Town Founding Exercise  
Geog 571  
Prof Holtgrieve  

Town: West Linn, OR (Reconstructed Linn City)

Introduction

When West Linn was founded in 1913 (Cite needed), it was not the first attempt at settling the area on the westside of the Willamette across from Oregon City. Linn City was the first recorded attempt at this location to build a town. Living in the Willamette Valley in Oregon was very popular due to the lush vegetation, river ways and natural resources (cite needed). Both Linn City and West Linn were named after pioneer Dr. Lewis Fields Linn, who was a supporter of the occupation of Oregon against claims by the British and the Native peoples (cite needed). Here is the old map on record of the area. It was commissioned in 1852 and drawn by Joseph Hunt. Obviously the main reason for establishing West Linn in 1913 was the reason for many settlements in the Willamette Valley (Cite Needed), the river itself. The river is a major natural resource for the surrounding area. This map shows several features about the area, including the defining feature of West Linn, the Willamette River and Willamette Falls. The main reason for its’ re-founding in 1913 was the lock system that was built to get around the falls and the paper plant.
Another interesting feature about this map that may show some reasoning for the town’s founding is its proximity to Oregon City, which at the time the map was made was the capital of Oregon until later that year when it moved to Salem. *(Oregon: Her History, Her Great Men, Her Literature, 125, 153–4, 176).*
The river provides many necessary resources for a town. As Oregon City shrank from prominence because of the building of the Willamette Locks in 1873 (Cite needed), West Linn started to thrive because of the paper mill built on the shores of the Willamette River. As you can see by this map in 1925, West Linn had grown quite a bit since the building of the locks.

**Willamette Falls and the Locks**

The Willamette Falls was a huge part of the landscape pre-1873 and even in its’ lesser capacity today. Prior to the Locks being built, Oregon City and West Linn's predecessor Linn City were a way stop on a trip up the Willamette River and Valley (cited needed). The falls themselves were one of the biggest falls in America (Seigneur, *Images of America: West Linn*).

(http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/images/1848.jpg, 1848)

Much of the reason for establishing West Linn was as a logging community and another city to house the many necessary functions of a stop on a ferry trip up the Willamette. Willamette Falls served as an important symbol for the area and is still visible today from both sides of the river, even though because of the locks, its size is nowhere close to what it was previously. These Locks are the oldest continually operated locks in the United States (Seigneur, *Images of America: West Linn*).
The West Linn-Oregon City Bridge

The Bridge that goes over the river was another reason the city grew in size so quickly. After the pedestrian bridge was built in 1888, a bigger bridge was needed to continue the growth and accommodate larger vehicles crossing between Oregon City and West Linn (Hadlow, Robert W. (2001). Elegant Arches, Soaring Spans).

Oregon City-West Linn Bridge (, 2010)

West Linn at that time was a farming community as well as a mill town and needed access to the bigger city of Oregon City to sell and trade (cite needed). The bridge was completed in 1922 and has been in use ever since (Wood, Sharon (2001). The Portland Bridge Book). This bridge allowed more traffic to flow into West Linn, however the bridge is now old and out of date. It barely fits modern cars on it. After looking into it more, it seems that it was only meant to be one lane of a two lane bridge over the river, however local residents did not want to pay for the second bridge (ibid). Because of the growth in the 1970's in the West Linn area, another bridge was completed in conjunction with I-205 being built...
(cite needed). This drastically cut down on traffic over the old bridge. In 2005, this bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places (http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/research/nris.htm).

West Linn Paper Company

Another factor that allowed the city to grow bigger was the fact that many industrial opportunities were available to entrepreneurs that could either take advantage of the large amount of Douglas firs that were in the area, or the pulp that was created by the power being generated into the Portland power grid by the late 1800's (http://www.wlinpco.com/company/history.htm). Willamette Pulp & Paper was opened in 1889 and employed many of the locals in West Linn. It changed hands and was open until the mid 1990's when it was closed and many of the local people were laid off due to cost of labor increases. It reopened in 1997 and has been known as the West Linn Paper Company ever since.

This is just one of several mills that were in both Linn City and West Linn in the early days of the town. In fact the town was almost called Millsburg if not for a last minute change to honor Linn City and the pioneers who died in the fire and flood that destroyed the old town in 1860 and 1861 (Seigneur, Images of America: West Linn). The sights of most of the mills on the waterfront, both still in use and not, can be seen to this very day.

Growth from the Beginning to Now

Small settlements had been established on the west side of Willamette River after the fall of Linn City, however no established city existed prior to 1913. These settlements were and encompassed Sunset City, West Oregon City, Bolton, Willamette Heights, Windsor, Weslynn and the part of Oregon
City that was on the west side of the Willamette River (Seigner, *Images of America: West Linn*). In 1916, the town of Willamette was incorporated into West Linn.

http://westlinnoregon.gov/maps/historic-maps, 2010

Many of the next annexations had to do with the new development of I-205 and the transition of West
Linn from a mill town to a suburban town for Portland. With the building of I-205, Portland and other business communities became a short commute from West Linn, expanding the population even more. With the building of new schools and suburban amenities, West Linn grew from a small town of a few hundred people, to a town of greater than 20,000 people and an affluent member of the Portland suburban landscape(http://www.census.gov/).

Growth over the last twenty years or so has been remarkable. As a resident from 1987-2005, I have seen a doubling of the town, both in size and foot traffic. According to the cities’ website, growth is no longer a huge priority in the city because they are afraid of over-expansion and the angry backlash that shaped that last decade's voting population to put major anti-growth people in power. West Linn is not a dying town, however there has been limited expansion in the last twenty years that would bring any real jobs, besides service jobs, to West Linn, and that is the way that the current city government would like it to stay.
Work Cited Page

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