



LANDSCAPE

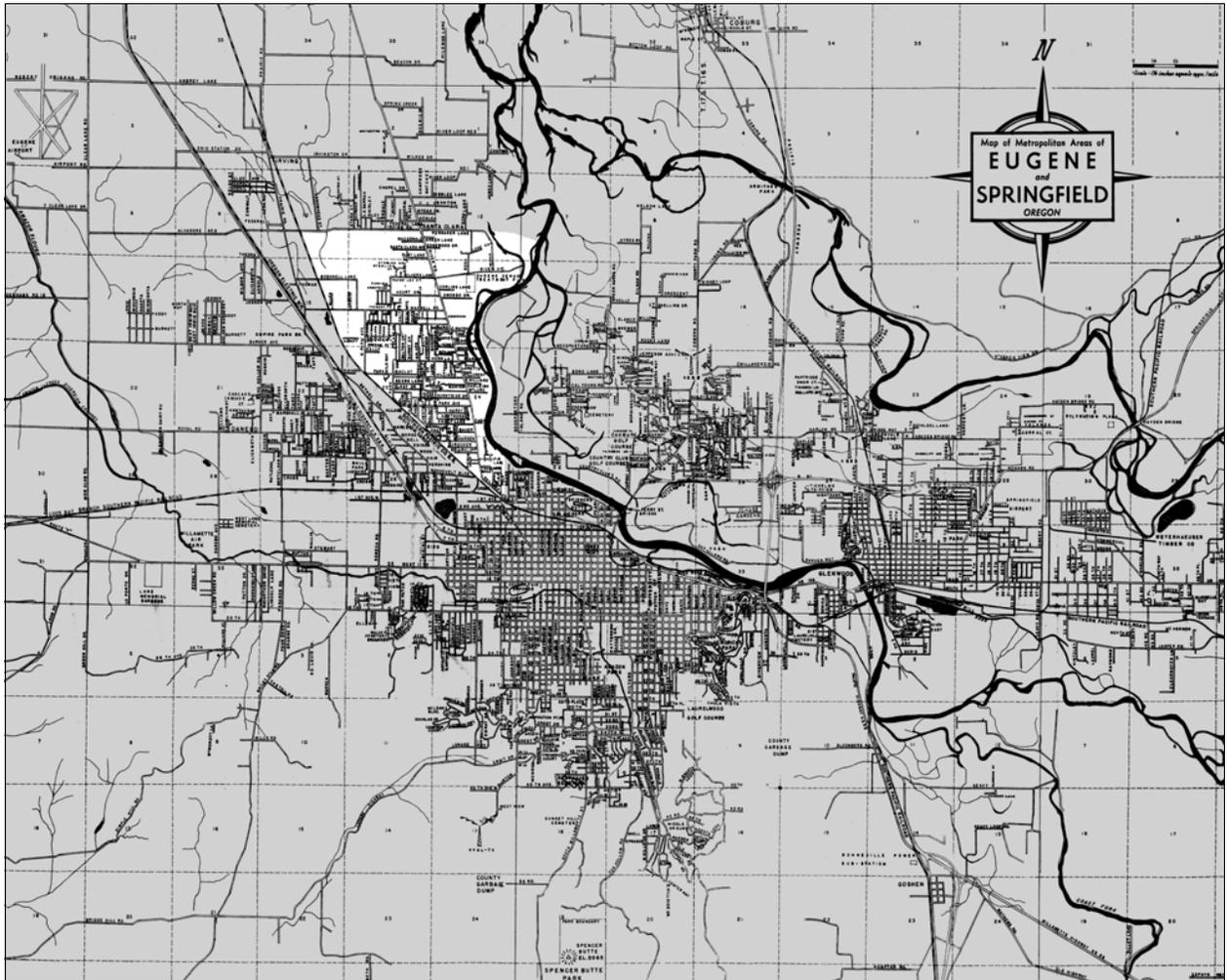
The Willamette Valley is characterized by small rock buttes and alluvial plains. Annual spring flooding was a fixture before flood control measures were introduced in the twentieth century¹ and major floods could be expected every ten years.² The land lies within the rain shadow of the Coast Range with 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.³

