

SUBDIVISIONS OF THE ORIGINAL LEWIS COUNTY

The people of the provisional government of Oregon claimed all the land in Old Oregon which extended from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains and from the forty-second parallel to fifty-four forty.

At a meeting held at Champoeg on July 5, 1843, the people adopted a law dividing Oregon into four districts, two of which embraced all of the future State of Washington. Twality District took in all of the land west of the Willamette River and a supposed line running north and south from that river and lying between fifty-four forty on the north and the Yamhill River on the south. Clackamas District embraced all the land east of that Willamette line to the Rocky Mountains, north of a line projected eastward from the mouth of the Anchiyoke River to the Rocky Mountains, and bounded on the north by the parallel fifty-four forty. This was the first subdivision of the land now known as the State of Washington.¹

On August 12, 1845 a bill was introduced in the legislative assembly to create two new counties north of the Columbia River and give one the name of Lewis and the other the name of Clark in honor of the famous explorers. The bill passed but with a rider attached substituting the name Vancouver in place of Lewis and Clark, and defining one district instead of two counties. Thus, Vancouver District was created to include "all that portion of the Territory of Oregon lying north of the middle of the main channel of the Columbia River."² At the next session of the assembly the eastern boundary was changed from the Rockies to the Columbia River.³

On December 18, 1845, Mr. Hill presented two bills; one to change the name of Vancouver District to that of Clark and the other providing for the creation of a new county to be called Lewis. The bill to change the name of Vancouver District was indefinitely postponed, but the bill creating Lewis County was passed a few days later.⁴ At this same session of the legislature, an act was passed changing the word "District" to "County."⁵ Thus, Lewis was the first real county created in what is now the State of Washington, and is often called the "Mother of Counties."

Lewis County, as originally created, included all that territory west of the Cowlitz River, between the Columbia River and fifty-

1 *Laws of Oregon*, V. I, p. 26.

2 Smith, C. W., *Naming of Counties in State of Washington*, p. 1.

3 Meany, E. S., *History of State of Washington*, p. 148.

4 Smith, C. W., *Naming of Counties in State of Washington*, p. 2.

5 *Laws of Oregon*, V. I, p. 35.

four forty.⁶ Since then, however, Lewis County has been subdivided several times and many new counties have grown from these subdivisions. It is the purpose of this paper to show when and how these new counties were created.

The treaty of 1846 between the United States and Great Britain caused the northern boundary of Lewis County to be changed from fifty-four forty to the forty-ninth parallel. The treaty provided that the boundary between the United States and Canada should be continued along the forty-ninth parallel "to the middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver's Island; thence southerly through the middle of said channel, and of Fuca's Straits, to the Pacific Ocean."⁷ This was the first slice cut from the original Lewis County.

Pacific County

The member from the northern side of the Columbia River was absent from the Legislature and as Mr. McKean from Clatsop County, who was their councilman, was more interested in Clatsop than in Vancouver or Lewis County, the settlers of the latter counties felt themselves poorly represented. By means of lobbying they were able to have a county created out of the strip of country bordering on Shoalwater Bay and the estuary of the Columbia; and in 1851 the three counties north of the river were able to elect a councilman, Columbia Lancaster, and a representative, D. F. Brownfield, in whom they placed their trust as Americans.⁸

Pacific County was created by an act of the Territorial Government of Oregon on February 4, 1851, and was cut from the southwestern part of Lewis County. It was to include all that part of Oregon lying within the following boundaries: "Beginning at Cape Disappointment and running northerly along the Pacific Coast twenty-five miles, thence due east for thirty miles, thence due south to the Columbia River, thence down the middle of the channel of said river to the place of beginning."⁹ This was the first new county carved out of the original Lewis County. It was named "Pacific" on account of its Ocean boundary.

Thurston County

The movement for separation from Oregon also started a movement for the creation of new counties. The Cowlitz convention in addition to other business, recommended the creation of

⁶ *Laws of Oregon*, V. I, p. 43.

⁷ Meany, E. S., *History of State of Washington*, p. 136.

⁸ Bancroft, H.H., *History of Washington, Idaho and Montana*, p. 46.

⁹ *Laws of Oregon*, 1850-51, p. 38.

four new counties north of the Columbia River. A petition signed by fifty-six persons praying for the establishment of a new county, to be known as Simmons, was presented by Mr. Anderson and a bill to this effect was about to be passed when Mr. Michael T. Simmons, the man to be honored, protested and the county was named Thurston in honor of the first Delegate to Congress from Oregon Territory, who had just lost his life on the return trip to the Pacific Coast.¹⁰

Thurston County as created by the Territorial Government of Oregon on January 2, 1852, was to include all that part of Oregon Territory lying within the following described boundaries: "Beginning at the northwest corner of Pacific County, and running along the northern boundary line of said county, to the northeast corner thereof; thence continuing a due east course to the summit of the Cascade Range of Mountains; thence along the summit of said range, in a northerly direction to the boundary line between the United States and the British possessions; thence in a westerly direction along said boundary line to the Pacific Coast; thence in a southerly direction along the coast to the point of beginning."¹¹

