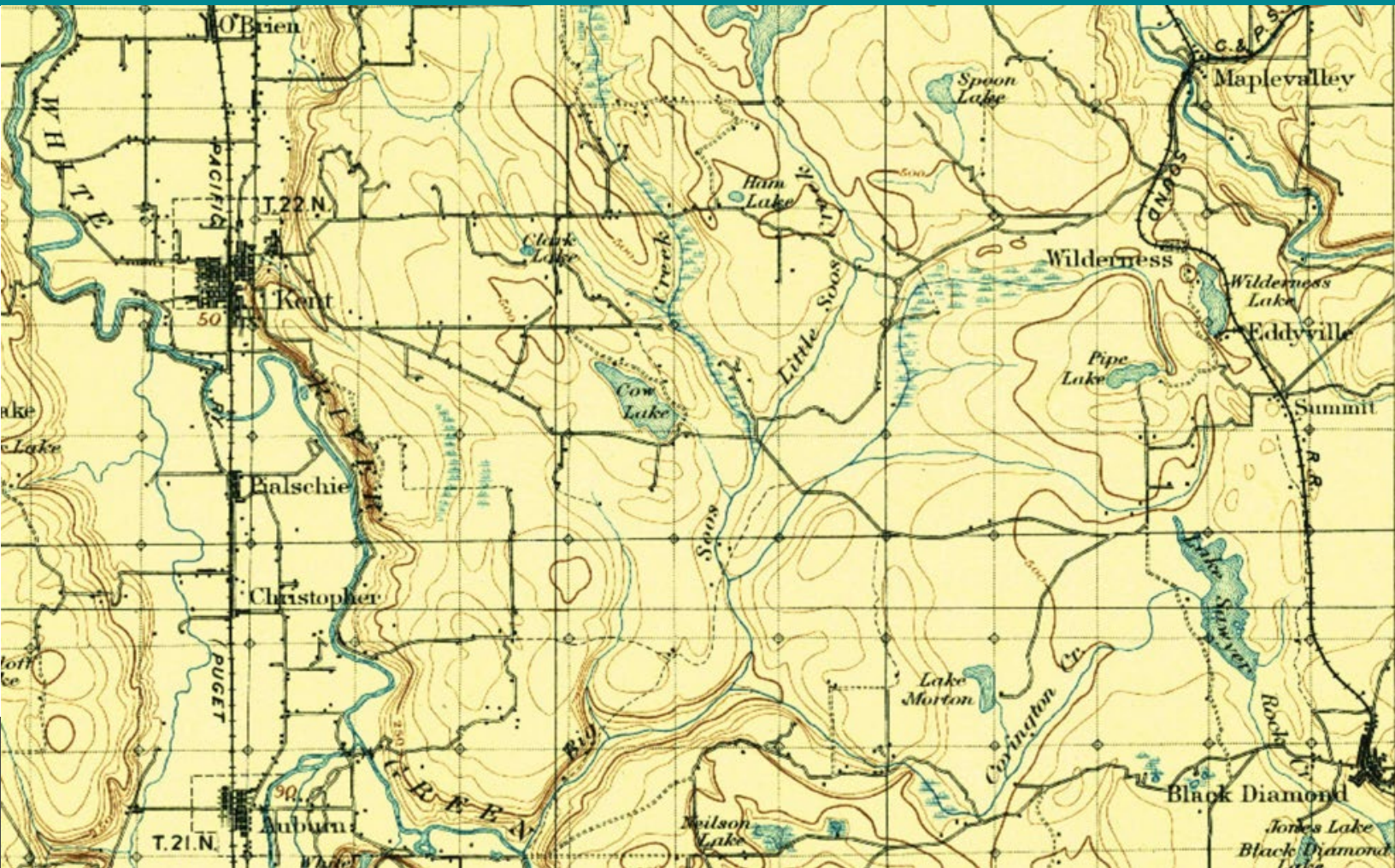


Covington Community Context Statement



Prepared for
the City of Covington &
the King County Historic Preservation Program

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2. BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

On behalf of the City of Covington and the King County Historic Preservation Program, consulting historian Sarah J. Martin completed research, fieldwork, and this report between February and April 2023. This historic context statement is funded in part by a grant from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and is intended to serve as a tool for evaluation of historic resources within the City of Covington, Washington. While the city was not incorporated until 1997, Covington has been recognized as a community since the early 20th century.

Research repositories included Washington State Archives Puget Sound Regional Branch, University of Washington Libraries and Special Collections, and King County Library System. Numerous online collections reviewed include those of the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Washington State Archives, and White River Valley Museum, as well as Seattle Public Library's *Seattle Times* and *Post-Intelligencer* historical archives, and Newspapers.com. Review of secondary-source literature yielded two particularly helpful publications on local history – Morris Skagen's *History of the Soos Creek Plateau From 1860 to 1960* (2015) and an edited collection of essays by longtime residents titled *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas: A Written Portrait of Covington's Past* (1995).

Correspondence with the City of Covington's Permit Center staff and the King County Historic Preservation Program staff yielded a map of plats and city-wide building dates that are particularly useful in revealing how and when Covington developed and offering a snapshot of the current built environment. Martin completed a windshield-level survey of Covington and the immediate surrounding areas on March 15, 2023. Fieldwork focused on observation of the natural and built landscapes to understand development patterns and to locate properties that are potentially eligible for local landmark status.

Martin wishes to thank Jennifer Meisner, King County Historic Preservation Officer, and J. Todd Scott, AIA, Preservation Architect and Planner, King County Historic Preservation Program, for their assistance and collaboration during this project. She also thanks Michael Houser, State Architectural Historian, and Maddie Levesque, Architectural Historian, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, for their review and feedback.

3. INTRODUCTION

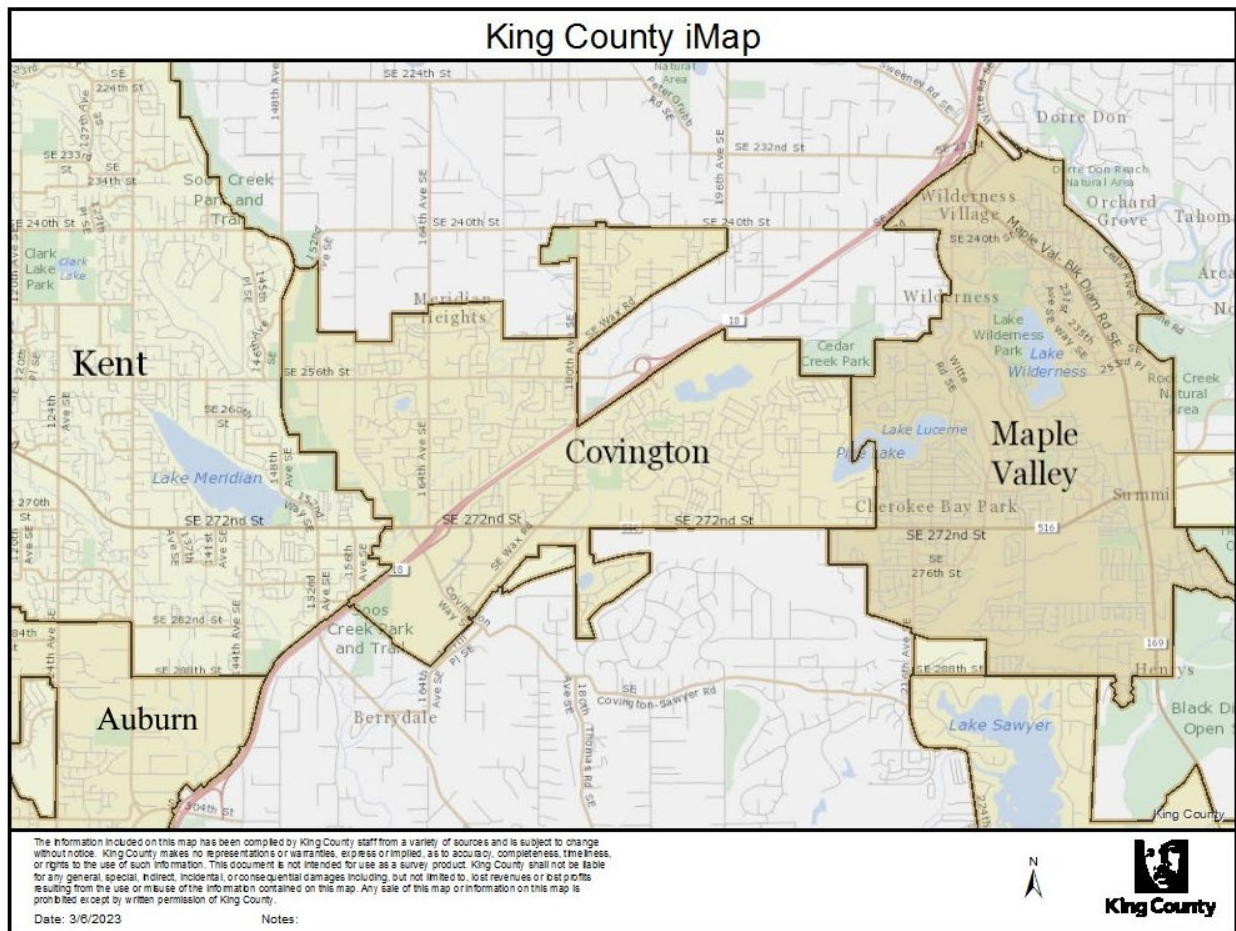


Figure 1: King County iMap (2023) showing Covington's city boundaries between Kent and Maple Valley.

The City of Covington (2020 pop. 20,777) is located in southern King County and southeast of Kent (Figure 1). Incorporated in 1997, Covington is tucked between Kent and Auburn to the west and Maple Valley to the east, with unincorporated areas north and south of the city. Covington has experienced tremendous growth since the 1960s. Today, the community setting is characterized by a suburban landscape with a patchwork of residential plats that developed since the 1960s to serve expanding business and industry in nearby cities of Kent (2020 pop. 136,628) and Auburn (2020 pop. 87,256) as well as Seattle and Tacoma beyond.

