a serious war. In 1787 Meares commanded an expedition to the north Pacific coast, and in May 1788 he arrived in Nootka, and for two pistols bought some land from Chief Maquina."

In July, 1788, Meares set sail on an exploring expedition along the coast. He passed the mouth of the Columbia River on July 6, 1788, but he failed to identify it as a river. He then named several features, including Cape Lookout. Meares's description and pictures of Cape Lookout, beyond all doubt, refer to what we now call Cape Meares, and the rocks that Meares christened Three Brothers are now known as Three Arch Rocks. George Davidson, of the then U.S. Coast Survey, applied the name of Cape Meares to the feature herein described in 1857 because the charts of 1850 and 1853 mistakenly applied the name Cape Lookout to the prominent cape south of Netarts Bay.

Corvallis, BENTON. John Avery settled near the mouth of Marys River in 1846 and in 1850 he established the post office Marysville. In 1853, the legislature changed the name of the locality from Marysville to Corvallis. The name Corvallis was made by compounding Latin words meaning heart of the valley and was originally intended for Salem.

Crane, HARNEY. The community Crane was named because of its situation near Crane Creek and Crane Creek Gap, prominent geographic features in the Harney Valley.

Deer Island, COLUMBIA. Deer Island was named by Lewis and Clark. They first visited the island on November 5, 1805, on their way down the Columbia and again on March 28, 1806, on their return. It was on the second visit that the party had good luck finding venison.

Eola, POLK. The name Eola comes from Aeolus, god of the winds in Greek mythology. There seems to be good authority for the belief that the name Eola was suggested by a local musical enthusiast named Lindsay Robbins.

Estacada, CLACKAMAS. Estacada is a Spanish word and means staked out, or marked with stakes, and the principal use of the name in the United States is in northwestern Texas. The Spanish name refers to the trunks of an upright desert plant. The name was used in Oregon because it had a pleasing sound, with no thought of its original significance.

Fossil, WHEELER. Joan F. Conn Hoover's great-granddaughter wrote the compiler in 1998 to say there had been a large landslide nearby that uncovered a number of fossil bones. These were sent to Prof. Thomas Condon, then in The Dalles. This discovery suggested the name of the new office.

Gateway, JEFFERSON. Gateway is named for a natural depression in the terrain north of Madras, caused by erosion by Trout Creek and its tributaries. It is in effect a natural gate for the railroad and vehicular traffic north and south through central Oregon.

Grass Valley, SHERMAN. Pioneer settlers, without ever changing countenance, tell newcomers that in early days the ryegrass was so tall in this part of Oregon that it was well over a man's head. They even state that this was so when the man was on horseback. This accounts for the name.

Halfway, BAKER. An article printed in the Baker City *Democrat-Herald*, which seems to be authoritative, says that the post office was established about 1887 on the Alexander Stalker ranch, now Canaday farm, and the office was named Halfway because it was about midway between Pine and Cornucopia. This appears to be correct. Later, the office was moved, and it is now much nearer Pine. The original significance of the name has been lost.

Helix, UMATILLA. This place was named because a local resident had a painful experience with an infection in the helix of his ear. Dr. F.A. Kiehle of Portland told the compiler that he heard this story after he came to Oregon in 1908 from the secretary of one of the medical societies.

Heppner, MORROW. Named for Henry Heppner. He and Jackson L. Morrow opened the first merchandise store there in 1873. Destruction of a large part of the town of Heppner June 14, 1903, by flood was one of the great tragedies of Oregon.

Idleyld Park, DOUGLAS. Idleyld Park is one of Oregon's mystery names. The place is on North Umpqua River near the mouth of Rock Creek. In January 1946, K.D. Lytle of Roseburg, division engineer of the Oregon State Highway Division, wrote the writer that about 1918–19 an amusement hall was built in the place, and the owner named it Idleyld Park for a similar place he had heard of in California. There is a post office in California named Idyllwild. If that name is the genesis of the Oregon name, there has been some fancy confusion along the line.