Today, the River Road area is not easily perceived as a primeval 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 human-made: Beltline Road on the north, the Northwest Expressway on the west, and Thomason Lane 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:⁴

1. Historic patterns of spatial organization (landscape structure)
2. Historical land uses and activities
3. The response of built elements to natural features 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 farmsteads and along transportation routes
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 c.1960 map of Eugene, extending from Beltline Road to the north, the Willamette River to the east, Thomason Lane 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.⁵ Though a modern observer might be tempted to call it a wild landscape, it was, in fact, a human-made creation. Native Americans, and 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.⁶

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.

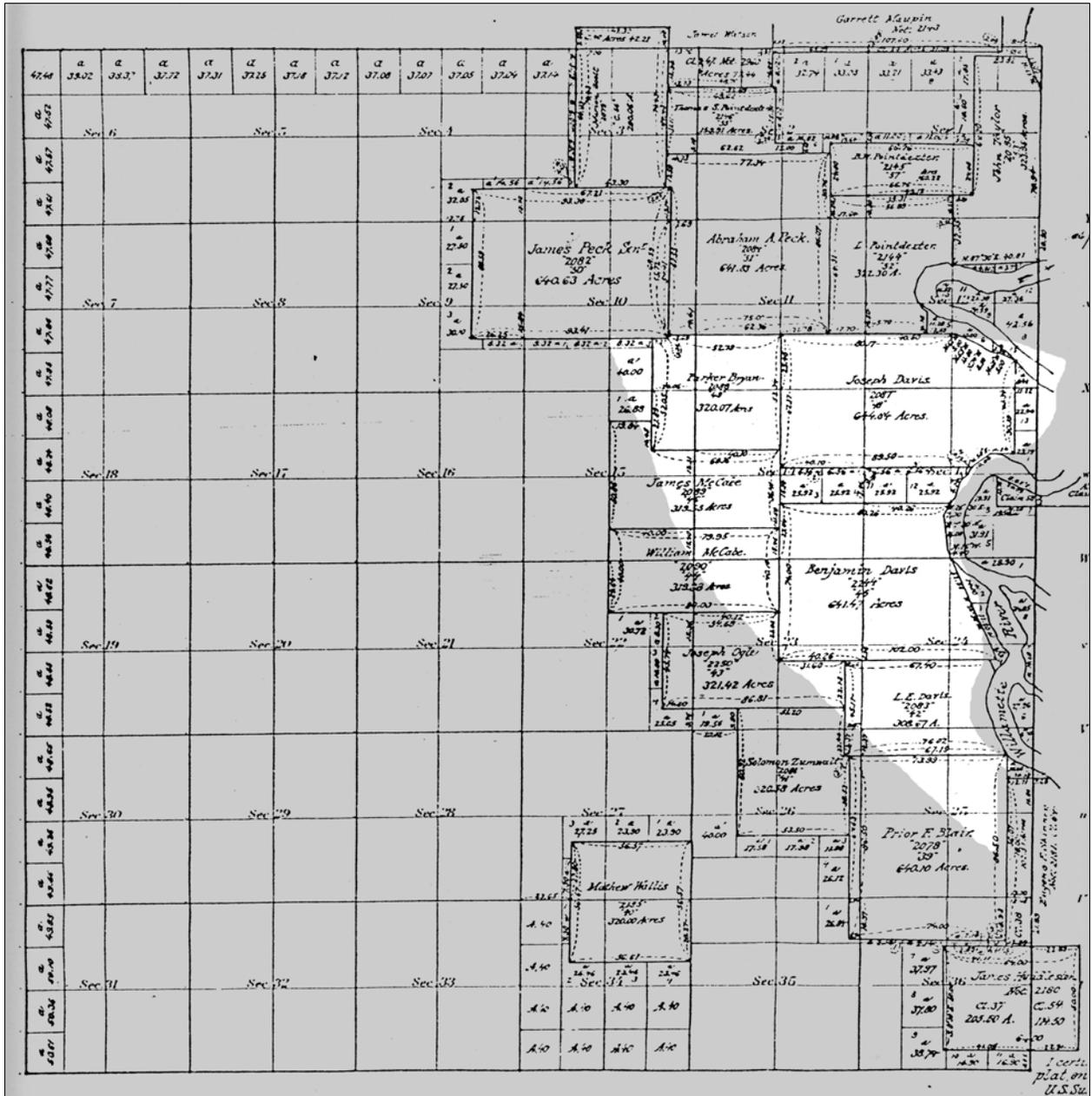
Some roads, such as River Road, were adopted from Native American trails. Others, such as Sunnyside Drive, Briarcliff Avenue, Owosso Drive, and Irving Road, developed along the borders of Donation Land Claims.

