

St. Andrew Lutheran Church – Sacred Land Story v3.3

A Draft by the Anti-Racism Action/Reflection Group – February 2024

God created the land around St. Andrew, along with the Columbia Gorge, by glacial action during the last Ice Age.¹ The Columbia River Basin provided a fertile home and a sustainable way of life for several Indigenous Nations for thousands of years, including the Chinook² near the river, the Cowlitz³ north and west of us, and a few others,⁴ and the land was understood to be sacred. The marshy area near us was called Kolsas by the native people⁵ (later known as Fourth Plain), and likely provided the Indigenous peoples with camas bulbs and wapato tubers, which were staples of their diet,⁶ and also traded with other nations. The local tribes also had a hearty diet of salmon, deer, berries, and other foodstuffs from the land and water.⁷ What is now called Fourth Plain Boulevard was once part of the Klickitat trail,^{5,8} which was used for trade between the peoples in our area with the Klickitat people to the east and north.

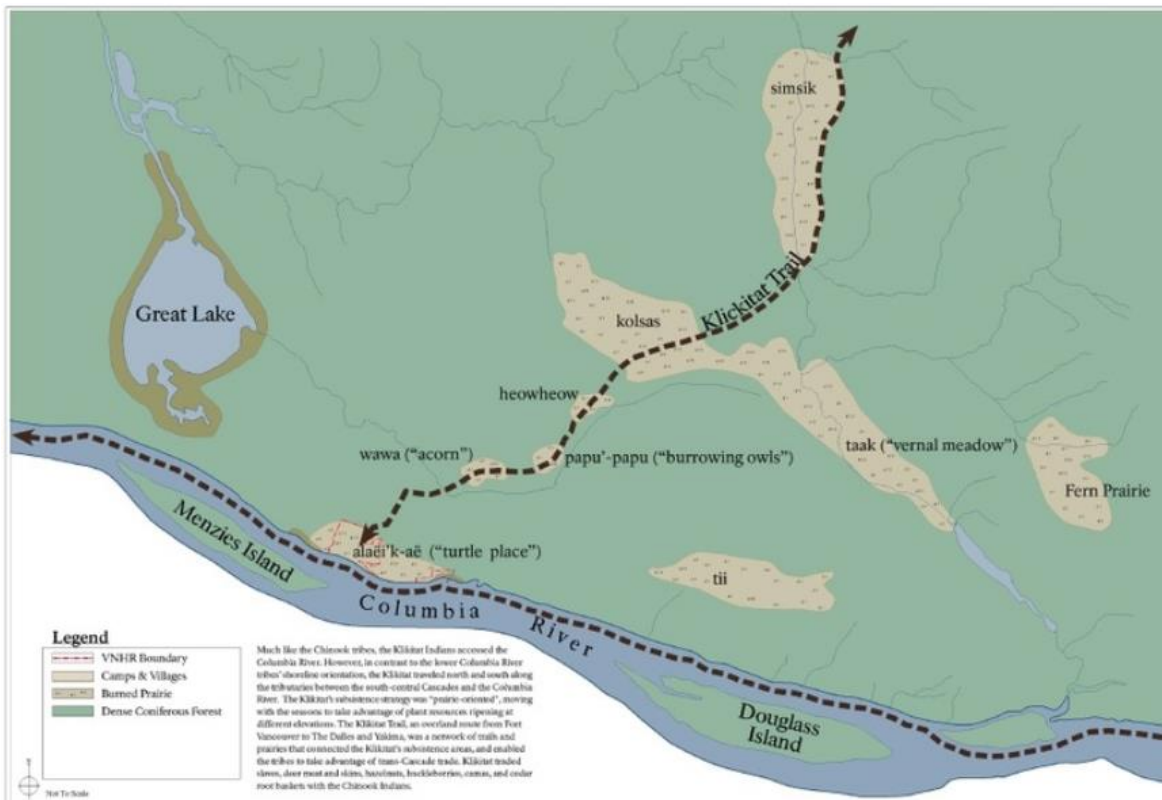


Rowena Crest Viewpoint

Columbia River Gorge¹



Wapato⁶

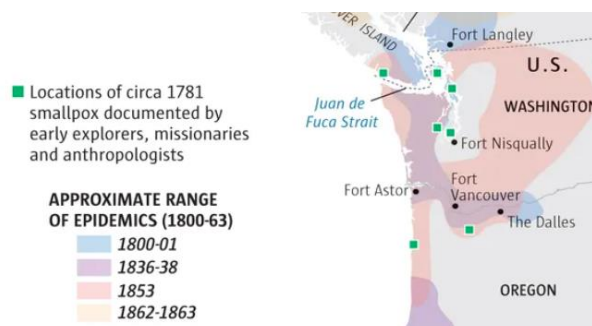


Vancouver landscape, pre-1824⁹

The settlement and westward movement of Americans of European ancestry, also referred to as settler colonialism, expelling Indigenous people, was encouraged by ideologies such as the Doctrine of Discovery¹⁰ and Manifest Destiny¹¹ and accelerated after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.¹² We are not aware of any evidence that Lutheran churches or church bodies opposed settler colonialism while it was occurring. The ELCA belatedly repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in 2016.¹³ While intentional genocide was not practiced in the Northwest to the extent it was in several other parts of the U.S.,¹⁴ diseases brought by Euro-American people in the early-to-mid 1800s, including smallpox, malaria and measles, had an apocalyptic impact on Indigenous people, much worse than the Coronavirus epidemic, leading to the death of 90% or more of the original inhabitants of this land.¹⁵ This early contact included the journey of Lewis and Clark in 1805-1806 and the establishment of Fort Vancouver by the British Hudson's Bay Company in 1825.¹⁶ The U.S. Congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act in 1850, which completely ignored the presence and rights of people and nations already here and permitted unmarried male or married-couple white homesteaders to claim up to 320 or 640 acres of land, respectively, now seen as property, in the Oregon Territory.¹⁷ In the case of a married couple, the husband and wife each owned half of the total, one of the first opportunities for married women in the United States to hold property under their own names. The first recorded owner of our land is Thomas Nerton, for whom Nerton Road is named, who claimed 320 acres in 1855 (lot 74).^{18,19}



*American Progress, John Nast (1872)*¹¹



*Epidemics in the Pacific Northwest*¹⁵



*Fort Vancouver, ca. 1845*¹⁶



*Map of Clarke County, 1881*¹⁸

Even though white settlers and their descendants have repeatedly tried to decimate the Cowlitz tribe and erase their history, they have proven themselves to be the “Forever People.”²⁰ In 1855, for example, the Cowlitz refused to sign a treaty that would have forced them to move away from their land and, more importantly, their ancestors, who are a source of strength and guidance. The tribe was denied federal recognition in 1923, but worked tirelessly with the support of Creator and ancestors until they gained it in 2000. After much opposition they opened the Ilani Casino Resort in 2017. Opposition has since ceased, as the Cowlitz tribe have proved to be exemplary neighbors, having donated \$28 million to local and state organizations.²¹



