

# Eugene's Historic River Road



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The activity that is the subject of this publication has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, as provided through the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the view of policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

*Front Cover: A cow at a gas station on River Road taken during the January 1946 flood. Superimposed over a c.1885 cadastral map. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2052).*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Eugene's Historic River Road* was researched and prepared by Bernadette Niederer, Caitlin Harvey, Sally Wright and David Pinyerd of Historic Preservation Northwest, a local historic preservation consulting firm, in conjunction with the City of Eugene Planning and Development Department staff. The Context presents an overview of Eugene's River Road area and is intended to provide a broad understanding of the neighborhood's growth and development. The document also identifies the type and likely location of historic resources in the neighborhood.

Thanks go to Rob Handy and the Board of the River Road Community Organization for their assistance and dedication to River Road's history. Special thanks to Mike Sims for your tremendous assistance on this project. Thank you to the staff and volunteers at the Lane County Historical Museum, especially to Cheryl Rosse, who assisted in the search of the photograph collection and newspaper clipping files and who provided requested



*Aerial view of flooding in the River Road area. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN6684).*

images. Much appreciation to Kathleen Allison at the 4J School District for her help on the education chapter. Thanks also go to City staff, Ken Guzowski, senior planner for historic preservation, and Adam Tyler, project intern, for their contributions to this project. A special thanks to all the senior citizens and the Emerald Park District for encouraging us to learn more about local history. In addition, thank you to the Eugene Historic Review Board for its support of this project and for their contributions to the development of the goals and objectives stated herein.



## PREFACE

*Eugene's Historic River Road* is the culmination of an eight-month collaboration between Historic Preservation Northwest, the staff of the Eugene Planning and Development Department, and members of the public.

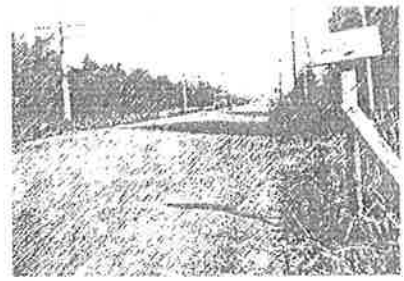
Since history is a process, this context statement must be seen as a "work in progress," periodically reviewed, corrected, and made current. It is a product that we hope will help us all to appreciate and evaluate the resources in Eugene's River Road neighborhood.

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## INTRODUCTION



A historic context statement is a document used for strategic planning of a community's historic resources. It describes the broad patterns of historic growth and development of the community and helps to ascertain the historical themes, events, and associated individuals that have played an important role in that development. A context statement also helps to identify historic resource types, such as structures, sites, objects, and districts, that represent these patterns of development. It also helps determine the potential distribution of these resources. Just as importantly, the document provides guidance for evaluating and protecting significant historic resources. It is intended to be a dynamic document, evolving over time as community needs and desires change.

*Eugene's Historic River Road* is a context statement written in 2005 by Bernadette Niederer, Caitlin Harvey, Sally Wright and David Pinyerd of Historic Preservation Northwest, a local historic preservation consulting firm. The historic context is a geographically-oriented study that covers Eugene's River Road neighborhood. It is intended to assist in the preparation of city and county policies pertaining to the identification and protection of historic resources in the area.



*Hop barn in the River Road area. Demolished. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2053)*

The National Park Service developed context-based planning as a means of organizing activities for preserving historic resources. Such planning is based on the following four principles:

1. Significant historic properties are unique and irreplaceable.
2. Preservation must often go forward without complete information.
3. History belongs to everyone.
4. Planning can be applied at any scale.

This project was financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and was administered by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. All work was completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

# Historic Context Definitions

Determining what is to be studied is an important first step in understanding a historic context and helps keep the research focused. The three elements used to determine the parameters of a historic context are theme, time, and place.

## Theme

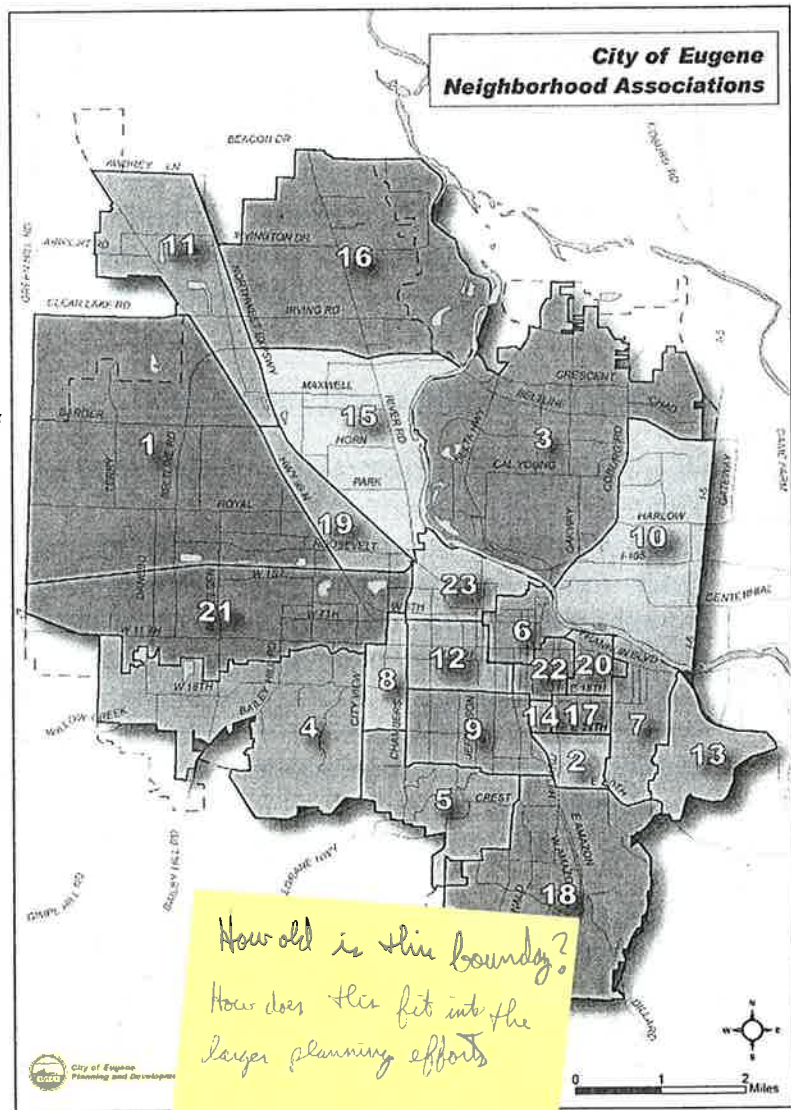
The theme of the context statement identifies what is to be studied. This can vary in scale from an entire community to a significant historic trend, such as the college fraternal movement, or to a single resource type, such as schools. This context is a geographically-based study, as it covers the River Road neighborhood. Significant activities, events and people are discussed within the context sub-themes, which includes Transportation, Government, Residential Development, Commercial Development, Education, and Religion.

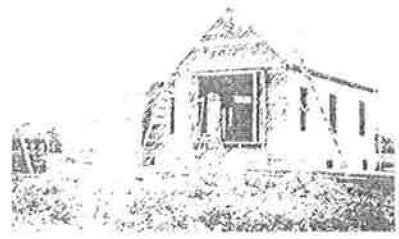
## Time

The time boundary of a historic context establishes the dates that bracket the period of study. In the River Road area we are documenting and evaluating the period of Euro-American settlement (circa 1850) up until 1970.

## Place

The place or spatial boundary of a context statement describes its geographic limits. Determining a reasonable area of study keeps the research manageable, yet the boundary should not be chosen arbitrarily. The boundaries of this study encompass the River Road neighborhood, labeled "15" on the figure to the right. The boundaries are formed by Beltline Road to the north, the Willamette River to the east, Cross Street to the south, and the Northwest Expressway to the west.





## LANDSCAPE

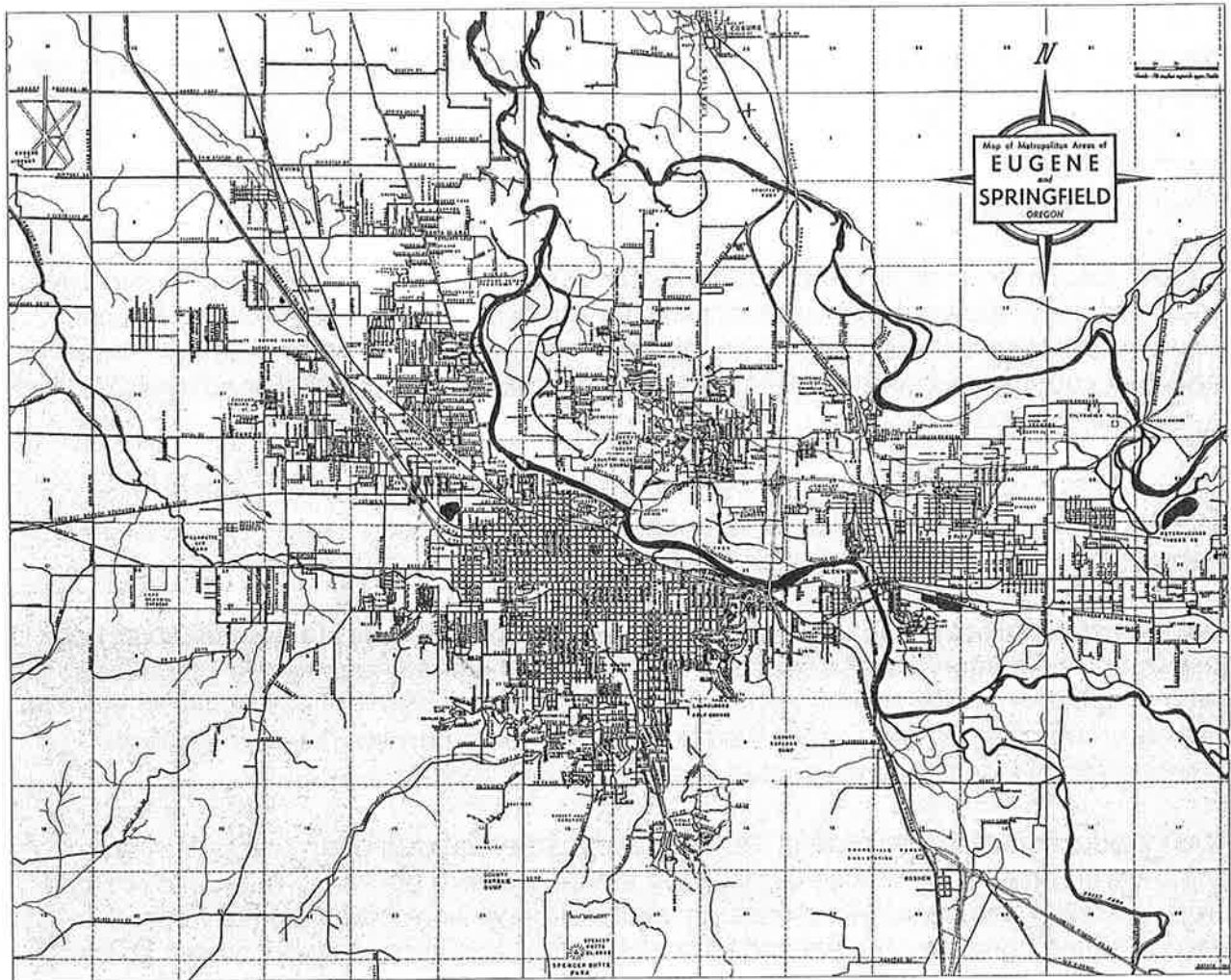
The Willamette Valley is characterized by small volcanic buttes and alluvial plains. Annual spring flooding was a fixture before flood control measures were introduced in the twentieth century<sup>1</sup> and major floods could be expected every ten years.<sup>2</sup> The land lies within the rain shadow of the Coast Range with 70% of the annual rainfall concentrated between November and March. Only 1% of annual rain falls in July through August. The native vegetation consists of oak woodlands, riparian forests and prairie grasslands. The latter were artificial creations maintained by annual aboriginal burning.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the River Road area is not easily perceived as a landscape, and upon a cursory examination, appears more like an entirely human-made environment. Its only natural boundary is the Willamette River toward the east, while its other edges are man-made: Beltline Road on the north, the Northwest Expressway on the west, and Cross Street on the south. A few pockets of landscape exist along the river or in carefully tended gardens, but these seem like rarities among the asphalt and noise generated by the major thoroughfare that is River Road. Though these impressions are essentially true, there is also an underlying cultural landscape, one that is in a constant state of change and has been shaped by human hands in various forms for centuries, perhaps even for millennia.

Components of the cultural landscape include:<sup>4</sup>

1. Historic patterns of spatial organization (landscape structure)
2. Historical land uses and activities
3. The response to natural features of built elements of the landscape
4. Trails, roads, railroads, and other circulation networks
5. Donation land claim boundaries and other historic boundary demarcations
6. Orchards, ornamental plantings, and other vegetation related to land use
7. Clusters of buildings in rural communities, centers, and farmsteads
8. Residences and individual farm buildings, industrial and commercial structures, bridges, canals, and drainage features
9. Small-scale elements such as isolated graves, farm, or logging machinery
10. Historic views and other perceptual qualities

When we see the landscape as a cultural element, we begin to see the forms that shape it: the Willamette River, the prime agricultural soils created by the river's flooding, residential and commercial structures of various shapes and periods, and transportation networks such as the railroad and, especially, River Road.



*The highlighted area is the basic boundary of the study area on this 1965 map of Eugene, extending from Bellline Road to the north, the Willamette River to the east, Cross Street to the south, and the Northwest Expressway to the west.*

## **Pre-Euro-American Settlement**

Long before the arrival of Euro-American trappers and later settlers, Native Americans shaped the environment that is now the River Road area. The land immediately adjacent to the Willamette River consisted of riparian woodland, with Willow, Black Cottonwood, Oregon White Ash, and Red Alder. A transitional forest with Big Leaf Maple and Douglas Fir abutted the river lands to the west. These wooded areas transitioned into wide, flat prairie grasslands with isolated stands of White Oak and other large trees.<sup>5</sup> Though a modern observer might be tempted to call it a wild landscape, it was, in fact, a human made creation. Native Americans, in the Eugene area, bands of Kalapuya, managed the prairie through periodic burnings, which facilitated their hunting and gathering activities. This native landscape included food staples such as salal, tarweed, camas, wapato, berries, acorns, fish, and game.<sup>6</sup>

It was the abundance of game which first attracted trappers. These transitional visitors may have over-hunted the area, but essentially left the landscape in its Native American form.

## Settlement Patterns

Settlers began to arrive in Lane County in the 1840s. The River Road area would have been especially desirable because of its proximity to a water supply, but also because the open prairie required little clearing and provided ample fodder for livestock. The land was subdivided into the 320- and 640-acre plots characteristic of the Donation Land Claim period.

