



## Counties of Washington Brief Histories

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**Adams:** The Washington Territorial Legislature created Adams County on November 28, 1883 out of Whitman County. It is named in honor of President John Adams. County seat: Ritzville.

**Asotin:** October 27, 1883 out of Garfield County. It is named after the Native American word, Asotin, which means "Eel Creek." County seat: Asotin.

**Benton:** March 08, 1905 out of Yakima and Klickitat Counties. Named for Thomas Hart Benton, lawyer newspaper editor, and Missouri congressman who fought a duel with Andrew Jackson. County seat: Prosser.

**Chehalis:** April 15, 1854 out of Thurston County. Chehalis is an Indian word meaning "Shifting Sand." Renamed Grays Harbor June 09, 1915.

**Chelan:** 1899 out of Okanogan and Kittitas Counties. Chelan is an Indian word for "deep water." County seat: Wenatchee.

**Clallam:** April 26, 1854 out of Jefferson County. It is named after the Indian word, Clallam, meaning "Strong People." County seat: Port Angeles.

**Clark:** Original County. The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Clark County on September 3, 1849. It is named in honor of William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. County seat: Vancouver.

**Columbia:** November 11, 1875 out of Walla Walla County. It is named in recognition of the Columbia River, the "great river of the West." County seat: Dayton.

**Cowlitz:** April 21, 1854 from Lewis and Clark Counties. It was named in honor of the Cowlitz tribe. County seat: Kelso.

**Douglas:** November 28, 1883 out of Spokane and Lincoln Counties. It was named in honor of Stephen A. Douglas, a famous lawyer, political leader, and orator known for his debates with Abraham Lincoln. County seat: Waterville.

**Ferry:** February 21, 1899 out of Stevens County. Named in honor of the State's first governor, Elisha P. Ferry. County seat: Republic.

**Franklin:** November 28, 1883 out of Whitman County. It is named in honor of Benjamin Franklin. County seat: Pasco.

**Garfield:** November 29, 1881 from Columbia County. Named for President James A. Garfield. County seat: Pomeroy.

**Grant:** February 24, 1909 out of Douglas County. Named in honor of President Ulysses S. Grant. County seat: Ephrata.

**Grays Harbor:** Formerly Chehalis County. Renamed in 1915 in honor of Captain Robert Gray. County seat: Montesano.

**Island:** Original County. Oregon Territorial Legislature created Pierce County on December 22, 1852. County seat: Coupeville.

**Jefferson:** Original County. Oregon Territorial Legislature created Pierce County on December 22, 1852. It is named in honor of President Thomas Jefferson. County seat: Port Townsend.

**King:** Original County. Oregon Territorial Legislature created King County on December 22, 1852. It was named after William Rufus De Vane King, acting vice-president under President Millard Fillmore, who had succeeded to the presidency upon the death of President Zachary Taylor. On April 19, 2005, the Governor signed [Senate Bill 5332](#) into law, declaring that, effective July 24, 2005, King County would be named in honor of the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. County seat: Seattle.

**Kitsap:** Named for Chief Kitsap. January 16, 1857. It was originally named Slaughter County in honor of Lt. William Slaughter who died in 1855 during the Indian Wars. However, a few weeks later the county name changed to Kitsap in honor of a local Indian chief whose name means "Brave." County seat: Port Orchard.

**Kittitas:** November 24, 1883 out of Yakima County. It is named after the Indian word, Kittitas, meaning “gray gravel bank” or “plenty food.” County seat: Ellensburg.

**Klickitat:** December 20, 1859. It was named after the Indian nation which lived in the area and means “beyond.” County seat: Goldendale.

**Lewis:** Original County. The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Lewis County on December 19, 1845. It is named in honor of Meriwether Lewis. County seat: Chehalis.

**Lincoln:** November 01, 1883 out of Spokane County. Named in honor of President Abraham Lincoln. County seat: Davenport.

**Mason:** Called Sawamish until 1864. Named in honor of C.W. Mason, secretary to the first Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens. County seat: Shelton.

**Okanogan:** November 1888 out of Stevens County. Named for the Okanogan Indian tribe. County seat: Okanogan.

**Pacific:** Original County. The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Pacific County on February 4, 1851. It is named for the Pacific Ocean. County seat: South Bend.

**Pend Oreille:** 1911 out of Stevens County. Named for the Pend D’Oreille Indian tribe, which is a French term meaning “earring people.” County seat: Newport.

**Pierce:** Original County. The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Pierce County on December 22, 1852. It is named in honor of President Franklin Pierce. County seat: Tacoma.

**San Juan:** October 13, 1873 from Island County. It is named after the largest island, San Juan, found within the San Juan Archipelago. Lieutenant Juan Francisco de Eliza named the island in honor of the Catholic Saint San Juan Bautista. Under joint British-American jurisdiction until 1872. At least some residents are listed in the 1860 Whatcom Census. County seat: Friday Harbor.

**Skagit:** November 24, 1883 from Whatcom County. It was named in honor of the Skagit Indian Tribe. County seat: Mount Vernon.

**Skamania:** March 9, 1854 out of Clark County. It was named after the Indian word Skamania “Swift Waters.” County seat: Stevenson.

**Snohomish:** January 14, 1861. It is named after the Indian word Snohomish meaning “Union” or “Coming Together.” County seat: Everett.

**Spokane:** January 29, 1858. Original boundaries encompassed present-day northern Idaho and northwestern Montana. This first Spokane County was renamed Stevens in 1864. The second Spokane County was organized October 30, 1879 out of Stevens County. It is named after the Native American word, Spokane, which means “Child of the Sun.” County seat: Spokane.

**Stevens:** Organized as Spokane County January 29, 1858 from Washington Territory. Renamed for Washington’s first Territorial Governor, Isaac I. Stevens, on January 20, 1864. County seat: Colville.

**Thurston:** Original County. The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Thurston County on January 12, 1852. It is named in honor of Samuel R. Thurston who was Oregon Territory’s first Delegate to Congress, famous for his speech to Congress supporting the admission of California to the Union in 1849. The State Capital, Olympia, is located in Thurston County. County seat: Olympia.

**Wahkiakum:** April 25, 1854 out of Lewis County. It is named after a local Native American chief, Wahkiakum, which means “tall timber.” County seat: Cathlamet.

**Walla Walla:** April 25, 1854 from Spokane County. It was named after the Indian word, Walla Walla, which means “Running Water.” County seat: Walla Walla.

**Whatcom:** March 9, 1854 from Island County, and named in honor of the local Native American chief. County seat: Bellingham.

**Whitman:** November 29, 1871 from Stevens County. It is named in honor of Marcus Whitman, founder of the Methodist mission at Waiilatpu. County seat: Colfax.

**Yakima:** January 21, 1865 out of Ferguson (1863-1865, no longer in existence) and Spokane Counties. It was named in honor of the Yakima Indians and means “Black Bear.” County seat: Yakima.