

History of Tenino

Hodgden's Station

The first settler in Tenino was Stephen Hodgden from Maine. Mr. Hodgden came out west with the California Gold Rush and in 1851 took up a donation land claim on the banks of Scatter Creek. Soon "Hodgden's Station" was a regular stop on the stage coach road from the Columbia to Olympia.

By 1872, the railroad from the Columbia reached Hodgden's farm, and a new station was built and named "Tenino."

What's in a Name?

The railroad settlement later grew into the Town of Tenino. According to Arthur Dwelley's written history, "There is much speculation about the origin of the name, with stories that it was named after a railroad locomotive with number 1090 or a survey stake with that designation marked on it. According to the railroad archives, neither of these tales is true. There is considerable evidence that the name preceded the railroad and is of Indian origin, meaning 'a branch in the trail' or 'a meeting place.'"

Most likely the name originated from the [Tenino tribe](#) located on the Columbia. The steamship Tenino (probably named for the tribe) ferried up and down the Columbia. Northern Pacific and the Steamship Company formed a partnership. At the same time Northern Pacific built the depot near Hodgden's and named it Tenino. Travelers could then travel from the "Tenino" (steamship) to "Tenino" (the depot) all by steam.

Sandstone Quarry & Boomtown

Tenino's little depot settlement continued to grow, adding retail businesses, a hotel, and professional farming. In 1888, S.W. Fenton and George VanTine located sandstone in Tenino, which began the industry that "changed Tenino from a sleepy little whistle stop to a bustling town." For the next 30 years, until concrete began to replace sandstone as a major building material, stone quarrying was Tenino's major industry.

Home of Wooden Money

Following [World War I](#) and until the [Great Depression](#), logging and farming were the major economic factors in Tenino. Tenino was deeply affected just as other places in the country, but Tenino won world popularity by the [Tenino Chamber of Commerce's](#) “wooden money” scheme, which was a plan to issue emergency scrip to relieve the money shortage caused by the failure of The Citizen's Bank of Tenino. According to Dwelley, “The original scrip was on paper and was given to bank depositors in exchange for assignment to the chamber of up to 25% of the depositor's bank account balance. Shortly afterward, the scrip was printed on ‘slice wood’ of spruce and cedar and immediately became famous as the original wooden money. Eight issues were printed between 1932 and 1933 with a total of \$10,308 of the wooden currency put into circulation. It became a collector's item, and only \$40 was ever redeemed by the chamber.”

Continued Growth

Throughout the next few decades, the people of Tenino proved their tenacity as they held to their values of hard work and community support. Today, our friendly City of Tenino boasts thriving businesses and [schools](#), a [city park](#) and community swimming pool, and an active, family-oriented community that enjoys holiday events, parades, and a seasonal weekly farmer's market.

- To Learn More about Tenino History, check out our [Historian's Page](#).
- And visit the [Tenino Depot Museum](#).