

APPENDIX C SEQUIM HISTORY

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Before there was Sequim, there was Seguin. Seguin, according to postal records, was the name of the "surrounding area" for which the first post office in what is now Sequim, was named in 1879.

The first settler on the Sequim Prairie was John W. Donnell. The story is told that he had first come to New Dungeness, found it too crowded for his liking and walked up the river seeking a suitable homestead. He took up a donation claim of 320 acres of prairie and bottom lands along the Dungeness River which extended approximately from Hendrickson Road to Grant Road. His patent, signed by President Andrew Johnson, was dated March 6, 1866.

Although the prairie was mostly scrub brush with stands of Garry Oak, a few pine trees, grass and cactus, on a gravel sub-soil, Donnell managed to raise a crop of wheat on the bottomlands along the river. The arid condition of most of his land was caused by the rainshadow effect of the Olympic Mountains, which created a "desert-like" atmosphere. In the spring the land became lush and green with patches of wildflowers as the winter snow melted away and the spring rains followed. With an average rainfall of approximately 17 inches a year, the summer sun parched the land and dried up the few springs and small streams that flowed through the grass and weeds.

The second settler and the first on the prairie, was John Bell, an Englishman who had come to Fort Victoria to work on the Hudson Bay Company farm. After a few scrapes with authorities, he took leave of the company, confiscated a small boat and rowed across the Strait to Clallam County. Possibly because British authorities frequently visited the coast to look for contracted escapees from the Hudson Bay properties, Bell pioneered around the north Puget Sound area and fought as a volunteer soldier in the last of the Indian Wars on the Sound. After a few years, he took out naturalization papers and filed a 160 acre homestead claim at what became the southeast corner of Sequim Avenue and Washington Street. Bell Creek flowed through part of his land.

Before long other homesteaders joined him at the corner (Matthew Fleming - SW corner, William Webster - NW corner, and Joseph Sinclair - NE corner). They gradually sold off parts of their homesteads and bought land nearby.

Bell stayed on his land. He had married Sara Ann Greenlaw Vert of Scotland in the first "white" wedding in Clallam County in March 1856. Their first child, Mary Jane--the first white child born in Clallam County--was the oldest of five children. The Bells were very hospitable and the word got out, "for a real good meal and bed and hearty welcome stop at John Bell's." The couple welcomed everyone who came by. As other settlers moved in and purchased lots from the early homesteaders, they were welcomed to use the deep well built by the Bell family. Most of the newcomers were young families seeking a place to put down roots. They built small homes, fenced an area for a cow or two and began to raise children and small gardens. Very few had much cash money. After the homes were built, many men went away to work in the Port Discovery Mill, returning home monthly carrying a sack of basics such as sugar, flour, baking soda, and coffee from the mill store.

Other families moved in and before long there were enough children on the prairie to create a demand for a school. In April 1868, the first school on the prairie was established - the one-room Seguin School located behind the present high school library. The first school was open only three months a year and all young children were expected to attend up to the third grade.

In 1879 the first post office was built and named "Seguin" for the surrounding area. The first business in town was a small general store begun by William Homer about 1892 at the intersection of the four properties. In 1893 Seguin was considered to have the best racetrack on the peninsula -- it ran down the middle of Washington Street. After the town was incorporated, an oval track was located near the blocks now bordered by Second and Third Streets between Cedar and Spruce Streets. A wagon road ran between Seguin and New Dungeness.

The community did not really begin to grow until after 1896 when the first irrigation ditch brought water from the Dungeness River onto the prairie. Water brought the prairie to life. Water flowed through irrigation ditches -- including one that ran through the middle of town to the Bell farm--seeped into the arid prairie soil and made farming prosperous. Most new settlers took up farmland on the prairie; stores and other businesses in the settlement were begun. Several were two-story buildings with storefronts at the street level and meeting rooms on the upper floor. These included the IOOF Hall, the Farmers' Hall which later became the GAR hall (on land donated by John Bell), and the Opera House. Bell also donated land for the Pioneer cemetery on Washington Street.

