Footprints Through the Sands of Time

The Story of Grays Harbor County

Byline: Kelly Calhoun, Executive Director/Curator of Museum of the North Beach
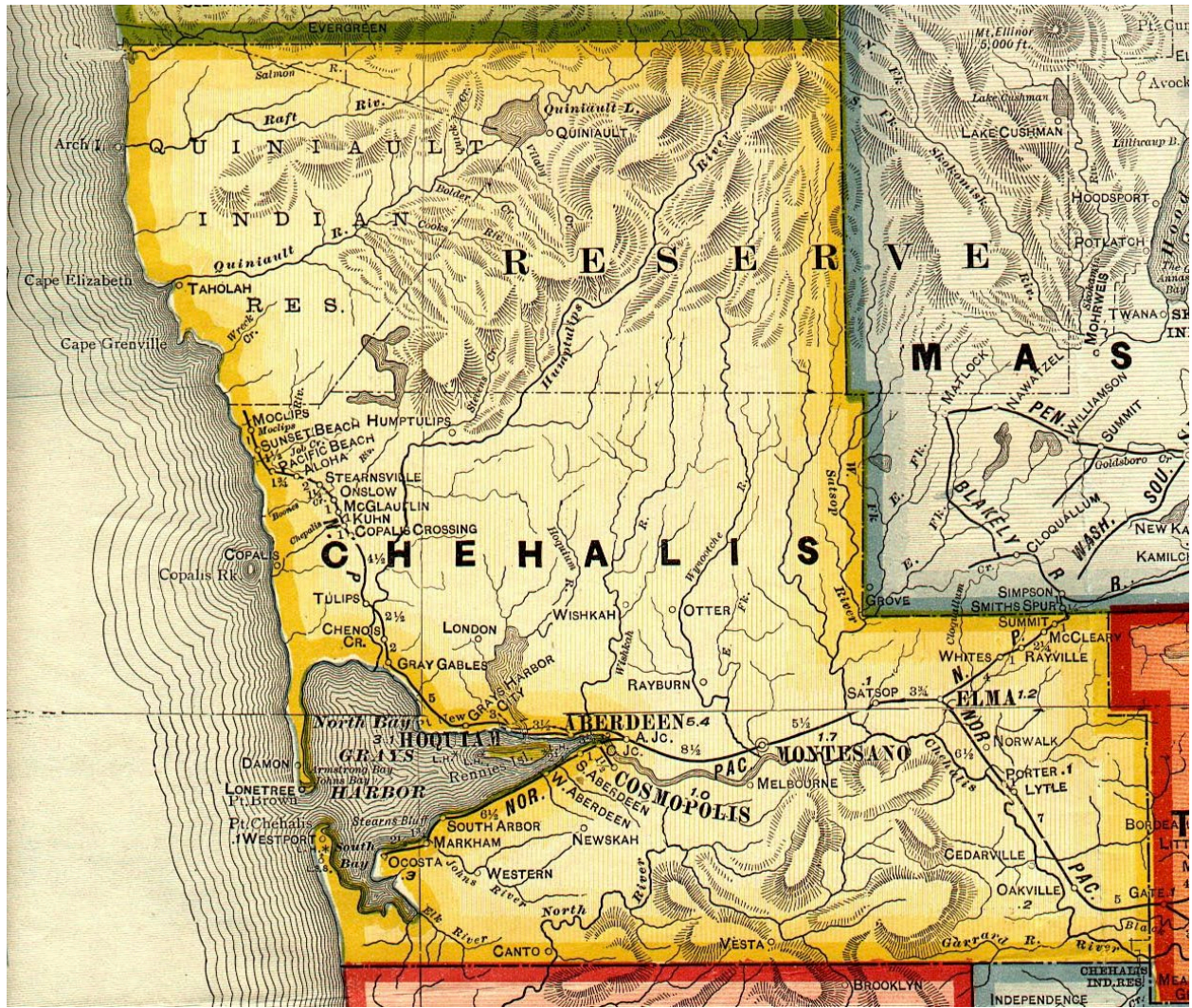
On March 15, 1915, Chehalis County's name was officially changed to Grays Harbor, after the excellent harbor located in its southwestern corner. Since 1854, the county had been known as Chehalis, named after the Chehalis Indians who lived along the harbor. Prior to that, this area was a part of Thurston County.

Ranking fifteenth in geographic size of the 39 counties of Washington State, Grays Harbor has 60 miles of ocean beach and an area of 1,927 square miles. This includes the Quinault Indian Nation and the southern fringe of the Olympic Forest reserve.

Beginning in 1905, a near civil war broke out on the harbor. Due to their larger populations, Aberdeen and Hoquiam campaigned to move the county seat to the lower harbor, which had 80% of the county's residents. A petition began that started a feud between cities and towns. The measure failed by only a few hundred votes.

In 1907, state Senator Alex Polson of Hoquiam introduced a bill to leave Montesano as the county seat of Chehalis County and designate Hoquiam as the seat of a new county called Grays Harbor. After several injunctions involving the Attorney General and the Supreme Court, the split of the county was declared unconstitutional. When Chehalis County was renamed Grays Harbor County, the long fight was over.

(one photo ahead)

Chehalis County map