

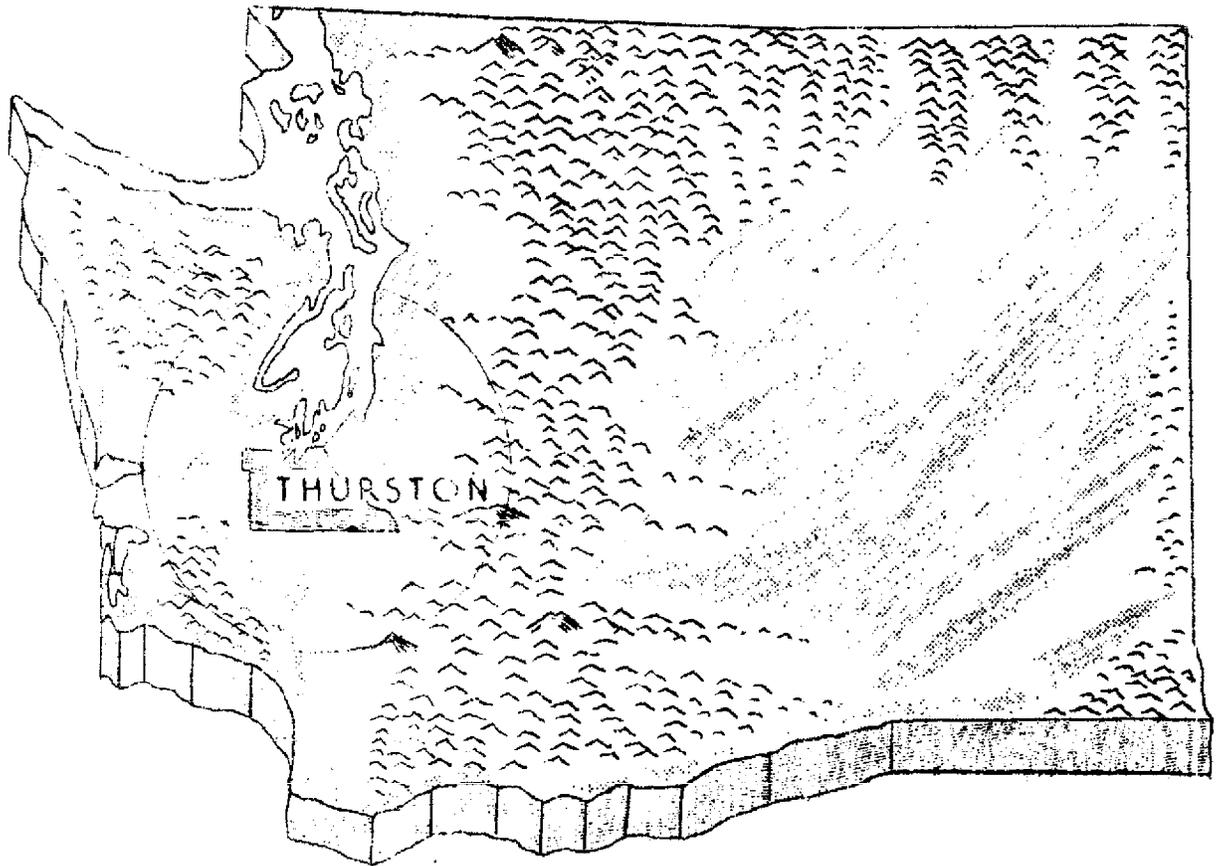
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THURSTON COUNTY

AGRICULTURE

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Joseph D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
S. R. Newell

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FOREWORD

This book on Thurston County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Thurston County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Thurston County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Thurston County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Thurston County in 1857. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. Vladimir Kovalik, University of Washington graduate student in geography, compiled most of the statistical tables and graphs. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington
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PART I

History of Thurston County Agriculture

Introduction

Thurston County occupies an area of glacial plains, Coast Range and Cascade Mountains located at the southern extremity of Puget Sound in western Washington. Created by the Oregon Territorial Legislature, it is the fourth oldest county in the state. Olympia, the leading settlement on Puget Sound at the time, was established as the first and only Washington Territorial Capital.

