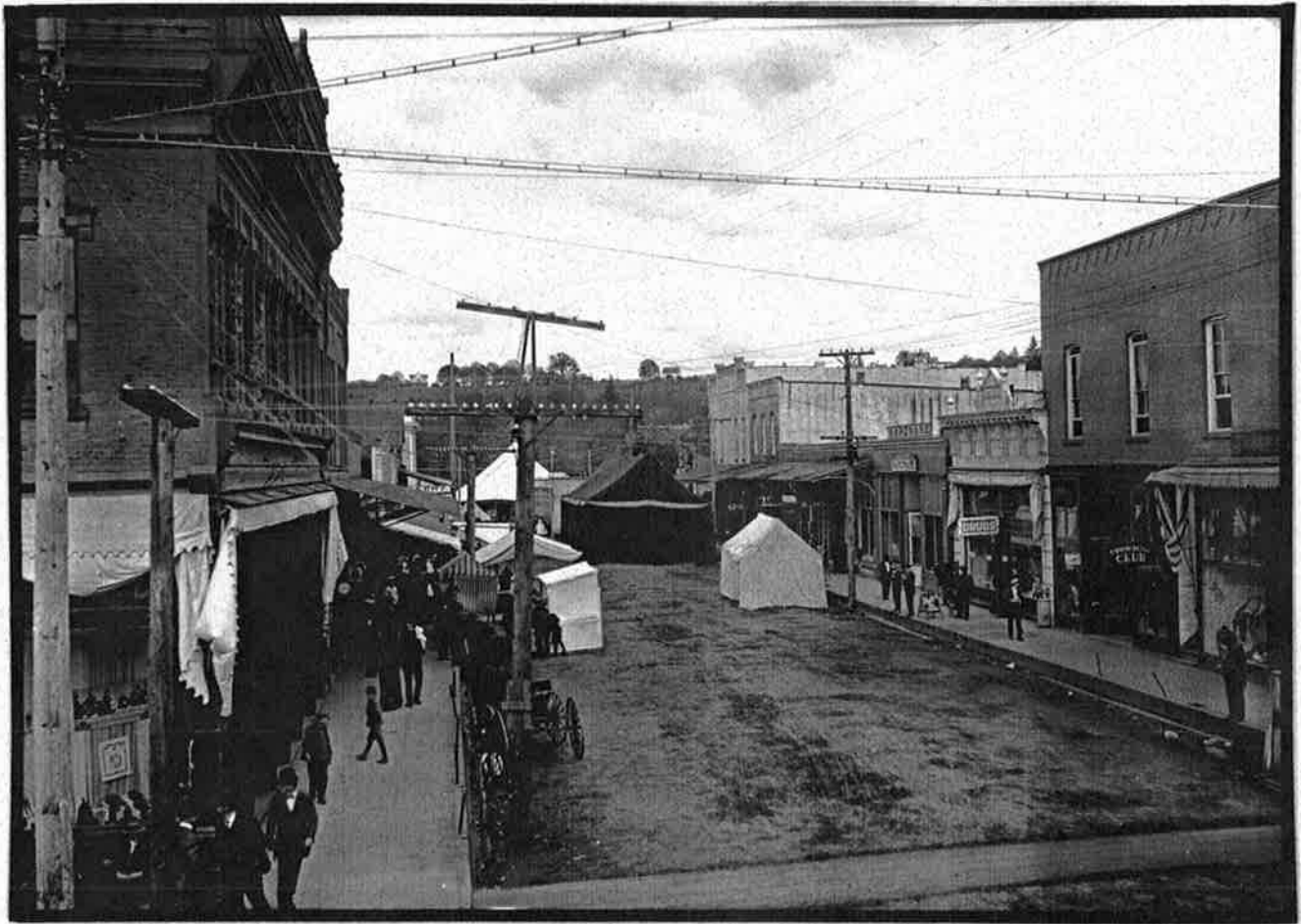


SILVERTON, OREGON

HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT



West Main Street, Silverton, in the early twentieth century.
(Photo by June Drake. Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society, Negative No.: Drake 1821.)

presented to the
City of Silverton, Oregon

by
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The completion of this Historic Context Statement owes much to the efforts of others, many of whom are past or present Silverton residents who have written about the different aspects of the town's history. Several of their names appear in the endnotes and bibliography, which follow the "Historical Overview" section of this document. This study also benefitted greatly from the information and general helpfulness given freely by several individuals, including Jeff Brekas, Mildred Thayer, Betty and Al Hollin, Robert Edgerton, and Jim Engeman. The project as a whole has received the overall support of Historic Silverton, Inc. Any errors of historical fact or interpretation are those of the author's alone.

