

# A Brief History Of Troutdale

Troutdale's history centers on the confluence of the Sandy and Columbia Rivers where Native Americans, English explorers, Hudson Bay Company fur trappers, and then Lewis and Clark were travelers.



The wetlands along the Columbia were hunting and fishing spots for Chinookan Indians once the spring floods eased. In the pools and ponds left behind, native people found fish, bird hunting and camas. Some artifacts were left behind and are in the care of the Troutdale and the Oregon historical societies.

From the British point of view, the Sandy River was "discovered" in October 1792, by Lt. William Broughton and his men in the armed tender "Chatham," which was delegated to explore the Columbia by Capt. George Vancouver. Ascending the river, Broughton and his vessel reached a point just east of the mouth of the Sandy River, which he named Barings. Sighting Mount Hood for the second time on that voyage, he named the mountain after a British admiral. A rocky lava outcropping, immediately across the Sandy River from Troutdale, was later named Broughton Bluff.

The American overland expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in 1804-1806, acknowledged Broughton's name for the mountain, but renamed what is now the Sandy as the Quicksand on Nov.3, 1805. On their return while hunting in the area, the Americans learned from native residents that they had bypassed the Willamette River. Following a map drawn in the sand, they returned to explore the river. That trip would help open the way for overland travel to this area.

The earliest settlers to this area came in 1850 and 1851. Many landed at a small community, named Sandy, at the ferry landing at the mouth of the Sandy River. Early donation land claims were filed by John Douglass, D.F. Buxton, Benjamin Hall, James Stott and Felix Hicklin. Family records credit David F. Buxton as Troutdale's true founder because he filed an 1853 donation land claim in the center what is now Troutdale. Buxton developed the town's first primitive water system, which was in use until the 1960s. He died in Troutdale in 1910.



However, it was Capt. John Harlow, a former sea captain from Maine and successful Portland businessman, who conceived a plan for the town and made it happen. In 1872 he purchased part of Buxton's land claim to build a country home along the Sandy River. Because he raised trout in ponds on his farm, he called his farm "Troutdale." He seized the opportunity when a transcontinental railroad extended east from Portland through the Columbia River Gorge, to campaign for a depot so he could ship produce from his farm. On November 20, 1882, Troutdale had its depot and a stop on the rail line; an important step in becoming a bonafide town.

After Harlow's death in 1883, his widow, Celestia, platted a town on the hillside (later called Hungry Hill) with blocks and streets facing the railroad. Much of the new city was built in 1890 and 1891. The first edition of Troutdale's newspaper announced the opening of Aaron Fox's new store and a restaurant, and included ads for a hardware store, surgeon, notary public and blacksmith.



The town's major industry was the American Dressed Meat Company, later sold to become Portland's Swift and Company. Other industries that rose were a lumber mill, a hotel and a distillery. The distillery burned in what was reported as a "bright blue flame" in the 1890s.

Aaron Fox was instrumental in incorporating the city in 1907 and became its first mayor. It had become a town of saloons, and incorporation arose from the necessity to exercise controls over them. Huge licensing fees for the saloons precluded the need for city taxes.

In 1907, a disastrous fire swept through the city burning the 1890s buildings. A church built on a hillside two blocks from the business district, along with hillside houses, was among the buildings that survived.

In 1912 women of Oregon got the right to vote. Two years later, Clara Latourell Larsson took office as mayor of Troutdale, becoming one of Oregon's earliest women mayors. The Columbia River Highway construction began in 1913, and its approach ran through Troutdale in 1916. Enterprising residents opened businesses, restaurants, tea rooms, hot dog stands, and dance pavilions to feed and entertain the travelers.



In 1924, Laura Harlow, daughter-in-law of John Harlow, was elected mayor of the city.

In 1925, a second fire again destroyed most of the business district. This fire is believed to have resulted from an explosion of a still in the garage of John Larsson, the former mayor's husband. The Tiller Hotel and Helming Saloon, both built after the first 1907 fire, survived the 1915 blaze. The Helming Saloon building still stands, adjacent to Mayor Square. Tiller's Hotel was

demolished.



John Harlow's original house was torn down in the 1920s. Remaining on the family property was the home his son, Fred, built in 1900 on the farm site. That building is now the Harlow House Museum of the Troutdale Historical Society. The original rail depot burned in 1907 and was replaced by a second depot that is now the Depot Museum. It was moved from its original location north of the Union Pacific rail line to its present site in 1979.

In the 1920s, Troutdale claimed the title of the "Celery Capital of the World" as a result of prize-winning celery grown here. But farmers also grew produce and gladiola bulbs in the area's fertile, sandy soil. Troutdale vegetables and later strawberries were shipped all over the nation by rail.

The Troutdale City Hall was completed by a citizen volunteer effort in 1922. The original wooden dance floor was the center of social life for years. Later the entire building was remodeled as city hall offices.

Construction of an aluminum plant to meet wartime needs was a boon to the economy in the mid 1940s and brought workers from all over the nation to work at what is now the industrial park. Eventually emissions from the plant ended the gladiola and other bulb industries and damaged other crops.

Completion of Interstate 84 in the 1950s pulled traffic away from the Columbia River Highway and Troutdale. The City remained fairly quiet during the 1950s.



In the 1960s as Portland suburbs pushed east, Troutdale got its first subdivision, Weedin Addition. With growth coming, the city was required to build a sewage treatment plant by state agencies. Under the guidance of Mayor Glenn Otto, who later became a state senator and statewide leader, the city boundaries expanded from 320 to more than 2000 acres including the Multnomah County Farm and what was then a home for the disabled and aged.

