

Narrative about Skagit County

Native Americans in Skagit County

[The 1856 Treaty](#)

Skagit County History [from Janet Oakley, <https://www.historylink.org/File/5663>

Notes by Doris Brevoort April, 2017

First Peoples of Skagit

People have inhabited present-day Skagit County for nearly 10,000 years. Some time around 1300, a group came down from the interior, possibly using the Skagit River. They came to be known as the Coast Salish. These tribal groups were largely extended families living in villages in cedar plank houses. They had active, viable communities that socialized and traded far beyond their villages and region. They fished for salmon, collected clams and mussels, and used fire to encourage bracken fern and camas to grow on natural prairies.

Skagit River Valley attracted the attention of European and American explorers as early as the 1790s. Euro-American settlement began in earnest in the early 1860s. After the first dike was built on the LaConner flats in 1863, the county began to emerge as a major agricultural center.

John Work, a trader with Hudson's Bay Company, came through the area in December 1824 and noted several "Scaadchet" villages as he crossed Skagit Bay and went up a winding Swinomish Channel. In 1850 there were 11 different tribal groups in Skagit County. As Work did, Euro-American settlers called them all Skagit Indians, not recognizing the differences.

After signing the Point Elliot Treaty of 1855, many of these tribal groups moved to a reservation on the southeastern end of Fidalgo Island. Others chose not to sign or could not attend the signing due to severe weather. Today, tribal communities in Skagit County, include the Swinomish, Upper Skagit, Sauk-Siuattle, and Samish.

Euro-Americans

Rosario Strait is on the most western edge of Skagit County. The Spaniard Juan Francisco de Eliza charted it in 1791, and named it Canal de Fidalgo. Thick forests lined its eastern coastline. A year later George Vancouver (1758-1798) discovered an inner waterway while exploring Rosario Strait. He named it Deception Pass, but the Wilkes Expedition of 1841 determined that the area north of the pass was actually an island. Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) called it Perry's Island (present-day Fidalgo Island).

The first Euro-American to live in the county, was Englishman William (Blanket Bill) Jarman (1827-1912) who came in 1852 with his Coast Salish wife, Alice, settling for a

short time near present-day Edison. The earliest permanent Euro-American settlement began on the long, narrow peninsula on Fidalgo Island later known as March's Point. Attracted by the prairies where the Swinomish cultivated camas and bracken fern, Enoch Compton planted potatoes there in 1853, then went back up to Bellingham Bay to work in the coal mines.

Settlement progressed sporadically for the next few years, due in part to the 1855 Indian War and raids by northern Indians. By 1860 Enoch Compton returned to Fidalgo. Joining him were Hiram H. March, William Munks, and James Kavanaugh, among others. Several of the men came with their Coast Salish wives. In 1870, Munks opened a store at his wharf.

Settlement on the county's mainland took hold when Michael Sullivan (1850?-1912) and Samuel Calhoun began diking the marshy flats near present day LaConner in 1863. At first ridiculed, they proved that with diking, agriculture was possible on what was thought to be useless wetland. Diking became an important part of settling the county.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, new settlements and trading posts appeared on Guemes Island, Samish Island where Daniel Dingwall set up the first logging operation in 1867, Edison, and the south fork of the Skagit River. LaConner developed from a trading post across from the Swinomish Reservation under the watchful eye of John Conner and his wife Louisa for whom the town was named. Amos Bowman (1839-1894) dreamed of a Northern Pacific terminus on Fidalgo and in 1879 built a small store and post office in a place he called Anacortes, named for his wife.

Logjams at the site of old Mount Vernon blocked the Skagit River and prevented river traffic from passing through. In a three-year effort completed in 1879, workers removed the masses of logs around Mount Vernon. The removal of the logjams opened up access to the interior upriver. Mount Vernon began to grow with the arrival of sternwheelers and upriver towns took root. LaConner was for a time the leading town, but growth brought changes in 1883.

Skagit County Comes Into Its Own

Washington Territory formally came into being on March 2, 1853. At that time, Skagit County was a part of Island County, which included the present counties of Snohomish, Island, Whatcom, and San Juan as well. A year later, in March 1854, a small group of settlers broke away from Island County and formed Whatcom County. Skagit country went with it. For the next 30 years, many of the founding settlers did business up on Bellingham Bay or held territorial positions that kept them there while they proved up their claims down on Fidalgo and in other county settlements. In November 1883, a group of local legislators, fed up with Whatcom's dominance and convinced of their own future, successfully passed a bill in the territorial legislature that separated Skagit from Whatcom. LaConner was Skagit's new county seat, but only for a short time. Mount Vernon became the county seat a year later.

