

Mount Vernon, Washington

People and Place

Location

Mount Vernon, located in Skagit County on the Skagit River, encompasses approximately 11.1 square miles of land and 0.3 square miles of surface water. Mount Vernon is located approximately 60 miles north of Seattle on the Interstate 5 corridor and 30 miles south of Bellingham. The City of Mount Vernon is located at 48°25'17"N, 122°21'42"W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census the population of Mount Vernon was 26,232. Between 1990 and 2000, U.S. Census data reports that the population of Mount Vernon increased by 48.6%. In 2000 the percentage of males and females was 49% and 51% respectively. The racial composition of the population in 2000 was predominantly White (75.4%), followed by Asian (2.6%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1%), Black or African American (0.7%), and Pacific Islanders (0.2%). Over four thousand individuals (17.1%) classified themselves as belonging to some other race. Overall, 2.9% of the population identified themselves as belonging to two or more races. Slightly over a quarter of the population (25.1%) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

In 2000 the median age of the population was 31.1, lower than the national median of 35.3 for the same year. According to the 2000 U.S. Census the population of Mount Vernon had an even age distribution. Almost one fifth of the population (19.5%) was foreign-born; of the foreign-born population 70.9% were born in Mexico. Approximately 82% of Mount Vernon's population was living in family households in 2000. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 75.7% of the population over 18 years of age had received a high school degree or higher, 16% had received a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 5.4% received a graduate or professional degree; as compared to the national averages of 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

History

The Mount Vernon area has been home to native peoples for millennia. Members of the Upper Skagit Tribe, comprised of 11 bands of Native Americans, traditionally occupied lands between Mount Vernon and Newhalem. Three additional tribes – Swinomish, Samish, and Sauk-Suiattle – living in the area now known as Skagit County were signatories to the 1855 Point Elliot Treaty. The treaty gave Western Washington tribes the right to self-governance and set aside several reservations. Members of the remaining three tribes were forced to move onto the Lummi, Tulalip, or Swinomish reservations. Many Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle tribal members, accustomed to riverine lifestyles, held their ground and refused to move onto the reservations. Today many members of the Upper Skagit Tribe live on an 84-acre reservation located in central Skagit County along the Skagit River.¹ The U.S. Census shows 238 individuals living on the reservation in 2000.

In the 1700s Spanish, British, and Russian explorers and fur traders were the first nonIndians to enter the Skagit region. The first White settlers were primarily homesteaders, who arrived in the area in the mid-1850s. In 1877 Mount Vernon was founded by two men, Harrison Clothier and Edward English.² Also in the 1870s the commercial salmon and cod fishing industries began in Skagit County, primarily around Anacortes and La Connor. The associated industries of canning and packing were established shortly thereafter. Skagit County was created

in 1883 from the southern portion Whatcom County. Mount Vernon, incorporated in 1890, now serves as the county seat. Skagit County derived its name from the Indian tribe which lived along the river known by the same name, the largest watercourse in the North Cascades.

The county remained a rural area well into the twentieth century with pockets of light industry in Mount Vernon and other towns.³ Farming became increasingly popular in the area during the early 1900s; in 1940 S.A. Moffet, the second vegetable freezing company in the nation, built a freezing plant in Mount Vernon. Farming has continued to remain an important aspect of the local economy although the number of farms has declined by 12% since 1987.⁴ The Mount Vernon area has also been popular among local and traveling artists. In 1926 the historic Lincoln Theatre opened and due to the efforts of the community-based Lincoln Theatre Center Foundation, the theatre has been restored and continues to serve Mount Vernon residents as a local performing arts center.⁵ The last two decades have seen an increase in telecommunication and technology businesses in the area. The most popular event in the area is the Annual Skagit Valley Tulip Festival occurring the first two weeks of April. Today Mount Vernon, with its medical, educational, and professional services, serves as a hub for Skagit County residents.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census 13.9% of the employed civilian population 16 years of age and over was employed within local, state, or federal governments. The majority of Mount Vernon's employed civilian population 16 years of age and over (26.1%) was employed in "sales and office occupations." Slightly less (25.4%) were employed in "management, professional, and related occupations." According to the 2000 U.S. Census natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed only 7% of the population.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census 60.2% of the potential labor force was employed and there was a 7.6% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). A total of 34.8% of the population over 16 years of age were not in the labor force in 2000 as compared to the national average of 36.1% for the same year.

