



Champoeg and French Prairie

A historical and cultural survey



French Prairie,
as historically
understood

CHAMPOEG Timeline

The First People

Pre-contact through the early 1700s

The human history of Champoeg spans over 7,000 years. Discover some of the key elements of Champoeg's story, outlined over the following six pages.

Kalapuya Indians live in the interior valleys between the Cascade Mountains and the Coast Range. They seasonally set fires in the Willamette Valley to create prairies and manage food supplies. Champoeg provides access between river and prairie, and is an important meeting place. Today, scholars believe the name "Champoeg" comes from the Kalapuya word for yampah, an edible root.



Source: *Atlas of Oregon*, University of Oregon Press, 2001



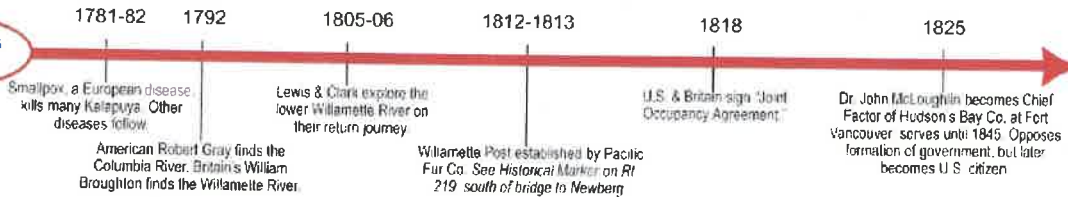
Source: *Champoeg Heritage Park Guide*



Time Line illustration courtesy of *Champoeg Heritage Park Guide*

Champoeg → French Prairie

Trapper's Paradise




Lewis and Clark at Three Forks (Montana Historical Society)






Time Line illustration courtesy of *Champoeg Heritage Park guide*

Commercial & Political Center



History: Bay Coast area was one of the Astoria sites.

1827-31 1830-31 1833 1834 1835 1837 1839 1841 1841-43

French Canadian's begin the first farms in the Northwest near Champoeg. Local area known as "French Prairie".

Malina appears, reducing Kalapuya numbers to a few, founded by the 1840s.

John Bull establishes the first American farm in the Northwest and in today's park boundary.

Wilamette Mission established by Methodist missionary Jason Lee. Visit *Wilamette Mission State Park* to see the ghost structure.





Walter Handquist builds first grist mill in Wilamette Valley at Champoeg.

Ewing Young leads first cattle drive from California to Wilamette Valley.

Father Blanchet establishes first Catholic mission in St. Paul. See the 1846 church on the *Self-Styled French Prairie Tour*.

Ewing Young's death causes settlers to meet and discuss probate matters. Hutchon's Bay Co. warehouse built at Champoeg.



Settlers—mostly retired American and French Canadian trappers and mountaineers—meet at various places to discuss organizing an Oregon government: the Wolf Meetings of 1843.

Lower Willamette Valley: from *Champoeg: Place of Transition* by J A Hussey

Wolf meeting—French Prairie 1843

Time Line illustration courtesy of *Champoeg Heritage Park Guide*


May 2, 1843 July 5, 1843 1843 1845-61 1850 1851

Meeting held at Champoeg. Joe Meek calls for a "divide" vote to accept Provisional Government. Vote passes 52-50. See the Gageaux painting in the Visitor Center.



Organic Law adopted at Champoeg, establishes a simple government.

First large group of Americans (about 900, including significant numbers of women and children) come off the Oregon Trail to farm and settle in the Willamette Valley. Political power shifts to the newcomer Americans.

Champoeg develops as an important commercial center along the Willamette River. Robert Nowell is the chief promoter.

Donation Land Law enacted: settlers who arrived prior to 1851 entitled to free land.

A.U.S. commission meeting at Champoeg signs treaties to buy native lands and move the people to reservations. The U.S. Senate refuses to ratify the Treaties.