The area's natural landscape influenced early settlement patterns and subsequent development for generations. Covington is situated at the southeast part of the Soos Creek Plateau between the Cedar River Valley to the east and the Green River Valley to the west. It is near the junction of the Soos and Jenkins creeks, which flow south toward the Green River, and is part of the Green River Watershed (Figure 2). Much of the plateau is located in Township 22 North, Range 5 East, which has a hilly terrain with numerous lakes dotting the landscape. The area was settled

The Green/Duwamish River Watershed

Legend:

- Watershed Boundary
- Basin Boundary
- River
- Major Road
- Open Water

Subwatersheds:

- Duwamish Estuary Subwatershed
- Lower Green River Subwatershed
- Middle Green River Subwatershed
- Upper Green River Subwatershed

Map Details:

- Scale: 0 to 6 Miles
- North Arrow
- Date: May 2006

King County
Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Water and Land Resources Division

Produced by:
Department of Natural Resources and Parks, WLRD,
GIS, Visual Communications & Web Unit
File Name: 0605greenbase sk

Covington was a sparsely populated unincorporated lumber and farming community in the early 20th century. Perceptions of the community's geographic boundaries evolved as newcomers arrived, as roads developed, as schools were built and then consolidated, and as people and businesses came and went. For example, the collection of essays by community members published in 1995 as *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas: A Written Portrait of Covington's Past* focuses most closely on the area between 152nd Ave. SE, 176th Ave. SE, SE 256th St. (SR 516), and the Kent-Black Diamond Road SE at Berrydale, but it also highlights stories of Lake Meridian and points farther north. When viewed through a historical lens, the current city boundaries (Figure 3) are somewhat arbitrary and do not include some areas once associated with Covington. Therefore, research and windshield survey completed for this report went beyond the current city boundaries to encompass the Lake Meridian area (Kent) and the Berrydale area (unincorporated) (Figure 4).

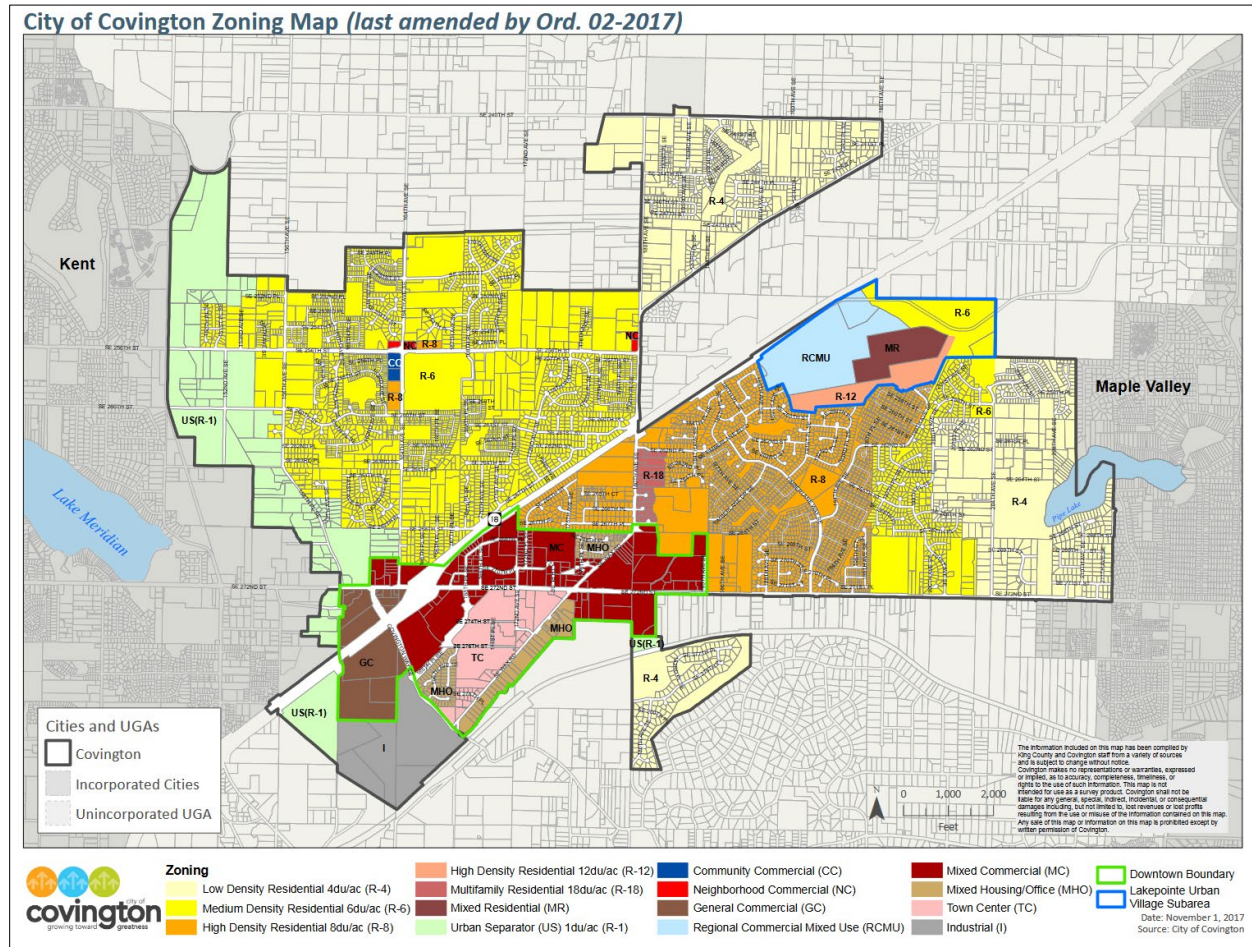


Figure 3: [City of Covington Zoning Map](#) (2017), showing current city boundaries and neighboring cities.

This report identifies four key periods in the growth and physical development of Covington and reveals how the natural landscape and early transportation networks influenced growth. First, Covington and nearby Berrydale developed as a lumber milling center, with the largest concentration of sawmills among the plateau communities from 1900 to 1920. Second, irrigation, better roads, and the influence of Kent as an agricultural market center brought a brief heyday of small- and mixed-farming operations, particularly poultry farms. Third, New Deal-era investment in public infrastructure in and around Covington, as well as school consolidation, set the stage for tremendous growth in the middle and late 20th century. Lastly, as business and industry moved to South King County and the Green River Valley following World War II, Renton and Kent became hubs of industry, spurring residential suburban development in Covington. Today, Kent is the fourth-largest municipality in the greater Seattle area and Covington is the only incorporated city among the older plateau communities.

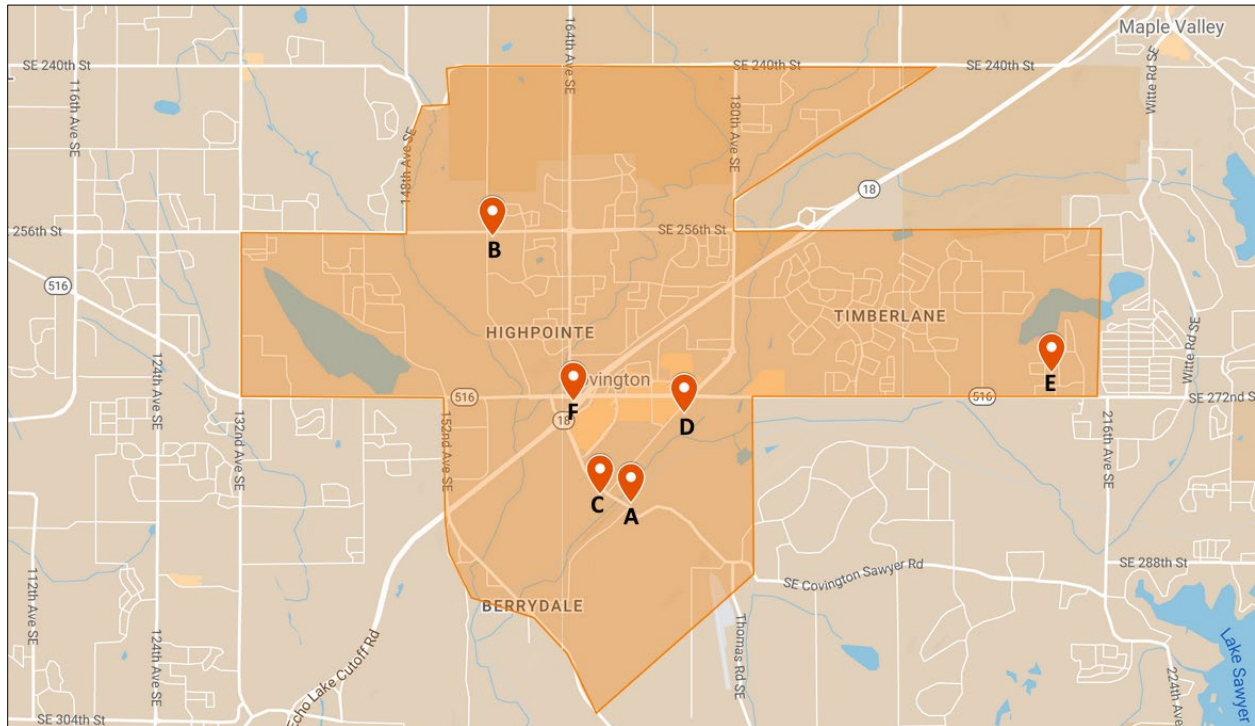


Figure 4: Map showing general survey area. The six flagged properties are identified as potential local landmarks (section 6). North is at the top.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| A. Residence, 28220 Covington Way SE | B. Residence, 15633 SE 256th St. |
| C. BPA Substation, 28401 Covington Way SE | D. Church, 17455 SE Wax Rd. |
| E. Residence, 26928 210th Ave. SE | F. Gas Station, 16405 SE 272nd St. |

¹ Morris Willard Skagen, *History of the Soos Creek Plateau From 1860 to 1960* (King County, WA: by the author, 2015), 274.

4. HISTORIC CONTEXT & COMMUNITY HISTORY

Newcomers Bring Change (mid-1800s to 1920)

The greater Green River Watershed has long been an important place to the generations of Indigenous peoples who have inhabited the Puget Sound region. The area remains the home of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, whose membership is made up of descendants of the Duwamish and Upper Puyallup people, as well as three bands that occupied the lands around the White and Green rivers in the mid-19th century, as newly arriving settlers staked claims. These bands of Lushootseed-speaking peoples were the Stkamish on the lower White, the Smulkamish on the upper White, and the Skopamish on the upper Green.² The fertile valleys and their abundant resources that had sustained generations of Indigenous peoples attracted newcomers, and by 1855 the White River Valley was “the most desirable place to settle” in the nascent King County.³

General Land Office survey maps of the 1860s provide a snapshot of the area as newcomers set down roots and began to transform the landscape. Most initial settlers, who were from other



Figure 5: General Land Office, Bureau of Land Management. [Land Survey Map](#), T21N, R5E (1867). Box indicates Indian village, arrow indicates trail to Meridian (Jenkins) Prairie.

