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Courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum

In 1873 this was the view of downtown Eugene looking north from the corner of Willamette Street and Broadway. Skinner Butte was completely void of vegetation and the street was full of mud inches deep.

## Early Eugene held promise for all

*'Hogs and grog shops' were among the sights*

By Stephen Maher

Of the Emerald

The area must have possessed a wild look to it when Eugene Skinner climbed the butte, which would later bear his name, in June of 1846. He undoubtedly saw the Willamette River meandering back and forth and the rich and wide valley stretching north and south.

He also saw how scantily settled the area was.

A farmer by trade, Skinner and his family had traveled west from Independence, Mo., with a wagon train. Like other Willamette Valley settlers of the day, Skinner was originally from the northeastern United States. It wasn't until years later that settlers hailing from the South arrived.

Skinner laid out a 640-acre claim and on July 14, 1846 filed it. The claim stretched from the Willamette River to present-day Eighth Avenue, and from Monroe Street to Hilyard Street. Near the corner of Second Avenue and Lincoln Street, Skinner erected his cabin.

For the next four years, Skinner and his family lived off the land. They made their own tools, cut down trees, planed lumber, fished, hunted and made household items from scratch.

In 1851, the year Lane County was established, Skinner operated a ferry across the Willamette River and a trading post out of his cabin. His cabin also was designated "Skinner's Post Office," a welcome service for the 40 or so families that lived within a day's ride.

That same year Hilyard Shaw discovered a slough near a bend in the Willamette River and recognized the potential for power. Soon after, Shaw built a millrace with the help of another settler, William Smith. They built a sawmill and gristmill along the banks, providing lumber and flour for the settlers.

In 1852, Skinner donated a large chunk of his claim for a town. It was platted from the river to Seventh Avenue and from Ferry Street to High

Street. Skinner's wife, Mary, named it Eugene City, in honor of her husband.

But Skinner's generosity didn't end with his original donation. A year later he gave an additional 40 acres for county buildings. Another settler, Charnel Mulligan, also gave 40 acres and a county clerk's office was built near Willamette Street and Ninth Avenue.

The clerk's office was so small, however, that juries were forced to sit outside under an oak tree while in session. Two years later, a two-story courthouse was constructed at Eighth Avenue and Oak Street to alleviate the problem.

In 1856 a wild celebration occurred in Eugene City when the first steamboat to reach town, the "James Clinton," arrived from Portland. Still, the accomplishment was overshadowed by the fact it took three days for the boat to travel the last 53 miles from Corvallis.

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