INTRODUCTION

This "Historic Context Statement" has been prepared for the City of Silverton in partial fulfillment of Oregon's Land Use and Development Commission's (LCDC) Goal 5 requirements for assessing the presence and value of historic resources in the City. In its "Comprehensive Plan" (adopted in 1979 and most recently revised in 1989) the City indicated its intention to complete an inventory of all historic resources in the City located outside the commercial district, which was formally listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. This document also complies with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) requirements for historic context statements, which are designed to serve as the basis for a detailed inventory and evaluation of historic features. The information contained in this context statement, together with the future inventory of specific historic features in certain neighborhoods, will aid the City in making decisions about goals and strategies to protect valuable historic resources as the City grows. This context statement will also provide an overview of Silverton history that can be used for a variety of purposes by Silverton residents and the visiting public.

In general, a historic context statement describes general patterns of historical development in a community and its region during a specified time period. It identifies important trends that are represented by existing historic features, often referred to as cultural resources. This identification process helps form the foundation for planning decisions aimed at protecting and preserving valued cultural resources. The Silverton Historic Context Statement describes several broad patterns of history that relate to particular themes. Together the thematic categories and chronological periods developed by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service provide the organizational structure for this context statement.

A knowledge of Silverton's past is immensely important in planning the community's future. This context statement is a vital tool for effectively targeting areas in the City and outlining tasks to be undertaken in the future in a more detailed site-by-site inventory of historic features. Information contained in this context statement and the future inventory of important historic sites and buildings will help determine planning priorities and provide greater incentive for historical designation and protection. This study also suggests methods for resolving conflicts over historic preservation issues. Finally, both the context statement and the future inventory of historic features, will encourage further research on Silverton's history and its cultural resources.

In 1986 an overview history of Silverton and inventory of forty-four buildings within approximately seven acres of the downtown core area was completed for the nomination of the City's historic commercial district to the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of historic properties recognized by the federal government as worthy of preservation. This historic context statement and the future detailed inventory will expand on and extend beyond the information contained in that National Register nomination form.

TEMPORAL BOUNDARIES

The Silverton Historic Context Statement briefly chronicles the history of the City during the period of Native American occupation, European and American exploration, and initial settlement in the Silver Creek country. It describes in greater detail the City's history from the time of settlement through 1945.

SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

The spatial boundaries include the area within Silverton's urban growth boundary (UGB), which embraces several acres outside the City limits, particularly around Pine Street in the northwest, Hobart Road in the north, and Water Street in the southeast. (Please see accompanying map.)

GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Topography

Silverton is located at the eastern edge of the broad alluvial plain of the Willamette Valley, just north of an area known as the Waldo Hills, near the base of the Cascade's western foothills. Ancient lake sediments, fluvio-glacial deposits, and volcanic pumice underlay much of the more recent river alluvium in the relatively flat northeastern and northwestern sections of Silverton. Volcanic basalt, interspersed with sedimentary stratum, characteristic of the Columbia River geologic group, are found in a large area of southwestern and southeastern Silverton. Marine sediments exist in the southeast, within the urban growth boundary.

The commercial center of town is around 250 feet above sea level. Steep-sided, wooded hills rise abruptly 200 feet or more above the narrow Silver Creek flood plain, which extends to and pinches off southeast of the center of town. North of the town center, the land levels off at about 200 feet and flattens into broad, open fields dotted with scattered individual or small clusters of trees.¹

Silver Creek, a tributary of the Pudding River, which flows into the Willamette River, is a historically important natural feature inside the Silverton UGB. After leaving the human-made Silverton Reservoir south of town, Silver Creek flows in a northerly direction through the town center, then westerly toward the Pudding River. Silver Creek and, to a lesser extent, Abiqua Creek, which flows generally from east to west just north of the UGB, drain the town.