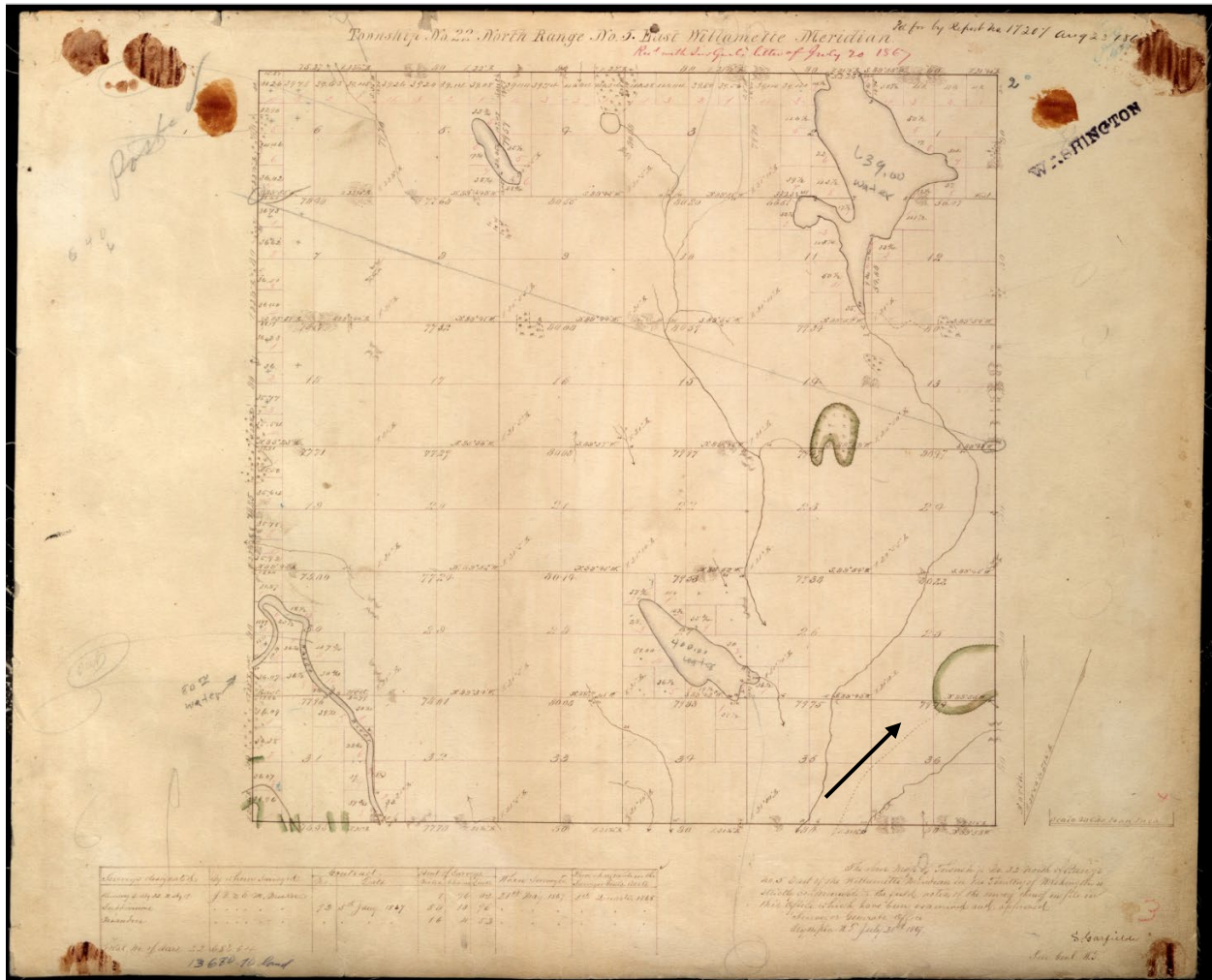


Figure 6: General Land Office, Bureau of Land Management. [Land Survey Map](#), T22N, R5E (1867). Arrow indicates trail to Meridian (Jenkins) Prairie.

parts of the United States, filed claims in the fertile lowland areas of the White River Valley (today's Green River Valley), along waterways that served as key transportation routes and that were of particular importance to Indigenous people. Although mainstream histories have traditionally downplayed or outright ignored the presence of Indigenous people in accounts of early-day King County, these survey maps reflect a more complex landscape that historian Matthew Klinger describes as "at once both white and Indian."⁴ The 1867 map of Township 21 North, Range 5 East noted an Indian village (see box in Figure 5) at the junction of the White and Green rivers at present-day Auburn. From this village extended a series of roadways and trails, including a path extending east-northeast toward Meridian Prairie, later called Jenkins Prairie, in Township 22 North, Range 5 East (see arrows in Figures 5 and 6). The surveyors estimated the Meridian Prairie to contain about 250 acres. Although the map of Township 22, where Covington later developed, noted no settlement, this and other plateau prairies were important seasonal gathering places where Indigenous people harvested camas during the spring months.⁵

Among the first newcomers to settle on the plateau, in about 1880, was George Jenkins, a logger who settled at Meridian or Jenkins Prairie. The surrounding area remained largely unsettled well into 1890s, which can be attributed to a few reasons. First, the dense and continuous timber stands made the area difficult to traverse and clear. Second, the soils on the plateau were less suitable to farming than areas in the adjacent fertile valleys.⁶ The Northern Pacific Railroad had developed through the White River Valley in the 1880s, and sawmill and railroad development opened up the valley to platting and town building. While logging and railroad camps pushed toward distant coalmines around Black Diamond and Ravensdale, it would be 1900 before the construction of the Northern Pacific's Palmer Cutoff and a railroad stop at Covington that jumpstarted growth.

The Palmer Cutoff connected Auburn with Kanaskat and played a significant role in opening up development of the greater Covington area. Not only did it lessen the distance to Seattle by more than 20 miles, it provided passenger service to Seattle as well as freight service for the burgeoning sawmill industry at Covington and the coalmines beyond.⁷ The railroad followed a northeast/southwest path through Covington, parallel to Jenkins Creek. A wood-frame passenger depot reportedly sat north of today's Covington Way SE.⁸



Figure 7: Covington Lumber Co. Camp, ca. 1900. Courtesy White River Valley Museum, PO-00040.

During the first decade of the 20th century, sawmills dotted the plateau landscape, but the largest concentration was centered at Covington near the junction of Jenkins and Soos creeks. Among the best-capitalized and diversified of the milling outfits were the Calhoun Lumber Company and the Covington Lumber Company. In 1901, Isaac Calhoun purchased the short-lived Suise Creek Lumber Company operated by Scottish immigrant Alexander Turnbull. Calhoun and his partner Joseph Krause operated their Calhoun Lumber Company mill along Soos Creek about a mile north of the Covington railroad station (near the current junction of SR 18 and SE 272nd St.), first relying on the creeks, a tramway, and horses to move milled product to the railroad for shipping. In 1905, the company laid track to the Covington station and also built a new company store. The company was clearing areas around Cow Lake (Lake Meridian) in 1909.⁹

Meanwhile, E.W. Bereiter and John Sandstrom built a mill at the junction of Soos Creek and the Northern Pacific Railroad at Berrydale. Their business incorporated as the Covington Lumber Company in 1901 and quickly grew into a bustling, diversified outfit with a shingle and lath mill, a planing mill, and dry kilns. Within just a few years it had the capacity to produce between 40,000 and 50,000 feet of lumber per day and had extended logging railroad lines to timber stands

around Swan Lake (Lake Youngs). It also maintained a company store for mill workers and families. Both Calhoun Lumber Company and Covington Lumber Company maintained logging camps closer to the timber stands within a few-miles radius of Covington (Figure 7).¹⁰

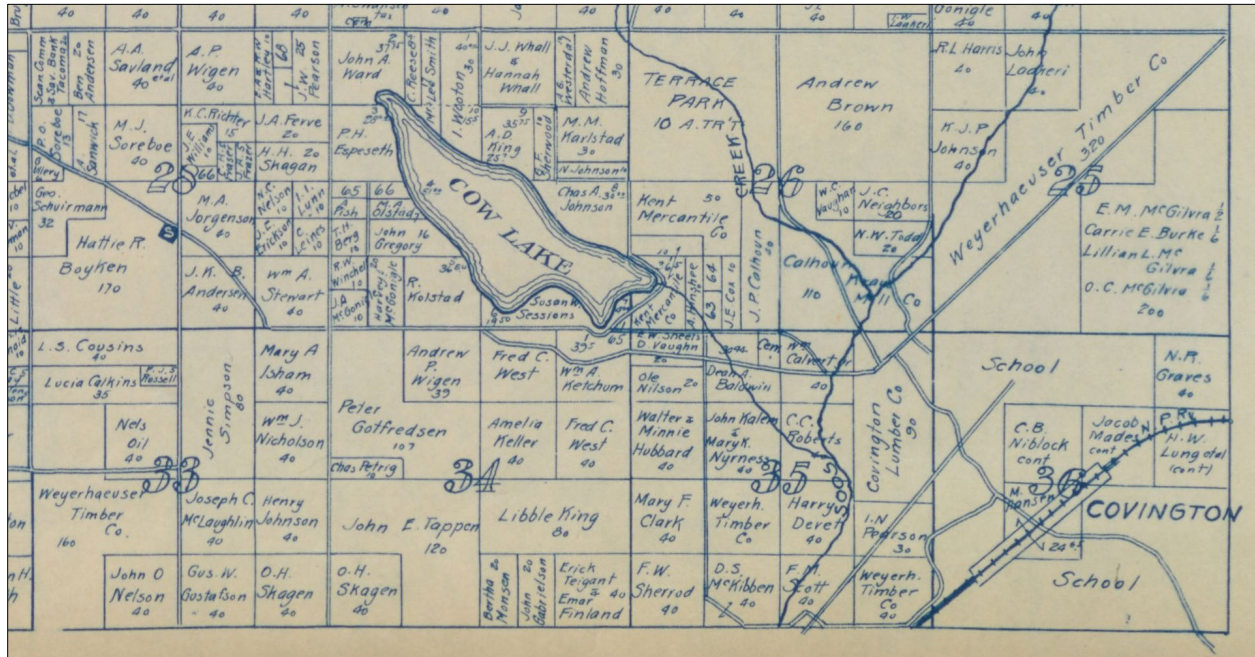


Figure 8: Partial image of [Kroll's Atlas of King County](#), Township 22N, Range 5E, 1912. North is at the top.