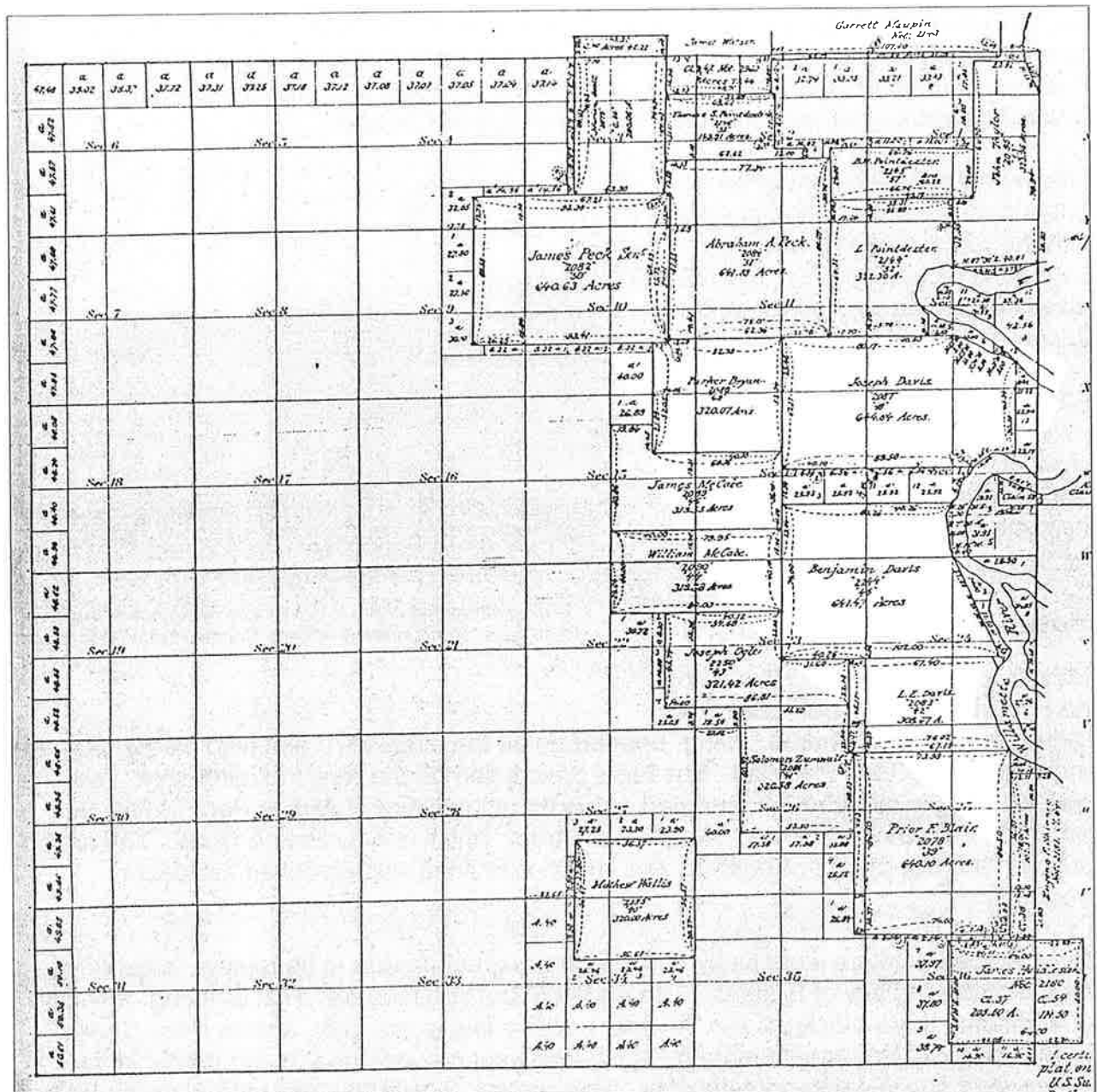
Some roads, such as River Road, were adopted from Native American trails. Others, such as Sunnyside Drive, Briarcliff Avenue, Owosso Drive, and Irving Road, developed along the borders of Donation Land Claims.

The size of claims resulted in a scattered settlement pattern, with farms placed at half-mile to one-mile intervals. As subsistence farms evolved into large-scale operations beginning in the 1860s, claims were fenced and native vegetation was replaced by grain and other imported plants.<sup>7</sup> With the exception of some berries, few of the Native American food staples were adopted into the settlers' diets.

The introduction of the railroad in 1871 encouraged expanded grain production and engendered prosperity. It also established a hard western boundary to the River Road area. Farmhouses became increasingly elaborate and were often located near transportation corridors, but set back from the street and fronted by driveways shaded by allées with walnut trees, maples, or firs.<sup>8</sup>

The decline of large-scale agriculture in the 1890s spurred the division of Donation Land Claims among offspring as well as sales to new arrivals. The new farms, somewhere between 20 and 200 acres, rather than their original 320 and 640 acres, were also more diversely planted. As a result, the landscape took on an even more checkerboard appearance. The checkerboard became increasingly chaotic as the twentieth-century progressed and residential development expanded. The first subdivisions were platted in the 1910s and residential construction doubled the River Road population by the 1930s. However, in contrast to the housing boom following World War II, these early suburban enclaves were still uncrowded and surrounded by farmland.

Though more and more farmland was consumed to accommodate Eugene's exploding population following World War II, River Road maintained some of its rural character well into the 1970s. Some major thoroughfares, such as Sunnyside Drive remained unpaved, and pockets of agricultural landscapes persisted. It was not until the twenty-first-century that the last vestiges of farmland ceased to operate with Woodruff Nursery being the last holdout.



An 1857 cadastral map showing the Donation Land Claims in the River Road area (highlighted). Note the large tracts of land yet to be claimed west of the River Road area.

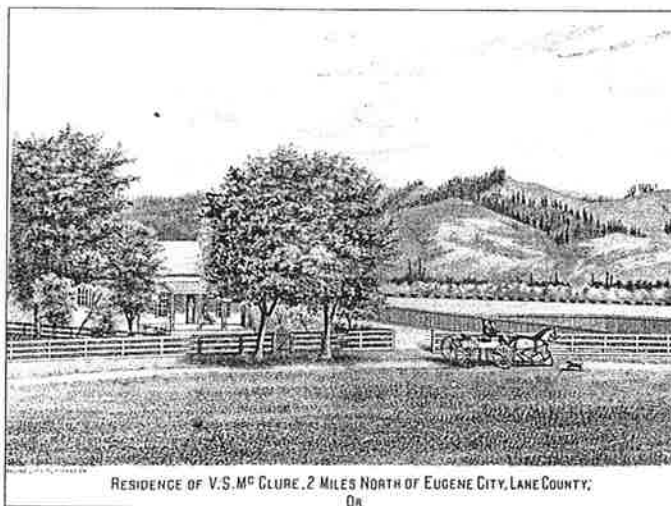
## Neighboring Communities

Before the Southern Pacific Rail Yards defined River Road's western boundary (1925) and the Beltline Highway defined its north (1961), River Road was a less cohesive area with several clusters of communities.

The communities surrounding the River Road neighborhood were initially comprised of pioneer subsistence farmers. An 1853 surveyor's map indicates cultivated fields on the donation land claims of James Peck and Marion Scott, in the area of Irving, and on the

claim of Abraham Peck, in Santa Clara. The Joseph Davis claim, a portion of which is later identified as Stumptown, shows plowed fields along the east side of River Road. The map also reflects the residences of Solomon Zumwalt and Mathew Wallis (Wallace), whose claims would later be part of Bethel-Danebo.

The majority of these areas were influenced by, or had an association with the railroad, which arrived in Eugene in October 1871. The rail line initially extended only as far south as Roseburg, but still provided a vital link for the local agriculture and timber industries. Certain areas that took advantage of the opportunities provided by the railroad developed into small communities by the turn of the century.



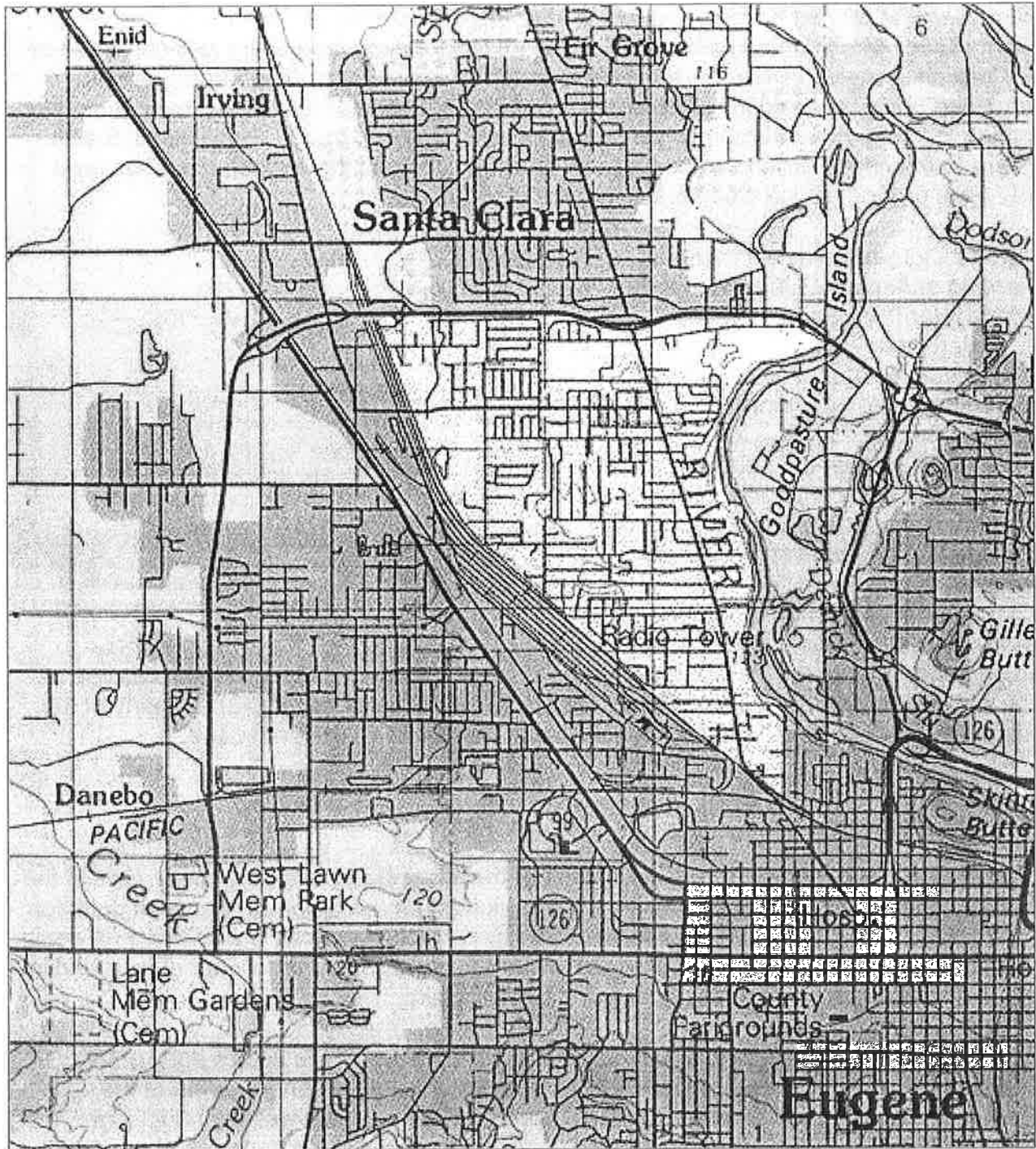
*Walling lithograph of the V.S. McClure residence in the River Road area. Print courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN6312)*

## Irving

Irving is located to the northwest of the River Road neighborhood. The earliest map with the name “Irving” appears to be the circa 1870 plat filed by the Oregon and California (O&C) Railroad. The legal description on the map indicates that “The town of Irving is situated in... and part of the donation claim of James Peck”. The plat ran south from Irvington Road along Peck Street, which is now Prairie Road. The area between the five blocks of building lots and the rail lines was identified as “depot grounds”.

Early railroad workers were likely housed on the grounds due to its relative isolation at the time from the city of Eugene. The undated, but subsequent, “Plat of Irving” reflects an additional three blocks of 60x144-foot building lots to the east, across Peck Street. By March 1889, Eugene’s *Morning Register* newspaper included “Irving Items” in its coverage of surrounding communities. This section, which also included news on Fern Ridge and Cottage Grove, tended to cover personal items as opposed to hard news.

By the turn of the century, farmers were diversifying crops on lands that had primarily grown wheat. Fruit and vegetable production was becoming a larger and stronger sector of the market, a trend that virtually continued through World War II. The Irving area concentrated on fruit production and benefitted from the convenient location of the rail lines. This is evidenced by the Allen Orchard Company and later Chambers Orchard Company operating to the east of the depot grounds for decades. Due to its relative distance from Eugene, Irving did not face the development pressures affecting other neighboring communities.



A 1986 USGS quadrangle map of northwest Eugene with the River Road area highlighted and retained neighborhood names surrounding it.

## Santa Clara

Santa Clara is located directly to the north of the River Road neighborhood. “At its inception, in the 1880’s, Santa Clara was a part of a larger area and voting precinct known as Pleasant Grove.”<sup>9</sup> This area extended approximately 10 miles north of Beacon Drive. Santa Clara proper was established in 1888 by Colonel J.A. and Mary A.

Straight, who named a new subdivision after their hometown in California. The plat of Santa Clara was situated within the L. Poindexter donation land claim and consisted of 36 parcels, ranging in size from one-acre to 22.65-acres each. The larger parcels provided adequate land for small scale orchard production. This helped the community maintain its agricultural roots while “development” was occurring. Social life in Santa Clara has focused around its community facilities, such as the school, churches, and the local grange, which was established in 1918.

"Santa Clara remained an outpost farming community until shortly after World War II."<sup>10</sup> Residential and commercial development was influenced by what was occurring in the River Road neighborhood in the late 1940s and 1950s. Construction seemed to start at the southern end of River Road and continue northward into the surrounding farmland. Residential growth was especially spurred by the formation of the Santa Clara Water District in 1953. This attracted development to the area due to its ability to support the water demands of a large scale subdivision and because of the availability of large tracts of land. By the 1960s, houses had replaced many of the filbert and walnut groves that once dominated the Santa Clara landscape.



*The Mounts' residence in Santa Clara. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN6311)*

## **Bethel-Danebo**

Bethel-Danebo is located to the southwest of the River Road neighborhood. One of the earliest additions in this area was Alva Park, located on the Solomon Zumwalt donation land claim. The subdivision was located on the current Roosevelt Boulevard, just west of Four Corners, and consisted of eight 10-acre parcels. The Plat of Bethel was filed in 1927 and was also located on Zumwalt's original claim.

