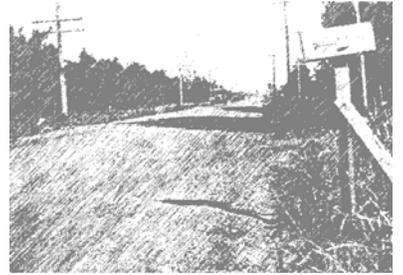


COMMERCE & INDUSTRY



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.¹ 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



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

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.²



McDaniel Lumber Company building was built c.1945 at 240 River Road. It was closed and torn down in the late 1970s to make way for the Northwest Expressway, completed in 1980. Photo from the 1965-66 North Eugene High School yearbook.

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.³



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

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.⁴ 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.

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.⁵ At this time, dairy farms also came to the fore and Bethel-area farms 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.⁶



View of Woodruff Nursery circa 1930. Photo from City files.

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 McClure 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 (1968), 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. 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, which moved from Smith’s Center to a new building adjacent to the clinic.⁷

In the late 1970s, most businesses in the 100 and 200 blocks of River Road were demolished to make way for the Northwest Expressway, which was completed between Park Avenue and River Road in 1980; and the Chambers Connector, which opened 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 near 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.⁸

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 in the River Road area 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, the McKay family sold the store, and the new owners built a new River Road Market building at 645 River Road, immediately



McKay's Market at 1015 River Road in the 1950s. Photo from City files.

south of the old location. A year later, Lloyd and Jean Walker established River Road Hardware in the former grocery store building, where they did business until the building was torn down in 1982 when River Road was widened to four lanes. In the early 1960s, the River Road Market 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 1975, the supermarket was bought back by McKay's. The grocery store operated as a, 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



The former McKay's Market is today a Goodwill store. Photo by City in 2005.

a regional McKay's Market 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.⁹

Other markets and grocery stores in the River Road area included the Park Avenue Market, Community Market and Irish's Supermarket. The original Park Avenue Market building at North Park Avenue and Beebe Lane was destroyed by fire in 1957, but rebuilt soon afterward. Irish's, part of an established Eugene supermarket chain, opened in 1962 as an original tenant 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.¹⁰

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 to 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.¹¹



River Road Hardware in December 1965 at 675 River Road. It was torn down in the mid-1980s during the widening of River Road. Photo from the 1965-66 North Eugene High School yearbook.

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 chain, it was one of the earliest Abby's 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.¹²

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 on the Pacific Highway north from Eugene was a Richfield station at 420 River Road. This facility later did business as an Arco and then a Mobil service station until 1989. From the late 1940s until the early 1960s, there were Veltex and Chevron gas stations adjacent to Cabin City Auto Camp, near where River Road met Railroad Boulevard. The Chevron facility closed and was torn down in the mid-1960s, but the former Veltex station was purchased by Eugene-based Fraedrick-Skillern Oil Co., which operated one of its many Sunny discount gas stations on the site until the mid-1970s. The Leaf Station, on the northwest corner of River Road and Hilliard Lane, was another early gas and service facility in the area. It operated until the mid-1950s, closed and was torn down, and replaced in 1958 by Fraedrick's Saving Center. Fraedrick's was a typical postwar discount station, selling unbranded gasoline, motor oil and other automotive products at lower prices than the big-name service stations.

River Road Associated Service was established in 1952 at 595 River Road, and was later renamed Clark's Flying A Service. It was owned by prominent area native Clark Hollis, who made a lifelong career of service station proprietorship on River Road. In 1963, the Flying A station (now Glass Spray Service) closed and Hollis established Clark Hollis Enco and U-Haul Rental Service at 988 River Road. When Humble Oil & Refining Co. abruptly closed the station in 1971, Hollis acquired the Texaco station at 615 River Road. Clark Hollis Texaco and Rental operated until 2003. Both Hollis'



The Flyin' Scot Restaurant was built in 1962 at 1041 River Road. Photo from the 1965-66 North Eugene High School yearbook.

Texaco and Enco facilities remained in constant use as automobile-related businesses after they ceased operations as branded gas stations.

The mid-1950s business boom on River Road brought Mobil and Union 76 stations to the corner of River Road and Oakleigh Lane, between Smith's Center and McKay's Market. In 1968, the Mobil station became a Mr. Suds Car Wash and Phillips 66 gas station; it closed in the late 1970s. The Union 76 station operated until the late 1970s as well, then was dismantled and rebuilt, piece by piece, on Highway 101 in Florence.

In 1967, Signal Oil Co. built a Hancock service station at 895 River Road, displacing two small houses, which were moved to nearby McClure Lane. In the early 1980s, the station was torn down and replaced with a 7-Eleven store.

Between the early 1960s and 1980s, the intersection of Maxwell Road and North Park Avenue was home to two service stations: Glen Haldorson's Maxwell Park Mobil Servicenter and Nelson & Beaver Richfield (later Arco).

As with many similar communities across the country, the number of gas stations on River Road declined after the mid-1970s. In 1965, there were 13 stations on River Road between Railroad Boulevard and Beltline Highway. In 2005, there was only one.

Catering to River Road residents' other needs were drugstores such as Powell Drug (later Deer Drug), the River Road Pharmacy and Tiffany's Rexall Drug. Tiffany's, an original Riviera Center tenant, also offered variety-store merchandising, as did Fuller's in the Emerald Shopping Center. The area's first "superstore" retailer, Villa Mart (later Valu-Mart) opened in 1963 on the former Cabin City site at 225 River Road. The Seattle-based chain store was the River Road area's first alternative to department-store shopping in downtown Eugene.

Hand's Jewelers, in the River Road Center at River Road and East Hilliard Lane, provided some luxury retail shopping. For floral needs, River Roaders went to Briarcliff Florist, which originated in the 200 block of River Road and later moved to the River Road Center; and Riviera Florist in the Riviera center.

Useful services could be found at Nu-Way Cleaners, Ayr-Dot Radio & TV Service (which also provided vending machine repair), Emerald Radio & TV Service, the Ruff family's Our Barber Shop, and Brunner Dryer.

For entertainment, there was the Firs Theater, which opened in the early 1950s at 1950 River Road. It became the Firs Bowl, the first bowling center in northwest Eugene, in 1958-59.

The area got its own branch bank for the first time in 1958, when U.S. Bank opened its third Eugene branch on the former River Road School site at 1000 River Road.

With the coming of large national and regional chains such as Safeway and Bi-Mart, among others, the "Mom-and-Pop" nature of River Road's business community began to diminish. When the Beltline-River Road interchange was completed in 1970, the

immediate area became a commercial hub, attracting fast-food establishments such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), McDonald's and Pizza Hut. The Fred Meyer retail chain opened its first facility outside of the Portland-Salem area at River Road and Beltline in 1975.

These developments further decreased the uniqueness of River Road's commercial atmosphere, making the area much like other suburban areas in Eugene, in Oregon and throughout the country.



Firs Bowl, formerly the Firs Theater, at 1950 River Road.

Commerce Endnotes

¹Carter, Elizabeth and Michelle Dennis. *Eugene Area Historic Context Statement*. (Eugene Planning and Development), 31.

²Sims, Mike. "River Road History Survey." Unpublished correspondence, 6/13/05, 4.

³Carter, 42.

⁴Carter, 75.

⁵Carter, 105.

⁶Carter, 5.

⁷Carter, 3.

⁸Bethel Danebo Neighborhood Scoping Report, 7.

⁹Sims, 4, addendum.

¹⁰Sims, 4, 5, addendum.

¹¹Sims, 5.

¹²Sims, 5, addendum.