

A Historical Look At La Pine Oregon

By

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The purpose of this paper is to show the reader an interesting look at a town that is not yet a city. Its geographical location, change over time, and how it was perceived by those interviewed who wish it to grow and those who wish it to remain the same, offer an interesting look at an area that has much to offer. Its geographical location offers a variety of outdoor activities and has supported the areas growth over the decades. Its change over time has shown myself that La Pine can be viewed as a town that has survived as a result of timing since the area was platted in 1910. Efforts in recent years to incorporate show that many people from the surrounding community have grown accustomed to the idea that self-governing may benefit the future of La Pine as a city.

The origin of the name La Pine has remained a mystery to this day. The most logical explanation is that a French trapper with the Hudson Bay Company during the 1800's had something to do with naming it. Several people I interviewed thought a surveyor from Portland by the name of Alfred Aya might have been the one who named La Pine. But any official documentation that clearly states the naming of the La Pine area remains elusive to this day. The only conclusion that I have come to is perhaps it was named for its vast amount of jack-pine trees to describe the area as a landmark.

The La Pine area is the largest rural, unincorporated area within Deschutes County, encompassing approximately 100 square miles with no real defined boundaries. The community is dispersed over an extensive network of paved, gravel, and dirt roads with the primary commercial service areas of

Wickiup Junction and the La Pine commercial community, located along Highway 97.¹ The nearest urban center, Bend, is located 30 miles north of the La Pine area and offers a wider variety of employment and services not readily available in the La Pine area. To the west of La Pine, the volcanic Cascade Mountain Range provides a rain shadow over the High Desert. The east presents the High Desert with the junipers, sagebrush, and sand. The vast coniferous forest consists of ponderosa (yellow pine), lodge pole (Jack), Shasta fir, noble fir, and sugar pine, providing a scenic background to the area.

Geographically, La Pine is fortunate to be surrounded by the Cascade Lakes, Deschutes River, Crane Prairie Reservoir, Wickiup Reservoir and Little Deschutes River. The Deschutes River is often described as one of America's strangest rivers. The name of the river, Deschutes, goes back to the early days of fur trading when the river was called the "Riviera des Chutes," meaning River of the Falls.² In normal years, the source for the river is Little Lava Lake in the High Country just east of the Cascade crest, where the small stream runs into the two man-dammed basins of Crane Prairie Reservoir and Wickiup Reservoir. It is said that it is a river fed by a thousand springs. All the feeder streams originate from the Cascades except Crooked River. The Deschutes River has been recognized as an ideal power-producing stream. It is also regarded as one of the nation's best fishing and recreation streams.³

The most notable geographical landmark surrounding the La Pine area is the Newberry Volcano, which is one of the most recent volcanic features within the contiguous United States. More than a thousand years ago Mt. Newberry, a

shield volcano, erupted leaving at least two hundred-fifty parasitic cones in existence on the Newberry slopes.⁴ This area is known as the Newberry Volcanic National Monument consisting of Paulina and East Lakes. Nestled within the Newberry Caldera and the Lava Lands is an area of fresh cinder cones, twisted lava, and year-round ice-cold caves.⁵ Growing up in the La Pine area I have noticed many visitors to this national monument.

Central Oregon has a dry, continental climate with warm summers and cool winters. La Pine ranks as one of the coldest reporting stations in Oregon for a large part of the year and has the distinction of being one of the coldest stations in the United States during the summer months, with frosts likely any night.⁶

The first recorded exploration by a white man to the inland Oregon region known today as Central Oregon was in the winter of 1825 by Peter S. Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company. Ogden's chosen path was the River of the Falls, the Deschutes of the Oregon country. On a second trip down the Deschutes Ogden discovered East and Paulina Lakes in Newberry Crater. The winter of 1834 brought another explorer named Nathaniel J. Wyeth, who explored the upper Deschutes River. In 1853 the La Pine basin became the site of the Elliott Cutoff Party's attempt to find a new route through the Cascade Divide. More than 250 wagons and loose stock, led by Elijah Elliot, followed the Little Deschutes River upstream to the vicinity of Crescent, Oregon before heading west across the Cascade Mountains creating the Willamette Pass.⁷