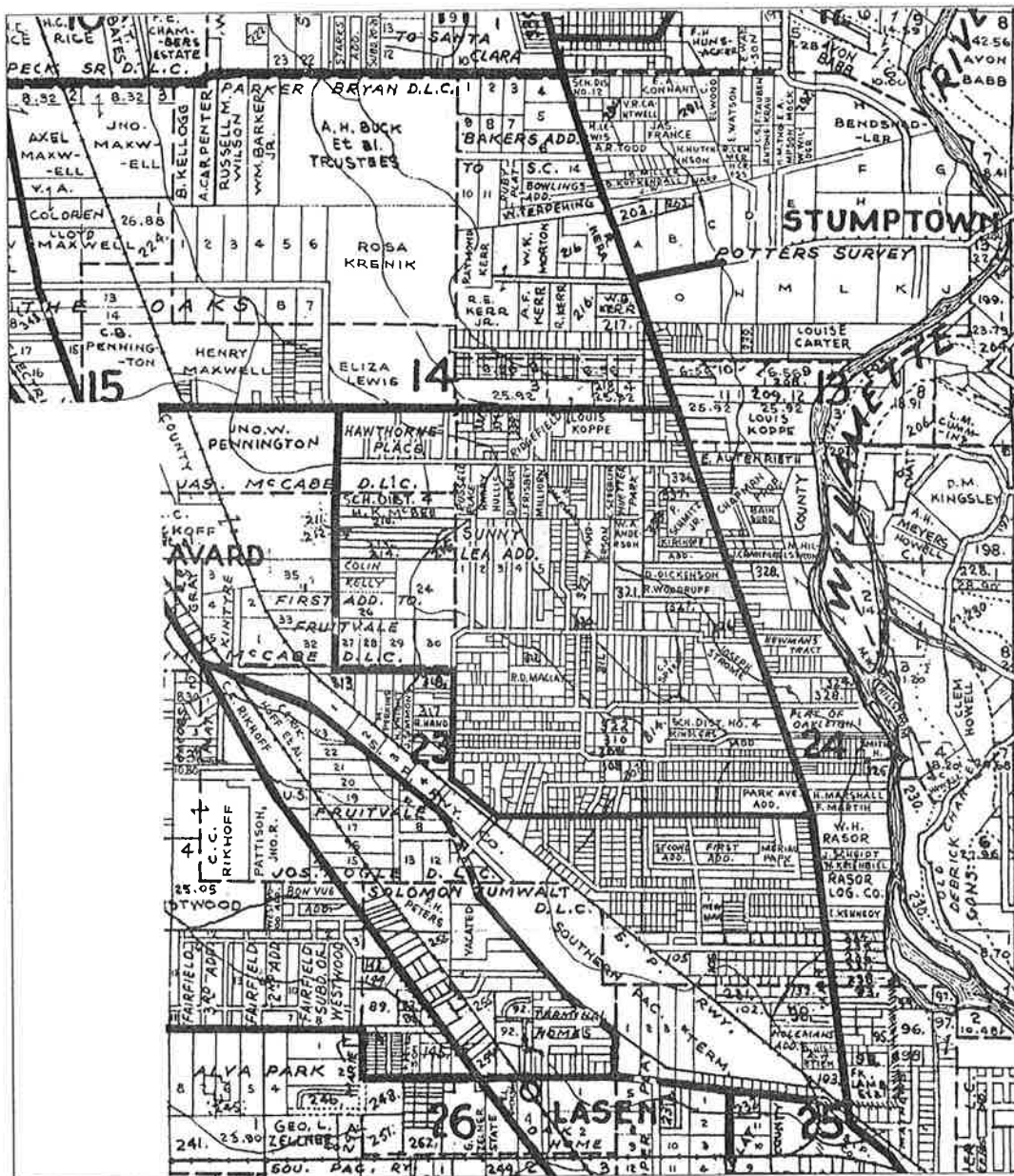
The name Danebo, meaning Danish borough, is reflective of the area's early ethnic heritage. In 1900, a group of Danes from Iowa established a congregation of the Bethesda Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, where services were conducted in Danish until 1920. The church was the early social center of the community, as it was the sole public building beside the fire station.

Danish farmers settled, drained their acreage, and started dairying, which was gaining a stronghold in the local agricultural economy. Based on cooperative farming methods from Denmark, in 1914 the Eugene Farmer Creamery was opened. Poultry raising was also popular at this time, as evidenced by the establishment of the Peterson Farm. Dairying continued to develop as a major industry in the late 1930s. "By 1945, most of the 23 dairies and creameries were located on the outskirts of town, such as the Echo Springs Dairy in Bethel."<sup>11</sup>

Due to water issues and its reliance on sewers, Bethel-Danebo was not as prone to the development pressures felt in other parts of Eugene. It was not until the early 1960s, upon its annexation to the City of Eugene and the reconfiguration of streets around the rail yard, that residential and commercial development began in earnest.

## Arvard and Lasen

A series of Metsker maps dating from 1931 to 1954 reflects small circles accompanied by the identifiers Arvard and Lasen. The circles are located directly on the Oregon Electric Railway tracks, leading to speculation that the names correspond to rail stops.



A 1954 Metsker map showing Arvard [sic] to the left and Stumptown to the right.

Arvard appears on the 1931 map, in the approximate location that Barger intersects with the rail line. (It is identified as "Avard" [sic] on the 1941 and 1954 maps.) Lasen appears on the 1941 and 1954 maps, and is located to the southwest of Arvard, where the current Roosevelt Boulevard crosses the tracks. Neither of these identifiers appears on the 1968 Metsker map. Further research is needed to confirm their origination and association.

## Stumptown

The same series of Metsker maps shows Stumptown as located in the northeast corner of the neighborhood, to the east of River Road. Stumptown corresponds directly to the 1889 Potter's Survey, which included 15 lots, ranging in size from 9.76- to 26.90-acres. River Avenue was the only road platted in the survey, and it was flanked on its north and south sides by the individual lots. Beltline Highway currently dissects the lots in the northern section. The names of both Potter's Survey and Stumptown appear on this property on the 1931, 1941 and 1954 Metsker maps, but in 1968 it is identified only as Potter's Survey.

Unfortunately, research conducted to date at the Lane County Historic Museum and the University of Oregon's Special Collections, among other locations, did not yield any information regarding Stumptown. The term appears to be used as a generic reference to a parcel of land that had been cleared of its timber, leaving only stumps behind, a name still associated with Portland, Oregon.

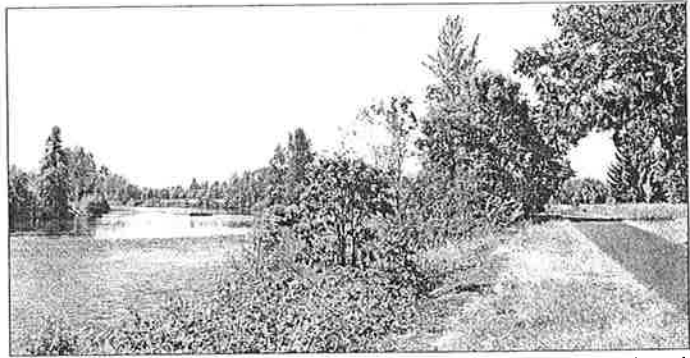
## Willamette River

The Willamette River not only designates the eastern boundary of the River Road neighborhood, but also played a major role in the shaping of the area. The river was responsible for depositing the rich alluvial soils that provided ample nourishment for native plants, which in turn attracted game animals and Native American hunters and gatherers. The same soils, combined with the easy access to water for irrigation, also proved attractive to Euro-American pioneer farmers. The Willamette was also a source of difficulty because of annual flooding, which was not thoroughly controlled until around 1950. The river also changed its course between 1861 and 1902,<sup>12</sup> a source of difficulty for landowners in its vicinity. A 1907 Warranty Deed for land now occupied by the Lombard-Potter House at



*Store and house surrounded by water during the January 1946 flood in the River Road area. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2048)*

405 River Road notes the sale of a parcel "...containing 30 acres more or less, part of which is washed away by the river and now covered by the River."<sup>13</sup> The significance of the river shifted in the late twentieth-century, when it became a source for recreation and land conservation. In 1974 the Land Conservation and Development Commission was established.<sup>14</sup> In 1975, the Willamette River Greenway Plan prepared for the State of Oregon's Department of Transportation further emphasized the river as an important natural resource. Similarly, the swampy lands around Amazon creek, which had been a source of frustration for Danebo's Danish farmers, became subject to wetlands restoration in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup>



*Willamette River in 2005 from the River Road neighborhood.*

## Landscape Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Forster, Thomas B., ed. et al. *The Cultural and Historic Landscapes of Lane County, Oregon*. (Lane County, OR, 1986), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Wilson, Jeffery Scott. *Farming the Urban Fringe*. University of Oregon Thesis, Department of Geography, 1981, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Forster, 20.

<sup>4</sup>Forster, 16.

<sup>5</sup>Wilson, 17.

<sup>6</sup>Wilson, 28.

<sup>7</sup>Forster, 120.

<sup>8</sup>Forster, 121.

<sup>9</sup>River Road-Santa Clara Park & Recreation Master Plan 1978-79, 1.

<sup>10</sup>River Road-Santa Clara Park & Recreation Master Plan 1978-79, 2.

<sup>11</sup>Wright, Sally and David Pinyerd. *Eugene Modernism 1935-1965*. (City of Eugene Planning & Development, 2003), 7.2.

<sup>12</sup>Carter, Elizabeth and Michelle Dennis. *Eugene Area Historic Context Statement*. (City of Eugene Planning & Development, 1996), 110.

<sup>13</sup>1907 Warranty Deed for sale of land from Robert W. Carrick and Mary Carrick to David Meyers.

<sup>14</sup>Carter, 115.

<sup>15</sup>Lindley, Pauline Anderson. "Danebo Development Centered Around Church," *Lane County Historian*, Spring 2002.



## TRANSPORTATION

“The development of transportation routes was extremely important due to the relative isolation of many areas in the county [Lane] and to the geographic barriers to travel presented by the Coast, and the Cascade and Calapooya Mountains. Earliest non-Indian travel into central Lane County was from the north, up the wide, flat Willamette River Valley from its confluence with the Columbia River 100 miles from Lane County. Circulation through the county prior to 1846 was primarily over Indian trails or by river.”<sup>1</sup>

Early overland transportation routes in Lane County consisted primarily of Native American paths and pack trails, which followed the features of the natural landscape. When settlers set out to establish Donation Land Claims, they followed these dirt paths. Their horse drawn wagons tended to widen the trails, which evolved into roads. Many of these passageways were along the foothills, as annual flooding and excessive rain often made the valley floor impassable during winter months.

“By the time settlers began to arrive in the late 1840s, only one of the many trails was still in active use” – the current Applegate Trail.<sup>2</sup> In 1846, a party led by Jesse Applegate explored and laid out this route as a southern alternative to the Oregon Trail. There were actually two routes of the Applegate Trail that passed through Lane County. The western route is approximated by Territorial Road, while the eastern route passed through Cottage Grove, Creswell, Eugene and Junction City near the west bank of the Willamette River. “The 14-mile section between Eugene and Junction City became known locally as ‘the river road.’”<sup>3</sup> The Applegate Trail was the earliest local transportation development beyond path and river travel. Both routes of the trail were shown on an 1850 map produced by federal surveyors, considered the first accurate map of Lane County.

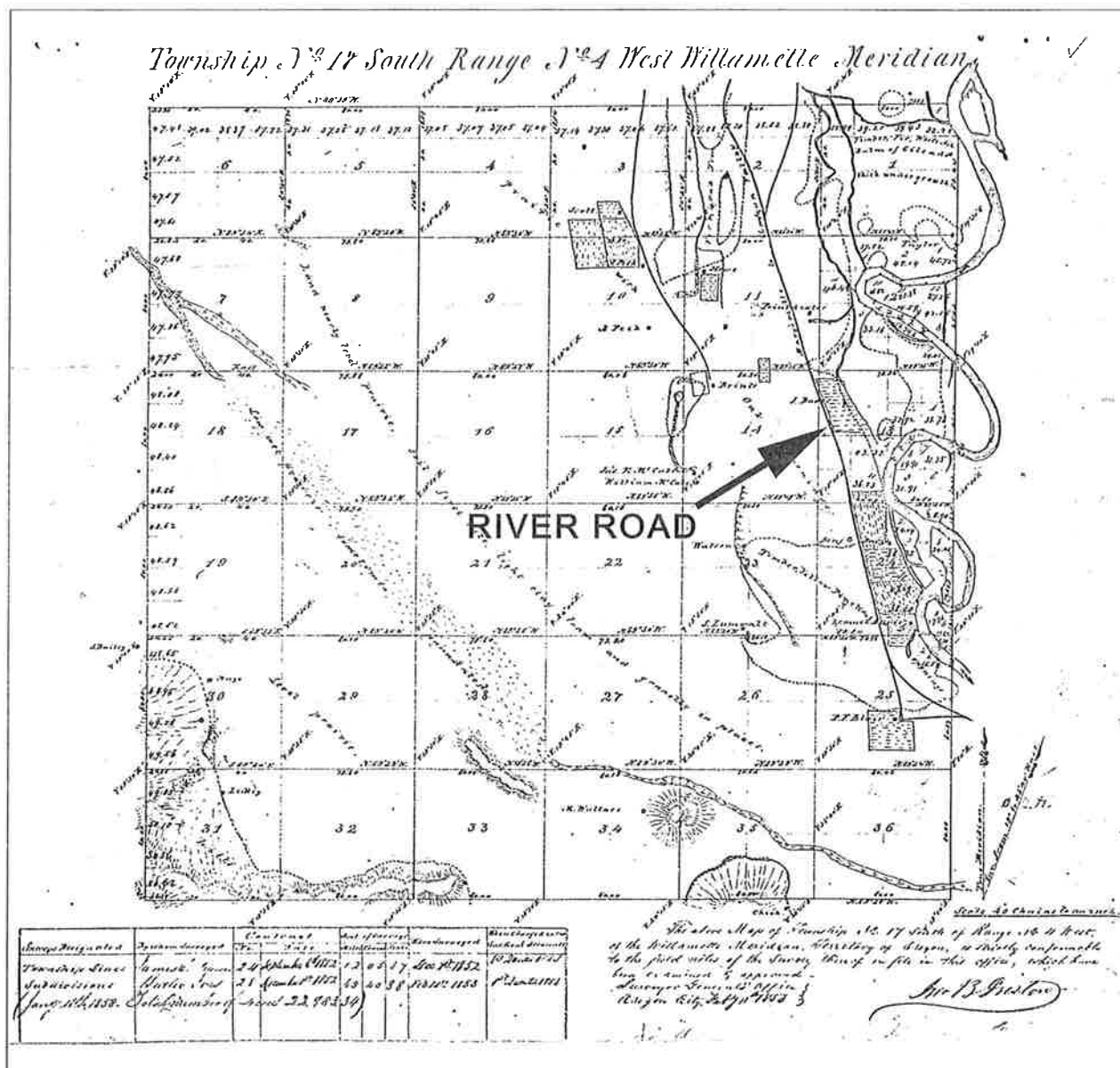
During the pioneer period, transportation was the key to economic growth. Because of this, communities tended to establish roadways and ferry crossings upon their founding. Shortly after his arrival to the area in 1846, Eugene Skinner established a ferry service located near the foot of the current Ferry Street Bridge. By 1848, Jacob Spores was ferrying foot passengers across the McKenzie River north of Eugene in a canoe.<sup>4</sup>

### Stage Lines

By 1850, a daily north/south stage line passed through the Willamette Valley. These coaches were generally drawn by six horses and connected Portland to Marysville,

California, in just under a week. However, "stage travel was uncomfortable, and passenger often chose to walk over certain notorious sections, especially the corduroy roads made of tree trunks laid side by side".<sup>5</sup> Roads tended to be dry and dusty in the summer and muddy in the winter. As such, most travel was done out of necessity and not for pleasure.

