

## 1.2 Historical Perspective

The history of Harney County dates from the early 1800's when the first white man appeared. These fur trappers and traders, among them Peter Skene Ogden, traveled Harney County around 1826. Wagon trains on their way to the Willamette Valley traversed the area during the 1840's and 50's, but most of the permanent settlers or homesteaders did not arrive until after 1860. Until that time, the Great Basin was the domain of the Paiute tribes, a sub tribe of the Shoshone.



Pioneers settled Harney County during the 1860's as they traversed the land in covered wagons pulled by horses and oxen.

A series of floods in California during the mid-1860s and the passage of "No Fence Laws" which made owners of livestock responsible



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for the damage done by their animals unless enclosed by a fence, forced many stockmen into northern Nevada and southeastern Oregon. Sporadic raids by Indians, however, discouraged a mass migration of ranchers into the area. In response for protection of white settlers, Fort Harney, named for General William S. Harney, was established in 1867 to offer protection from Indian raids.

In 1869, John S. Devine, became the first permanent landowner when he established the White Horse Ranch on the east side of Steens Mountain.

In 1872, Peter French, the "cattle king", established one of the largest organized cattle outfits known to the county.

In 1873, Frank McCleod, moved 250 head of cattle from California to an area that is now located within the Burns city limits. In 1877, Peter French and Dr. Hugh Glenn purchased land 16 miles north of the "P" Ranch, now the site of the "Round Barn." In 1879, the treaty between the Paiute Indian Tribe and the U. S. Government was concluded removing the final deterrent to full-scale settlement of Harney Basin by homesteaders.



Peter French's Round Barn, constructed in 1870s

During the late 1870's and early 1880's, the community of "Burns", in then united Grant County, continued to grow. On January 22, 1884, "Burns", named after the Scottish poet Robert Burns, was officially recognized.

By the end of 1888, Burns had a population of 250 and several businesses including two mercantile stores, blacksmith shop, meat market, drug store, harness & saddle shop, livery stable, barber, land office, school, church, jeweler, two newspapers, two hotels,

three saloons, three physicians, two carpenters, a race track, two lawyers, a sawmill, surveyor, furniture store, mortician, hardware store, and a brewery.

Those years saw more settlers move into southeastern Grant County. The population reached 3,000. The difficulties experienced in travel and personal safety from this part of the county to the county seat of Canyon City during the two to four day trip was one of the factors responsible for the convention at Harney City in November, 1888, to offer instructions to an Oregon State legislator for the division of Grant County. On January 6, 1889, state legislator G. W. Gilham introduced a bill in the Oregon State Legislature entitled "A Bill for an Act to Create the County of Harney." The bill passed and Harney County was born on February 25, 1889.



The cattle ranching industry in Harney County employed many buckaroos, as they would move the cattle to market and around the large rangeland areas.

Harney City was designated as the temporary county seat pending the outcome of an election to establish a permanent site. Burns became the county seat in 1890, winning the election by six votes over Harney City. Harney City didn't give up the fight easily, though. The election was appealed to the Supreme Court. The Burns townspeople raided Harney City shortly thereafter and stole the county records and established them in Burns. In 1892, the Supreme Court ruled that Burns was indeed the winner of the election.