*Cowlitz settlement*²⁰

The Chinook Indian Nation were and are also inhabitants of this area and have been fighting for federal recognition as a tribe for over 120 years. They briefly received recognition in 2001 under the Clinton administration, but the government proposed relocating the Chinook further north, adjacent to the reservation of the Quinalt Indian Nation, and the Bush administration used opposition by the Quinalt as an excuse to rescind the recognition only 18 months later. The lack of recognition means, for example, that the Chinook are unable to receive any government health care or other benefits, such as funds that were allocated to tribes for COVID-19 relief, which disproportionately impacted Indigenous peoples.²²



*Orchards mural*²³



*Prune harvest, Washougal (1907)*²⁵

The land around St. Andrew continued its purpose as food provider as more whites settled and the swamps were drained—there were so many fruit trees, particularly prunes, that the area was renamed Orchards in 1904.²³ A fire destroyed much of Orchards in 1911.²⁴ Enough locally-grown prunes found their way into brandy that the Prohibition era (1920-1933) was quite difficult economically for Orchards.²⁵



*Prune festival queen*²⁵

The population of the Vancouver area grew greatly during World War II, with 57,000 residents in housing built by the newly-formed Vancouver Housing Authority²⁷ and another 40,000 in Vanport,²⁸ just south of the Columbia River, many of whom were African Americans who moved from the South²⁹ as part of the Great Migration.³⁰ However, the population of Vancouver generally, and Orchards more particularly, has been overwhelmingly white since the mid 1800's.³¹ Washington (split off from the Oregon Territory in 1846), unlike Oregon, never had constitutional prohibitions against free Black residents, and Vancouver, unlike Portland, never had explicit prohibitions against integrated neighborhoods. However, Black Vancouverites who wanted to stay after the Kaiser Shipyard closed in 1946 found it very difficult to do so, with many property owners refusing to sell to Blacks and many employers refusing to hire Blacks.³² For example, the city of Camas, for a number of years, had an ordinance forbidding Blacks to be in the city after 6 pm every evening.³³



Kaiser Shipyards²⁷



Fourth Plain Village²⁶

In 1970, Kenneth and Donna (Loewen) Ellertson and Richard and Donna (Kvamme) Smythe transferred land in Orchards to the American Lutheran Church, and St. Andrew was organized as a congregation of the American Lutheran Church in 1971, with 52 baptized members being received on Reformation Sunday. The congregation moved into a new building in 1972. Sadly, the main church building burned to the ground in 1994 and was rebuilt in 1996.³⁴



St. Andrew campus (Google Earth)

During most of its history, St. Andrew has viewed the land as a venue for worship, education, and service but has not had a strong focus on the land itself. However, in 2012 St. Andrew

began a Community Garden and our Preschool initiated its strong outdoor focus, in a sense beginning to return to the ancient purpose of our land. We pray that our community will recover a sense of stewardship and sacredness, rather than ownership and domination, and of abundance rather than scarcity, with regard to our land. Who is the land for? The land is “for all.”