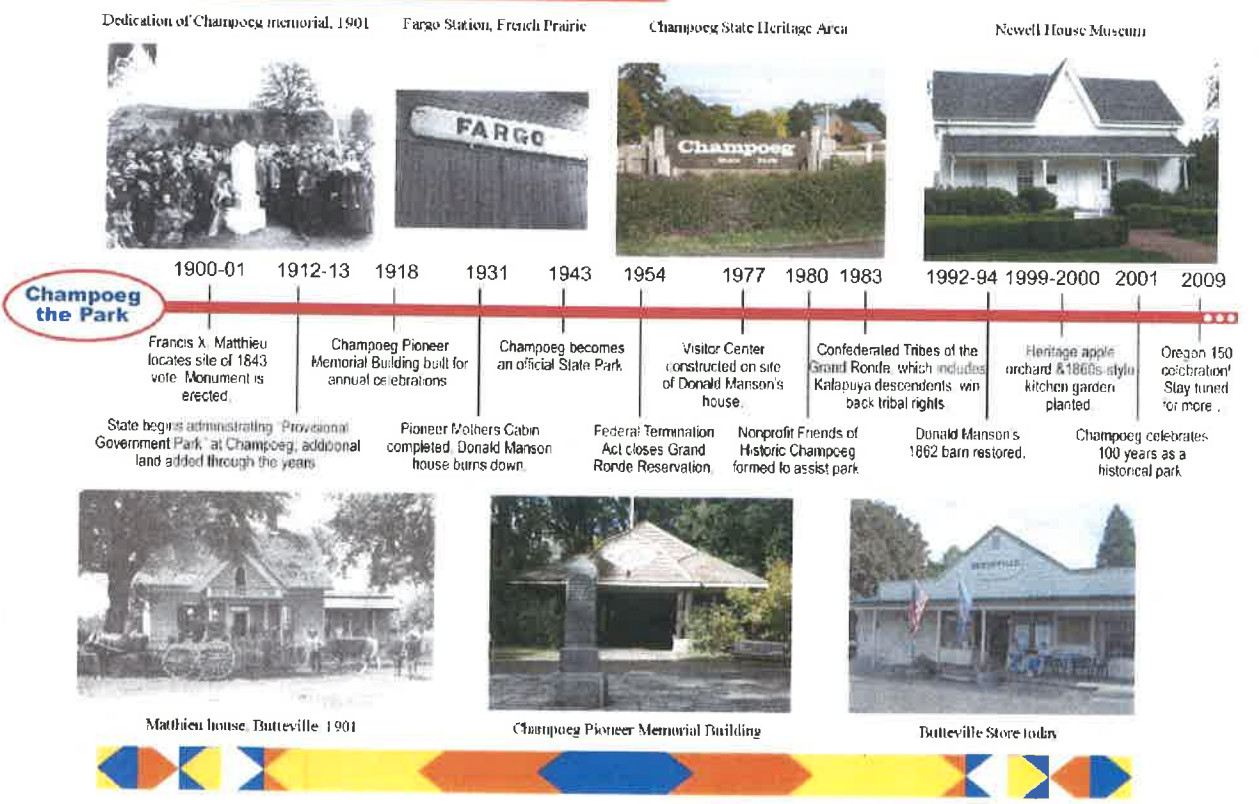
