

RAILROAD INFLUENCES ON OREGON TOWNS

by

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Many geographers have assessed the importance of the railroad in various facets of American history. Relatively few, however, have examined the impact of the railroad on the American landscape, the matrix in which we go about our lives.

This thesis examines the role of the railroad in the making of Oregon's urban landscape. The railroad's influence on the pattern of communities throughout the state is examined, and found to be ambiguous, but on the whole relatively small. Railways do, on the other hand, exert a great influence on the morphologies and neighborhood development of Oregon towns. These influences are categorized into effects of separation, in which two neighborhoods of different characteristics exist on either side of the tracks, and puncture, in which a neighborhood distinctly different from the surrounding areas exists by the rail corridor. These effects can be profound, and can linger for many years after a rail line is removed.

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## Chapter I

### RAILROADS AND TOWNS

In the years 1911 and 1912, many of the residents of the small coastal village of Nehalem, Oregon, packed up their belongings and moved their families and businesses south a few kilometers to the new town of Wheeler. They made this move for one reason alone--proximity to a railroad line. Nehalem, bypassed by the tracks of the Pacific Railway and Navigation Company, had lost much of its appeal. Wheeler, laid out alongside the newly-constructed railroad, suddenly seemed a far preferable place to live.<sup>1</sup>

A small-town newspaper, the Nehalem Enterprise, was one business that took part in the exodus. In its first issue under the new and more universally appealing name of the Nehalem Valley Reporter, the paper's editors explained the motives behind their move:

It seems that all business enterprises naturally drift toward the railroad where transportation facilities and the added benefits of direct communication with the outside world are important factors in the transaction of business, and one is at a decided disadvantage if located so that it is

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<sup>1</sup> The PR&N was opened to the coast on November 1, 1911. (Auston, Ed, and Dill, Tom, The Southern Pacific in Oregon. Edmonds, Washington: Pacific Fast Mail, 1987. p. 167)

impossible to share in these present essentials to  
a successful business career.<sup>2</sup>

2

Although Nehalem would survive, its position as a dominant center in the Nehalem Valley had been supplanted by the new railroad town. Wheeler would, in turn, lose its importance, but it remains today the larger of the two villages.<sup>3</sup>

Abandonment of established small towns for new towns on the railroad was a fairly frequent occurrence during the construction of Oregon's rail network.<sup>4</sup> This observation, in isolation, suggests that railroads could be a primary influence on the state's settlement patterns, eliminating existing towns and cities and replacing them with its own. Other observations, however, seem to negate the railroad's importance. Most of Oregon's largest places, for instance, were founded before 1868, the year that workmen laid the state's first rails. Many Oregon towns, moreover, have survived and prospered without ever receiving a rail connection.

How important, then, were railroad lines in the historical geography of Oregon settlement? In an attempt to answer this question, this thesis divides Oregon towns into

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2     Untitled article, Nehalem Valley Reporter (Wheeler), August 14, 1913. p. 2.

3     Wheeler's 1987 population was 340, as compared to Nehalem's 240.

4     Oakes, Dennis James, Site Abandonment; Placename Evidence in Oregon. MA thesis, Department of Geography, University of Oregon, 1988. pp. 35-36.

four categories: towns that never had railroads, towns that<sup>3</sup> grew on the railroad, towns that gained the railroad, and towns that lost the railroad. By analyzing the distributions of these town-types across Oregon, I hope to show the varying influence of railroads in different parts of the state.

A second question addressed in this thesis is the nature of the railroad's impact on a town's interior landscape. I will classify several ways in which the presence of a railroad can affect a town's morphology<sup>5</sup> and neighborhood development. In so doing, I hope to give the reader a sense of the extent to which the presence of a railroad can influence town landscapes.

### Railroads and Settlement: an Overview

The opinion of the Reporter's editors that settlement would "naturally" gravitate to a railroad line was by no means unusual in the first decades of this century. In popular nostalgia, as well as in many textbooks and scholarly writings, the railroad is depicted as the one dominant institution that shaped the growth of the American West. One scholar, writing in 1965, claimed that:

The swift and widespread adoption of the railroad, together with the telegraph and ocean-going steamship, forged a transportation revolution that

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<sup>5</sup> "Morphology" is a term meaning town layout, referring especially in this project to street grid patterns.

profoundly altered existing patterns of American agriculture, industry, and commerce. Besides stimulating national production and income, the new forms of transportation, particularly the railroad, helped to create new economic methods and institutions that were essential in guiding and shaping the American drive to industrialism.<sup>6</sup>

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The conception of the railroads as all-important in American history remained virtually unchallenged until the 1964 publication of R. W. Fogel's Railroads and American Economic Growth. In this provocative work, Fogel argued that the railroad was at most only a minor stimulus to Western settlement, and that agricultural and economic growth in the West would have occurred at only slightly diminished levels in the absence of railroad technology.<sup>7</sup> This new idea sparked an academic debate which has been carried out in journals of transportation and economic geography to the present day.

Although Fogel's arguments are persuasive in their application to the large scale (i.e. the American West), they fail to address the local impacts of railroad lines. Regardless of the debatable importance of railroads to the development of vast regions, they were extremely influential in the economic, physical, and cultural growth of individual towns. In some areas, in fact, the presence of a railroad was nothing short of essential for a town's survival. John

6 Chandler, Alfred D., introduction, The Railroads, the Nations First Big Business. Edited by Chandler. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965. p. 3.

7 Fogel, Robert William, Railroads and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1964.

C. Hudson, in his Plains Country Towns, studies an area encompassing more than a quarter of North Dakota, finding only one town that survived past the 1920's without a rail connection.

The small-town determinism of the Wheeler newspaper may sound quaint or even ludicrous to our ears, but it should come as no surprise that towns in the West attached great importance to the railroads. Any community or economic location in an interdependent society such as the United States' requires the ability to import and export. In the second half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th, the period in which most Western towns were founded, the railroad was considered the fastest and cheapest form of long-distance transportation.<sup>8</sup> If there was no competitive form of transport available, proximity to a railroad siding was for all intents and purposes necessary for a town's survival.

The specific location of railroad tracks in relation to a townsite influences a community's morphology, neighborhood formation, and economic potential.<sup>9</sup> Geographers have

8 Leo Marx discusses the rise of the railroad as an American cultural symbol in "The Impact of the Railroad on the American Imagination, as a Possible Comparison for the Space Impact", in Mazlish, Bruce, editor, The Railroad and the Space Program, An Exploration in Historical Analogy. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1965. pp. 202-216.

9 See for instance Francaviglia, Richard V., "Railroads as Barriers in Midwestern Town Development." Paper presented at the Minnesota Academy of Sciences, May 1, 1971, St. Mary's College, Winona, Minnesota., or Hudson, John C., "Towns of the Western Railroads." Great Plains Quarterly 2:1 (Winter, 1982). pp. 41-54.

studied aspects of these railroad influences, but concern for the study of regions has, on the whole, won out over the study of localities. Thus Holtgrieve complains that "studies of economic development related to the railroad are abundant, but few such studies direct specific attention to the kinds of relationships between town populations and the railroads,"<sup>10</sup> and Due and French report that "rarely has the interdependence between transport and general economic development been explored on a local scale."<sup>11</sup>

Railroads in Oregon have been written about in some depth and volume, but usually in the "great man" biographical style of the early twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Whole volumes, for instance, have been dedicated to the life of Henry Villard, a capitalist who directed the construction of many of Oregon's early railways.<sup>13</sup> Many of these works fail

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10 Holtgrieve, Donald G., Historical Geography of the Willamette Valley: Transportation Routes and Town Population Changes. PhD Dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Oregon, 1973.

11 Due, John F., and French, Giles, Rails to the Mid-Columbia Wheatlands. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979

12 Space does not allow for a treatment of Oregon railroad history in this paper. An extensive bibliography of early works on the subject is Condz, Marian, "Bibliography of Railroads in the Pacific Northwest." Washington Historical Quarterly 12 (1921), pp. 91-114. Perhaps the best synopsis of rail history in the western half of the state may be found in chapter 1 of Auston and Dill. (pp. 9-29.)

13 A readable example is Hedges, James, Henry Villard and the Railways of the Northwest. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930.

to address the rails themselves in any but the most superficial way and mention few towns other than Portland and Salem. Certain colorful railroads and incidents, such as the Oregon Pacific and the west-side/east-side controversy, are discussed in book after book, while it is nearly impossible to find any information on many railroads in Eastern Oregon.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis is an attempt to bridge two gaps. On one hand, I hope to complement the geographic literature on local and sub-regional impacts of railroads. On the other, I hope to expand the understanding of how Oregon towns and railroads have interacted in the creation of the contemporary landscape.

### Limiting a Sample Set

Before beginning an analysis of towns and railroads, it is necessary to specify what will be considered a town and what will be considered a railroad. Compilation of all past and present communities in Oregon would be in itself a major work. Railroads, as well, appear in uncountable varieties in Oregon history, including street cars, logging railroads,

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<sup>14</sup> The story of the OPRR is told in Mills, Randall V., Railroads Down the Valleys; Some Short Lines of the Oregon Country. Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1950. The west-side/east-side controversy is summarized nicely by Auston and Dill (see footnote 9).

portage railroads, miniature children's railroads, and mule-<sup>8</sup> powered railroads built for jetty construction.

The sample of towns selected was essentially the list of Oregon's incorporated places in 1990. This set has the strength of representing a large spectrum of town sizes, locations, and histories. Incorporated towns are typically of a large enough size that there is a distinguishable town layout which may be analyzed. Information is more readily available, furthermore, for incorporated places than it is for unincorporated settlements.

The sample, however, is not without its limitations. Most obviously, it considers only cities that are significant today. Not included are the many small settlements that were abandoned in favor of new towns founded on the railroad.<sup>15</sup> Also potentially ignored are towns that disappeared after a railroad line was abandoned, or towns that the railroad failed to propel to success. In a survey this broad, however, these problems are inevitable. In a study of contemporary morphology, moreover, abandoned towns are irrelevant.

A second problem with incorporated cities is the sometimes purely political nature of their incorporation. Johnson City, King City, and Rivergrove, for instance, incorporated not as *bona fide* communities, but in efforts to

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15 See Oakes, pp. 35-38.

avoid annexation by neighboring cities.<sup>16</sup> Maywood Park, similarly, was incorporated to give its residents political leverage in a battle over the route of a freeway.<sup>17</sup> These four places are excluded from the sample.

The railroads considered herein are "general haulers," railroads that were chartered to transport a variety of cargos. Thus, logging railroads that operated within the city limits of Newport and Waldport are not considered, as they were used exclusively for the movement of raw timber.<sup>18</sup> Because of this, it is unlikely that they would attract businesses or trackside settlement. Indeed, it seems unlikely that logging railroads were viewed with the same respect, awe, or even interest as were the "real" railroads.

### Constructing a Typology

From these definitions of "town" and "railroad", it is possible to divide Oregon towns into categories, based on their relationships to the railroads. These categories include towns that never had railroads, towns that gained railroads, and towns that grew on railroads.

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16 McArther, Lewis A., Oregon Geographic Names, 5th edition. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1982. pp. 398, 415, 624.

17 McArther, p. 478.

18 These roads are described in Palmer, Lloyd M., Steam Towards the Sunset; the Railroads of Lincoln County. Newport: Lincoln County Historical Society, 1982. pp. 29+.

*Towns that never had railroads* are defined as towns that have at no point in their existence been tied into the national rail network.

*Towns that gained railroads* are defined as towns that were founded prior to receiving rail service.

*Towns that grew on railroads* are towns that were founded on pre-existing tracks. Also included in this category are communities that grew on the route of a planned rail line. Thus Junction City, which was deliberately built on the proposed junction of two main line tracks into the Southern Willamette Valley, is included, even though it was a sizable town by the time that the railroad arrived. Towns that moved to a railroad line are also included in this category. Cottage Grove and Milton-Freewater, lastly, are also included in this section. Both of these towns were formed by the merger of two communities, one of which was bypassed by a railroad and the other of which was founded in an attempt to replace the older town.<sup>19</sup>

Towns in either of the later two categories may be further classified as "towns that lost railroads."

*Towns that lost railroads* include towns on abandoned rail lines and towns on technically intact rights-of-way that see no rail traffic. This classification does not include towns in which there are no rail shippers or receivers if these towns are located on an active rail line. I suspect that the presence of through trains remains relevant in these communities.

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<sup>19</sup> see Workman, Mary H., "Cottage Grove-the Cinderella City." Lane County Historian 17.2 (1972): 23-38, and Umatilla County: A Backward Glance. Pendleton: Umatilla County Historical Society, 1980.

The task of fitting 237 towns into these categories is somewhat laborious. Although dates of railroad construction to specific towns are fairly easy to determine, specifying a date of town "founding" was more difficult. If the town was incorporated prior to the building of the tracks, it obviously gained the railroad. If the settlement did not have a post office or had not been platted at the time of the railroad's arrival, it grew on the railroad. The remaining places had to be researched individually, through publications of county historical societies, historical journals, and early state business directories.

Having made these distinctions, we can proceed with an investigation of rail influences on Oregon towns. In Chapter 2, I will investigate the importance of the railroad in shaping the pattern of towns across the state. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will evaluate the influences of the railroad on aspects of a town's interior morphology. In Chapter 5, I will examine the significance of an abandoned railroad line within a town. The four town types will be useful tools for evaluating the railroad's importance in each of these chapters.

## Chapter II

### RAILROAD INFLUENCES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF TOWNS IN OREGON

The distributions of the four town types are, of course, related to the pattern of Oregon's rail network. They are, in particular, related to a few primary rail routes, or "main lines." All but two of these, in turn, follow one of the states two primary transportation corridors, one of which runs essentially east and west and the other north and south. These corridors delineate the general route not only of Oregon's first transcontinental rail connections, but also of important early immigrant trails into Oregon and of the state's contemporary interstate highways. (Figure 1)

The first corridor runs east from Portland through the Columbia Gorge to northern Morrow County, where it veers slightly to the southeast, towards Pendleton. From this city, the route runs southeast through the Grande Ronde and Baker Valleys, passing through Ontario and Nyssa on its way to Idaho's Snake River Valley. This was, generally, the route of the Oregon Trail, and it is the path of today's Interstate 84. It was also the route of the Oregon Railroad

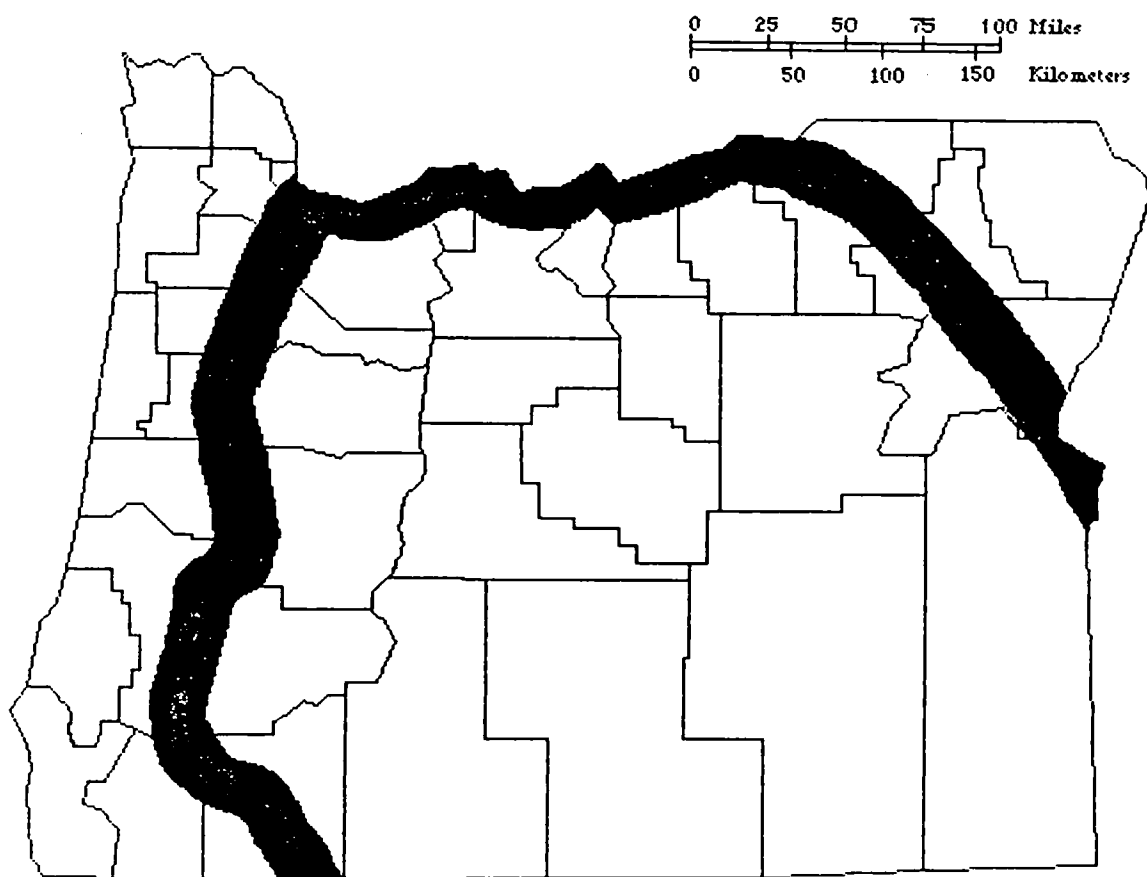


Figure 1: Oregon's Primary Transportation Corridors

and Navigation Company's transcontinental connection with the Union Pacific Railroad.

The second corridor runs south from Portland on the east side of the Willamette river, passes through Salem, Albany, and Eugene, continues south through the Umpqua Valley, and veers southeast through the Rogue and Bear Creek Valleys on the way to California. This was the path of the Applegate Trail, an important early immigrant road in Oregon, and is the route of modern Interstate 5. It was also the route of the Oregon and California Railroad's main line to California, and, from Portland to Eugene, the main line of the Oregon Electric Railroad.

Two other rail corridors, the Natron cut-off and the Oregon Trunk, are also relevant to this study. The Natron Cutoff was completed in 1926 by the Southern Pacific as an alternative to the steep grades and tight curves of the Eugene-Ashland route.<sup>1</sup> Leaving Eugene, this line crosses the Willamette Pass in a southeasterly direction to Chemult, heading directly south from that town to Klamath Falls, a hub of several rail lines. The Oregon Trunk, begun in 1909, was built south from the Columbia through the Deschutes River Canyon.<sup>2</sup> It passes through Madras and Bend, meeting the Natron Cutoff near Chemult. (Figure 2)

These five lines, which exist today as the Southern

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1     Auston and Dill, pp. 278.

2     Due and French, p. 103.

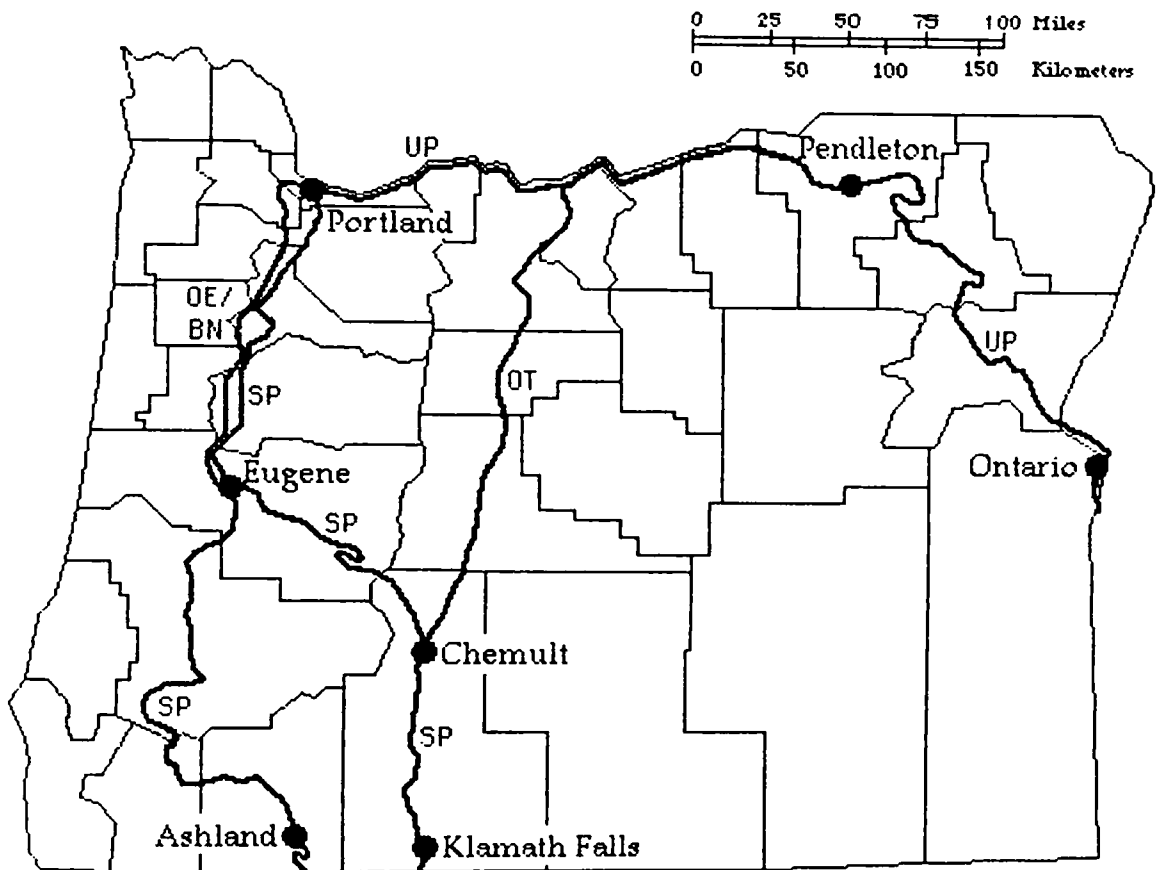


Figure 2: Oregon's Main Lines

UP = Union Pacific  
OT = Oregon Trunk

SP = Southern Pacific  
OE/BN = Oregon Electric/  
Burlington Northern

Pacific lines from Portland to Klamath Falls and from Eugene to Ashland, the Burlington Northern line from Portland to Eugene, the Union Pacific line from Portland to Ontario, and the jointly-owned<sup>3</sup> Oregon Trunk, are considered "main lines" in this thesis<sup>4</sup>. Oregon's many other rail lines will be referred to as "branch lines."

