City of Mt. Angel

Mt. Angel is a small community of about 3,700 people approximately eighteen miles northeast of Salem. Indians had worshipped on the butte, called Tapalamaho, for generations, traveling from Klamath country to the southeast and from east of the Cascades. The first white settlers in the area included William and Jane (Graves) Glover, in 1847, and Benjamin and Rachel (Tompkins) Cleaver in 1850. Benjamin Cleaver established on his land the plat that would eventually become the city of Mount Angel. John H. and Catharine (Graves) Palmer settled in 1853 on Mt. Angel itelf, which the settlers then called "Graves Butte."

In 1881, Father Adelheim Odermatt, from the Benedictine Abbey of Engelberg, Switzerland, arrived with a contingent of Benedictine monks. A large group of Bavarians followed and settled in the area. A Benedictine abbey was completed in 1884, with a pilgrimage chapel on the summit called Lone Butte. The butte and community were renamed Mt. Angel (the English translation for Engelberg), and Father Odermatt started a school for boys. The Queen of Angels Sisters, also from Engelberg, moved to Mt. Angel in 1888 to provide teachers. They established Mount Angel College, which closed in 1973.

A railroad station named Fillmore had been built at the site in 1881. A year later, a post office was established, and the town was named Roy. The city of Mt. Angel was incorporated on April 3, 1893, with the new post office of St. Benedict located at the abbey.

The considerable German influence in Mt. Angel is evident in its Bavarian-style storefronts and in its boast that it has the largest Glockenspiel in the United States. The town’s four-day Oktoberfest, held every year since 1966, is the largest folk festival in the Northwest.

Mt. Angel’s economy is based on both agriculture and industry. Farmers grow berries, Christmas trees, and row, seed, and grain crops, and several businesses operate in the industrial zone next to the Southern Pacific line.

Written by Ted Dethlefs

Further Reading:

Marion County Historical Society. *Marion County History, Vol. 15.* Salem, Ore.: Marion County Historical Society, 1998.

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