Climate & Soil

The climate throughout the Willamette Valley, and in Silverton, is relatively mild. Considering its northerly latitude, Silverton's annual temperature fluctuations are small, ranging from only 59 to 64 degrees Fahrenheit. July temperatures average from 52 to 76 degrees Fahrenheit, while January's average

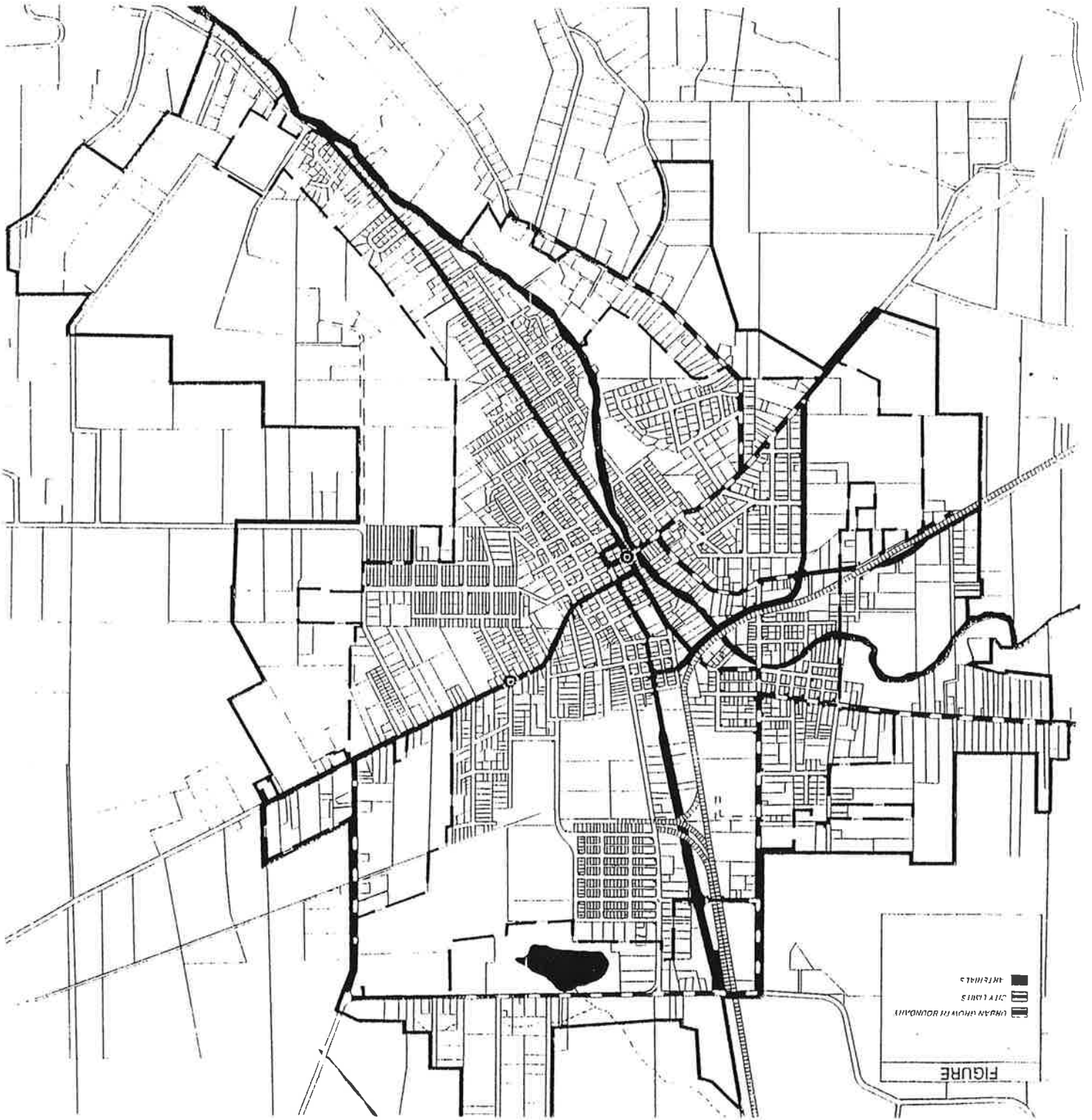


FIGURE
URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY
CITY LIMITS
WATERWAYS

temperatures range from 34 to 42 degrees Fahrenheit. Precipitation, primarily in the form of rain falling in the fall and winter, ranges between 40 and 50 inches annually.²