The distribution of each town type is related to the pattern of these main lines. Towns that never had railroads, as might be expected, are usually found at some distance from any of the main lines, where their remoteness discourages the construction of long branch routes. Towns that grew on the railroad are very likely to be on a main line, if they are not suburbs of a larger city. Towns that gained the railroad, conversely, are more likely to have been reached by a branch line. Towns that lost railroads, lastly, are not on or very near the main lines. In all but a few cases, these places were served by now abandoned branch lines, or were termini on lines that have been abandoned at a point closer to the main line.

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3 ...by the Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern.

4 All except for the SP route from Eugene to Ashland are the current main lines for their respective companies. The Eugene to Ashland line was built as a main line, but was later replaced by the Natron Cutoff. Except the Burlington Northern's Portland to Eugene route, which has declined in importance since the peak years of the Oregon Electric Railroad, these lines have the highest traffic densities in the state. See Railroad Maps; the West. Colorado Springs: Mac Publishing, 1980. pp. 135-155.

Towns that Never had Railroads

Out of the 237 incorporated places in the sample set, forty-nine are towns that never had railroads. These range from the abandoned mining camp of Greenhorn,<sup>5</sup> with a 1987 population of three, to Newport, a coastal town of 8455. Most are among the smaller of Oregon's towns; their average population was 1200 in 1987, and thirty of the towns without trains had fewer than 1000 inhabitants.

These places are, as noted above, concentrated in areas remote from the main lines. They are, more specifically, largely distributed in two belts, one along the Pacific Coast and the other in and near the John Day River watershed through Grant and Wheeler Counties. (Figure 3) There are fifteen towns in each of these belts, both of which are characterized by a sparse population density and rugged, mountainous terrain, two factors which discourage railroad construction. They do, however, have higher population densities than, for instance, the High Cascades or the southeastern corner of the state, which do not have belts of rail-less towns simply because there are so few towns in these places.

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<sup>5</sup> Despite having a population of 3, this anomalously incorporated town has at least ten people in its city government, which lists a southwest Portland address in the Oregon Blue Book 89-90, pp. 354.

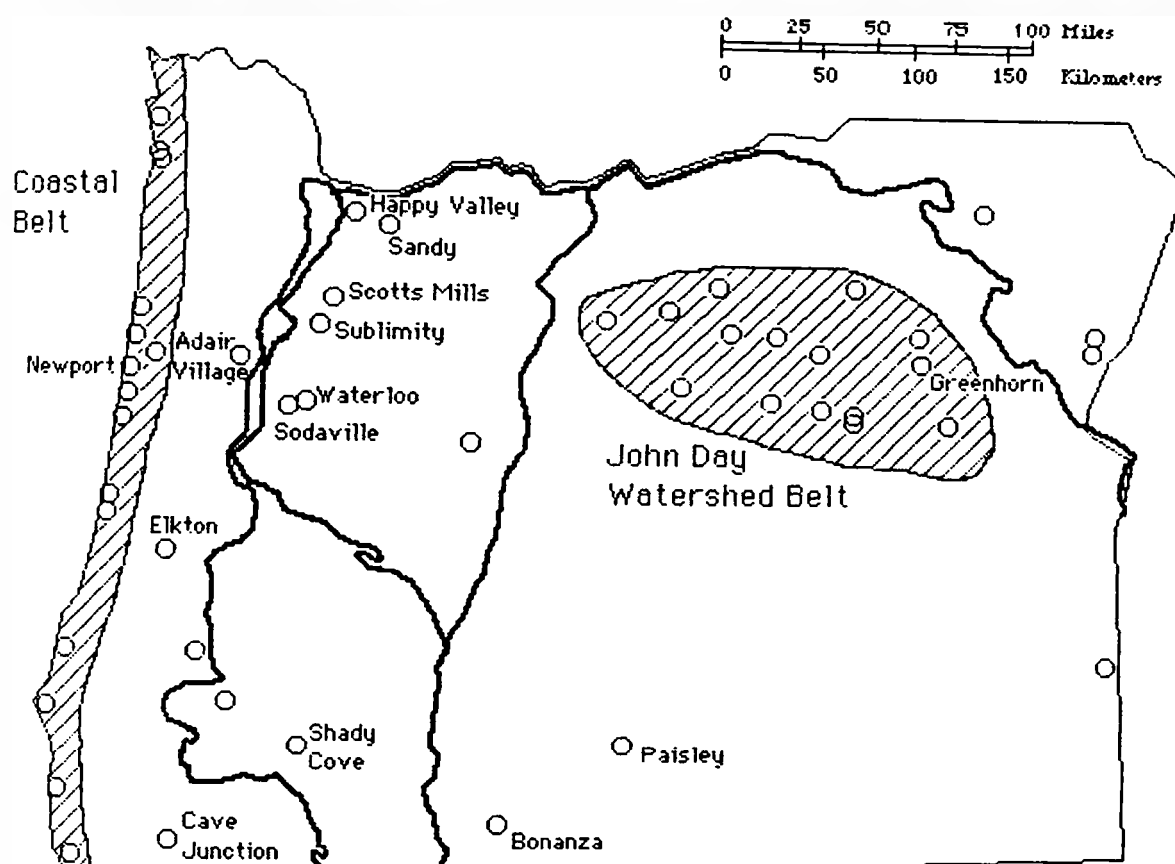


Figure 3: Towns that Never had Railroads

Eighty-two of Oregon's incorporated places are towns that grew on a railroad. Of these, forty-nine (60%) were founded on a main line.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 4) Many of these towns were established in the late 1870's, when settlers established communities along the newly-constructed Oregon and California Railroad main line from Portland to Ashland. These settlers either established new townsites where settlement had previously been acentric and dispersed, in places like Riddle and Yoncalla, or actually moved their town's buildings to the trackside, in Grants Pass, Oakland, and several other places.<sup>7</sup> The railroad companies, at the same time, hurried along the construction of new towns for their own profits, creating and promoting such places as Halsey, Junction City, and Gaston.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Five more were founded on the Oregon Pacific line into the Cascades, which was originally conceived as a main line from Corvallis to a transcontinental connection.

7 See Beckman, Stephen Dow, Land of the Umpqua: A History of Douglas County, Oregon. Roseburg: Douglas County Commissioners, 1986. It is difficult to determine exactly how many townsites were formed in this way, as the lineage from one town to the next is often blurred. Holtgrieve, for instance, describes Gervais as having formerly been Waconda, now an abandoned site. (Holtgrieve, 90) Gervais gained its post office, however, directly from a different abandoned place, Belpassi. (Helbock, Richard M., Oregon Post Offices, 1847-1982. Las Cruces, New Mexico: La Posta, 1982.)

8 Holtgrieve, 145.

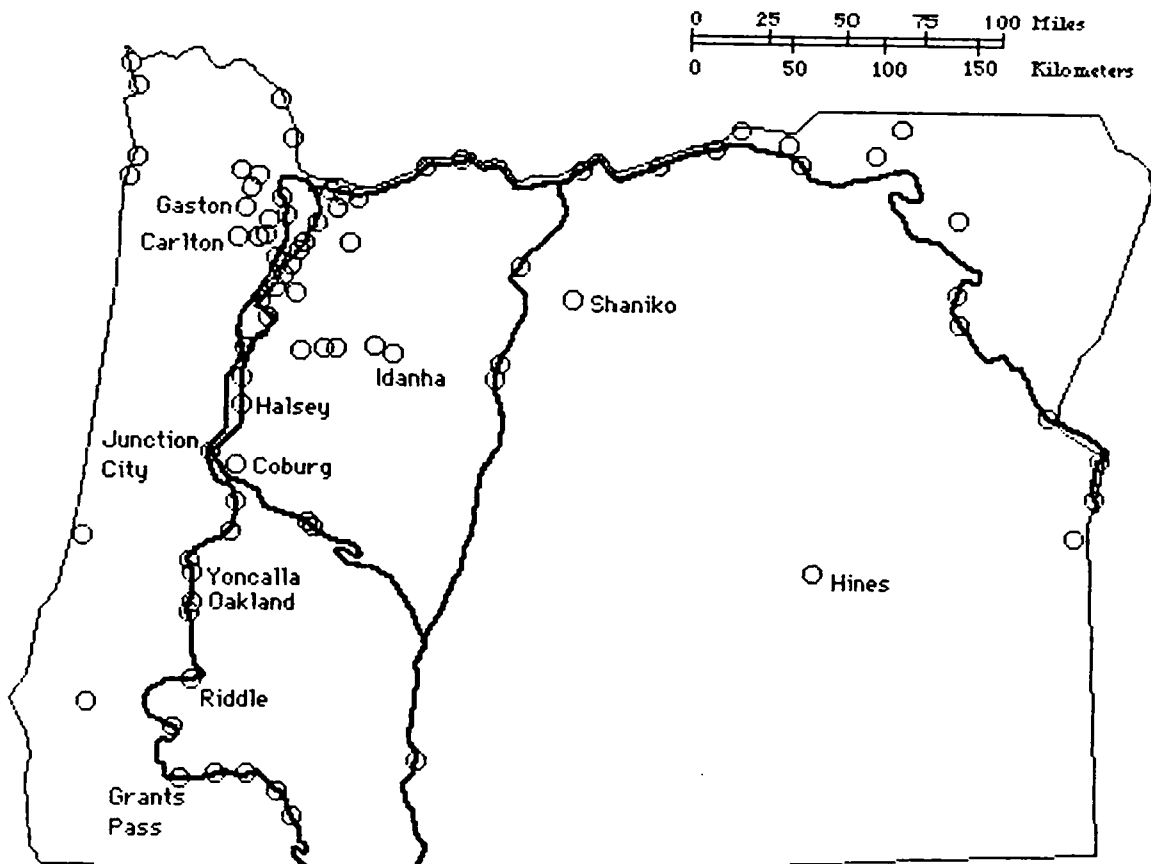


Figure 4: Towns that Grew on the Railroad

The greater traffic on main lines, as opposed to branch lines, may have made the former more attractive to settlers (and thus also to promoters) as potential town sites. It seems equally as likely, though, that the appeal of the main lines was simply that they were the first railroads in a given area, something certainly true of the Oregon and California main line. Branch lines, typically built to tie an already settled area into the rail network, were less likely to pass through areas without well-established communities. Thus, a new town founded on a branch line would have to fight not only the effects of its isolation from the primary transportation corridors, but also, in most cases, competition from nearby, established towns. A new town could have formed with no nearby competitors on one of the branch lines over the Coast Range, but there is little economic basis for long-term settlement in these mountains.

A few towns, such as Shaniko and Idanha, were founded at the termini of branch lines. This, on the short term, could be a very lucrative position. Shaniko, on the southern terminus of the Great Southern Railroad in southeast Wasco County, served in the first two decades of this century as the shipping center for the Central Oregon ranching industry.<sup>9</sup> Such locations, however, were very unstable. Shaniko lost its advantageous position, along with much of its population, when the building of the Oregon

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9 Due and French, pp. 73-4.

Trunk up the Deschutes River Canyon brought a more accessible rail line to the central portion of the state.<sup>10</sup> Terminal towns, likewise, could lose their advantages if the line that served them was either extended or abandoned. In short, these towns were generally not well situated for long-term success: Shaniko, which at one time was home to more than a thousand people, had only twenty-five inhabitants in 1987.

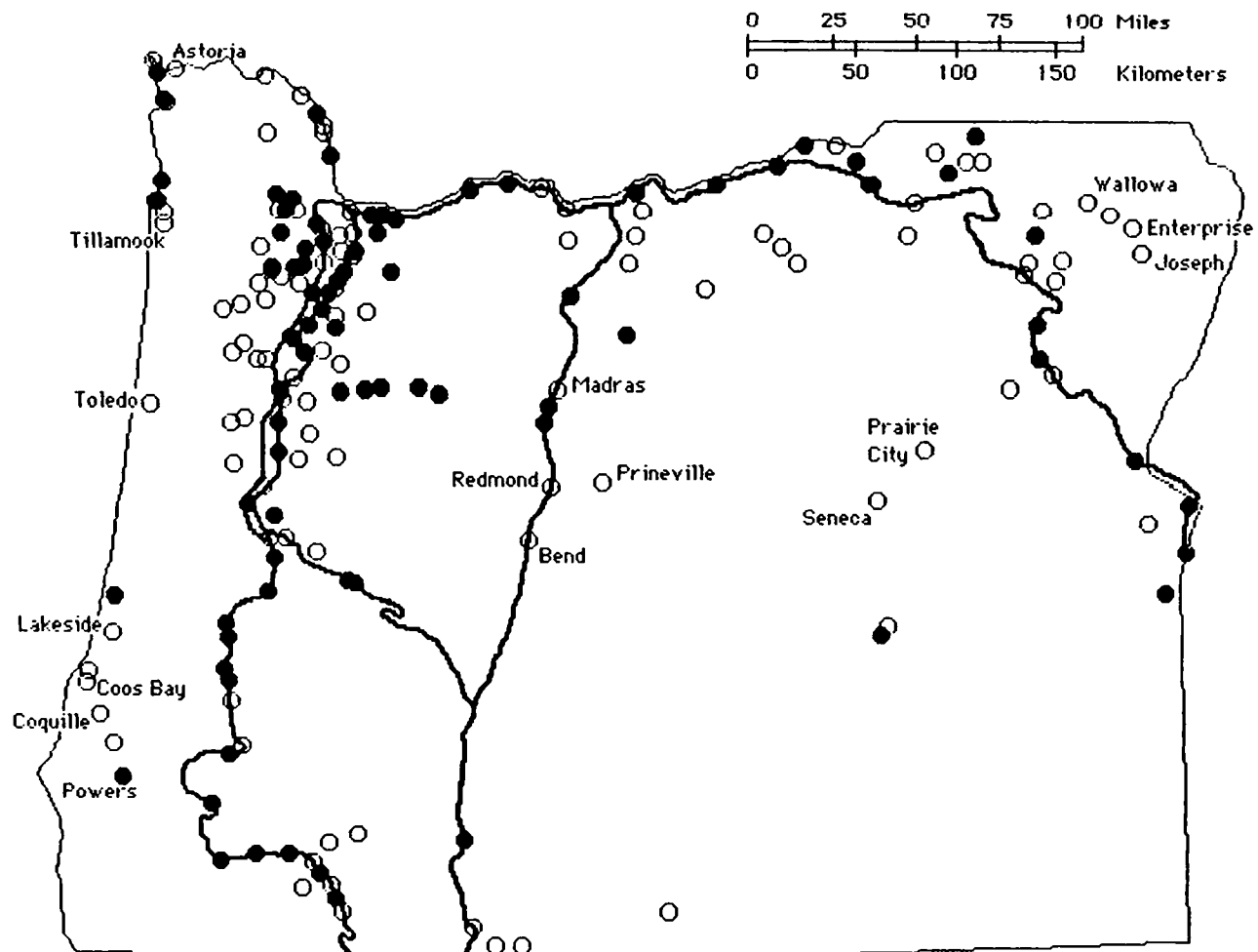
#### Towns that Gained Railroads

Compared to the previous two categories, Oregon's 106 towns that gained railroads show a much more general distribution, crudely resembling the distribution of Oregon's population as a whole. (Fig. 5) The Willamette Valley contains a great number of such towns, as do the Rogue and Bear Creek Valleys and the agricultural lands of North Central and Northeastern Oregon. There are also several towns in this category in those areas of the Coast that were reached by rail lines.

In the Willamette Valley and Northeastern Oregon, towns that gained main lines are few compared to those that gained branch lines. This is, of course, at least partly due to the greater mileage laid in branch lines than in main lines, as well as the necessity of building a main line directly

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10 Due and French, p. 106.



- Towns that Grew on the Railroad
- Towns that Gained the Railroad

Figure 5: Towns that Gained the Railroad and Towns that Grew on the Railroad.

enough from one large center to the next to facilitate inter-regional traffic. It is probable, moreover, that many towns were deliberately by-passed to increase the value of land in townsites platted by the railroad company or by speculators who "donated" land to it. Railroad companies were by no means above this type of manipulation. There were numerous instances of railroad extortion in Oregon as well as elsewhere, in which a railroad company refused to build to a city unless its citizens paid a substantial fund of cash to cover "detour fees." Even towns such as Portland, Salem, and Eugene, without which the railroad could not operate profitably, were threatened, successfully, in this way.<sup>11</sup>

Several branch lines, such as the Southern Pacific line through Coos County and the Union Pacific line through Wallowa County, are easily traceable on the map of towns that gained railroads. In these areas, rails were lain to reach specific locations after settlement was well established. Instances of town bypasses are less common in these places; deliberately shunning an old town in order to promote a new one was perhaps a less realistic scheme, and the importance of a straight, efficient route was not paramount.

Towns that gained railroads, on average, are far larger than towns in the other three classes. (Table 1)

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<sup>11</sup> See Holtgrieve, 134-8, for these and other examples of railroad strong-arming.

Table 1: Population Characteristics of Town Types

| Town Type                          | N=  | Population |        |
|------------------------------------|-----|------------|--------|
|                                    |     | Mean       | Median |
| Towns that Never<br>Had Railroads  | 49  | 1199.9     | 530    |
| Towns that Grew<br>on the Railroad | 82  | 4196.0     | 1140   |
| Towns that Gained<br>the Railroad  | 106 | 11547.9    | 2235   |
| Towns that Lost<br>the Railroad    | 38  | 1602.6     | 705    |

a mean 1987 population of 11547, compared to 4196 for towns that grew on railroads. This is partially, but not wholly, due to the classification of nine of Oregon's largest twelve incorporated places as towns that gained railroads. The median population of towns that gained railroads was 2235 in 1987, still nearly double that of towns that grew on the railroad, which was 1140.

Towns that gained the railroad are perhaps the largest of the town types because they are also the oldest. Whatever importance the railroads might have had in Oregon's settlement, it is important to remember that the state's first towns were established more than twenty years before the coming of the railroad. An urban hierarchy, with Portland, Salem, and Eugene as principal centers, had been established in the Willamette Valley, Oregon's most densely populated area. New railroad towns had to compete against cities with considerable head starts as population, trade, and service centers. Those towns founded well away from competing pre-railroad cities are typically in relatively remote and rugged areas not typically suited for large-scale settlement. Not surprisingly, towns that grew on the railroads in these places remained modest in size.

### Towns that Lost Railroads

Thirty-eight of Oregon's incorporated cities have lost the railroad. Most of these places, like towns that never

had railroads, are relatively remote. Towns that lost railroads have a much lower mean population, at 1602, than their counterparts that have retained rail service, which had an average population of 9830 in 1987. They are, however, somewhat larger than towns that never had railroads.

Towns that lost railroads are distributed throughout the state in several small clusters, each representing an area of railroad abandonment. (Fig. 6) One can again estimate the route of the abandoned Columbia Southern from the locations of Wasco, Moro, Grass Valley, and Shaniko, or the route of the Oregon Pacific Railroad from Mill City, Detroit, Gates, and Idanha. The locations of these clusters are distributed fairly evenly throughout the state, although locations well away from the main line, such as Powers and Myrtle Point or Seaside and Gearhart, seem especially susceptible to loss of their railroad connections. A place located between two large centers is of course much less likely to lose a railroad. If a town is on a main line, it is nearly impossible for it to lose its rails.<sup>12</sup>

Of the thirty-eight towns that lost railroads, twenty-five had gained railroads and thirteen were towns that grew on the rails. Towns that gained the railroad are thus somewhat better represented in this group than in the state

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<sup>12</sup> Nearly impossible. Lowell lost its rail connection in 1952, after the Natron Cutoff was rerouted around the newly created Lookout Point Reservoir. (Auston and Dill, 281)

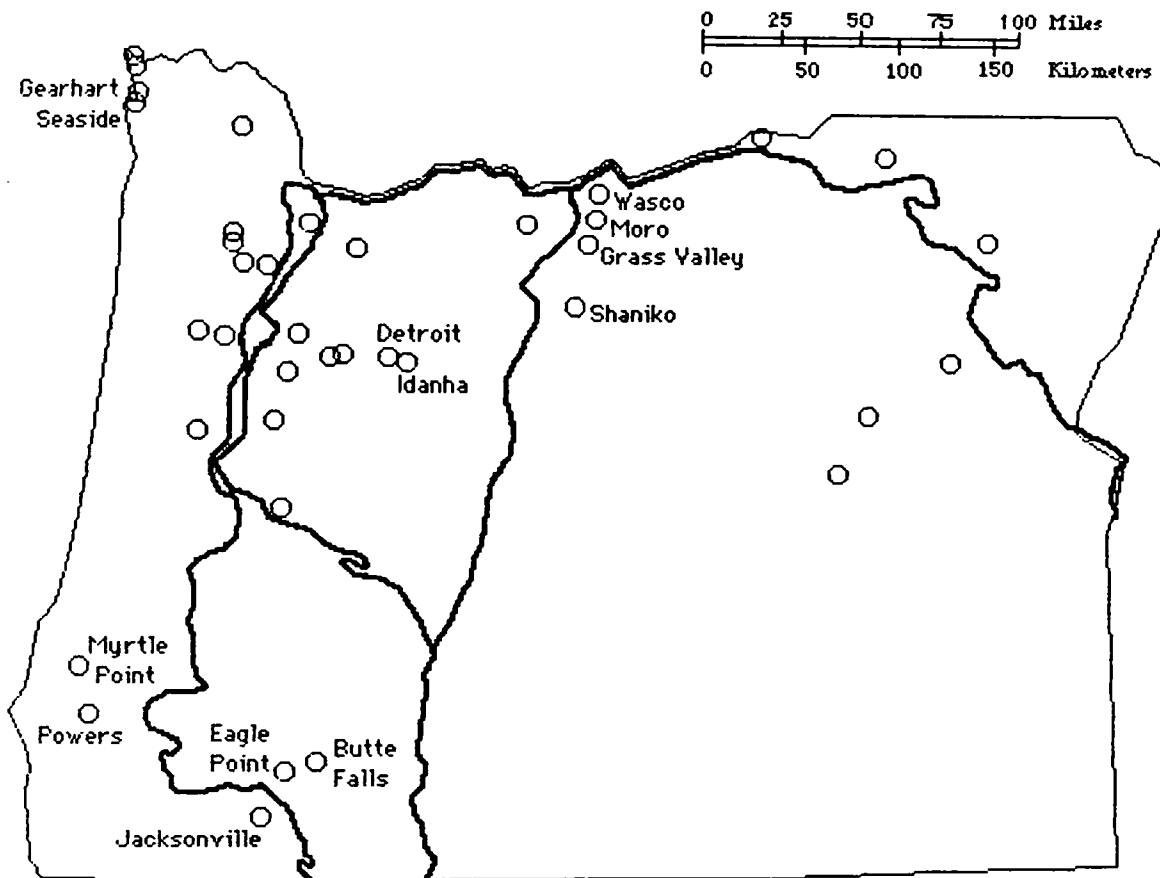


Figure 6: Towns that Lost Railroads

as a whole. This should, however, come as no surprise; it has already been explained that many towns that grew on the railroads were founded on the main lines, and that a town on the main line is unlikely to lose its railroad line. Therefore we might expect there to be relatively few towns that grew on a railroad that in turn lost that rail connection.