Subdivisions of Eastern Thurston County

From the above description of Thurston County we see that it included not only the northern part of Lewis County but a large strip of land lying between Puget's Sound and the Cascade Mountains. This area was later divided into three new counties, namely, Pierce, King, and Island.¹² Island County was in turn subdivided into Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, and San Juan Counties. King County, as originally created, extended westward to the Pacific Ocean, and thus, took in part of the original Lewis County.¹³ The same session of the Legislature that created Pierce, King, and Island Counties also created a new county on the Olympic Peninsula and gave it the name of Jefferson.

Jefferson County

Jefferson County was created by the Territorial Government of Oregon on December 22, 1852. It was named in honor of Thomas Jefferson, who had taken much interest in this great Northwest. It was to embrace all that portion of Thurston County lying within the following boundaries: "Commencing at the middle of Admiralty Inlet at a point due east of Pilot Cove; thence due west to the Pacific Ocean; thence north along the coast to the northern

¹⁰ Smith, C. W., *Naming of Counties in State of Washington*, p. 3.
¹¹, ¹², ¹³, ¹⁴, and ¹⁵ *Laws of Oregon*, 1852.

boundary line of the United States; thence east along said boundary line to the northwest corner of Island County; thence south along the western boundary of Island County to the southwest corner of the same; thence east to the place of beginning."¹⁴

Lewis County Boundary Moved Eastward to Cascades

In 1852 the same session of the Legislature that created Thurston County moved the eastern boundary of Lewis County to a point on the bank of the Columbia River fifteen miles east of the mouth of the Cowlitz, and running due north to the southern boundary of Thurston County.¹⁵ On February 1, 1853, the following act was passed: "The western boundary of Lewis County shall commence at the point on the Columbia River now established as the southeast corner of Pacific County; thence along the east line of Pacific County to its northeast corner; thence due north to the channel of the Chickeeles River; thence up channel of said river to the mouth of the Skookum Chuck River; thence eastward to the summit of the Cascade Mountains; thence along the summit to a point due east of Mount St. Helens; thence on a direct course to the east end of township line between townships Nos. 5 & 6; thence along said line to the Columbia River and down the Columbia to the place of beginning."¹⁶ This was the law that placed the eastern boundary of Lewis County at the summit the the Cascade Mountains.

*Counties Created by the First Territorial Legislature
of Washington*

The first Territorial Legislature of Washington created seven new counties, five of which were within the boundaries of the original Lewis County. These new counties were Whatcom, Skamania, Sawamish, Chehalis, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and Clallam.

Sawamish (Mason) County

Sawamish County was carved from Thurston County on March 13, 1854, and was named for a local tribe of Indians. The name of this county was changed on January 8, 1864, to Mason County, in honor of Charles H. Mason, the first Secretary of Washington Territory. Sawamish County as originally created was to include that part of Thurston County embraced within the following boundaries: "Commencing in the middle of the main channel of Puget's Sound, opposite the mouth of Case's Inlet; thence westerly along the main channel to the point of land between Eld's Inlet and

¹⁶ *Laws of Oregon*, 1853, February 1.

Totten's Inlet; thence westerly, following the dividing ridge between said inlet to the summit of the Coast Range of mountains; thence due west to the Pacific Coast; thence northerly along said coast for thirty miles; thence due east to the middle of the main channel of Hood's Canal; thence along the middle of said channel to Wilke's Portage; thence easterly to the head of Case's Inlet; thence down the middle of the main channel to the place of beginning."¹⁷

Chehalis (Grays Harbor) County

Chehalis County was cut from Thurston County by the first session of the Territorial Government of Washington. The date of creation was April 14, 1854. The name is that of an Indian river and tribe. The word Chehalis means "sand," having reference presumably to the sand bars at the mouth of the River Chehalis.¹⁸ The name has recently been changed to Grays Harbor County. Chehalis County was to include all that portion of Thurston County embraced within the following boundaries: "Commencing at the northwest corner of Pacific County, on Shoalwater Bay; thence due east to a point due south of a point on the Chehalis River six miles above Armstrong's Mills; thence north to the line of Sawamish County; thence west along said line of Sawamish County to the Pacific Ocean; thence south along the coast of the Pacific Ocean and Shoalwater Bay, to the place of beginning."¹⁹

Cowlitz County

Cowlitz County was set off from southeastern Lewis County and northern Clark. It was created on April 21, 1854. The county was named after a local Indian tribe. Its boundaries were to be as follows: "Beginning at the southeast corner of Pacific County, on the Columbia River, thence up said river to the south bank of the Kalama; thence east to the first range line east of the meridian; thence north along said line to the east fork of the Cowlitz River; thence westerly, following the east fork of said river to the point where it intersects with the west fork; thence due west to the dividing ridge dividing the waters of the Chehalis and Columbia Rivers; thence along said ridge to the western line of Pacific County; thence to the place of beginning, on the line of Pacific County at the Columbia River."²⁰

¹⁷ *Laws of Washington*, 1854, p. 474.