By the 1910s, the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, a dominant force in the forest industry of the Pacific Northwest, also owned considerable amounts of land in the Covington area (Figure 8). Small- and medium-sized lumber operations all over King County – including those in the Covington area – gradually disappeared in the 1910s and 1920s through corporate mergers, bankruptcies, or fires. The Covington Lumber Company changed hands and was known by other names including Pratt Mill, Bell Mill, and Dent Mill. It survived into the 1920s, when it was destroyed by fire never to reopen.¹¹

The 1910 federal census was the first to record Covington, with less than a few hundred residents. The precinct was made up almost entirely of residents employed at the Covington Lumber Company, including a group of 30 Japanese men, as well as two Japanese women and two small children, who lived in segregated mill housing. Fewer than 400 Japanese residents lived in the White and Green River valleys at this time, and many had been recruited to replace Chinese laborers on railroad and lumber crews and for domestic and agricultural work.¹² Roughly two-thirds of all residents living in the Covington precinct at the time were American born. In addition to the Japanese, other foreign-born residents were from Austria, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Families were among the residents, prompting the need for a teacher and schoolhouse. The census recorded just one family engaged in farming in the Covington district.¹³

The 1920 federal census recorded about 150 residents in the Covington district but with many fewer working for the mills. There were no Japanese residents living in the Covington district in 1920. Nearly three-quarters of residents recorded were U.S.-born, and most foreign-born residents were from Norway but a handful of others were from Finland, Poland, Italy, Scotland, England, and Belgium. Most heads of households worked as general and poultry farmers, as well as a few miners, laborers, and others working for the railroad.¹⁴

Unlike the farming communities in the White and Green River valleys, Covington never developed a defined and platted community center during this formative period, perhaps due to the volatility of the timber business, the transitory nature of those working in the industry, and the reliance on the company stores for goods. Mill workers often moved on to work for other milling operations or in other sectors like construction or agriculture, especially as logging declined around Covington by the 1920s. Residents who remained relied on merchants and professionals for necessities in nearby Kent, which first served as the main market town for most plateau communities.¹⁵

Good Roads Bring Agricultural Heyday (1910-1940)

With the local timber industry in decline in the late 1910s and early 1920s, new agricultural sectors gained influence in south King County, including dairy farming, produce farming, and raising poultry. With no defined city center or market, the increasing number of farmers in the plateau communities gravitated to Kent. Kent's central location in the Green River Valley and its site along the Northern Pacific Railroad made it a hub of activity for business related to agricultural processing, packing, and shipping in the early- and mid-20th century. There were three main roads that connected the greater Covington area with Kent: the North Road (SE 240th St.), the Middle Road (SE 256th St.) and the South Road (SE 272th St.), each a mile apart. The Kent-Kangley Road (SR 516) began as a wagon road in the late 19th century and cut diagonally between the Middle Road (SE 256th St.) and the South Road (SE 272nd St.) east of Meridian Lake (Figures 8, 11, and 16).

Early Covington-area settlers like George Jenkins had relied heavily on the roads and trails long used by Indigenous people. While some modern roads, such as SR 18 between Auburn and Covington, follow these same historical paths, transportation networks to and through plateau communities were limited well into the 20th century. For example, it wasn't until 1928 that a new road was built shortening the distance by six miles between Auburn and Berrydale.¹⁶ The following year, a gathering at Meridian Grange celebrated the paving of the Black Diamond Road (SE 272nd St.) to Lake Meridian.¹⁷ As roads like these improved, residents also looked to Auburn and Renton for services.

By 1915, few area farmers still owned more than 40 acres. Smaller farms were ideal for poultry farming which required much less land than other types of farming (Figures 8 and 11). Poultry farming also worked well for those who also grew produce or practiced other types of farming,

such as raising goats for dairy. Dairy farming was less robust in the Covington area beyond what operated around Berrydale and areas north of Covington.¹⁸ For a period beginning in the 1920s, a cheese factory reportedly operated at Berrydale.¹⁹



Figure 9: Kent Hatchery (Washington Cooperative Chicken Association), ca. 1930. Courtesy White River Valley Museum, PO-01105.

Poultry farming was much more prevalent, and by 1915, farmers were supplying local and regional markets with eggs. Egg farming had long been a cottage industry of mostly family operations with small flocks that provided eggs to area loggers, railroaders, and miners.²⁰ This began to change as the industry organized around 1917 with such groups as the Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association, created to standardize production and pooling resources among farmers to market, ship, and sell product to distant markets.²¹ August Wax operated the Wax Poultry Farm and Hatchery, a sizeable operation that consisted of several buildings including a two-story storage

barn, a big feed house, and a stone-walled hatchery. It was located on the east side of Wax Road at today's SE 272nd St. Wax's daughter Betsy Wax-Sestrap recalled that "eggs were cleaned and graded, cased and hauled to Seattle where brokers sold them," and that he sometimes shipped to distant markets when he grew displeased with local brokers.²² At its peak, the operation had

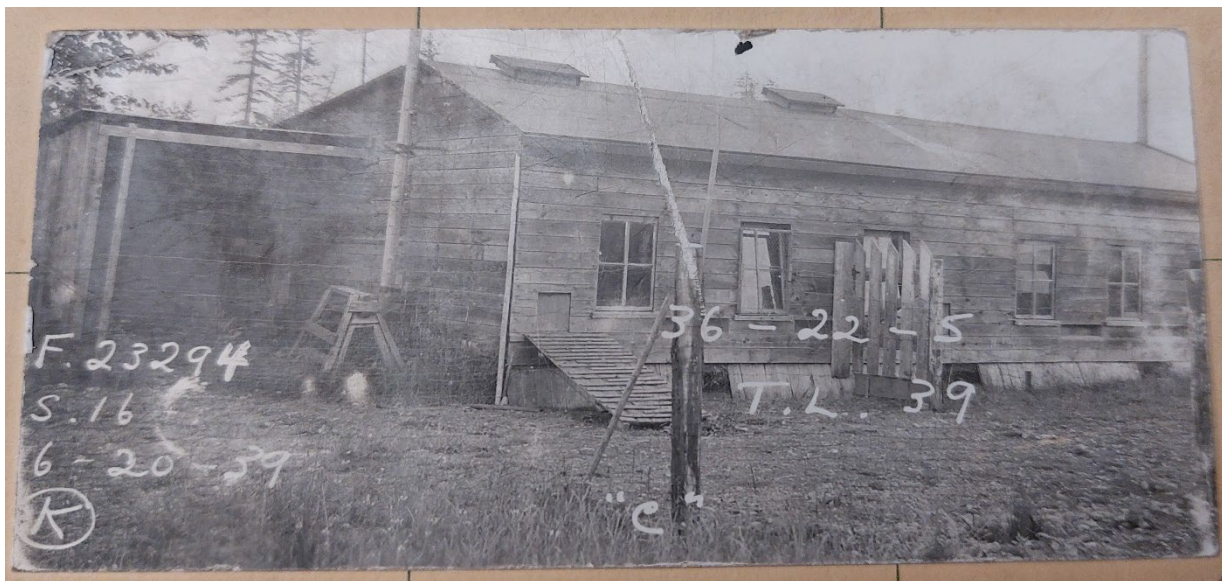


Figure 10: Large chicken house on a Covington-area farm, 1939. Courtesy King County Assessor Property Record Card file for Township 22N, Range 5E.

40,000 laying hens and included a hatchery for selling chicks, some certified White Leghorns, to other farmers.²³ The Kent Hatchery (Figure 9) opened in 1927 to provide area farmers high quality chicks and further illustrates the size and scale of the local poultry industry.

Seeing an opportunity to expand farming in the Covington area, investors formed the Western Washington Land and Irrigation Company with an eye toward making the gravelly plateau soils into productive farmland. In the early 1920s, the company installed an irrigation system with canals and flumes that carried water from Jenkins Creek to approximately 1,250 acres of area farms. Boosters promoted the system as enabling farming diversification and providing better control of moisture for crops during dry periods.²⁴ One longtime resident, LaVelle Wenham-Almand, recalled the system still in use into the 1930s.²⁵ Irrigation likely aided those who grew produce like berries and vegetables. Around this time, truck or garden farming gained favor as a way for small-scale farmers to truck their fruits and vegetables directly to local markets for sale. Seattle's Pike Place Market opened in 1907 to provide a place for area farmers to sell products directly to consumers and became a destination for generations of King County farmers, particularly during the truck farming heyday of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ Many area farmers also sold produce to the Libby, McNeill & Libby cannery in Kent, which operated for decades and employed hundreds of seasonal workers at a time including women.

Small-scale and independent farmers formed cooperative organizations and granges, such as the Meridian Grange, in order to keep control of the handling, processing, and distribution of their products, as well as to pool resources for marketing and to better navigate changing industry standards and technology.²⁷ Covington-area farmers organized Meridian Grange Number 265 in 1908 out of frustration at how local merchants treated farmers. In 1913, Meridian Grange leased a parcel of land from the railroad near Covington where it operated a cooperative store. The Grangers' Warehouse Company proved quite successful, offering "virtually everything that a farmer and his wife would want to buy," and even provided short-term loans to area farmers. By 1920, the business had annual sales of \$300,000. The warehouse moved to Kent and used its Covington building for a feed mill.²⁸ The Meridian Grange continued to meet and host community celebrations at its hall at the intersection of 132nd Ave. SE and Kent Kangley Road until about 1975 when its new hall opened closer to Covington at 15422 SE 272nd St.