With Oregon gaining statehood into the United States of America in 1859,

more settlers ventured west.⁸ There was no real settling in the actual La Pine area until the late 1860's. Those who did settle were drawn to the La Pine area for several reasons. The four most prominent reasons were the construction of the Central Oregon Military Road, the Homestead Law of 1862, and the Carey Land Act including the Walker Basin Irrigation Project, and the prospect of a railroad.⁹

The construction of the Central Oregon Military Road, which stretched from Eugene, Oregon to the most eastern part of the state was the most influential instruments that opened up the La Pine area for settlement. After the completion of the western section of the road in 1867, Central Oregon saw wagon traffic from the Willamette Valley. Under the Homestead Law of 1862, a citizen of the United States could acquire 160 acres of public domain providing he met certain requirements: he must live on the land for five years, make his home on it, cultivate the ground, and pay a fee of around sixteen dollars. Numerous homesteaders of the 160-acre era built up small ranches, raised their families, and established schools and churches. Many hamlets, towns in the name only, were established in the new homestead country.¹⁰

In 1870, Bynon Johns Pengra, the Surveyor General of Oregon, was brought to Central Oregon for the building of the Central Oregon Military Road. He homesteaded land northwestern corner of what was later to become the La Pine area. The intended purpose of the military road was to serve as a supply line for troops stationed in southeastern Oregon. However, miners and settlers became the most valuable function.¹¹

In 1897, the Rosland post office was established on Pengra's land to accommodate the other homesteaders and squatters' prior to the Homestead Act. The town site of Rosland was established in 1900 and took its name from the post office on the Pengra ranch.¹² The first north-south wagon road was surveyed through the La Pine basin, establishing Pengra Huntington Road. The road was named for J. W. Perit Huntington, the Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, a man who had used the route when it was a mere footpath.¹³

Three men from Portland, Oregon had secured the exclusive township rights on the 28,000-acre irrigation project of the Deschutes Land Company in 1910. Alfred Aya, James Gleason, and W. R. Riley formed the La Pine Townsite Company and the site of La Pine was platted and mapped.¹⁴ They pledged to develop a big town in the heart of the segregation and the nucleus of the town was to be a fine hotel planned on the main street in the center of the town site. Since Rosland had a post office, mercantile store, saloon, blacksmith shop, hotel and school a strong campaign was started by Alfred Aya to attract people and industry to this under-developed part of the state.¹⁵ By 1920, La Pine had acquired a bank, livery stable, hotel, dairy, mercantile store, meat market, grocery and even its own newspaper.¹⁶ Aya served as president of the La Pine State Bank, La Pine Commercial Club and as publisher of the town's newspaper, the La Pine *Inter-Mountain*. However, eight years later, he returned to the Portland area to pursue other investment opportunities.¹⁷

The birth of the La Pine area marked the death of nearby Rosland.¹⁸ By 1911, La Pine had a population of 600 with more than 100 children attending

school.¹⁹ The Rosland School was moved to La Pine in 1912 because there were more students in La Pine than in Rosland.²⁰ The first settlers in the Rosland-La Pine area buried their dead near their own homes, as was the custom in rural areas. The two oldest known cemeteries in the La Pine area are the Rease Cemetery and the Masten Cemetery, neither in use today. The remaining cemetery, the Improved Order of Redmen Cemetery, is located east of La Pine and encompasses 40 acres of woodland and was last used in the 1920's. Through the efforts of the American Legion Auxiliary and Marvin Russell, this cemetery is now La Pine's Community Cemetery. Under the rules of the Improved Order of Redmen, no profit may be made on the use of the cemetery. The only fee charged for a gravesite is for necessary insurance and maintenance.²¹

