

Baker County Unlimited
Baker County Chamber & Visitor Center

**CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS
IN BAKER COUNTY**

- 1811** Wilson Price Hunt, leading the John Jacob Astor overland expedition, passed through Baker Valley known then as The Lone Tree Valley. Hunt is responsible for the first crossing the Blue Mountains to the Columbia, thus establishing a passage for the western end of the Oregon Trail, the major travel route to the West. He arrived in Astoria in 1812. The first child to be born in this new land was the child of Pierre and Madame Dorian. Pierre was a French Canadian guide of the Hunt Party and his wife, Marie, was Native American.
- 1827** Peter Skene wintered in the Powder River about five miles upstream from Baker City
- 1832** Nathaniel Wyeth's first western expedition passed through the present site of Baker County
- 1834** - Captain Benjamin Bonneville arrived in Eastern Oregon near the present site of Richland in the Panhandle of Baker County. Nathaniel Wyeth's second expedition.
- 1841** Through 1869 more than 250,000 Americans took the Oregon Trail to the West, starting their journey in Independence, Missouri. Nearing the end of their journey, they arrived at Farewell Bend on the Snake River and proceeded to conquer the treacherous Burnt River Canyon. The Trail ahead led them across Virtue Flat to Flagstaff Hill and into Powder River Valley. In the distance lay the challenge of the Blue Mountain crossing.
- 1845** Famous "Lost Wagon Train." In August 1845 a group of wagons led by Stephen Meek, left the Oregon Trail for a short cut to Western Oregon. After suffering many hardships and deaths, the survivors reached The Dalles in October. While camped at a tributary of the John Day River, small yellow pebbles were found along the water's edge. Not realizing that the pebbles were gold, they were left behind in an old blue bucket and the legend of the "Lost Blue Bucket Mine" was born.
- 1847** Whitman Massacre. The news of conflict with the Indians discouraged the settlement of Eastern Oregon until more military protection could be supplied.
- 1861** Gold discovered in Baker County. Four men, searching for the fabled "Lost Blue Bucket Mine," found gold in Griffin Gulch, south of where Baker City is now located.
- 1862** In the spring, the town of Auburn was laid out in Blue Canyon and soon mushroomed to the unbelievable population of about 5,000 people! It was even considered a lively prospect for the Capitol of Oregon. The first county seat of Baker County was the town of Auburn. In October, Baker County was established and named after Col. Edward Dickinson Baker, Oregon's first Senator. Baker died during the Civil War at the Battle of Balls Bluff, the only member of Congress to die in that conflict. Sumpter was established. The Chandler Wagon Train arrived in Powder River Valley in September and settled at Pine City at the foot of the Elkhorn Ridge of the Blue Mountains. The town was moved

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down the mountain and renamed Pocahontas. Express Ranch was established as a Wells Fargo stage station. It was later renamed Durkee when the railroad purchased the right of way. The first school for Baker County was organized at Auburn.

- 1863** The Sisley Toll Road was built from Weatherby to connect with the Old's Ferry Toll Road to the Snake River and the Old's Ferry. Gold was discovered at Sparta. The 125 mile long Eldorado Ditch, probably the world's longest hand-dug ditch was surveyed and started. It was constructed mostly by Chinese labor. (Charles Place lived in a cabin and operated on the banks of the Powder River, he also operated the Place Toll Road. Charles Fisher has a cabin in the vicinity of today's Geiser Pollman City Park.)
- 1864** Baker City was platted by R. A. Pierce. Ruckles Stamp Mill was constructed in Baker City. October 14, 1864 part of Union County became Baker County.
- 1865** The first hotel, Reid & Fletcher's Western Hotel, was build and served as the headquarters for overland stages, which passed through Baker City five times a week. The post office moved (unofficially, but later approved) from Auburn to Baker City for more efficient handling of the mail.
- 1866** Baker City was made the county seat by an act of the State Legislature, but Auburn refused to relinquish the records. Following the official vote of the people in 1868, the records were confiscated in an early morning surprise visit of the new Baker county officials.
- 1868** The first organized church services were held by the Methodists.
- 1870** *The Bedrock Democrat*, first newspaper of Baker City, published in May.
- 1871** A small frame Catholic Church was the first church in Baker City.
- 1874** Baker City was incorporated. Sumpter became a post office.
- 1877** The first Baker County Fair was held in September.
- 1881** Joseph Gale, one of the founders of Oregon's Provisional Government at Champoeg and one of the first Territorial Governors, died December 13 and was buried in Eagle Valley where he spent his retirement years.
- 1882** Huntington established – formerly known as Miller's Station.
- 1883** Chinese Joss House built in Baker City for the sizeable Chinese population.
- 1884** Cornucopia was established after gold was discovered in the area. Transcontinental Railroad reached Baker City. Burnt River homesteaded by sheep and cattle ranches.
- 1886** In 1886 and 1888 the same business block of Baker City's Front Street was almost completely destroyed by fire.