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.⁷ With the exception of some berries, game, and fish, few of the Native American food staples, such as camas, 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 of walnut trees, maples, or firs.⁸

The decline of large-scale agriculture in the 1890s spurred the division of Donation Land Claims among offspring as well as lot sales to new arrivals. The new farms, somewhere between 20 and 200 acres, rather than the 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 20th 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 21st century that the last vestiges of farmland ceased to operate, with Woodruff Nursery and Brunner Truck Gardens being the last holdouts.



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.

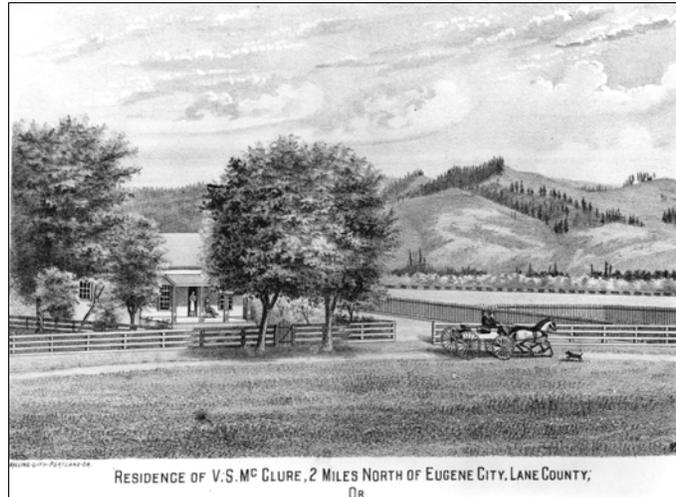
Neighboring Communities

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 made up 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.



