

5-2009

# Oregon's Pacific University Grew from Ancient Lands

Steve Dodge  
*Pacific University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/pumag>

---

## Recommended Citation

Dodge, Steve, "Oregon's Pacific University Grew from Ancient Lands" (2009). *Pacific Magazine Extra*. Paper 1.  
<http://commons.pacificu.edu/pumag/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Relations at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pacific Magazine Extra by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact [CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu](mailto:CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu).

---

# Oregon's Pacific University Grew from Ancient Lands

## **Description**

In the wide sweep of time there have been innumerable changes to the landscape and peoples that came to be Oregon's Pacific University. This article, originally published in Pacific Magazine in 2009, chronicles the natural and social history of Pacific University's roots.

## **Comments**

This article originally appeared in Pacific magazine, Vol. 42, No. 1, May 2009.

For images associated with this article, please visit the [image gallery](#).

## **Rights**

[Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.](#)

## Featured Article

### Oregon's Pacific University Grew from Ancient Lands

*Steve Dodge*

In the wide sweep of time there have been innumerable changes to the landscape and peoples that came to be Oregon's Pacific University.

About 60 million years ago, volcanic and tectonic plate activity pushed up the Coast Range mountains, left basalt cliffs and formed the Oregon coast roughly as it is today. Over time, many species from dinosaurs to tiny horses to tropical plants came and departed forever. Humans, whether by Siberian bridges or Polynesian outrigger, didn't appear until about 6,000 years ago, though the recent discovery of Kennewick Man, believed to be about 9,000 years old, is turning many theories on their heads.

Curiously, even the famously rich soil of the Tualatin and **Willamette** valleys didn't come from here. Some 10,000 to 15,000 years ago—toward the end of the last Ice Age—a glacier ground into the path of the Clark Fork River in present-day Montana, forming a massive ice dam. Scientists believe water backed up 1,000 feet deep and many miles wide over the Missoula area. When the dam broke, as it did many times over 2,000 years, it sent torrents of ice, boulders and water down the Columbia Gorge, scouring much of eastern Washington bare.

The massive Missoula, or Spokane floods, perhaps as many as 90 separate events, left wave marks high on the basalt gorge walls. The waters surged into the Willamette and Tualatin valleys, blanketing the entire basin with fertile soil. In addition, islands of ice left behind numerous "erratics," boulders from Canada and the northern United States. The Willamette Meteorite, a 15 ton nickel-iron object found in 1902 in West Linn, Oregon, is now believed to have fallen on a Canada ice sheet and floated to Oregon in the floods.

Although the oldest rocks in Oregon are the Klamath and Blue mountains at 400 million years, people have inhabited the Willamette valley for only about 6,000 years. The **Kalapuya**, including the Atfalati or Tualatin, are the first known inhabitants of what became Washington County, west of Portland. These Native Americans were small bands of extended families loosely affiliated by the Chinook language. At their most numerous before the arrival of Europeans, the Kalapuya are estimated to have numbered about 14,000 in the area roughly from the Columbia River in the north to Salem in the south along the Willamette drainage.

For thousands of years the Kalapuya worked the forests and fields of the valley, deliberately burning portions in between the oaks, alder and fir trees to encourage camas root, huckleberry, medicinal plants and game. However, viral diseases such as influenza, small pox and measles introduced by early European explorers, proved catastrophic for the region's natives. By the 1840s when Euro-Americans began to come to the West Tualatin Plains in greater numbers, barely 60 natives remained. These last Kalapuya were forced from their lands and marched to reservations along with other Oregon natives.

## Featured Article

---

Not surprisingly for a school that predates statehood by 10 years, native history is closely intertwined with Pacific's history. The first settlers to Forest Grove, including A.T. Smith and Harvey Clark, came specifically to convert the natives to their New England brand of progressive Protestantism. The Congregationalist movement, which had diverged from its much more conservative Puritan roots, was a leading element in the drive to abolish slavery and also strongly advocated the education of women. The movement had resulted in the founding of Harvard University and spawned numerous missionaries who looked west to spread the word. When natives at the mission near Walla, Walla, Washington, killed Dr. Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa and 12 others in the midst of a measles outbreak, many of the remaining missionaries fled to Forest Grove and Oregon City.

Finding few natives to tend to, the Tualatin Plains missionaries looked to what seemed to be the next greatest need. The Great Migration to Oregon across 2,000 miles of wilderness was no easy task and left many orphans. The California Gold Rush of 1848 also saw many adults head south, leaving children in the care of relatives or friends. At the time, the West Tualatin Plains had barely ten families spread out among the stands of oaks and open grasslands. Roads were primitive or non-existent, following old native and game trails. Under the wide skies of what would become Forest Grove and Washington County, the only signs of humankind were a few widely dispersed log cabins.

So it was in one of these **cabins** that a former schoolteacher from Massachusetts named Tabitha Brown had her kernel of an idea. To her hosts and the owners of the cabin, the Rev. Harvey Clark and his wife Emeline, Brown mused that if she only had money, she would start a shelter and school to tend to the orphans and children of the area. The Rev. Clark asked Mrs. Brown if she was serious. She replied that she was. He said he would help.

In 1846 the Clark cabin, which also served as the Congregationalist church meetinghouse, became the Orphan Asylum. It's not clear exactly where this cabin was. The Clarks were known to have a cabin at present day 15th and Elm streets in Forest Grove, at the southern end of their land claim. Another Clark cabin, marked by the Petrified Stump on the Forest Grove campus of Pacific, is thought by some historians to be the Asylum's location.

Either way, in July 1848, the Rev. George Atkinson, who had come west specifically to start a Congregationalist college, met with the Clarks, Mrs. Brown, and the Reverends Henry Spalding, Elkanah Walker and Lewis Thompson at the Clark cabin. The group formed the Oregon Association of Congregational and New School Presbyterian Ministers, and at a meeting of the new group in Oregon City on September 21, they determined to begin an academy near the Asylum.

Mrs. Brown gave \$500 to the cause, a considerable sum for the time, and the Clarks gave a portion of their land claims. According to local historian Mary Jo Morelli, A.T. Smith, whose house still stands in south Forest Grove, likely did much of the carpentry on the academy building. The wood frame building, now known as **Old College Hall**, took shape in July 1850 on the site of present-day **Marsh Hall**, with the whole town assisting and celebrating. Smith, who had been one of the participants at the Champoeg meetings, which led to the formation of the Oregon Territory, made a typically matter-of-fact entry in his diary: June 29, 1850—"Plowed my potatoes and helpt lay the foundation of the Tualatin academy." The frontier school that grew into a university had begun.

## Featured Article

---

This article originally appeared in *Pacific* magazine, the magazine of Pacific University, Vol. 42, No. 1, May 2009.

---

### Sources:

**Splendid Audacity: The Story of Pacific University**, Gary Miranda and Rick Read. Documentary Book Publishers, Seattle Washington, 2000.

The Kalapuyans, a Sourcebook on the Indians of the Willamette Valley, Harold Mackey, Ph.D. Mission Hill Museum Association, Salem, 1974.

Covered Wagon Women. Vol. 1, Kenneth Holmes, The Arthur H. Clark Company, Glendale, Calif., 1983.

Geology of Oregon, Ewart M. Baldwin, University of Oregon, 1964.