After the turn of the Century, more people were attracted to the La Pine area with hopes of a better life. The Carey Land Act, accepted by the state of Oregon in 1901, allowed private capital to carry out a tremendous task by whatever available means of irrigating public lands which were deemed suitable.²² The Carey Act project, later known as the Morson Project, was expected to bring water to 28,000 acres of land in the La Pine area by 1914. After the construction of main canals, money for the irrigation project was lacking, and by 1912, progress on the irrigation scheme ceased, at least temporarily. In 1919, Frank W. Tomes, who was prepared to spend \$30,000 to complete it, resumed the Morson Project. Tome's plans included digging 17 miles of canals, constructing head gates and repairing the previously dug canal banks. It was

anticipated that 10,000 acres of land would be irrigated by 1920. However, the irrigation project was never completed and even if it had been, the short growing season would have precluded all but the hardiest root vegetables.²³

The Rosland-La Pine area and most of Deschutes County have been part of one district and five counties since 1843. Deschutes County formed primarily because of the great distance between Prineville and its neighboring communities and the county seat, The Dalles, where all legal business had to be transacted and all court cases tried. The dates when these entities were formed are: Champoeg District 1843; Linn County, 1845; Lane County, 1851; Wasco County, 1854; Crook County, 1882; and Deschutes County, 1916.²⁴

The Pringle Falls Electric Power & Water Company was constructed on the Deschutes River in 1916 and promised to provide enough surplus power to supply lumber mills, woolen mills, and other manufacturing enterprises. However, with the lack of railroad lines to connect the power project the ambitious development was short lived.²⁵ La Pine, which first moved to be on the line of a projected railroad, found itself by chance on the route of U S Highway 97, when the Oregon Highway system took form in 1917.²⁶

With the completion of US Highway 97 in 1917, two major projects were initiated within the La Pine area over the next 34 years. These were the construction of Craine Prairie Reservoir and Wickiup Reservoir, both of which spurred growth for the area.

John Dubois and A.C.F. Perry were the engineers from the construction of the Crane Prairie irrigation project. Work on this privately financed dam began in

1919 and was completed in 1922. The first dam was built as an experiment to determine if the site would hold water. Because the rock-filled structure leaked, the Bureau of Reclamation rebuilt it in 1939 and 1940. The new dam, 285 feet in length, created a reservoir that covers approximately seven miles.²⁷ Irrigation districts served by Crane Prairie waters include the Arnold and Central Oregon districts located in Bend and the district of Lone Pine near Redmond.²⁸

After a feasibility study for Wickiup Dam was completed in 1937, work began on the site in 1938 and was completed in 1948. Civilian Conservation Corps workers did most of the work on the dam. The low dam, which impounds the water in the reservoir, is over a mile long. When full, the reservoir is the largest body of water in the Deschutes National Forest.²⁹ The North Unit Irrigation District located in Jefferson County, about 100 miles from the storage site, uses water stored at Wickiup Dam.³⁰ Wickiup Reservoir is 100-foot-tall earthen dam that impounds 200,000 acre-feet of irrigation water.³¹ The dam is built on ancient lakebed silt, formed when lava flows dammed up a prehistoric river. The river cut through the lakebed, and the silt deposited from the action is underneath the dam.³²

Two companies that established in the La Pine area that had a huge impact were the Shevlin-Hixon Lumbar Company and Midstate Electric Cooperative. The Shevlin-Hixon Lumbar Company built a lumbar mill in Bend in 1915 and a logging camp was established in the La Pine area in 1934, providing more jobs and improving the economy for the community.³³ In the early 1950's, the La Pine area was designated as headquarters of the Mid-State Electric

