WEBFOOTER EXTRA

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Rockwood's Historic Past

Ten Mile Road House on Baseline Road (now Stark Street) at Rockwood, circa 1917.

Rockwood's Historic Past

When Oregon became a territory of the United States, a surveyor general was directed to layout a baseline and a Willamette meridian to be the basic east-west and north-south lines by which the new townships, ranges, sections and land boundaries would be identified. A road was built along the baseline from Portland eastward called the Baseline Road. Starting at the courthouse steps in Portland a stone marker was placed each mile to the east up to fifteen. Their names identified how far they were from the courthouse.

According to Lewis McArthur's Oregon Geographic Names, Rockwood was named for the rocks and Douglas fir that confronted the pioneers, was the inspiration for the name. To this day stands of Douglas fir still grow in the area's parks and along roadsides.
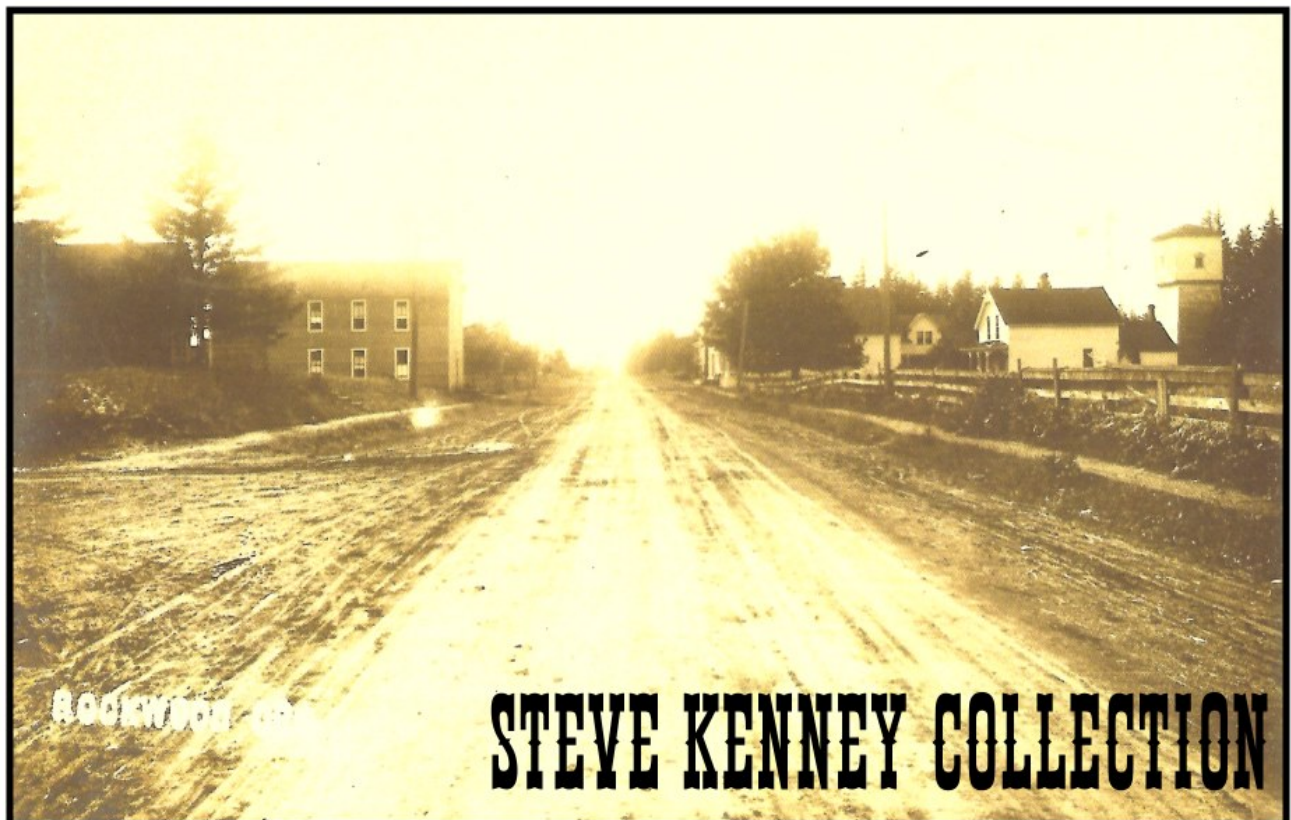

View of A.W. Kreofsky's General Merchandise Store and Garage with Union Gasoline in Rockwood, Oregon, circa 1917.

