



# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

## MAY 2025



## TROUTDALE, OREGON GATEWAY TO HISTORY



This Greetings from Troutdale postcard was postmarked on September 19, 1914 in Troutdale, Oregon.



# TROUTDALE, OREGON GATEWAY TO HISTORY

**BY MARK MOORE**

Situated at the confluence of the Columbia and Sandy rivers, the town of Troutdale played an early part in Oregon's history. The earliest settlers to this area came from 1845 to the 1850s. Many landed at a small community, nicknamed "Sandy," at the ferry landing at the mouth of the Sandy River. Lewis & Clark had christened it "Quicksand," in 1805.

Prior to that time, the wetlands along the Columbia River were hunting and fishing spots for Chinookan Indians, once the spring floods eased. In the pools and ponds left behind, native people found fish, birds for hunting and camas lilies. Troutdale became the confluence where Native Americans, English explorers, Hudson Bay Company fur trappers, and Lewis and Clark were travelers.

British explorers came to the area in October of 1782 when Lt. William Broughton and his crew, in the armed tender HMS Chatham, was delegated to explore the Columbia River by Capt. George Vancouver. Ascending the river, Broughton and his vessel reached a point just east of the mouth of the Sandy River, which he named Barings. Sighting what is now known as Mount Hood for the second time on that voyage, he named the mountain after a British admiral. A rocky lava outcropping, immediately across the Sandy River from Troutdale, was later named Broughton Bluff.

When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led the American overland expedition in 1804 to 1806, they acknowledged Broughton's name for the mountain, but named what is now the Sandy River as "Quicksand," on Nov. 3, 1805. Settlers who arrived in the area in the 1840s shortened the name to Sandy. In 1852, ferries were established at the mouth of the river on the west bank where a community began to grow. The ferries would cross to the east bank of the river, providing access to goods and supplies for the increasing population.

Early donation land claims were filed by John Douglass, D.F. Buxton, Benjamin Hall, James Stott and Felix Hicklin. Family records credit David F. Buxton as Troutdale's true founder because he filed an 1853 donation land claim in the center of what is now Troutdale.



The first post office was established at "Sandy" on June 1, 1854 when Emsley R. Scott was appointed the first postmaster. The Sandy (Multnomah County) post office was later discontinued on February 26, 1868. Another town in Clackamas County, which was about 12 miles up the Sandy River, and two miles south from the river, now bears the name of "Sandy," where the post office opened on Feb. 13, 1873. This post office continues to operate.

However, it was Capt. John Harlow, a former sea captain from Maine and a successful Portland businessman, who conceived a plan for the town and made it happen. In 1872, he purchased part of Buxton's land claim to build a country home along the Sandy River. Because he raised trout in ponds on his farm, he called his farm "Troutdale."

A new post office was established at Troutdale on May 17, 1880 with James S. Brand as the first postmaster. This post office was later discontinued on June 25, 1883. When a transcontinental railroad extended east from Portland through the Columbia River Gorge, Harlow campaigned for a depot so he could ship produce from his farm. On November 20, 1882, Troutdale had its depot and a stop on the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company (OR&N) rail line; an important step in becoming a genuine town. After Harlow's death in 1883, his widow, Celestia, platted a town on the hillside with blocks and streets facing the railroad. Much of the new city was built in the 1890s.

The second post office named "Troutdale" opened on April 4, 1890 and it continues to serve a growing population. The first edition of Troutdale's newspaper announced the opening of Aaron Fox's new store and a restaurant, and it included ads for a hardware store, surgeon, notary public and blacksmith. The first known school was built in 1892. Some sources say that another school predated it.



Real photo postcard of the Troutdale School, circa 1907. The school was built in 1892 and it was torn down in 1926 when a new school opened in Troutdale. Postally unused.





Real photo birdseye view postcard of Troutdale, Oregon, circa 1908. The Union Meat Company packing plant can be seen in the lower right. Postally unused.



Real photo postcard of the Union Meat Company baseball team in Troutdale, Oregon in 1909. On Sept. 4, 1909, Troutdale's Union Meat Co. team beat the Gresham ball team 11-2. Postally unused.



