

## **Exploring Your Property's Past: Questions and Resources**

Developing a property history for your woodland management plan

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### **Finding the past**

One of the special things about woodland ownership is the connection to place it creates for people. That connection is evident in the pride of ownership, passion and the energy that people put into their property. Less obvious but often very strong is the connection to time and history associated with that place, however long a person's own relationship to the land has been. Many people really enjoy exploring and recording their property's history.

We recommend you first develop the basic story, with the recent history of the property, as you know it (for your Woodland Discovery Plan, or Forest Management Plan). Then maybe you go on to collect information and memories from other family members and neighbors.

If you are then interested in digging deeper, and extending your search further back in time, then this document can help. It provides a list of resources, many of them available free online that may be useful to people exploring the history of their woodland properties.

What do you hope to learn? Besides the recent history, (some of which may be) available in the memories of living people, a lot of information is available in public and historical records. A variety of resources can help you learn about native people, pioneers, early settlers, donation land claims and more. We introduce some here, but others will be unique local documents you may have to discover yourself.

### **Building Your History**

Visiting your local historical museum is a good place to start. Many have oral histories, photographs, maps and other resources to provide context as well as details across a wide span of time. You can also try out many online resources to learn about specific things such as pioneers who settled on or near your property.

### ***What is known about pre-European use of the land?***

There was a long history of Native American people in Oregon before European settlement. You might be able to find some information about that, or infer the use of the land prior to European settlement from some of these sources. However, most of the available documents and resources will address the time following settlement.

Ideas for learning about Native American land use:

- Visit the local city or county's museum or historical society in person or online. For example: <http://www.washingtoncountymuseum.org/home/exhibits/kalapuya/>
- Pre-settlement (~1850) land cover was often very different from what we have today. Maps of pre-settlement vegetation types have been developed from General Land Office survey records and other data.

An overview of presettlement vegetation in the Willamette Valley is available here: [http://www.fsl.orst.edu/pnwer/wrb/Atlas\\_web\\_compressed/4.Biotic\\_Systems/4b.presetveg\\_web.pdf](http://www.fsl.orst.edu/pnwer/wrb/Atlas_web_compressed/4.Biotic_Systems/4b.presetveg_web.pdf)

Other maps are available online through Oregon Explorer. Use the Map Viewer tool and select the Historic Oregon Land Use and Land Cover layer (under the Vegetation tab)

[http://tools.oregonexplorer.info/oe\\_map\\_viewer\\_2\\_0/viewer.html?Viewer=OE](http://tools.oregonexplorer.info/oe_map_viewer_2_0/viewer.html?Viewer=OE)

### ***Was Your Property Settled by an Oregon Pioneer?***

The US government established the Territory of Oregon in 1848. To encourage settlement of the area by US citizens, the government passed the Donation Land Claim Act in 1850. This act granted free land to pioneers who lived on the land and cultivated it for four years. Settlers arriving before 1850 were granted 320 acres if single or 640 acres if married. Settlers arriving after 1850 were granted 160 acres if single or 320 acres if married. Thirty thousand white immigrants traveled west and 7000 individuals made claims to 2.5 million acres of land under the Donation Land Claim Act. Many of these claims were in the Willamette Valley. The act expired after 1855, but the government continued to sell land to early settlers for \$125/acre.

The trip west on the Oregon Trail was about 2,000 miles long and took about six months. Usually 50-100 wagons traveled together as a group. Wagons were heavily loaded with supplies and most of the pioneers actually walked the 2,000 miles. Related families traveling together sometimes amounted to 25-50 family members. The age range was from grandparents (> 70 years) to newborns. The trip was arduous and nearly one in ten died on the trail. The most common causes of death were "camp fever" (cholera) and accidents. Travel usually started in the spring and pioneers reached Oregon in the fall. Families would find a temporary place for over-wintering and the search for a homestead site the following spring.

Two avenues to research these early homesteaders are through **maps** (if you know the location, and are trying to identify the settler or owner); and **people** searches (to learn more about an individual/family once you know their name). The rest of this document provides a list of Internet tools that can help you with this research.

## A. Mapping websites

### Bureau of Land Management Land Records - Oregon Donation Land Claims

You can use this site to find information on the settlers who filed Donation Land Claims. It is searchable by location and name. It is helpful to know your Township, Range and Section.