Rockwood was named by an Irishman, Francis Tegart, frequently called Lord Tegart, local landowner, who is said to have insisted they apply for a post office with the name of Rockwood in the hope of impressing his family members in Ireland with his "estate." The request was approved. A post office was established there on March 14, 1882. Cyrus C. Lewis, the first storekeeper in Rockwood, became the first postmaster, hoping a post office located in his store, would help his mercantile establishment.

The office was closed February 28, 1903 with the advent of rural delivery.

A north-south road intersected the Baseline Road near the ten-mile marker, coming down from the Columbia River and going south toward Oregon City. The north-south road was named Rockwood Road. Stage coaches coming out of Portland along the Baseline Road would stop at the Ten-Mile Inn before continuing on toward the Twelve-Mile corner where they crossed the Fairview Road that led south to Damascus. In January 1892, a portion of Baseline Road was renamed Stark Street after Benjamin Stark (1820-1898), a U.S. senator from Oregon.

A small community grew up around the ten-mile junction in that rocky wooded area of Rockwood. The junction also attracted Rockwood School #27 which was built in 1902, a grange hall in 1903, a church, a blacksmith shop, and a grocery store, among other businesses. Rockwood Road became 181st Avenue.

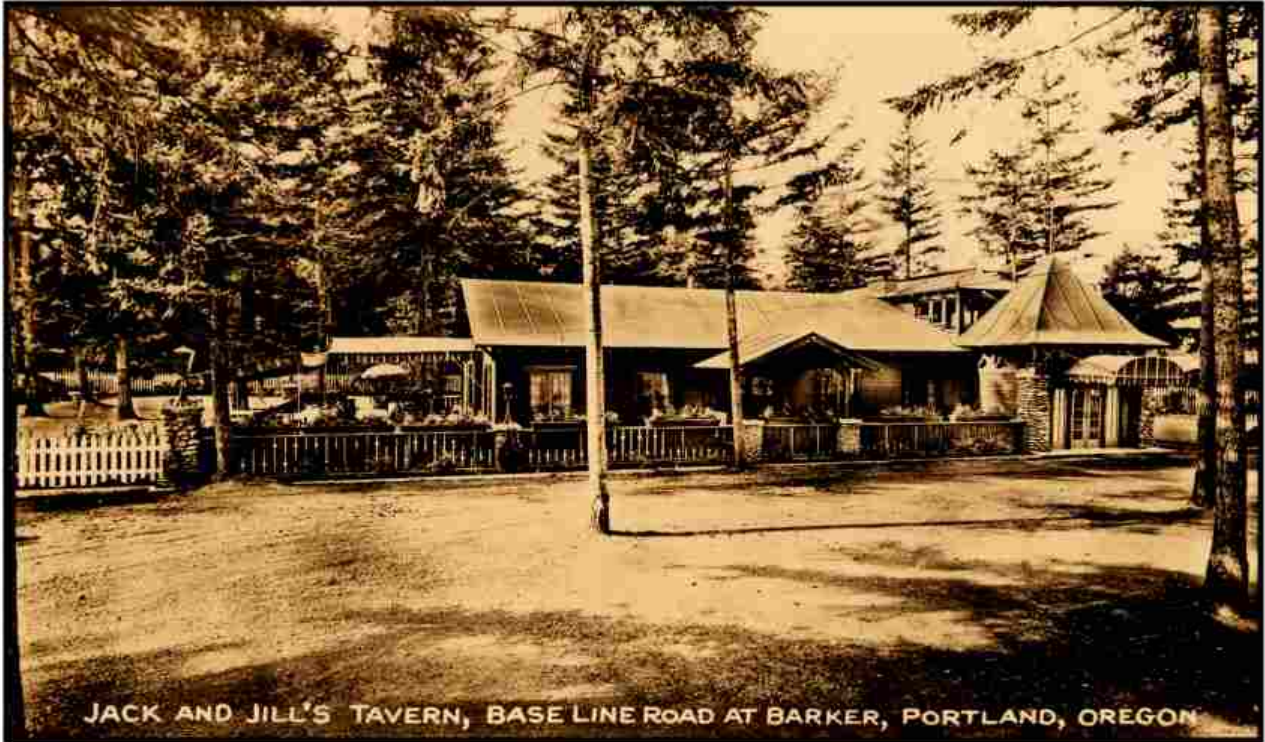**Baseline Road (now Stark Street) in Rockwood, circa 1910.**

Baseline Road, now Stark Street at the intersection with Rockwood Road, circa 1920.