Troutdale's leading industry was the American Dressed Meat Company, better known as Union Meat Company and later sold to become Portland's Swift and Company. Other businesses included a lumber mill, a hotel and a distillery. The distillery burned in what was reported as a "bright blue flame" in the 1890s. Aaron Fox, who operated a store, was instrumental in incorporating the city in 1907 and he became Troutdale's first mayor.

In 1904, the Oregon Water Power and Railway Company (OWP) floated plans for expanding their railroad from Gresham to Troutdale and going further east. In 1905, the Troutdale Branch was built using steam locomotives as part of a projected connection to the Camas-Washougal district across the river in the state of Washington. Plans called for a ferry across the Columbia River, but those plans were never implemented.

The OWP, became part of the Portland Railway Light & Power Company (PRL&P) on April 23, 1906. After the Cazadero power plant near Estacada was activated, the Troutdale line was electrified in 1907, and interurban streetcars ran from Linnemann Station in Gresham and travelled north through Ruby Junction, where it connected with the Mt. Hood Railway and Power Company line. The Troutdale Branch continued north then turned east following what is now northeast Halsey Street, going all the way to the west end of Troutdale. In 1924, the PRL&P was sold to the Oregon Electric Power Company and interurban passenger service to Troutdale was discontinued on June 15, 1927.

However, the Union Pacific Railroad continues to carry freight through Troutdale. The Union Pacific created the Oregon Short Line Railroad from Granger, Wyoming to the Oregon Railway & Navigation lines at Huntington, Oregon, connecting the two rail lines on November 11, 1884. The Union Pacific ended passenger service to Troutdale in 1965.



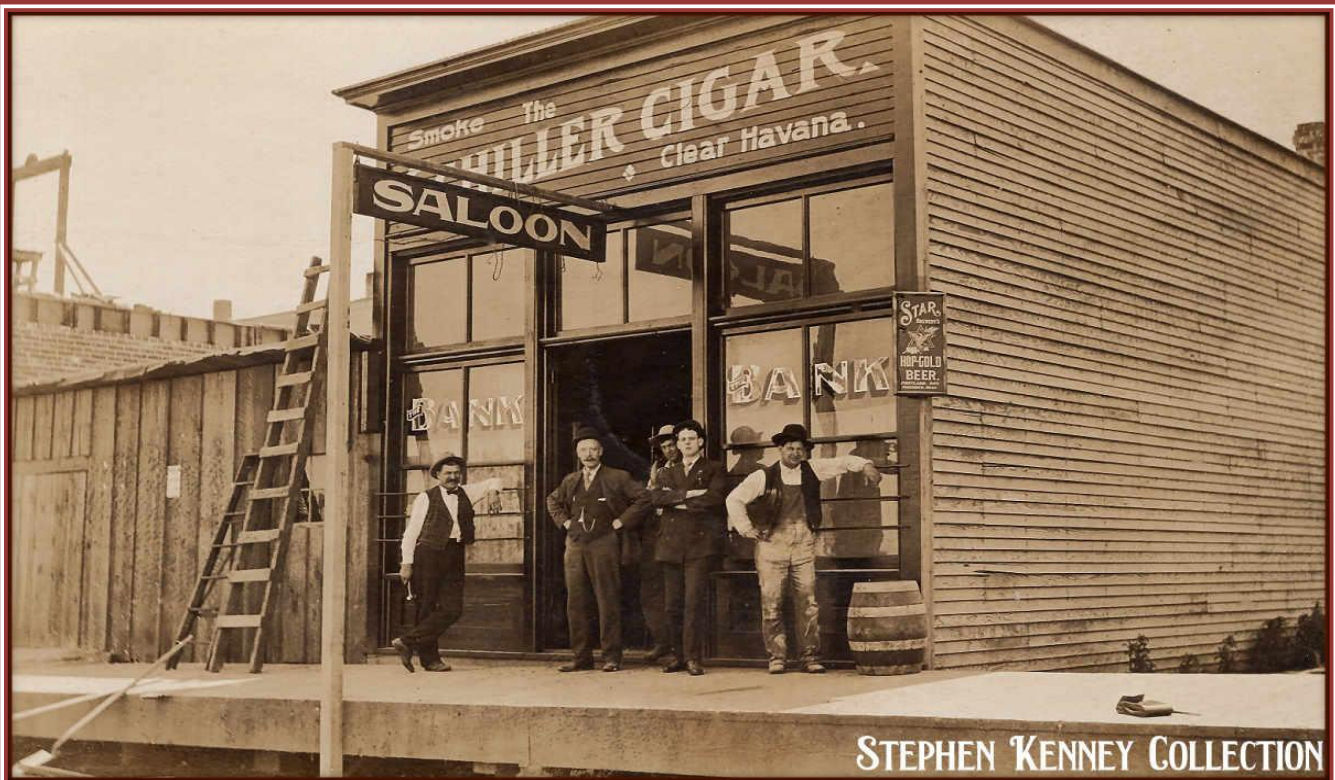
Real photo postcard of interurban Car 1058 at the Portland Railway Light and Power Company (PRL&P) Depot at the west end of Troutdale, circa 1908. Postally unused.