<http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/default.aspx>

- Choose *Land Patents*
- Enter *State, County, Township, Range, Section, or settler's name*. Then click *Search Patents* at the bottom of the page. You will get more details about the claims, e.g. number of acres and surrounding property owners.

View 1850's survey maps at: <http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords>

- Choose *View Land Records without Survey Notes*
- Enter: Township, Range
- Choose a Cadastral Survey

Two types of maps are available – landscape & owners. Hand-drawn Landscape Maps show interesting features and the location of some homesteads. Property boundary maps show the outlines of specific donation land claims with the owner's name.

### Historic Map Works

This site contains ownership maps from various points in time through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

On <http://www.historicmapworks.com>, search state and county name. Scroll through map pages to find Township and Range of interest and click on that map.

Scroll to bottom menu and click on enlarge button. Use mouse to move around map to the area of interest.

Use "Insert Screenshot" function or snipping tool in WORD to import the map section of interest into a WORD document.

### County Map Websites

Many counties have extensive map resources online. An example is given below for Benton County, but other counties have sites that function similarly.

**"BentonMaps":** <http://maps.co.benton.or.us/benton/geomoose.html>

Zoom in on area of interest.

Look at "Catalog" Choices on right side of screen.

Choose "Survey" folder and check box for Donation Land Claim (DLC). Map will display owner name and outline of property for DLCs.

## **B. Sites to research early Oregon families**

### Early Oregonians Search

Information about Oregon pioneers is available on the Secretary of State's Public Records system, Early Oregonians webpage:

<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/prs/personProfileSearch.do?earlyOregonian>

This site is searchable and if you know the pioneer's name, you can enter that and find out dates of birth, arrival in Oregon and death. Often information on parents and spouses is included as well county of residence as indicated in census records.

### Find-A-Grave

<http://www.findagrave.com/>

Using the search tool enter as much of the following that you know, such as: first and last name, date of birth and death, and state and county where buried. Sometimes biographies and photos are posted.

### Census Records - Family Search

Do an internet search for "XXXX Census" for a specific year e.g. "1850 Census". Choose results from **familysearch.org** (it's free). Can provide name index and images of population schedules listing inhabitants of the United States in the year of the census. Searchable data and browse are available for all states and territories included in that census year.

Enter first and last name, date of birth if known, and state and county of residence if known, and then click on *Search* at bottom of page.

Click on a name of interest to get a record for the household.

Images of the actual census record pages may also be available.

### The Oregon Territory and its Pioneers

Stephenie Flora maintains this webpage with multiple resources.

Go to <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/> and follow the link "Settling of Oregon and its pioneers" and scroll down the page to find lists of emigrants for specific years. Select the year of interest and scroll through the list for persons of interests. Sometimes short biographies are included. Female spouses are listed under their maiden names.

## General Internet Searches

You can try doing an internet search using one of these strategies:

- Try “Pioneers of (Your) County Oregon”. Online resources about early pioneers vary a lot from county to county. **Benton County Oregon Pioneers** offers extensive resources.

<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?db=benton>

Choose a letter that begins the last name of the person of interest.

Scroll through the list and click on the person of interest. Information will be displayed.

- Try searching landowner’s name (with birth and death dates if possible).
- Or try searching for history of a geographical area, e.g. “History of Benton County Oregon” results in an online book by Fagan that has some biographies of early settlers.

## Ancestry.com

Available at some libraries for public use, or get a personal subscription for \$19.95/month for home use.

Click on “Search” and enter as much information as known.

“Family Trees” are most useful, but use with caution. Some trees contain erroneous information. One way to check is to pay attention to dates. E.g. someone cannot be born if both parents are already dead. “Historical Records” are reliable. “Stories” and “Photos” are very interesting but not always available.

## **For Further Reference**

Two very thorough publications from Washington State University Extension document the process of developing a property history. Although some of the resources discussed are specific to the state of Washington, they illustrate the process one can take to build a property history, and the potential for discovery.

- Grand, L. A. and K. W. Zobrist. Property Ownership and Land-use History for King County Forestland. Washington State University Press. Extension Manual EM104E.  
<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/EM104E/EM104E.pdf>
- Grand, L. A. and K. W. Zobrist. Property Ownership and Land-use History for Island/San Juan/Skagit/Snohomish/Whatcom Forestland. Washington State University Press. Extension Manual EM099E.  
<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/EM099E/EM099E.pdf>

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