### Regions of Railroad-Town Interaction

Oregon is anything but a homogeneous unit. Looked at from virtually any geographic standpoint--geology, ecology, culture, climatology, and so on--Oregon is a state of many regions. This holds true, as well, for the relationships between railroads and towns within the state. Oregon can be divided into eight distinct regions, which, due to differing railroad and settlement histories, contain varying proportions of the four town types. (Figure 7; Table 2)

#### The Coast

Only four rail lines, to Astoria, Tillamook, Toledo, and Coos Bay, were ever constructed through the Coast Range to the Oregon Coast. Aside from these lines and a few logging roads, the Coast has remained remote from the rails. Because of this, half of this region's towns are towns that

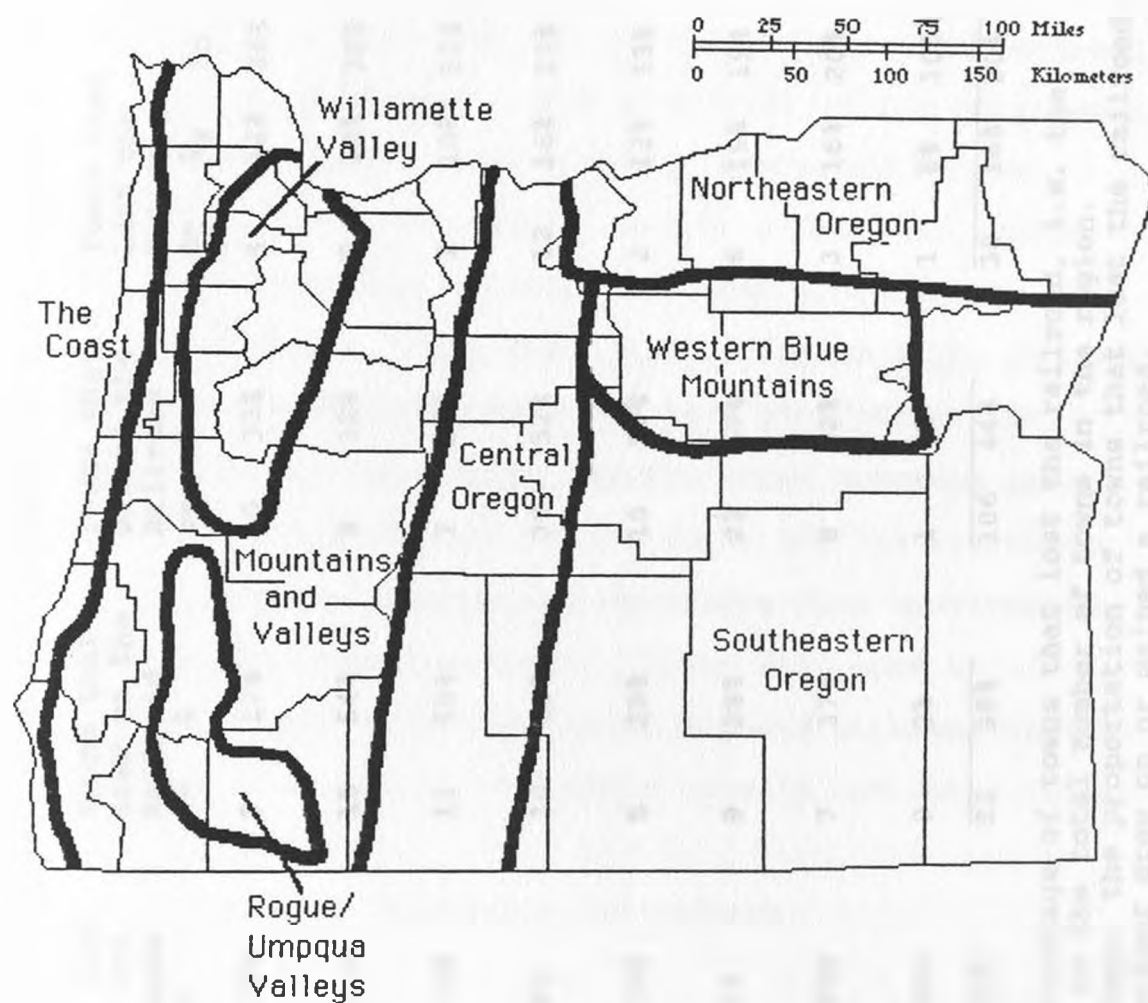


Figure 7: Oregon's Eight Regions of Railroad-Town Interaction

Table 2: Number of Town Types in each Region of Oregon

| Region                         | Towns that<br>Never Had<br>Railroads |     | Towns that<br>Grew on the<br>Railroad |     | Towns that<br>Gained the<br>Railroad |     | Towns that<br>Lost the<br>Railroad |                |                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                | n=                                   | %   | n=                                    | %   | n=                                   | %   | n=                                 | % <sub>g</sub> | % <sub>n</sub> |
| The Coast<br>(30 towns)        | 15                                   | 50% | 5                                     | 17% | 10                                   | 33% | 4                                  | 12%            | 26%            |
| Mountains and<br>Valleys (28)  | 4                                    | 14% | 15                                    | 54% | 9                                    | 32% | 9                                  | 32%            | 38%            |
| Umpqua/Rogue<br>Valleys (20)   | 2                                    | 10% | 11                                    | 55% | 7                                    | 35% | 2                                  | 10%            | 11%            |
| Willamette<br>Valley (75)      | 6                                    | 8%  | 30                                    | 40% | 39                                   | 52% | 12                                 | 16%            | 17%            |
| Central<br>Oregon (17)         | 2                                    | 12% | 5                                     | 29% | 10                                   | 59% | 2                                  | 12%            | 13%            |
| Northeastern<br>Oregon (32)    | 1                                    | 3%  | 9                                     | 28% | 22                                   | 69% | 6                                  | 19%            | 19%            |
| Southeastern<br>Oregon (19)    | 4                                    | 21% | 7                                     | 37% | 8                                    | 42% | 3                                  | 16%            | 20%            |
| Western Blue<br>Mountains (16) | 15                                   | 94% | 0                                     | 0%  | 1                                    | 6%  | 1                                  | 6%             | 100%           |
| Oregon (237)                   | 49                                   | 21% | 82                                    | 35% | 106                                  | 44% | 38                                 | 16%            | 20%            |

%<sub>g</sub> signifies the gross percentage of towns that lost the railroad, i.e. the proportion of that type to the total number of towns in the region.

%<sub>n</sub> indicates a net percentage, the proportion of towns that lost the railroad among towns in the region that either grew on or gained a railroad.

never had railroads, compared to sixteen percent of the towns in the rest of the state.

Five of the region's thirty towns grew on the railroad, and ten gained railroads. This 1:2 ratio is low compared to the rest of the state, but is easily explained by the inaccessibility of the region. Before a railroad company would find it economic to build a branch line through the rugged Coast Range, there would have to be existing economic activity on the Coast to make the line profitable. In addition, the barrier of the Pacific Ocean prevents the extension of a branch line to the west, and the ruggedness of the terrain discourages any extensive rail construction north or south along the coast. Towns that grew on railroads, in contrast, tend to be located in areas of "in-betweenness," on routes of traffic between two other places.

### Mountains and Valleys

The Mountains and Valleys region is an excellent illustration of the importance of in-betweenness. Consisting of the Coast Range, the Cascade Mountains, and the Columbia Gorge, this is a sparsely-settled area through which tracks were lain to connect other places. Most towns in this district have a distinct perceptual quality of in-betweenness, and thus one will often hear that Elkton is "in-between the Willamette Valley and the Coast," or that Oakridge is "on the road from Eugene to Klamath Falls."

There are fifteen towns that grew on the railroad in this region, as opposed to nine that gained railroads. Four of the former are cities in the western side of the Columbia Gorge that grew as bedroom communities of Portland, and four of the later are towns along the lower Columbia River, which were established river cities before the construction of the Portland-Seaside line. If these eight places are eliminated, eleven of the sixteen remaining railroad towns in the Mountains and Valleys district were constructed on existing lines that extended, or were planned to extend, between two points outside of the region.

The Mountain and Valleys region also has one of the highest proportions of towns that lost railroads of any of the regions. This is due in large part to the abandonment, by sections, of the Oregon Pacific line up the Santiam Valley, which today survives only as a truncated Southern Pacific branch line. Originally conceived of as a transcontinental line, this road never reached the east side of the Cascades, and the four towns founded on it are now without rails. The Santiam Valley, however, is perhaps more unusual in having a large number of incorporated places relative to its population size than in having a large number of places that grew on, and then lost, the railroad. This Valley's role as a corridor from the Willamette Valley to the recreation areas of Detroit Lake, the Cascades, and Central Oregon may have allowed such small centers as Gates,

Detroit, and Idanha to achieve success unrelated to the railroad's impact.<sup>13</sup>

Only four of the twenty-eight towns in this region never had a rail connection. Sandy is, to an extent, a satellite of Portland, and Cave Junction is situated at the entrance to a national monument. Except for these two specially-located towns, only Elkton and Shady Cove have incorporated without rails in this rugged, forested area.

#### Umpqua and Rogue Valleys

The Umpqua and Rogue Valley Region, like the Mountains and Valleys Region, has a high proportion of towns that grew on the railroad. These towns, without exception, were founded along the Oregon and California main line. This route was built in the early 1870's, a period of rapid population growth in Oregon, and it traversed lightly settled agricultural land. In addition, it promised to be an efficient bridge to the agricultural market of California and a link to the transcontinental railroad. Furthermore, it had the advantage of being in-between the population centers of the Willamette Valley and California. It is hardly surprising, then, that residents of and immigrants to the Rogue and Umpqua Valleys concentrated their settlements,

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<sup>13</sup> These three cities, along with Mill City and Lyons, all incorporated in the decade 1948-58.

founded new towns, and even moved whole communities to the new railroad line.

Unlike in the Mountain and Valley Region, however, relatively few of the Umpqua and Rogue Valley towns ever lost the railroad. Only the city of Jacksonville, which built and then lost a connection to the Oregon and California line, and Eagle Point, on a small branch line, lost rail service. This, once again, testifies to the security of retaining a main line connection. Although the Eugene to Ashland route is no longer the official Southern Pacific main line, it still sees relatively high amounts of through traffic.

### The Willamette Valley

The Willamette Valley has very few towns that never had railroads. Here, where Oregon's population density is highest, its rail network is also at its densest, and only six towns have been too small or inaccessible to warrant a side branch at some point in history. (Figure 3) Happy Valley has grown largely in the automobile age, as a bedroom community of Portland. Adair Village, between Monmouth and Corvallis, was built on the site of Camp Adair, an army post. The Southern Pacific was forced to re-route a branch line around this installation when it was built in 1942, and has not since extended a spur to the town.<sup>14</sup> The other four

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14 Auston and Dill, 161.

Willamette Valley towns that never had a railroad are small communities on the eastern edge of the valley floor, relatively remote from primary transportation corridors: Scotts Mills, Sublimity, Sodaville, and Waterloo.

The ratio of towns that grew on the railroad to towns that gained the railroad is slightly lower in the Willamette Valley, at 1:1.38, than in the rest of the state, at 1:1.29. This difference is a reflection of the early settlement of the Valley. When the Oregon Central Railroad laid Oregon's first extensive rail line, in 1868, the Valley was already dotted with established communities, most of which would later gain a branch line.

Many of the towns that grew on railroads in the Willamette Valley, in fact, were founded on one of several "interurban" commuter lines that served Portland in the early years of this century.<sup>15</sup> Several, as well, are more recent suburban communities which, like Portland's Wood Village and Salem's Keizer, grew accidentally on a rail line--the presence of the railroad was of little relevance in the placement of the town. There were, however, also several towns, such as Coburg, Dundee, and Halsey, that grew solely as stations on various valley lines.

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<sup>15</sup> See Throckmorton, Harold L., The Interurbans of Portland, Oregon, a Historical Geography. MA Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Oregon, 1962.

The Oregon Trunk and the Natron Cutoff are the primary rail lines in the Central Oregon Region. These lines, described earlier in this chapter, were both built relatively late in Oregon's settlement. For this reason, as well as the aridity of the area which they traverse, these lines attracted fewer new towns than did other Oregon main lines.

For the same reasons, these routes appear to have bypassed fewer towns than did the other main lines. Of the larger towns in the area, only Prineville, somewhat away from the straight route suggested by the cities of Madras, Redmond, and Bend, was left off of the Oregon Trunk main line.<sup>16</sup> (Figure 5) Prineville resolved this problem by building a municipal short line, the City of Prineville Railroad, to connect with the Oregon Trunk.

### Northeastern Oregon

Northeastern Oregon is a unique region in two respects: it has the lowest proportion of towns that never had railroads (3%) and the highest of towns that gained the railroad (69%). Both of these distinctions are due to an

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<sup>16</sup> Although Culver had to move to the rail line. See Jefferson County Reminiscences. Portland: Binfords and Mort, 1957. pp. 59-60.

unusually thick rail network relative to the region's population, which is in turn due to the region's primary commodity: wheat. Wheat, like ore, is a bulky commodity shipped in very large quantities, and one for which the railroad is an ideal means of transport. In Northeastern Oregon, and particularly in Northern Umatilla County, competing railroads built many miles of trackage in an effort to win the patronage of area farmers. As a result, almost every town in the region, no matter how small, was able to attract a rail line.

#### Southeastern Oregon

Southeastern Oregon occupies more than a third of Oregon's area, but it contains only nineteen incorporated places. Important railroads in this region include the Union Pacific main line through Baker County, the abandoned Sumpter Valley Railroad through Baker and Grant Counties, and the Union Pacific branch line to Burns and Hines, in Malheur and Harney Counties.

In Southeastern Oregon, the proportions of each of the four town types are nearly identical to their proportions in the state as a whole. (Table 2) Since such a large area must be delineated to form a statistically relevant group of towns in Southeastern Oregon, one is left with a diversity of settlement histories not, perhaps, unlike that in the state as a whole.

Five of this region's seven towns that grew on the railroad are on the Union Pacific main line from Portland to Ontario; a sixth is Hines, a residential community adjoining Burns. Only the small town of Adrian, in Northeastern Malheur County, grew on a branchline in this vast, often desolate region.<sup>17</sup>

### Western Blue Mountains

The distinction of the Western Blue Mountain region is obvious: 94% of its towns lack the railroad. The Blue Mountain highlands is a rugged area with relatively little human activity to draw rail construction. The only rail line to penetrate this region was the narrow-gauge Sumpter Valley Railroad (SVRR), which extended from Baker City to Prairie City in the early twentieth century.<sup>18</sup>

From the Columbia, four branch lines were built south to Shaniko, Kinzua, Heppner, and Pilot Rock. A region of towns that never had railroads begins just south of these four termini, and ends just south of Mitchell, Mt. Vernon, and Canyon City. The end of this belt, however, exists only

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17 The town of Juntura, on a branch line from Ontario to Burns, was once incorporated. Rail access was not enough to make it a successful community, however, and it has long since disincorporated.

18 For a history of this road see Ferrel, Mallory Hope, Rails, Sagebrush, and Pine: A Garland of Railroad and Logging Days in Oregon's Sumpter Valley. San Marino, California: Golden West Books, 1967.

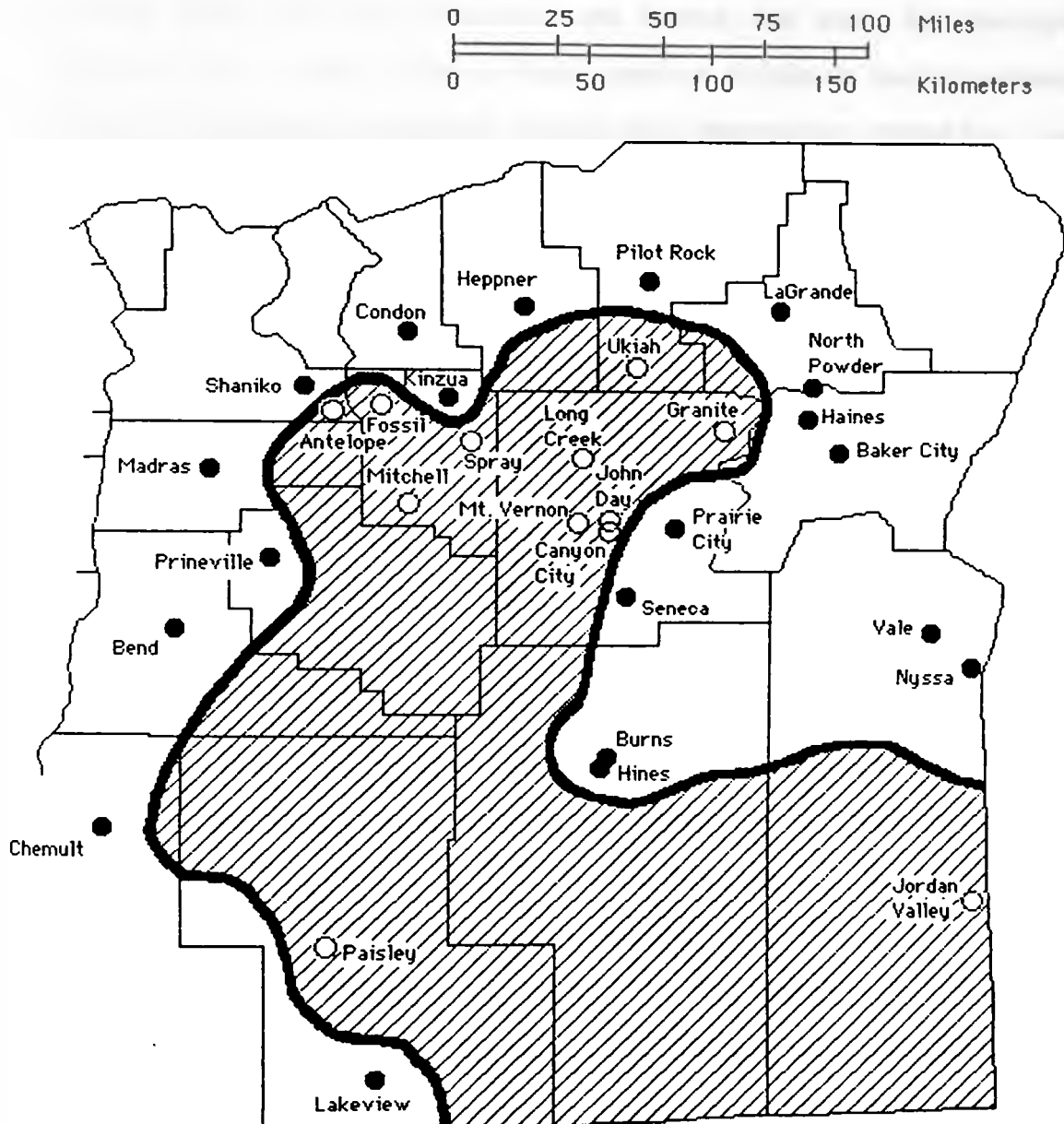


Figure 8: Oregon's Rail-less Area. Railroads have never been built into this map's shaded area, which covers about one-quarter of the state's surface area.

because there are no incorporated towns for many kilometers south of this road. The actual region without rails extends south to encompass eastern Crook and Deschutes Counties, and much of Lake, Harney, and Malheur Counties. (Fig. 8)

Prairie City, at one time the terminus of the SVRR, has long since lost its rail connection, giving this region a very high 100% net proportion of towns that lost railroads.

### Conclusions

It is safe to say that the map of Oregon townsites locations was influenced by the construction of the railroad. Particularly in the Umpqua and Rogue Valley and the Mountains and Valleys region, where more than half of the towns grew on railroads, the placement of the rail line determined where the town would be built.

We should be fairly cautious in applying this argument, however. In the Mountains and Valleys Region, there are only a limited number of spaces in which railroads, which can not generally tolerate sustained grades of much more than two percent, could be built. Similarly, very few towns in the United States are built on the tops of hills--the valleys are the preferred locations. Thus, one might argue that the railroads were built where the towns would have been located anyway, and that fixing a given axis on which towns could develop in an area as enclosed as, for instance,

the Columbia Gorge or the Santiam Valley is not a truly significant influence.