STEPHEN KENNEY COLLECTION

Real photo postcard of the S.S. Logan Store in Troutdale, Oregon in 1907. On July 21, 1907, the store burned to the ground. The horse pulling the delivery wagon was named "Nellie." Postally unused.



STEPHEN KENNEY COLLECTION

Real photo postcard of the newly opened Bank Saloon on August 11, 1908 in Troutdale, Oregon. The saloon was operated by the Latourell Family. Postally unused.





Real photo postcard of a delivery wagon at the Portland Railway Light and Power Company Depot at the west end of Troutdale, circa 1912. Postally unused.

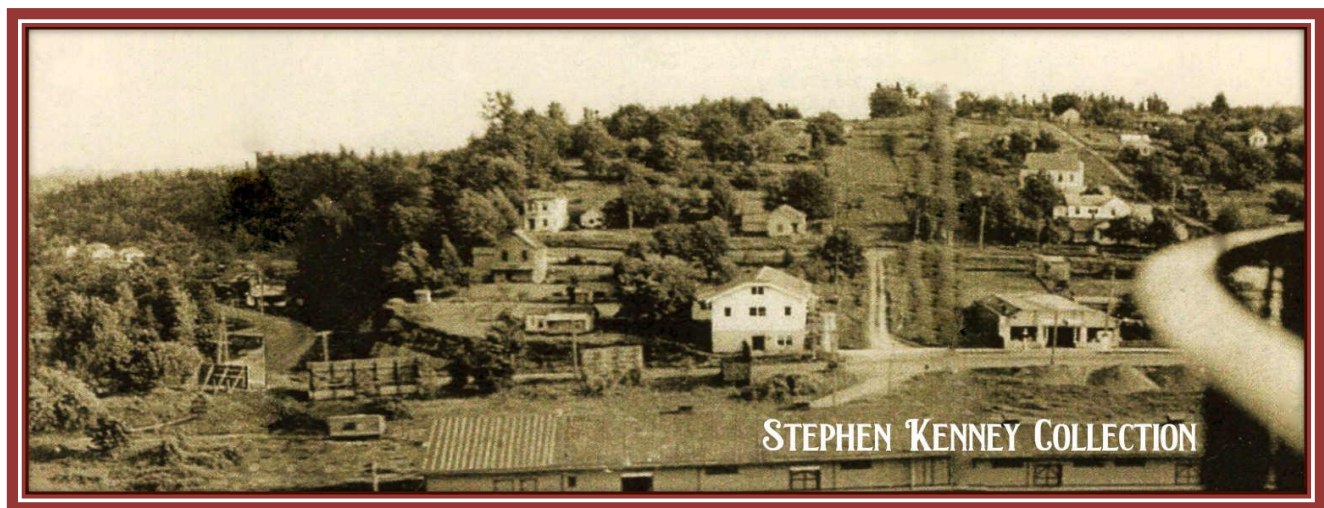
Troutdale had become a town of saloons and incorporation of the town arose from the necessity to exercise controls over them. Huge licensing fees for the saloons precluded the need for city taxes. In 1907, a disastrous fire swept through the city, burning the buildings built in the 1890s. A church built on a hillside two blocks from the business district, along with hillside houses, were among the buildings that survived.

The construction of the Columbia River Highway began in 1913, and its approach was completed through Troutdale in 1916. Voters approved the closure of saloons in Troutdale in 1915. In 1925, a second fire again destroyed most of the business district. This fire is believed to have resulted from the explosion of a still in the garage of John Larsson, whose wife Clara, was elected the first woman mayor of Troutdale in 1913. The Tiller Hotel and Helming Saloon, both built after the first 1907 fire, survived the 1925 blaze. The Helming Saloon building still stands, adjacent to Mayor Square. Tiller's Hotel was later demolished.

