

Chapter 2: History of the City of Tillamook



The story began on August 14, 1788, when Captain Robert Gray, an American sailing the sloop “Lady Washington,” anchored in Tillamook Bay thinking he had found the “great river of the West.” This was the first landing on the Oregon coast. Tillamook is located in the northwest part of Oregon near the Pacific Ocean – approximately 70 miles west of Portland and an equal distance south of Astoria.

In its early years, the town of Tillamook, the first community to be settled in the county, bore the unofficial names Lincoln and Hoquarton, the latter believed to be an Indian name meaning “the landing.” Its name was eventually changed to Tillamook, an Indian word meaning “the many peoples of the Nehelim.” William Clark, of explorers Lewis and Clark, wrote in 1806 of the “Killamox” Indians but according to research by the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes the “K” was not used in the name of the tribe. Local folklore used “Land of Many Waters”, even though it was not the true meaning of the name, as the meaning of Tillamook.

The name Tillamook, is of Chinook origin. It means the people of Nekelim (pronounced Ne-elim). The latter name means the place ‘Elim,’ or, in the Cathlamet dialect, the place ‘Kelim.’ The initial “t” of Tillamook is the plural article, the terminal “ook” the Chinook plural ending — “uks”. The culture of the Tillamook differed quite considerably from that of the northern Coast Salish, and has evidently been influenced by the culture of the tribes of northern California.

The first settler in the vicinity was Joseph Champion, who came in 1851 and made his home in a hollow spruce tree he called his “castle.” Within months other settlers came – all bachelors.

In 1852, the first two families arrived to make their homes. Each successive year brought more families. On Dec. 15, 1853, Tillamook County was created by an act of legislature.

In 1854, the first election was held, the first census taken, the first school started and the keel was laid for a community ship: the “Morning Star.”

The “Morning Star” was built out of economic necessity because shipwrecks had destroyed all transportation that had carried local dairy products, fish and potatoes to market. The vessel was built by the combined efforts of Tillamook’s settlers. Most of the materials came from the forest, but iron work from a wrecked ship was laboriously packed on horseback from the Clatsop beaches by way of Neahkahnie Mountain. Sails were purchased from the Indians who had salvaged them from a ship wrecked near Netarts. Pitch was used to caulk the craft. Paint was not available. The ship was launched in the Kilchis River on Jan. 5, 1855, and for some years made possible the existence of the pioneers and development of Tillamook County.

In 1861 Thomas Stillwell, aged 70, arrived with his family from Yamhill and purchased land. The following year he laid out the town that would become Tillamook and opened the first store. In 1866 the first post office was opened and the town was permanently renamed Tillamook. An election in 1873 chose Tillamook as the county seat. The first public building was the jail built that same year.

Tillamook became an incorporated city in 1891. The first County Courthouse and City Hall were erected in the early 1890s. Both the City Hall and County Courthouse have been relocated since that time. Tillamook’s history will be discussed further in the Historic Resources section. By 1920, the City of Tillamook had a growing population of 1,964 residents.

Historically, large public works projects have strongly influenced the City’s economy and the region’s economy. In the 1940s, the United States’ involvement in World War II brought significant changes to the region in the form of the Navy’s construction of Naval Air Station Tillamook on property located approximately 3 miles south of the City, as well as residential construction within the City’s limits. After the War, ownership of the Naval Air Station property, including the Tillamook Municipal Airport and railroad line, was transferred to the Port of Tillamook Bay (the Port) for use as an Industrial Park complex. This transfer brought opportunities for new capital and jobs to the area.

In mid-twentieth century, construction of US Coast Highway 101 brought new capital into the region and enhanced tourism and freight hauling. The initial infusion of capital and jobs sparked by this construction has ended. However, Highway 101 continues to provide a heavily used route for tourists, a connection to other coastal communities and a strong link between the City and the Port.

Today, Tillamook’s City Hall is located at 210 Laurel and occupies the former Tillamook Post Office, which moved to a new facility on First Street in 1986. The building is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. It opened as a post office in 1925. In 1943, as part of a national public works program, the U.S. Treasury Department commissioned native Tillamook resident Lucia Wiley to paint a mural on one inside wall of the building. It is entitled “The Landing of Captain Robert Gray in 1788.”