The 2000 U.S. Census reports that in 1999 the income of 15.9% of the population was below the poverty level. The median household income in 1999 was \$37,999 and the per capita income was \$17,041.

In 2000 there were 9686 housing units in Mount Vernon. The percentages of occupied housing units that were owner versus renter occupied were 57.3% and 42.7% respectively. Approximately 4.2% percent of the housing units were vacant, of which 8% were vacant due to seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

Governance

Mount Vernon has a Council-Mayor form of government. The Mayor of Mount Vernon is elected for a four-year term; seven members serve on the Mount Vernon City Council. Skagit County, including Mount Vernon, levies a 7.9% sales tax and a 2% hotel/motel tax.

Several taxes directly impact commercial and recreational fishermen. Commercial fishermen operating in Washington waters are subject to the Business and Occupation (B&O) tax under the "extraction" classification (0.48%); those fishing outside of Washington waters but selling fish within Washington are subject to the tax under either the "wholesaling" or "retailing" classifications (0.48% and 0.47% respectively), unless the fish are sold in interstate or foreign

commerce.⁶ Those who both catch and sell fish in Washington are eligible for a Multiple Activities Tax Credit (MATC).⁷

Washington State levies a Food, Fish, and Shellfish Tax, paid by the first commercial processor of food fish or shellfish, including: Chinook, coho, and chum salmon or eggs (5.62%); sockeye and pink salmon or eggs (3.37%); oysters (0.09%); sea urchins/cucumbers (4.92%); and shellfish and other food fish or eggs (2.25%). Tuna, mackerel, and jackfish are exempt from this tax. Additionally, there is an Enhanced Food Fish Tax, which applies to the “first possession of enhanced food fish by an owner in Washington State” and is based on the “value of the enhanced food fish at the point of landing.”⁸ The rate of the tax depends upon the species of fish or shellfish.

Vessels used for commercial fishing purposes part-time are subject to an annual Washington State Watercraft Excise Tax levied at 0.5% of the fair market value of the boat. Vessels used for commercial fishing purposes full-time are subject to personal property taxes at the base rate levied by the state. Washington levies a 10% excise tax on fishing equipment, a three percent tax on electric motors and sonar fish finders, and import duties on tackle and pleasure boats to fund sportfish restoration programs.⁹ Washington State also levies a tax of \$0.28 per gallon on motor vehicle fuel. Since most of this tax is used to maintain terrestrial roadways, Washington boaters are entitled to a refund of about \$0.17 per gallon. The difference includes state sales tax and a penny per gallon contribution to a Coastal Protection Fund. Most diesel fuel sold at docks has already had this tax removed.¹⁰

There is a National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office located approximately 60 miles south in Seattle. The nearest North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting also takes place in Seattle. There is a Regional Department of Fish and Game office located about 45 miles south in Mill Creek and a small field office located in the nearby Town of La Connor. The nearest U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is located in Seattle. Mount Vernon falls within the Bellingham U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Station’s area of responsibility which includes the San Juan Islands north to the Canadian border and south to Admiralty Inlet. The USCG Bellingham Station was established in 1947 and provides six vessels.

Facilities

Mount Vernon is accessible by ground and air. Mount Vernon is located on the Interstate 5 corridor that runs between Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia. Highway 20, approximately five miles north of Mount Vernon, runs east-west through Skagit County connecting most of the county’s major cities. There is a Greyhound bus terminal located in Mount Vernon. Skagit Transit provides public transportation between the cities of Mount Vernon, La Connor, Burlington, Sedro Woolley, Anacortes, and upriver through Concrete. Washington State Ferries run from Anacortes, 20 miles west, to the San Juan Islands and Vancouver Island, B.C. Amtrak’s Cascade Corridor Service, stopping in Mount Vernon, provides rail transport between Vancouver, B.C. and Eugene, Oregon. The Skagit Regional Airport, located five miles north in Burlington, provides for public-use but the nearest airport certified for commercial carriers is located 30 miles north in Bellingham. Additional nearby airports include Vancouver International Airport in British Columbia and SeaTac International Airport in Sea Tac, Washington.