If Seguin could be considered to have a "mover and shaker," Joseph Keeler was a candidate for that honor. He had been born in Kansas and at the age of fourteen moved with his parents to Port Townsend where he engaged in a variety of business ventures. Always ready for new ventures, he prospected up the Caribou Trail in British Columbia in 1897, prospected in the Yukon, and returned to Port Townsend in 1898 to marry Etta Priest, daughter of a pioneer Seguin family. They had one son, Hammond. The young family moved to Dawson where Keeler engaged in mercantile businesses and successfully invested in mining properties.

He moved back to his wife's hometown in 1902 and immediately became involved in a number of businesses. He started the first telegraph office in town and built a saloon on the southwest corner of Washington Street. Later he built the fifty-room Sinclair Hotel on the same corner using lumber from a mill co-owned with his father-in-law. Keeler promised there would be running water and electricity in every room by a certain date. He kept his promise. Keeler built a water tower behind his hotel and pumped water from his well to the tower to provide gravity-feed water to every room. Other people and businesses requested water and Keeler laid pipelines through the town. He put in a generator powered by a gas engine to provide electricity for the hotel. Soon neighboring businesses were asking to have power lines run to their places. That was the beginning of the Sequim Light and Power Company. He also built a saloon, a bakery, a butcher shop, and engaged in real estate sales.

In 1907, due to a Postal Official's error in reading an official report, the post office was titled "Sequim" for approximately a month. With the next report, the Official read the letter "g" as a "q" and the post office here became known as "Sequim." The name change apparently did not worry the residents enough to protest. It has been known as Sequim ever since.

Keeler laid out the first plat in the future town site. Before long at least seven others followed suit, laying out city-size lots on rectangular blocks and providing for wide streets and

alleys. Some followed Keeler's lead and dug deep wells, put up water towers and provided water for a price to homes in their additions.

There is no record of the origin of street names in the first town site, but it is believed that the man who did the first town plat of 40 acres in 1907 also named the original streets. In addition to the "tree" streets, one is named Etta and another Hammond. In the beginning the North-South streets were numbered "First, Second, Third, etc." beginning at present "Second" Street.

Incorporation

As member and president of the Sequim Chamber of Commerce, Keeler was active in pushing for incorporation. By 1913 citizens were ready to petition for incorporation. The act, which was approved by a vote of 90 to 55, established a Fourth Class Town of 440 acres, one mile north and south and three quarters of a mile east and west. A plat of eight city blocks extended along Sequim-Dungeness Way to Fir Street. The town began a pattern of growth, annexing more and more of the surrounding rural land, a pattern still being followed today. City Hall was built on Cedar Street near the post office within a year.

Jilson White, a local salesman who was elected first mayor, and a Town Council composed of five men set to work enacting ordinances regulating stores and businesses and providing for public safety. Over the course of the next fifty years almost every businessman in town who was interested in a political office served on the Town Council.

In 1971 voters did away with the Town caucus and it was decided that candidates for mayor and council would file at the County Auditor's Office and stand as candidates in the primary election as well as in the general election in November.

In 1973 the Town of Sequim came to an end when voters moved to advance to the classification of City. This meant a Council of seven and election of all officers -- mayor, council, treasurer, clerk and attorney. Twenty years later voters spoke again and the City adopted the City Manager form of government. Citizens elected the Council which in turn hired a professional city manager and elected one of their members as mayor.

Coming of the Railroad

In 1914 the Seattle, Port Angeles and Western Railway went through Sequim instead of Dungeness and Sequim became the agricultural marketing center of the Peninsula. Conceding to Sequim, Charles Franklin Seal, a leading merchant in Dungeness, built his two story Sequim Trading Company on the corner opposite the Sinclair Hotel. He sold everything anyone would want for housekeeping or farming and if he didn't have it he promised to get it. With the advent of the automobile when State Highway 9 came through town, he moved the building back some fifteen feet and installed a gas pump in front. He was hailed as the premier pioneer businessman of the community when he died in 1943.