¹⁸ Smith, C. W., *Naming of Counties in State of Washington*, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Laws of Washington*, 1854, p. 472.

²⁰ *Laws of Washington*, p. 471.

Wahkiakum County

Wahkiakum County was created on April 24, 1854, from the eastern portion of Pacific and the western part of Cowlitz Counties. It is an Indian name taken from the name of a tribe. It was enacted by the legislative assembly of the Territory of Washington, "That all that portion of Washington Territory contained within the following boundaries, namely: Beginning at a point in the southern boundary line between said Territory and the Oregon Territory due south from the southwest corner of the claim of Alexander S. Abernethy, and running thence due north to the southern boundary of Lewis County; thence westerly along said line to the eastern boundary line of Pacific County; thence south to the southern boundary line of Washington Territory, and thence easterly along said southern boundary line to the place of beginning, be organized into a county, to be known and called Wahkiakum County, and possess all the rights and privileges of the other counties of this Territory."²¹

Clallam County

Clallam County, created also by the first Territorial Legislature, was named for a local tribe of Indians. The word is said by the Clallam Indians to mean "strong" or "strong people." The county was created on April 26, 1854, and was a subdivision of Jefferson County. The southern boundary of Jefferson County was in turn moved southward and included most of that portion of King County lying west of Puget's Sound. Clallam County was to include all that portion of Jefferson County embraced within the following boundaries: "Commencing on the south side of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, at a point in line as near as may be between Port Townsend and Port Discovery, so as to divide the peninsula between said places as nearly equally as possible; thence following said range northwesterly to the sea coast; thence following up the sea coast northerly to Cape Flattery, and to the Straits of Juan de Fuca; thence easterly, along the coast to the place of beginning."²²

Slaughter (Kitsap) County

What is now Kitsap County was created as Slaughter County by an act approved January 16, 1857. It was named in honor of

²¹ *Laws of Washington*, p. 474.

²² *Laws of Washington*, p. 472.

²³ Smith, C. W., *Naming of Counties in Washington*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Laws of Washington*, 1856-7, p. 52.

white men's homes. On January 9, 1857, petitions from the people of King and Jefferson Counties, asking to be set off into a separate county to be called Madison, were presented to the House of Representatives. In the hands of the committee on counties the name Kitsap was substituted for Madison. On the 13th day of January the house inserted the name of Slaughter in place of Kitsap and the bill became a law. Many protests, however, were made to the name and a supplementary act was passed giving the citizens the privilege of choosing a name. Kitsap was the name of a friendly Indian chief and that was the name adopted by the people.²³ Slaughter or Kitsap County was to include all that portion of the counties of King and Jefferson embraced within the following boundaries: "Commencing at a point in the main channel of Colvo's Passage, and running west, following the old boundary line of King to the head of Case's Inlet; thence westerly along said line to the head of Hood's Canal; thence following the main channel of said canal to junction with Admiralty Inlet; thence following the main ship channel of said inlet to its junction with Colvo's Passage; thence following the main channel of said passage to the point of beginning."²⁴

San Juan County

The Treaty of 1846 with Great Britain defined the boundary line between the United States and Vancouver's Island as the "Middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver's Island," but did not specify which channel. The Americans contended that the treaty meant the Canal De Haro, and the British claimed that it was the Rosario Straits. William I, the Emperor of Germany, was selected as arbitrator and on October 21, 1872, he declared the San Juan Islands to be the property of the United States.²⁵ On October 31, of the following year, the legislative assembly of the Territory of Washington passed the following act: "All the islands forming the De Haro Archipelago, and hitherto known as the disputed islands and which are at present included within Whatcom County, be and the same are hereby organized and established as a county, to be known as San Juan County, and shall be bounded as follows: Commencing in the Gulf of George at the place where the boundary line between the United States and the British possessions deflects from the 49th parallel of north latitude, thence following said boundary line through the

²⁵ Meany, E. S., *History of State of Washington*, p. 253.

Gulf of Georgia and the Canal De Haro to the middle of the Straits of Fuca, thence easterly through Fuca Straits until opposite the middle of Rosario Straits and through the Gulf of Georgia to the place of beginning."²⁶

Summary

Thus, we see that a total of ten new counties have been created from the vast territory that was originally Lewis County. Three of these counties, Pacific, Thurston and Jefferson, were created by the Territorial Government of Oregon. The other seven, Mason, Grays Harbor, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Clallam, Kitsap, and San Juan, were created by the Washington Territorial Government. Three were named after persons, four were given Indian names, and the other three were named for geographic features.

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²⁶ *Laws of Washington, 1873, p. 461.*