In the Willamette Valley, where almost any site would be acceptable for town construction, there were relatively few towns that grew on the railroad. One can, however, imagine that the map of Oregon towns would be altered somewhat if the main Valley line had built on the west side of the Willamette River, as was originally planned.<sup>19</sup> Towns such as Halsey, Tangent, Turner, Gervais, Hubbard, Aurora, and others would not have been founded at their current sites, and counterparts on the west side of the Valley floor would probably have been built. This could have caused a shift in the population equilibrium of the valley, and resulted in a different web of roads and towns in the Willamette Valley today. It is, however, difficult to imagine that any railroad pattern could have altered the primacy of Portland, Salem, and Eugene in this region, nor the basic pattern of scattered urban settlements in the South Valley and more densely-packed communities in the North Valley.

The railroad, then, must be seen as a secondary factor in the making of Oregon's large-scale urban pattern. Although the railroad played some role in shaping the

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<sup>19</sup> The plan was not altered due to any physiographic principle; it was entirely a (dirty) political decision. See Auston and Dill, chapter 1.

distribution of towns and cities that we see in Oregon today, topography and the patterns of pre-rail settlement were, in most parts of the state, far more important.

### Chapter III

#### THE RAILROAD AND TOWN ORIENTATION

Most American towns west of the Appalachians have a street-grid pattern that is oriented<sup>1</sup> to the cardinal directions of the township and range system.<sup>2</sup> Geographers often view any deviation from this rule as a clue that a town's planners viewed a certain feature as central to the town's existence. A grid oriented to a navigable river, for instance, is thought to indicate that the town depended on the river for commerce or transportation. Similarly, towns with street grids oriented to a railroad line are often assumed to be towns that grew as railroad shipping points.

This is, however, anything but a universal rule. Many towns that grew on railroads show no evidence of their

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<sup>1</sup> To say that a street grid is "oriented" to a given feature means that the streets run parallel and perpendicular to that feature. In a street grid oriented to the township and range system, the streets run north-south and east-west.

<sup>2</sup> Reps, John W., The Making of Urban America; a History of Urban Planning in the United States. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965. pp. 294-324. About three-quarters of Oregon's towns that never had railroads, for instance, are primarily oriented to the cardinal points.

origin within their street grid patterns. Some towns that predate their railroads by decades, furthermore, seem to be oriented to the railroad. Still, a town that grew on the railroad is more likely to display this grid pattern than one that gained the railroad.

To make this statement, one must assess the degree to which each town's street grid is oriented to the railroad. To differentiate between towns that are completely oriented to the rails, such as North Powder, and towns in which only some of the community is so oriented, such as Woodburn (Figure 9), I estimated to the nearest quarter the proportion of each town's grid that is oriented to the railroad. The results of this simple assessment are shown in Table 3.

Several towns were excluded from this analysis. In Idanha, Dayton, Cove, St. Paul, Lowell, West Linn, and Jacksonville, all towns which have lost railroads, it was impossible to reconstruct the route of the old grade with available resources. Cottage Grove and Milton-Freewater are both excluded here due to their unusual histories, described in Chapter 1. Detroit, which grew on the railroad, was later moved to a new site when Detroit Lake was created in 1950; in its current incarnation, it has never seen a railroad.<sup>3</sup> Finally, six towns were built in locations where the railroad was topographically separated from the town

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<sup>3</sup> Auston and Dill, p. 143.

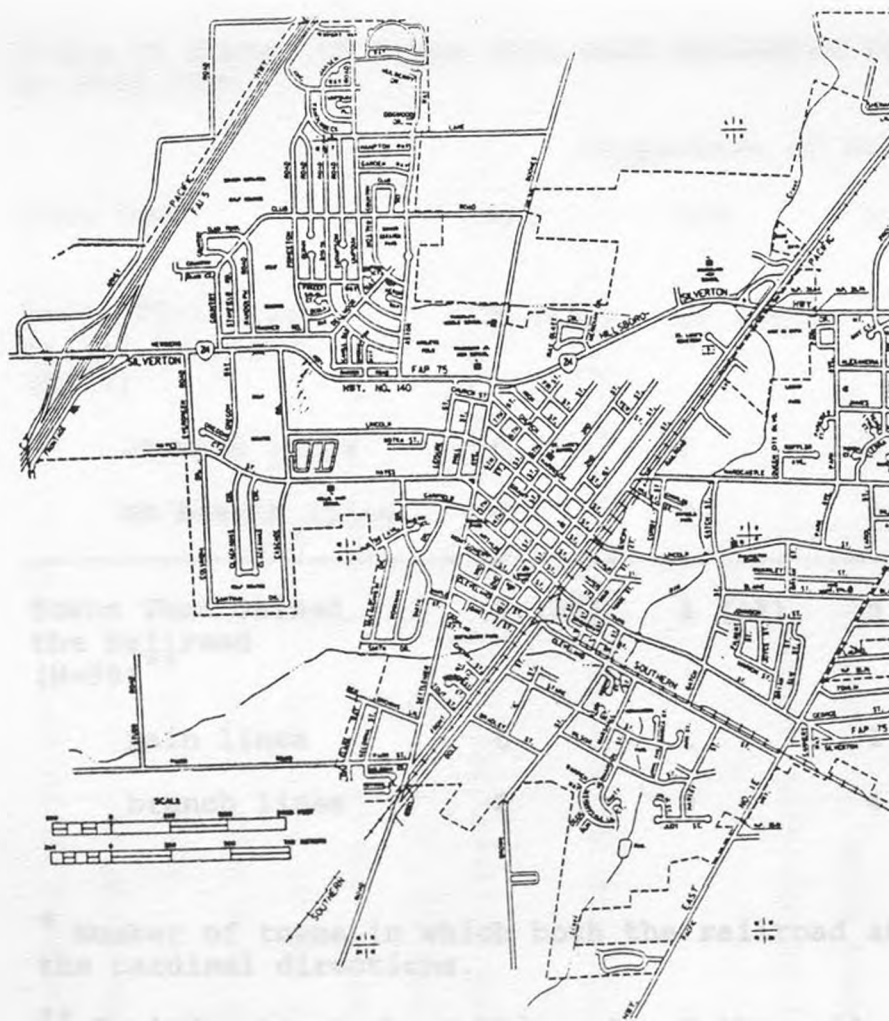


Figure 9: The street grid of North Powder (below) is almost entirely oriented to the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad. Only about one-quarter of Woodburn's streets (left) are oriented to the Southern Pacific's main line.

Maps taken from Oregon Department of Transportation City Maps of North Powder, March 1989, and Woodburn and Vicinity, December 1984.

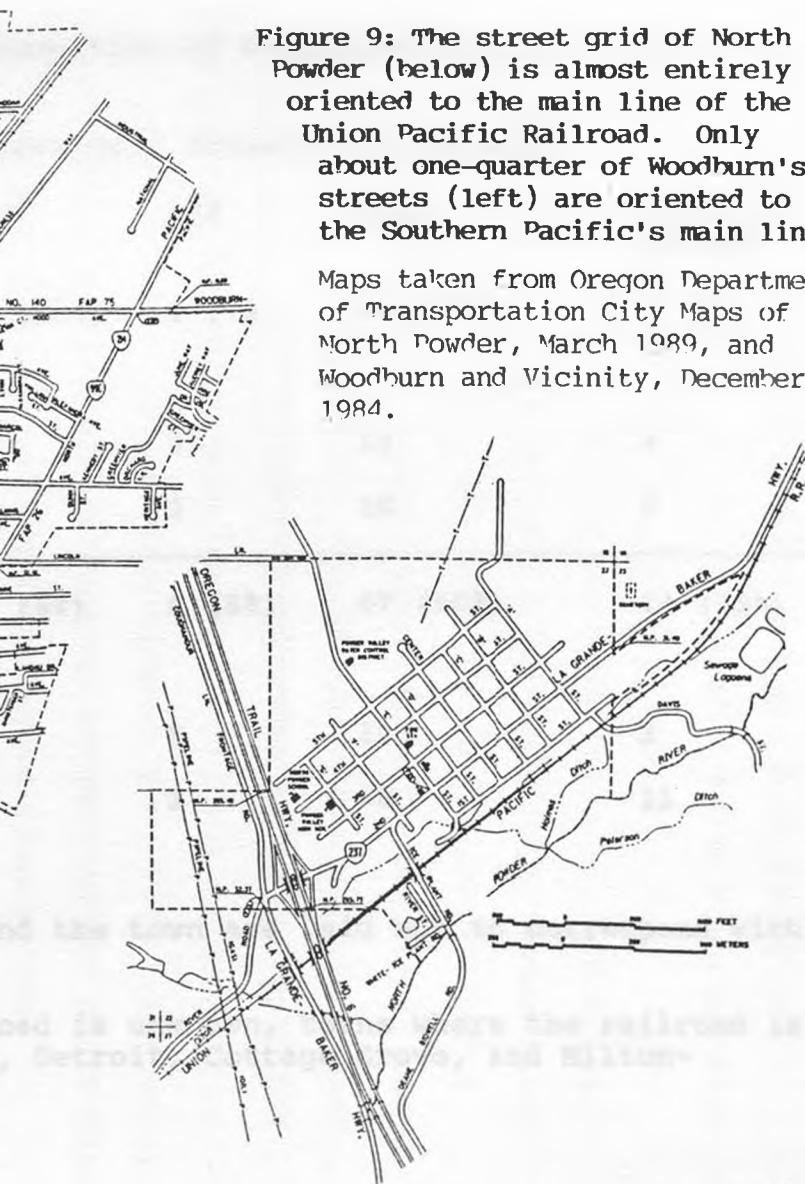


Table 3: Number of Towns With Each Estimated Proportion of Railroad-Oriented Street Grid, by Town Type.

| Town Type                                | Proportion of Street Grid Oriented to Railroad |          |         |        |          | Cardinal Points* |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------|------------------|
|                                          | All                                            | 3/4      | 1/2     | 1/4    | None     |                  |
| Towns That Grew on the Railroad (N=73)** | 9 (12%)                                        | 12 (16%) | 7 (10%) | 5 (7%) | 34 (47%) | 6 (8%)           |
| on main lines                            | 8                                              | 7        | 5       | 3      | 16       | 4                |
| on branch lines                          | 1                                              | 5        | 2       | 2      | 18       | 2                |
| Towns That Gained the Railroad (N=98)**  | 2 (2%)                                         | 1 (1%)   | 5 (5%)  | 8 (8%) | 67 (68%) | 14 (15%)         |
| main lines                               | 0                                              | 1        | 1       | 5      | 19       | 2                |
| branch lines                             | 2                                              | 0        | 4       | 3      | 48       | 12               |

\* Number of towns in which both the railroad and the town are laid out to correspond with the cardinal directions.

\*\* Excludes towns where the route of the railroad is unknown, towns where the railroad is topographically removed from urban development, Detroit, Cottage Grove, and Milton-Freewater (see text).

grid; Maupin, set on a shelf of land high above the Deschutes River Canyon and the Oregon Trunk Railroad line, is a prime example.

In twenty-one towns, it is impossible to determine if the street grid is oriented to the railroads because both the town grid and the railroad line are oriented to the cardinal directions. This occurs more frequently in towns that gained the railroad, suggesting that rail lines were perhaps built through these town grids in such a way that minimal disturbance would result.

When these factors are accounted for, 52% of the towns that grew on railroads, as opposed to only 21% of those that gained railroads, have some orientation towards the railroad. In 27% of the former category, more than half of the street grid is railroad-oriented; this occurs in only 3% of towns that gained railroads.

#### Railroad Grids in Towns that Gained Railroads

The initial observation seems confirmed by these data. Railroad towns do, indeed, have a distinct tendency to be oriented towards the railroad line. What may be more surprising to those accustomed to thinking in the old model, however, is that one out of every five towns that gained the railroad has some rail-oriented street grid.

There are three explanations for this phenomenon. The first is simply that new growth in an older community may

adjust itself to the railroad's presence. Ashland's streets, for instance, were originally oriented to the stage road passing through the town and Ashland Creek. (Figure 10) Following the construction of the Oregon and California Railroad in 1881, a new neighborhood grew to the east of the original settlement, with a street grid aligned to the railroad line.<sup>4</sup>

A second possibility is that both the town and the railroad are oriented to some third feature. Moro, for instance, was platted in 1884, and virtually all of its street grid pattern is oriented towards Barnum Creek.<sup>5</sup> (Figure 11) The Columbia Southern, which reached the town in 1898, built along the side of the creek, through the bottom of Barnum Canyon.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore only an illusion that Moro is oriented towards the railroad, but an unwary analyst might well jump to the conclusion that the town was born as a rail-oriented community.

A third explanation is the adaptation of the railroad to the layout of the existing town. Lafayette, for instance, was laid out in the 1840's, long before railroads

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<sup>4</sup> For maps of pre-railroad Ashland see Atwood, Kay, Mill Creek Journal; Ashland, Oregon 1850-60. n.p.: Kay Atwood, 1987. pp. 144, 145, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Due and French, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Due and French, p. 50.

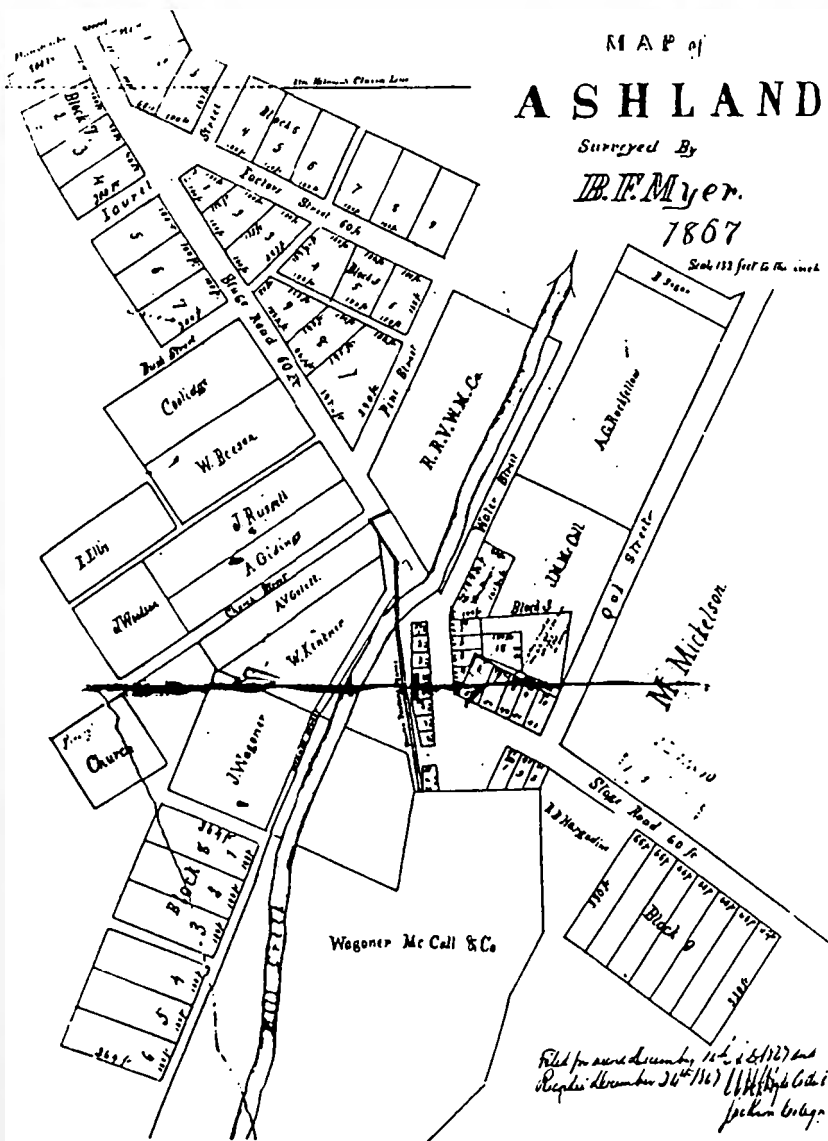
# ASHLAND

*Surveyed By*

*B. F. Meyer.*

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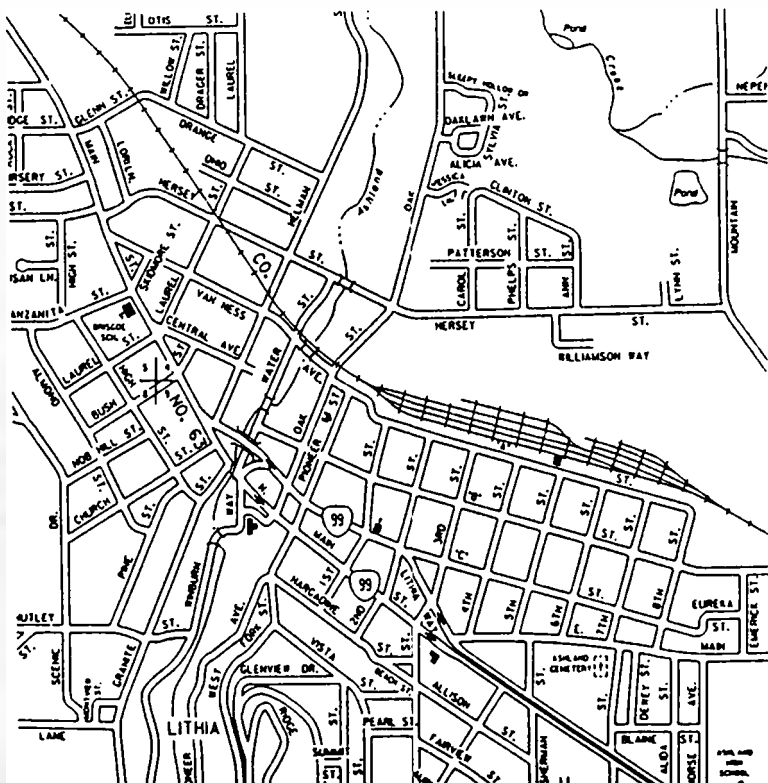


Figure 10: Prior to the railroad's arrival, Ashland's streets were aligned either to Ashland Creek or to a stage road, the predecessor of today's Highway 99. After the rails reached the town, in 1881, a new neighborhood oriented to the rails sprang up to the east of the original town. The area shown on the 1867 map, to the left, is outlined on the contemporary map, above.

Early lot map reproduced in Atwood, p. 145.  
 Contemporary map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Ashland and Vicinity, December 1984.

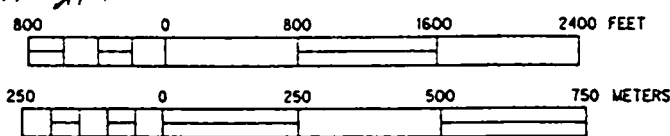
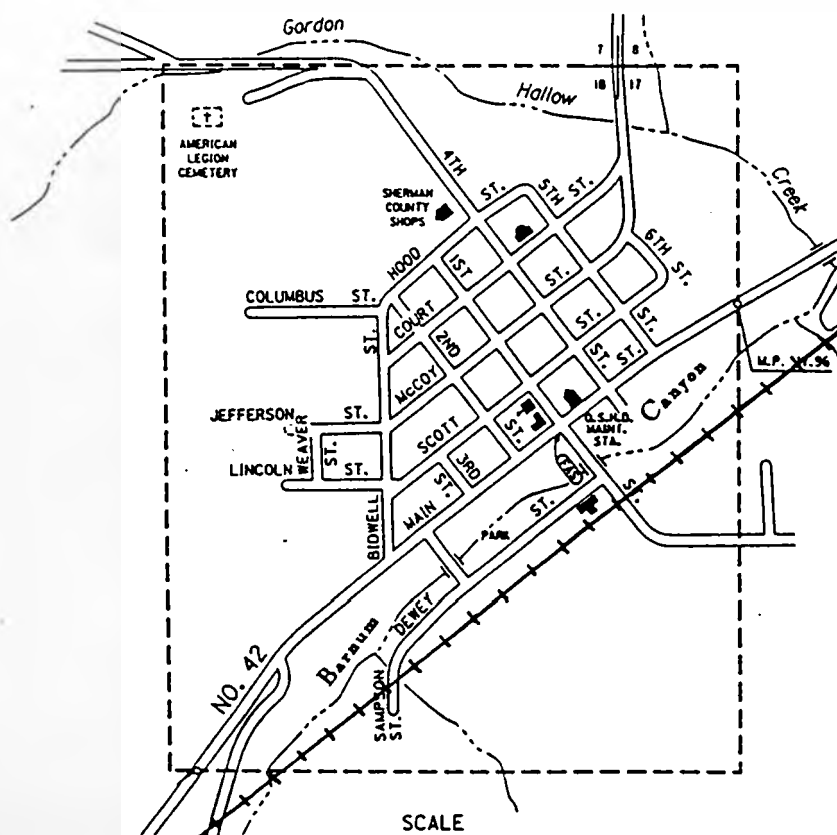
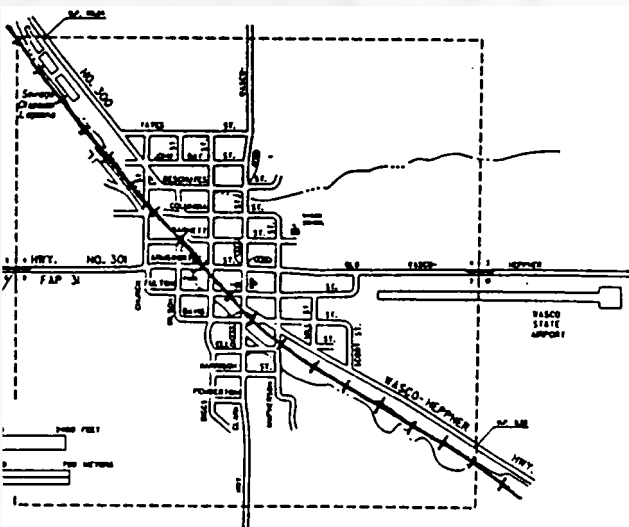


Figure 11: The town of Moro was laid out to conform to the topography of its physical setting. The railroad, constructed fourteen years later, was also built to fit the landscape, giving Moro the illusion of being a community planned and established on a pre-existing railroad line.

Wasco (smaller map, below), in which the railroad and street grid are unrelated, is more typical of towns that gained railroads.