Construction began on roads, bridges, and ferries. The county built a bridge over the Sullivan Slough near La Conner and four ferries were set up on the Skagit River. A "horseman" went for 10 cents, a "footman" for five. Cattle and sheep went for 25 cents.

Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, the new county continued to grow. Small communities established public schools. Logging camps providing steady employment and open space for more farming. In 1886, Mortimer Cook opened the first shingle mill near present day Sedro-Woolley. Mining camps up the Skagit River and on Ruby Creek in 1879 brought dubious results for gold, but they inspired new settlements when limestone, coal, iron, and talc was found: Hamilton, Birdsvew, Baker (later Concrete) and Marblemount among others. The mining district became an important area for investment and growth.

With new communities came the demand for roads and the railroad, which came to Sedro-Woolley in 1889 from Fairhaven up on Bellingham Bay. There was also a desire for better communication.

The Western Union Telegraph Company had put in a line that ran through the Swinomish Indian Reservation in 1864, but with better roads and logjams gone, the mails improved. Delivery between Seattle and Mount Vernon went to three times a week. In 1886, the Skagit River Telephone proposed a line from the mouth of the Skagit River to the Sauk River. It did not develop beyond incorporation, but three years later Anacortes was using this brand new technology. By 1894, Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley had their first telephones. Wheelock & Glover and the Independent Telephone helped bring long distance calling to communities around the county. A free local call could be made from general stores, charging long distance by the quarter-minute.

County Industries Grow Up

Fish canneries opened in Anacortes in the late 1890s amid anti-Chinese sentiment and a national Depression. The industry would be an economic mainstay up to the latter half of twentieth century.

Agriculture continued to be the main industry. For a long time, oats and eventually peas were the mainstay, but new crops took on prominence just after World War I. One of these was the growing of seeds. A decade before forming the Puget Sound Seed Garden in 1883, A. G. Tillinghast had grown cabbage seed. Beets, flax, spinach, mustard, and cabbage were all attempted. Several other farmers joined him in the 1920s. At first the crops were harvested by hand, but eventually various combine machines were invented to help with the harvest. In the 1930s, the Charles H. Lilly Company developed seed production further. At one point Skagit County grew 95 percent of the cabbage seed produced in the United States. All seeds were grown under contract to one or another seed company.

The Tulip Industry

Tulip bulb production is an extension of the seed production industry. Mary Brown Stewart started growing tulips in 1906 with bulbs from Holland, but tulips were "only a small part of the crop and the whole operation was of modest size" (Barrett). In 1926 her son Sam Stewart started the Tulip Grange Bulb Farm near LaConner. Marinus Lefeber, a friend of Sam Stewart, moved his Whatcom County operation down to a farm along Memorial Highway near Mount Vernon. The farm was in business until 2002. Other bulb growers joined them after 1945. By 1997, 700 acres were used for bulb farming, with a value of \$42 million.

In the late 1920s, farmers began growing vegetables commercially for large packing outfits such as the Bozeman Canning Company of Montana, the San Juan Island Company, the Skagit Valley Packing Corporation at Avon, and the MacMillan Canning Company at LaConner.

They mainly packed peas, but also packed green beans, spinach, and several kinds of vegetables and fruits. S. A. Moffet, the second company in the nation to get into freezing vegetables, built a freezing plant in Mount Vernon in 1940 after successfully starting the precooling process of 50 tons of peas in a LaConner farmer's barn in 1936.

During World War II, there was a labor shortage while the men were away in the service. Braceros (farmworkers) were brought to Skagit County from Mexico in large numbers to help harvest the hay and pea crops, important to the dairy industry for fodder. The braceros camp at Burlington was the largest mobile camp in the United States.

Cows Galore

Skagit County was also known for its dairy industry. Pastor B.N.L. Davis, who formed some of the first Lutheran congregations in Skagit County, had a farm in what is now Mount Vernon, Skagit College. He brought the first dairy cows to Mount Vernon from the midwest by train. At the turn of the century there were as many as 900 dairies in the county. These dairy farms were small family operations where every cow had a name and mixed ancestry. Changes came to the industry in the 1920s with pasteurization and purebred stock.