Imnaha River, WALLOWA. Imnaha is a beautiful name for a stream that rises in the Wallowa Mountains and flows to Snake River through one of the deepest river gorges on the continent. The word was used by William Clark on a map issued with the original Lewis and Clark journals in 1814, in the form Innahar. J.H. Horner of Enterprise, the authority on Wallowa County history, told the writer in 1927 that Imna was the name of a subchief and that it was the custom among the Indians to sound *ha* to indicate the territory ruled over by a chief. Thus Imnaha was the land ruled over by Imna.

Izee, GRANT. In 2004, Oliver Keerins told the compiler his great-grandfather, Carlos Bonham, named the place for his cattle brand I Z. Bonham had been a blacksmith at Fort Harney before ranching near the headwaters of South Fork John Day River.

Kinzua, WHEELER. Kinzua was established in 1928 and was named by E.D. Wetmore, president of the Kinzua Pine Mills Company for Kinzua, Warren County, Pennsylvania. In 1978, the mill was closed, the town and all facilities removed, and the property planted to a tree farm.

La Pine, DESCHUTES. La Pine was named by Alfred A. Aya. The name was suggested by the abundance of pine trees in the neighborhood.

Madras, JEFFERSON. Bert Doze, a newspaperman in Wichita, Kansas, was sent to the new community about 1903 to open a store. The name Madras was suggested, which was taken from a bolt of cloth in the store. Madras is a well-known cotton fabric named for the city in India.

Maupin, WASCO. Maupin bears the name of one of the most celebrated of Oregon pioneers. Howard Maupin came to Oregon about 1853 and settled in central Oregon. He is best known for his conflict with Chief Paulina. Later, Maupin had a ferry on Deschutes River near the mouth of Bakeoven Creek, which has been called Maupin since 1909.

Maxville, WALLOWA. Maxville was a logging camp owned by the Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company. The place was named, with a slight change, for J.D. McMillan, the company superintendent.

Mount Vernon, GRANT. Herman Oliver of John Day stated that David W. Jenkins, an early settler, owned a prize black stallion named Mt. Vernon. Both the town and the rocky eminence just to the north were named for the horse, and the animal was stabled in a small stone building constructed especially for him as protection against Indians and thieves. In 1990, the building was still standing, unfazed by over 100 years, just north of US-26, about one and one half miles east of Mount Vernon.

Noti, LANE. H.G. Suttle, postmaster at Noti, told the writer in February 1926 of the unusual origin of this name in the following words: "In the early days an Indian and a white man were traveling together from a point on the coast into the Willamette Valley with one horse between them. In order to make as rapid progress as possible they were doing what was known as 'riding and tying.' One would take the horse and ride ahead a distance, tie the horse and proceed on foot. When his companion reached the point where the horse was tied, he in turn mounted and rode a given distance beyond his partner and tied the horse again. It is said that the white man had agreed to tie the horse at about the point where the Noti Creek joins Long Tom River, where the present town of Noti is now located, but instead double-crossed the Indian and rode on to Eugene and left the Indian to walk. When the Indian discovered that he had been jobbed, he is said to have exclaimed, 'Him no tie,' and from there the place received its name."

Oak Grove, HOOD RIVER. The area was first called Crapper, after W.S. Crapper, who settled there about 1884 and gave the land for the first school. Later, when the church was constructed, it was called Oak Grove Church. About 1904, when the present school was constructed, residents changed the name of Crapper district to Oak Grove district.

Olex, GILLIAM. This post office was intended to honor one Alex Smith, a local resident, but the enthusiasm of the petition writer was better than his handwriting, and the authorities at Washington misread Alex into Olex, and so it was.

Oretown, TILLAMOOK. James B. Upton, a local settler, petitioned for a post office in 1877. He had a seal with Oregon City cut in the die, and he suggested that the proposed post office be named Ore City, for he had an idea that he could alter the seal in such a way that it could be used for the new community. Postal officials would not accept this name and suggested the name of Oretown. The subsequent history of the seal has not transpired.

Orient, MULTNOMAH. Barbara Yasui in *OHQ* tells how Andrew McKinnon brought Miyo Iwakoshi to Oregon as his bride in 1880. Miyo and her younger brother were the first Japanese to settle permanently in Oregon. McKinnon was part owner of a sawmill, which was named Orient Mill in honor of his bride. The community that grew around the mill thus received its name.

Phoenix, JACKSON. The place was named by Sylvester M. Wait, who was the agent for the Phoenix Insurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut, and he took that name for the post office.