For a short time during the Oregon territorial period, Thurston County included most of western Washington, but by 1853 it had approximately its present area of 719 square miles. It is one of the smaller counties of the state, ranking 32nd in size. In population, however, Thurston ranks 12th in the state and in rural-farm inhabitants is 13th.

Localized farming districts within Thurston County are intensively managed and produce products of high value. Poultry production is valued at nearly \$1,000,000 annually and the county ranks eleventh in this respect. Dairying, Thurston's second most valuable farm industry, ranks 13th in the state and returns about \$1,500,000 per year. Livestock raising, however, is the most common type of farming and sales of livestock and livestock products each return over \$3,000,000 to Thurston County farmers.

History 1/

The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Thurston County on January 12, 1852. It was named in honor of Samuel R. Thurston, first delegate from Oregon Territory to Congress. Olympia, on Budd Inlet at the southern tip of Puget Sound, became the county seat as well as the territorial capital when Washington Territory was created in 1853.

Western civilization and agriculture began in Thurston County during the British period of fur trading in the southern Puget Sound Basin. Following the explorations of the Captain George Vancouver Expedition of the Royal Navy in

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1792, the Hudson Bay Fur Company came into the area and in 1833 established Fort Nisqually in what is now Pierce County near present Fort Lewis. In conjunction with the fur business, British fur traders formed the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, Governed from Fort Nisqually by Dr. William T. Tolmie, this company farm was a large cattle, horse and sheep operation located on the inland prairies between the Nisqually and Puyallup Valleys so that portions of present Thurston County made up considerable part of the ranch's range lands. Vegetable gardening and some dairying also was practiced at the Fort. Nisqually and Squaxon Indians were employed in farm work and were taught gardening and the handling of livestock. This large farm project existed until about 1846 when American claims to "The Oregon Country" were granted under the Treaty of 1846 establishing the present boundary between the United States and Canada in the Pacific Northwest.

Agricultural and commercial settlement by Americans began at Tumwater Falls, now in the southern suburbs of Olympia, as early as 1845. Coming north from Oregon, a party of 32 persons led by Michael T. Simmons, founded Tumwater on a falls of the Deschutes River near its mouth on Budd Inlet.

The Simmons group built a grist mill to grind flour from grain grown locally. They also built a water-powered sawmill--the first American mill on Puget Sound. Tumwater is marked as the western end of the Oregon Trail because of the Simmons party's overland migration. Although preoccupied by lumbering and trading, settlers spread some livestock raising, gardening and wheat growing eastward from Tumwater to East Olympia and Lacey. Early advertisements in the "Columbian", a newspaper started in 1852 at Olympia, showed that bacon, lard, wheat, milk, butter and cheese were being produced for sale on farms on the prairies of Thurston County.

Immediately north of Tumwater, the city of Olympia was started by Edmund Sylvester and Levi L. Smith. Sylvester acquired a 320-acre Donation Act land claim on the south shore of Budd Inlet. A village started on this claim and its growth was encouraged with the establishment of a Federal Customs House in 1851. Sylvester named the village Olympia because of its panoramic view of the Olympia Mountains.

Olympia and Tumwater continued to grow after the Washington Territory was created in 1853. The first Governor, Major Isaac I. Stevens, arrived late in 1853 and proclaimed Olympia as the Territorial Capital. Olympia was incorporated in 1859 and had a population of 1,489. The settlement continued to grow as the center of Federal Government activity in the Territory. Settlers and

1/ This historical summary has been derived from four sources:

- (1) 1953 Yearbook, Washington State Associations of Commissioners and Engineers. Page 144. Marion H. James, Thurston County Section
- (2) Richard M. Perry. The Counties of Washington (mimeographed) Secretary of State, Olympia, 1943.
- (3) American Guide Series. Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, Revised, 1950. Metropolitan Press, Portland, Oregon.
- (4) Lucile McDonald, "Nisqually River Was Important to Puget Sound's White Population in Late 1800's". Seattle Sunday Times Magazine, August 11, 1957. pp. 2-3.

trade goods moving northward up Puget Sound passed through Olympia and it became an active port as well as lumber center.

