

History of Lyle, WA

The following is a compilation of accounts gathered from various sources, listed chronologically to the best of our ability. Gratitude to all who documented these details over the years for us to enjoy.

Lyle is located along an ancient trading route that was frequented annually by many Indian tribes.

1805: The Lewis and Clark Expedition, begun in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1804, had as its guide the Indian woman, Sacajawea – called in English, "The Bird Woman". The Indians first inhabited the land and considered it to be their own, as indeed it was until the white men came. Sacajawea was the first link between the Indian and the white man along the great Columbia River.

During the winter of 1805 the Expedition reached the mouth of the Klickitat River where it empties into the Columbia. There, they found the Klickitat Indian tribe encamped and made their own camp there on the knoll west of the Klickitat, bartering goods for the delicious smoked salmon which the tribe prepared. During their two-day stay they referred to the location as "Klickitat Landing", in their records on October 29, 1805.

1859: Established around 1859, the first European settler was Egbert French, who arrived from Ohio.

1866: French sold his holdings to James O. Lyle from The Dalles, Oregon, who moved to the north bank of the Columbia River.

1876: The first Post Office east of the Cascades and north of the Columbia River was established at Klickitat Landing to service most of Eastern Washington. The mail arrived by steamship from the opposite shore and was distributed by horseback. James O. Lyle became the Postmaster and changed the name of the community to Lyle. Steamboat operation lasted until the North Shore Railroad was completed.

Early settlers recognized the strategic importance of Lyle and platted a town site. A ferry boat run was developed to accommodate trade between Oregon and Washington.

1892: An English Lord Balfour purchased over a mile of river frontage and most of the land surrounding the town site of Lyle and built a mansion overlooking the Columbia west of the Klickitat River. The hillsides north of town were turned into vineyards and orchards.

1903: The Columbia River & Northern Railroad was completed between Lyle and Goldendale.

1908: When the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railroad was completed between Pasco and Portland, the company purchased the town of Lyle and also made the CR&N Railroad a branch line.

1909: The present town of Lyle was platted. Two sheep sheds with a capacity of 30,000 sheet were constructed on the Point. With those in place, Lyle became an important sheep and wool shipping center.

It has been said that some residents of Old Lyle engaged in winemaking in the early years. An old barn had a huge iron vat in its upper story, discovered when the property changed hands.

1912: Some time after 1912, a tragic and devastating fire occurred in Old Lyle and many buildings and homes and the school were destroyed. Rebuilding was done, by mutual consent, to the north of the railroad tracks on Lyle's present location.

1918: Prior to 1918, when it went out of business, there was a printing office that published and printed a newspaper, "The Washingtonian".

1920: Lyle supported two stores, two garages, a bank, three hotels, a livery stable, a machine shop, two sawmills and a drug store. Shortly after 1920, two of the three hotels burned down . One of the garages housed the Delco electric plant which provided Lyle with its first electric lights. Used for lighting only, it was turned on at sundown and off at 10 p.m.

East of the sheep sheds was an Apple Warehouse, where apples from many orchards on Fisher Hill were sorted, packed and shipped each fall. After the apple harvest the building was used as a dance hall, all winter. (Around 1930 it burned and was never rebuilt.)

1922: A heavy winter snow fell, and one of the sheep sheds collapsed. The industry could not survive the loss, and dwindled away. (The remaining sheep shed was burned as a public service in 1968.)

1933: The tunnels were blasted through the rock walls east of town, and State Highway 14 was constructed. Prior to that, Lyle's only road access was by bridge over the Klickitat River, then up the hill toward White Salmon and other communities to the north.

1941: There was a small airport in Lyle.

As civilization has continually modernized through the decades, the town of Lyle has seen development booms come and go. Lyle, it seems, often returns to being a quiet little village on the banks of the beautiful Columbia River Gorge.

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