

2-20-41

Early Pioneers Settled In Mount Vernon Before 1870; Incorporated 1890

Early History of Mount Vernon is Recalled; Local Community Was First Permanent Inland Town Started In County

Fifty years as one of the famed agricultural and dairying communities of the Pacific Northwest is the achievement which Mount Vernon celebrated in 1940.

It was on June, 1890 that the history of Mount Vernon as an incorporated municipality began. Fifty years of growth and prosperity have followed, developing the present city which serves as county seat for the 37,502 people residing in the 1,774 square-mile area called Skagit County.

Lest you misunderstand, the beginning of the city was not in 1890. That was the year of the incorporation of the then small village and that year marks the birth of the official city of Mount Vernon. No, the actual beginning was not even in 1880 nor in 1875 for as early as 1870 two pioneer families had settled near the big log jam in the Skagit river to lay the foundation of the present Mount Vernon. Jasper Gates was the first to settle here, preceding Joseph F. Dwelley by a few months. Several settlers came during the next year and by early 1872 the first school in Skagit county was started in a building originally intended for a barn on the D. E. Kimball ranch here.

First Permanent Town

Mount Vernon had the distinction of being the first permanent inland town started in Skagit county. Guemes, "a land of many deer, wild life, and a thousand wolves," was the first Skagit territory to be occupied and Anacortes was the first community to be founded. Early pioneers landed in the Fidalgo and Guemes country between 1853 and 1860; and it was in 1867 that the second Skagit settlement, LaConner, was started by Alonzo Low. Edison was first settled in 1869 while Skagit City, a flourishing village destined to an early extinction, was also established in that year.

Following Mount Vernon were the founding of Fir in 1876; (the first settlement at Conway was made in 1873 but the founding of the actual town was not until 1891); Mountain View (Clear Lake) and Hamilton in 1877; Sedro-Woolley and Sterling in 1878; Eagle Harbor (Cypress) in 1881; Burlington, Bay View, Avon and Padilla-Whitney in 1882; Atlanta (Pt. Williams) and Bancroft in

1883; Lyman, Montborne and Sauk City in 1884; Baker (Concrete) in 1888; Dewey in 1889; Fidalgo, McMurray and Bessemer in 1890; Thorne and Rockport in 1900; Bow in 1901 (first homesteaded in 1869); and Clement City in 1905.

Two Log Jams

Two huge log jams in the Skagit, one centuries old, proved major obstacles in the community's development but the hearty pioneers with brain, brawn and perseverance, finally were victorious and following the opening of the river, the community grew rapidly. The largest of the log jams was located about a mile above the present city while the second was a half-mile below. So dense and solid were the jams that even large trees grew on top of the debris.

First Farmers

Samuel Calhoun and Michael J. Sullivan were the first of a group of foresighted farmers who set foot on Skagit mainland soil, seeking to reclaim it and convert it into farm land. Ignoring the scoffings of pessimists who said such tideswamps could never be conquered, the settlers persisted and thereby laid the first foundation for Mount Vernon as the heart of a prosperous agricultural section. . . . By 1874 Mount Vernon and the upper valley had enough settlers to seriously consider means to break the log jams Indians reported had been "always existent." Appeals to congress, however, were fruitless. Skagit City, meanwhile, flourished. Steamboat service was established between Seattle and Skagit City in 1874 and mail service, which was available only at Utsaladdy and LaConner, was demanded. In 1877 Mount Vernon received its first mail, coming from LaConner to Skagit City by skiff and packed afoot by Jasper Gates to Mount Vernon.

Town Founded

The year 1877 also saw the actual founding of the town of Mount Vernon with Harrison Clothier and Edward G. English playing the leading roles. The first hotel was erected in the same year, a rather plain building on Front street, built at a cost of not to exceed \$100.

Mining excitement in the Ruby creek district in 1880 created a new interest in the Mount Vernon country and by 1881 the town had a

population of about 75 people. The first church Baptist in denomination, was established in 1884 as was the first newspaper, the Skagit News. The Methodists were organized two years later but it was not until 1889 that the city had its first church building, "a comfortable and tasty church" built at a cost of \$2,500.

History of other parts of the county was by this time speedily interweaving into an interesting narrative which would require unlimited space here to retell, but which had direct bearing on the development of Mount Vernon.

Demand Incorporation

By 1889 the community's population was estimated at "nearly 1,000" and the people began to demand that the city expand by incorporation. Obstacles were encountered at the start, however, as an application to the district court was returned unsigned. The presiding judge was of the opinion that the state incorporation law was unconstitutional and refused his signature. Special meetings were held throughout 1889 in an effort to incorporate the community but the judge continued his refusal.

THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1941

Mount Vernon In 1881 — 60 Years Ago



One of the earliest pictures ever taken of Mount Vernon is the upper scene depicting the town of 1881. First settlement was made along the river bank as water transportation was relied upon exclusively for travel. A few years later considerable improvement had been made as is evidenced by the picture at the right.

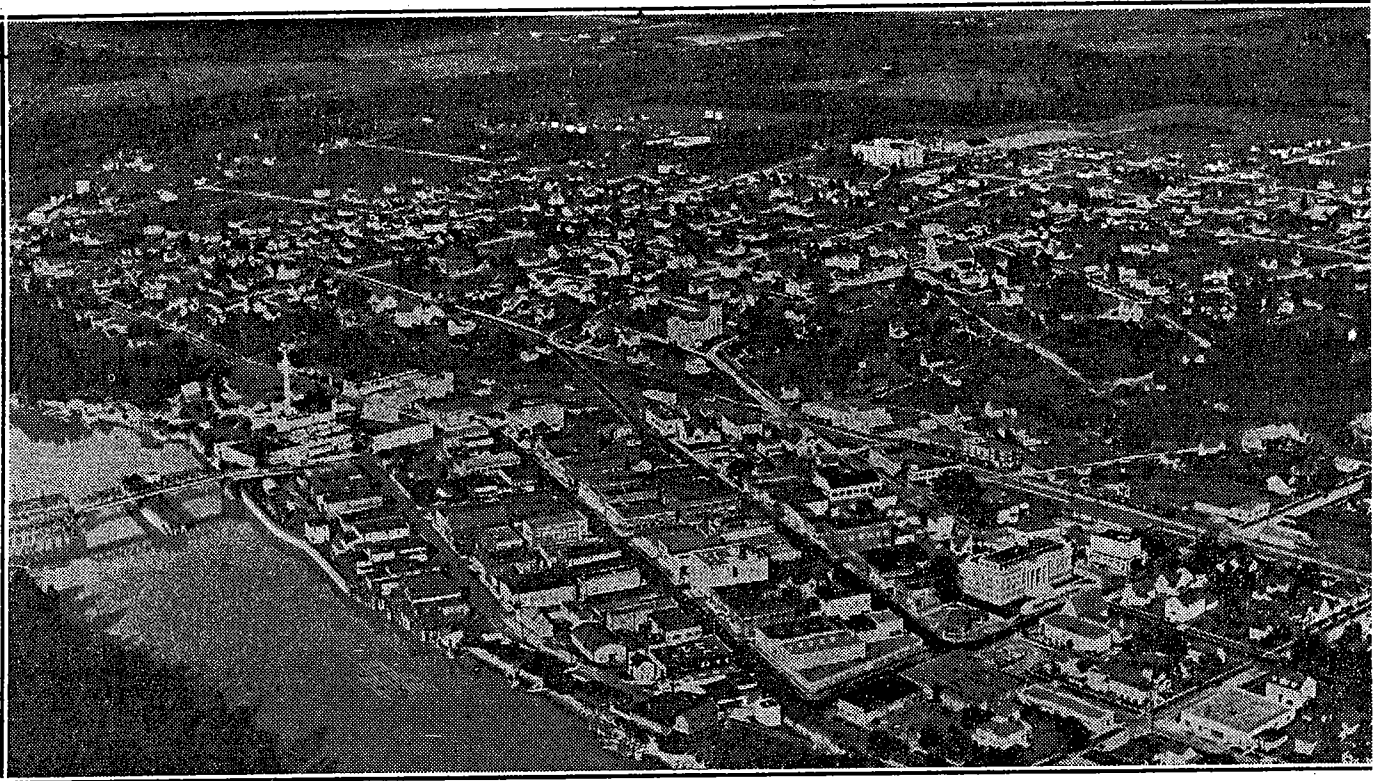
Mount Vernon Five Years Later



THE MOUNT VERNON ARGUS

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Mount Vernon On Its 40th Birthday—1930.



The first air picture ever to be published of Mount Vernon is this scene taken in 1930. Interesting is the study of this picture and the early scenes published on the opposite page.

Also equally interesting is the growth of the community since 1930, a vivid comparison of which can be made by noting the picture published on the cover page of this section. Many new buildings, such as the postoffice, can be noted in the 1941 picture.