Stage stops, such as the one at Renfrews in Eugene City, provided food, lodging, and an exchange of horses and drivers. Stops were originally located in farmhouses, then established as separate buildings near the main road. Small communities often developed around the stage stops, with taverns, supply stores, and blacksmith's to serve travelers. By 1860, regular commercial stage service had been established in Eugene, and carried mail, freight and passengers. However, its usage was curtailed by the connection of the local railroad to California in 1887. Stages were then used for



General Land Office (GLO) map from 1853 showing information recorded in 1852. What was to become River Road is visible next to the Willamette River in the upper right quadrant.

more local purposes and for shorter stretches, such as to Mapleton, until their demise in the early 1900s.

In 1856, the main road north from Eugene City to Corvallis, and on to Portland, was established and followed the current Blair Boulevard and River Road. This route cut across the Donation Land Claims in the area, and as such, many of the parcels are oriented towards it. Other roads in this neighborhood tended to be irregular, as they followed claim lines, many of which were not quite rectangular or lined up with one another. "Where the terrain was level, roads built after the Territorial Roads and spur roads to individual farms often followed section or quarter section lines".<sup>6</sup>

## Steamboats

While communities situated on the lower stretches of the Willamette River were able to accommodate steamboat travel early on, due to their deep waters, this method of transportation did not reach Eugene until the mid-1850s. Establishment of local steamship service was prompted by area farmers and loggers. They were frustrated by the delays caused in transporting goods over primitive roads. "At that time the roads were virtually impassable to wagons during eight months of the year, so the river was (perceived to be) the best means for moving produce and lumber out, and just as important, for bringing manufactured goods in."<sup>7</sup> An agreement was made with the captain of the *James Clinton* to travel further up river to Eugene City in exchange for additional freight business. On March 12, 1856, the first commercial stern wheeler arrived in Eugene, connecting the community with the rest of the state.

In the 1860s, the People's Transportation Company was founded by the McCullys to promote transportation even further up river. These Harrisburg merchants ran steamboats to Eugene beginning in 1862 and to Springfield as of 1869. "Unfortunately, the river at Eugene proved to be quite shallow, and steamer traffic was limited to only four to six months out of the year, during periods of high water. Snags and uncharted sand and gravel bars were a continued problem, making steamboat travel quite unreliable."<sup>8</sup> The river proved to be neither a convenient or profitable method of local transport. Although service continued through the turn of the century, the arrival of the railroad in 1871 essentially ended the local steamboat era.

## Railroads

"The most significant transportation development for the economic and population growth of Lane County was the arrival of the Oregon and California Railroad in 1871. While the railroad went no further south than Lane County until the late 1880s, Lane County now had convenient, fast transport for freight and passengers to the larger towns and shipping centers in the north valley."<sup>9</sup>

Ben Holladay, who was laying out the new lines, insisted on a \$40,000 payment for the tracks to pass through Eugene and not Springfield. The community agreed and in October 1871, the Oregon and California (O&C) Railroad arrived in Eugene. The train *JB Stevens* was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd at the depot, a wood building near 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Willamette Street. The line initially extended only as far south as Roseburg, but still provided a vital link for the community's growing agriculture and timber industries. In 1885, the O&C went bankrupt and was acquired by Henry Villard, who changed its name to Southern Pacific (SP) Railroad. The line to California was completed two years later, cementing the railroad's domination of long distance transportation.



*Looking south from the Maxwell Street Bridge at the Eugene rail yard.*

The railroad not only made personal travel comfortable again, but also had a tremendous impact on local economic development. It opened up huge new markets for the export of local goods and produce, allowing for the creation of affordable and timely distribution systems. The railroad also connected the relatively isolated Oregon country with the more established states, easing the flow of information, trends, 'modern goods' and induced a new wave of settlers to head west.

While the train provided for longer trips, horse and wagons were still the primary transportation mode for short distances. By the late 1870s, it was apparent that improvements to local transportation and roads were necessary. In 1876, a covered bridge was constructed in the vicinity of the current Ferry Street Bridge, eliminating the need for Skinner's ferry service. In addition, "In 1877, the City Council ordered all intersections graded and completed with timbered street crossings and all property holders on Willamette from the depot to the southern boundary (14<sup>th</sup> Avenue) were directed to fill sinks in the street."<sup>10</sup>

The first improvements to the old wagon and stage roads were motivated by the need to create "market roads" or to ease the transport of agricultural goods to market. Lorane Highway is one such road. By the 1880s, the major routes leading in and out of the Eugene area were the east and west Territorial Roads, a county road leading south (now Alder Street), Coburg Road leading north, and a road leading to Junction City and Monroe that approximates the current Prairie Road.

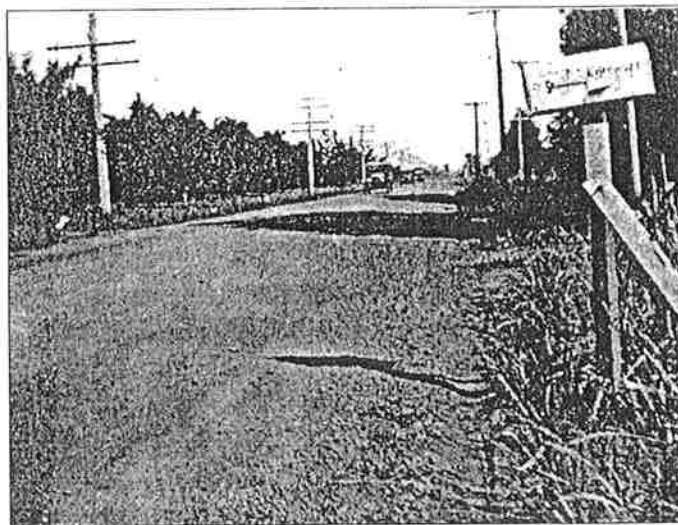
In 1891, the City of Eugene granted a franchise to Henry W. Holden to construct and operate a local street railway system. "On June 26, the line opened for business with mule-drawn trolleys traveling down Willamette Street from the train depot to 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and east to the University."<sup>11</sup> Although the line met with moderate success, service was discontinued in 1904. Two years later, the city granted another franchise for a local transportation system. It authorized the Willamette Valley Company to construct an electric street car line that would reach to Springfield. The system opened to the public

in the fall of 1907, with four lines originating near the train depot. Three lines operated within the City of Eugene and a fourth line ran to Springfield.

## Automobiles

The first automobile arrived in Eugene in 1904; two years later only four vehicles were locally owned. Within the next few years however, the number of automobiles in Oregon skyrocketed, and by 1912, there were over ten thousand cars on the road. Automobiles provided travelers with a tremendous sense of freedom. Trips no longer had to be planned around the train's time schedule. Travelers could go where they wanted, when they wanted, in the privacy of their own vehicle.

The introduction of the automobile created a market for new services and commercial enterprises. Filling stations, garages, repair shops and auto part supplies were just some of the businesses created to fill the utilitarian needs of car owners. Between 1910 and 1914, the number of automobile related businesses in Eugene increased from two to nearly twenty, the majority of these operating near the downtown core. It was close to 1920 when River Road received its first service station, a Richfield Gasoline outlet located at 420 River Road.



*River Road in 1920. Photo courtesy of Clara Yockey.*

The increasing usage of the automobile also created a need for additional and better quality roads. In 1913, the Oregon Legislature established the state highway system and designated a route, the Pacific Highway, from Portland to the California state line. In Eugene, the highway originally followed the current Franklin Boulevard, Blair Boulevard, and River Road. The highway was improved for year-round use, although it would not be paved until 1920. By 1926, both the Oregon and California sides were improved and "...the Pacific Highway was the longest continuous paved road in the world."<sup>12</sup>

The designation of River Road as a state highway greatly impacted the appearance of the neighborhood's agrarian landscape. In addition to an increase in the numbers of roadways were the business and services catering to the automobile itself. The improved road network allowed people to live farther away from the established neighborhoods near the center of town. Additional residents began moving to this agricultural area north of town. According to the *Eugene Register Guard*, "once River Road became a highway, people came out from the city and took up plots of ground and built houses and settled down with cherries and chickens."

Despite the appearance of the automobile, the railroad was still the dominant force in long distance travel and the transportation of goods in the early 1900s. In 1908, Southern Pacific Railroad replaced their wood depot at the north end of Willamette Street with a new brick structure. Three years later, the railroad completed its branch line from Eugene to Coos Bay. The line created a “Y” where it departed from the main track, near the intersection of River Road and Blair Boulevard.

In 1912, the Oregon Electric Railroad Company began laying tracks on both the east and west sides of the Willamette Valley. Two years later, the company built a station in Eugene and ran five daily passenger trains to Portland. In 1916, the Oregon Electric began construction on its Blair Street Terminal Yard. From here, tracks extended into the eastern and western reaches of the county. The rail line connected widely scattered farmsteads and was key to the development of early dairy farming. Four years later, due to increased demand, the railroad more than doubled the number of its daily trains to Portland.

In 1915, Southern Pacific Railroad purchased the local street car system. Within five years, however, the impact of the automobile on local rail travel was apparent, in the form of drastically reduced ridership. In 1926, the line to Springfield was discontinued and the following year, service within Eugene ceased. However, Southern Pacific would continue to provide a local transportation option. The city authorized the railroad to substitute a motor bus system for the streetcar network, and Oregon Motor Stages was soon in operation.

In 1925, community leaders were apprized of a plan by Southern Pacific Railroad to locate their new rail yard in Springfield and turn Eugene into a spur line. Hoping to retain this important industry, several viable parcels of land in Eugene were identified and offered to the railroad at no charge. After Southern Pacific refused these lots, the leaders essentially told the railroad to choose the land it wanted and that the city would obtain it on their behalf. Part of the bargain, however, was that the railroad relinquish title to the land it had acquired in Springfield.

Southern Pacific chose a 205-acre site in the agricultural lands to the northwest of town, west of River Road and anchored on the south by the current Roosevelt Boulevard. The new facility would stretch diagonally to the northwest, for approximately one-half mile. To accommodate the new yard, some changes were made to the area’s street system. Blair Boulevard was closed off where it would cross new tracks; County Road, later Bethel Drive, was diverted; and a short access road was extended from Elmira Road into the yard. The new yard became the western boundary of the River Road neighborhood, creating a barrier to the lands to its west.

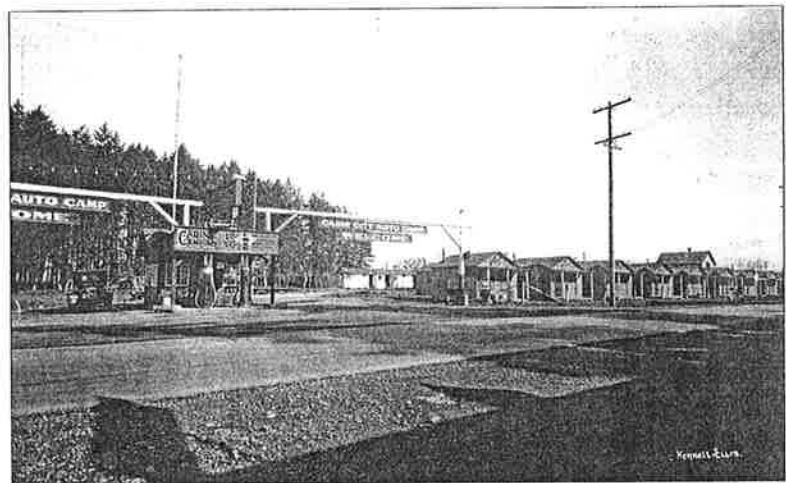
Development of the terminal yard began in 1925 and continued for the next four years. The first building to be constructed was a tie treatment facility, which was intended to serve Southern Pacific operations as far south as San Francisco. “Once completed (in 1926), the tie facility was considered one of the finest and most modern in the United States.”<sup>13</sup> The next buildings to be constructed included the roundhouse and turntable, oil storage tanks, a yard office, a car repair shed, pump house and a machine shop. The railroad also constructed a new bridge spanning the Willamette River, designed to

handle the heavier locomotives. The need for the bridge was anticipated due to the opening of the Natron Cut-off/Cascade Line which would reach into central Oregon. By March 1926, Southern Pacific began the consolidation of its operations at the Eugene facility, when it transferred its freight division from the soon to-be-defunct Junction City station.

During this period, the automobile industry was also making great strides. With an ever-growing number of vehicles on the road came an increasing demand for services and businesses that catered to them. New opportunities for specialized employment and manufacturing were created. For example, Polk's 1925 Classified Business Directory for Lane County includes these sub-categories, among others, under "Automobile": Accessories; Body Builders; Bumpers; Electricians; Enamel; Greasing; Polish; Rims and Wheels; Springs; Tires; Top Repairing and Wrecking.

Following the paving of Pacific Highway in 1923, automobiles were being used for personal travel of increasing lengths. Businesses catering to drivers sprang up along the highways. Of the ten service stations operating in 1925, five were along Pacific Highway, with four on Blair Boulevard and the fifth on River Road. Overnight accommodations began to be developed in the form of automobile camps, the precursor to motels. These camps generally consisted of a gas station, communal restroom, and small, detached cabins. The Cabin City Auto Camp, at 225 River Road, was one of three operating in Eugene in the mid-to-late 1920s.

In the early 1930s, due to its designation as a highway, River Road became an important transportation route and access to it was seen as key to development. A study of land patterns in the River Road-Santa Clara area by Michael Spyrou included approximately one-half of the land in the River Road neighborhood. According to Spyrou, in 1931 fifteen of the nineteen streets in his study area were tributaries of River Road. This phenomenon is attributable to two main development trends that took place in the area. First, was the practice of Donation Land Claim holders creating roads leading from their property directly to River Road, the main and only road through the area in the late 1850s. As these claims were divided, new owners would create their own access to the main road, as necessary.