View of Tillamook looking west in 1900's



Within the surrounding Tillamook City area are the floodplains and lower reaches of the Wilson, Trask, and Tillamook Rivers; the rich agricultural lowlands; and the forested foothills of the Coast Range with an opening to Tillamook Bay to

the northwest.

The climate of the Tillamook area is typical of western Oregon with mild winters and moderate summers. As in other coastal areas, precipitation is heavy, over 90 inches per year, with about 70 percent occurring in November through March. Dairy fields, floodplains and forest lands surround the City's Urban Growth Boundary. The general climate characteristics also allow the area to participate in the growing attraction of the recreation and tourist industry to the beauties of the Oregon coast.

History of Land Use in the City of Tillamook

View of Tillamook looking north in 1900s, Tillamook, 1905 Courthouse on the upper right



Land use in the City of Tillamook has evolved with the development of different modes of transportation. The Native American Indians who lived there before white settlers arrived called the City “Hoquarton”, and during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, business in Tillamook was carried out along streets abutting Hoquarton Slough, where

boats carrying supplies could land to load and unload cargo. The lumber mills also ran alongside the slough. Sparse urban development extended south to about Sixth Street. The Highway 101 Bridge crossing the slough was built in 1931 by the Clackamas Construction Company.

By the mid-twentieth century, Hoquarton Slough, the existing lumber mill, and the Trask River generally defined the City's limits to the north, east and west respectively.

At the time of the development of the first City Comprehensive Plan in the early 1980's, Hoquarton Slough continued to define the northern border on that part of the City west of U.S. Highway 101, Dougherty Slough for a moment defined the northern border of town on 101, but was quickly replaced with Wilson River determining the northern boundary. In general, State Highway 6 helped determine where the northern border and Urban Growth Boundary was located on that part of town east of 101. The Trask River continued to define the City limits on the west side, and Marolf Loop Road on the east

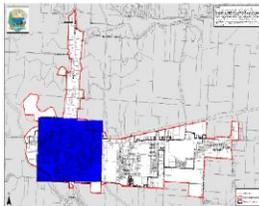
side. The area, across the Trask River, once in the southwest corner of the City Limits was determined to be rural land and could not be efficiently served by public facilities. This land remains rural and was excluded from the UGB.

View of Tillamook looking east on First Street in 1900

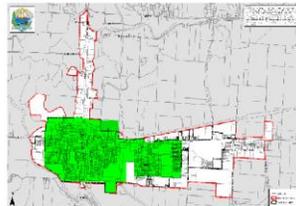


Further adjustments were made to the shape of the City by the late twentieth century. On June 4, 1980, public hearing testimony was received by the City Council concerning Goals No.3 and 4 involving the inclusion of the Citadel property (east of Trask River Road) into the Urban Growth Boundary for future City growth and expansion. Adequate need was not shown through population and land use statistics for inclusion of this property into the Urban Growth Boundary. Tillamook City must consider the area for future urban development in conjunction with eastward expansion of the City Limits. Property along U.S. Highway 101 north to the Wilson River was annexed into the City, areas of farmland once in the City Limits were withdrawn from the City at the time of the last Periodic Review. The following maps show the City's development over the past 65 years.

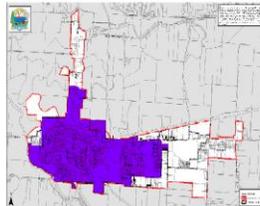
City Limits – 1950



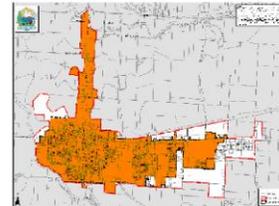
City Limits – 1960



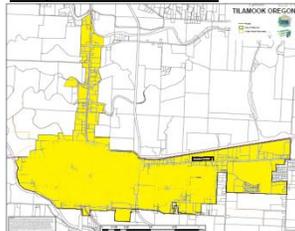
City Limits – 1980



City Limits – 2005



City Limits – 2015



(Note: pictures may be altered for clarity)