The City of Mount Vernon hosts six public elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The city also offers several alternative schools including Montessori, Headstart,

and Christian schools. The Skagit Valley College, located in Mount Vernon, has an enrollment of over 3400.

Cascade Natural Gas serves the residents of Skagit County and electricity is supplied by Puget Sound Energy. Drinking water is provided by the Public Utility District No. 1, based in Mount Vernon. Wastewater services are provided by the city's Department of Public Works. The Mount Vernon Police Department provides public safety to city residents. The Skagit Valley Hospital is located within the city and offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient services.

The City of Mount Vernon has several community services and organizations including: the Mount Vernon City Library, a senior center, a symphony orchestra and historic theatre, and art galleries. Additionally the city hosts several yearly festivals including the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival and the Highland Games and Scottish Faire. The tourism industry in Mount Vernon is well developed with over 10 hotels.

There is a dry stack marina located approximately 10 miles west of Mount Vernon on the north end of the Swinomish Channel. The marina provides dry, protected, and secure storage for recreational boats up to 35-feet in length. Most charter companies in the area are located on the water in the nearby cities of Anacortes and La Connor; however a few charter guides offering fishing excursions on Puget Sound and the Skagit River are located in Mount Vernon. Sea Hawk Salmon Charters, offering salmon and bottomfish trips from February to late November, is one of the few saltwater charter companies in Mount Vernon. Founded in 1991, the company fishes for salmon and bottomfish in the San Juan Islands (M. Dunnigan¹¹). There are several marine supply stores located in Mount Vernon that cater to recreational fishermen such as Checkered Flag Marine and Master Marine Services Incorporated.

The Skagit County marine resource committee (MRC), a Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative, alternates monthly meetings between Anacortes and Mount Vernon. The purpose of the MRC is to bring a scientific and grassroots approach to protecting and restoring marine resources in the area. Serving on the MRC are representatives from the scientific community, local and tribal governments, and economic, recreational, and conservation interests. Two additional Mount Vernon-based organizations – the Skagit Land Trust and the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group – are active in environmental conservation in the area.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

There were zero West Coast landings made in Mount Vernon in 2000. Data shows that in the same year there were zero fish processors located in the community. In 2000 Mount Vernon residents owned 33 vessels. Community members owned 15 vessels that participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the number of vessels owned by Mount Vernon residents in 2000 that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/1), crab (8/0/0), groundfish (6/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (15/1/0), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/0), and other species (8/0/0).¹²

Three Mount Vernon residents held a total of three Federally Managed Groundfish fishery permits in 2000. In the same year recorded data indicates that the number of Mount Vernon residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (1/0/9), crab (7/0/0), groundfish (1/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (25/1/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), and shrimp (3/0/0).¹³

According to available data, 65 state and federal permits were registered to Mount Vernon residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of permits held by

community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (1/0/17), crab (10/0/0), groundfish (5/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (26/0/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), and shrimp (3/0/0).¹⁴

According to the Boldt Decision,¹⁵ the usual and accustomed fishing areas of the Upper Skagit Tribe extend from near Mount Vernon upstream to Gorge Dam. The extent to which members of the Upper Skagit Tribal are engaged in commercial fishing in the Skagit River near Mount Vernon is not discussed in this Community Profile due to the lack of available data.