Construction of an aluminum plant at Troutdale to meet wartime needs was a boon to the economy in the 1940s and it attracted workers from all over the nation to work at what is now the Industrial Park. Interstate 84 was completed in the 1950s, bypassing Troutdale, and it diverted a majority of the traffic away from the Columbia River Highway as well as Troutdale. However, the city is vibrant and parking spots are difficult to find. And traffic on the Columbia River Highway can be congested at times, especially during summer months.



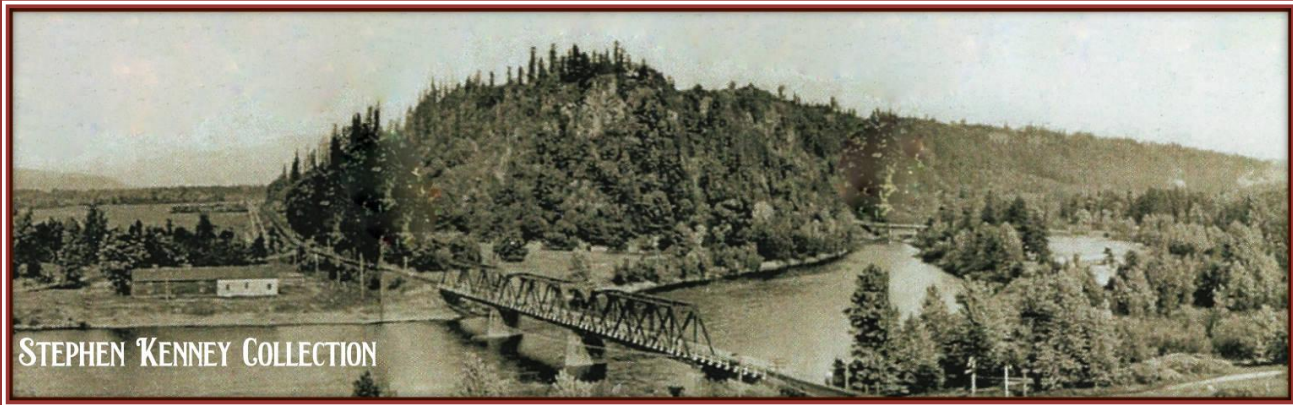
Real photo postcard of Main Street in Troutdale, circa 1909. Postmarked January 6, 1910 in Troutdale.



Panoramic photo of Troutdale Hill from Bissinger's Wool Pullery Water Tower, circa 1930.

The Bissinger & Company Wool Pullery was founded by Adolph Bissinger, Samuel Bissinger, Louis Bissinger, and Louis Gerstle in the 1880s. Its history in Troutdale originated with Samuel Bissinger, a Jewish immigrant from Bavaria who lived in Portland, Oregon. Bissinger arrived in the United States when he was 16 years old, and became an energetic promoter of the Portland area who joined numerous social groups, and was respected for his creative ideas and intuitive judgment. He decided to move his family's pullery out of Sellwood, Oregon, into Troutdale onto an eight-acre parcel located on Macadam Road at the west bank of the Sandy River.





Panoramic photo of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge at Troutdale across the Sandy River from Bissinger's Wool Pullery Water Tower, circa 1930. Broughton Bluff is in the center.

The two-story Bissinger & Co. Wool Pullery building opened in Troutdale in 1925 to process the hides of livestock and sheep. By the 1930s, the pullery generated a weekly payroll of roughly \$1,700, and it is credited with keeping Troutdale working during the Great Depression. The plant thrived and operated for decades. In the early 1930s, the company built a 125-foot tall water tower to ensure a more consistent water supply for the operation.

While not operational, the iconic water tower still stands. After the wool pullery shut down in 1970, a cabinet manufacturing business operated in the building until 1999. The remains of sheep were buried on the site and the site has been the subject of contamination cleanup efforts. Redevelopment efforts at the site have stalled.



Troutdale celebrated 100 Years of Incorporation in 2007. Longtime Webfooter and Troutdale resident Stephen Kenney created this postcard with a collage of his postcards from Troutdale.



**Sources for this article:**

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Postmark from Troutdale Oct. 7, 1890, Larry Maddux collection.



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