The first cattle breeding programs began in the early 1930s. The Youngquists paid \$12,000 for a Pontiac Segi purebred cow. A neighbor, Jim Hulbert had purebred Herefords. Milk production increased along with the quality of the stock. Butter was made at home for a long time. Milk was sold to a creamery such as the Mount Vernon Creamer, which began to take everything for milk and butter. The Youngquists hauled it in by horses until they got a truck. In 1907 a "Carnation" condensory plant came in and took 10-gallon cans. Mount Vernon had the nickname "Milk Town."

Increased production and breeding programs were expensive for farmers. To help them, co-ops were organized to ease the cost. Darigold was the first co-op in the area. During 1940s and 1950s, Darigold had 1,800 members. Each paid \$10 a cow to get into the organization.

Skagit County Today

The county continued to be a rural area well into the twentieth century, with pockets of light industry in Mount Vernon, Burlington, and other towns. These towns and some of the outlying districts had electricity, but as late as 1940, many of the older houses were still not wired. The logging industry still provided important income to many families.

Many of Skagit County's roads were graveled, though the Pacific Highway built by the Federal Government in 1915 was a "hard-surfaced" road. It came up from the Mexican border in Calexico, California via Seattle. The name changed to US Highway 99 in 1926. In those days it took several hours to come and see the sights of Skagit County and the flats. In the 1960s Interstate-5 replaced 99, sometimes going over the old road, other times paralleling it. The new freeway brought more people to the valley.

Such increase in urban areas has put pressure on the county's agriculture. Although farming remains one of the most important activities in the Valley, since 1987 the number of farms had declined from 806 farms to fewer than 710. Nine out of 10 farm couples depend on off-farm income to keep their farms going. Despite this, old and new crops continue to bring substantial dollar numbers to the county.

Skagit County is a major producer of cabbage, table beet, and spinach seed for the world. About half of the world's beet and Brussels sprout seed are grown in the Valley. A substantial percent of the U.S. supply of parsley, cabbage, parsnip seed, Chinese kale, Chinese cabbage, Chinese mustard, and Brussels sprout seed are also grown in Skagit County. A new development has been in the growth of nurseries, greenhouses, and organic farming. Potatoes are one of the prominent crops in the county. Permaculture farming, efficient gardening year-round, has become popular in the 21st Century.

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

Note: Information concerning the Tribes was copied from their websites.

We are a community of Coast Salish peoples descended from groups and bands originating from the Skagit and Samish River valleys, coastal areas surrounding nearby bays and waters, and numerous islands including Fidalgo, Camano, Whidbey and the San Juan Islands.

We honor our ancestors representing four aboriginal bands: Swinomish, Samish, Lower Skagit, and Kikiallus, who joined together to form the present day Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Seven generations ago, in 1855, Swinomish chiefs along with 81

other tribal chiefs gathered at Múckl-te-óh (present-day Mukilteo, Washington) to sign the Treaty of Point Elliott.

Our ancestors committed to protecting a way of life passed down from generation to generation. The 11 elected members of the Swinomish Senate continue that commitment by strengthening our government so that we may protect our treaty, culture, and collective wellbeing. As a sovereign nation, we engage in local, state, and interstate commerce, manage our natural resources, and exercise power over our homelands and waters.

We value collaboration with fellow tribal and non-tribal governments. Our partnerships spread throughout Washington State, the Pacific Northwest region, and the nation. As a tribal community, we are proud and honored to play leadership roles through partnerships with the Association of Washington Tribes, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, the National Congress of American Indians, and other important institutions advocating for the rights of Native people.

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community is a federally recognized Indian Tribe that occupies the Swinomish Indian Reservation on Puget Sound in Washington State. The Tribe is governed by a Constitution and Bylaws that was originally adopted in 1936 and by the Swinomish Senate, the tribe's governing body, which is comprised of 11 elected members that serve staggered five year terms.

Each year there is an election for two of the Senate positions and every five years there is an election for three Senate positions. Following each year's election, the 11 Senators select a chairman, vice chairman, secretary and treasurer.

Contact Information:

General Reception Phone (360) 466.3163

location 11404 Moorage Way, LaConner, WA 98257

The Upper Skagit Indian Tribe

The Upper Skagit are a federally recognized Native American tribe living in the state of Washington. Before European colonization, the tribe occupied lands along the Skagit River, from as far downstream as present-day Mount Vernon, Washington, and villages going north as far as Newhalem along the Skagit River, as well as lands on the Baker, and the Sauk rivers.[1]

Culturally, the Upper Skagit share characteristics with the Lower Skagit, the Coast Salish, such as the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, as well as the Plateau Indians on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains. They traditionally spoke Lushootseed, part of the Salishan language family. It was spoken by many coastal tribes of the Northwest.

