

Timeline of Washington history

We aren't certain when humans first lived in Washington. Some think people first came by boat from Asia or islands in the Pacific. Others think the first people crossed a land bridge that, during the last Ice Age, connected Siberia and Alaska. Many Native peoples believe they have always been here.

Native Americans all over North America are devastated by smallpox and other diseases brought by Europeans. Before European settlers ever arrived in Washington, the population of Native tribes had been reduced—possibly by as much as 80%, though no one knows for sure.

1770's



Image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma

The Lewis and Clark expedition travels across the country, down the Snake and Columbia Rivers, and reaches the Pacific Ocean.

1805-1806

A treaty leaves the Pacific Northwest in a state of "joint occupancy" by Britain and the United States, and ends Spanish claims to this area.

1819

1579

British explorer Sir Frances Drake explores the Washington coast, beginning a long period of exploration by people from England, France, and Spain.

1792

A Spanish explorer, Salvador Fidalgo, establishes the first European settlement in Washington at Neah Bay. During the same year, American Captain Robert Gray enters the Columbia River, which he names after his ship, and Grays Harbor, which is named after him.

Image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma



1825

The Hudson's Bay Company establishes Fort Vancouver as a center of the fur trade. (In 1811, another company, called the Pacific Fur Company, built forts at Astoria and Okanogan.) In 1833, the Hudson's Bay Company also builds Fort Nisqually.

Marcus and Narcissa Whitman establish a mission near Walla Walla.

1833



Image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma

Early settlers in Oregon organize a provisional government. (*Provisional*, in this case, means “not quite official,” since Oregon at that time was still jointly occupied by Britain and the U.S.)

1843

Britain gives up claims to what is now the U.S. part of the Pacific Northwest.

1846

The first settlers arrive in what is now Washington, and settle near Olympia.

Image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma



The U.S. Congress creates the Oregon Territory.

1848

1847

The Whitman’s mission is attacked by people from the Cayuse and Umatilla Tribes, and 13 people are killed.

The U.S. Congress passes the Donation Land Claim Act, which promises free land to settlers who come to the Oregon Territory.

1850

1849

The first U.S. census in the Oregon Territory counts 304 non-Native people living north of the Columbia River. Just one year later, this number swells to 1,049.



Governor Stevens and Washington tribes sign treaties that oblige Indians to move to reservations.

1854-1855

1853

U.S. President Millard Fillmore establishes the Washington Territory, and a Territorial Legislature is established. The Territory includes what is now Idaho. The President sends Isaac Stevens to be the first governor of the new Washington Territory.

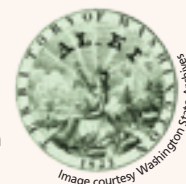


Image courtesy Washington State Archives

1860 The non-Indian population of Washington Territory is 11,594.

President Lincoln signs a law that creates Idaho Territory.

1863

1864

The first telegraph line reaches Seattle, allowing fast communication across the country.

1870 The non-Indian population of Washington Territory is 23,955.



1872

U.S. President Ulysses Grant creates, by executive order, the Colville Reservation. One month later, a second decree moves the reservation and dramatically reduces its size.

1880 The non-Indian population of Washington Territory is 75,116.

Anti-Chinese riots in Seattle, Tacoma, and elsewhere drive out most Chinese laborers.



Image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma

1885

1883

The Northern Pacific Railroad reaches Tacoma, linking Washington to the rest of the country.





Washington becomes a state. **1889**

1887 The Dawes Act breaks up Indian reservations and allows settlers to claim reservation land.

1890 The population of the state is 357,232. (This is the first year in which the census was to include all Indians, but most of the records of this census were lost in a fire in 1921.)

The Washington state legislature passes the Barefoot Schoolboy Act, which provides state funding for local schools. **1895**



1900 The population of Washington is 518,103.

The Washington State Highway Department is created. **1905**

Washington's constitution is amended to permit citizen initiatives and referenda. **1912**

1910 Women win the right to vote in Washington.



1917 The Boeing Company begins building airplanes in Seattle.

1920 Washington's population reaches 1,356,621.

Bertha Landes is elected mayor of Seattle—the first female mayor of an American city. **1926**

1924 The U.S. Congress passes The Indian Citizenship Act.

Construction of the Grand Coulee Dam begins. (The Grand Coulee Dam was completed in 1941; the Bonneville Dam was completed in 1937.)