Maps adapted from O.D.O.T. City Maps of Moro, December 1988, and Wasco, July 1986. Railroad routes added from United States Geological Survey Quadrangles of Moro, 1971, and Wasco, 1971, photorevised 1987 (both 7.5').



were anything but a dream in Oregon.<sup>7</sup> When the railroad was built through this community, it followed the route of First Street, skirting the community and causing minimal morphological disruption. This is one case in which the railroad did not influence the town's morphology; the town morphology, instead, influenced the railroad. (Figure 12)

A few established towns, then, added new, railroad-oriented street grids when the railroad reached their communities. Most "railroad-oriented" street grids in towns that gained railroads, however, are actually incidences of street grid-oriented rail lines or topography-controlled transportation corridors.

#### Railroad Grids in Towns that Grew on Railroads

Of the thirty-three towns that grew on railroads and had railroad-oriented street grid patterns, only nine (28%) have no other grid patterns. Most towns, like Metolius (Figure 13) have streets located some distance from the railroad that are oriented to another feature, usually the cardinal directions. This may represent a period in the community's history where the significance of the railroad faded in the thinking of the inhabitants, and new, peripheral growth followed the convenient standardization of

<sup>7</sup> Hilden, Clark Gilbert, An Historical Geography of Small Town Main Streets in the Willamette Valley, Oregon. PhD Dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Oregon, 1980. p. 55.

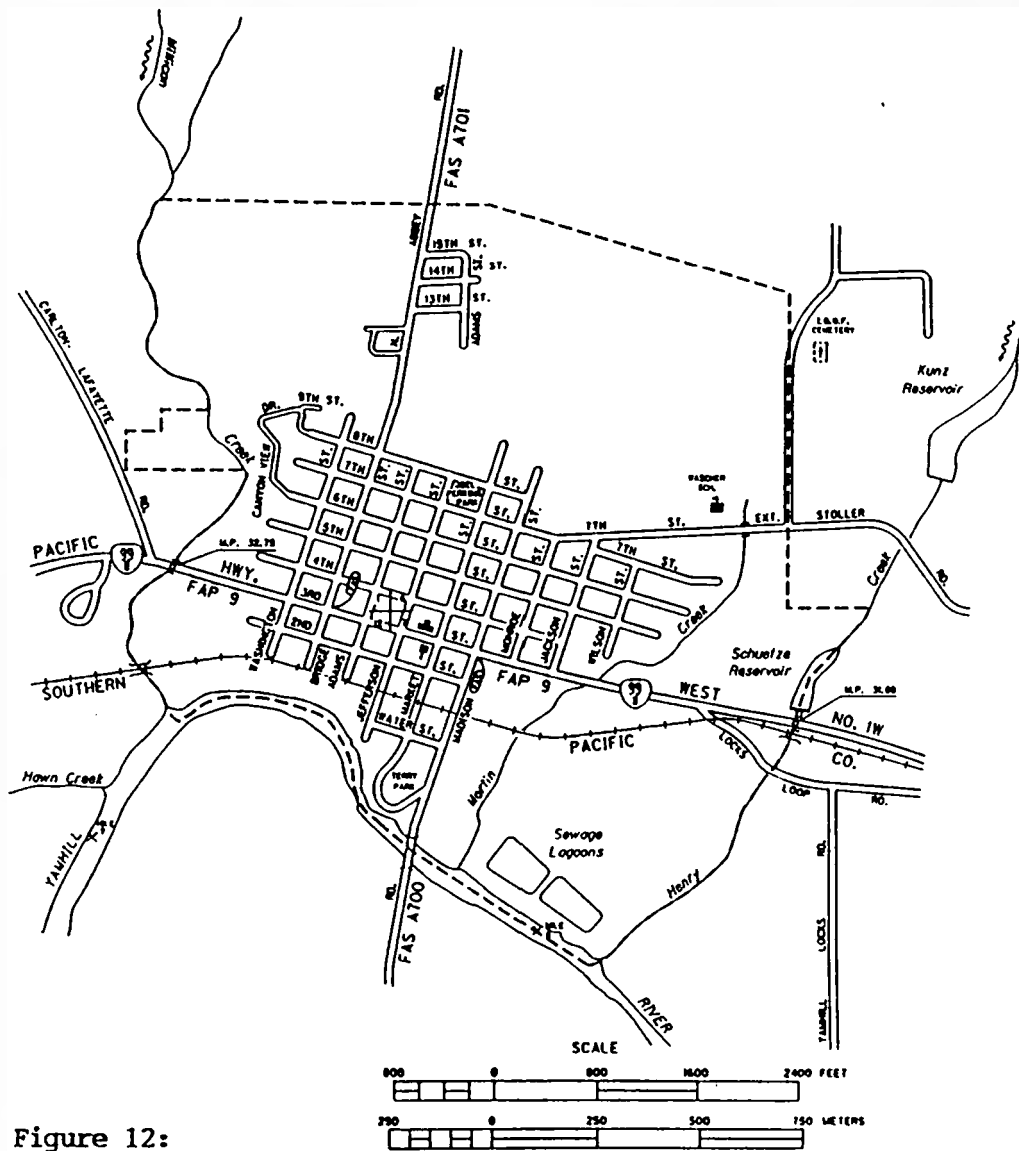


Figure 12:

The town of Lafayette was founded long before Oregon's first railroad was built, and its streets were platted parallel and perpendicular to the road which became Highway 99W. The rail line was later constructed so as to correspond with this town grid, replacing First Street.

Map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Lafayette, November 1988.

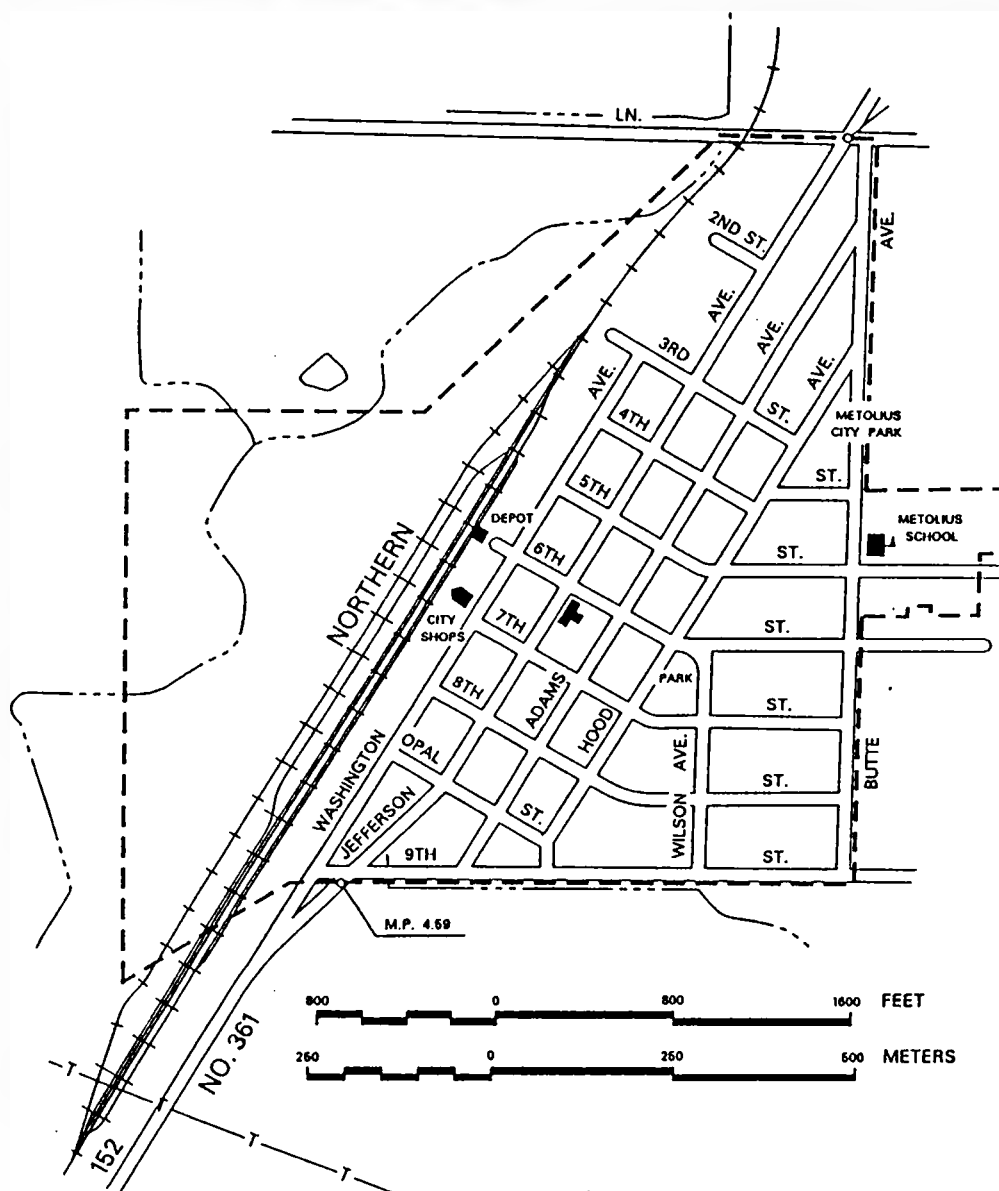


Figure 13:

Like many towns that grew on a railroad, Metolius has a neighborhood away from the tracks with streets oriented to the cardinal points.

Map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Metolius, March 1989.

the township and range system.

Towns that grew on main lines were much more likely to be oriented towards the railroad than were towns built on branch lines. Eight Oregon towns are totally oriented to a main line, and only 37% of the towns built on main lines are not oriented to the tracks. Only North Plains is entirely oriented to an Oregon branch line, and 60% of towns on branch lines show no orientation to the railroads. This may show the more prominent role that town founders expected a main line to play in the life of the community. The builders of Gervais or North Powder, for instance, may have seen their community as a "railroad town" that ought to be centered on the railroad, while the people who built Reedsport may have been more inclined to think of themselves as a community that happened to have railroad connection.

Although an interesting basis for speculation and insight, the orientation of a town's streets has little impact on the lives of its residents. Railroads have a strong influence on the street patterns of Oregon towns. The following section will explore the extent to which railroads influence the patterns of the neighborhoods that are set in those streets.

## Chapter IV

### RAILROAD INFLUENCES ON THE TOWN LANDSCAPE

The presence of a railroad line within a town can have a profound influence on that town's morphology and neighborhood patterns. This influence can be manifested in either or both of two forms, which might be termed "separation" and "puncture." Railroads can divide two adjacent areas by imposing a perceptual, spatial, or visual barrier between them; separation occurs when the two neighborhoods on either side of this barrier are markedly different in function or character. A rail line may also puncture a neighborhood, cutting an abnormal swath along the tracks in which the landscape differs substantially from that of the surrounding areas, which may be otherwise homogeneous or represent a steady gradient from one type of neighborhood to another.

It is important to remember that when we discuss any "influence" or "effects" of railroads on the town landscape, we are using a potentially misleading form of academic shorthand. Railroads are, of course, inanimate objects and unable to exert any influence at all; what we are really

observing is a pattern of human reactions<sup>1</sup> to the presence of the railroad. Thus, whatever influence a railroad might have on a town landscape is dependent on popular attitudes towards railroads in general.

This chapter is based on a pair of assumptions about the ways that people have perceived railroads. During the period of most widespread town settlement in Oregon, people considered rail lines valuable amenities and centers of commercial activity and town life. Today, however, railroads are thought of as a necessary evil, a noisy, dirty, and dangerous piece of equipment best kept as far away as possible.

I discussed the first of these assumptions, which should ring true to anyone who has studied the history of American settlement, in Chapter 1. The second assumption is based on observations of the way contemporary society views its railroads. The concept of "train," for instance, is best represented to many by a toy representation of a small steam engine, a rail technology that has been absent from the American landscape for nearly three decades. The modern diesel train is mentioned in conversation as the cause of an automobile delay or as an annoying neighbor of a cheap hotel; in the media, it is mentioned only in the event of a major accident. In short, the railroad has gone in the

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<sup>1</sup> "Human Reactions" may be manifested in the decision-making of individual property owners or of governmental land-use boards. The railroad, in all likelihood, influences the thinking of both.

course of a century from being perceived as the "iron horse" and the pulse of the nation to being thought of as an annoyance or, at best, a nostalgic reminder of yesteryear.

There are obvious indications of this change of perceptions within the urban landscape. In Halsey, for instance, there is a line of homes directly across East First Street from the Southern Pacific main line. Of the eight older homes on this strip, seven are built facing westwards, towards the tracks which were, when the houses were built, the town's lifeline. Of the four newer homes, however, only one faces the railroad; the others face side roads or long driveways, with the front door as far from the rails as the lot will allow.

Clark Gilbert Hilden, in his dissertation An Historical Geography of Small Town Main Streets in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, showed how commercial centers in some Oregon towns have shifted over time from railroads to highways. Other students have augmented his work.<sup>2</sup> Their research shows that the areas adjoining railroad lines which were once considered quite prominent--and, indeed, in towns that

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis was in part inspired by a University of Oregon Historical Geography class, taught by Professor Alec Murphy, which produced three excellent (but unpublished) research papers in this vein. These are Smith, Deborah, and Witteman, Mark, The Urban Morphology and Transportation Modes of Junction City; Behrends, James, and Yates, Charity, The Effects of Transportation Arteries on Business Location: The Case of Harrisburg; and Hawley, Lisa, and Dorn, Roxanna, Functional Growth of Small Towns as Trade Centers in the Southern Willamette Valley.

grew on the railroad, areas that were designed to be the city's core--have been rejected as undesirable.

Little else has been written about the role of the railroad in shaping the contemporary landscape of Oregon towns. To understand and describe the impacts of the railroad line, I carried out field observations in forty-three Oregon towns. This sample, regrettably, is biased towards the Willamette Valley, and in fact contains no towns east of Prineville. I must admit the possibility that the observations noted here are applicable only in the west half of the state.

All references in this chapter to the class structure, affluence, ethnic makeup, or function of a given community or neighborhood are based only on my observations of town landscapes. Because it is possible to misread landscapes, the influences discussed here are only those that manifested themselves clearly in several communities. Although this chapter deals largely with appearances, appearances are themselves a part of reality and a useful clue to that which cannot be seen.

### The Separation Effect

The separation effect is a phenomenon in which two neighborhoods with markedly different characteristics exist on the two sides of a railroad line. These neighborhoods can serve different functions, as they do in Halsey, where

the railroad divides a residential neighborhood from an industrial corridor. They may also serve the same function, but be different in other ways. In Silverton, a neighborhood of run-down housing on gravelled, pothole-ridden roads lies across the tracks from an area of sedate, upper-income homes. The dividing line between the neighborhoods may be thick or thin; in Halsey the two neighborhoods are separated only by a rail grade, while in Silverton they are separated by the railroad and a thin row of industrial buildings.

In the thirty-eight railroad towns surveyed, rails are peripheral to the town in eight. As there are only neighborhoods on one side of the tracks in these places there is, strictly speaking, no separation effect. These cases might, however, be thought to show profound separation--a neighborhood separated by the railroad from a near total lack of development. Few people in these towns wish to locate a new home or business near the railroad line, and this, along with the complications involved in building a road or extending city services over or underneath tracks, prevents new development from occurring across the line. The railroad serves as a barrier separating the town, often dramatically, from the surrounding area. (Figure 14)

Of the thirty remaining towns in the survey, eighteen (60%) show clear evidence of a separation effect. In one additional town, Prineville, a high-income residential



Figure 14: The western edge of Metolius, looking south. To the east (left) of the tracks is a small industrial area, beyond which is the rest of the town. To the west, there is only a short siding and open fields.

neighborhood is separated by rails from an area of more moderate housing, but as the tracks in this city run along the base of a steep hill, one might expect to find this pattern, with the wealthy living on the slopes, regardless of the railroad's presence.

### Types of Rail Separation

In Woodburn and Jefferson, neighborhoods have been built across the tracks from the original town core--neighborhoods that are much newer than the more centrally-located areas.<sup>3</sup> The railroad once served as a barrier separating the original town from a largely undeveloped area, but it has since been bridged. A high demand for housing in these communities as they shifted in function from agricultural centers to bedroom communities for Salem and Albany, respectively, may have provided the impetus necessary to propel new development across the rail barrier.

In three of the surveyed towns, railroad tracks separate commercial areas from residential neighborhoods. This phenomenon is most extreme in Gervais, where the railroad, alone with its abandoned depot, is the sole occupant of a block-wide strip through the length of the town. Facing the tracks on the Fourth Street side is a

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the division between the older and newer buildings on the United States Geological Survey 7.5' Quadrangle of Albany, Oreg., 1970, photorevised 1975.

commercial district resembling one-half of the familiar "Small Town U.S.A." image: a line of two-story shops, markets, and municipal offices. Instead of a similar image on the other side of the street, however, there is only an empty strip of grass leading to the railroad grade. On the Fifth Street side of the tracks, there is a similar half-image of a modern residential street. Mt. Angel and Creswell present similar, though less dramatic, scenes.

Eight of the towns surveyed have a "wrong side of the tracks," an area of poor housing separated from middle-class neighborhoods by a railroad or railroad district. In North Plains, the wrong side of the tracks<sup>4</sup> is clearly the side closest to U.S. Highway 26, which is a major freeway west of Portland. In Donald, another town with a wrong side, the poorer neighborhood is immediately adjacent to rail-oriented industry, and it is possible that it is the industry, as much as the railroad, that has cast the neighborhood into disfavor. The most important factor in determining which side of the rail line is less affluent, however, seems to be access to the town's commercial core. Seven of the eight wrong sides are on the opposite sides of the tracks from their towns' central business districts.

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<sup>4</sup> To avoid redundancy, I will omit the quotation marks from this descriptive colloquial phrase. I do not by any means intend to imply, however, that there should be any stigma attached to living where one wishes, or must.

Another manifestation of the separation effect is the separation of industrial areas from commercial or residential neighborhoods. Industry<sup>5</sup> is not noted for its aesthetic qualities, and industrial centers are often segregated from homes and commercial enterprises by a transitional area or a buffer of vacant space. In six of the towns surveyed, however, residential and business neighborhoods were located immediately adjacent to an industrial neighborhood, separated only by a rail grade.

In both Donald and Halsey, for instance, middle-income housing (as well as low-income housing in Donald) is separated only by a street and a rail grade from grain and seed elevators and other agricultural industries. (Figure 15) This juxtaposition of residential and industrial functions is much closer than one would ordinarily expect, especially in small towns with little pressure towards high-density settlement.

In Creswell, similarly, a mixed area of shops and homes faces a lumber mill across a road and a rail line. In McMinnville, a quiet residential neighborhood with gardens and tree-lined streets is separated by a railway from an area of industry, vacant lots, run-down housing, pitted gravel roads, weeds, and discarded pieces of rusty machinery. In Junction City, a mixed commercial

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<sup>5</sup> The term "industry," as used in this thesis, should be taken to include agricultural processing and shipping facilities such as grain elevators and seed warehouses.



**Figure 15: The rail grade divides Donald's industrial strip from a middle-class residential district.**

neighborhood of shops, municipal buildings, lodges, and houses faces an industrial corridor across the Southern Pacific main line. These neighborhood divisions are all sharp and dramatic.

### An Explanation of the Separation Effect

Clearly, a railroad can be a dividing element within a town landscape. These divisions occur because the railroad acts as a barrier between the two sides of its right-of-way. A railroad can be a perceptual, spatial, visual, or a physical barrier, and often leads to discontinuities between the neighborhoods on either side.

Of these, the perceptual factor is the least concrete but perhaps the most significant. Railroad grades are simply not aesthetic places in the eyes of most people. Greasy, noisy, subject to periodic spraying, reeking of creosote, they are generally viewed as an unpleasant necessity, like a gutter. Most would prefer never to see a rail grade, and certainly not to walk across one.

The mere width of the right-of-way, as well, forms a minor barrier. If there is no adjacent road, the gap imposed by a rail line is not usually large, but the width of a rail grade combined with the width of a road and sidewalks can create a strong sense of discontinuity between flanking buildings. Often, there are also sidings and spurs within communities that can double this width. In a large



**Figure 17: The rail corridor in Eugene is more than half a block wide as it skirts the city's central business district.**

Photograph by Mark Witteman.

city with many sidings, the width of the rail corridor can be quite impressive. (Figure 16)

A railroad can also impose a visual barrier between adjoining areas. The rail grade itself is often raised, sometimes to such a height that it blocks eyesight. Owners of railside property, furthermore, often erect fences or grow hedges and trees to distance themselves from the sights and smells of the right-of-way, and these can effectively partition neighborhoods as well. A rail siding inside a community, when used for storing freight cars, is a still more effective visual barrier. A siding along the Southern Pacific line that bisects Creswell, for instance, is usually filled with a solid string of imposing boxcars. Without close observation, one would not notice that there is a commercial neighborhood opposite the homes to the north of the town, or a mill opposite the mixed neighborhood to the south. (Figure 17) In Mt. Angel, a residential neighborhood is often visually separated from the commercial core by a string of corn syrup tank cars, used by a local soft drink distributor.

Railroads are, finally, an obstacle to automobile transportation. It is costly to build roads over a railroad grade; not only must asphalt be laid over the loose gravel on which the rails lie, but special planking or preformed inserts must be installed so that car and train wheels can both traverse the same space. Some form of crossing gate or signal must also be installed. (Figure 18) For this



Figure 17: A solid string of parked boxcars in this mixed commercial and residential neighborhood of Creswell entirely blocks the view of the large lumber mill on the opposite side of the tracks. Note the railroad motif on the restaurant sign.