*Cabin City Auto Camp in 1927 at 225 River Road. Photo by Kennell-Ellis courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (KE1033)*

The second trend was the tendency for land owners to subdivide their properties so that the new parcels faced existing streets, creating access and eliminating the need for creating infrastructure. As was common, these early roads were named after adjacent

property holders and include (Frank M.) Horn Lane, (D.C.) Howard Avenue, (Jerry) Beebe Lane and (Charles A.) Hardy Street. Early Metsker Maps of the area show that the phenomenon occurring in Spyrou's study area was indicative of the entire River Road neighborhood.

During the Depression years of the early 1930s, several road-related projects occurred in the River Road neighborhood. This included work by Lane County, such as the construction of the 1932 River Loop Covered Bridge, designed by Nels Roney. "Structurally, it is typical of the conservatively designed Howe trusses favored by Lane County bridge builders for so many years."<sup>14</sup> Larger scale road projects included improvements to sections of the Pacific Highway that ran through Eugene, in preparation for it becoming an interstate highway. This resulted in the route following Blair Boulevard and River Road being designated as Highway 99 North (99N).

Street improvements were completed primarily by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which was created to provide work to the unemployed, largely in the form of community improvement projects. "In the depression years of the 1930s, road crews of the CCC paved and graveled roads throughout the county."<sup>15</sup> In 1935, Eugene was still in the process of upgrading its roads, as 15 of 68 miles of roads were still dirt or gravel. As work focused on streets within the city limits, few improvements were made in the River Road neighborhood that were not directly related to the Pacific Highway.

Due to its proximity to the Willamette River and its low elevation, the River Road neighborhood was prone to frequent flooding. During such times, Highway 99N was impassable. In 1936, the route of the highway was relocated to the west of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks and terminal yard. Traffic was shifted to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Prairie Road, leaving Blair Boulevard and River Road to serve local traffic. In order to accommodate increasing traffic, in 1941 the Oregon Highway Department converted 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues into one-way couplets to service the highway. Five years later, additional improvements to Highway 99N, including its separation from Prairie Road, near the rail yards, resulted in the roadway's current configuration.

As automobiles became more affordable and paved roads made traveling easier, additional motorists took to the roads. Additional services sprung up, but most were concentrated along the highway, to serve the bulk of the traffic. By 1944, of the 31 automobile camps in the Eugene Area, at least 22 were located on Highways 99N and 99S, including West 6<sup>th</sup> and West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues. In addition



*Cow at gas station during the 1946 flood. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2052)*

to the Cabin City Auto Court, the River Road neighborhood also boasted the Green Gable Auto Court and the Fir Grove Auto Camp. Once sited on the “outskirts” of town, these new accommodations were being developed around the city center and were increasingly referred to as courts, lodges and motels.

“The construction of Highway 99N in 1946 increased the local traffic capacity of River Road and offered more opportunities for favorable commercial locations along it; this also had the effect of making it a more favorable residential site.”<sup>16</sup> Commercial development became oriented toward the neighborhood, and by 1948, an appliance store, department store, dry cleaners and small offices sat among the six gas and oil stations lining the road. Unlike this new commercial development and also unlike the residential development of its past, however, the new residential growth was not oriented to River Road, but was still dependent on it.

In 1946, according to Spyrou’s land use study of the area, more than half of the 63 roads in the neighborhood directly joined River Road. This resulted primarily from earlier residential development, which had new additions abutting existing streets, and the location of the Southern Pacific Railroad terminal yard, which created a buffer on the neighborhood’s west side. Growth after World War II reinforced the focus on River Road, as new development was simply sited within the street network that was already established. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, 14 new residential plats were filed in the neighborhood, with an average of 11 parcels each. These were primarily replats of older additions or the infill of vacant parcels that were already surrounded with development. As in the past, these additions were located on streets that already existed, many of which either directly intersected with River Road or fed onto streets that led to River Road, such as Park Avenue.

In 1947, local bus operations were purchased by City Bus Lines, which maintained the system for almost a decade. After a near-bankruptcy, the bus drivers formed a driver-owned cooperative to take over operations in 1958. By the end of the following year, the Emerald Transportation System had purchased twenty Volkswagen microbuses, which served the residents of Eugene and the fringe areas for much of the 1960s.



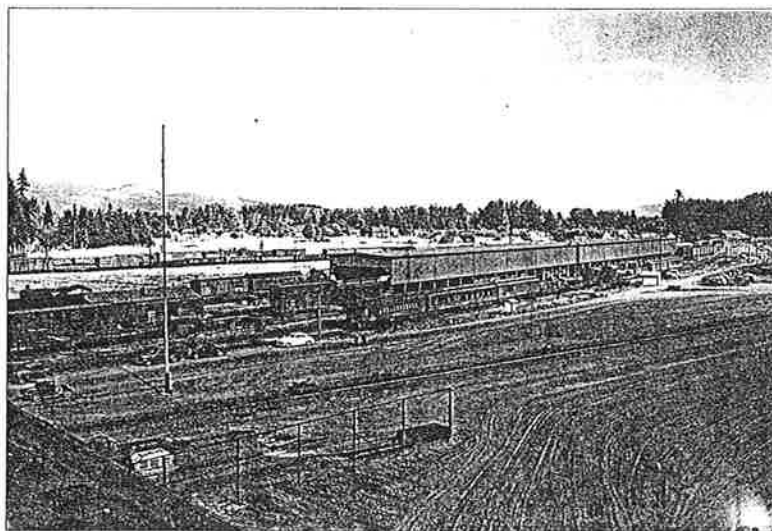
*The Emerald Transportation System and their fleet of Volkswagens in the 1960s.*

From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, a number of large-scale road projects were undertaken around Eugene. Lane County began to expand its street network and improve its roadways to the north of Eugene. “Using federal timber receipts, Lane County built the roads that served the fringe developments,” including Irvington, Royal and Barger.<sup>17</sup> In 1956, local construction began on Interstate 5, which was part of the Interstate Freeway system established the prior decade. As the freeway was located on

the outskirts of town, its completion included the Interstate 105 spur, which connects the freeway to downtown Eugene.

During the time that these freeways were being developed, a number of changes had occurred at Southern Pacific's Eugene yard. In the late 1930s, improvements were made to increase efficiency, accommodate longer freight trains, and handle larger locomotives. For example, additional stalls were added to the roundhouse and a larger turntable was installed.

In 1944, Southern Pacific decided it would no longer purchase steam locomotives as diesel electric power was more efficient. Within two years, the first diesel freighters were in operation and were soon followed by diesel passenger trains. The introduction of a new power source required new and updated service facilities. As a result the Eugene yard went through another round of modernization and upgrades in the 1950s. This included its conversion from a flat switching yard to one using radar operated gravity, part of a \$6 million expansion completed in 1956.



*Looking east in 1942 towards the River Road area from the machine shop in the Eugene rail yard. Photo by Fred Davis and courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (T60/L79-301)*

It was during this time that Southern Pacific entered into a variety business ventures that would affect the look and use of its local facility. In 1955, the railroad opened Southern Pacific Pipelines, a refined petroleum products pipeline. Storage tanks, pipelines, and an associated spur line were developed in the northwest section of its yard. In 1958, the Pacific Electric Motor Transport Company, a trucking subsidiary that provided rail-to-store delivery, relocated its Northern District Headquarters to Eugene.

In 1962, Southern Pacific expanded its yard north to Irving. As a result, the railroad transferred a number of functions and hundreds of employees to Eugene from its southeast Portland yards. Two years later, Southern Pacific constructed a new highway transport terminal next to the yard, enabling the company to take advantage of the new interstate road system. These two actions added to the population surge in the River Road area and surrounding neighborhoods.

In 1961, a Eugene transportation report suggested a number of changes around the Southern Pacific Railroad terminal to help facilitate the flow of vehicular traffic. One was a road connection over the tracks at River Road and Chambers Street and another was the construction of a northwest highway along the east side of the yard. "By December

1961, Lane County proceeded with construction of the North Eugene Highway, now known as the Beltline, across the yard.”<sup>18</sup> Beltline Highway connected Interstate 5 to the River Road and Bethel-Danebo neighborhoods.

The following year, the Delta Highway was constructed on the agricultural lands of Goodpasture Island. It provided a connection between Beltline Highway and Interstate 105 to its south. “The Interstate freeway system was one aspect of the postwar technological explosion that had a very significant impact on Eugene’s and the region’s development. Its construction heralded the accelerated growth of Oregon cities and the accompanying changes in land use and attitude toward our national environment.”<sup>19</sup>

The construction of the freeway system accelerated growth and the accompanying changes in land use. It greatly facilitated the commercial and residential development of the River Road neighborhood, among other effects. Automobile-related development began to occur at or near the freeway interchanges, such as the River Road exit from Beltline. As these new commercial enterprises tended to focus on the recreational traveler, gas stations, motels and restaurants were the most common services provided. The freeway system also allowed people to live farther from their place of work and allowed development on land once considered too rural.



*Construction of the Delta Highway prior to the Jefferson Street Bridge, 1964. Photo by Harry Gross courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN252)*

The 1960s saw the introduction of the large-scale subdivision in the River Road neighborhood. Developments of this size required additional roadways to be installed, which began to change the look of the area’s transportation network. The new streets began to conform to the grid pattern that most of the city was based on, yet which had remained largely absent from this neighborhood. During this time, curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs were also introduced to a landscape that only knew the meandering of Marion Lane south of River Road Elementary School.

These contemporary roads and large subdivisions are concentrated in the west and northwest sections of the neighborhood. These areas, which back up to the Southern Pacific rail lines, developed later than others due to their comparably inaccessible location. The extension of existing streets, such as North Park Avenue and Silver Lane, helped promote construction in this pocket. Despite the introduction of these new road

features, the main street pattern in this neighborhood remained unchanged – the majority of arterials still lead to River Road.

## Transportation Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Forster, Thomas B., ed. et al. *The Cultural and Historic Landscapes of Lane County, Oregon: Summary Report of the 1986 Lane County Cultural and Historic Landscape Resources Survey*. (Lane County, OR, 1986), 41.

<sup>2</sup>Forster, 41.

<sup>3</sup>Sims, Mike. "River Road History Survey." Unpublished correspondence, 6/13/05, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Carter, Elizabeth and Michelle Dennis. *Eugene Area Historic Context Statement*. (City of Eugene Planning & Development, 1996), 23.

<sup>5</sup>Carter, 24.

<sup>6</sup>Forster, 71.

<sup>7</sup>Carter, 25.

<sup>8</sup>Carter, 25.

<sup>9</sup>Forster, 48.

<sup>10</sup>Carter, 41.

<sup>11</sup>Carter, 76.

<sup>12</sup>Carter, 85.

<sup>13</sup>Ossa, Rebecca R. *Southern Pacific's Eugene Yard: A Survey and Evaluation of Preservation Opportunities for a Historic Rail Yard and its Architecture*. University of Oregon Thesis, Historic Preservation Program, 1997, 25.

<sup>14</sup>Nelson, Lee H. *A Century of Oregon Covered Bridges 1851-1952*. (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>Forster, 44.

<sup>16</sup>Spyrou, Michael. *Land in the Suburbs: Spatial Patterns of Lots in the River Road-Santa Clara Area, Eugene, Oregon*. University of Oregon Thesis, Department of Geography, 1973, 17.

<sup>17</sup>Stone, Norman, F. *Bountiful McKenzie: The Story of the Eugene Water & Electric Board*. (Eugene, OR: Parkston Company, 1986), 63.

<sup>18</sup>Ossa, 54.

<sup>19</sup>Wright, Sally and David Pinyerd. *Eugene Modernism, 1935-65*. (City of Eugene Planning & Development, 2003), 2.4.



## AGRICULTURE

Agricultural landscapes of Lane County fall into three distinct yet intersecting developmental phases, the agrarian (1846-1940), the industrial (1865-1940) and the commercial (1890-1940)<sup>1</sup>

The agrarian period marks the time when agriculture was the dominant force in social, cultural, and economic development. It includes the period of initial Donation Land Claim settlement from 1845 to 1860, as well as the emergence of complete farms between 1850 and 1870<sup>2</sup>. Though the industrial revolution is primarily associated with manufacturing, it had a significant impact on agriculture as well. Mechanization made it possible to farm large parcels without large labor supplies, while improved transportation networks, especially the rail roads, made it possible to reach nationwide markets<sup>3</sup>. The collapse of grain markets in the 1890s, a shift of large-scale wheat and cattle farming to Eastern Oregon, and the steady growth of urban centers and regional markets, ushered in the decline of industrial-scale farming ventures in Lane County. Smaller, more diverse farms characterize the resulting commercial agricultural phase. Row-crops, orchards, and dairies replaced large-scale grain farming, while the resulting produce was designated for regional rather than national distribution<sup>4</sup>. It is this last phase that had a particularly broad impact on the River Road area prior to its suburbanization following World War II.

### Pioneer Agriculture

The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 allowed pioneers to claim 320 acres, if single, or 640 acres if married, with the condition that the land needed to be improved. In 1860, the Homestead Act reduced claim sizes to 160 acres and 320 acres, respectively. The popularity of the Acts, as well as the desirability of land in the Upper Willamette Valley, resulted in the nearly complete settlement of the region by the late 1850s. What is now the River Road area would have been especially attractive to settlers because of its easy access to water and rich soils. In addition, its Prairie grasslands provided ideal pasture and required little effort to clear.

The 1857 Survey Map indicates that the primary landowners in River Road were members of the Davis family, with Joseph and Benjamin Davis each holding slightly over 640-acres, and L. E. Davis holding another claim of slightly over 300-acres. Their "neighbors" to the north, in what is now Santa Clara, included claims by members of the Pointdexter family, as well as James and Abraham Peck (a.k.a., Peek): The holdings to their west belonged to Parker Bryan, James and William McCabe, and Joseph Ogle. Prior Blair and Solomon Zumwalt settled to the Davis' south and southwest.<sup>5</sup>

Settlers brought a variety of seed and livestock with them, initially planting approximately 20 acres of their claim to support themselves and their families.<sup>6</sup> Cattle were often the first focus of farm expansion because the rich prairies of the Willamette Valley provided ample grazing in unfenced fields and because cattle were easier to transport to distant markets.<sup>7</sup>

## **Industrial-Scale Agriculture**

The 1850s and 1860s saw much experimentation and solidification of agricultural technology and practices. In 1860, the Oregon State Agricultural Society was established. The introduction of silos came in 1873, a sign of an emerging dairy industry.

The gold rushes in California and later British Columbia spurred further expansion of production for Oregon farmers. Though some Oregonians left for the gold fields, many more stayed behind and prospered by supplying miners with food and other goods. The 1870s and the 1880s saw a boom in wheat, which was further facilitated by improved transportation networks and farming technology. Though agrarian settlement patterns continued to exist into the twentieth century in the remoter reaches of Lane County, in the more central River Road area, small farms were replaced by larger scale industrialized agriculture by the 1870s.