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- 1889** Baker City completed the new public school to house twelve grades. It was the second public high school in Oregon. The Hotel Warshauer was constructed. The most elegant structure between Portland and Denver, this was the forerunner of the Geiser Grand Hotel.
- 1890** Sumpter Valley Railway was incorporated to carry logs from Sumpter Valley to the Baker City sawmills.
- 1890** The population of Baker City is 6,663, larger than either Boise or Spokane. The Street Railway was due to be in operation the same year.
- 1891** The community of Unity was established. Work was completed on the Sumpter Valley Railroad to McEwen. The mountainside at Boulder Gorge was blasted to make room for the tracks.
- 1892** A sawmill in Baker City was completed by the Oregon Lumber Company. Sumpter Valley Railroad reached Sumpter.
- 1896** A 20-Stamp mill was installed at the Red Boy Mine that was founded in 1886.
- 1898** The first telephone service arrived at Baker City.
- 1900** The Baker City Opera House was completed. The Alpha Club was organized with the goal of providing Baker County and Baker City with a free public library.
- 1901** Population of Sumpter is 3,000 with over 80 businesses.
- 1904** The Baker Forest Reserve was established and then combined with the Blue Mountain Reserve to become the Whitman Nation Forest in 1908.
- 1908** The town of Copperfield established to house mining and railroad crews working at the Snake River. Copperfield, known for its lawlessness, was destroyed by fire in 1914. April 16, 1908 contract for Baker County Courthouse was signed. Architect Delos D Neer and Contractor was T. R. Yerger. Cost was \$59,500. (Commercial Journal G page 149)
- 1909** The town of Robinette served as a railhead for the Oregon Shortline. It was flooded out by the backwaters of the Snake River Dams in the 1950's.
- 1910** Sumpter Valley Railroad extended to Prairie City to serve ranchers and farmers as well as lumber and mining.
- 1911** Baker City residents voted to drop "City" from their name.

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- 1913** Dredging in the Sumpter Valley began, temporarily revitalizing the mining industry. The “Armstrong Nugget”, weighing 80.4 oz., was discovered by George Armstrong.
- 1916** The limestone quarry at Lime was expanded. Between 1923 and 1980, over 6.5 million tons of stone was taken from the area.
- 1917** A fire, starting in the kitchen of the Capital Hotel, destroyed much of Sumpter. The town’s water supply failed thirty minutes after the start of the fire and dynamite was finally used to stop the flames. The fire, combined with the shutdown of the gold mines, ended the boom in Sumpter.
- 1925** The Eldorado Ditch was abandoned after many years of struggle between ranchers and miners to control the water it carried.
- 1928** The Iron Dyke Mine of Homestead closed and the railroad leaves.
- 1929** Baker County newspapers, The Morning Democrat and the Evening Herald, combined into to Democrat-Herald.
- 1931** The Courier of Huntington and the Haines Record combined to become The Record-Courier
- 1933** Anthony Lakes Ski Area was established and named in honor of Dr. Anthony, a pioneer circuit-riding doctor of early days.
- 1935** Sumpter Valley Dredging Co. builds and operates a dredge.
- 1937** Baker City Opera House burns. The connection of Unity Dam was to regulate spring flood water. Formal passenger service on the Sumpter Valley Railroad discontinued.
- 1939** Ellingson Lumber Co. has two sawmills, at Unity and Ironside.
- 1947** Sumpter Valley Railroad closes.
- 1954** The Brownlee Dam is built one the Snake River.
- 1961** Oxbow Dam completed.
- 1968** Hells Canyon was put into operation. Mason Dam built on the Powder River for irrigation.
- 1970** Sumpter Valley Railroad Restoration began.. St Francis Academy closed permanently.
- 1975** Congress established the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.
- 1978** The Baker Historic District was listed in the National Register.

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- 1990** Voters restored “City” to the name of Baker City.
- 1992** The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center on Flagstaff Hill opened.
- 1971** Restoration of the SVRR began.
- 1987** Baker High School burned down.
- 1991** New Baker High School Building was completed.
- 1995** Restoration of the dredge in Sumpter began.
- 1996** Sumpter Valley Railroad restoration reaches Sumpter Depot Restoration completed of the Geiser Grand Hotel. Closing of Ellingson Lumber Company
- 1998** Leo Adler Pathway project begins. Grand re-opening of the Geiser Grand Hotel.
- 2000** Anthony Lakes 3 chair lift
- 2000** New nine at Baker Municipal Golf Course completed
- 2001** Sports complex completed
- 2002** Tenth anniversary of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
- 2009** Baker County Courthouse clock is restored.