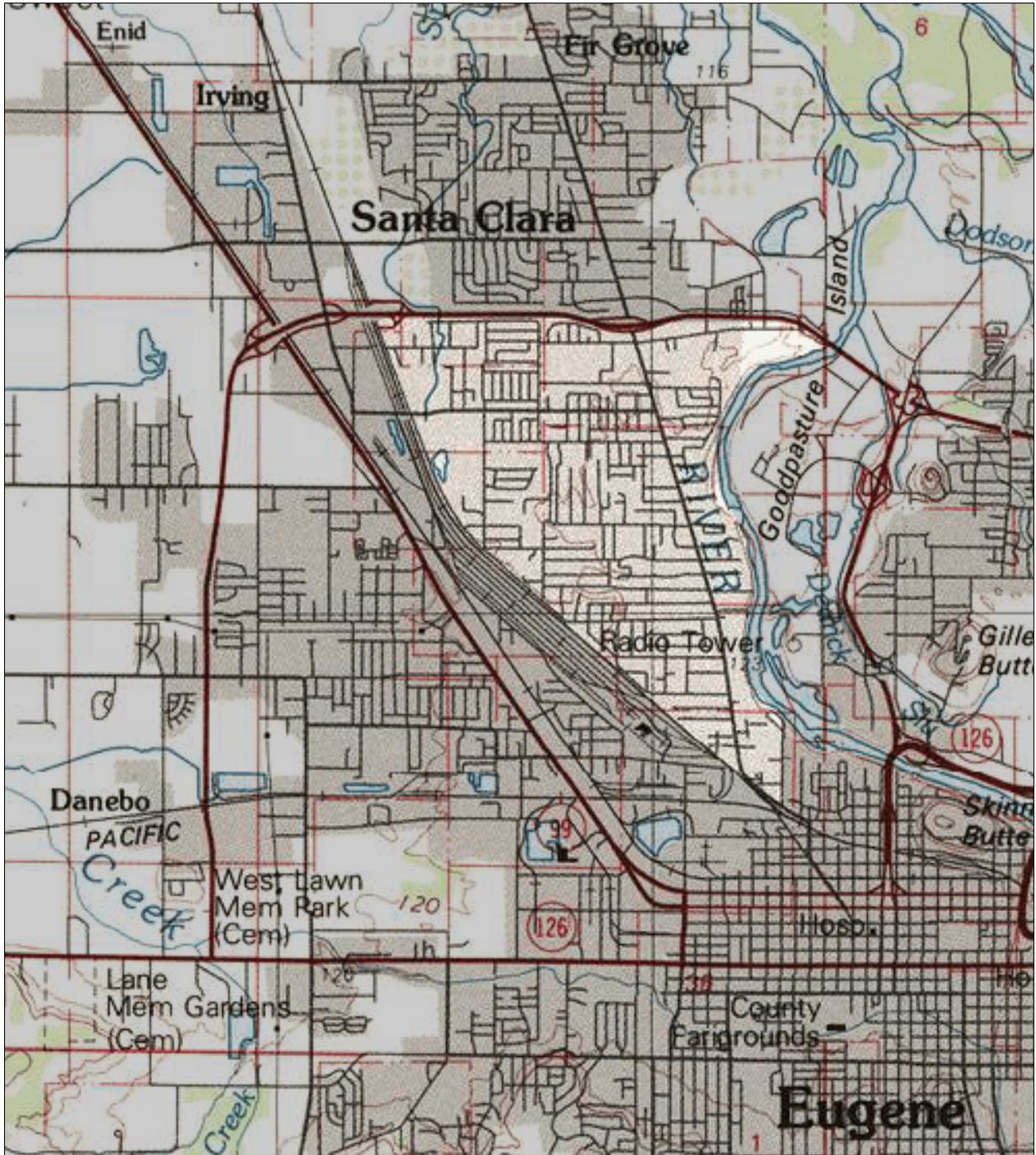
Walling lithograph of the V.S. McClure residence in the River Road area. Print courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN6312)

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 map 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 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 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.”⁹ 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."¹⁰ Residential and commercial development was influenced by what was occurring in the River Road neighborhood in the late 1940s and 1950s. Construction appeared 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 large scale subdivisions 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 Highway 99, and consisted of eight 10-acre parcels. The plat of Bethel was filed in 1927 and was also located on Zumwalt's original claim.