Figure 18: This photograph illustrates the complexities involved in moving trains and automobiles through the same places. The Eugene city street in the foreground is fit to the rails with special inserts which allow locomotive wheels to pass unimpeded. It is also guarded by crossing gates, two of which are visible on the far left. The bridge in the background lifts six lanes of freeway over the tracks; the foreground bridge is for pedestrian traffic.

reason, there are very few towns containing a railroad in which the street grid is not interrupted. Most resemble Hubbard, in which seven out of ten lateral streets are interrupted by the rail grade. (Figure 19)

Even on those streets that do cross the railroad, motorists must sometimes wait when a train, possibly more than a mile in length, passes through town at a reduced speed. Because of this, it is popular to build bridges or tunnels to take roads above or below railroad grades. In Portland, Salem, Corvallis, Albany, and other large urban centers, elaborate loops of concrete are used to channel traffic over the comparatively simple tracks. (Figure 18) Traveling over these bridges gives one a definite sense of crossing a barrier, of leaving one place and going to another. This channeling is thus a powerful separating influence of the railroad.

In Junction City, Independence, Monroe, Harrisburg, Lebanon, and Forest Grove, railroads were installed down the center of city streets.<sup>6</sup> In these places, the separating effects of the railroad are for the most part absent. The

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<sup>6</sup> In Junction City, the Oregon Electric/Burlington Northern line runs along Holly Street. In Independence, both the Southern Pacific and the barely-used Valley and Siletz lines run along streets. The Southern Pacific line once operated along 6th Street in the south part of Monroe; this line, like the OE/BN line along "A" Street in Forest Grove, is now abandoned and paved over. The Southern Pacific still operates (according to a service station attendant) a short spur down the center of Olive Street in Lebanon.

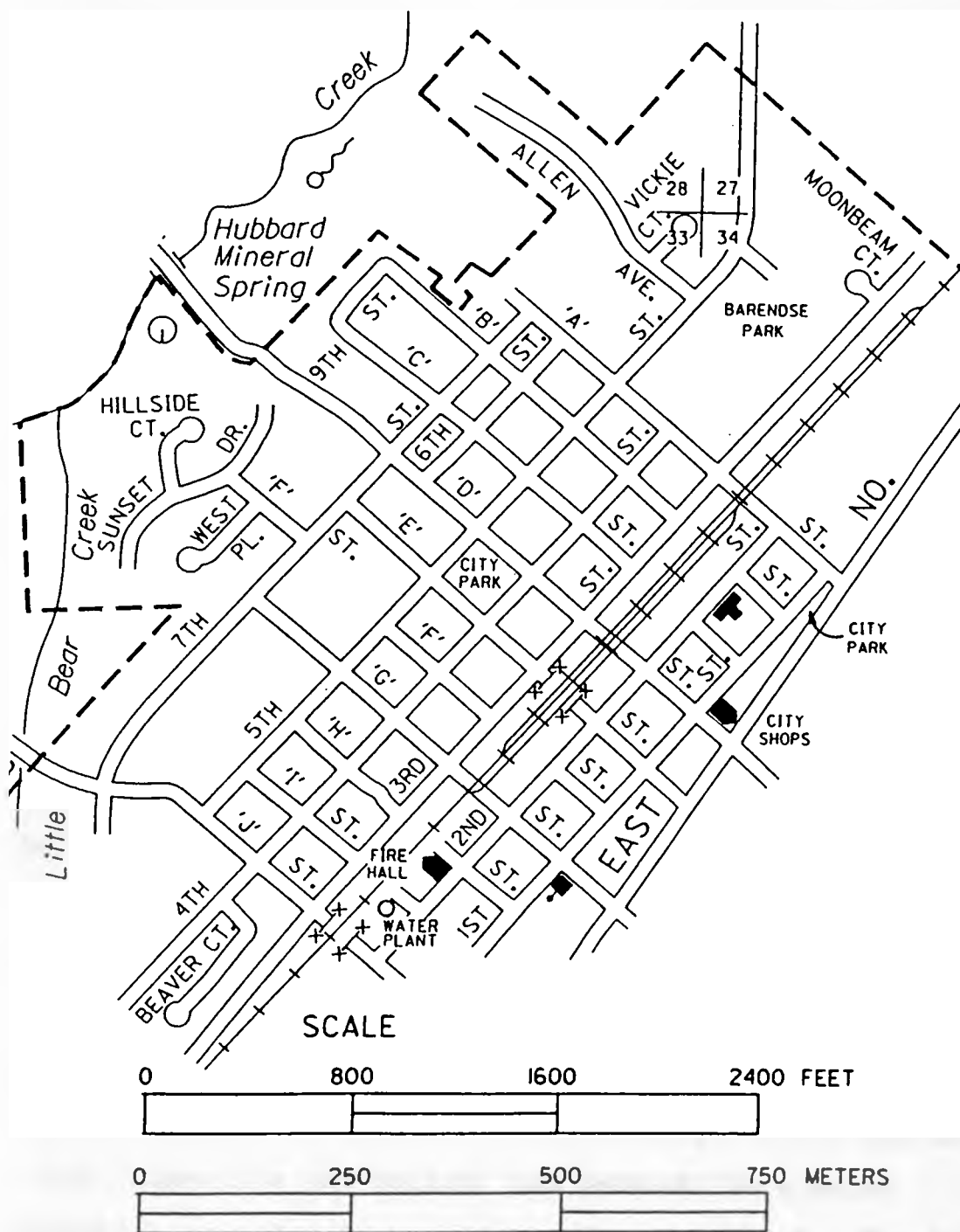


Figure 19:

Of Hubbard's ten lateral streets, only "A", "D", and "G" Streets cross over the railroad.

Map taken from O.D.O.T City Map of Hubbard, August 1987.

ugliness of the conventional grade is eliminated, as is its additional spatial requirement. There are no visual barriers--the tracks are, in fact, embedded in the concrete of the road--and, except when a train passes, the road is no more of a transportation barrier than any other. It comes as no surprise, then, that none of these railroads have any separating effects, and that the neighborhoods flanking them are as continuous as if there were no railroads at all.

### The Puncture Effect

A railroad may be said to have a puncture effect on a community when there is a neighborhood centered on or by the tracks that shows markedly different characteristics than the neighborhood or neighborhoods which flank it. Often, the railroad neighborhood is industrial, but it may also be a strip of vacant land, an area of degraded housing or a mixture of these neighborhood types.

Of the thirty-eight railroad towns observed, thirty-three showed clear signs of some puncture effect. In the five remaining towns, the rails were peripheral to the town in two (Aumsville and Dallas) and parallel to a major automobile corridor in two (Creswell and Monroe). The fifth town, Philomath, is something of an anomaly; a Southern Pacific branch line runs through its northwest corner, imposing itself on a residential area indistinguishable from others in the town with no major impact on the landscape.

## The Industrial Strip

The city of Bend, on the other hand, offers a striking example of a railroad puncture. In contrast with the comfortable neighborhoods to its east and west, Bend's railroad strip is a corridor of industries, vacant lots, gravel roads, pre-fabricated metal buildings, and parked rail cars. (Figure 20) Traffic between the two halves of the town is funnelled through three large underpasses which dip below the rail strip, effectively hiding the area from passing motorists.

Twenty-four of the towns surveyed are punctured by a rail-centered industrial strip. In Sheridan, for instance, commercial and residential neighborhoods are interrupted by a block-wide cut of industrial development. (Figure 21) Where the railroad is peripheral to a town, the industrial strip is typically, though not always, found on the town side of the tracks.

Not all of these industrial corridors, of course, were "caused" by the railroad. In some cases the railroad was built to the area of a town in which a mill or other industry was already operating. What is impressive, particularly in smaller towns, is the extent to which all

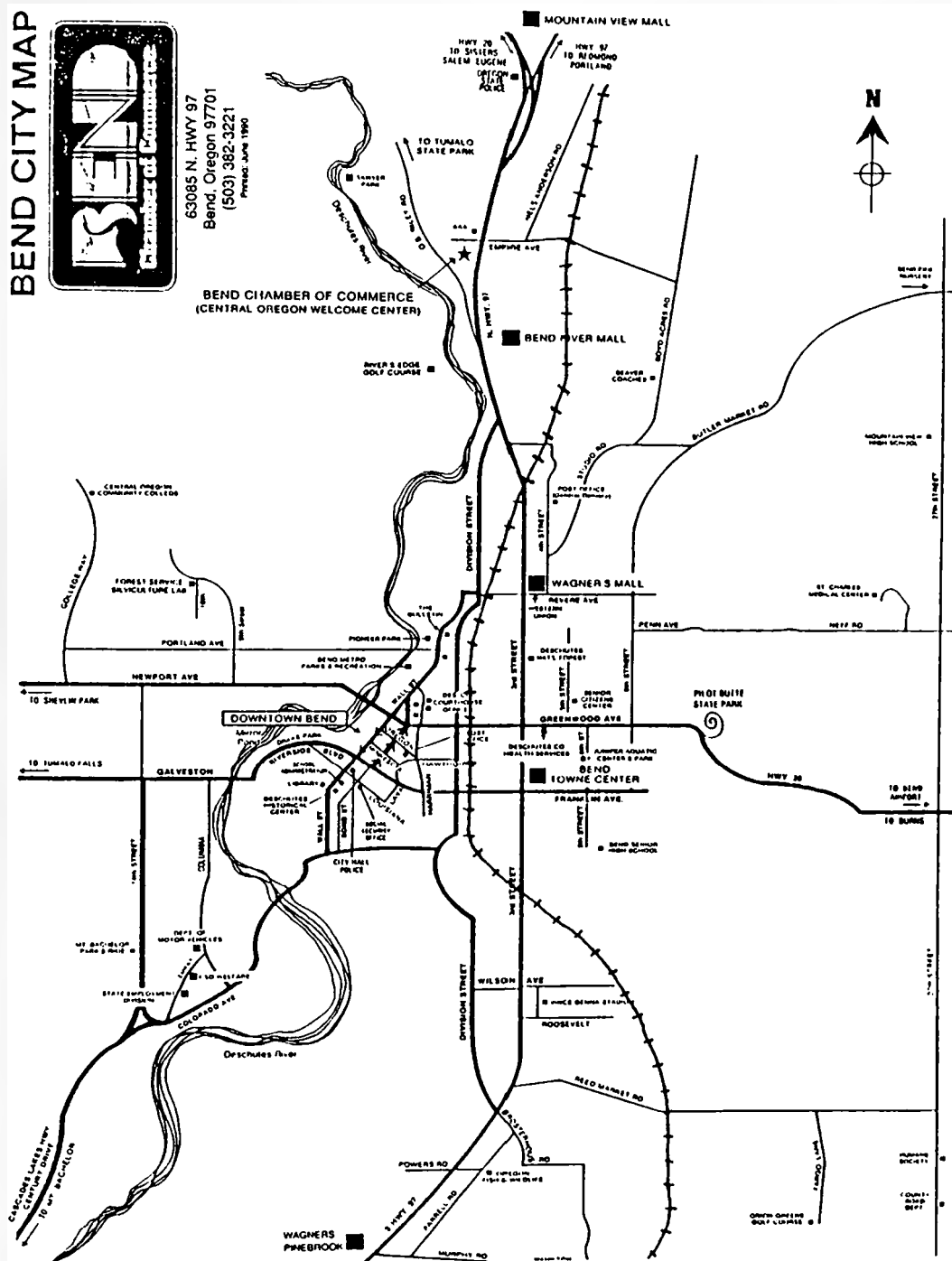


Figure 20: A chamber of commerce will typically advertise institutions that it feels will make its town interesting or attractive to tourists or investors. Note the distinct absence of such institutions in Bend's rail corridor, between Third and Division Streets.

Rail line added from O.D.O.T. City Map of Bend and Vicinity,  
August 1986.



Figure 21: These photographs of Sheridan were taken facing west (left), north (upper left), and east (above) from the same location. A discrete strip of industry punctures the commercial and residential neighborhoods of this Oregon town.

communities where the rails came to the industry, it appears, the railroad became an anchor for industrial development.

### Empty Space

In fifteen of the thirty-eight towns, the railroad is flanked by empty space, in the form of parking areas, vacant lots, or even a strip of mown grass. The later incarnation has been mentioned in regards to Gervais; railroad lawns also appear in Mt. Angel and Hubbard, where a neatly mown half-block of grass faces a wall of industrial buildings across the tracks. (Figure 22)

In Canby, the Southern Pacific main line cuts through the commercial core of the town between North First Avenue and South First Avenue, which is also Oregon Highway 99E. (Figure 23) Both streets are halves of a familiar landscape. Highway 99E, on the south side, is a typical highway strip, with new malls, convenience stores, and chain outlets, but on the north, it is almost entirely empty pavement, gravel, and weeds, with only a handful of businesses and empty buildings. On North First Street, the businesses cater not to the highway traffic but to the town



Figure 22: The railroad is flanked on the west (right) by a wide strip of neatly mown lawn as it passes through the town of Hubbard. The automobiles in this photograph are parked on the grass for a special event, the parade of the annual Hubbard Hop Festival.

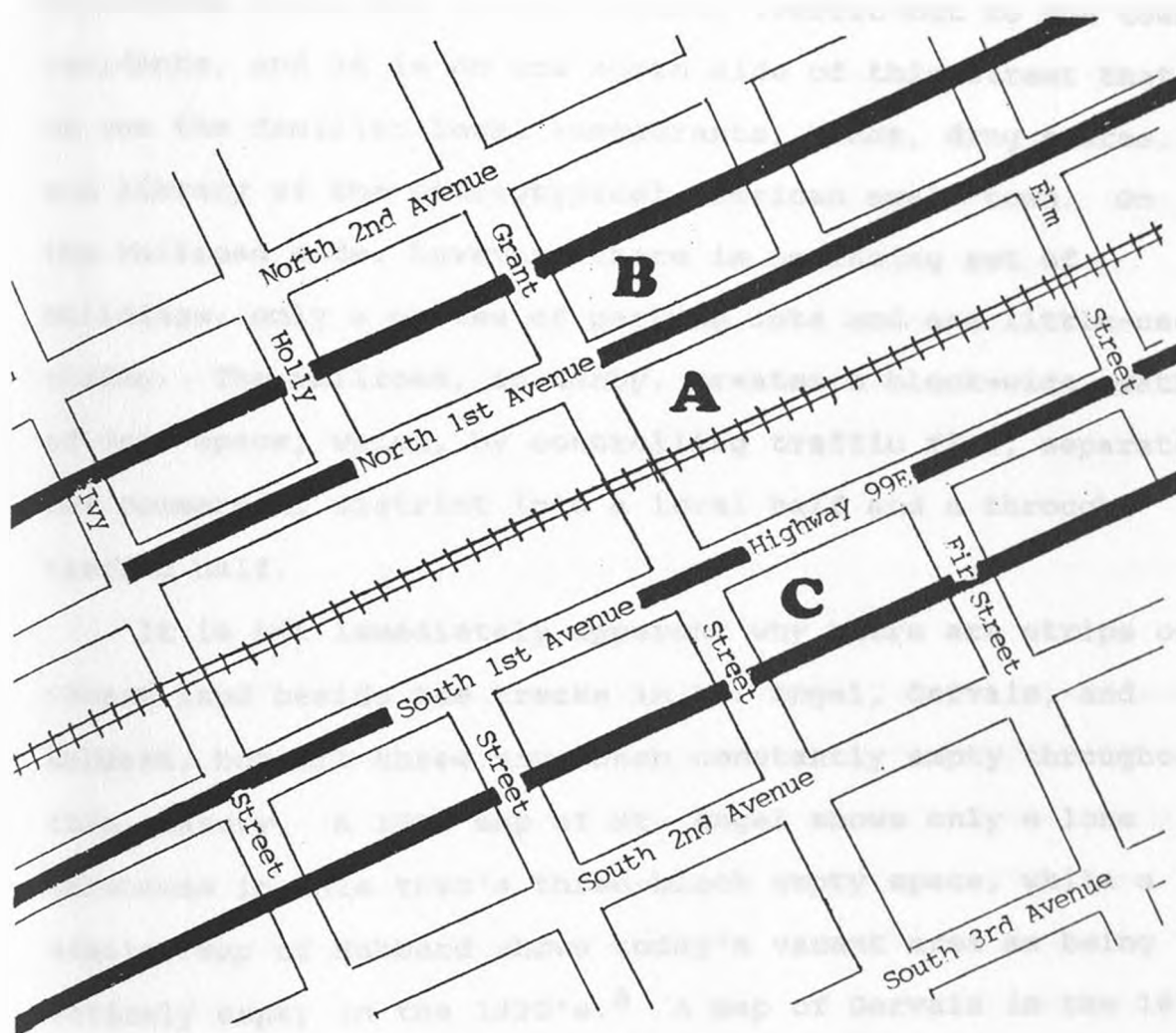


Figure 23: The railroad cuts a swath of empty space through Canby's commercial core, separating businesses serving the local population from those catering to through traffic. Some of the land in this swath (Zone A) is used for parking, but most sits unused and grown over with weeds. To the south of this puncture, malls, fast-food franchises, and gasoline stations form a solid belt along the south side of Oregon Highway 99E. (Zone B) These businesses are situated so as to take advantage of this major artery, and their functions and advertising are calculated to bring in the passing motorist. The businesses to the north of the railroad, on the other hand, consist of a hardware store, barber shops, a small, privately-owned diner, and other establishments that typically serve only the town's residents. (Zone C)

businesses and empty buildings. On North First Street, the businesses cater not to the highway traffic but to the town residents, and it is on the north side of this street that we see the familiar local restaurants, banks, drug stores, and library of the stereotypical American small town. On the railroad side, however, there is no facing set of buildings, only a series of parking lots and one little-used siding. The railroad, in Canby, creates a block-wide swath of dead space, which, by controlling traffic flow, separates the commercial district into a local half and a through-traffic half.

It is not immediately apparent why there are strips of vacant land beside the tracks in Mt. Angel, Gervais, and Hubbard, but all three have been constantly empty throughout this century. A 1922 map of Mt. Angel shows only a lone warehouse in this town's three-block empty space, while a similar map of Hubbard shows today's vacant area as being entirely empty in the 1920's.<sup>8</sup> A map of Gervais in the 1878 Historical Atlas of Marion and Linn Counties, Oregon shows today's vacant area as "depot grounds," offering a clue to the reason for its vacancy. Similarly labelled areas are not necessarily vacant today in other towns, however; in Jefferson, the depot grounds of the 1878 atlas are now an industrial area, and in Banks, the old depot grounds serve

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<sup>8</sup> Sketch maps of Mount Angel and Hubbard, drawn by Hilden from Sanborn Insurance Maps. Hilden, p. 133, 132.

today as a commercial street.<sup>9</sup>

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In Canby, however, there are patches of concrete alongside the railroad that appear to have once been the floors of large buildings. This vacant area, it is safe to assume, was once an industrial corridor like those in many other valley towns. Certainly there are many aged grain elevators and unused shipping warehouses along Oregon's railways today that will be vacant space in the foreseeable future.

### Minority Districts

A third puncture effect of railroads is the development of minority housing areas along the railroad tracks. In Gervais, for instance, the entire residential street facing the railroad is occupied by Hispanic families. This town has a large Hispanic population, but it is only in the houses facing the railroad that there is a total absence of Anglo residents.<sup>10</sup> In Madras, similarly, a predominantly Native American population appears to live along the Oregon Trunk line north of the city. A mixed population,

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<sup>9</sup> Compare the partial plat of Banks, reprinted in Hilden, 45, with the contemporary map of the town (O.D.O.T. City Map Series, Banks, December 1988).

<sup>10</sup> As the field observation of Gervais was made on one of the hottest days of the summer, virtually every resident of the town was sitting in his or her front yard, trying to cool off. This was, of course, extremely helpful in establishing a demographic profile.

were no other communities in which observations were convincing enough to be mentioned specifically here.

### Degradation

A forth and very common type of puncture effect is that of degradation. This term indicates neighborhoods along rail lines that are less desirable places, by the values of mainstream America, than the surrounding areas.<sup>11</sup> Streets in these areas may be unpaved or in poor repair, and sidewalks may be minimal or absent altogether. Businesses and houses may be in battered condition, lawns and gardens unkempt, abandoned vehicles and other machinery strewn about. In many cases, empty buildings stand uncared-for.

Coquille offers an excellent example of railroad degradation. Skirting the central business district of this city, the Southern Pacific's Coos Bay branch abuts the back of several business buildings on Main Street. The businesses on the north side of Main Street, away from the tracks, are typical of Coquille's downtown, but those on the south are vacant, house low-prestige enterprises such as second-hand stores, or are used to store automobiles. On the back side, facing the rails, these buildings are unpainted and grimy, with more windows broken than intact.

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<sup>11</sup> "Degradation" is, again, a term of convention, not of moral judgement.

consisting of members of both Hispanic and Native groups, lives by the rails in Metolius. Although this phenomenon appeared to be somewhat widespread, there were no other communities in which observations were convincing enough to be mentioned specifically here.

### Degradation

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In Junction City, where the Oregon Electric/Burlington Northern line passes through a mixed commercial and residential neighborhood, the degrading effect of the railroad is clear. Holly Street, down which the tracks run, is lined with vacant buildings, parking spaces, and empty lots. Businesses located along the street are for the most part low-prestige operations, and include a scrapyard and a laundromat. Most newer homes face onto side streets, and those that face the rails are for the most part run-down. The old Oregon Electric station, although painted in Burlington Northern green and white, has essentially been left to rot.

The decline of railroad-oriented industry has also contributed to the degradation of railroad industrial corridors. Although many shippers still remain at Redmond, for instance, many of the buildings, including the passenger station, are boarded up and falling to ruin, giving the whole area an eerie ghost-town atmosphere. (Figure 24)

The degradation effect can, in towns with simple morphologies, influence neighborhood patterns over an area extending a surprising distance away from the railroad. The town of Culver, for instance, offers a simple model of the gradient that can develop around a railway and a rail corridor. (Figure 25) Along the tracks, on the west side of town, there is an industrial strip consisting primarily of agricultural shippers. East of this strip, there is a band of run-down housing and trailer homes. Between this



Figure 24: Although many industries still ship from the Redmond rail corridor, the presence in this neighborhood of abandoned structures such as this warehouse, with its collapsed loading dock, give the corridor a deserted, ghost-town appearance.