The large scale of the Donation Land Claims lent themselves to industrialized agriculture. A single, unassisted family group could hardly cultivate a 640-acre, or even a 320-acre claim without the aid of hired labor and increasing mechanization. The results of expanded cultivation, large harvests, were also beyond the capacity of local communities to absorb, resulting in an increasing volume of exports.<sup>8</sup>

Though the advent of steamboat shipping aided the export of goods, the construction of railroad networks caused exports to explode. Profitability was such that some new crops, such as hops, were introduced in 1875-1900. Hop cultivation required the first intensive use of migrant labor. Evidence tentatively suggests that Native American migrant labor was especially associated with hops cultivation and harvest in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>9</sup> A boom in hops between the 1880s and the 1920s collapsed with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Prohibition, which became effective in January of 1920.<sup>10</sup>

## **Commercial Agriculture**

In the 1890s a significant shift occurred. The previously exuberant grain markets collapsed, forcing many farmers to sell all or part of their holdings.<sup>11</sup> Donation Land Claims were often split among the children of the original claimants or were sold to new arrivals. While the average farm size in 1860 was 388 acres, by 1900 it had diminished to 170 acres.<sup>12</sup>

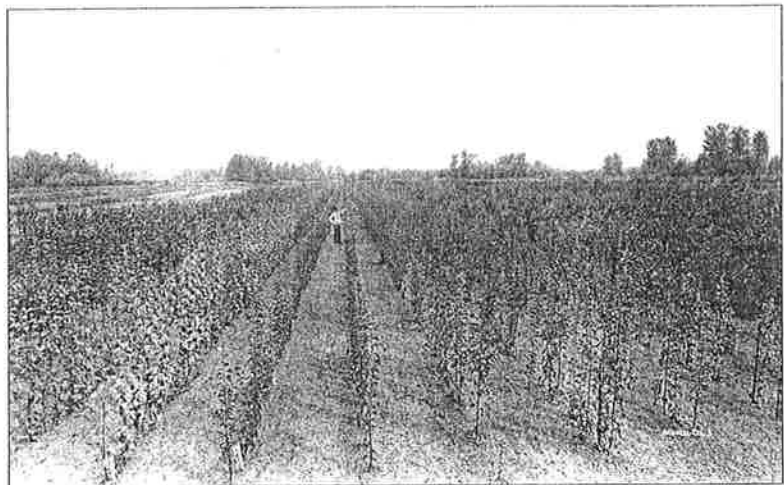
Improved irrigation techniques and large open tracts of land shifted cattle ranching and wheat farming towards eastern Oregon.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the average farm size declined in the western portion of the state, while the number of farms in operation increased. Willamette Valley farms also became more diversified, increasing the production of row crops and orchards that could supply local markets. During this time, local markets expanded as more and more laborers arrived to work in new industrial endeavors. Simultaneously, improved road networks further facilitated the development of regional markets.

The greater quantity and smaller size of the new farm forms attracted new farmers, some lured by advertising campaigns. In the early 1900s, small-scale farming was promoted as healthy and virtuous, an expression of the Jeffersonian idyll. Willamette Valley land was promoted by boosters, such as the Southern Pacific, the Sunset Magazine Homeseeker's Bureau, and the Eugene Commercial Club.<sup>14</sup> The Willakenzie area, whose agricultural and residential development parallels that of River Road, was promoted by George Melvin Miller, among others, who advertised "Miller's Little Farms," in the *Morning Register Industrial Edition* in 1907. Miller offered lots ranging from 4- to 20-acres, along with very specific instructions for maximizing profit from walnuts, peaches, berries, and potatoes.<sup>15</sup>



## Orchards and Row Crops

The newer settlers from the Midwest and East Coast states brought new crops with them, as well as new techniques such as crop rotation.<sup>16</sup> Though the first grafted fruit trees were imported into Oregon in 1847, horticulture did not become a significant force in agricultural economics until the late nineteenth-century. Flax had a similarly delayed acceptance, arriving in the state in 1844-1850 and remaining a minor crop until the war efforts of the 1940s<sup>17</sup>



*Fruit tree production at Woodruff Nursery on River Road. Photo by Kennell-Ellis courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (KE887)*

Market gardens flourished between 1900 and 1940, with new focus on cherries, walnuts, filberts, and apples. Field patterns were generally composed of equal sized

parcels of orchards and row crops.<sup>18</sup> The trend toward an increased quantity of farms of smaller size continued. Some could be as small as 20 acres, but ranged up to 200 acres. Grain fields persisted, but no longer dominated. Cattle and other livestock also continued to be kept, but were often for home use, rather than for commercial purposes.

The annual value of fruit production in the Northwest nearly doubled between 1880 and 1900, fueled in part by improved transportation networks and processing facilities such as prune dryers. By the 1920s, prunes became the number one fruit, with apples running a close second.<sup>19</sup> In 1903, George Dorris began to grow Filberts commercially in the Springfield area. Gas powered equipment introduced between 1914 and 1940 further speeded up planting and harvesting. Oregon agriculture boomed during World War I. The following Great Depression saw the collapse of the independent family farm and consolidation into commercial operations, though smaller scale market gardens persisted, especially in urban areas.<sup>20</sup>

## Dairies

Another agricultural development between 1890 and 1930 was the emergence of dairy farms. In addition to improved transportation networks, technological innovations associated with the proliferation of dairies include the development of the cream separator in the 1890s and slightly later, the introduction of electricity, initially in the form of generators.

In the River Road area, dairies were primarily associated with the Danish Community. Neils Johansen (1852-1927) and Jans Elgaard (1858-1938), both Danebo Danes and River Road residents were also dairy farmers and founders of the Eugene Farmers Creamery in 1914.<sup>21</sup>

Land, markets, machinery, and crop varieties determined the scope of operations. Labor was often in short supply, especially during the two World Wars, which meant that family-based labor remained significant. Nevertheless, labor shortages between 1910 and 1940 resulted in the conversion of some dairy operations to orchards or to chicken farms.<sup>22</sup>



*Arps' Dairy farm on River Road, c.1910. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN7035)*

<p><b>ARP'S DAIRY</b> <i>Pure Bred Holstein-Friesian Cattle</i> <small>Herd Under Federal Control for Tuberculosis</small> <b>PURE MILK AND CREAM DELIVERED DAILY</b> <small>MOTOR ROUTE A      TEL. 51-F-23      EUGENE, OREGON</small></p>
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## Social and Professional Organizations

Some organizations also served as outlets for information, as lobbies, social centers, and as ventures for the sale of produce, such as the Lane County Agricultural Society, which existed between 1859 and 1908.<sup>23</sup> Granges served a similar function. Though the Oregon State Grange as well as the Springfield Grange Number 12 were established in 1873, it was not until the twentieth-century that granges were established near the River Road area. These include the Willakenzie Grange (1913),<sup>24</sup> the Santa Clara Grange (1918),<sup>25</sup> and the Irving Grange (by 1940).<sup>26</sup> The construction of Eugene's first cannery in 1891 boosted the export values of fruits and other row crops. In 1908 the Lane County Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association was established.<sup>27</sup>

The Beebe family were notable local farmers. Owning a barn, house and other outbuildings on the corner of North Park Avenue and Beebe Lane, Jerry Beebe was active in Lane County agricultural business and was an early member of the Eugene Fruit Growers Association, later known as Agripac. This organization would grow to become extremely influential in agricultural practice and business throughout Eugene and the surrounding area.<sup>28</sup> Eighty growers founded the association in 1908, with a capital of \$5,000 and a small warehouse. They undertook to can their produce and make it more available to a greater market. Packaging anything from green beans to dried fruit and nuts, the Fruit Growers Association grew over the years until, in 1940, over 42,000,000 pounds of produce were being handled, earning half a million dollars.<sup>29</sup> This agricultural organization was no doubt lucrative for the farm-focused community around River Road and contributed to the commerce of the area.

## Suburbanization

Though the suburbanization of the River Road area began in the 1920s and 1930s, after World War II its pace speeded up considerably. Development often leapfrogged, taking advantage of less expensive land just beyond current boundaries of development, resulting in a mixed pattern of residential enclaves and farmland. Fringe farms, 10-acre farmettes located on the Urban Services Boundary (USB) became popular between 1950 and 1980, especially in the still less developed Santa Clara area. The average farm size continued to decline between 1900 and 1974, but less drastically, from an average of 212 acres to 166 acres. The number of farms, however, was nearly cut in half, from over 500,000 to 264,123.<sup>30</sup> The 1987 *Santa Clara Urban Facilities Plan* noted that the approximately 500-acres of agricultural land remaining in River Road/Santa Clara constituted a "productive interim land use."<sup>31</sup>



## Agriculture Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Forster, Thomas B., ed. et al. *The Cultural and Historic Landscapes of Lane County, Oregon*. (Lane County, OR, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>Forster, 60.

<sup>3</sup>Forster, 73-74.

<sup>4</sup>Forster, 81-82.

<sup>5</sup>1857 DLC map.

<sup>6</sup>Wilson, Jeffery Scott. *Farming the Urban Fringe*. University of Oregon Thesis, Department of Geography, 1981, 33.

<sup>7</sup>Wilson, 34.

<sup>8</sup>Forster, 74.

<sup>9</sup>Library of Congress photo of Hop picking near Moxie City.

<sup>10</sup>Speulda, Lou Ann. *Oregon's Agricultural Development: A Historic Context, 1811-1940*. (Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, 1989), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 37.

<sup>12</sup>Johnson, Maura. *Willakenzie Area Plan Historic Context*. (Eugene Planning & Development, 1989), 7

<sup>13</sup>Johnson, 5.

<sup>14</sup>Johnson, 8.

<sup>15</sup>Johnson, 10.

<sup>16</sup>Forster, 84.

<sup>17</sup>Speulda, 8.

<sup>18</sup>Forster, 85.

<sup>19</sup>Speulda, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Speulda, 15.

<sup>21</sup>Hall, Katherine. "Notes on the Johansen-Moody House." unpublished.

<sup>22</sup> Hall, Katherine.

<sup>23</sup>Carter, Elizabeth and Michelle Dennis. *Eugene Area Historic Context Statement*, (Eugene Planning & Development, 1996), 71.

<sup>24</sup>Carter, 42.

<sup>25</sup>"Santa Clara Land Use Plan," 1975.

<sup>26</sup>Carter, 105.

<sup>27</sup>Johnson, 12.

<sup>28</sup>Sims, Mike. "River Road History Survey." Unpublished correspondence, 6/13/05, 13.

<sup>29</sup>Moore, Lucia, Nina McCornack, Gladys McCready. *The Story of Eugene*, 220-221.

<sup>30</sup>Wilson, 43.

<sup>31</sup>"Santa Clara Urban Facilities Plan," 1987, Sect. 2-17.



## RESIDENTIAL

In the early 1920s, the most common way to obtain a residential building site in Eugene continued to be the purchase of a lot from a developer. These lots were generally in platted subdivisions located near the downtown core and the University of Oregon. Individual property owners would then construct a residence on their property, often with the assistance of a builder and/or architect. This practice resulted in neighborhoods with a variety of sizes and styles of houses. Yet, a sense of continuity existed due to the interlocking street system, uniform lot sizes, and development requirements, such as set-backs, that these subdivisions generally imposed.

The acquisition of building sites in the River Road area did not conform to this practice, however. Donation Land Claim (DLC) owners west of River Road tended to partition off small sections of their property at a time, with 5-10 acre parcels being sold directly to individuals, not to land developers. The land was outside of the city limits and was, therefore, served by septic tanks and not subject to zoning regulations and land division rules. New lots were generally sited along existing roads, which tended to follow or dead-end at original claims and subsequent property lines. Due to the sale of lots to individual owners, single family houses dominate this neighborhood.

This practice of subdividing to take advantage of existing roadways is quite apparent in the central section of the neighborhood. Properties between Horn Lane and Howard Avenue have River Road frontage, yet the lots stretch east or west for hundreds of feet, creating long narrow parcels. This development pattern is also evident in the portion of the original L.E. Davis DLC which sits along the Willamette River. From

**Miller's Little Farms NPT**  
LANE COUNTY, ORE.

The above plat of land lies 2 3/4 miles due north from the business center of Eugene and is for sale in tracts as platted at prices from \$75 to \$125 per acre, subject to change without notice. Terms 20 per cent cash and balance on or before 5 years at 6 per cent in. It lies on macadamized road leading into Eugene, on telephone line and good school is near, in a splendid neighborhood of enterprising people. This land will produce anything that grows in the Willamette valley. To get the highest revenue out of this land it should be planted in English walnuts 40 feet apart, or 30 trees to the acre. At 12 years old these trees will produce 100 pounds of nuts each, worth 15 cents per pound wholesale. Between the rows of walnuts plant peach trees 40 feet apart which at four years old will produce 150 pounds worth two cents per pound. Between the rows of peach and walnut trees plant two rows of blackberries, or raspberries, which at two years old produce full crops, always saleable in the Eugene markets at 3 to 4 cents per pound. While the trees and shrubs are small the ground can be cultivated to potatoes and other garden truck and as they grow and shade the ground, the berry bushes may be taken out and eventually the walnut will crowd out the peach trees and yield from \$500 to \$1000 per acre yearly, without any cultivation while the ground between them may be planted to grass and yield good cow pasture.

I also have a large list of stock farms, timber lands, seaport property at Florence in this county, city and suburban property in Eugene and Springfield.

I have been in the Real Estate business in Eugene since 1882 and know the country thoroughly. References any bank or business house in Eugene.

**Geo. Melvin Miller**  
Rooms 20 & 21 McClung Block, EUGENE, OREGON.

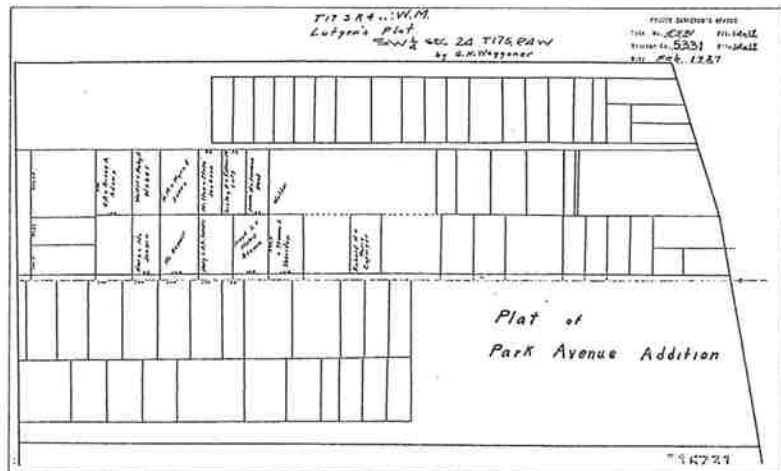
*Real estate ad from the area from the Morning Register Industrial Edition, 1907.*

approximately Park Avenue south to Hansen Lane, parcels extended from the east side of River Road to the edge of the Willamette River.