Two basic soil types exist within Silverton's urban growth boundary. In the nearly level, lower-lying northern and northwestern sections of town, which lie at the edge of the Willamette Valley floodplain, soils are characteristically deep, silty, moderately dark, and somewhat acid. Poor drainage in this area is common. Soils in the southern and eastern sections of Silverton, where the land is hilly and begins to rise toward the western uplands of the Cascade Range, are derived from igneous, volcanic, and sedimentary rock. They are typically dark, clayey, and moderately acid. The soil and climate around Silverton have made this area well suited for growing a variety of crops, for orcharding, and for livestock grazing.³

Native Vegetation

Since the arrival of Euro-Americans, many of the earlier open prairies have been replaced with closed-canopy oak forests. Settlers and later farmers perpetuated existing grasslands and created new ones by burning grass and clearing trees for diversified farming. The large old oak tree that once stood in the intersection of Silverton's main commercial streets (Main and First streets) serve as a reminder of the prominent existence of oaks in the town's pioneering years. Some Silverton street names, like Oak, Pine, Ash, Willow, and Alder streets, also suggest the presence of these tree species at the time that those particular streets were surveyed and named.

Many of the native plant and tree species that existed on the Willamette Valley floor and foothills in the past are still present within the Silverton UGB. Narrow gallery forests of deciduous and scattered coniferous trees and their understory line the moist riparian stretches of Silver Creek. Tree species in this vegetative creek corridor include Oregon white oak, red alder, big leaf maple, and black cottonwood. On the flatter eastern margin of the Willamette Valley floodplain, which lies inside the northwestern portions of Silverton, the thick-trunked, heavy-limbed Oregon white oak often stands as a conspicuous landscape feature along the edges of agricultural fields. Solitary or small open groves of old oaks are scattered throughout this section, and found at places like the Silverton Pioneer Cemetery, the intersection of Hobart and Monitor roads, and between Mark Twain School on Church Street and Mill Street. A small stand of large oaks is near the intersection of West Main and Welch streets.

Older stands of Oregon white oak are often found mixed with Douglas fir and, sometimes, western red cedar in several areas of the hilly central and southern sections of Silverton. Coolidge McClaine Park, on the west side of Silver Creek near the downtown commercial district, is heavily shaded by an aging, stately stand of oak and Douglas fir that dates from the park's founding in the early 1900s. Open stands of mixed oak and Douglas fir cover several sections of the western slopes and ridges above Silver Creek. White oaks mixed with a few Douglas fir are also scattered along the ridge tops east of the town center. East of these ridges, a distinctive grouping of oaks are scattered throughout a meadow south of Reserve Street between East Park and East View Lane.

METHODOLOGY

Preparation of the Silverton Historic Context Statement involved four often overlapping activities: review of existing historical studies, reconnaissance field survey, archival research, and information compilation

Review of Existing Studies

All existing studies, known as secondary sources, written about the history of Silverton and western Oregon were thoroughly reviewed at the outset of the project. Materials reviewed included books, published articles, dissertations and theses, booklets, pamphlets, and brochures found in or obtainable through the Chemeketa Regional Library Service and the Oregon State Library. Information gathered during the literature review helped determine an organizational framework, based on historical themes and time periods, for the historical overview section of this context statement. In addition, by indicating the types and distribution patterns of historical features that might be likely to exist in Silverton today, this material also suggested what buildings, structures, and landscape features to look for in the field. Finally, the review of secondary sources indicated areas of missing information that would require more intensive research in other libraries and in archives.

Reconnaissance Field Survey

The purpose of the reconnaissance field, often called windshield, survey was not to gather detailed data about particular structures or sites but, instead, to get a general picture of the distribution of historic features and the overall character of streetscapes, commercial buildings, residential neighborhoods, and cultural landscapes. During the field survey, which involved driving and sometimes walking throughout Silverton, cultural resource types and their patterns of distribution throughout the city were recorded. Also noted were the environmental and social effects of past growth on historic features. An assessment was made of resource types that were missing from those places they were expected to be found and of the reasons for their absence. The windshield survey helped identify geographically definable concentrations of historic buildings and major cultural landscape features such as parks, cemeteries, and roadways with distinctive land-use patterns. It suggested areas that warranted a more detailed intensive survey in the future. Lastly, this visual reconnaissance raised questions that required further in-depth historical investigation in archives.