Cooperative, which brought Bonneville power into the region.³⁴

Tourism has been a factor in many land use changes since the 1950's. The nearby outdoors recreational opportunities, especially hunting and fishing, were excellent but these assets were not capitalized on until after World War II. Thus, for many years, La Pine remained a small rural community. In 1951, small parcels of land were offered as sites for summer cabins. Most of the growth within the La Pine area has occurred since the 1960's. Septic-tank permits were required before home construction could begin starting in the 1960's. Only then did some property owners discover that because of soil conditions their land could not be built upon.³⁵ By 1963, approximately 900 people lived in the La Pine area. This number doubled by 1971 and by 1979, some 2750 families, over 6000 people, lived in the area.³⁶ By 1965, about 90% of the lots in the La Pine area was platted. In 1966, voters repealed all zoning laws in Deschutes County resulting in increased development, numerous subdivisions and roads established without any planning and no provisions for their continued maintenance. There are 84 miles of unimproved roads within the La Pine area, which were established during the 1960's.³⁷ The La Pine Volunteer Fire Association was formed in June 1968 as a the first fire-fighting organization in the La Pine area. All the equipment was borrowed or donated until 1970 when a truck was given to the organization. In 1971, the volunteer association was dissolved and the La Pine Rural Fire Protection District took its place.³⁸ The Deschutes County Road Department established a maintenance station in the La Pine area in 1971.³⁹ Oregon created the nations first truly statewide land use

planning system in 1973.⁴⁰ Also in 1973, Ace Hardware was established to help meet the needs of the growing area and still operates today.⁴¹ Midstate Electric Cooperative added 255 new services during the year of 1975, which represents growth for the community of La Pine.⁴² The current growth rate for the La Pine area is 7% annually.⁴³

Although the railroad did not materialize, the irrigation project failed, and many old timers left for better opportunities, the area has survived and become a center for the remaining farmers, tourists, retired people and vacationers.

From the time the area was established, the only form of government that controlled the La Pine area was the Deschutes County Commissioners' office located in Bend. Several attempts have been made to incorporate the La Pine area in 1985, 1994, and 2000.

The first attempt appeared on the 1985 ballot offering a proposal to incorporate the La Pine area into a city but was defeated by a vote of 65-33.⁴⁴ Nine years later, another ballot measure was presented to the voters of Deschutes County with regards to the La Pine area development. In 1994, measure 9-5 *Port of La Pine Formation* states that a port district proposed for the purpose of developing a viable economic base, which would interact, but not duplicate or conflict, with other governments services now available. Establishment of a port district would allow local control in development of the La Pine industrial site, currently owned by Deschutes County. The area's large population base demands a variety of services. Approval of the measure would allow formation of a special district called the Port of La Pine. A tax base of

\$51,750 would be authorized. The proposed area was 100-square miles.⁴⁵ The voters also defeated this measure.

The La Pine area has taken the failed opportunities of the past and created the La Pine Community Action Team. This nonprofit organization of volunteer citizens decided to improve the community through a variety of activities. The La Pine Community Action Team (LCAT) appointed a twenty-five-member incorporation committee to work on the feasibility of incorporation.⁴⁶

La Pine has much to gain from incorporation. The most important benefit appears to be self-governing. Incorporation will enable La Pine to choose their own city council from within their community. Those in favor of incorporation feel this will get more attention to the issues that need taken care of. Some of the issues concerning the La Pine area are economic development, road maintenance, parks, cemetery, recreation code enforcement, law enforcement, and sewer and water. These issues make a lot of people in the area feel things would be handled easier with a local government.

The La Pine Strategic Plan from April 1996 discusses the importance of preserving the local beauty and environment while maintaining its rural identity and quality of life as explores ideas into the outcome of La Pine's future. The need for the La Pine area to become a full-service community to accommodate the increasing number of residents and tourists is imperative to its future.⁴⁷

In early 1998 the La Pine Community Action Team obtained a grant from the US Economic Development Administration to undertake a study of governance options for the La Pine area.⁴⁸ This study was actually a follow-up to

a strategic plan that had been previously developed that calls for a system of governance to be in place by the year 2000. The LCAT hired the firm of Cogan, Owens, Cogan from Portland, Oregon to undertake the task of a feasibility study of governance options. A workshop held on March 8, 1998 helped the LCAT to select three governance options for further study: incorporation of a large city, incorporation of a small city, and formation of a multipurpose county service district. Five major areas to be considered within either of these categories were the sewer, water, parks and recreation, planning and building code administration, and road repair and construction.⁴⁹ The large city option, encompassing approximately 32-square mile area and about 7,500 people, was chosen by LCAT as the best incorporation option.⁵⁰