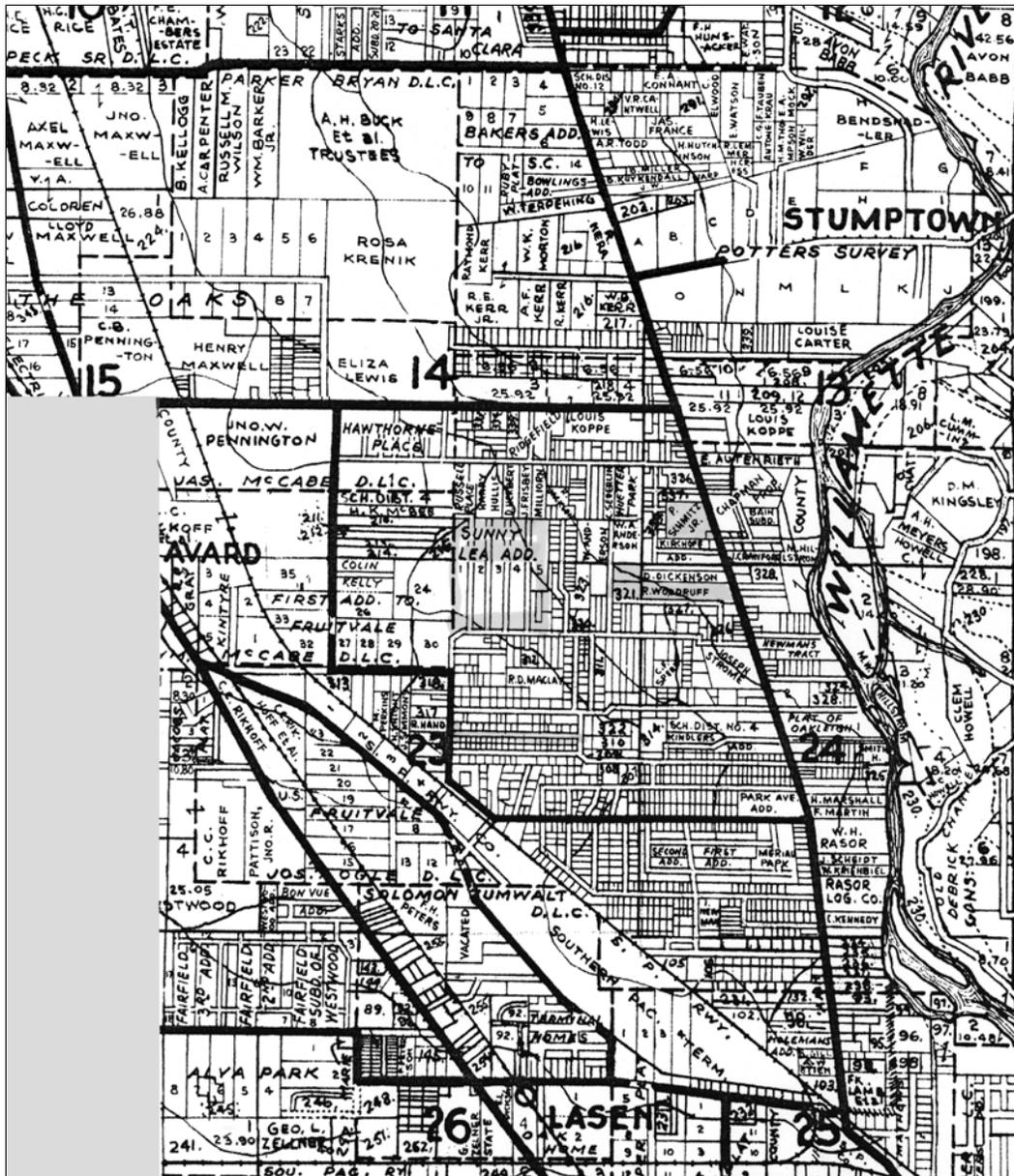
The name Danebo, meaning “Danish borough,” is reflective of the area's early ethnic heritage. In 1900, a group of Danes from Iowa established a congregation of the Bethesda Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, where services were conducted in Danish until 1920. The church was the early social center of 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 Farmers 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.”¹¹

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.

Avard and Lasen

A series of Metsker maps dating from 1931 to 1954 shows small circles accompanied by the identifiers Avard 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 Avard to the left and Stumptown to the right.

Avard appears on the 1931 through 1954 maps and is in the approximate location that Barger Drive intersects with the rail line. (Avard is identified as “Arvard” on the 1931 map.) Lasen (also spelled “Lassen”) appears on the 1941 and 1954 maps, and is located to the southwest of Avard, 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 in the northeast corner of the neighborhood, 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 Potter’s Survey and Stumptown both 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 1902,¹² 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."¹³ The significance of the river shifted in the late 20th century, when it became a source for recreation and land conservation. In 1974 the Land Conservation and Development Commission was established.¹⁴ 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 a center for wetlands restoration in the 1990s.¹⁵



*Willamette River in 2005 from the River Road neighborhood.
Photo provided by City of Eugene.*

Landscape Endnotes

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

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

³Forster, 20.

⁴Forster, 16.

⁵Wilson, 17.

⁶Wilson, 28.

⁷Forster, 120.

⁸Forster, 121.

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

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

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

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

¹³1907 Warranty Deed for sale of land from Robert W. Carrick and Mary Carrick to David Meyers.

¹⁴Carter, 115.

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