Although the automobile and improved highways wooed travelers from the rail line, the railroad, which had been bought out by the Milwaukee Line, continued to offer freight service until 1986 when the tracks were removed. Today the Sequim Bypass follows part of the rail line through town and the Olympic Discovery Trail utilizes much of the former right-of-way.

Public Utilities

Keeler started the Sequim Light and Power Company with one gas-powered generator. As nearby businesses wanted power, he would run a line to their buildings and give them power. There wasn't enough power in the generator to give everyone electricity, but it sufficed until the Elwha Dam was built in 1914-15 and lines were run to substations on the peninsula. In 1925 the Sequim Light and Power Company was sold to Puget Sound Power and Light and Keeler was appointed District Manager. Later the power systems in Clallam County became part of a Public Utility District.

When Keeler dug his well and built a water tower to provide water for the hotel, neighbors asked for water and he ran pipes to their homes and businesses. Other developers in the small town built water towers for their additions, but most residents relied on their own small wells. The water table on the prairie had risen measurably with the open irrigation ditches and water was more plentiful than it had been when the first settlers arrived.

In 1922 the town purchased Keeler's water system. In addition to wells, water flowed from small springs on the prairie. Seven years later bonds were issued to extend the system to secure a water supply from the Dungeness River. A wooden pipeline from the river was built to a reservoir on the hill above town. The water system was entirely gravity from its source in the Dungeness River to the reservoir and into town. In the 1970s a well field south west of town off River Road was developed. In the 1990s a second well field was developed beside Port Williams Road.

In the beginning every home and business had its own privy or out-house. Hotels furnished slop jars emptied daily by staff. Some homes and businesses eventually built septic systems and had indoor toilets. A small local sewer system was installed in some parts of town. As houses in town crowded together, some systems began to fail and during the hot summer months, people complained about the stench. In 1934 the Town Council passed a law that required all homes in town to have indoor toilets. In 1936 the town sewer system was built with the help of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The project was financed by bonds which paid for pipes and supplies; the WPA workers did the work. The main trunk line ran from the southwest corner of town, eastward toward Washington Harbor. Several miles of main and lateral lines were built, feeding into the main trunk line at the intersection of Fir Street and Sequim- Dungeness Way. A water treatment plant was built and treated water was emptied into the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Additions were made to the lines and the treatment plant as the town expanded. In the last decade of the twentieth century lengthy litigation involving environmental issues slowed development of an improved water treatment system and longer outfall pipes.

Street Improvements

For many years Sequim streets remained unpaved. Horses and wagons--later automobiles and trucks--left a coating of dust on everything in town. Streets turned into heavily rutted washboards during the year. Every spring the City let out a contract to a local farmer and his grading machine and the main streets were smooth again. After periods of heavy rain, the dust turned to mud.

The Burlingame Road to Dungeness was an important commercial route until the railroad was laid through Sequim instead of Dungeness. Later State Highway 9 (now the Old

Olympic Highway) was laid on Washington Street through Sequim, connecting with the Port Williams Road at Mantle's Corner and west to Port Angeles.

In the early 1930s State Highway 101 was built, straightening Highway 9, and a new bridge across the Dungeness River provided a more direct route from Port Townsend to Port Angeles through Sequim.

In the 1950s residents began to protest against the condition of City streets and hard surfacing was begun. The Council directed that horses were to be kept off all resurfaced streets. The first City paving project was completed in November 1957.

When Elwha power was extended to Sequim in 1915, five streetlights were placed on poles along Washington Street and a warning light was installed at the intersection by Seal's store to let travelers know they could expect cross traffic. In 1953 a stop signal was installed and citizens were warned to "wait for the green light." As traffic increased, additional stoplights have been installed.

In 1952 the Council ordered the electric poles on both sides of Washington Street from Sunnyside to Fifth Street moved to the alleys in the middle of the block.