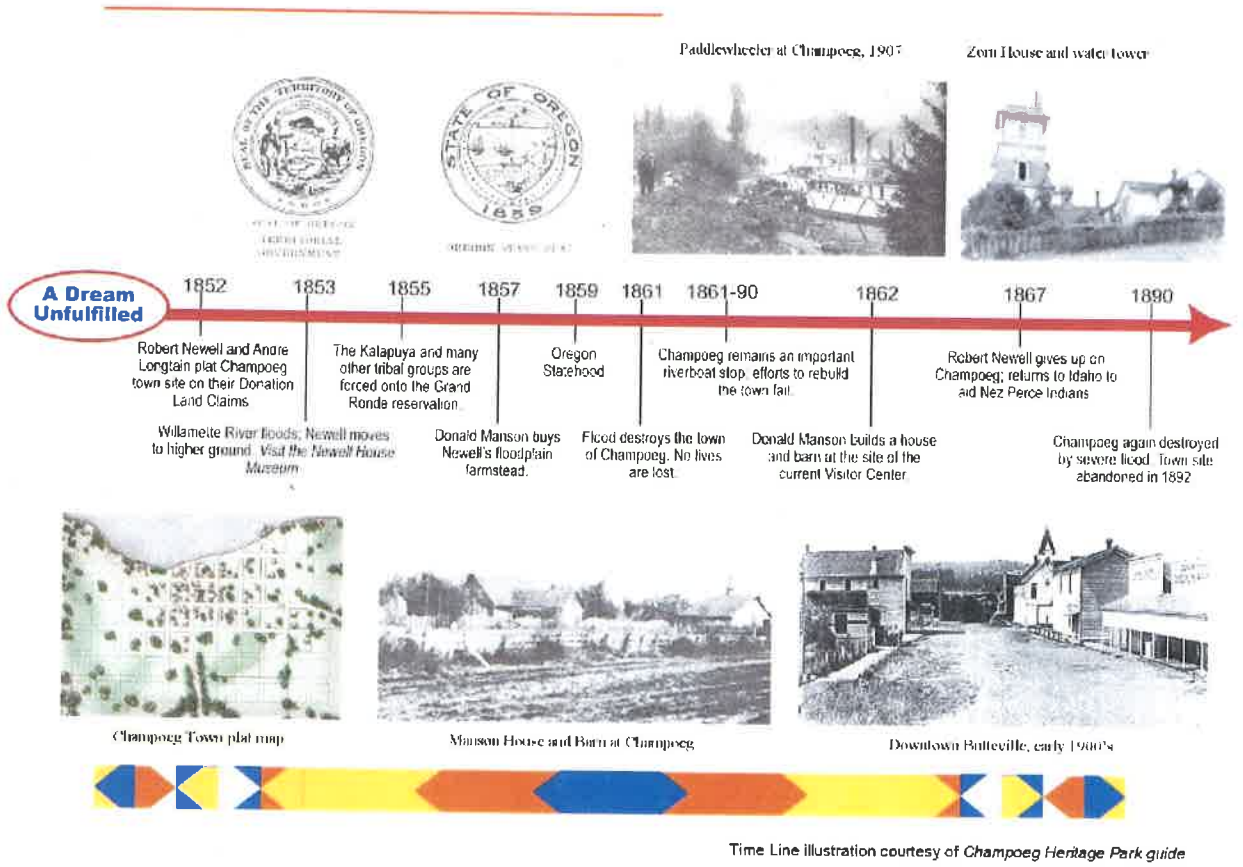




