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belonged to the Northern Paiute tribes. While the Paiute had hundreds of tribes in places such as Nevada, Idaho and California, many bands established themselves in stretches of Eastern Oregon. After 10 years of treaties and settlement in Western Oregon, the Northern Paiute continued protecting their lands and the U.S. military became increasingly determined to take control of the land by the 1860s. In 1878, five years after the Malheur Indian Reservation was created to house the Paiutes and five years prior to the unveiling of the Oregon Short Line Railroad, the Paiute were uprooted, their land was taken, and the tribes were ordered into Yakima, Umatilla and Warm Springs reservations across the state.

David G. Lewis, a Native history researcher and anthropologist, explains in an essay: "Whole bands of Paiutes were hunted down and exterminated with extreme prejudice. ... The Paiutes (lost) their rights and lands and (were) dispersed to other reservations by the 1880s. This area was a true western frontier with no laws and death coming easy to those who did not take care."

Nearly a century later, descendants of the Paiute were able to acquire 771 acres of land now known as the Burns Paiute Reservation, about 130 miles southwest of Ontario.

The construction of the Oregon Short Line Railroad in 1883 was essential to Ontario's economic successes and led to an influx of international laborers that included a large arrival of Basques, a sheepherding indigenous ethnic group hailing from the Iberian Peninsula near the Pyrenees mountain range that hugs France and Spain. Ontario wasn't officially founded until 1899, but one of the five original white American settlers used the opportunity to pay homage to his hometown of Ontario, Canada, in a big way.

As the newly minted Ontario became the livestock industry hub of the region, the public lands provided ample opportunity for grazing. By 1900, the number of sheep in Malheur County had ballooned steadily. Hundreds of Basque inhabited Eastern Oregon and brought along family members. By 1940, the influx slowed, but 1.4 percent of Ontarians in 2010 still identified as Amerikanuak, or of Basque ancestry in the United States.

Agriculture quickly became Ontario's main industry as farmers tilled the land to prepare for the crops that still dominate today – onions, russet potatoes and sugar beets, among others. Money order records indicate that, despite the Oregon Census of 1910 reporting no Mexicans or Latinx in Oregon, at least 85 Mexicans were in the state by that time. Mexican *vaqueros*, or cowboys, tended to cattle and Japanese *Issei*, first-generation immigrants, continued working on farms in their new home country. World War II, however, drastically changed life for Mexican and Japanese immigrants in Oregon and beyond.

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin

D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 effectively ordering the internment of thousands of Japanese-American citizens and families. However, Elmo Smith, then Ontario's mayor and later governor of Oregon, called for the U.S. government to allow Japanese descendants to relocate inland to Ontario since living on the West Coast had been cited as a chief concern. Paired with Malheur County's desperate need for agricultural workers, Japanese Americans in Oregon were able to abandon the makeshift living quarters at the Portland Assembly Center and escape internment on May 20 following the adoption of Civilian Restrictive Order 2.

The Japanese population quickly skyrocketed from 134 with the arrival of 800 additional Japanese American workers in the Ontario area. At the end of the war, many Japanese stayed in the area. They credit Ontario's hospitality in part to Smith, who also published a local newspaper and penned positive, honest editorials about Japanese immigrants to subdue xenophobia. By 1950, Ontario boasted the highest Japanese-American population per capita in all of Oregon.

At the same time, thousands of Mexican migrant farmworkers were recruited as part of the Bracero program introduced in 1942 to similarly keep up with the agricultural labor demands. Nearly half a million Mexican workers migrated to Oregon, California, Texas and other states by 1947. Nyssa, Ore. – fewer than 15 miles south of Ontario – became home to the largest Latinx population due to its proximity to farms, and Ontario followed closely behind.

Although the Ontario Basque Club established in 1947 is still thriving, many Basque descendants have opted for bigger cities such as Portland and Boise. The Native American community in the area has never truly recovered, but two hours away in Burns, the tribe hosts regular language programs, spear-making workshops and an annual pow-wow event for families, featuring camping and lacrosse. And Snake River Correctional Institution, Oregon's largest prison just 15 minutes from Ontario's city center, has hosted pow-wows since 2002.

