

County of Coos, and how Coquille won the seat

Coos County was organized December 22, 1853, while Oregon was still a territory. In the Rogue River Indian dialect, Coos means "Lake, lagoon, or inland bay." The name was first mentioned by Lewis and Clark, who spell it Cook-koos-oose, and early day residents always wrote it Coose.

In May 1853, an exploring party under Perry B. Marple left Jacksonville, Oregon, to search for a harbor that would give an outlet for Southern Oregon. They arrived at Coos Bay in three days.

Empire Settled in 1853

W.H. Harris, one of the party, selected the ground where Empire now is, and in October 1853, filed claim under the donation land claim act to one-half section land. This was the first land filed on in Coos County under the land laws of the United States.

After taking claim, Captain Harris built a cabin, the first in the county. He laid out and platted eight blocks for a town and chose the name of Empire City. A custom house was established there in 1853, with David Bushness as collector. Empire City was the first settlement in the county, and served as county seat until 1899, when the seat of county government was moved to Coquille.

The City of Coos Bay (then called Marshfield) is part of the land claim taken by Wilkins Warwick in 1855. In 1856, he sold part of his claim to Andrew J. Davis for \$3,000. In 1867, there were but two buildings, but in that year John Pershbaker started lumber and shipbuilding industries.

The first locomotive was shipped by boat to Coos Bay in December 1874, together with two passenger cars and two freight cars.

In 1869 the first newspaper was established, it being a sheet 6 by 9 inches, and called the "Bumblebee."



The first courthouse in Coquille was built in 1898, following the 1896 election in which Coquille was selected to be the new county seat. Prior to that, the county seat had been in Empire.

First County Judge

Chas. Pearce was the first county judge of Coos County, serving under appointment from April 12, 1854 until December 18, 1854. R.S. Belknap was appointed to succeed Pearce. He served until September 4, 1855.

The first county election was held in summer of 1855, with A. N. Foley being named county judge. His term was for four years, ending July 8, 1859.

The other early county judges serving in Coos County were:

Samuel S. Mann, July 4, 1859, to July 4, 1866; Gilbert Hall; D. J. Lowe; J. H. Nosler, two terms; Geo.

M. Dyer; D. L. Watson, father of James Watson of Coquille, two terms; J. Henry Schroeder, member of the original Baltimore colony and father of W. H. Schroeder (a jeweler in Coquille); L. Harlocker, two terms; John F. Hall, two terms; F. Thompson and Hugh McLain.

County Seat Removed to Coquille

Empire remained the county seat until April 5, 1899, when, following an election in 1896, it was removed to Coquille.

Marshfield residents, hoping to have the county seat relocated to their

town, had convinced the state legislature to permit a vote of county residents on a new location for the county seat. The publisher of the Coquille City Herald campaigned residents in this end of the county to turn out and vote; the result was that the less-populated south portion of the county produced 431 more votes than the well-populated north part, and Coquille won the county seat designation.

The county court at this time comprised L. Harlocker, county judge; I. T. Weekly and Donald McIntosh, commissioners; Edward Rackleff, county clerk (his deputy was Louis H. Hazard); and W. W. Gage, sheriff.



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