Agricultural settlement on the outlying prairies to the south proceeded slowly between 1850 and 1860. Using the Donation Land Act which gave 640 acres to a married couple and 320 acres to a single person, a number of families took up homesteads at some distance from tidewater. George Bush, a Negro from Missouri, developed a livestock farm on Bush Prairie between Olympia and Tenino. James Longmire, leader of an immigrant party, led a group of homesteaders to Yelm Prairie in 1853 where cattle raising was started. In 1854, Aaron Webster settled at Bucoda in the Skookumchuk Valley. William Packwood, a Cascade Mountain explorer and prospector, settled in the Nisqually Valley flats in 1847.

Indian hostility beginning in the 1850's became critical about 1855, discouraging farm settlement on the prairies. Settlers moved to tidewater settlements and forts at Steilacoom and Olympia. Stockades were built at Grand Mound and Yelm. Most of the trouble eased when Governor Stevens made a treaty at Medicine Creek north of Olympia in 1854 with the Squaxon, Nisqually and Puyallup Indians. However, a small group of Nisqually led by Chief Leschi did not recognize the treaty and joined bands of Yakima and Klickitat Indians who raided Puget Sound settlements. Treaties were eventually signed with all Indians of the area and small reservations, the Nisqually and the Chehalis, were set aside in Thurston County for Indian occupancy.

Improved roads, the establishment of railroads, the beginning of coal mining and the expansion of lumbering and other industries in Olympia and Tumwater brought general growth to Thurston County between 1855 and 1900. The entire southern Puget Sound area and Grays Harbor expanded mainly from lumbering activity. Population grew from 1,500 in 1860 to 9,900 by 1900. Local sawmill towns on the Sound, on Grays Harbor and along the inland route between Centralia and Tacoma created important markets for dairy products, poultry, livestock and vegetables enabling farmers to begin specializing in commercial crops and animal products.

Between 1870 and 1880 the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad between Tacoma and Portland, Oregon, opened new markets for Thurston County mills and farms. Two villages--Tenino and Bucoda--grew up on the railroad where coal mining and rock quarrying were developed as well as thriving lumber industries. Another branch line of Northern Pacific was constructed from Olympia to Aberdeen on Grays Harbor. Along this line developed a string of sawmilling towns and local farming trade centers such as Little Rock, Rochester and Grand Mound. Part-time farming combined with work in the lumber, logging and mining industries became common in southern Thurston County.

From 1900 to 1950 the economy of Thurston County expanded and its city, town and farm population rose between each Census. Olympia, particularly, grew as new industries came in as well as from expansion of the state government offices at the capitol. Between 1900 and 1920 large numbers of immigrants from eastern states and Europe came to work in the forest and other industries and to buy logged-over land for small farms growing berries and hay, and raising dairy cows and poultry. Between 1900 and 1920 the population rose from 9,900 to over 22,300, and in the same period the number of farms went from 665 to 1,490. The number of farms reached its peak in 1940 at 2,876. By 1940

agriculture had become considerably diversified, a private stock company having contributed largely to this diversity with an irrigation system in the Yelm area where many new farms were established.

During the World War II period (1940 to 1945) industrial expansion and federal work connected with national defense in the Tacoma, Fort Lewis and Olympia areas drew many persons away from agriculture in Thurston County. The number of farms dropped to about 2,000 by 1950. There was considerably abandonment on the Yelm and Grand Mound Prairies and many farms went to a part-time basis as their owners went into industrial employment.

Over the years Thurston County agriculture has been encouraged and guided by several agencies and private associations. The Washington State College Experiment Stations at Puyallup and Vancouver provided technical assistance and information related to dairying, poultry raising and berry growing. Assistance and guidance has been provided by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and State College Extension Service through County Agents located in Olympia, and through soil scientists of the Soil Conservation Service. Several private associations of farmers have worked for improvement of production and marketing of the county's farm output. These include the Thurston County Crop Improvement Association, Thurston Dairymen's Federation, Thurston-Mason Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Thurston County Cattlemen's Association and two dairy clubs, the Capitol Guernsey Club and Thurston-Mason Jersey Club. The annual Thurston County Fair and Southwest Washington Fair have stimulated local interest in agriculture. While group work in these organizations has been of great influence, there have been individuals too numerous to cite here who have influenced farming in the area through their ideas and demonstrations of successful specialized agriculture.