Similar to 1920, the 1930 federal census for Covington remained dominated by farmers, although it appears there was a fair amount of part-time farming that was paired with other work to make ends meet. In addition to general and poultry farms, there was truck or garden farming and one farmer even raised foxes, presumably for their furs.²⁹ More broadly, however, there were fewer plateau residents listing farming as their occupation in 1930, a trend that continued as non-farm jobs were increasingly available in the nearby towns.³⁰

New Deal Investment (1930-1945)

The collapse of the American economy in 1929 and the failure of thousands of banks and businesses upended the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans. Washington State

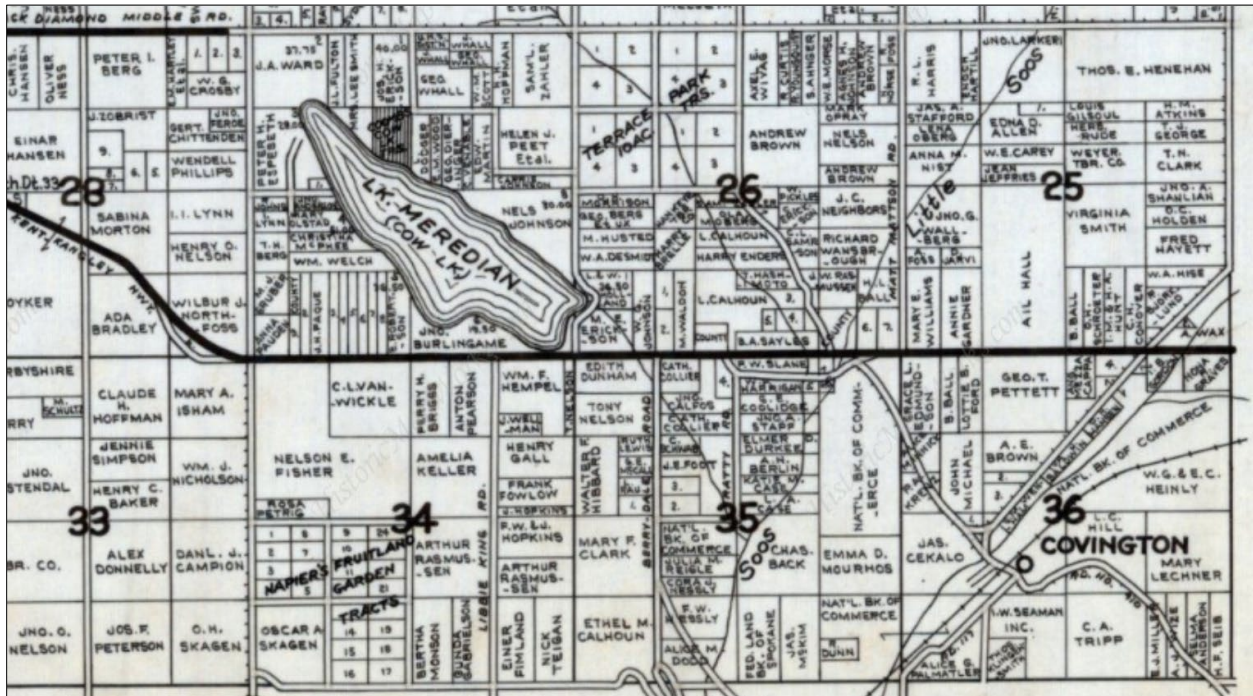


Figure 11: Partial image of [Metzger's Atlas of King County](#), Township 22N, Range 5E, 1936. North is at the top.

unemployment numbers soared to 25 percent by 1932 and approached 30 percent by the end of 1933.³¹ When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office as president in 1933, he announced an ambitious New Deal to provide employment relief to the unemployed who went to work constructing schools, parks, bridges, roads, waterworks, and other public projects.

A series of state and federal agencies administered funds allocated for public works in Washington State, including the State Emergency Relief Commission in 1933; the Civil Works Administration from 1933-34; the Washington and Federal Emergency Relief Administrations from 1934-1935; and the Works Progress Administration (renamed Works Projects Administration under the Reorganization Act of 1939) from 1935 through 1943.³² Roosevelt's New Deal programs left a lasting impact on the greater Covington area through the construction of new schools and recreational facilities as well as the Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) Covington Substation.

WPA Invests in Area Schools

By about 1915, nine grade schools served children living in the greater Soos Creek Plateau vicinity. They were Brace, Crosson, Covington, Ham, Hazelwood, Panther Lake, Spring Glen, Swan Lake, and Tanner schools. The first school at Covington – a small, one-room building “just wide enough to accommodate four rows of desks” – served children in the families of Covington Lumber Company workers.³³ A bigger, two-room school replaced it in 1912 and was located near the mill at Berrydale.³⁴ The Ham, Tanner, Brace, and Covington districts joined together to build

the Meridian High School in 1914. (It was located at the southeast corner of SE 256th St. and 140th Ave. SE.)

Many local and regional factors contributed to the push to consolidate rural schools. In the Covington area, the dwindling and eventual closure of area sawmills in the 1920s as well as the improving transportation network led to local demographic changes that impacted area schools. Busing, for example, gained momentum more broadly, and “by 1933, 65,700 students were being bused [to school] statewide.”³⁵ Regional and national education advocates pushed for standardized curriculum and facilities, a movement that gained traction when New Deal programs sought public projects to support. State and federal officials secured Works Progress Administration (WPA) funding to improve and add to area schools, including a new consolidated school building to serve the former Brace, Covington, Ham, Tanner, and Union districts. The Meridian Consolidated School project was announced in late 1937:

Seventy-six men will be given employment for seven months in construction of the \$80,211 Meridian School near Kent ... All of the men will be taken from the relief rolls ... The project calls for the erection of a modern one-story tile and concrete building and a separate garage for school buses. Of the total cost, the district is providing \$31,620 for materials. This is the sixth school built in the state of Washington with WPA funds, while more than 150 have been modernized and reconditioned.³⁶

It was built at the southwest corner of SE 256th St. and 140th Ave. SE, but it took much longer to compete than planned. Following an eight-month pause to find additional funding, it opened in 1940, “at a cost of \$47,940 to the district and \$102,872 to the W.P.A.”³⁷ The Meridian and Kent school districts merged in 1948. The school still operates today as the Meridian Elementary School within the Kent School District.

In addition to the new school, the WPA funded recreational facility improvements at Meridian High School. Work included “clearing of six acres of grounds, construction of a tennis court, running track, bleachers, baseball backstop and fences, at a cost of \$20,500.”³⁸ Rapid change in the Green River Valley following World War II brought an influx of new residents to Kent and Covington that would continue to change the public education landscape in and around Covington. For example, the new Kent-Meridian High School opened in 1951 (10020 SE 256th St., extant) and Covington Elementary School opened in 1961 (17070 SE Wax Rd., demolished).

BPA Power Substation at Covington

Formed in 1937, the purpose of the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) was to distribute and market electricity generated from federally-owned and operated hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River. This included delivering power to rural or underserved areas and enabling the expansion of industrial development in the Pacific Northwest. To do this, the agency designed a Master Grid with substations that “became the backbone of the Northwest Power Pool,” and “merged public and private generation into a cooperative system to meet the area’s electric needs.”³⁹



Figure 12: Covington Switchyard, 1959. Courtesy BPA, Image E50612, NRHP Nomination.

In 1940, the BPA acquired former mill property at Covington between the Soos and Jenkins creeks, as well as condemned parcels, on which to build a substation. It was constructed from 1940-42 during the initial BPA development period and then continued to expand through the mid-1970s (Figure 12). *The Seattle Times* announced, on March 7, 1942, that “power flows at Covington station.”⁴⁰ Following World War II, both domestic and industrial demand for electricity in the region grew significantly.⁴¹ The station was a key component in the development of the region.

King County population statistics of the mid-20th century illustrate a considerable shift among urban and rural residents, a trend that began in the 1930s and continued through the post-war decades. In the 1930s, the population of Seattle increased a mere 0.7 percent, while the census districts outside the city gained 53.1 percent, what geographer Calvin Schmid called “centrifugal movement of people to the suburbs.”⁴² Many factors contributed to the shifts including widespread economic fallout of the Great Depression as well as unprecedented government investment in public infrastructure that would set the stage for significant suburban growth throughout King County.

Suburbanization & Lead-up to Incorporation (1950-1995)

Small cities and towns throughout King County – including those in the Green River Valley and on the Soos Creek Plateau – had emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as economic centers tied to resource extraction, such as logging, mining, and agriculture. Following World War II, these places were poised for considerable change. Major infrastructure projects continued in the mid-1950s and early 1960s that would sustain and attract development in and around Renton, Kent, and Auburn for years to come. The Valley Freeway (WA-167) was under construction by 1957 and would ultimately connect Kent with Auburn to the south and Renton to the north via a four-lane highway. The State of Washington designated and improved SR 18 in the early 1960s, connecting Tacoma with Snoqualmie Pass on a route through Covington. Construction of Interstates 5 and 405 was also underway during this period, and they would provide important regional connections for valley communities. The completion of the Howard Hanson Dam in 1962 brought relief to valley residents, farmers, and business owners alike, who had long been plagued by flooding. These transportation improvements and flood control measures further enticed industry to the area, most notably The Boeing Company’s space center at Kent.⁴³

Covington's proximity to Kent, in particular, led to suburbanization of the area's once-rural landscape. The *King County Mid-Century Modern Residential MPD* describes what was happening as follows:

As more infrastructure was installed and early development took hold, property taxes on adjacent farmlands increased. Farmers, typically the smaller farmholders first, sold their land at a greater profit than could be realized by continued farming, and businesses in the farm support industries such as processing plants and feed stores began to decline. As local agricultural business closed, remaining farmers were required to travel greater distances to access processing or supply needs. Pressure from developers often led to revisions in the county comprehensive plan to allow higher density in areas targeted for suburban development. Incorporated communities such as Kent and Auburn annexed swaths of adjacent agricultural lands to accommodate their own growth and build their tax base. After annexation, city governments were quick to change zoning designations to allow more intense development.⁴⁴

While Kent and Auburn annexed surrounding areas, the plateau communities remained unincorporated. Change happening in these nearby cities eventually reverberated toward Covington by the early 1960s when, as one local resident put it, the area was "discovered by the developers," transforming Covington "from a rural outpost to a bedroom community for regional industry."⁴⁵ **Table 1** is a list of the earliest residential plats filed that are within today's Covington city limits, illustrating the intensity and domination of single-family residential development.⁴⁶

Table 1: Plats and Dates Filed, Located in City of Covington, To 1980 See Figure 13				
Date	Plat Name		Date	Plat Name
1961	Aqua Vista Estates		1970	Crystal View Estates Div. 3
1962	Fisher's Addition		1970	Timberlane Estates Div. 5
1963	Suncrest Park Addition		1970	Meridian Trace
1967	Burwood		1975	Fir Manor
1967	Burwood Park		1976	Fir Manor 2
1967	Squires Estates		1976	Covington Firs
1967	Suncrest Park Addition No. 2		1976	Hart's Addition
1968	Lillian's First Addition		1977	Fir Manor 3
1968	Suncrest Park Addition No. 3		1977	Meridian Court
1968	Squires Estates Div. 2		1977	Milosevich Addition
1968	Squires Estates Div. 3		1978	Shadow Glen
1968	Timberlane Estates Div. 1		1979	Greenwood Estates Div. No. 1
1969	Covington Homes		1979	June Estates
1969	Crystal View Estates Div. 1		1979	Kameloch
1969	Crystal View Estates Div. 2		1980	Victoria Glen
1969	Timberlane Estates Div. 2			
Sources: City of Covington (Figures 3 and 13); King County Parcel Data and Plat Maps.				