Archival Research

Although much of the information required to complete this historic context statement came from existing historical studies, some additional historical research was required when certain information was missing or the accuracy of existing material proved questionable. In such cases, historical records and documents produced and preserved from the time period of interest, known as primary sources, were consulted. Primary sources that provided valuable information for this context statement included scattered back issues of Silverton

Appeal Tribune, census records, city and county commercial directories, cemetery records, maps, and photographs. This material is housed at various repositories such as the Silver Falls Public Library (in Silverton), the Oregon State Library, the Oregon State Archives, and the Marion County Historical Society (all in Salem), the Oregon Historical Society Library (in Portland), the Kerr Library at Oregon State University (in Corvallis), and University of Oregon libraries (in Eugene).

Information Compilation

After gathering and organizing the historical information, compilation and summarization began. The Historical Overview and Identification sections of the context statement were written first. They formed the basis for the last two parts, the Evaluation and Treatment sections, which were developed in close consultation with the City of Silverton staff.

DOCUMENT FORMAT

The Silverton Historic Context Statement consists of four basic parts: "Historical Overview," "Identification," "Evaluation," and "Treatment."

Historical Overview

The overview chronicles important events, trends, influences, and cultural values that have contributed to and help define the history of Silverton. The overview is not intended to be a definitive history of Silverton but, rather, a summary of broad patterns of change and continuity over time. The overview is organized according to historical themes and chronological periods suggested by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. The broad themes characterizing the historical development and cultural resources of Silverton include: settlement, agriculture, transportation, commerce, manufacturing and industry, government, and culture (such as architecture, education, fraternal movements, religion, medicine, and recreation).

Identification

Based on information presented in the Historical Overview and previous inventories of historic sites in Silverton, this section identifies the types and distribution of cultural resources that are known or likely to exist in the city. Historic photographs, maps, and other records, as well as a visual inspection of all areas in town, provided information that helped approximate the date of roads, neighborhoods, and landscape features.

Evaluation

Following the completion of the first two parts, the Evaluation section

presents a method for evaluating the types and condition of extant cultural resources in Silverton. It suggests a criteria for evaluating the significance of historic, architectural, and cultural landscape features by defining those characteristics of good and best existing examples of each resource type.

Treatment

The Treatment section focuses on the future research and inventory needs that have been identified in the other three sections of the context statement. In this section specific recommendations for protecting Silverton's cultural resources are outlined. Recommended strategies for treating the City's cultural resources were devised in consultation with the City planner and are directly linked to the City's planning goals and priorities as articulated in its Comprehensive Plan.

Endnotes

1. William G. Loy, Atlas of Oregon (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1976), 108-109, 116-17; Ewart M. Baldwin, Geology of Oregon (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1976, 39-47; "Silverton Quadrangle, Oregon" map and "Stayton NE Quadrangle, Oregon" map (Denver, Col.: U.S. Geological Survey, 1956, photorevised 1985 [Silverton] and 1969 [Stayton NE]).
2. Loy, Atlas of Oregon, 130-39; Richard M. Highsmith, Jr., Atlas of Oregon Agriculture (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1962), 6-11.
3. Loy, Atlas of Oregon, 124-25; Jerry F. Franklin and C. T. Dyrness, Natural Vegetation of Oregon and Washington, U.S. Forest Service General Technical Report, PNW-8 (Portland, Oreg.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1973), 15-16.