Without a grid street system to guide it, this pattern of residential development in the River Road area continued to add to the area's history of odd-shaped lots. These non-typical configurations were first created by the DLC's themselves. While the original claims were generally rectangular in shape, they did not always result from straight lines and were not always lined up with other claims. Adding to this configuration were small parcels of land that went unclaimed and the application of the section-land system over the original claims, which created "fractional" sections.

In 1925, the River Road neighborhood received its fourth plat, the Park Avenue Subdivision. It was located on the west side of the River Road intersection and consisted of 19 lots of approximately 0.32 acres each. Park Avenue was both the first addition to the record since 1910 and the first subdivision in this area to feature individual buildings sites. Prior to this, the lots in new additions had consisted of at least three-acres each. Two years later, E.S. Lütgen platted his land to the northwest of the Park Avenue Addition, also into individual building lots. Although all 20+ parcels were rectangular in shape and had a depth of 200-225 feet, the frontage along Sunnyside Drive ranged from 70 to 108 feet. As a result, this area contains the neighborhoods greatest concentration of residential resources dating from the 1920s and 1930s.

In the latter 1920s, two major factors affected the development of the River Road area. First was the 1926 decision to site the new Southern Pacific Railroad yard and shops just to the west of the neighborhood, creating an impermeable boundary. As a result, new suburban housing was built along River Road, and on nearby lanes and side streets, to house the population influx brought by new jobs at the rail yards.<sup>1</sup> The second



Park Avenue plat of 1925.

factor was the automobile and the development of roads. As living outside of the city core became more feasible, residential development outside of downtown in the "fringe areas" began in earnest. The River Road area became popular as people were willing to locate in the agricultural areas. In addition to the freedom it represented, the rural lifestyle was also seen as an escape from high rents and high taxes.

By 1930, the population of the River Road-Santa Clara Area had reached 1,462, nearly double from the prior decade. This represented about 9% of Eugene's 18,901 total residents. The original donation land claims in this area had been divided into approximately 300 smaller parcels. As indicated by the 1931 Metsker Map, this piecemeal development continued to occur in a somewhat haphazard manner.

The Depression brought residential development in the entire community to a standstill. During the early 1930s, no new subdivisions were filed in the Eugene area. As the economy began to improve, new construction was reactivated, but it was initially concentrated in the established parts of town. One exception was the Sunny Lea Addition platted on the property of Frank Horn. It contained five long blocks and dead-end streets that stretched from Horn Lane two-thirds of the distance to Howard Avenue. In 1937 the developers were advertising "½ acre lots for sale. \$150-\$350 terms."



*Sunny Lea development tract office on Horn Lane. Fay M. Bennett, manager, in doorway. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2025)*

By the end of the 1930s, Eugene's construction had resumed at a brisk pace and its population had inflated. In 1940, the population of the River Road-Santa Clara area increased by nearly 60% to 2,545, and represented 12% of Eugene's population. The following year, Bert Dotson a neighborhood resident, devised a "simple, unique house-numbering system for the lanes branching off River Road. Dotson proposed assigning address numbers based on the number of feet properties are located from River Road (i.e., 295 Sunnyside Drive – 295 feet from River Road). Prior to acceptance of "the Dotson plan" (presumably by Lane County and/or postal authorities) area addresses consisted of the usual rural route-box number combinations."<sup>2</sup>



*Single-family residence under construction in the Sunny Lea housing development. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2026)*

This period of development in the late 1930s was brief, however, as the United States prepared to enter World War II. In April 1942, a National "Stop Order" was issued for building construction, as materials were to be conserved for the war efforts. This order limited the investment in commercial, industrial and recreation structures to less than \$5,000, in farm buildings to less than \$1,000, and in residential construction to \$500. This order contributed to the slowdown of the building industry during the war years, as timber production was re-oriented to the war effort and workers were increasingly unavailable.

Following WWII, the size and population of Eugene exploded. The community experienced the same suburban growth that was sweeping the nation, particularly due

to the growth of the timber industry. Between 1940 and 1950, the number of residents increased by 72% to 35,879. During this same period, the population of the River Road-Santa Clara neighborhood more than doubled to 6,412, representing 18% of the city's residents. "Due to its location near most of the area's sawmills and the railroad, River Road and Bethel-Danebo received the bulk of suburban growth north of Eugene."<sup>3</sup> During this time, the automobile courts that had been established along River Road began to act as low-rent housing facilities. This included acting as a temporary shelter for families building homes in the neighborhood and as a permanent residence for the more impoverished.

With this growth came significant changes to Eugene's residential development patterns. A strong economy led to a building boom, and 60 new additions were platted between 1946 and 1950. These subdivisions ranged widely in size, from a handful of homes to a neighborhood with over 200 units. Of the fourteen plats filed in the River Road neighborhood during this time, the number of lots ranged from two to twenty-four. Many of these new plats were owned by developers, who planned to fill the tracts with standardized, economical, and pre-built houses.

It was no longer necessary for individuals to buy bare land on which they would construct a residence. They could now purchase ready-built houses located in developer-built suburban neighborhoods in Eugene. The look of residential architecture began to change, with the introduction of new technologies which provided for an increased variety and type of building materials. It became popular and "modern" to incorporate large plate glass; applied masonry, such as tile, stones and brick; and new roofing materials, such as rocks.

Another change in residential development patterns following World War II was the introduction of subdivision design innovations. This included curved streets and cul-de-sacs, which were particularly popular as they reduced the use of land for streets to a minimum and helped with siting issues on difficult parcels. However, the introduction of these new elements would serve to further complicate road patterns in the River Road area.

WWII also introduced the technique of mass production to the housing industry, such as standardization of plan, production line techniques, and an assembly line approach to construction. Instead of using a lone group of workers from start to finish, this approach utilized specialized crews, such as framers, plumbers, and electricians, who moved from house to house completing a single task. This allowed developers to build tracts of standardized, economical houses, most of which were not sold until after completion.

In the same vein were house plan books, which had been produced for decades by such companies as Sears and Aladdin. Construction of the chosen plan was done on-site, on bare land already owned by the buyer. The company would ship all the materials necessary, from pre-cut lumber and glass panes to nuts and bolts, directly to the construction site. Most companies offered a variety of floor plans and a range of options, such as garages and basements. Some houses were designed specifically for future additions, such as a bedroom wing.

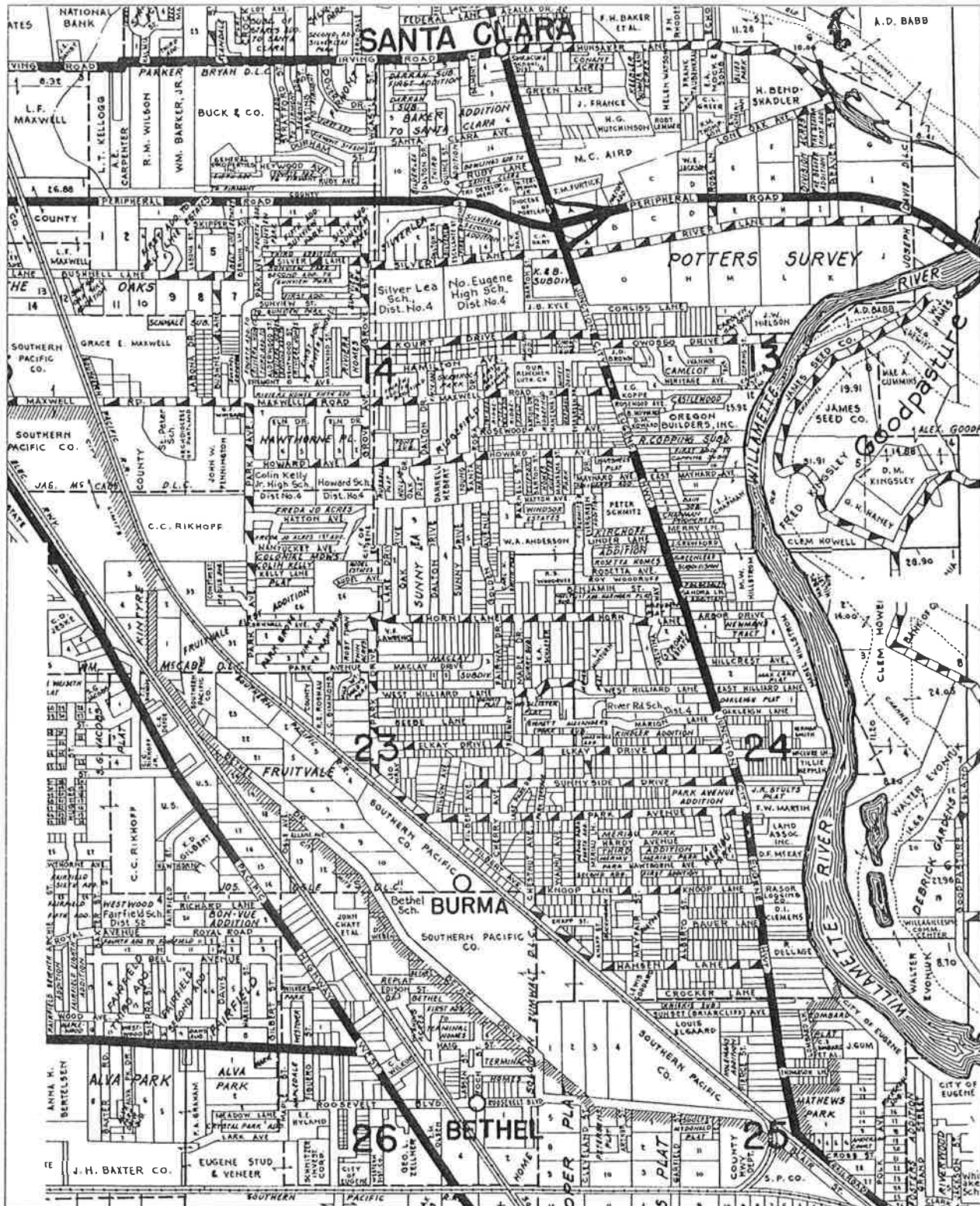
In 1946, the Gilbert Addition near Four Corners was platted, the first subdivision filed outside of the metropolitan area after World War II. "This growth reflects the sense of prosperity and forward-looking attitude that had returned to Eugene. However, it did little to ease the housing crunch in the short term. As a result, veterans placed tiny trailers on the outskirts of town and constructed houses without attention to building codes. Between 1930 and 1960, and especially between 1945 and 1955, population in fringe areas grew much faster than inside the city. The fringe referred to such outlying neighborhoods as Friendly, Glenwood, Bailey Hill, Bethel, and River Road."<sup>4</sup>

New development in the River Road area resulted primarily from the replat of older subdivisions, such as the original 5-10 acre lots in The Oaks, and the "infill" of vacant parcels that were already surrounded by development. Such infill led to the creation of "flag lots," which result from partitioning off the back half of a lot which already has a house on the front portion. Plats initially remained relatively small, ranging from 2-24 lots each. The rural feel of this area, which previously had been covered by small farms, began to evolve into a distinct residential district. Building lots started to become more uniform in size and shape and streets began to conform to the grid pattern, features which had previously remained largely absent from the area.

During this period of development, some of the remaining family farms were also platted into new additions, including the orchards of Jerry Beebe. In the late 1940s, houses were being constructed on land that had formerly been cultivated by the family. Residences were also appearing on the former Walker walnut orchard, due to the platting of the Meriau Park Addition. The plat covered the area south of Park Avenue to Knoop Lane and extending west from River Road to Mayfair Street.

A 1953 study of the rural-urban fringe in Eugene determined that the primary motivations for moving to these areas included less congestion, more room; better for the children; unable to find housing in town; proximity to employment or business; room for garden; cheaper land and lower rent; and lower taxes. Beginning in the 1950s, "we see subdivisions plunked down in the middle of orchards and farming land. Open fields, horse pastures, orchards, abandoned orchards, and idle land are mixed with rows of modern suburban houses. The voices of children playing in the fields mix with the noise of the farmer's tractor."<sup>5</sup> A 1952 aerial photograph of the River Road neighborhood reflects the infiltration of housing into this former agricultural area.

There was an ironic result of the continued and increasingly popular "fringe living," where open space was a main attraction: the individual building lots began to get smaller, and thus, closer together. In the early 1900s, new plats had lots ranging in size from 3 to 14 acres, because properties generally contained pasture, field, and/or orchards. The 1925 Park Avenue Subdivision was the first truly residential subdivision, with corresponding lots of about one-third acre. By 1945, during the post-war boom, the average lot was reduced to about one-quarter of an acre. The subdivisions platted in 1950 decreased lots to less than one-fifth of an acre, or 0.20 each, though individual lots varied from 0.15 to 0.21 acre.



Metsker map from 1968 showing shrinking lot size and new road construction in the River Road area.

Subsequent development has remained consistent with this approximate lot size. The exception appears to be 1955 and 1960 additions consisting of nine parcels or less,

where the average parcels are closer to one-third acre. Whether by owner design or as the result of an odd-shaped property, lots returned to the average one-quarter and one-third acreage. Examples include the 1955 Schmalls Subdivision, with nine lots of 0.37 acres each, and the 1960 Briarcliff Subdivision, with six 0.23 acre lots.

The population of the River Road-Santa Clara neighborhoods had increased to 11,210 residents in 1960, or 21% of the city's total population. This represents an increase of 74% from the prior decade, as compared to a growth rate of 42% for the City of Eugene. Due to this rapid pace of development in River Road since World War II, it is estimated that 45% of the area's residences were constructed between 1940 and 1959.

Between 1960 and 1964, the River Road neighborhood had a record-breaking number of new additions. Of the 23 projects, a few were infill or replats consisting of just a few parcels, such as the three-lot Neely House subdivision. However, at the other end of the spectrum were the 83-lot Camelot Plat and the 75-parcel Park Grove. These plats represent the introduction of large-scale residential subdivisions to this neighborhood, where, previously, the biggest addition consisted of 27 lots. Not surprisingly, the balance of the current River Road area street system was created during this time.

These large additions were providing a consistency to the area's landscape patterns, due to their consistent lot sizes and connecting streets. In 1962, Lane County revised its subdivision ordinance to create a "Minor Subdivision," which consists of three lots or less. The ordinance required that all new lots face an existing street, regardless of the size or shape of the underlying parcel. As such, it had the tendency to promote the continued piece-meal division of land that characterizes the River Road neighborhood.

## Residential Endnotes

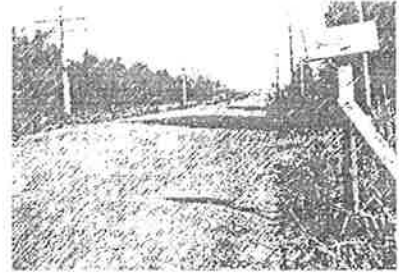
<sup>1</sup>Sims, Mike. "River Road History Survey." Unpublished correspondence, 6/13/05, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Sims, 3.