The 2000 November ballot will present the voters with the opportunity to decide whether it is time for La Pine to become a city. Only 3,694 registered voters are within the proposed city limits and a simple majority is needed for incorporation to pass.⁵¹ (See Appendix 1)

Currently, Deschutes County provides administrative services, such as assessment and taxation, as well as a number of general government services to the area of La Pine. These services include planning, zoning, building code enforcement, health and sanitation, road construction and maintenance, and law enforcement/criminal justice services.⁵² If La Pine incorporates, these services will become the responsibility of the new city (see Appendix 2). The first years operating expenses are estimated to be \$698,550, which excludes parks, water, fire protection and sewer services since they are already established.⁵³

La Pine schools will remain part of the Bend-La Pine School District even if a new city is formed. The decision to establish a new school district is not part of the current proposal and would be addressed well after incorporation is achieved. The elementary and secondary schools located in the unincorporated area of La Pine are and will continue to be managed from the district offices located in Bend.⁵⁴

The last two decades has seen a steady growth with regards to population and development in the La Pine area. Some of the concerns facing the incorporation goals with regards to becoming a city are water quality, substandard roads, wild land fire hazards, and higher taxes. Water quality is an issue since there is a high water table in the region and this affects development of business and residential areas. The vast amount of unimproved roads within the proposed boundary area will become a major project for the new city to tackle. It is estimated that \$350,000 in state gas tax money would be available to the new city for road maintenance, however this would not cover the operating costs. The most unpredictable issue for a new city to deal with is wild land fire hazards.⁵⁵ Incorporation means higher property taxes for citizens in order to support the new city. LCAT is considering a permanent tax rate of \$1.50 per every \$1000 of assessed value.⁵⁶ Now the words “considering a permanent tax rate” does imply that nothing permanent has been considered. This appears to be the foremost concern for the residents of the La Pine area when considering incorporation. Jerry Hopper, a member of Citizens Against Incorporation of La Pine, stated that higher taxes could prove detrimental to many of the low-income

residents in the area.⁵⁷

On the positive side, the new city would be eligible for state and federal grants and enhanced self-determination. These benefits are far more difficult to quantify than the costs, but they are not insignificant.⁵⁸ La Pine is considered a rural community with a large portion of retired people who no longer wish to be involved and raise taxes to pay for services they do not need. This appears to be the overall factor for failure in its first attempt fourteen years ago.⁵⁹ However, since this time La Pine has grown substantially and offers a more diverse group with regards to the voting pool.

Common concerns for both sides of incorporation consists of keeping a rural community, taxes low, preserving an affordable lifestyle for people on fixed incomes, maintaining the small town feel, and keeping the area from becoming another urban center like Bend or Redmond. The 32-square-mile area proposed for incorporation is the same size as the city of Bend, however the population distribution differs greatly. Bend's current population is about 50,000 versus La Pine area of 7,500.⁶⁰ A study done by the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory found that more than 50% of residents within the La Pine area felt that a form of self-government was needed.⁶¹

The issues surrounding incorporation leave much to be decided by the community come this November. The responsibility of governing a new city appears to have the community in mixed emotions concerning the future of La Pine's history. The idea of fixed tax rates and deciding their own development sound appealing to some, while increasing tax rates in general and on issues not

discussed, like schools, make others question if the benefits are worth the trouble.

La Pine is a rural community located in southern Deschutes County near the Newberry Volcanic National Monument, home of East Lake and Paulina Lake. The recreation rich Cascade Lakes region of Central Oregon surrounds the La Pine area. There are abundant fishing, hiking and boating at any one of the many nearby lakes in the summer. In the winter, enjoy cross country and alpine skiing at nearby Mt. Bachelor, or snowmobile through the woods and up the nearby foothills.⁶²

The La pine area development over the decades shows me timing had a hand in the development of the area that exists today. The development of reservoirs help to simulate growth until their completion and the local community then relied on the other projects such as the Carey Land Act. When that failed to achieve its goal, the prospect of the railroad kept people there until that proved to never come. When US Highway 97 construction showed up it then began to serve as a tourist attraction because of its closeness to some of the major lakes and recreational attributes it offered. From then on, the community has grown and developed business to meet the needs of those visiting the area and work in bend. Of the 82 businesses registered with the local chamber of commerce, none of them are really able to support the growing community that seem to be requiring more services than the area can offer. Its recent attempts to incorporate have shown me a part of the community feels the La Pine area is getting to large to be controlled from the Deschutes County office and immediate response to

local problems should be handled from those most closely involved.

