

## The Lemati/Slabtown Feud

The city of Cottage Grove began west of the Coast Fork river, along what is now River Road. The town earned the nicknamed Slabtown because slabs of wood were used to cover roads and sidewalks in the rainy season keeping people and their wagons out of the mud.



In 1872 the Oregon and California Railroad was built east of the river. The tracks still run the original route through town. The train depot was located about where Scarpelli's is today. Businesses began moving closer to the railroad along what is now Main Street. This annoyed the citizens on the west side who wanted the heart of the town to stay where it was.



On February 11, 1887 Cottage Grove was **incorporated** as a town. The town east of

the river was referred to as "East" Cottage Grove. This annoyed East Siders, so they began to call their side of town Lemati, a Chinook Jargin word believed to mean "peaceful valley". A 1963 newspaper article explained how to pronounce the word: It read "you pronounce Lemati as if you are saying Lemmuh tie your shoe".

Anger between the two sides of town got so bad that in 1894 East Siders decided to **secede** and become their own town. The West Siders fought the petition at the State Capitol in Salem, but the East Siders won and the city of Lemati became its own town.

These two towns existed with the river being the boarder between Cottage Grove to the west and Lemati to the east.

Forming two separate towns did not stop the feuding. Cottage Grove outlawed riding bicycles on the sidewalks. Soon the Marshal caught the daughter of Lemati's Mayor riding her bicycle on his side of town. He walked her back across the bridge. The next day the Marshal forgot to remove his badge when he went across the bridge to get the mail, and Lemati officials put him in jail. Another local legend tells of the Post Office being stolen from Cottage Grove and **relocated** to Lemati.



During this time there was a mining boom and the populations of the two towns grew quickly from 800 to 3,000. With so many new people, the **overt** anger between the two sides diminished. In 1899 the two towns reunited as one, the feud became part of history, and Cottage Grove entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century as one united city.

Discussion Points:

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1. Considering where you live, would you have been an East Sider (Lemati) or West Sider (Cottage Grove/Slabtown)?
  2. A key issue at the heart of the feud was where the business district should be located. Why would this be important to those in Cottage Grove? To those in Lemati?
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### **Vocabulary**

Incorporated: Legally recognized as a town by the State.

Overt: Easily seen, not hidden

Relocated: Establish in a new place

Secede: To formally separate or withdraw