*Information supplied by the [Troutdale Historical Society](#).*

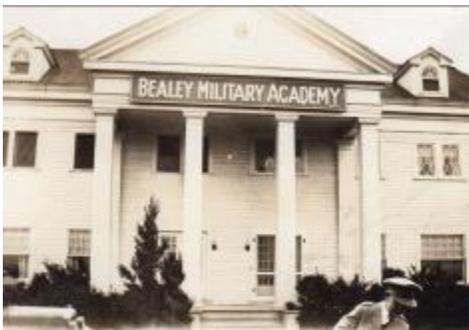
## History Tidbits



### 1964 Christmas Flood

Glenn Otto Community Park was originally owned by the town's founding family, Capt. John Harlow and his heirs. In 1906, Lou and Laura Harlow, who would later live in the Harlow House (the home, a few blocks north, is now a Troutdale Historical Society Museum) sold the six-acre site to the...

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### Bealey Military Academy

The Bealey Military Academy at Troutdale flourished in the 1920s and early 1930s in a handsome cluster of buildings north of McMenamins Edgefield at about the location of the Multnomah County Animal Shelter.

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### Bissinger Company Water Tower

The water tower, a landmark of Troutdale's old town skyline, once served the Bissinger Wool Pullery, a firm built in 1920 to process the hides of winter-killed livestock and sheep. The workers at the pullery removed the wool from the hides before sending them on to be tanned.

The Bissinger...

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Captain Harlow's Carp

Captain John Harlow named his home Troutdale because it had a "small dale near his house where he had a fish pond which he stocked with trout." But then came an unfortunate attempt to introduce carp to Oregon diners.

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City Hall Functions

Troutdale's Old City Hall once served many other purposes, according to Troutdale old-timer Walter Nasmyth.

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Dancing in Early Troutdale

Dancing was among the most popular of pastimes in early Troutdale. In addition to dances in local halls, including Troutdale City Hall, community members traveled to surrounding towns.

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## Discovery and Naming of the Sandy River

The Sandy River Delta, more than 1,000 acres on the eastern side of the Sandy River, is now public land and part of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

The first record of it by English explorers was in 1792 when Lt. William Broughton sailed up the Columbia River on a 'scouting...

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## Early Photographers

Troutdale had its share of early photographers who set up cumbersome cameras on tripods and, using glass plates, exposed pictures of local scenery.

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## Flower Growing in Troutdale

In 1928, A.D. Kendall, station agent of the Troutdale Rail Depot, took a custom-made box, filled with his most prized gladiolus, loaded it aboard a refrigerated rail car and set out for the American Gladiolus Society's annual show and competition in Toledo, Ohio.

Kendall, his wife and...

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## Fourth of July Celebration

In 1968, Dick Knarr, founder of Troutdale Sand & Gravel, decided to go out to visit old friends interviewing them about their memories of early Troutdale. This one from Milo "Mike" Coons:

"One of Mike's best youthful memories was of a Fourth of July celebration held by Troutdale on...

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Historic Gas Station

The restoration of the historic gas station at the west end of the Troutdale bridge was originally the work of Jack Glass, a fishing guide, who set up a small business there as Jack's Snack N' Tackle. (Now Sugarpine Drive-in.)

The little station with its canopy was built about 1930 to...

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## Internment of Japanese-Americans

In May 1942 during World War II, East Multnomah County's Japanese Americans were taken away to internment camps for the duration of the war. The event, then regarded as a war-time necessity, resulted in an official apology by the U.S. Government years later.

The internment act singled out...

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Lovers Oak

Troutdale has a new Lovers Oak, the second of its kind, on the south side of the Harlow House museum. The original tree was shaped by an 1876 Columbia River flood.

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## Origination of Kibling Street Name

Troutdale's historic street names come from the community's pioneer families and earliest residents. Troutdale's old City Hall is on Kibling Street, named for Joseph and Dora Kibling, whose donation land claim covered much of the area where downtown Troutdale is located.

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## Richard Knarr, Troutdale Sand and Gravel

In the fall of 1922, Knarr & Sons, owner of the local sand and gravel operation on the Sandy River, had a \$600 contract to haul sand and other materials to Corbett where the new Corbett high school was under construction.

Corbett High School, also known as Columbian High, burned on...

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## Robert McBride Sturges, Mayor 1972-1982

Bob Sturges succeeded Glenn Otto as Mayor of Troutdale in 1972 and served until 1982. Mayor Sturges was instrumental in developing the City's deep well water system which was wisely built to accommodate future growth.

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Seidl Family Early Settlers

Jacob Seidl, for whom Seidl Road west of Springdale is named, came to the Troutdale area from Czechoslovakia in 1888, building a log cabin on Staggerweed Mountain, the elevation behind Broughton Bluff on the east side of the Sandy River.

His son, John, was born there in 1894. To support...

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Smelt Runs in the Sandy River

Learn about Troutdale's history with the little silvery fish

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The Sandy River

The Sandy River has always drawn visitors from Portland to cool off on its beaches, or enjoy the shade among the trees in the Sandy River Gorge. The home of Junki and Linda Yoshida at the Stark Street Bridge began in 1912 as the Portland Automobile Club, a destination for early auto owners. In...

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## Troutdale Bridge

Construction began in 1912 as a part of the building of the Columbia River Highway. Troutdale would be the gateway to the remarkable road, which was the engineering marvel of its day and officially dedicated in 1916. While there were earlier bridges across the Sandy River, they were wooden...

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