Pistol River, CURRY. James Mace lost a pistol in this stream in 1853, and it has been known as Pistol River since that time.

Plush, LAKE. The town of Plush was named for a local celebrity who was a member of the Paiute tribe. A letter of C.A. Moore published in the *Oregonian* February 16, 1926, tells how the man received the name Plush. This was the result of a poker game that he got into. The game was a frame-up. The Indian was dealt a flush by another member of the party who held a better one. He could not pronounce the word *flush* and called it *plush*, and that was the name he subsequently went by.

Progress, WASHINGTON. When Progress was named in 1889, optimism was fairly singing in the air. It is at the crossing of the Scholls Ferry Road and Hall Boulevard. In the 1970s, a large shopping mall, Washington Square, was erected in Progress, and, by 1989, the community had become part of a heavily built suburbia stretching from Beaverton to Tigard. This much progress is questionable.

Sams Valley, JACKSON. Chief Sam of the Rogue River Indians formerly lived in this valley, and it was named for him. There is also a small community with the same name and Sams Creek flows through the valley.

Sitkum, COOS. About 1873, J.A. Harry established a tavern or roadhouse about halfway between Roseburg and what was known as Coos City. As a result of a competitor putting up another halfway house nearby, a new name was selected, Sitkum, which is the Chinook jargon word for half.

Sublimity, MARION. Sublimity was named by James M. Denny, who established the town and said he called it Sublimity "for the sublime scenery in the hills around the town."

Sunny Valley, JOSEPHINE. This locality was first called Grave and then Grave Creek, because in 1846, Martha Leland Crowley was buried nearby. The name was changed to Sunny Valley in 1945. Local residents were apparently a little morbid about the old name and selected Sunny Valley because the locality is often free of the low fogs that frequent the general area.

Telocaset, UNION. When the railroad was built through the Blue Mountains, Dr. William C. McKay was asked to suggest new names for stations that had names duplicating others in Oregon. Among those he suggested was Telocaset. This word is from the Nez Perce language and means a thing at the top, or put on top, such as a tree growing on a hill, summit, or plateau, overlooking a valley.

Terrebonne, DESCHUTES. The community of Terrebonne was first known as Hillman, a word made by taking parts of the names of two prominent railroad men, James J. Hill and E.H. Harriman. Shortly after the town was founded, a man named Hillman, a prominent real estate operator in the Deschutes Valley, got into trouble with the government, amidst unpleasant notoriety. This was disquieting to the good people of Hillman, who changed the name of the place to Terrebonne, a French expression meaning good earth.

Unity, BAKER. The first post office in the area was about one and a half miles from the present site. This was apparently not a convenient place for the settlers who were all ranchers throughout the valley, so they had a meeting to decide where to move it and what to name it. They all agreed on the location and were so pleased with their agreement that they decided to call it Unity. In 1884, the OR&N established a station named Unity seven miles north of Durkee. This was a long way from the town and had no connection. The name was later changed to Caton.

Wonder, JOSEPHINE. About 1902, a man by the name of John T. Roberson started a store on Slate Creek about two miles southwest of Wilderville near the mouth of Pollard Gulch. He began to call this store Wonder Store because neighbors wondered where he would get his trade, as the territory was sparsely settled. The present community of Wonder is some two miles farther west on Slate Creek.

Yachats, LINCOLN. This place was first known as Ocean View. In 1916, the name was changed to Yachats for a tribe of Indians. These Indians had previously been moved to Siletz, and they are now practically extinct. The name is pronounced Ya-hots. Indians say that the word means "at the foot of the mountain."

Zigzag River, CLACKAMAS. On October 11, 1845, Joel Palmer crossed the deep ravine of Zigzag Canyon near timberline on Mount Hood. In his journal for that day he uses the following description: "The manner of descending is to turn directly to the right, go zigzag for about one hundred yards, then turn short round, and go zigzag until you come under the place where you started from; then to the right, and so on, until you reach the base." It is obvious that the principal stream was identified by the crossing. The river is no more crooked than adjoining streams, and there is no reason to believe it was named for an especially irregular alignment. The name Zigzag has also come to be applied to Zigzag Glacier on Mount Hood as well as to a community two miles west of Rhododendron.