

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

A partnership between Portland State University, Portland Public Schools and the Beaverton School District, funded by the U.S. Department of Education

The Oregon Settlement GIS Project

Throughout the 19th century, the boundaries of the United States expanded from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Unlike the massive Louisiana Purchase or the annexation of the southwest after the Mexican War, the boundaries of the Pacific Northwest evolved via more subtle social and political forces. Key among these forces was the vast migration of people from the eastern United States to the Pacific Northwest – shifting the political balance of power from the British influence of the Hudson’s Bay Company to dominance by a decidedly American polity. The 1850 Donation Land Act provided a powerful pull factor that drew thousands of settlers along the various overland westward trails. Each has a “story” to tell and each land claim added to the shifting landscape that eventually produced the national and international boundaries that exist today.

The Oregon Settlement GIS Projects:

The Oregon Settlement GIS Project has been created for various GIS-based viewing and interaction methods including projects built for an ArcReader, ArcExplorer, ArcView 3.3 and Google Earth platform. The project focuses on the Upper Willamette Valley (incorporating the greater Portland Oregon metropolitan region) and uses rich data from several sources:

Department of the Interior Land Survey (1852-1875). A raster layer was created from copies of the original land survey of the Willamette Valley. The layer shows both historic physical features (water and roads) and some other notations (location of cities, road names and some property); the vector layers for the historic water and road/path features were digitized from this survey.

Department of the Interior Cadastral Survey (1860+). A raster layer was created from copies of the first cadastral (property) survey which shows the original donation land claims in the Willamette Valley.

Oregon Manuscript Census (1850 and 1860). Excel spreadsheets record the individual records for the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census for the Territory/State of Oregon. The 1850 census is complete (includes all the counties that existed in 1850). The 1860 census is in process (key missing counties are Multnomah and Marion – which have not yet been transcribed). Where available, individual 1860 census records were added to the corresponding features in the land claim theme.

Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims (Vol. I and II). These are volumes created by the Genealogical Forum of Oregon and include an index of Oregon land claims with all available genealogical records; where the land claim was identified, this genealogical information was added to the corresponding feature in the land claim point theme.

Oregon Manuscript Census Spreadsheets:

The 1850 and 1860 Oregon manuscript censuses are in Excel spreadsheet format and contain information such as names, ages, birthplace, and occupation. These spreadsheets tell a fascinating story about movement across the country, blended families, and the quest for land and opportunities.

Use the sort or graphing functions to look at particular demographic information. Where did most people migrate from? What are the most common occupations? What are the age ranges? Was Oregon a young state at that time? Sort by last name and compare these names with the geographic placenames we have today (street names, school names, physical features, etc.). Locate a family in an area of interest (Hint: Initially sort by HN – house number – in order to capture all members of that household despite differences in their last names; then do a secondary sort by county). Note where the children were born, whether other people are part of the household and who they might be. Try to put together a “story” about this family.

Using the GIS-Ready Projects:

The layers on the OR Settlement GIS Project provide a geographic picture of settlement in the northern Willamette Valley. Turn on or add current spatial layers (from Metro’s RLIS data for example) to compare the region then and now.

Where did people settle and why? What were the physical features that constrained land claims (Hint: Look at the water features; turn on the hillshade)? Do these physical features exist today? If so, how do they impact settlement patterns today? How did people get around? How do historic roads and paths relate to our street pattern today? Who originally claimed the land where your school/home is located? Where did people settle first (Hint: use the Arrived in Oregon field to sort, select and/or classify the layer) and why do you think they choose that particular piece of land? What was the “density” of the population in 1860? What is it today in your area of interest? How does an 1860 land claim encompassing 640 acres compare to a typical residential block today?

Use the FIND tool to locate a particular person. Use the DISTANCE tool to locate and trace a route from a person’s claim to Oregon City or Portland or Champoeg made to, perhaps, get supplies or attend a meeting to discuss territorial status or statehood.

Use the ID tool (on the Claims point layer) to access information about individual claims and the corresponding census/genealogical data about family members. Most of the claim and genealogical data is attached to the head of household. NOTE: Each point on the map represents, in most cases, more than one person. When you click on the point with the ID tool, each record will show in the left box. Click on the individual records to see data about each household member (in the right box).