Sportfishing

In 2000 there was at least one salmonid charter fishing operator located in Mount Vernon. Three years later, in 2003, at least one salmonid and one non-salmonid charter business operated out of the community. There are at least two licensed agents selling fishing permits in Mount Vernon. In Mount Vernon in 2003 there were 9004 sportfishing license transactions valuing \$160,303. In Catch Record Card Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island, and Skagit Bay) the 2000 sport salmon catch, based on catch record cards, was 2105, including 969 Chinook and 1136 coho. In 2000 there were approximately 7772 marine angler trips in the sport salmon fishery. In the same year a total of 1449 bottomfish were caught by boat-based anglers in Puget Sound within Catch Record Card Areas 8-1 and 8-2 (Ports Susan and Gardner). The recreational harvest of clams (lbs) and oysters (#) for Area 8-1 in 2000 was estimated to be 113,325 and 0 respectively; harvest occurred over an estimated 18,847 user trips.

Subsistence

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering activities are fundamental to the way of life of some coastal community members. Both tribal and nontribal individuals participate in subsistence fishing. Today, members of the Swinomish Tribe and other nontribal subsistence fishermen obtain fishery resources from waters near Mount Vernon. Subsistence fishing is not discussed in great detail in this Community Profile due to the lack of available data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 Mount Vernon residents owned 61 vessels that were involved in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year community members landed fish in the following North Pacific fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): other finfish (confidential/confidential/1), Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish (confidential/confidential/1), halibut (confidential/confidential/1), herring (198 t/\$68,630/5), and salmon (2732 t/\$2,244,300/42).

In 2000 95 Mount Vernon residents served as crewmembers in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year 60 community residents held registered state permits and 14 held registered federal permits.

A total of 84 state and federal permits were registered to individuals in Mount Vernon in 2000. In 2000 residents of Mount Vernon held three groundfish License Limitation Program permits. In the same year, Mount Vernon residents held 12 crab, 16 BSAI groundfish, 11 halibut, 18 herring, 55 salmon, and 2 shellfish Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permits. The halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota shares for people residing in the community were 368,514 and 311,640, respectively.

Sportfishing

Two hundred and three Alaska sportfishing licenses were sold to Mount Vernon community members in 2000. In the same year there was at least one North Pacific sportfishing business operating in Mount Vernon.

¹ Northern Puget Sound Ecological Characterization. No Date. Tribes, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www3.csc.noaa.gov/npsec/html/human/tribes.htm> (access date - December 2004).

² Skagit River Journal. No Date. Mount Vernon Record, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.stumpranchonline.com/skagitjournal/SkagitCtyRiv/Library/County/MVRecord18971007.html> (access date - October 2004).

³ HistoryLink. 2004. Skagit County: Thumbnail History, [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.historylink.org/WA_output.cfm?file_id=5663&CFID=3861171&CFTOKEN=8300214 (access date - October 2004).

⁴ HistoryLink. 2004. Skagit County: Thumbnail History, [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.historylink.org/WA_output.cfm?file_id=5663&CFID=3861171&CFTOKEN=8300214 (access date - October 2004).

⁵ HistoryLink. 2004. Mount Vernon's Lincoln Theatre opens in April 1926, [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.historylink.org/WA_output.cfm?file_id=5168&CFID=3861194&CFTOKEN=67610644 (access date - October 2004).

⁶ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2004. Commercial fishing, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/Industry/Fish/default.aspx> (access date - July 2004).

⁷ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2002. Information on Washington's Tax Structure: Fish Taxes, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/industry/fish/default.aspx> (access date - July 2004).

⁸ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2001. Commercial Fishing, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/Industry/Fish/default.aspx#enhanced> (access date - July 2004).

⁹ National Conference of State Legislatures. 2004. Environment, Energy, and Transportation Program: Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/esnr/FISHHUNTWILD.htm> (access date - July 2004).

¹⁰ Washington State Department of Licensing. 2003. Fuel Tax Frequently Asked Questions, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.dol.wa.gov/vs/ft-faq.htm> (access date - July 2004).

¹¹ M. Dunnigan, Captain, Sea Hawk Salmon Charters, Mount Vernon, WA. Pers. commun., 04 October 2004.

¹² 'NA' refers to data which was not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.

¹³ 'NA' refers to data which was not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.

¹⁴ 'NA' refers to data which was not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.

¹⁵ Center for Columbia River History. No date. Boldt Decision, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.ccrh.org/comm/river/legal/boldt.htm> (access date - October 2004).