Ground breaking (1995)³⁵

¹ For example,

<http://npshistory.com/brochures/iafl/gorge.pdf>

² For example, <https://chinooknation.org/political-history/>;

<https://historylink.org/File/9101#:~:text=The%20site%20was%20originally%20inhabited,history%20more%20than%20most%20cities>

³ For example, <https://www.cowlitz.org/our-story>

⁴ For example, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/languagesatfova.htm>; <https://www.confluenceproject.org/library-post/peoples-of-what-is-now-vancouver/>

⁵ For example, http://columbiariverimages.com/Regions/Places/vancouver_plains_prairies.html

⁶ For example, <https://www.confluenceproject.org/library-post/important-foods-wapato/>.

⁷ For example, <https://www.chronline.com/stories/berries-salmon-elk-and-camas-fed-our-people,127481>.

⁸ For example, <https://www.confluenceproject.org/library-post/peoples-of-what-is-now-vancouver/>

⁹ <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?pg=6539323&id=F4B72062-155D-4519-3E59C54AEEF56534&gid=F506D915-155D-4519-3E80B2911E47E497>.

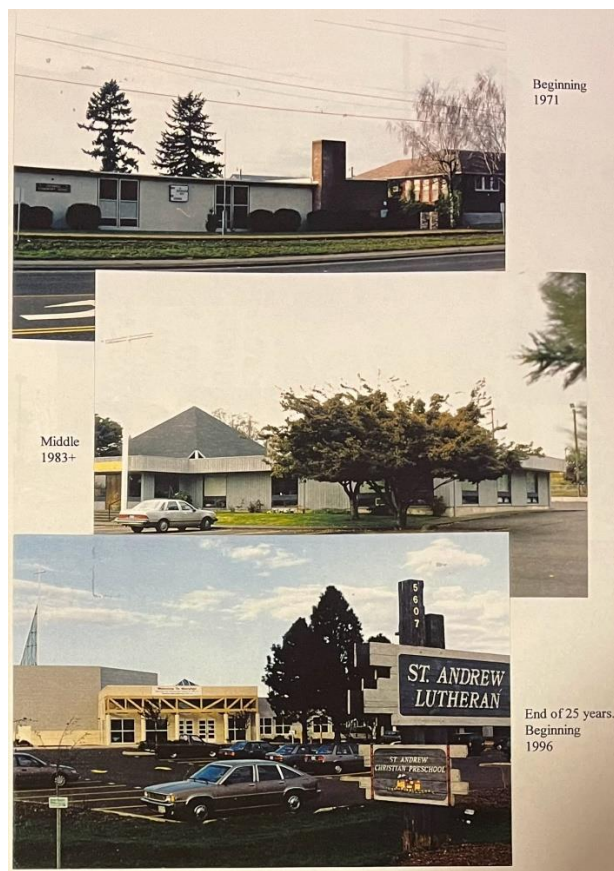
¹⁰ For example, <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/christopher-columbus-and-the-doctrine-of-discovery-5-things-to-know#:~:text=The%20Doctrine%20of%20Discovery%20provided,%E2%80%9Cdiscovered%E2%80%9D%20and%20sovereignty%20claimed>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_doctrine; S. Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery*, Herald Press (2021).

¹¹ For example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest_destiny; [https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-early-republic/age-of-jackson/a/manifest-destiny#:~:text=Manifest%20Destiny%20was%20the%20idea,or%20destroy%20the%20native%20population.](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-early-republic/age-of-jackson/a/manifest-destiny#:~:text=Manifest%20Destiny%20was%20the%20idea,or%20destroy%20the%20native%20population.;);

¹² For example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Purchase.

¹³ <https://elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Ethnic-Specific-and-Multicultural-Ministries/Indigenous-Ministries-and-Tribal-Relations/Repudiation>.

¹⁴ For example, R. Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Beacon Press (2014); J. Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*, Grove Press (2000).



