Historic Albany

Oregon Fever broke out across the U.S. around 1840, when trains of covered wagons moved westward. The offer of free land brought many settlers up into the Northwest region..

Between 1850-1855, the Donation Land Claim Act granted each white male citizen over the age of eighteen 320 acres of land if he was single and 640 acres of land if he was married.

The first settlers to the Albany "Prarie" [sic] were farmers who came in the 1840s.

In 1848 Walter and Thomas Monteith arrived on the future site of Albany and purchased the Hiram Smead claim for $400.

Town lots were laid out on that portion of land and a new town was founded, on the east bank of the Willamette River, just below the mouth of the Calapooia River.

The city was named Albany after the capital of Monteith's home state – Albany, New York.

In about 1849 the Monteiths built the first frame house, which still stands at 518 Second Avenue S.W.

Monteith House

In 1850 Abram Hackleman, son of Abner Hackleman, laid out 70 acres on the east side of Albany for future development.

On January 8, 1850, Albany's first post office was established. The same year the Methodist chrch was founded. The Methodists were the first church group to be established in Linn County.

By 1851 Albany was designated as the county seat and all court meetings were held here. The first courthouse was built in 1852.

Ralston House

Welcome to "Hub City"

Albany's first school was established in 1851 by R.C. Hill, the town's first physician. The first building erected specifically for use as a school, however, wasn't built until 1855 and stood at the corner of Fourth and Broadalbin streets.

The Oregon Democrat was Albany's first newspaper and was founded by Delazon Smith, who became one of Oregon's first U.S. Senators. The newspaper is known today as the Albany Democrat-Herald.

Agriculture was Albany's first industry. In 1850 Linn County's non-native population numbered 994 people, belonging to 172 families living on 138 farms. A total of 6,041 acres of land had been cleared and planted or crops. For more than four decades, 1845 to 1885, wheat was the principal crop in Linn County.

The California Stage Company, one of the first major stages in the west, began operating in Oregon in 1860 with stages leaving daily from Portland to Sacramento. The first stage from Portland arrived in Sacramento six days and five hours later. The 710-mile route was the longest in the nation. Albany was a stopover in Linn County.

Fares from Portland to Albany were $10.

The first steamboat, the "Multnomah," arrived in Albany in 1851. It had been built in New York City, shipped in pieces around Cape Horn, and reassembled in Oregon City. In 1870 a person could travel to Portland by steamboat for one dollar.

Another early industry was the Magnolia Flouring Mill built in 1852 and located on the Calapooia River at the west end of First Avenue. It was owned by Walter and Thomas Monteith, I. Briggs, Sam Hill and Sam Althouse.

In 1871 the first locomotive whistle was heard in Albany. The arrival of the first train was celebrated as the greatest event in Albany's history. Albany businessmen raised $50,000 to ensure that the rails would come through their city, instead of bypassing it a few miles eastward.

The train brought the farmers' markets close as stagecoaches and steamboats gave way to the railroad.

The world's longest wooden railroad drawbridge was built in 1888 for the Albany-Corvallis run.

By 1910, 28 passenger trains departed daily from Albany going in five different directions.

Five hundred Chinese laborers had been brought to the valley to build the railroad and dig the Santiam Canal, which brought water, water power and transportation to the city. It was completed in 1874.

In 1875, 15 manufacturing plants such as sawmills, flour mills and a twine mill were powered by water power. In 1887 electricity was first generated by waterpower from the canal.

Albany became the manufacturing and transportation hub of the Willamette Valley.

The city grew and prospered at a slow and steady pace. Each year, houses and commercial buildings were built in styles fashionable at the time.

Chamberlain House

New industry moved to the outskirts, the main highway bypassed the downtown and post-World War II housing developed outside the original core of the city, leaving the old downtown and residential neighborhoods almost intact.

Today historians and architects credit Albany with having the most varied collection of historic buildings in Oregon. This collection includes styles from the 1850s through the 1920s and is concentrated within an area of approximately one hundred square blocks.

Albany Trolley Line

Four Albany Historic Districts are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

You can explore Albany's Historic Districts by foot, bicycle, automobile, or organized tours. As you do, try to imagine the slower, quieter pace of days gone by.

~ Albany Visitors Association