The Beginning of Oregon; courtesy Champoeg State Park

Home in Butteville, 1852

Champoeg and the Prairies Beyond and First Four Legislative Districts: from *Champoeg: Place of Transition* by J A Hussey

Time Line illustration courtesy of *Champoeg Heritage Park Guide*





The Willamette Valley & French Prairie

**A historic assessment of a special
agricultural resource**

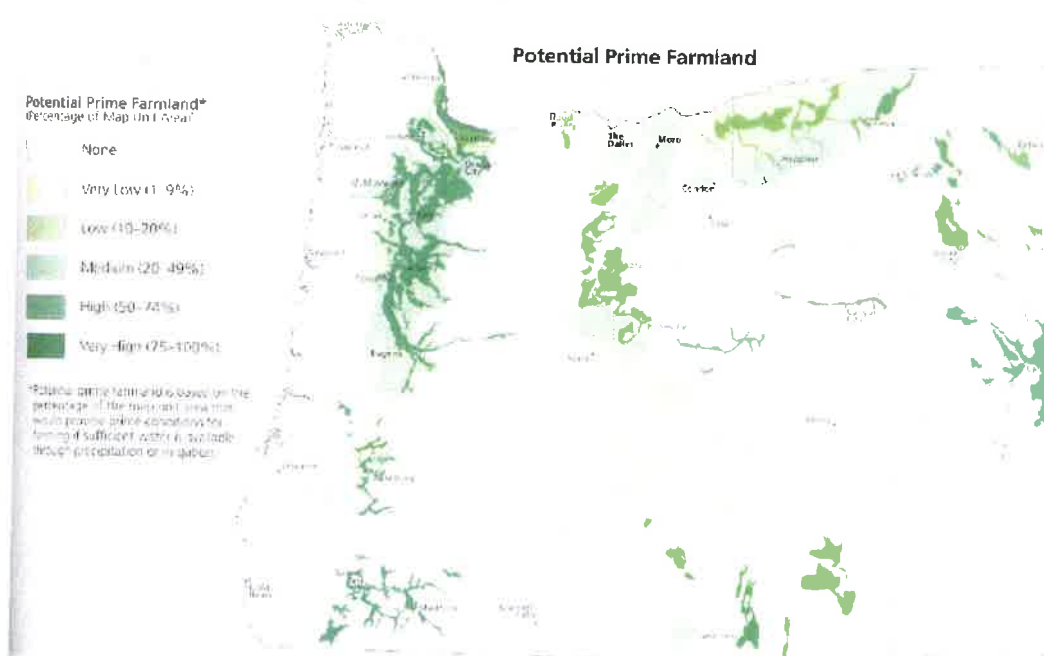


In spite of the perceptions of the Pacific Northwest as a verdant paradise, there is precious little arable land for farming.



Source: Atlas of Oregon, University of Oregon Press, 2001

The source of the high quality soils in the Willamette Valley is the deposits from the Missoula Floods (12-18,000 years ago)



Source: Atlas of Oregon, University of Oregon Press, 2001

Concentration of Prime Farmland in the Willamette Valley

French Prairie



A truly unique agricultural resource

What makes French Prairie unique for farming?

- Outstanding **soils**—some of best in country
- Mild **climate**—long growing season, limited severe weather
- Mostly adequate **water** for irrigated crops
- Excellent **transportation** corridor and **markets**
- **History** and **culture** of farming for past 150 years
 - Experience
 - Creativity, ingenuity
 - Infrastructure
 - Agriculture resources for educational, technical, financial support—a network to support success

Willamette Valley Soils

- Willamette Silt Loam—our most common valley soil
 - About one-half of the soils in FP are Willamette silt loams
 - Deep, well-drained, highly productive, dark with lots of organic matter
 - Formed when Missoula Floods occurred 10,000 years ago and deposited sediments



Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC

Willamette Valley Climate

- Average about 165 frost free days per year
- Adequate moisture with ~ 40" of rain per year
- Mild temperatures—no great extremes; about a dozen days over 90 degrees annually



Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC

Willamette Valley Water



- Over 650MM gallons of water needed daily for crops in irrigation season—nearly 80% of all water used in state goes to agriculture
- Water availability becoming more limited—no new permits
- Higher efficiency systems becoming more popular

Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC

Willamette Valley Transportation/Markets

- Location, location, location
- I-5 transportation corridor
- Port of Portland
- Linking people and products



Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC

Willamette Valley History and Culture of Agriculture



Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC

French Prairie's Important Crops

- Nursery (field and greenhouse)
- Fresh and Processed Vegetables
- Vegetable and Flower Seed
- Berries (strawberries, caneberries and blueberries)
- Christmas Trees
- Hazelnuts
- Livestock (cattle, dairy, poultry)
- Hops
- Grapes
- Grasses and Legumes
- Grains and Hay
- Pasture

Slide courtesy Mike Bondi, NWREC