

Eugene's history one of the deepest in the state

By Bill Holmstrom
Freelance Reporter

Those people new to Eugene, or even those who have been in the city for a while, might want to know a little bit about its history.

Believe it or not, it didn't get this way by accident. The first people to inhabit the area were the Kalapuya Indians. The Kalapuya were a hunting and gathering people who had lived in the region for several centuries. The Kalapuya practiced grass-burning techniques to create better habitats for the animals and vegetation that they used for food.

The first white settlers to the southern Willamette Valley began to arrive in the 1840s. The valley was

an agricultural paradise, drawing people from all walks of life seeking adventure and the promise of making something out of the wilderness.

At this time, the Willamette Valley was the prime location to settle for pioneers heading west. Gold wasn't discovered in California until 1849, and there wasn't even a cabin in the Seattle area until 1851.

So, when Eugene Skinner built a tiny cabin in 1846, he was among the first of a plethora of pioneers staking claims in the valley. Skinner built his cabin just northwest of the hill the Kalapuya called Ya-po-ah.

For the first few years, there was not much of anything else in the area. Oregon City was the largest

city in the region, as Portland was little more than a "stumptown" of fourteen houses. In the years just before the gold rush, even San Francisco was little more than a rag-tag village of 60 houses, barns, and tents. The creation of the Oregon Territory in 1848 started to bring more settlers west.

The next few years brought more progress to the area. The post office arrived in 1850. 1851 was a busy year, as Lane County was created by the Territorial Legislature and the first county elections were held. Eugene Skinner surveyed a town site on his claim, a trading post was built near Skinner's Ferry landing and a shallow slough was deepened and

lengthened to create the Millrace. A mill was built along its banks.

Eugene Skinner filed the town plat, a detailed surveyor's plan, for Eugene City in 1852. The Lane County Commissioners chose it as the county seat in the next year. Eugene City grew, and incorporated in 1862, shortly after Oregon gained statehood. The name of the town was changed to the City of Eugene in 1864. But Eugene didn't really hit the big time until the railroad arrived in 1871.

The University's roots in the community began in 1872 when the Union University Association was formed and began to gather funds for the construction from


people around the town. Money was tight for the University in those days, and the first building, Deady Hall, was barely complete in time for classes to begin in 1876.

Today, Eugene bears the name of that first pioneer, Eugene Skinner. Ya-po-ah, the hill that the first cabin sat alongside, also takes his name today, as Skinner Butte. Skinner died in Eugene in 1964. Today, if one walks up to the Masonic Cemetery at University Street and 25th Avenue, you can see where Skinner and other Eugene pioneers are buried.

You may even recognize names from local streets, parks, campus buildings and other city landmarks.

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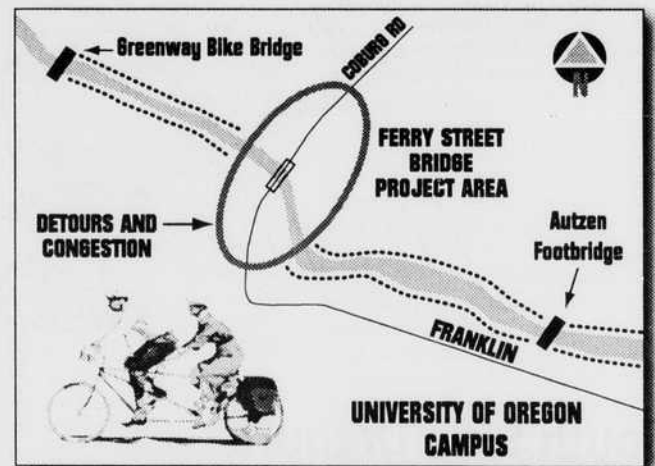
Bicycling is a great way to commute to campus or get around town. If your ride includes the **FERRY STREET BRIDGE** here are some tips:

- **Consider alternate routes.** The Autzen Footbridge and Greenway Bridge at Valley River are free of construction.
- **Be aware of detours.** Follow signed detour routes to avoid the frustration of deadends and dangerous crossings.



- **Plan your route** before you leave home.
- **Call the traffic relief hotline at 984-8484** for construction updates.
- **Pick up a free brochure** about detour routes at the Campus Safety Office or Oregon Hall.

For information about the Ferry Street Bridge Project, call 682-8449 or visit www.ci.eugene.or.us/pw/fsb



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