The Upper Skagit Indian Reservation consists of three separate small parcels of land in western Skagit County. The cities of Sedro-Woolley and Burlington have developed

near the reservation parcels. The largest section, located northeast of Sedro Woolley, is at 48°32'31"N 122°11'15"W, while the smaller western sections are at 48°33'33"N 122°20'42"W (the section where the casino is), and at 48°34'07"N 122°20'43"W, between Burlington and Alger. The total land area is 84 acres (0.447 km²). Its resident population was 238 persons as of the 2000 census.[3]

The Upper Skagit owns and operates the Skagit Valley Casino Resort, along with the Bow Hill gas station located on Bow Hill.

Contact Information
Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
25944 Community Plaza Way
Sedro Woolley, WA 98284
Phone: (360) 854-7090

Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe

The Sauk-Suiattle Indian people lived under the gaze of Whitehorse Mountain for many generations. We lived as hunters, gathers and fishermen in the region of Sauk Prairie near the present-day town of Darrington, Washington. In the early days, we were known as the Sah-ku-mehu.

We were canoe people, plying the swift waters of the Sauk, Suiattle, Stillaguamish, Cascade and Skagit Rivers in our river canoes. Though our homelands were in the foothills of the North Cascades, we often traveled downriver to Puget Sound. There we harvested fish, shellfish and other foods not available in the mountains. We even voyaged in large seagoing canoes.

We also traveled over the mountains to gather food, herbs and other necessities. We became skilled horsemen, trading with tribes from Eastern Washington. Our free roaming horses grazed among our relatives there.

Our Homelands were the entire drainage area of the Sauk, Suiattle and Cascade Rivers. We had an important village at Sauk Prairie near the confluence of the Sauk and Suiattle Rivers. The village consisted of eight traditional cedar longhouses which were destroyed in 1884 by early non-Indian settlers who had laid claim to these lands under the U.S. Homestead Act.

We thus became a landless people, but continued to live in scattered groups close to our traditional homelands. Though many of our tribal members left the area or joined other neighboring tribes during our exodus, we maintained our tribal government, our social structure, our identity, and most importantly, our hope for the future. Our tribal membership numbered around 4,000 before 1855, and by 1924 our numbers had dwindled to 18 members. Residents in the Sauk Suiattle Indian Reservation are the surviving descendents of the original peoples who lived in this special valley. Our current membership numbers around 200 individuals. The Sauk Suiattle Indian Tribe's

enrollment requirements is one quarter Indian Blood and proof of decendency from the ancestral native Americans who inhabited this unique valley recorded in the 1942 United States Census.

Contact Information:
5318 Chief Brown Lane
Darrington, WA 98241
Phone (360) 436-0131

Samish Indian Nation

Website: <http://www.samishtribe.nsn.us/#>

Street Address: 2918 Commercial Avenue, Anacortes, WA 98221 | Mailing Address:
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Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30am - 5:00pm - Closed on all Federal and Tribal
Holidays

<http://www.samishtribe.nsn.us/#>

Miscellaneous Notes

Mineral Park

Mineral Park was located at a point on the Cascade River where the North and South Forks joined and the trails from the mines converged. John Kinsella and Oleson ran a general store and Doty ran a saloon, supporting about 200 miners in the area. The town was abandoned in 1894.

When the mining journalist L. K. Hodges went up the Cascade River in 1896, he wrote:

"This is a town without any people. During the lively times immediately following the discovery of mineral on the Cascade it boasted a population of about 90 persons and had a hotel, store and saloon, but now all is left to the chipmunks, mice and woodrats. The first building passed after crossing the bridge is the store.... The door stands open and gives a view of two bunks on each of which is a spring mattress..."

" ...There had been much talk of Mineral Park. It was our objective point for camp that night, and I think I had gathered that it was to be a settlement. I expected nothing less than a post-office and perhaps some miners' cabins. When, at the end of that long, hard day, we reached Mineral Park at twilight and in a heavy rain, I was doomed to disappointment.

Mineral Park consists of a deserted shack in a clearing perhaps forty feet square, on the bank of a mountain stream. All around it is impenetrable forest. The mountains converge here so that the valley becomes a canyon. So dense was the growth that we put up our tents on the trail itself."