

THE CHAMBER



VISITOR and CONVENTION BUREAU

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OUR HISTORY AT A GLANCE

By act of the Territorial Legislature, Josephine County became Oregon's 18th county on January 22, 1856, three years before Oregon became a state.

The only county in the state of Oregon named in honor of a woman, Josephine County derives its name directly from Josephine Rollins, who was the first white woman to settle for any length of time in this part of Oregon. Born in Illinois in 1883, her full name was Virginia Josephine Rollins. In 1850, Josephine and her father, Lloyd Rollins, became members of an emigrant train heading west which reached Oregon City, in October. The following spring in 1851, Josephine accompanied her father and a party of miners southward where upon reaching the Rogue River, they were told by Indians of gold in a creek to the west. Guided by the Indians, the party made its way to a point on a creek within a few miles of the present Illinois River where good placer ground was found. The creek, which is the location of the first gold strike in Southern Oregon, is still called Josephine Creek.

In 1852, sailors, who had deserted their ship near Crescent City, started for the newly discovered gold fields at Jacksonville, but found rich deposits at a location in the Illinois Valley some 25 miles south of present Grants Pass. This discovery at "Sailor Diggin's" immediately became an important mining center with a population of several thousand. The name was later changed to Waldo in honor of William Waldo, brother of Daniel Waldo, a prominent figure in early Oregon history. In 1858, many miners left for new discoveries on the Frazier River of British Columbia never to return again. The crumbling foundations of the last store are all that remain of the first county seat.

Sailor Diggin's had been designated as the first county seat "until a permanent location was established" by a vote of the people. On July 7, 1857, Kerbyville was selected to serve as the seat of government for Josephine County. In 1885, the voters cast a majority of their votes for Grants Pass as a "permanent location" for the county government.

The Indians who lived along the Rogue River have often been termed fierce. There were a number of linguistic groups comprising these tribes of Indians frequently referred to as "The Rogues" because of their willingness to fight for their rights. The true tribal classifications were Takelma and Shasta. After the final war of 1856, the Indians were moved to the Siletz and Grande Ronde Reservations on the Northern Oregon Coast.

The Applegate wagon train of emigrants in 1846 made the first wagon tracks through the beautiful Rogue River Valley. The emigrants, of that time had but one destination in mind, the Willamette Valley, and failed to note the spectacular beauty which would one day provide Oregon's greatest tourist attractions. The trail followed by the Applegate party was on the south side of the Rogue River and crossed at Fort Vannoy about five miles west of present Grants Pass.

The Post Office was established March 22, 1865. A part of Jackson County at that time, Grants Pass remained only a stage station until the arrival of the railroad. In 1885, a row of townships along the west border of Jackson County was annexed to Josephine County to establish a rail head in Josephine County.

The Oregon-California Railroad line was completed to Grants Pass on Christmas Eve, 1883. The rapid growth of population in the county brought with it tradesmen of many types including miners, farmers, lumbermen, orchardists. Grants Pass became the trading center of the county. By the 1890's it could boast of having its own opera house, the Grants Pass Water, Light and Power Co., which generated power at a dam a few hundred feet west of the present Caveman Bridge; the Rogue River was spanned by the first of several bridges (at 5th street), and a fire department. The first church in Grants Pass was the Methodist, erected in 1887 on the site of the present building which was completed in 1980 under the leadership of Rev. T.L. Jones.

OUR NAME

Grants Pass served as a stagecoach stop in the 1860's and became a rail-head with the completion of the California-Oregon railroad (now the Southern Pacific) in 1884. The name was selected to honor Genreal U.S. Grant's success at Vicksburg and the Post office was established in 1865. Until after the turn of the century our name still retained the original spelling of Grant's Pass using an apostrophe.