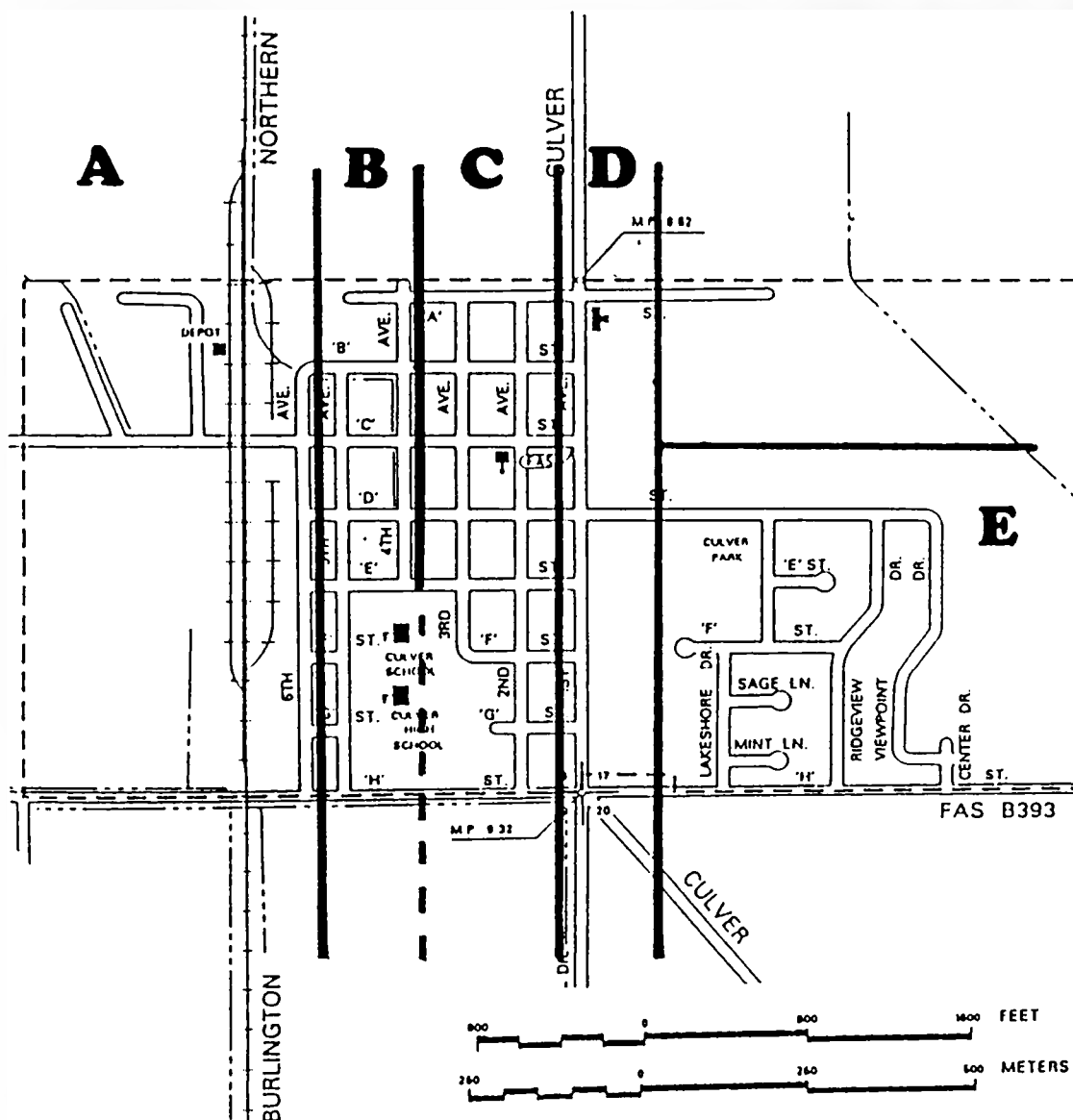


Figure 25: The neighborhood pattern in Culver is strongly influenced by the presence of the railroad. Zone A, along the tracks, is an agricultural processing and shipping district. Zone B is a belt of mobile homes and low-income housing. Zone C, a middle-class neighborhood, and Zone E, a more affluent district, are separated by Zone D, a commercial belt along the town's main road.

Map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Culver, May 1989.

and a concentration of commercial development along First Street, there is an area of middle-income housing. The town's affluent neighborhood sits on a slight rise to the east of the main grid. Street names aside ("Ridgeview Drive" and "Viewpoint Drive"), the vista from this mound is minimal, and it is clearly as much the desire to escape the rail line and its related complexes as it is to gain a few meters of perspective that draws the well-to-do of Culver to this neighborhood.

### Gentrification

A final type of puncture, which seems at first antithetical to the degradation effect, is gentrification. This phenomenon is somewhat rare, but significant enough to deserve mention here.

South of Bend, there is a private housing development called "Pottingham Square." The lawns, gardens, and trees in this complex are professionally tended and immaculate. The homes are stylish and spacious. The occasional BMW, Mercedes, or Rolls-Royce glides down streets with names like "Sherwood Forest Drive" or "Robin Hood Lane." Curiously, however, Pottingham Square's manicured lawns end at a barbed-wire fence that is the boundary of the Bend Railyard. (Figure 26)

Of the thirty-eight towns surveyed, there is new development immediately adjacent to the rail line in four:



Figure 26: The manicured lawns of the high-income "Pottingham Square" housing development end abruptly at the barbed-wire fence of the Bend Railyard.

Pottingham Square is by the rails south of Bend, a large new retirement center on Holly Street in Junction City neighbors the OE/BN line, and new housing subdivisions border a railroad in both Aumsville and Banks.

This strange-seeming pattern of development is doubtless rooted in the vagaries of the real estate market. Bend, Aumsville, and Banks are all in areas with a high demand for housing, Bend as a high-growth area and Aumsville and Banks as suburbs of Salem and Portland, respectively. Residential land near a rail line, moreover, is in all likelihood depreciated in value, and is thus attractive to a developer interested in constructing a space-intensive project. In Aumsville and Banks, moreover, rail service has declined to an average of less than one train per day, and on the OE/BN line in Junction City to two trains per day--tolerable levels of traffic.<sup>12</sup> In Bend, where the traffic level is still high, the developers have planted trees and left a swath of grass between the homes and the rail yard.

Pottingham Square is anomalous in its level of affluence. The senior center at Junction City, though new, is modest by comparison, and the subdivisions at Banks and Aumsville are filled with ranch homes of at best average quality. In a few years, these same houses might be taken as further evidence of rail degradation.

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<sup>12</sup> Auston and Dill, 126, 191, and interview with Junction City resident, July 1990.

It is possible, however, that these places suggest a trend towards development of the vacant land adjoining rail lines. Particularly in areas where rail lines are falling into disuse and demand for building space is high, we might expect to see a gentrification of the trackside.

This phenomenon should not be seen as the decline of the railroad's influence on the town landscape, but rather as a new form of puncture. Along with the visible swath in the landscape, the railroad in all probability creates an invisible puncture in a town's land values. Low land values can in turn lead, in the correct circumstances, to gentrification. Indeed, this process shows us by its newness that the railroad, though not at the forefront of American thought, is still playing a role in the evolving shape of the American urban landscape.

#### Interaction of Puncture and Separation Effects

Of the thirty-eight towns surveyed, both puncture and separation effects were evident in seventeen (45%). In these communities, both effects of railroads act together in influencing the town landscape. To illustrate the ways in which these effects interact together, the following section will summarize observations of three Willamette Valley towns: Jefferson, Gervais, and North Plains.

### Jefferson: Independent Effects

Jefferson was established in the 1850's, and gained the railroad in the 1870's.<sup>13</sup> Although early maps of the town show a city evenly bisected by the railroad tracks, they also show an imaginary "Jefferson University" which was never built. The town was, in fact, almost exclusively on the west side of the railroad line until the late 1960's.<sup>14</sup>

Subsequent development to the east of the original community has made the railroad a dividing line between an old town, to the west and north, and a new town, to the east. (Figure 27) The residential neighborhoods of Jefferson are punctured by a small industrial district, centered on the small yard north of Hazel Street. This industry, although it may impose a more effective barrier between old and new neighborhoods than would the railroad alone, seems to have little degrading effect on the homes around it.

In Jefferson, the puncturing and dividing effects operate more or less independently of each other. Both impose a simple yet undeniable effect on the landscape of the town.

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<sup>13</sup> Hilden, pp. 30, 38.

<sup>14</sup> United States Geological Survey 7.5' Quadrangle of Albany, Oreg., 1970, photorevised 1975.

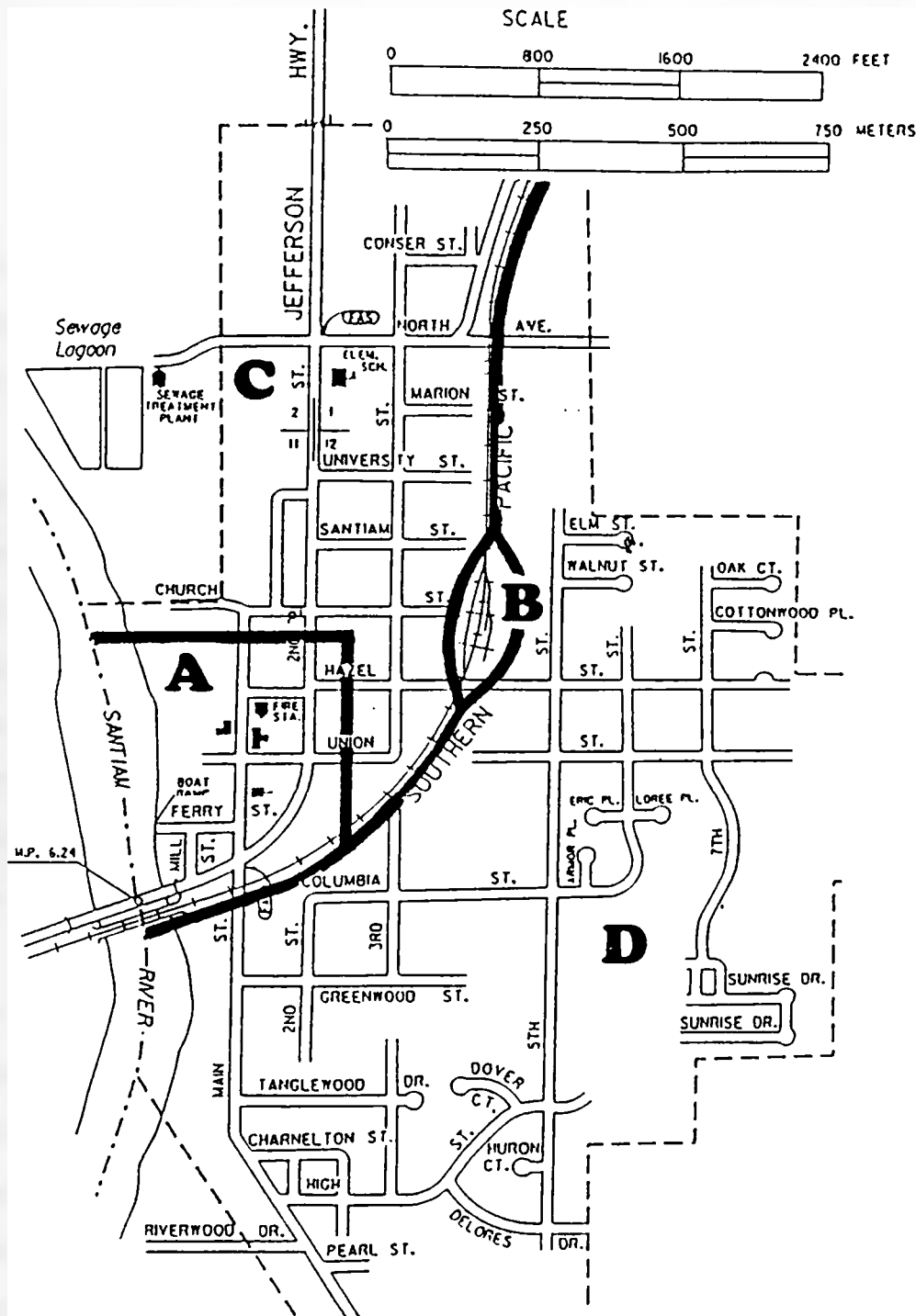


Figure 27: Jefferson has a relatively simple neighborhood structure. Zone A, on the banks of the Santiam River, is the old commercial core of the town. Zone B is an isolated puncture of railroad-oriented industry. Zone C and Zone D are both residential areas, but the homes in the latter are much newer, most having been built since 1970.

Map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Jefferson, January 1985.

### Gervais: Complementary Effects

Gervais is a small agricultural town between Salem and Woodburn. Having been built on the railroad and bypassed by the major highways of the valley, it is an ideal town in which to observe railroad influence.

The railroad influences Gervais' landscape in four major ways. The railroad is flanked by a wide grassy vacant area through the heart of the town. The railroad corridor, secondly, is lined by a largely Hispanic population. Thirdly, the railroad separates a commercial district, on the southeast, from a residential district, on the northwest. Lastly, the railroad divides the town into two ethnic components, Anglo on the northwest and Hispanic on the southeast.

With these four pieces of information, we can divide Gervais into five neighborhood strips running, appropriately, parallel to the railroad. (Figure 28) Zone A is a predominantly white neighborhood (evidence of separation). Zone B is an almost exclusively Hispanic domain, facing the tracks (puncture). Zone C is a grassy vacant strip, straddling the rail grade (puncture). Zone D is a retail and commercial district (puncture). Zone E, finally, is a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood (separation).

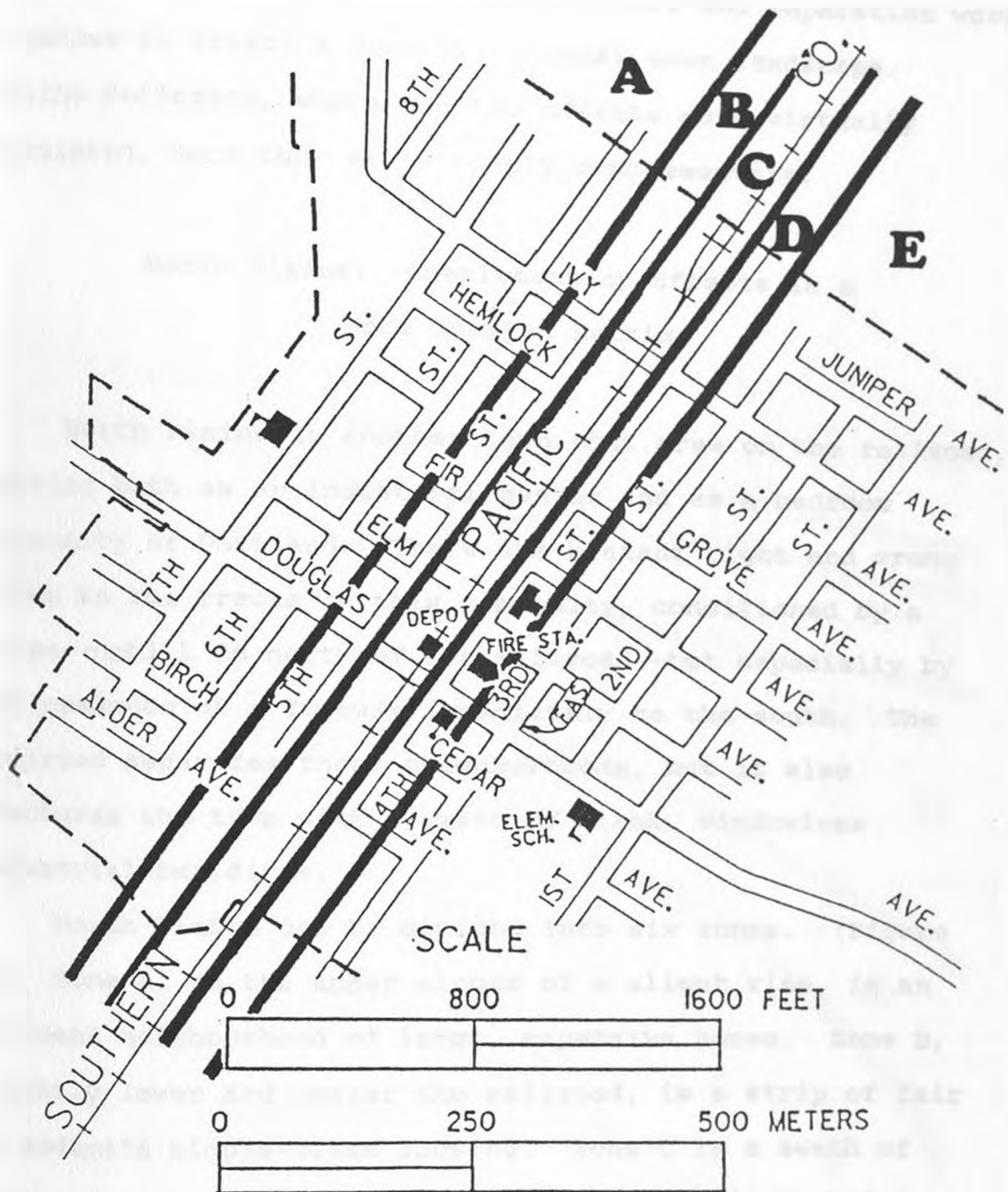


Figure 28: The railroad, which bisects Gervais, exerts a powerful influence on its town landscape. Gervais' streets are almost without exception oriented to the railroad line, and the neighborhoods of the town run in belts parallel to the line. (See text for a description of these neighborhood belts.)

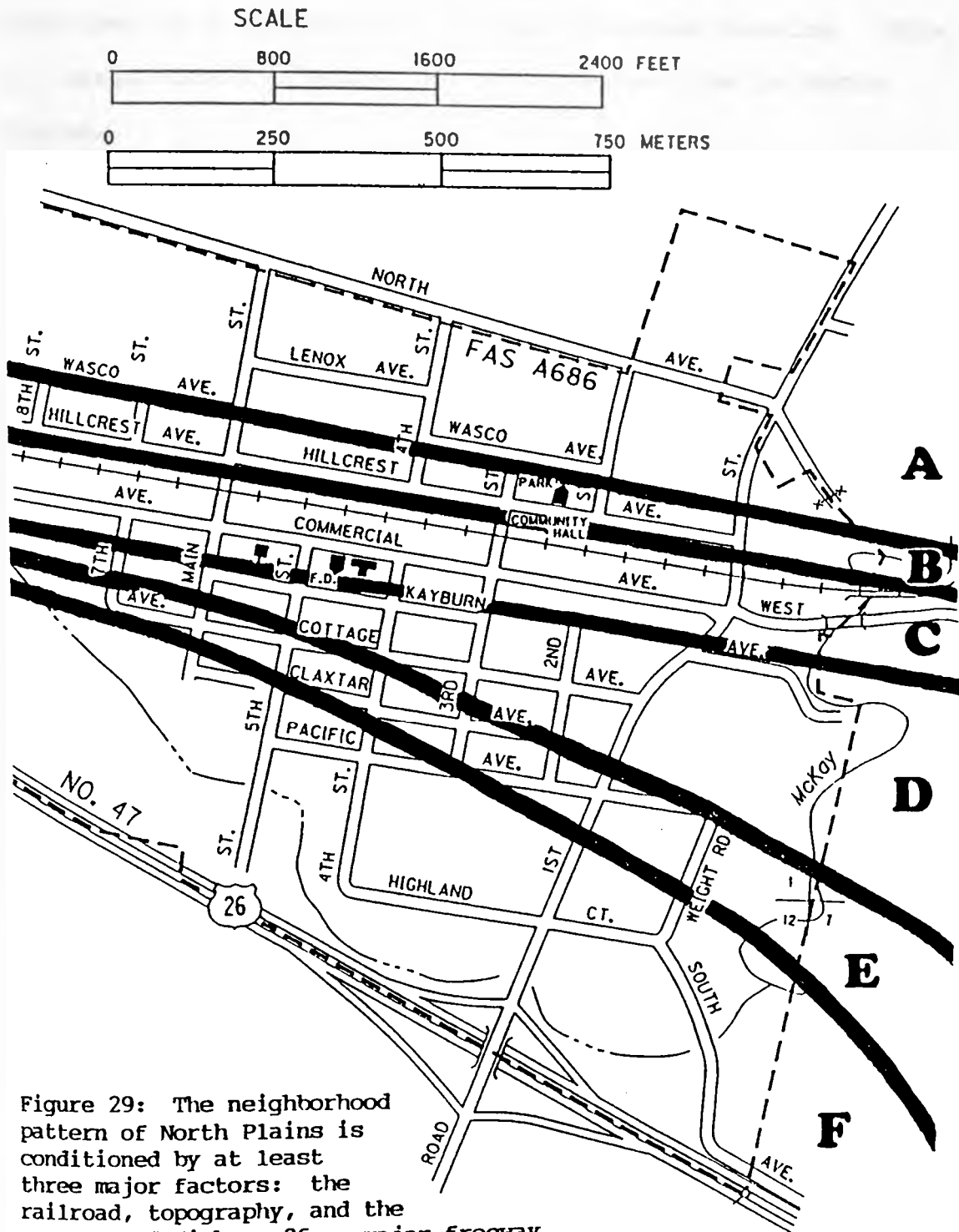
Map taken from O.D.O.T. City Map of Gervais, September 1984.

In Gervais, the effects of puncture and separation work together to create a complex, unusual town landscape. Unlike Jefferson, where the two effects were virtually unrelated, here they are strongly complementary.

North Plains: Complementary Effects in a  
More Complex Matrix

North Plains is another town that grew on the railroad, serving both as an industrial center and as a bedroom community of Portland. There are blatant right and wrong sides to the tracks in this community, conditioned by a slope--uphill is north of the railroad--but especially by the presence of a freeway immediately to the south. The railroad separates these neighborhoods, but it also punctures the town with a swath of blank, windowless industrial buildings.

