

## **Brief History of the Flathead Valley**

By The Daily Inter Lake

**1810 — Jasper Howse** sent by the Hudson Bay Co. to establish a trading post. Some believe the post was at the north end of Flathead Lake, while others say the unsuccessful settlement was above Lake Pend d'Oreille in Idaho.

**1812 — Canadian explorer David Thompson** rides to a hill near Polson and describes Flathead Lake in his journal. His Indian companion notes that there is a gap through the mountains above the lake, but it isn't used because of the Blackfoot Indians on the prairie side.

**1846 — Fort Connah established** by Canada's Hudson Bay Co., north of present-day St. Ignatius. The Northwest is disputed territory at the time, with "Fifty-four forty or fight" Americans wanting the Oregon territory to take in British Columbia, while Canadians like Thompson argue that present-day Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana should remain in British hands.

**1854 — St. Ignatius Mission** established in the Mission Valley by Father DeSmet. With Indian agents corrupt or, in one case, crazy, the Catholic mission becomes the leading force on the reservation.

**1854 — Capt. John Mullan** and his party explore the Tobacco Plains near Eureka. The Indians once cultivated tobacco in the area, and near Spotted Bear on the South Fork.

**1860 — Missoula County organized.** At the time, it was part of Washington Territory. Montana Territory lies four years in the future.

**1880 — "Honest John Dooley"** builds a boat landing and store on the Flathead River near Kalispell.

**1883 — Ashley Crossing founded** on the southwest edge of present Kalispell. Some of its streets are part of the current city.

**1885 — The U.S. Grant** begins hauling freight and passengers on Flathead Lake. It is the first of many steamboats on the lake, running freight up from the Northern Pacific Railroad terminal at Ravalli.

**1887 — Demersville** is founded on the Flathead River, southeast of present-day Kalispell. It becomes a ghost town when the railroad reaches Kalispell. Named after store owner T.J. Demers, the town is pronounced "De-MARS-ville" by locals.

**1887 — Two Kootenai Indians lynched by a mob** at Demersville after being arrested for the killing of three prospectors near Libby. In 1890, four Kootenai Indians were hanged in Missoula for other murders. A company of "buffalo soldiers" is stationed in the Flathead to deal with the uprising.

**1891 — The Great Northern Railway** arrives in the Flathead and businessman Charles Conrad establishes a town around the division point at Kalispell. But the route west, over the Marion hill, proves to be a tougher haul for locomotives than over the Continental Divide.

**1892 — City of Kalispell** incorporated.

**1893 — Flathead County** created out of Missoula County.

**1899 — Flathead County High School** opens. In the first graduating class is a young black woman, daughter of the janitor at Demersville School. He put all his kids through college.

**1904 — The Great Northern** moves its main line to Whitefish to take advantage of a lower route down the Kootenai River that eliminates 165 curves. Kalispell residents are angry about it for years, and one local historian writes a book entitled, "The Train Didn't Stay Long."

**1903 — City of Whitefish incorporated.** An early settler described the 160-acre townsite as "a heavily wooded, swampy marsh full of green frogs, lizards and other creepy things with trees so big and so thick that the sun could hardly shine through." Stumps remain in Central Avenue, resulting in the early nickname "Stumptown."

**1909 — Lincoln County created** out of Flathead County.

**1909 — Columbia Falls incorporates**, more than 20 years after it was founded. It had originally been selected as the division point for the Great Northern. But speculators with inside information demanded too much for the land, and angry Great Northern President Jim Hill turned his sights to Kalispell and then Whitefish.

**1910 — Flathead Reservation opened** for settlement. Kalispell is jammed with hopeful homesteaders. Indians are given 160-acre allotments, which they soon lose.

**1910 — Glacier National Park created.** Promoted heavily by the Great Northern, it becomes a mecca for rich tourists until World War II.

**1923 — Lake County created** out of Flathead County. A 36-square-mile section of the Flathead Reservation remains in Flathead County.

**1929 — The Half Moon fire** starts west of Columbia Falls and sweeps across the mountains into Glacier National Park. In just three days, it burned 103,000 acres in a 30-mile swath that cut across Teakettle and Columbia mountains, across the Flathead River, into the Canyon and on to Apgar. Denuded by the fire, the south-facing slopes of the Belton Hills become prime winter range, still used by elk.

**1938 — Kerr Dam** built at Polson. The concrete structure is 204 feet high and controls the top 10 feet of Flathead Lake. During World War II, there is a proposal to add 25 feet to the level, which would have flooded much of the valley below Kalispell.

**1947 — Big Mountain is launched** with a \$100 stock offering in Whitefish. After some nip-and-tuck early years, it grows into a resort boasting 3,600 acres of skiable terrain and 10 lifts. That same year, D.C. Dunham builds a lumber mill in Columbia Falls and names his company after a creek back in Bemidji, Minn. Plum Creek Timber Co. now owns millions of acres of timberland in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Louisiana and Arkansas.

**1953 — Hungry Horse Dam completed.** At 564 feet high, it is still the United States' 11th-tallest dam. The Columbia Falls aluminum plant is soon built, consuming about three times the dam's annual output of electricity.

**1964 — A major flood hits the Montana Rockies**, wiping out the highway and rail lines across Marias Pass. In Glacier National Park, McDonald Creek runs upstream. The Flathead River laps at the edge of the highway across from the airport and invades Evergreen.

**1967 — Grizzlies kill two campers**, miles apart, in a single night at Glacier National Park. They are the first fatal attacks since the park's founding. The incidents are chronicled in the book, "Night of the Grizzlies."

**1979 — Californian Ray Thompson** moves his Semitool company to Montana and sets up business in the old Bell Camper factory south of Kalispell. Later moved to West Reserve Drive, Semitool produces the processing tools and cleaning systems used in computer chip fabrication. The business is still thriving and employs 800 people.

**1988 — Forest fires sweep the West**, including the 37,500-acre Red Bench Fire on Glacier National Park's west edge.

**1997 — On the heels of the wettest year** in Flathead Valley history and fueled by near-record snowpacks, the Stillwater and Swan rivers experience 100-year floods. Hayfields turn into ponds, rising groundwater covers Montana 35 near Woods Bay and closes West Valley Drive. The Stillwater River floods parts of Evergreen and the Causeway road on Echo Lake is submerged.

**1998 — Blacktail Mountain Ski Area** opens near Lakeside.

**2001 — The Moose Fire** burns for two months across 71,000 acres of Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park.

**2003 — In a historic fire year**, 310,000 acres of forest burn in a series of fires stretching from the Bob Marshall Wilderness to the Canadian border.

**2004 — Flathead County passes Cascade County** to become the third-largest county in Montana. The population growth — almost 10 percent since 2000 — fuels record subdivision activity, real estate sales and commercial development.

**2005 — Population growth**, investment buying and limited supply combined to drive sales to unprecedented heights in the Northwest Montana real estate market: More than a billion dollars in commercial and residential property changed hands, up 25 percent from 2004.

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