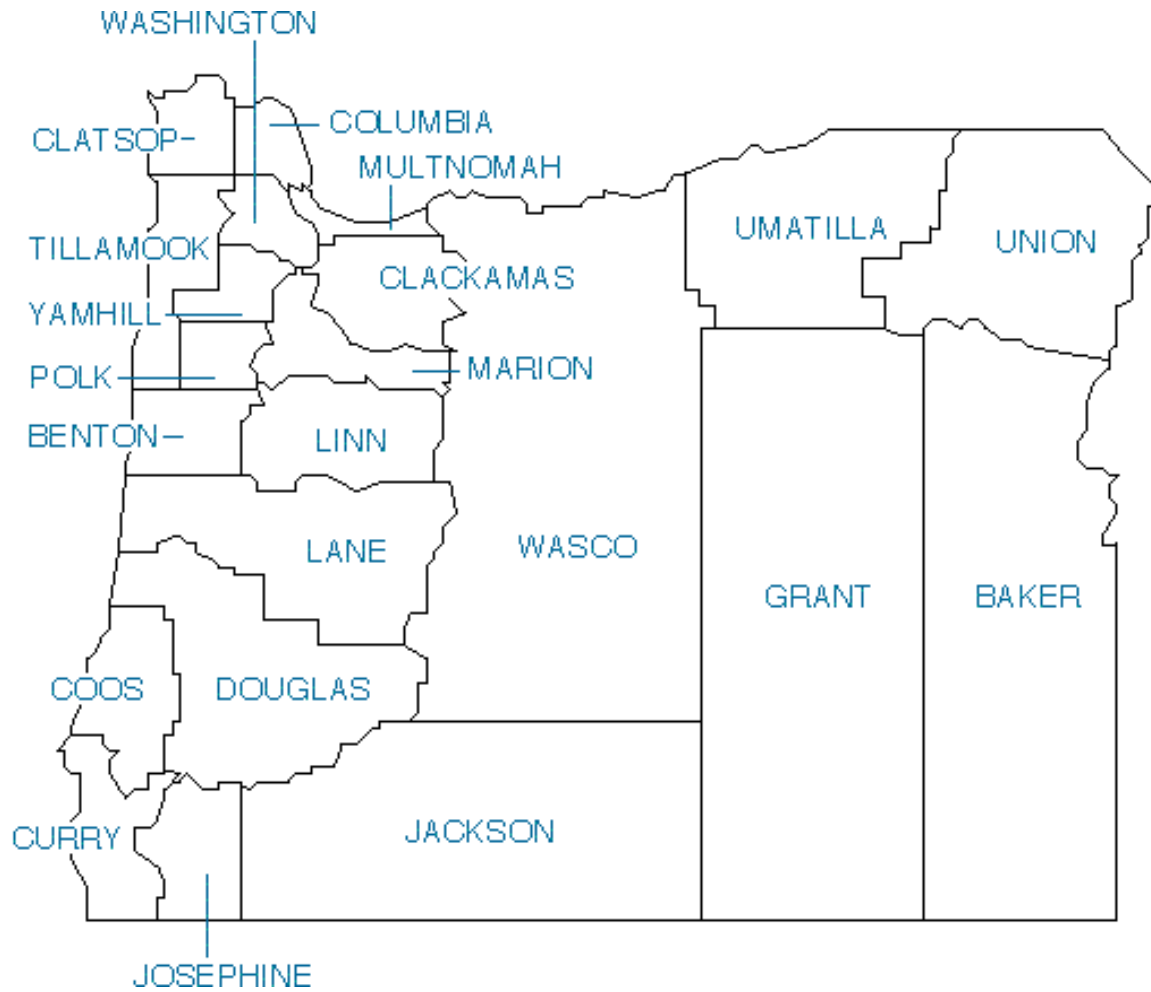
This period saw growth in Harney County influenced by the Homestead Act, the Desert Land Act, and the Stock raising Homestead Act. Homesteading reached its peak in the early 1900's when land speculators brought people from the Midwest to take advantage of the Homestead Act. Many who tried to "dry-farm" on some of the

arid unclaimed land of the Harney Basin and the windswept expanses of the High-desert country met with little success. By 1920, many had left discouraged and disappointed. Some, however, managed to obtain land with water suitable for grazing, and by working for established ranchers until their herds reached a size that could support a family, were able to establish a permanent home in the high country.

A reflection of the success or failure of homesteaders in the establishment of rural communities in Harney County is beneficial. A townsite with a post office and merchandise store, sometimes a saloon and livery stable sprang up around pockets of population. Many like The Narrows, Berduge, Albritton, Harriman, Evergreen, Harney City and Wellington are only names on a map today. Others like Riley, Fields, Frenchglen, Drewsey, Lawen, Princeton, and Crane continue to support a post office, gas pump, and sometimes a general merchandise store. But the events and circumstances channeled growth into one area of the County - Burns, and into the adjoining mill town of later years, Hines.

The lumber mill, established by the Edward Hines Lumber Company of Chicago assured the Burns/Hines area of the most concentrated population in Harney County. While the Burns/Hines area was afforded the conveniences of modern America in the early 1900's, the rest of Rural-Harney County did not receive electricity until 1957.

Today, as in years past, agriculture and timber production make up the mainstay of the Harney County economy, and barring any significant changes, they will continue to remain prominent in the future.



The State of Oregon's County boundaries as they existed in 1865. At this time, Harney County was the southern part of Grant County with the County Seat being located in Canyon City.