St. Andrew campus over the years³⁵

- ¹⁵ For example, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/the-first-epidemics-how-disease-ravaged-indigenous-northwest-peoples/>.
- ¹⁶ For example, <https://www.nps.gov/fova/learn/historyculture/hbcfort1.htm>;
<http://npshistory.com/publications/fova/ethnohistorical-overview.pdf> ;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Vancouver.
- ¹⁷ For example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donation_Land_Claim_Act;
https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Curriculum%20Packets/Ho_mesteading/IV.html.
- ¹⁸ Map of Clark County, Washington Territory; <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/15821648>;
https://glorerecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=WAVAA%20%20077386&docClass=SER&sid=xks_vngvs.ddb .
- ¹⁹ Thomas Nerton filed a Donation Land Claim on May 1, 1855, for 320 acres, and died from blood poisoning at age 42 on Sept. 11, 1882, leaving 11 children and his wife Elizabeth Nerton, who died in 1897. The land was passed down to John & Mary Schaub, Peter and Mary Ann Ueltshi, Samuel and Catherine O’Neill, Nellie Heitman, Richard Smythe, and Kenneth Ellerton over the next 70 years (M. Leisle, summary of original sources, 2023).
- ²⁰ For example, <https://cowlitz.org/our-story>; <https://www.chronline.com/stories/cowlitz-tribe-reflects-upon-its-past,217823>; <https://www.chronline.com/stories/roy-i-rochon-wilson-history-of-the-cowlitz-indian-tribe,133536>
- ²¹ For example, <https://cowlitz.org/our-giving>
- ²² For example, <https://chinooknation.org/recognition/>; [https://prismreports.org/2023/02/01/chinook-indian-tribe-calls-restoration-federal-recognition/#:~:text=After%20the%20Chinook%20were%20granted%20federal%20recognition%20in, rescind%20the%20previous%20administration%E2%80%99s%20recognition%20of%20the%20Chinook](https://prismreports.org/2023/02/01/chinook-indian-tribe-calls-restoration-federal-recognition/#:~:text=After%20the%20Chinook%20were%20granted%20federal%20recognition%20in, rescind%20the%20previous%20administration%E2%80%99s%20recognition%20of%20the%20Chinook;);
<https://www.hcn.org/issues/53.4/indigenous-affairs-the-slow-motion-genocide-of-the-chinook-indian-nation>.
- ²³ For example, http://columbiariverimages.com/Regions/Places/orchards_sifton.html
- ²⁴ C. Landerholm, *Vancouver Area Chronology 1784-1956*, Clark County Historical Society (1960); https://cchm-website-uploads.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Vancouver_Chronology.pdf
- ²⁵ <https://clarkcountytalk.com/2022/01/25/clark-county-prunarians-formed-as-a-booster-group-in-1919-to-promote-the-regions-prune-industry/> ; <https://www.confluenceproject.org/library-post/peoples-of-what-is-now-vancouver/> ; <https://www.columbian.com/news/2012/mar/17/county-has-proud-prune-past/>
- ²⁶ <https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/VancouverPlanWarHousing.pdf>.
- ²⁷ <https://www.nps.gov/articles/vancouverbarrackswwii.htm>
- ²⁸ For example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanport,_Oregon. Vanport was dramatically destroyed on May 30, 1948, when a 200-foot section of a railroad berm holding back the Columbia River collapsed during a flood, killing 15 people. The city was underwater by nightfall, leaving 17,500 of its inhabitants, of whom roughly a third were Black, homeless.
- ²⁹ J. E. Wulff, *First Families of Vancouver’s African American Community: From World War II to the Twenty-First Century*, NAACP Vancouver Branch #1139 (2012).
- ³⁰ For example, I. Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Penguin Random House (2010).
- ³¹ <https://depts.washington.edu/labhist/maps-race-vancouver-wa.shtml>
- ³² <https://www.columbian.com/news/2023/feb/26/clark-county-historians-dig-into-black-history/>; J. E. Wulff, op. cit., chapters 4-6.
- ³³ J. E. Wulff, op. cit., pp. 151-152.
- ³⁴ St. Andrew 40th Anniversary Book, https://salcvan-my.sharepoint.com/personal/officemanager_salcvan_org/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?ga=1&id=%2Fpersonal%2Fof ficemanager%5Fsalcvan%5Fforg%2FDocuments%2F1%2E3%20Newsletters%20%26%20Murmuration%2FAnniversary%2F40th%5FAnniversary%5FBook%5Flow%20%281%29%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fofficemanager%5Fsalcvan%5Fforg%2FDocuments%2F1%2E3%20Newsletters%20%26%20Murmuration%2FAnniversary.
- ³⁵ St. Andrew 25th Anniversary Book, https://salcvan-my.sharepoint.com/personal/officemanager_salcvan_org/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?ga=1&id=%2Fpersonal%2Fof ficemanager%5Fsalcvan%5Fforg%2FDocuments%2F1%2E3%20Newsletters%20%26%20Murmuration%2FAnniversary%2F25th%20Anniversary%20Scan%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fofficemanager%5Fsalcvan%5Fforg%2FDocuments%2F1%2E3%20Newsletters%20%26%20Murmuration%2FAnniversary.