History of Churchill County

Churchill became a county on November 25th, 1891. It is one of the first nine counties in the state of Nevada. The name derived from Fort Churchill, a post in present-day Nevada. Churchill County is named in honor of General Sylvester Churchill, of Vermont, a Mexican War brigadier general (1861–1862). Churchill County covers approximately 4,813 square miles (12,270 square kilometers) and accounts for approximately 4.4 percent of Nevada’s total surface area of 110,545 (286,267 square kilometers).

Churchill County is the center of honey production for Nevada. The county seat is the city of Fallon. The turn of the century brought new hope for Churchill County as its arid desert land became the focal point for the nation’s most ambitious irrigation projects. In the late 19th century, farmers began growing vegetables in the Nevada desert. A system of canals and dams was created diverting water to irrigate thousands of acres of farmland. This project gave birth to Fallon, one of the few communities in the state founded entirely on farming. Fallon also started as a Post Office, July 4th, 1896, and was the fourth county seat.

At the turn of the century Fallon was a “dusty crossroads” between St. Clar and Stillwater. The local Native Americans referred to it as “Jim’s Town.” Jim Richards operated his store very near Mike and Eliza Fallon’s ranch house and post office, which had been established in 1896.

Soon rumors flew about a project to build a dam and canal to irrigate, or “reclaim,” desert land. After the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, longtime conservationist Theodore Roosevelt became President. He soon joined the push which established the Reclamation Act of 1902, a federal reclamation system began — financed from the sale of public lands. The Reclamation Act also created the United States Reclamation Service (USRS).

The Fallon Irrigation Act of 1902 was the first federal reclamation project. The Fallon Irrigation District was established in 1902, and the first project was the construction of the 36-mile long Truckee Canal, which was completed in 1903. The town of Fallon was established in 1904.

The town of Fallon was established in 1904 and became the county seat. It was founded by the Fallon Irrigation District, which was established in 1902. The town was named in honor of General Sylvester Churchill, of Vermont, a Mexican War brigadier general (1861–1862). Churchill County covers approximately 4,813 square miles (12,270 square kilometers) and accounts for approximately 4.4 percent of Nevada’s total surface area of 110,545 (286,267 square kilometers).

In 1903, the state senator William Williams pushed through legislation that formally moved the county seat from Stilwater to the new town of Fallon. Stilwater residents were not particularly pleased with this turn of events, but ultimately conceded defeat. Construction of a courthouse for the new county seat was completed in 1903, and many Stilwater businesses moved to Fallon.

From the very beginning of the new irrigation project, Fallon grew and prospered. Work began on the Truckee River with the building of Detty Dam in June of 1903. Construction of the 36-mile long Truckee Canal was begun in 1905. Lahontan Dam was completed in 1914, and homesteaders flocked to the area, drawn by a national USRS advertising campaign.

Fallon was officially incorporated in 1908. It was the goal of the new city to provide the finest in services to its residents. With large groups of people expected to homestead the newly reclaimed land and a population of 20,000 was projected for the next few years.

Unfortunately, the scope of the original reclamation project was never fully realized and the city’s population grew at a slower than predicted pace. But growth it did, and in 1914 Fallon residents were thrilled when electricity, generated below the Lahontan Dam, reached the city.

The 1920s were the years in which “Hearts-O-Gold” cantaloupes were grown and shipped across the nation. For almost fifteen years, Newlands Project farmers had a near monopoly on cantaloupe sales in Nevada and northern California, for their jumbo-sized melons were said to have unmatched flavor and quality.