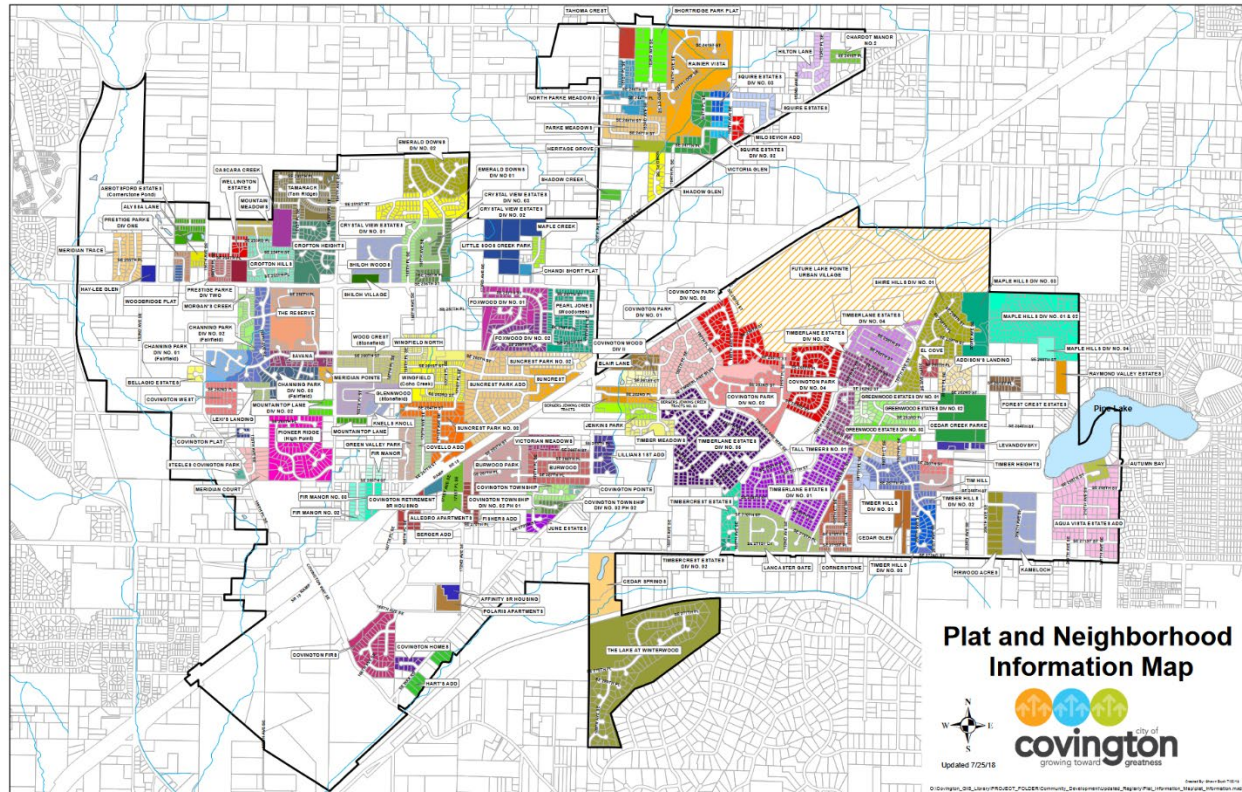


Figure 13: City of Covington Residential Plats (2018), showing current city boundaries and neighboring city boundaries. North is at the top.

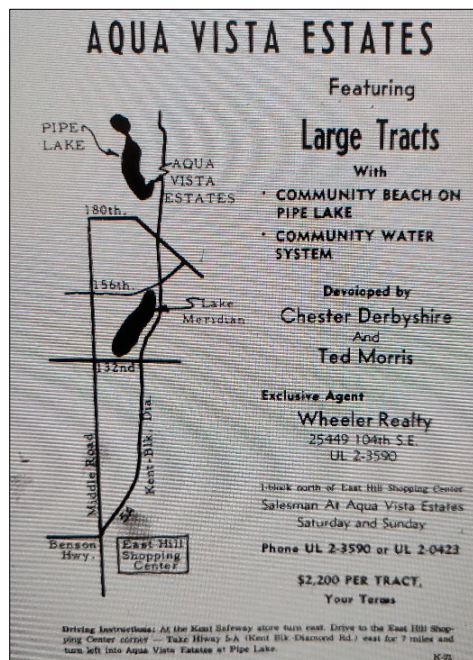


Figure 14: Kent News Journal, July 12, 1961: 12.

Like neighborhoods of this era throughout King County, these residential developments favored curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs accessed via arterials and secondary roadways. Large lots, privacy, access to lakes, a slower pace, and proximity to Kent, Renton, and Auburn were attributes advertised to sell new homes in these neighborhoods. Plat maps filed with King County suggest that in several cases property owners, perhaps some being second- or third-generation landholders, joined together in groups to plat and subdivide the land. In the case of Aqua Vista Estates, the oldest extant plat located within the current Covington incorporated boundaries, more than 30 property owners filed a plat with 107 residential lots of varying sizes of about one-third acre each. It was developed by Chester Derbyshire and Ted Morris. In 1961, Wheeler Realty advertised the new Aqua Vista Estates as having “large tracts” with a “community beach on Pipe Lake,”⁴⁷ (Figure 14). Suncrest Park is another early neighborhood but with slightly smaller lots. It was platted in three phases totaling 230 lots and was developed by Statewide Development Company, led by

Victor Meyers, Jr., and his father then-Washington Secretary of State Victor Meyers, Sr. They pitched the development as “secluded” but “minutes to Auburn and Kent” and conveniently located “on the Auburn-Issaquah Freeway just east of Kent.”⁴⁸

Table 2. Approx. Construction Date of Extant Covington Residences		
Decade	No. of Houses Built	% of Total Extant
1900-1909	8	0.12%
1910-1919	7	0.11%
1920-1929	12	0.19%
1930-1939	6	0.09%
1940-1949	17	0.26%
1950-1959	44	0.68%
1960-1969	1237	19.10%
1970-1979	957	14.78%
1980-1989	920	14.21%
1990-1999	1067	16.48%
2000-2009	1319	20.37%
2010-2019	572	8.83%
2020-2022	310	4.79%
Total	6476	100%
<i>Source: King County Parcel Data, March 2023</i>		

Property data on Covington’s extant residential buildings reveal patterns in construction dates that mirror the plat filing activity and reinforce how home construction dominated building activity during this period. **Table 2** shows that 98.55 percent of all extant residential buildings in Covington have been constructed since 1960, and that nearly 20 percent were built in the 1960s. Of those, two-thirds were constructed in 1968 and 1969.

While single-family housing clearly dominated development in Covington during this period, the community remained unincorporated and without a

defined city center. Other types of development arose apparently out of demand and included new public schools, a supermarket, and gas stations. The Covington Elementary School opened in 1961 along Wax Road and Cedar Valley Elementary opened in 1971 in the new Timberlane neighborhood, both as part of the Kent-Meridian district. In 1961, Johnny’s Food Center, a regional grocery business with stores in Renton, Kent, Auburn, Des Moines, and Midway, opened Covington’s first modern supermarket at 17239 SE 272nd St. (Figure 15). It remained in business until merging with QFC in 1994.⁴⁹ Modern gas stations replaced older filling stations, especially at key transportation junctions, like the one built in 1970 at 16405 SE 272nd St. Although just a representative sample, these non-residential properties were an important part of the burgeoning suburban landscape that they helped make possible.

Amidst all this building activity was the expected talk of development controls. As early as 1964, a group of citizens organized seeking development controls for the broader unincorporated Soos Creek Plateau. In a unanimous vote in 1979, the King County Council downzoned undeveloped land from one home an acre to one home for each five acres. The action was intended to ease strain on existing public services such as schools, fire and police protection, sewer and water service, and parks.⁵⁰ However, even among the community committee and long-time residents, there was strong opposition to the five-acre control. One community member in favor of controlling growth, questioned the five-acre minimum, claiming, “Many of the older folks have

been in the habit of selling off an acre here, an acre there to pay the bills or buy a new car. Their land was their insurance...[and] now the county is coming along and telling them they've scrimped and gotten by all these years just so they can't sell except in five-acre chunks?"⁵¹



Figure 15: Johnny's Food Center at 17239 SE 272nd St, 1971. Courtesy King County Assessor Property Record Card file for Township 22N, Range 5E.