Ontario's Japanese population remains the largest per capita in Oregon, albeit slowly declining, and the sister-city designation with Osakasayama, Japan, since 1973, continues a tradition of international exchange. The Latinx population has steadily risen, and from the 2000 to 2010 census alone, 1,173 residents of Latinx descent, or roughly 9 percent, made Ontario home. Latinx students now account for 67 percent of all students enrolled in the Ontario School District.

For Ontarians, cultural festivities like the Tradition Keepers event remind the community of the deep cultural roots that date back to the incorporation of the city. Residents say relations across cultures aren't always perfect, but diversity is a proud legacy and tradition



PHOTO BY CELESTE NOCHE

Customers at the Next Chapter food pantry in Ontario take shade while they queue for their turn to select food. It was 104 degrees on this day in August.

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month. A household earning \$1,680 a month – the equivalent of four weeks of full-time minimum-wage work – would be expected to contribute 30 percent, or \$504, toward rent. The remaining \$193 would be paid directly to the landlord by the housing authority.

When the same income level is applied to a high-cost area, however, the amount the housing authority must pay landlords significantly increases. For example, if the same recipient moves to a two-bedroom apartment in the 91901 ZIP code of San Diego County, Calif., they would still need to contribute \$504 toward rent, but the apartment – with a fair-market rent of \$1,590 per month – would require \$1,086 from the housing authority.

Oregon Housing and Community Services estimates the current average monthly tenant contribution at \$329 per month. An estimated 321 vouchers were in circulation last year in Malheur County.

Although people with vouchers issued prior to the April announcement are still receiving benefits as promised, the wait time has stretched from six months or less to 18 to 24 months. Rodriguez estimates that between 250 and 300 families remain on the wait list since it was closed, and many more prospective families are left unable to apply.

The true cost of living

Janell Young, 44, is a single mother with three sons. Her youngest children – Matthew, 11, and Brian, 10 – are in tow at the food pantry during a recent visit. Her pantry at home is full of processed, canned foods, she said, but her fridge is mostly empty.

"I get disability, \$100 in food stamps, and I don't get anything else after that. It's not enough during the summer," Young said. "The hundred dollars goes within about three days for food. We can stretch it for a week, but milk is the thing we go through the most – about a gallon a day. When these guys go to school, I still go to the food bank, so it just seems like a routine. We were hoping to get milk today."

Only one-quart cartons of shelf-stable milk are available, which Young explains will be consumed by her boys within a day. She opts for a large container of Lipton tea bags

DEFINING AFFORDABLE

The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines affordable dwellings as units that cost a household 30 percent or less of its monthly income. In Malheur County, the median family income, or MFI, for 2018 was \$51,500. Households earning 80 percent or less of MFI are designated "low income," while those earning 50 percent or less are considered "very low income." Households earning 30 percent or less are considered "extremely low income."

In Malheur County, low-income households earn \$41,200 or less per year, very-low-income households earn \$25,750 or less, and extremely low-income households earn \$15,450 or less.

According to a 2018 report published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, an hourly wage of about \$13.40 is necessary to afford the average 2-bedroom rental home at \$697 per month in Malheur County. A person earning the minimum wage of \$10.50, however, would need a 52-hour work week to afford the cost of housing.

instead, since it will last much longer.

"We make chili a lot with the food bank cans. We also eat a lot of spaghetti and mac 'n' cheese. It seems like when you're poor, you have to eat a lot of carbs because that's what they give us," she said. "An orange right now would be really good. Or even an apple. Those are nice to have. Those are luxuries we don't always get."

The average monthly benefit amount for eligible individuals under Social Security Disability Insurance in 2018 is \$1,198, and those receiving Supplemental Security Income earn a maximum of \$750 per month.

HUD considers households paying more than 30 percent of their incomes toward rent and utilities to be cost-burdened, and those paying more than 50 percent are severely cost-burdened.