1933 Washington's unemployment rate peaks at more than 25% during the Great Depression.

1934 The Indian Reorganization Act passes the U.S. Congress, and the Dawes Act is repealed.



Image courtesy Tacoma Public Library

Japanese Americans are forced to leave their homes and live in prison camps during World War II. **1942**

1943 Hanford is the site chosen for the top-secret project to produce the first nuclear bomb.

Washington's first TV station (KING TV in Seattle) goes on the air. **1948**



Photo courtesy U.S. Department of Energy

1950 The population of Washington is 2,378,963.

1965-1973

During these years, thousands of college students and other citizens hold demonstrations in schools and downtowns throughout the state to call for an end to the war in Vietnam.

The Black Student Union is founded at the University of Washington

1968

1967 Interstate 5 is completed.

The first Starbucks opens in the Pike Place Market in Seattle

1971

1970 Washington voters legalize abortion.

Voters approve the Shorelines Management Act and the Public Disclosure Act.

1972

1974 Federal Judge George Boldt rules in favor of Indian fishing rights, consistent with language in the treaties.

Microsoft is founded to create software for computers.

1975

1976

Dixy Lee Ray is elected Washington's first female governor.

Voters approve an initiative removing the sales tax from food.

1977

1979

The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the Boldt Decision on Native American fishing rights.

On May 18, Mt. St. Helens erupts, riveting the attention of people all over the world.

1980

1988

Initiative 518 is passed by the voters. It raises the minimum wage, and indexes it to inflation, so that when prices go up, the minimum wage goes up, too.



1990 The population of Washington is 4,866,700.

The state legislature passes the Growth Management Act.

1990

1996

Gary Locke becomes Washington's first Asian American governor.



1999

Nine salmon runs are listed as endangered species by the U.S. Department of Interior.

2000 The population of Washington is 5,894,121.



Image courtesy of the Washington State Senate

2004

Chris Gregoire is elected governor in the nation's closest-ever election. After three recounts, she wins by 133 votes.

At the request of the state legislature, a special Historical Court is convened, and it exonerates Leschi, the Nisqually leader who was wrongly convicted of murder and hanged in 1858. (*To exonerate* means to declare that an accused person was innocent.)



2010 The population of Washington is 6,817,770.

On February 13, 2012, Governor Gregoire signs a law legalizing same-sex marriage; in November, voters uphold the law in a referendum. In the same election, voters also approve an initiative that legalizes and regulates marijuana.

2012

2012

On January 5, 2012, the State Supreme Court rules in *McCleary v. Washington* that Washington state is not amply funding basic education, as required by the state constitution, and orders the legislature to increase school funding.

The Seattle Seahawks defeat the Denver Broncos to win the Superbowl.

2013



photo courtesy the Seattle Seahawks



photo courtesy BrandQuery

A portion of a hill collapses, creating a landslide that buries a neighborhood in Oso, on the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River, killing 43 people.

2014

2014

The Elwha River runs freely for the first time in 100 years, after two dams are removed. Soon after, salmon find their way to 81 miles of upstream habitat that had been blocked by the dams.



photo by J.Burger, courtesy National Park Service

Governor Inslee announces that he will not allow the death penalty to be carried out in Washington while he is governor.

2014

2016

Washington voters pass an initiative to increase the minimum wage and require employers to provide paid sick leave. By 2020, the minimum wage will be \$13.50 an hour.

Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson successfully sues to stop an executive order from President Trump that would have banned entry into the U.S. from seven mostly Muslim nations.

2017



photo courtesy the Washington State Attorney General's office



photo courtesy Washington State Department of Transportation

2017

In April, a super-giant drill nicknamed Bertha finishes boring a tunnel under downtown Seattle that will be part of Highway 99. The tunnel will replace a viaduct that was worn out and in danger of falling down in an earthquake.

2020 The population of Washington is approximately 7,540,000.

Wildfires in Washington, Oregon, and California made the air in Seattle and other cities very unhealthy.

2020

2020

A new and deadly virus called COVID-19 caused sickness and death all around the world.