Attempts at controlling residential development sure didn't stop it. Nearly 15 percent of Covington's extant residences were built in the 1980s, as was the \$11 million Covington Square Shopping Center, a commercial center anchored by a Super Safeway on a 14-acre site at the southwest corner of SE 172nd Ave. and Kent Kangley Road. Safeway's general manager, Pete Peterson, saw plenty of residential growth opportunity from his vantage. "The plateau, he said, 'is one of the last wide-open areas in King County.'" ⁵² Indeed, just five years later, in 1990, the Soos Creek planning area led all others in residential growth, with 1,537 homes and apartments authorized. ⁵³

After months of debate, the King County Council approved an updated Soos Creek Plan in December 1991. Among the highlights, it rejected the earlier pattern of five-acre lots in rural areas, emphasized preserving natural areas and wildlife, and encouraged Covington-area residents to consider incorporating the city. ⁵⁴ Within a short period, plans for a \$30 million Covington Medical Park to open in 1993 again brought up the same disputes and talk of incorporation among so-called "slow-growthers." It even prompted one county official to ask, "Is there a place called Covington?" Difficulty in determining exactly where Covington is was a key reason incorporation took so long. ⁵⁵

All of this suburbanization resulted in a dramatic loss of agricultural lands, a pattern seen county wide. The *King County Mid-Century Modern Residential MPD* offers these broader statistics:

Between 1945 and 1978, acreage in agricultural use fell from 165,635 acres to 53,116 acres, while the number of farms dropped by roughly 70% during the same period...The Green River, Sammamish, North Creek and Snoqualmie valleys were all transformed by suburban expansion on former agricultural land in the years between 1950 and 1970.⁵⁶

Indeed, Johnny's Food Center was built on a former strawberry farm owned by the Hilton family, the Covington Square Shopping Center was built on a former goat farm owned by the Huddleston family, and the 1990s-era Covington Medical Park is built on the former Wax chicken farm.⁵⁷

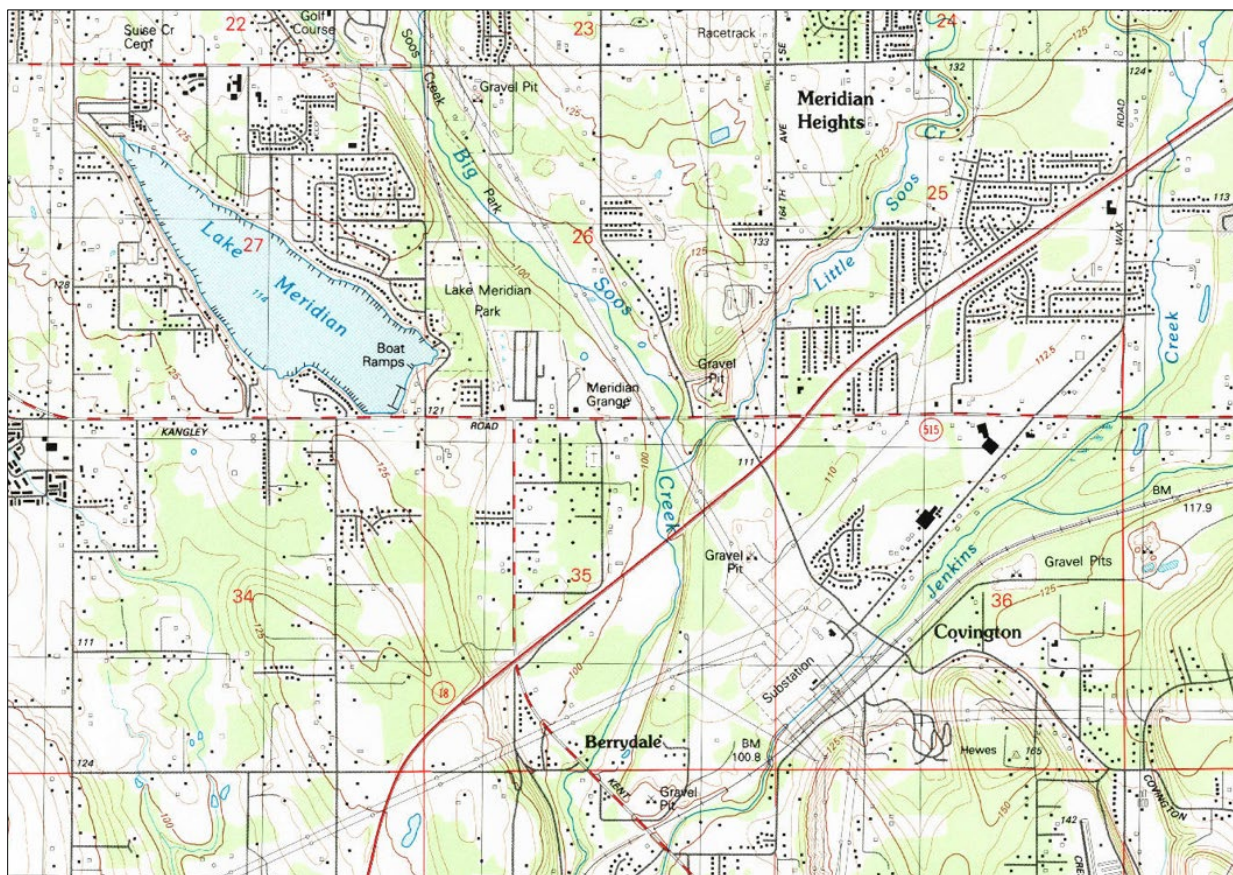


Figure 16: USGS Map, partial image of Auburn-area map, 1983. North is at the top.

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¹⁸ Skagen, 83.

¹⁹ Levack, Cullman, and Nelson, eds., *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas*, ix, 155.

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²³ Ibid., 66; [Classified ads], *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 29, 1936: 30.

²⁴ "Great Value of Irrigation Being Discussed," *The Seattle Times*, July 23, 1922: 11.

²⁵ LaVelle Wenham-Almand, "Growing Up in Covington," in *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas*, 88.

²⁶ Lentz, 46-47.

²⁷ Sharon Boswell, "King County Historic Settlement Context, 1850-1920," (King County Historic Preservation Program, 2017), 94. Accessed Feb. 13, 2023. https://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/services/home-property/historic-preservation/documents/resources/king_county_historic_context_vol_1.ashx?la=en

²⁸ Clarence B. Bagley, *History of King County, Washington*, Vol. I, (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1929), 740.

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³¹ Paul Dorpat and Genevieve McCoy, *Building Washington: A History of Washington State Public Works* (Seattle: Tartu Publications, 1998), 11.

³² Jessie Kindig, "The Great Depression in Washington State – Public Works in Washington State," [website] (Seattle: University of Washington, Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, 2009). Accessed March 20, 2023. https://depts.washington.edu/depress/wa_new_deal.shtml

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³⁷ "New School To Be Dedicated," *Seattle Times*, Oct. 20, 1940: 9.

³⁸ "Work to Start at Auditorium," *Seattle Times*, Jan. 14, 1938: 21.

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⁴² Calvin F. Schmid, *Social Trends in Seattle*, (Seattle: University of Washington, 1944), 75; quoted in BOLA Architecture + Planning, *Mid-Century King County: A Context Statement on Post-War Residential Development*, (2017), 3. Accessed Feb. 13, 2023. https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Mid-CenturyKingCounty_ResidentialContextStatement_2017.pdf

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⁴⁴ King County Mid-Century Modern Residential MPD, sec. E, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Virginia Levack, "Johnny Sommers," in *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas*, 23.

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⁴⁸ "\$1 Million Potential: Victor Meyers Embarks on Another Realty Development," *Seattle Times*, Oct., 16, 1963: 15; [Ad], *Seattle Times*, Feb. 12, 1967: 58.

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5. COVINGTON TIMELINE

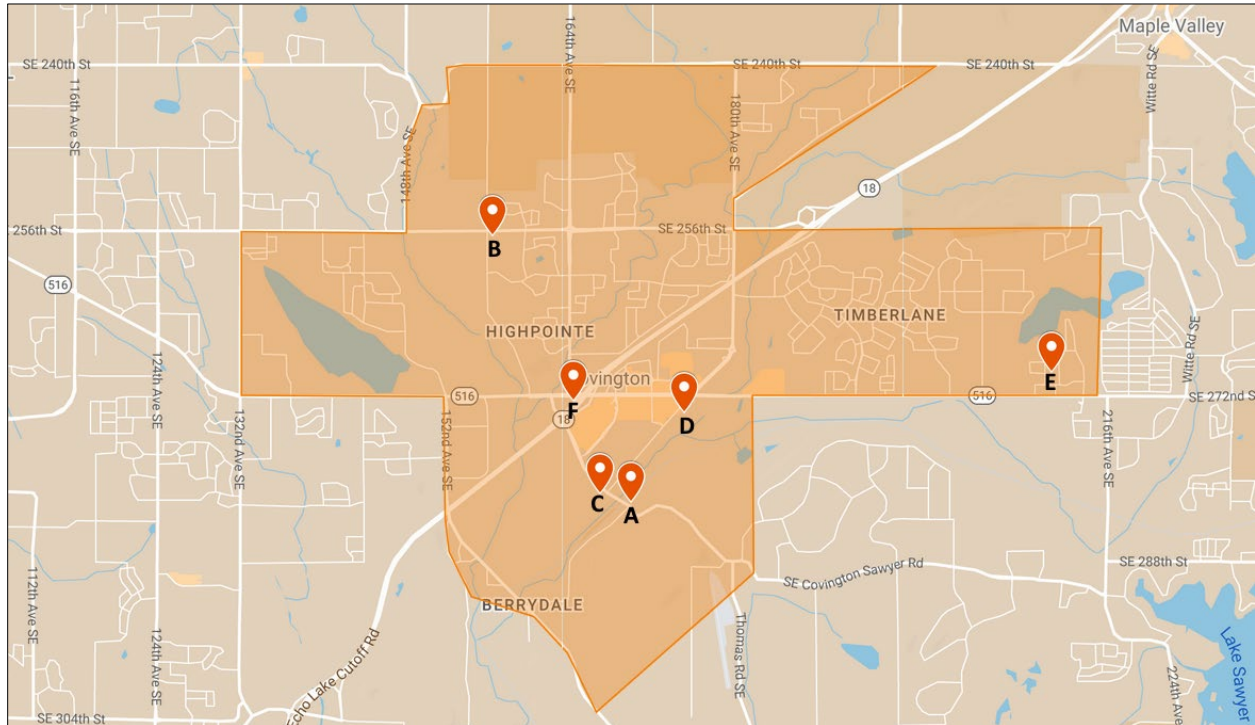
1900	Completion of Northern Pacific Railroad's Palmer Cutoff
1901	Calhoun Lumber Company formed Covington Lumber Company formed
1908	Meridian Grange organized
1912	Covington School built (at Berrydale)
1913	Grange Co-op organized
1914	Meridian High School built (25620 140th Ave. SE; demolished)
1920s	Covington Lumber Company (Dent Mill) burned, closed
1922-24	Irrigation ditches built
1937	(November) Work began on new Meridian Consolidated School ⁵⁸
1940	(October) Meridian Consolidated School completed and dedicated ⁵⁹ Property acquired, work began on BPA Covington Substation
1942	(March) Power flows at Covington Substation ⁶⁰
1957	Covington Community Church built (17455 SE Wax Rd., extant)
1961	Covington Elementary School built (17070 SE Wax Rd., demolished) Aqua Vista Estates plat filed (oldest plat within current City limits) Johnny's Food Center opened its Covington store
1976	1912 Covington school building burned
1979	Soos Creek Plan approved by King County Council
1986	Covington Square built
1991	Updated Soos Creek Plan approved by King County Council
1993	Covington Medical Park built
1997	City of Covington incorporates

⁵⁸ "Work on School To Employ 76," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 17, 1937: 19.

