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TOWNS' HISTORIES Keep DEBATE BREWING

Residents disagree about which community has been around longer.

BY CAPI LYNN

Stayton or Sublimity, which came first? It depends on the parameters used to date the two towns.

Stayton was mapped in 1872, six years before Sublimity. It adopted its first charter in 1901, two years before its neighbor. But a post office was established in Sublimity in 1852, two decades before Stayton.

"The post office is the significant thing," local historian Ernst Lau said. "That's when the official name is established." In his opinion, there is no debate. Sublimity came first.

But some resources, like the *Oregon Blue Book*, date towns by date of incorporation. In the case of Sublimity, there was a 51-year gap between the establishment of its post office and the adoption of a city charter. "Incorporation meant towns could levy taxes," Lau said. "They just wanted to put off taxation as long as possible."

Sublimity started out as an Indian village and then a trading post. It originally was named Hobson's Corner after Hadley Hobson, a brick contractor from North Carolina who came to the area in 1848.

Four years later, when a post office was established, believed to be the fifth in the state, the name was changed to Sublimity. James Denny, the first postmaster, selected the name "for the sublime scenery" in the hills around the town.

Lau said the residents of Sublimity were instrumental in developing Stayton. "There is massive documentation that Stayton was started by a whole bunch of people from Sublimity," he said.

Drury S. Stayton, whom the town is named after, was one of the early postmasters of Sublimity. He later moved his family 2 miles down the road and settled in Stayton.

He wanted to name the town Florence, for his youngest daughter, but the name already was taken by a coastal community. The west part of the town was known for a short time by the name of Ale, although no one seems to know how it ever acquired the name. It reportedly had a post office from 1888 to 1902.

One old-timer gave a simple explanation for the name in the Jan. 26, 1961 *Capital Journal*: An old ale bottle was found nearby.

Drury S. Stayton built a sawmill ' near town, taking advantage of its ' strategic location on the North Santiam River. The resource led others to do the same.

A wool carding mill, a cabinet factory, a sash and door factory, a flour mill and an excelsior mill were other water powered industries in the early days of Stayton. "That was why Stayton grew, because of the water," said Del Ditter, a fourth-generation Sublimity resident.

Early Sublimity was a larger town than it is today. In 1857, in addition to having a post office, it had a Chinese laundry, five stores, a gunmaker's shop, a made-to-order furniture shop, a hotel, a public

school, a college and Methodist and United Brethren churches.

Ditter's ancestors settled in Sublimity in about 1890, with a great uncle opening a pharmacy and tobacco store. The business evolved into a general store and most recently Ditter's IGA. Del sold the 105-year legacy nine years ago.

Sublimity's early claim to fame was that it used to be a college town. Sublimity College was founded in 1857 by the United Brethren Church. The Rev. Milton Wright was the first teacher and president, the same man who later returned east and became father to Orville and Wilbur Wright, inventors of the airplane. According to historical accounts, the school was given the name "college" in order to lure people to town, but one official referred to it as "only a glorified grade school."

Today, it takes just a hop, skip and a jump to get from Stayton to Sublimity But years ago, because of what Lau called "a vast, trackless swamp between the two," the trek was a difficult one. More specifically, it was bumpy. "For many years, there was a corduroy road with logs laid down in the mud," Lau said.

Stayton later became an agricultural town and was lauded in newspapers as the "bean capital of the valley." Sublimity earned no such recognition, but residents can brag about having a post office long before its neighbor.

In the estimation of some, that means Sublimity came first.