



First known as Centerville, it was changed to Athena in 1899 by town authorities.  
The school principal suggested the name.

### **Looking Back at Centerville (now Athena) in 1882**

The town of Centerville is situated on Wild Horse Creek, across that stream from the Umatilla Reservation. It is three miles from Weston, a high ridge dividing the rival towns As far as the eye can reach in all directions are seen those fertile hills and plains that are now recognized among the finest grain producing lands in the west.

### **First called Richards Station**

The site of Centerville was known for years as Richards Station, a point on the emigrant road to Walla Walla. The place was kept by D.A. Richards, who had a post office located there for the accommodation of settlers. He undertook to make a post office located there for the accommodation of settlers. He undertook to make a town, to which he gave the name of Bellville. In 1868 he made an arrangement with a man named Abell to manage things for him, but that gentleman was soon persuaded to go to Pine Creek and help build a town at that point. In 1869 the post office was discontinued, one having been established at Weston.

## **A start for Centerville**

The next effort to build a town was made by Thomas J. Kirk. In the spring of 1878, he laid out Centerville near the former site of Richards Station, and that summer a large agricultural hall, mat market, drugstore, general store, hotel, livery stable, harness shop, blacksmith shop, school house, and a number of dwellings were built. A few short weeks saw a town spring up and make its presence felt by those who had been struggling along for years. Its appearance made a trio in this corner of the county, all interested in securing a division and the creation of a new one. When this is done Centerville promises to make a strong fight to secure the county seat. A railroad from Walla Walla to intersect the Baker City Branch above Pendleton is surveyed through this place and as it will undoubtedly be built within a year or two, the prospect before the town is highly flattering.

Already it contains five general stores, two hardware stores, a drug store, furniture store, jewelry store, saddlery store, two millinery stores, an agricultural implement warehouse, three saloons, two livery stables, a hotel, restaurant, barber shop, meat market, two blacksmith shops, steam planing and feed mill, schoolhouse, two churches, post office, express office, and a population of nearly 300.

With such a start, certainty of a railroad, prospect of an opening of the reservation, and possibility of a county seat, the confidence of her citizen does not seem to be groundless. They have been erecting a \$6,000 schoolhouse this year, and improvements are going steadily on, while the sound of the saw and hammer salute the ear constantly. The M.E. denomination has here the finest church building in the county. It was erected in 1880 at an expense of \$2,500. There are about sixty members. The Christians built an edifice about the same time at an expense of \$2,000. They have some seventy members.

From "Historic Sketches of Walla Walla, Whitman, Columbia, and Garfield Counties, Washington Territory and Umatilla County, Oregon," by Frank T. Gilbert, Portland, Oregon 1882