

KITSAP COUNTY HISTORY

Captain George Vancouver, a British explorer, was the first white man to visit the Kitsap Peninsula. In 1792, he mapped and named many of the outstanding features of the Puget Sound area. An area slightly larger than the present state became the Territory of Washington on March 2, 1853. In 1855, as part of the Point Elliot Treaty, the Port Madison Indian Reservation was set aside for the Suquamish Tribe. A federal reserve for the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe was created in 1934.

An early Kitsap County photo of roadway clearing

In 1857, at the urging of local sawmill owners, the Territorial Legislature created a new county from what was then western King and southern Jefferson counties. The county was originally called Slaughter County after Lieutenant William Alloway Slaughter, who had been killed in the Indian Wars of 1855-1856. After a public outcry, voters renamed the county through a general election held July 13, 1857. Kitsap, which according to local native legend means the good and brave, was the name chosen.

Lumber and shipbuilding industries dominated early northwest political, social and economic life in the 1850's and 1860's. During that time, Kitsap County was home to five of the largest lumber mills in the world, and boasted the wealthiest county per capita in the United States.

Mills were established at Port Madison and Port Blakely on Bainbridge Island, with a third notable mill established by Pope and Talbot in 1853 off-island on the northern edge tip of the county. Settlements were constructed by mill owners to accommodate the needs of workers and their families. These company-owned towns included nice homes, churches, schools, and stores with abundant supplies.

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

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As a primary hub to mill activity, Port Madison on Bainbridge Island was selected by voters to be the first county seat, and George Meigs, owner of the Port Madison Mill, the first county commissioner. In the years following the Civil War, Kitsap County enjoyed great prosperity and many new settlers came to the area. By 1884, Long Lake, Colby, Olalla, Poulsbo, Silverdale, Brownsville, and Sydney were settled. Before its opening in 1891, rumors of the proposed Puget Sound Navy Yard generated a real estate boom along the Sinclair and Dyes Inlets and resulted in the platting and settlement of Tracyton, Chico, Manette Point, Charleston, and Bremerton. In 1893, residents, primarily farmers and small businessmen, relocated the county seat to Sydney (renamed Port Orchard in 1903). In 1898, the federal government-built Fort Ward on the south end of Bainbridge Island to protect the shipyard. They also acquired the property located across Rich Passage from Fort Ward to develop the Manchester Oil Depot. Over the years, military activity led to the development of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (formerly the Keyport Naval Torpedo Station), Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Naval Base Kitsap (formerly Naval Station Bremerton and Naval Submarine Base Bangor).

Before the advent of cars and bridges, waterways were the area's first freeways. Many small ferries carrying passengers and a variety of freight plied the waters of Puget Sound and Hood Canal, earning the name Mosquito Fleet. The still operating Bremerton-Port Orchard-Annapolis foot ferries are a remnant of the Mosquito Fleet days.

KITSAP COUNTY WASHINGTON

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