PART I : HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

THEMES

Historical themes and chronology provide the basic organizational framework for this Historical Overview. This section begins with a compressed history of Native American occupation, exploration and fur trade, and initial Willamette Valley settlement. The sections that follow discuss: Silverton settlement and early transportation (1840s-1880); railroads and industrial growth (1880-1905); industrial expansion in the progressive era and motor age (1906-1928); and decline, depression, and World War II (1928-1945). Each section includes a brief history of landscape changes. Notable individuals known for their contribution to Silverton's development are then briefly described. Endnotes referencing material cited are followed by a bibliography, which gives a complete list of the sources consulted in preparing this overview.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Native Americans, Exploration & Fur Trade and Initial Settlement (1650s-1850s)

The following discussion of aboriginal history in the Silverton area focuses on the period just before and during Native Americans' contact with non-native explorers, fur traders, and initial settlers. This does not mean, however, that the mid-Willamette Valley did not support humans long ago. After Pleistocene-Age glaciers retreated from the lower Columbia River Basin for the last time eleven thousand years ago and marshlands and shallow lakes slowly receded from the Willamette Valley's floor, the natural environment became hospitable for humans. About six thousand years ago, native groups gradually descended from the surrounding hills where they had lived for the previous two to four thousand years and began to inhabit the valley floor.¹

Over two hundred years ago, the present site of Silverton was at the periphery of contiguous overlapping territories occupied by Native Americans belonging to two different language families: the Kalapuya and the Molala. Between the late 1700s and the 1830s, when European explorers and fur traders ventured into the Pacific Northwest, several different groups of Kalapuya occupied the Willamette Valley from the falls at present-day Oregon City to the Umpqua River watershed. One dialectic band of the Kalapuya, the Ahantchuyuk or Pudding River Indians, ranged over country west of Silver Creek and south of the Pudding River's convergence with the Willamette. East and north of land occupied by the Ahantchuyuk band, the Molala language family was widely dispersed along the western slopes of the Cascades from present-day Clackamas County in the north to the headwaters of the Rogue River in the south. Some Molala bands traveled as far east as the Deschutes River drainage. Although the Kalapuya and Molala, like all Oregon native cultures did not adhere to the concept of land ownership and had somewhat fluid territorial borders, each group believed that it had the right to use and occupy its own particular territory.²

The Ahantchuyuk group, like the other Kalapuya bands, relied heavily on edible native plants, particularly camas (lily) shoots and bulbs as well as wapato,

tarweed seeds, hazel nuts, and a wide variety of other leaves, roots, seeds, and berries. The Kalapuya used more than fifty different types of plants for food and medicine. Mammals such as deer, elk, beaver, otter, and muskrat, along with migratory birds, fresh-water fish, crustaceans, and insects, supplanted their basic vegetarian diet. Tobacco, dried for smoking, was the only plant cultivated by the Kalapuya. The semi-nomadic Kalapuya pursued their many land-based subsistence activities of harvesting and hunting on a seasonal basis according to the availability and location of various food sources. From March, when the first camas shoots sprouted in moist wooded margins and open plains, through September and October, when tarweed seeds and grasshoppers were gathered on dry grassy prairies and acorns were collected in oak woodlands, the Kalapuya periodically moved their temporary windbreak shelters or open-air campsites to several different ecological habitats. In the cool wet winter months, the Kalapuya lived in long, multi-family lodges built of sticks, bark, and grasses grouped together in autonomous villages. From these they periodically set off on trips to hunt elk in open country on the Willamette Valley floor and white-tailed deer in dense woods and brush on the lower foothills of the Cascades. Prior to European presence in the area, the Kalapuya traded certain goods, implements, and slaves with native groups on the Columbia River, the Oregon coast, and in northern California, with the Cayuse in northeast Oregon and southern Washington, and with the Molala in the Cascades. About 100 square miles supported the subsistence activities of about 50 Kalapuya, allowing for a maximum population of 13,500 in the entire Willamette Valley. In 1780, on the eve of European contact, an estimated total of 3,000 Kalapuya occupied the valley; at that time around 200 Ahantchuyuk ranged over the Pudding River drainage.³

Like the Kalapuya, the Molala followed a pattern of seasonal subsistence. In winter they camped in semisubterranean houses along streams at lower elevations on the western Cascade slopes. Summers were spent gathering roots and berries and hunting deer, elk, and bear in higher mountainous country. The Molala had a close trading and social association with the Klamath Indians in the central Oregon plateau region. Seasonally they traveled over the Cascades on the so-called "Klamath Trail," which passed through the headwaters of the Santiam River to the Waldo Hills and across Silver Creek, about two miles southeast of present-day Silverton, and north to Abiqua Creek and beyond. Inter-marriage between the Molala and the Klamath Indians was not uncommon. This alliance eventually contributed to the ultimate demise of the Molala after Euro-American overland immigrants, in increasing numbers, settled in the Willamette Valley in the 1840s.⁴