⁵⁹ "New School To Be Dedicated," *Seattle Times*, Oct. 20, 1940: 9.

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6. HISTORIC RESOURCES FOR POTENTIAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION



Map showing general survey area. The six flagged properties are identified as potential local landmarks. North is at the top.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| A. Residence, 28220 Covington Way SE | B. Residence, 15633 SE 256th St. |
| C. BPA Substation, 28401 Covington Way SE | D. Church, 17455 SE Wax Rd. |
| E. Residence, 26928 210th Ave. SE | F. Gas Station, 16405 SE 272nd St. |

The resources discussed in this section reflect the history and development of Covington over the course of the 20th century and are potentially eligible for City of Covington or King County Landmark designation. Designation criteria for both programs are as follows:

An historic resource may be designated if it is more than 40 years old or, in the case of a landmark district, contains resources that are more than 40 years old, and possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:



- A1 Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, state or national history; and/or
- A2 Is associated with the lives of persons significant in local, state or national history; or
- A3 Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style or method of design or construction, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

- A4 Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history; or
- A5 Is an outstanding work of a designer or builder who has made a substantial contribution to the art.

There are additional special considerations regarding religious properties, relocated buildings and structures, birthplaces and graves, cemeteries, reconstructed resources, commemorative resources, and resources that have achieved significance within the past 40 years.

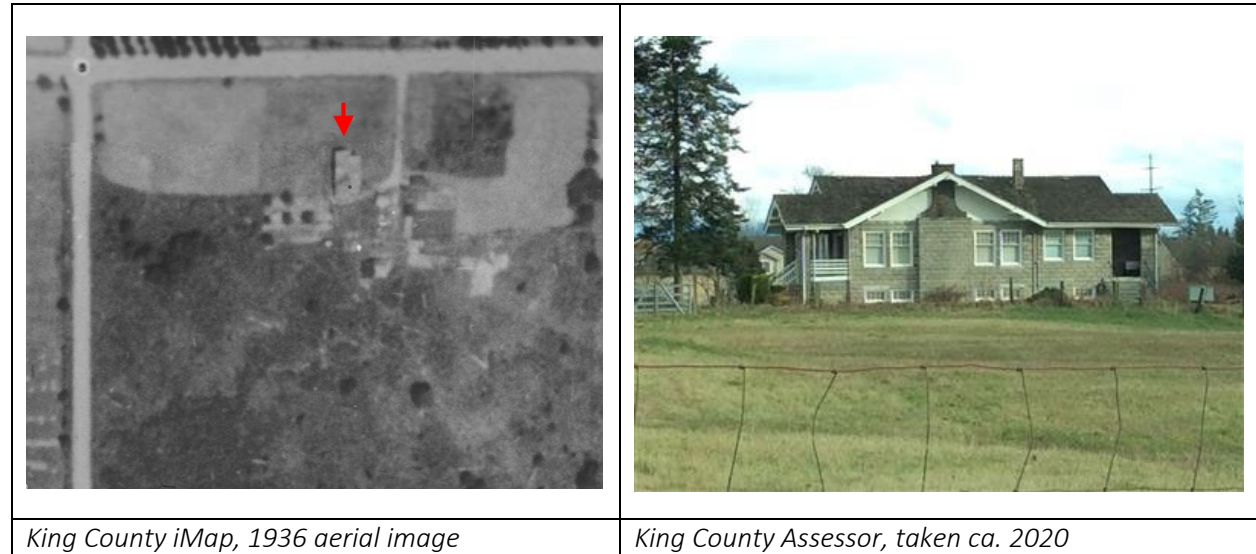
A. Residence and Outbuildings (ca. 1900) – 28220 Covington Way SE, King County

This single-family residence is located at an important early-day transportation junction and along the old Northern Pacific Railroad line. According to surveyor Fred High, it was probably built by the railroad and served as a section foreman's residence. It was intended as employee housing for the person responsible for inspecting and maintaining several miles of track. It appears quite intact, and although this property is located just outside the present-day incorporated city limits, it is clearly associated with the early development of Covington and is one of the few extant properties from the early 20th century. (WISAARD Property ID 717108)

	
<i>King County Assessor, taken 1939</i>	<i>King County Assessor, taken ca. 2020</i>

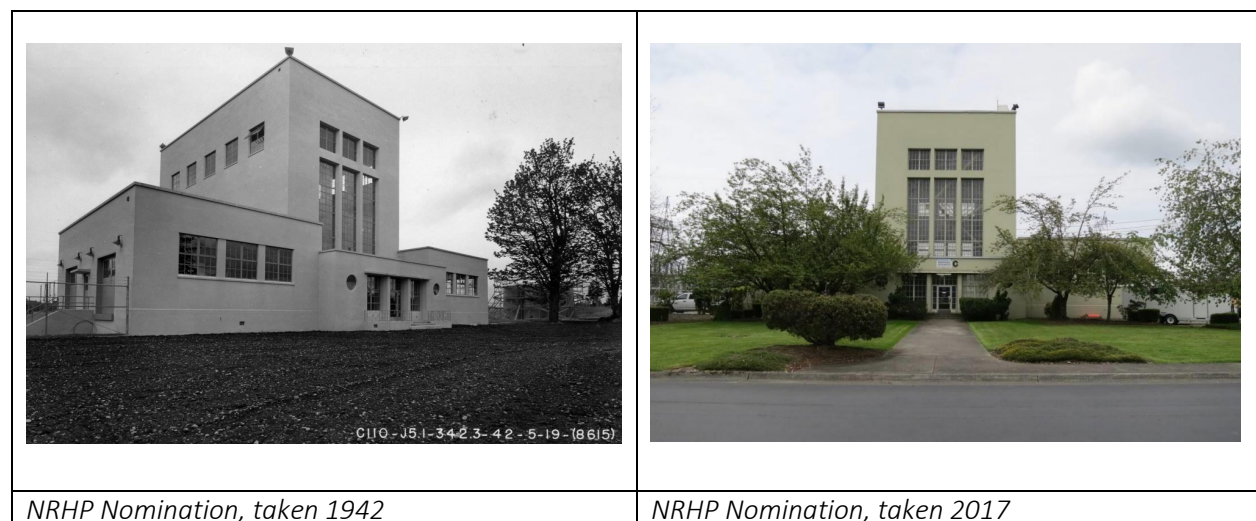
B. Residence (1920) – 15633 SE 256th St., Covington

This single-family residence is located on a 3.73-acre parcel at the southeast corner of SE 256th St. and 156th Ave. SE. It is a rare surviving and intact Craftsman bungalow, based on research and windshield survey. In addition to its architectural significance, the residence may have associations with farming given the character of the area depicted in the 1936 aerial image shown below.



C. BPA Covington Substation (1942-1974) – 28401 Covington Way SE, Covington

This federally-owned power substation is located at the junction of Covington Way SE and SE Wax Rd. and along the old Northern Pacific Railroad line. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2018 and includes 12 contributing and six non-contributing resources. According to the NRHP nomination, it was designed as a major hub in the original BPA Master Grid development, serving as the primary BPA facility in King County, and initially providing power from Bonneville Dam through interconnections with Seattle City Light and Tacoma City Light, both existing public power providers, as well as providing direct supply to major industry. This was one of the largest substations in the BPA grid. It was a key component in the development of King County and Pacific Northwest industrial development following World War II, including the aviation industry in the greater Kent area, which directly influenced the suburbanization of Covington beginning in the 1960s.



D. Covington Community Church (ca. 1957) – 17455 SE Wax Rd., Covington

A community of Christian worshippers organized around 1945 to form the Covington Community Church. Led by Brethren pastor Bernard Suttle, the group first met in the old Covington School at Berrydale until they acquired and repurposed an old bunkhouse from an area mining operation. That meeting space was located on Wax Rd. about one-third of a mile southwest of their current church, at about 17070 SE Wax Rd.¹ This church was built in the 1950s and is Covington's oldest surviving community building. A 1960s education building is located behind the church.



King County Assessor, taken ca. 2020



Author's photograph, taken 2023

E. Residence (1962) – 26928 210th Ave SE, Covington

This single-family residence is located Aqua Vista Estates, an early 1960s residential plat at Pipe Lake. The residence exhibits all the hallmarks of mid-century, single-family architecture, with its prominent attached garage and low-flung, sprawling floorplan. The residence and the surrounding Aqua Vista Estates reflect the suburban development trends that shaped the character of Covington from 1960 to 1980. The residence may be individually eligible, but the neighborhood should be studied for eligibility as a potential historic district.

¹ Virginia Levack, "The History of the Covington Community Church," in *Covington Washington and Its Surrounding Areas*, 105-106.



King County Assessor, taken ca. 2020



Google Maps, 2023

F. Gas Station (1970) – 16405 SE 272nd St., Covington

This gas station was built within a few years of the state designating the Auburn-Echo Lake Road as State Route 18. It is located at the important junction with SE 272nd St. It survived the widening of SR 18 to a limited-access, four-lane highway through the area in the early 1990s and has served both local and traveling motorists for more than 50 years. Its characteristic gabled canopy harkens back to the era of inexpensive gasoline, at the height of Covington’s suburban residential development. The station is an important part of the suburban landscape it helped make possible.



Google Maps, 2023



Google Earth, 2023

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Recommendations for additional research include

- This report reflects minimal windshield survey of a handful of mid-century neighborhoods, including Aqua Vista, Suncrest Park, and Hart's Addition. While change and infill have impacted neighborhood historic integrity, closer examination is needed of these and other areas, such as Timberlane Estates, to fully assess the potential for historic district designations.
- Closer examination of King County's creation of the Soos Creek planning area in the 1970s and the subsequent plans implemented could reveal much more information on the influences shaping Covington's extant built environment.
- Prioritizing survey and designation of extant resources within the Wax Road corridor, between Covington Way and 272nd St., parallels the paths of the railroad and Jenkins Creek and has been developed and redeveloped over time. This corridor, which includes Covington's oldest extant community building, the Covington Community Church, and several mid-century residences, is rapidly changing. Most recently, the 1961 Covington Elementary School was demolished within this corridor.
- Prioritizing survey and designation of extant resources built before 1960 is important given the very low percentage of surviving buildings from that period. This also may include looking outside Covington city boundaries to include the area between Covington and Berrydale along the 164th Place SE corridor, and areas between Soos and Jenkins creeks.

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