That same year, house numbers were assigned to each house in town. Residents refused to use them -- "they knew where everyone lived." House numbers were not accepted until 1953.

For a Better Life -- School, Library Parks

The 1868 school was outgrown within twenty years and voters agreed to build a new, larger school building. In 1911 the School Board announced plans to build a newer structure over the summer months that would double the capacity of the first two buildings. The eight room, two-story building was demolished in 1952.

As roads had improved throughout the East End and motor vehicles replaced horse drawn wagons as school busses, eleven smaller schools were consolidated into the Sequim District between 1913 and 1938. To meet the demand of a growing population, a new brick building was finished in 1922. That building -- the old brick high school building -- has been added to three times and partly remodeled a few years ago. Other high school buildings were erected in 1969. Eventually a new elementary school, now the Community School, was built on Alder Street. After Helen Haller Elementary School was built, the Alder Street school served as the Middle School.

In the 1990s a new middle school and an addition to the high school were added to the campus. The Sequim School campus now covers 60 acres -- larger than the original 40 acre Sequim town plat.

In Sequim, as in many other communities, women were responsible for starting libraries. By 1915 the Ladies' Club had collected books to be circulated in town. The books were given to the Army during World War I, and a new collection begun after the war. By the 1930s the library had grown to 500 books in two bookcases. It was easy to move the "library" from one place to another. In 1923 a club bought four lots on which to build a library. Funds were not available until 1935 when the club transferred ownership of the land to the Town of Sequim which contracted with the Public Works Administration (PWA) to build the Clyde Rhodefer Memorial

Library at the corner of North Sequim Avenue and Fir Street.

Over the years library use grew and in 1947 it became a branch of the County Library System. By 1976, in addition to the adult reading public, thirty classes from the middle and intermediate schools were coming to the library each month. In 1981, after serious community discussion and a fund raising campaign, plans were drawn and a new library building that would meet the needs of the fast growing community was built across from the high school.

Although sports, like horse racing and baseball, were an important part of life in early Sequim, and the entire town showed up for football and baseball games after a high school program was begun in 1915, parks were not an amenity offered by the town for many years.

In 1974 Charles Blake offered land around "Blake's ponds" at the east end of town as a park -- named for his wife, Caroline (Carrie) Blake. The ponds had been created by the Department of Transportation when they mined the gravelly subsoil for material to build Highway 101. Later the Lions Club built a community/conference center in the park. Other amenities such as trails, picnic areas and children's playfield were added. A Parks Master Plan in 1993 called for baseball and soccer fields, tennis courts, a band shell, walking paths and transportation improvements. It became a well-used community facility.

In 1976 John Kirner set two lots aside in the new Kirner Addition for a children's playground. It was dedicated to his wife, Margaret Kirner, and featured picnic tables and playground equipment.

During the late 1940s descendants of Sequim pioneers worked with the Garden Club to dedicate hours of work clearing out blackberry vines and weeds and creating Pioneer Park where the original cemetery had been. Most of the bodies in the cemetery had been moved to Sequim View Cemetery in 1915. A clubhouse, flag pavilion, green lawn and ornamental plantings graced the landscape. A plaque was installed on a rock memorializing all of the area veterans who had served their country. Just a few years ago negotiations between the Garden Club and the city turned the park over to the City, although the Garden Club continues to maintain and manage the clubhouse.

Sequim - Where Water is Wealth - and the Climate Healthiest in the World

In the 1950s civic boosters advertised Sequim -- Where Water is Wealth -- and lured by the sign and the climate, visitors became permanent residents and the town began to grow.

A 1962 a newspaper article extolling the healthy climate of the community lured thousands to this area. They soon discovered it was a better place to retire to than to make a living in. Real estate companies flourished. Farmers short-platted their lands and soon homes were planted where dairy cattle had roamed the irrigated fields.

Conclusion

This can only be a short summary of the life of the community. Sequim is still growing; the number of developments and retail stores increases. The need for improved infrastructure and parks continues. The Sequim story is just beginning.