Around 1920, several speakeasies and roadhouses flourished along Stark Street between Barker Road (now 162nd Avenue) and the 12-Mile Corner. According to local-resident Helen Lamb there were seven roadhouses from Barker Road to the 12-Mile Corner: Jack and Jill's at Barker Road, the Beacon Lodge at 165th, Ten-Mile Inn at Rockwood Road, a less-advertised establishment run by A.J. Tully, Bird Legs Reed's Roadhouse, El Porvenir (at 204th and Stark), and Merrill's Twelve-Mile House on Fairview Road, now 223rd.

Roadhouses were known for their good food and musical entertainment and a few had prostitutes, but the principal thing they offered was chicken dinners and moonshine whiskey. Five of the seven houses along Barr Avenue (now Halsey) housed "moonshiners"– people making illegal whiskey. One of the houses had an underground tunnel to the chicken house where the still was. The roadhouses and moonshiners dwindled away after Prohibition was repealed in 1933.

Pheasants and other game were commonplace in Rockwood and it was a posted game refuge. In the 1920s, A. Curtis Ruby, president of the Oregon Livestock Company, raised thoroughbred horses—Percherons, Belgians and Clydesdales—for shipment to the East and for display all over the world. On land now used for advanced automated wafer fab manufacturing, Ruby had a stock farm and golf course. The eighteen-hole Ruby Golf Course reached from Stark to Halsey Streets. The club house was where Abby's Pizza is now. Ruby went broke in 1934 and the clubhouse burned. Ruby Junction on the light rail line was named for him.

Jack and Jill's Tavern, Baseline Road at Barker in Rockwood, circa 1925. Photo Courtesy of Mark Moore.

Jack and Jill's Tavern, circa 1920. Photo courtesy of Steve Kenney.

Rockwood Grammar School in 1924.

Troh's Airport in 1935 at 174th and Section Line Road (now Division Street).

Troh's Airport, which opened in 1935, was located at an old dairy farm. The cow barn was repurposed for plane storage and the milking room became the mechanic's garage just north of Section Line Road (now Division) between 174th and 182nd. The runway was a single east/west turf strip running the length of the property. One unique feature of the airport was a hexagonal hangar which had the windsock prominently located on the center top of its roof.

Hank Troh lost his lease in 1946 to a competitor, forcing him to move about a mile east, building a larger airport he called 'Skyport.' Troh's 'Airport' became Division Street Airport and it closed in 1954.

Hank Troh's Skyport, northeast of 182nd and Division, celebrated opening day on June 30, 1946 with an afternoon airshow. The Portland Journal estimated the crowd at 7,000. The Goodyear & Mobilgas blimps were based at Troh's when special events brought them to Portland. Troh's Skyport closed in June of 1959. He moved his operations to a new facility in Happy Valley and called it Troh's Nest. He died in the mid-1970s, but the airport continued operating until the 1990s as Troh Memorial Airpark.

The newly-completed D-Street Corral in 1948.

The D-Street Corral opened at 172nd and Division in December 1948. The dance corral was a hot spot for Portland's young party crowd from the beat generation through the rock and roll era, drawing national celebrity performers such as Johnny Cash, The Temptations, Hank Williams, Bobby Darin, Roy Orbison, Paul Revere and the Raiders and The Kingsmen, among others. A fire in 1979 ended all the dances there. After several years of renovations, the building was rented out for events and finally a flea market. The building was demolished in 2007.

Fred Meyer opened a new store in the suburbs at Rockwood in 1957. For many years, it was very successful and it attracted shoppers from far and wide. It seemed like a large store at the time and it offered everything a person could want. It defined Rockwood for many years, making way for the Satellite Restaurant and Lounge and later G.I. Joe's. A major remodel in 2000 would not help the ailing Rockwood store that no longer yielded a profit. The Rockwood Fred Meyer store closed in 2003 and the building was later demolished.

Rockwood Fred Meyer Store.

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The Satellite Restaurant and Lounge. Photo courtesy of John Staub.

Another popular Rockwood establishment, the Satellite Restaurant and Lounge, was built as a bright neon salute to the 1950s dream of space, but its atmosphere was what drew people to the Satellite Restaurant with a huge metal globe perched on the roof. The restaurant opened in the first few months of the space age on October 22, 1958, and its furnishings reflected the science-fiction visions of the future. Planet-shaped lights hung from the ceiling. A three-dimensional mural of a spaceship decorated the back bar. The Satellite closed June 5, 2000.

The Rockwood area was annexed by Gresham in 1987. Rockwood is Gresham's most densely-populated and diverse neighborhood with 15,915 residents.