The Molala of the mid-Willamette Valley and western Cascade foothills as well as the Ahantchuyuk Kalapuya actually began experiencing grave and ultimately fateful consequences of non-Indians' arrival in the Pacific Northwest long before armed clashes with Euro-American settlers in the Silver Creek area. Disruption leading to the eventual physical removal of these Native American groups occurred over seventy-five years in three major stages: exploration and fur trade (1770s to 1830s), initial settlement (1810s to 1840s), and armed clashes and relocation (1840s-1850s). During each period the existence of indigenous peoples was challenged in different ways.

Imported diseases of various kinds wrecked havoc with native populations throughout the Northwest, including the area around Silver Creek, during the

period of exploration and fur trade. Soon after the Spanish government sent expeditions under Juan Perez, Bruno Heceta, and Bodega y Quadra to explore the Pacific Northwest shoreline in 1774 and English navigator Captain James Cook sailed along the Oregon coast in 1778, a plague, probably smallpox, swept through the Northwest in the early 1780s. Since Native Americans had not developed an immune resistance to foreign-born diseases, thousands living in the Columbia River Basin fell victim to this scourge and died. Mortality may have reached 2,000 among the Kalapuya in the lower Willamette Valley. In the 1790s venereal diseases, introduced by sailors and traders to natives at the mouth of the Columbia, slowly spread inland and took a deadly toll. Not long after the 1805-1806 Lewis and Clark expedition traveled down the Columbia River and passed by the mouth of the Willamette, fur trading and hunting exploits of men employed by John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company (headquartered at Astoria from 1810 to 1813), the Montreal-based North West Company (that bought Astor's firm in 1813), and the British Hudson's Bay Company (that took over the North West Company in 1821) traveled through the Willamette Valley. Men like Donald McKenzie (in 1812), William Wallace and J. C. Halsey (in 1812), William Henry (in 1813 and 1814), Alexander Henry (in 1814), Thomas McKay (in 1820 and 1821), and leaders of the Hudson's Bay annual Southern Expeditions (from 1825 into the early 1840s), as well as independent fur trappers like Regis Bruguier and countless others, may have wandered through Silver Creek country. During this period, other virulent fevers and epidemics, especially in 1823-1824, spread through the lower Columbia and into the Willamette Valley. Natives experienced the greatest disaster between 1830 and 1833 when an epidemic described as "fever and ague," probably malaria, ravaged natives up and down the West Coast and interior valleys. Entire villages and bands were completely wiped out. The effects of the epidemic, which climaxed the rapid decline of the Kalapuya, continued for a decade. When U.S. Navy Captain Charles Wilkes, in 1841, led his expedition into the Willamette Valley as far south as the present site of Salem, he reported that the Kalapuya numbered about 600. Not surprisingly, several Willamette Valley explorers, fur traders, and the earliest settlers described native peoples as greatly diminished in number, disorganized, and demoralized.⁵

In addition to diseases, the arrival of non-natives in the Willamette Valley brought about the gradual depletion of the Kalapuya's and Molala's subsistence economy. Beginning in the early 1810s, fur trading company trappers and hunters in the valley began to reduce the once abundant deer, elk, bear, beaver, and otter, upon which aboriginal groups depended for food and trade. By the mid-1820s, years of trapping and trading had extinguished beaver throughout most of the Willamette Valley and greatly reduced the number of large game animals. Additionally, beginning on a small scale in the early 1810s when retired fur trading company employees began settling on French Prairie between the Pudding and Willamette rivers, and continuing into the 1830s when Jason Lee's Methodist Mission was founded further upstream on the Willamette, cultivating, livestock grazing, and fence-building practiced by these early French Canadians and Euro-American settlers encroached on the Ahantchuyuk band's food-gathering territory, thus depriving them of vital vegetable staples. Horses and eventually cattle trampled or consumed numerous plants. Swine ate camas and acorns. Plowing for small wheat fields and vegetable gardens disturbed camas and wapato beds. Fences inhibited seasonal animal movements. In 1838 about 26 families lived in the French Canadian colony on French Prairie; in 1841 this colony of settlers numbered 61 families. An estimated 400 non-natives lived in the