<sup>3</sup>Sims, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Wright, Sally and David Pinyerd. *Eugene Modernism, 1935-65*. (City of Eugene Planning & Development, 2003), 4.2.

<sup>5</sup>Spyrou, Michael. *Land in the Suburbs: Spatial Patterns of Lots in the River Road-Santa Clara Area, Eugene, Oregon*. University of Oregon Thesis, Department of Geography, 1973, 2.



## COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

Once Eugene began to grow from a simple settlement into a true town, essential services were needed to provide for its inhabitants. Starting as early as 1846, commercial ventures began to be established, primarily centered around what would become the city's downtown core. The first of these was a small store, owned by James Huddleston, which was established near the Skinner Cabin, around 1850. After that, commercialism boomed and many businesses providing goods and services were established. Groceries, millinery shops, livery stables, hotels and mercantiles were among the many businesses that could be found in the city.

Due to its location on the outskirts of Eugene, the River Road area was not directly involved with the commercial development burgeoning in the city proper. The community of Irving, just north of River Road and associated with the study area, was established in the late 1840s and early 1850s as a settlement separate from Eugene. Because of its size, however, the community retained a particularly rural character and its commercialism was restricted to agricultural production.<sup>1</sup> It can be assumed that its proximity to Eugene provided for other needs the residents of Irving might have. It can also be deduced that the residents of the River Road area operated in a similar way; supported primarily by agricultural production and satisfying consumer needs in town.

Later, the River Road area subsisted primarily on small retail and service businesses, agriculture or light industrial operations located nearby. There were also a few professional establishments; primarily medical or dental offices. Residents of the River Road area were employed in many of these businesses, as well as in local schools. Still others worked for Southern Pacific Railroad, since its rail yard was located just west of the River Road neighborhood. The intersection of tracks serving various rail lines made this a popular location for mills and industrial plants that wanted to take advantage of such a transportation hub. Industry in the area consisted of sawmills, small-scale manufacturing plants, beverage distributors and gasoline or oil plants. Most of these were located at the south end of River Road in an area bordered by Monroe Street, West Fifth Avenue, Garfield Street and Roosevelt Boulevard and the railroad tracks.

One such establishment was the Chet's Frozen Food plant, established in 1946 by Fred Brunner. Located on Railroad Boulevard, it was in close proximity to the River Road neighborhood where many of its employees resided. Fred Brunner was also the proprietor of another area business known as Brunner Dryer, located on River Road, south of Howard Avenue. Other light industry was represented by Potter Manufacturing Company, located on River Road. This nationally-known company was established in

the 1920s and produced decals. The company moved to Prairie Road in the 1980s to accommodate the widening of River Road. Nearby McDaniel Lumber Company was established in 1945 and participated in the local lumber and milling industry until the 1970s. McAlpin Vault Company manufactured burial vaults into the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup>



*Fire at the Potter Manufacturing Company. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2035).*

## Agriculture

The River Road area, being located on the outskirts of the city, had a strong agricultural emphasis. Though farm size decreased around the turn of the century, production was increasing all over the Willamette Valley. Farmers worked to diversify their crops and create demand for many different types of produce. Popular local crops included hops, flax, peppermint and clover, as well as more common fruits, nuts, vegetables and grains. Farmers banded together to promote business and collaborate in their agricultural pursuits. In 1873, the Oregon State Grange was established to give farmers an official venue for such activities and soon smaller local granges were established, including those in Irving and Santa Clara.<sup>3</sup>

Hops were particularly popular between the 1860s and 1890s, and were used to produce beer both in the northwest and in Europe. The prevalence of hop growing declined at the outbreak of World War I, due to embargos and price drops, and during the Depression.<sup>4</sup> At this time, many local farms failed. Others, in an attempt to capture better profits, replanted hop yards as nut orchards. By 1905, walnuts and filberts became important local crops. A prominent walnut orchard, owned by the Walker family, was located between Park Avenue and Knoop Lane.

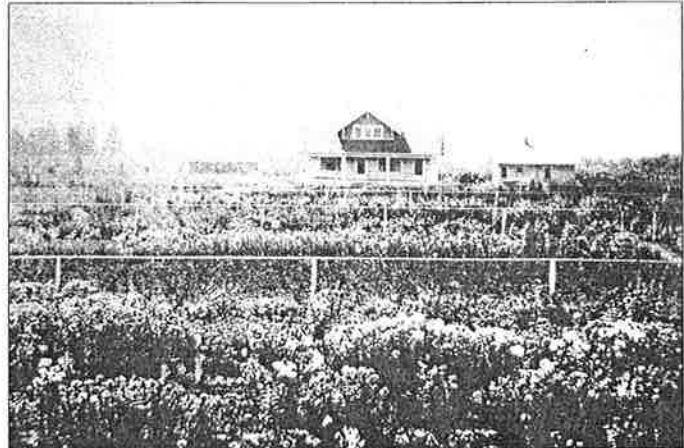


*Threshing grain near Irving just north of the River Road area. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN7140).*

During World War II, grain crops were largely replaced by legume crops in the Willamette Valley. Grass seed, and particularly flax, became dominant products as well. Flax took well to the local climate and was used extensively in the war effort to create fabric and fiber products.<sup>5</sup> At this time, dairy farms also came to the fore and the

Bethel area dominated the industry. In fact, agriculture in general was concentrated to the immediate north of Eugene at this time.

As well as farms and orchards, a few small horticulturally-oriented businesses operated from the River Road area's agricultural setting. Woodruff Nursery, located at 1270 River Road was a long time local business that provided for the area's orchard, nursery stock, and gardening needs for many years.<sup>6</sup>



*View of Woodruff Nursery circa 1930.*

From the late 1940s to the mid 1950s, the River Road neighborhood grew quickly in terms of residential sprawl. Construction of many of subdivisions and infill eventually edged in on agricultural lands. Farms and orchards were soon supplanted by housing, sending River Road's agricultural production into decline. The last filbert orchard was replaced by the establishment of Bi-Mart and Safeway stores across from the Riviera Center in 1968.

## Along Major Roads

In the mid-twentieth century, trends in commercialism lead to the establishment of shopping centers and strip malls. A few of these were constructed along River Road and added to the commercial atmosphere of the neighborhood. Around 1951, Smith's Center opened on the 900 block of River Road. It claimed the distinction of being the area's first strip mall and housed Powell Drug (later Deer Drug), the area's first Pharmacy, as well as the Rolling Pin Bakery, Our Barber Shop, and the first medical office of Dr. Virgil Samms. Another shopping center, which would be known as Emerald Center, was established in 1954 on the northeast corner of River Road and McLure Lane. It contained a mixture of retail and service businesses, such as Fuller's variety store, Emerald Radio and TV Service, Handi-Snack Café, a Laundromat and cobbler, as well as some professional offices like Dr. Leonard Smith's dentist office. In 1962, the Riviera Center, at the intersection of River Road and River Avenue was constructed. It was known as a "car-friendly" shopping center and was larger than the local shopping centers that had been constructed up to this time. It contained Tiffany's Rexall Drug, Irish's Supermarket, a Coast to Coast store, and a cafeteria. Associated with the shopping center were the Riviera Richfield Service station, serving the automobile traffic that the retail center attracted, and a First National Bank of Oregon branch, which later became a First Interstate Bank and then a Wells Fargo Bank.

In 1961, the River Road Medical group was established. Located at 890 River Road, it came to provide for many River Road residents' medical needs and represented a number of professional businesses that were established in the area. It originally consisted of Doctors Virgil "Bill" Samms, Olin Byerly, Kendall Hills and Charles Pyfer.

Having begun practicing in 1951, Dr. Samms was one of the first physicians to practice in the River Road area. He was a prominent member of the community in this respect and was known to travel the neighborhood on his bicycle, making house calls. Doctors Byerly and Hills had practiced together in another River Road location since the late 1950s. Establishing the River Road Medical group with Samms and Pyfer, they created an important resource for the community. While maintaining a “small-town doctor” approach to their practice, many of the River Road Medical Group doctors were recognized at a higher level. Dr. Samms was named Doctor-Citizen of the Year in 1962, by the Lane County Medical Society and the Oregon Medical Association, while Dr. Hills was chief of staff at Sacred Heart Medical Center in the late 1970s. He also served as the team physician for North Eugene High School and the University of Oregon's football and basketball teams. In the mid-1960s, the practice was expanded, incorporating two more doctors and partnering with Deer Drug store.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1970s, the majority of businesses in the 100 and 200 blocks of River Road were demolished to make way for the Northwest Expressway, constructed in 1980, and the Chambers Connector, built in 1988. Though something of a loss, the prevalence of other commercial establishments along River Road compensated for the demolition. By the 1970s, the area was already experiencing an influx of major businesses and new transportation corridors only served to bring more trade to the area.

## **Parallels with Residential Development**

Aside from established farms and the small community that developed around agricultural draws, residential development began to increase in the River Road area due to the railroad. The “Blair Yard” was established by Southern Pacific Railroad in 1915 and experienced expansion both in 1927 and 1966. At all times, it was a draw for employment and added to the number of people settling in the area to be close to their work. With the Pacific Highway passing through the area as well, the neighborhood became a logical location for commerce, which responded to both those passing through and those that lived in the area.<sup>8</sup>

River Road experienced a surge in residential growth during the early 1940s, due to the construction of Fern Ridge Dam. Many people employed by this project lived along River Road around 1940 and 1941, and some remained once the project was completed. Residential growth continued to grow in the years after World War II, when prosperity and the baby boom sent new and growing families looking for housing in suburban areas, such as River Road. Located on the city outskirts, yet not too far from urban conveniences, the area made an ideal location for the establishment of housing subdivisions. With this rise in population, however, came the need for commercial development that was even closer than downtown Eugene. To become somewhat self-sufficient, the area gave rise to more and diverse businesses. As residential neighborhoods flanking River Road grew, shops and services along the thoroughfare also increased. Many of the following establishments were established in the booming years of the 1940s and 1950s and continued in operation through to the present day. Still others, which had gotten early starts in the area, met the post-war years with the

capacity and inclination to change, expanding and diversifying to better serve the needs of the surrounding community.

The McKay family dominated the grocery business on River Road, starting in the mid-1930s. At this time, they owned and operated the River Road Market at 675 River Road. In 1948, this market was purchased from the McKays and converted into the River Road Super Market. This supermarket utilized a neighboring facility, while the original store was purchased and used by Lloyd and Jean Walker as the River Road Hardware store. In the early 1960s, the supermarket was remodeled and included a new south-facing

entrance, which changed its relation to River Road. In 1966, the market was purchased by Dean's Markets out of Junction City. A year later, the market changed hands becoming Shopper's Market. In 1977, the supermarket was bought back by McKay's. The grocery store operated under its original

moniker, McKay's Market, until around 1980. The McKays also owned a store at 1015 River Road, which was opened after the sale of the River Road Market. In 1949, this facility was constructed and became the cornerstone of a regional McKay's Supermarket chain. This supermarket operated under the McKay name until around 1965 when it closed and the building was used consecutively as the Mayfair Markets' sign shop, Tom Peterson's furniture and appliance store, and Mike Porter's discount appliance store until the 1970s. It is now the location of a Goodwill store.<sup>9</sup>



*McKay's Market at 1015 River Road in the 1950s.*



*The former McKay's Market is today a Goodwill store.*

Other markets and grocery stores in the River Road area included the Park Avenue Market, Community Market and Irish's Supermarket. The Park Avenue Market, located at the intersection of North Park Avenue and Beebe Lane, was destroyed by fire in 1957. Irish's Supermarket, part of a Eugene-based chain, opened in 1962 and was a part of the Riviera Center. Across from the Riviera Center a Safeway supermarket was constructed in 1968, introducing the large regional and national chains that would come to dominate. Auckerman's Food Market, which operated during the 1950s, became Late Shopper in the 1960s and 1970s and was a convenience shopping establishment.

The store shared a building with Holeman Lockers, where groceries were also available, and was torn down to make way for the Northwest Expressway extension.<sup>10</sup>

River Road Hardware, which had been established in the old McKay's Market at 675 River Road, operated in that location until the mid-1980s, when it relocated to the "Graffiti Alley" building due the widening of River Road. The hardware store was a mom-and-pop operation that lent to a strong sense of community and familiarity among neighbors in the River Road area.<sup>11</sup>

Restaurants and other eating and drinking establishments in the area during the later half of the twentieth-century included the Rolling Pin Bakery, North's Chuck Wagon and Eagan's Cafeteria at the Riviera Center, as well as many others. The Pioneer Inn Tavern was housed in a red log cabin and operated from the mid-1930s until it was torn down around 1970. A Bavarian themed restaurant and lounge, the Alpine Village Inn, operated from around 1960 until the mid-1970s, when it was torn down to make way for the Northwest Expressway extension. The Flyin' Scot Drive-In was established in 1962 by Curt and Frances Newell. It was a popular burger and chicken restaurant and was the first of four Flyin' Scot establishments. The Newells were prominent River Road citizens and in 1974 sold the restaurant to the Gould family, also long-time residents of the area, who opened Gould's Country Burgers in the store. Kellogg's Rich Maid, a local ice cream shop, later became Ashby's Ice Cream. Pizza was also sold on a take-out basis. The shop was closed by 1969. A Dairy Queen franchise came to River Road in 1960, and was the first national-chain fast food restaurant in the neighborhood. It was a popular after-school gathering place for children from River Road School and operated until the mid-1980s, when the franchise was moved to Santa Clara. The building still stands at 1030 River Road and operates as the Cedars Cafe.

Abby's Pizza Inn opened in December 1967 and was the first pizza parlor in the area. Part of a Roseburg-based company, it was one of the earlier stores to be opened and was a popular with several generations of high school students. The Handi-Snack Café, located in the Emerald shopping center was later known as the Emerald Café and in 1966 became the Twin Dragon Chinese restaurant. Another small eatery of the lunch counter variety was located at the west end of Hansen Lane and was likely established in the early 1940s. It catered to workers from the local Southern Pacific rail yard.<sup>12</sup>

Automotive services were available in the area starting in the 1920s. They were extremely prevalent, perhaps due to the fact that Eugene was the oil distribution center for the upper Willamette Valley. Many oil companies built their facilities in the industrial area just south of River Road and were easily accessible to gas and service stations in the neighborhood. One of the first service stations, first a Richfield and then an Arco station, was located at 420 River Road, a site chosen for its proximity to the new Pacific Highway that was established after World War I. In the late 1940s a Veltex gas station was located at 165 River Road. This station was owned by Fletcher Oil Company out of Boise, Idaho, which later sold the station to the Eugene-based Fraedrick-Skillern Oil Company. The station was converted into a Sunny discount gas station, which operated from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. The Leaf Station was another early service station that operated until the 1950s when it became a Fraedrick's Saving