¹ La Pine Chamber of Commerce.

² Phil F. Brogan, *East of the Cascades* (1964), 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 14-19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ Raymond R. Hatton, interview by author, 30 April 2000, Phone.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Brogan, 47.

⁸ County Historical Timeline.

⁹ Hatton.

¹⁰ Brogan, 84-85.

¹¹ Friends of La Pine Library, 9-11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ The Deschutes County Historical Society, "A History of the Deschutes County in Oregon" (1985), 92.

¹⁴ Brogan 146.

¹⁵ The Deschutes County Historical Society. 92.

¹⁶ Hatton.

¹⁷ University of Oregon, "Old Oregon", spring 1982..

¹⁸ Brogan, 146.

¹⁹ The Deschutes County Historical Society, 93.

²⁰ Friends of La Pine Library, 206.

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- ²¹ Ibid., 209-210.
- ²² Ibid., 93.
- ²³ Hatton.
- ²⁴ Friends of La Pine Library, 3.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 140.
- ²⁶ Brogan, 146.
- ²⁷ Friends of La Pine Library, *History of La Pine Pioneers* (1983), 197.
- ²⁸ Ken Grantham, interview by author, 8 May 2000, Bend.
- ²⁹ Friends of La Pine Library, 199.
- ³⁰ Grantham.
- ³¹ Acre-foot: one acre of water, one foot deep.
- ³² *The Bulletin* (Bend), 17 March 2000.
- ³³ The Deschutes County Historical Society, 93.
- ³⁴ Brogan, 146.
- ³⁵ Hatton.
- ³⁶ Raymond R. Hatton, *High Country of Central Oregon* (1980), 174.
- ³⁷ *The Bulletin*, 16 April 2000.
- ³⁸ Friends of La Pine Library, 214-219.
- ³⁹ Roger W. Olson, interview by author, 8 May 2000, Bend.
- ⁴⁰ *The Bulletin*, 12 February 2000.
- ⁴¹ Steve Dodd, interview by author, 31 March 2000, La Pine.
- ⁴² Darwin H. Thurston, interview by author, 31 March 2000, La Pine.
- ⁴³ *The Bulletin*, 12 February 2000.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 14 December 1999.
- ⁴⁵ Official Deschutes County 1994 Primary Voters' Pamphlet, 1994.
- ⁴⁶ Jill McLane, interview by author, 30 March 2000, La Pine.
- ⁴⁷ The La Pine Community Action Team, *La Pine Strategic Plan*, April 1996.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Cogan Owens Cogan LLC and Moore Brethaupt Associates, *Economic Feasibility with Estimated Tax Rate*, September 1999.
- ⁵⁰ McLane.
- ⁵¹ *The Bulletin*, 10 December 1999.
- ⁵² Cogan Owens Cogan.
- ⁵³ Cogan, Owens, Cogan.
- ⁵⁴ McLane.
- ⁵⁵ Damian Syrnyk, interview by author, 8 May 2000, Bend.
- ⁵⁶ McLane.
- ⁵⁷ Jerry Hopper, interview by author, 30 March 2000, Phone.
- ⁵⁸ McLane.
- ⁵⁹ Bob Shotwell, interview by author, 30 March 2000, Bend.
- ⁶⁰ McLane.
- ⁶¹ Oregon Survey Research Laboratory, *Southern Deschutes-Northern Klamath Population and Income Survey*, February-March 1998.
- ⁶² The La Pine Chamber of Commerce.