North Plains can be divided into six zones. (Figure 29) Zone A, on the upper slopes of a slight rise, is an affluent neighborhood of large, expensive homes. Zone B, slightly lower and nearer the railroad, is a strip of fair to moderate middle-class housing. Zone C is a swath of industry, in which the town's tiny downtown is included for the sake of simplicity. Zone D, directly south of this neighborhood, is a less-well defined area of somewhat run-down homes, which blends into Zone E, which is similar to Zone B. Zone F, bordering the freeway, can only be



described as a neighborhood of sub-standard housing. This is, unequivocally, where the poor people live in North Plains.

As in Gervais, the puncturing and separating effects interact in North Plains to create a complex landscape. In this case, however, they act together with a third major factor, the freeway. The lines demarcating the zones do not all run parallel to the railroad in North Plains, because the railroad is not the only major influence on the town's morphology.

#### Rail Influences in Different Categories of Towns

Towns may be grouped according to a wide variety of categories. To find in which towns the railroad impacts of separation and puncture are most common, I classified the towns observed in this study by population, rate of growth, rail region, and town type. There was no correlation between town growth rates and rail influences, but the likelihood of a town's landscape being influenced by a railroad varied according to the other three factors.

In only two rail regions, unfortunately, was I able to survey enough towns to make a meaningful comparison. When these two regions are compared, however, the results are striking. Although the Willamette Valley and Central Oregon towns seem about equally likely to show effects of separation, the Central Oregon towns are far more likely to

Table 4: Percentages of Towns in Survey Demonstrating Separation and Puncture Influences, by Selected Categories.

| Town Type<br>(Number of<br>Towns) | Separation                 |                                |       | Puncture         |                         |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
|                                   | Wrong<br>Side of<br>Tracks | Residential<br>and<br>Industry | Other | Degrad-<br>ation | Strip<br>of<br>Industry | Empty<br>Space |
| REGIONS                           |                            |                                |       |                  |                         |                |
| Willamette<br>Valley (31)         | 23%                        | 19%                            | 23%   | 29%              | 58%                     | 39%            |
| Central<br>Oregon (6)             | 17%                        | 0%                             | 0%    | 83%              | 100%                    | 67%            |
| POPULATION (1987)                 |                            |                                |       |                  |                         |                |
| Over 10000 (5)                    | 0%                         | 0%                             | 20%   | 80%              | 80%                     | 80%            |
| 2000-9999 (12)                    | 16%                        | 16%                            | 16%   | 50%              | 58%                     | 33%            |
| 1000-1999 (11)                    | 36%                        | 18%                            | 18%   | 18%              | 55%                     | 45%            |
| Below 1000 (10)                   | 20%                        | 20%                            | 10%   | 20%              | 70%                     | 30%            |
| TOWN TYPE                         |                            |                                |       |                  |                         |                |
| Gained a<br>Railroad (21)         | 24%                        | 5%                             | 10%   | 52%              | 52%                     | 33%            |
| Grew on a<br>Railroad (17)        | 18%                        | 29%                            | 29%   | 24%              | 76%                     | 53%            |
| TOTAL (38)                        | 21%                        | 16%                            | 18%   | 39%              | 63%                     | 42%            |

Fifty-eight percent of the twelve towns surveyed with populations between 2000 and 9999, for instance, are punctured by railroad-related industry. Percentages will not add up to 100% because most towns exhibit more than one of the listed Influences.

demonstrate puncture effects. (Table 4) All but one of the Central Oregon towns surveyed showed some effect of rail degradation, and all six had an industrial strip. Only twenty-nine percent of Willamette Valley towns, by comparison, are punctured by an industrial strip, and only fifty-eight percent showed signs of rail degradation.

Limits on time and transportation prevent a fuller analysis of influences by rail region here. This comparison, however, does suggest possibilities for future research into the varying influence of the railroad in different cultural and geographic region.

The five cities surveyed with populations greater than 10000 seemed to be affected differently by the railroads than were many of the smaller towns. Large towns demonstrate very few separation effects, and none have a noticeable wrong side of the tracks or a separation of residential and industrial neighborhoods. Railroad puncture, on the other hand, is quite prominent in these places; wide areas of open space exist along the rails in all of the large towns except Forest Grove, rail degradation in all but Woodburn, and industrial strips in all but Lebanon. These cities have grown to such an extent that any neighborhood that was at one time, for instance, the industrial side of the tracks, would now be enveloped deep inside the conurbations. This neighborhood, particularly if it had expanded across the tracks, would now be seen as an industrial puncture.

The other population size groups, show only minor deviation from the survey averages. One exception worth noting is the high proportion of wrong sides of the tracks in towns with populations between one and two thousand. These towns are large enough to straddle the railroad--only half of the towns under 1000 do so--yet not so large, perhaps, that the separating influence of the railroad is diluted by a great number of other factors.

Town type also seems to be a relevant factor in determining whether or not a community's landscape will be influenced by the railroad. (Table 4) Although towns that gained railroads and towns that grew on railroads are about equally likely to have a wrong side of the tracks, they differ substantially in every other category.

In towns that gained railroads, it is less likely that a rail line will separate a residential neighborhood from an industrial area. It is also more likely that there will be degradation along the rail line. This may be merely a function of city size; the towns that gained railroads in the survey, as in the state as a whole, are generally larger than towns that grew on railroads.

It is also conceivable, however, that the opposite is true, and that larger cities tend to show these effects because they tend to be towns that gained railroads. Certainly, we would expect to see more differentiation of neighborhoods on either side of the tracks if the tracks predate the town; a rail grade can impede neighborhood

growth far more effectively than a neighborhood division can channel the path of a rail line (or the calculations of a railroad surveyor). We might, similarly, expect to see a greater likelihood of rail degradation in a neighborhood that had the railroad imposed on it than in a neighborhood built around the railroad. Although it seems likely that town size is the dominant factor in these cases, it would be difficult to prove. It is interesting to note that Woodburn, only surveyed city of over 10000 which grew on the railroad, is also the only city of more than 10000 with no major signs of rail degradation.

The influence of a town's early relationship to the railroad is clearer in the effects of industrial puncture and empty space by the rails. Despite the prevalence of these influences in the largest towns, they are also more common in towns that grew on railroads than in towns that gained railroads.

The higher probability of open space along the tracks in a town that grew on a railroad is not surprising; a railroad built into an established town would be unlikely to penetrate through a wide, open area. Towns that grew on the railroad, furthermore, frequently grew around industrial and shipping areas along the tracks. In these towns, the industry would become a puncture within the city fabric, while industries in towns that gained railroads would more

likely locate in places outside of the town center where there was still access to the rail line.<sup>15</sup>

### Summary

Railroads can have a variety of important impacts on a town's landscape; these impacts can be categorized as separation and puncture effects. These effects can act in isolation, but are more likely to act together in a complementary fashion when both are present in a town.

These influences interact with myriad factors of town site and situation in creating an urban landscape. A town's size, regional setting, and history, in turn, influence the likelihood and magnitude of the railroad's impact. These complexities and caveats, however, can not erase the basic that in the thirty-eight railroad towns surveyed for this chapter, there are clear, obvious, and significant rail influences visible in thirty-seven. Only Philomath displays no obvious effects of separation or puncture.

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<sup>15</sup> Junction City provides an interesting illustration of this point. This city grew on the tracks of the Southern Pacific, along which there is today a considerable industrial puncture through the town. Industries served by the Oregon Electric/Burlington Northern line, however, which the city later gained, were concentrated along the tracks to the immediate north and south of the town grid.

## Chapter V

### RAIL ABANDONMENT AND THE TOWN LANDSCAPE

Although rail abandonment is usually associated with the rise of the private automobile and of the trucking industry, towns on unprofitable branch lines have lost railroads for almost as long as the railroad has existed. Oregon's St. Paul, for instance, lost its rail connection in 1890, just twenty-two years after the state's first ties were laid; Dayton, across the Willamette, lost its railroad the following year.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, a process that continues to this day. Auston and Dill, in their 1987 work The Southern Pacific in Oregon, mention that "...recently the bulk of the traffic out of Stayton has gone to trucks, causing concern for the future of the [Stayton] branch."<sup>2</sup> The tracks remained at Stayton in the summer of 1990, but they were overgrown with grass and weeds. The wheel ruts at road crossings were packed with undisturbed dirt, and the trackage at Stayton's one-time only shipper was largely

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<sup>1</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 123, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 126.

dismantled. Stayton had obviously lost the railroad in the last years of the 1980's.

After a town loses the railroad, some rail influences linger in its landscape. In Stayton, ties and rails are still in place, as are now-useless crossing gates and signs. In Dayton, however, any rail influences lingering one century after abandonment would be subtle indeed, and perhaps only archaeological evidence remains to suggest that tracks ever reached the town. In Stayton, presumably, the rail influence will someday be equally lost. How long does this process take? What is the significance of an abandoned rail grade within a town landscape?

To find answers to these questions, I made field observations in ten of Oregon's thirty-nine towns that lost the railroad. Although a span of abandonment dates from 1904 to the present is represented, five of the ten towns in the sample lost a railroad in the 1980's. None of them, furthermore, lost their rail connection between 1935 and 1964. This, on one hand, is a weakness of the set. As these towns were selected on the random basis of accessibility, however, it also suggests the current decline of railroad branch lines and the relatively robust stature of the industry in the middle third of this century. It is not, in other words, a misrepresentation of towns that lost railroads as a whole.

Case Studies: Towns that Lost Railroads

Towns abandoned before 1940: Monmouth and Scio

The town of Monmouth was at one time served by two railroads: the two-mile long Independence and Monmouth Railway, opened in 1890, and the narrow-gauge Oregonian Railway, which reached the town in about 1881. Both railroads were eventually taken over by the Southern Pacific, which abandoned them in 1920 and 1934, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Bypassed by the railroad, the citizens of Scio built their own short (one and one-half miles) line to connect the town with the railroad network. State inspectors eventually condemned this operation in 1904.<sup>4</sup>

In neither town is there any visual evidence today that a railroad ever existed. The Independence and Monmouth ran down Jackson Street, which has no doubt been paved several times since 1920; today, it looks like any other street of this town. The Oregonian Railway line has also disappeared, much of its route occupied today by the campus of Western Oregon State College. Carol Bates, in her Scio, On the Forks of the Santiam, relates the puzzlement of town residents who find rails and spikes in their gardens, and reports that even some long-time residents of that community

<sup>3</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 168-169, 178.

<sup>4</sup> Auston and Dill, p. 12.

must be presented with proof before they will believe that there was ever a railroad to the town.<sup>5</sup> After fifty years of absence, it appears, the railroad's influence on a town's landscape has either disappeared or become too subtle to be noticeable.

Towns Abandoned in the 1960's and 1970's:  
Falls City and Myrtle Point

The Salem, Falls City, and Western Railway reached Falls City in 1893, and the Coos Bay, Roseburg, and Eastern Railroad and Navigation Company reached Myrtle Point in that same year. The Southern Pacific later gained control of both lines, in 1907 and 1906 respectively, and abandoned the line to Falls City in 1965. The line to Myrtle Point fell out of use in the mid-1970's, and workers have since removed the rails to this town.<sup>6</sup>

Although the railroad was never central to either town, there are still clues in both that a railroad was once there. In both places, there are broad stripes of newer pavement where streets crossed over the rail line. (Figure 30) In Myrtle Point, faded paint on Maple Street still warns of a "railroad crossing," although no train has been to the town in more than a decade. Other signs are less

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<sup>5</sup> Carol Bates, Scio, on the Forks of the Santiam. Scio: Carol Bates, 1989. pp. 401-410.

<sup>6</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 171-174, 229-236.



Figure 30: The rails of the old Salem, Falls City, and Western Railroad are visible through the cracking pavement of this Falls City street.

obvious. A narrow dirt path through the woods, used by Falls City's motorcycle enthusiasts, follows the route of the old rail grade. The Spruce Street bridge over the South Fork of the Coquille, in Myrtle Point, is blackened on the underside from the exhaust of locomotives.

As the railroads were peripheral both of these towns, their remaining traces make little impact on the towns' landscapes. As the abandoned railroads left no real holes, in other words, we might expect the right-of-way to be treated like any other vacant land on the periphery of a city. There is, however, now a park covering a portion of the abandoned line in Myrtle Point. This suggests that the empty grade was seen as a gap to be filled by development, despite its peripheral location.

Towns with empty rail grades:  
Coburg, Brownsville, and Yamhill

Coburg and Brownsville were both served by the eastern branch of the Oregonian Railway. Brownsville was reached by 1881, and Coburg by 1882, and their rail connections were abandoned in 1985 and 1976, respectively.<sup>7</sup> The rails of the Oregon and California Railroad reached Yamhill in 1872; this line was abandoned in 1985. The railroads in these towns, like most in the western third of Oregon, were owned through most of their useful life by the Southern Pacific.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 123, 138.

Rail lines were peripheral to both Yamhill and Brownsville, but were none-the-less the foci for the towns' industrial areas. Five years after the removal of the tracks, the active industries in these towns are still located along the abandoned rail grade. (Figure 31) This is perhaps not surprising in these small towns, but it is representative of situations found elsewhere. In Forest Grove, for instance, a strip of industry remains through the heart of the town, but the railroad that served it has disappeared beneath buildings and pavement. This strange neighborhood strip, related to little else in the town, would prove baffling to someone unaware of the historic rail route.

In Coburg, the route of the railroad is easily found. In the center of the town, the depot grounds have been replaced by a civic park. The grass here is lush and well-maintained, but along its western edge, it becomes dry and scraggly. The oily underlying gravel from the railroad grade, laced with a century's oil and herbicides, makes a poor lawn soil.

Southeast of the park, Coburg's rail line passed through a quiet residential area. Today, the rail grade remains, an odd hole in otherwise typical small town blocks. (Figure 32) It is clearly not thought of as a particularly desirable space, being used for extra parking space, compost



Figure 31: A cluster of old industrial buildings lines the abandoned railroad grade just east of Yamhill. A shipping warehouse, just visible on the right edge of this photograph, is still in use, serving trucks now rather than trains.



Figure 32: An empty swath marks the former route of the railroad through Coburg. The line had been abandoned for fourteen years when this picture was taken.

and trash piles, and little else. Most of the back yards bordering this strip are carefully fenced off from it, even though there is little need for such a boundary in the absence of the railroad.

#### Towns With Vacant Tracks: Carlton, Monroe, and Stayton

Carlton, like Yamhill, was located on the Oregon and California Westside Line, built in 1872. The Corvallis and Alsea River Railroad reached Monroe in 1910, and Stayton was connected to the rail network by a spur from the Southern Pacific Eastside Branch between 1957 and 1969. These three lines, again, were ultimately owned and operated by the Southern Pacific, and all were abandoned in the last half of the 1980's.<sup>9</sup>

In these towns, although train traffic has ceased, the rails are still in place. The abandonment has been so recent, in fact, that these towns are for all intents and purposes indistinguishable from towns with active railroads, save for a coating of rust on the rails. The railroad was peripheral in Stayton, and in Monroe the railroad parallels Highway 99W so closely that it is hard to tell which is influencing the town landscape. In Carlton, however, there is still a puncture of vacant space along the rails, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Auston and Dill, pp. 147, 183, 126, 148, 182. United States Geological Survey Quadrangles of Stayton, 15', 1957, and Stayton, 7.5' 1969, photorevised 1986.

town's residential and commercial core is still punctured oddly by industrial buildings, which still line the tracks. (Figure 33) It remains a classic railroad town--without a railroad.

### Patterns of Landscape Influence

The railroad, obviously, becomes increasingly less important in the towns that it disappears from. In a typical abandonment, the town will for some time appear unchanged except in minor detail. Then, with the removal of the rails, the town develops a linear gap, which is gradually filled by parks, streets, buildings, or vegetation. Eventually, traces of the railroad line disappear. This evolution, simply enough, takes time. The longer a railroad is absent from a city, the less apparent is the influence of the railroad.

The magnitude of the abandoned railroads' impacts in Coburg and Carlton lacks such a simple explanation. In these two towns, the former rail line is far more prominent in the town landscape than it is in any other of the places surveyed. These towns, however, are the only two in the sample that grew on the railroad.

Since towns that grew on the railroad were built around railroad tracks--the railroad was, in fact, usually the basis of their existence--we might expect to find that loss of the railroad causes a greater disturbance in these places



Figure 33: The towering agricultural buildings lining the railroad tracks mark Carlton as a traditional rail shipping center. These rails, however, are red with rust, and have not been used in more than five years.

than in towns that gained the railroad. This is indeed the <sup>114</sup>  
case. The two towns in the sample that grew on the railroad  
are also the towns where the presence of the abandoned  
railroad and the consequences of its abandonment are by far  
the most profound.

## Chapter VI

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The central question of this thesis has been one familiar to students of transportation geography: "How important was the railroad?" Geographers have evaluated the influences of railroads in many realms; in this paper, I have explored the importance of the railroad in shaping Oregon towns. I had two primary questions: on the large scale, how important were the railroads in the selection of Oregon townsite locations, and on the local scale, how important was the presence of a railroad in shaping the interior landscapes of Oregon towns?

As might be expected, the answers to these broad questions are anything but simple. No measurement system exists whereby I could claim that the railroad had a certain number of units of influence on Oregon towns. My observations and findings, furthermore, were not so clear cut that I could claim that the railroad had either "insignificant" or "overwhelming" influences.

The railroads, certainly, had some influence on the specific location of many Oregon towns. Nearly a third of

Oregon's incorporated places were founded on a railroad. This figure, however, may be misleadingly high, and the railroad's influence on the statewide distribution of towns much less than this figure would suggest. Towns were more likely to be founded on main lines than branch lines, and thus the chief influence of railroads on the distribution of towns may be the bead-like succession of small towns following the state's main lines. It is in any event clear that the railroad played a important role in fixing the exact site where many Oregon communities would be built.

On the local scale, however, the influences of the railroad are less subtle. In virtually every town with a railroad--ninety-seven percent of the towns surveyed--there is a significant disruption in the town landscape which is clearly related to the presence of the railroad. These effects of separation and puncture shape whole neighborhoods and, in some cases, even whole towns.

This may or may not be new information to anyone who has lived in one of these communities. It is, however, information of a kind that geographers rarely write about. Indeed, a primary difficulty in writing this thesis was the development of a framework and vocabulary with which the information could be "scientifically" expressed. The railroads, in influencing town location and especially town landscape, influence an experiential geography--they are, in fact, shaping the matrix in which town residents live their lives. This, it could be argued, may be the most subtle,

yet the most important influence that railroads have had in Oregon, and by extension in the United States. 117

A secondary theme of this paper has been the persistence of history in the town landscape. This can be seen in the varying influence of both active and abandoned railroads in towns that either gained or grew on a railroad. It might be expected that newer and more massive landscape influences would bury the differences between towns that gained and grew on the railroad; instead, we find that the two types of towns are likely to manifest very different rail influences. We can also see that the impression of a landscape influence as powerful as the railroad can linger in a town long after the influence has been removed.

### Discussion and Implications

Time, funds, and succinctness prevented me from further researching the extent to which railroads shape the experiential geography of town residents. It would, for instance, be fascinating to provide residents of railroad towns with maps of their communities, ask them to draw in neighborhoods as they saw them, and see to what extent the railroad serves as a separator in their perceptions. The influence of railroads on local land values or contemporary zoning, two variables which in turn have a vast impact on local landscapes, could comprise a thesis in itself. A comparative survey of attitudes towards railroads held by

people living in each of the four town types formulated in this paper would also provide interesting, although not strictly geographic, data.

This list could be extended over several pages. What should be clear, however, is that asking how the presence of a railroad affects the human experience of living in a town is as provocative and important a question as Fogel's inquiry as to the importance of railroads in the United States' territorial and industrial expansion. Both questions, ultimately, must be answered if we are to understand how this technology has affected the character of human life.

At first glance, there seem to be few implications that can be drawn from this kind of research. We no longer build extensive railroad networks in Oregon, nor are we founding many new towns. Despite this, however, there are still lessons to be learned from a study of railroad influences on Oregon towns.

In the early 1980's, the MAX light rail system was installed between downtown Gresham and downtown Portland. Much of its route parallels the six-lane Banfield Freeway, but it also travels for some distance along Burnside Street in east Portland. (Figure 34) Although it is not as noisy or grimy as a diesel railroad, this electric line imposes a visual block and a prominent barrier to transportation between the two sides of the street. It will be interesting



Figure 34: The wires and barricades of the MAX line of Portland's East Burnside Street impose barriers to vision and to automobile movement.

to note whether the two neighborhoods so separated differ over time.

Other commuter rail lines are also in various stages of study and proposal in Portland. Indeed, some envision a day when the depletion of fossil fuels will return the energy-efficient railroad to prominence. Whatever the new railroads that might be built, they should be built with an awareness of the ways that rail lines can influence the landscape and the experiential geography of human lives. If, on the other hand, railroads should continue to decline, town planners should consider the problems and possibilities presented by vacant strips of rail grade through the centers of their communities.

Railroads, however, are not the only landscape influence in towns. Indeed, major and minor influences abound in uncountable numbers. The material presented in this paper suggests that among the most important of these influences on a community are the major transportation routes that pass through it. These are, ironically, also influences that have typically been placed according to state or corporate officials who have little or no attachment to or even knowledge of the community in question.

We are not currently building many miles of railroads, but we are busily extending, rerouting, and widening our roads with seemingly boundless enthusiasm. Major roads, like railroads, are a major landscape element. Like

railroads, they can separate neighborhoods visually, perceptually, and spatially, and serve, strangely, as a barrier to transportation. They are noisy, smelly, and potentially dangerous. These roads, in other words, may well with time demonstrate effects of separation and puncture, much as the railroad does.

When any major landscape element is created, in short, it influences the patterns and flows of its community. If we are to make our towns and cities more livable, cohesive places, we would do well to anticipate the consequences of that which we build. Transportation routes should not be seen and planned only as simple conduits between two points, but also as entities that can be primary in shaping the development and functions of town landscapes.

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 Cannon Beach, July 1983.  
 Canyonville, January 1985.  
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