

## A condensed history

*Carnation, which once boasted a condensed milk plant, post office, store and hotel, was gobbled up by Forest Grove*

BY ELIAS GILMAN

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Almost 140 years ago, the small community of Carnation was established not far outside of Forest Grove. It had all the trappings of a successful town in early Oregon: a post office, a general store, a hotel, several large employers and service by rail and streetcar.

Like many towns in the American West, Carnation was made by the railroad. In the 1870s the Willamette Valley Railroad asked the citizens of Forest Grove for \$30,000 to build a railroad terminal in the town. Residents, at the time mostly employed in either agriculture or by Pacific University, declined to pay. In response, the WVRR created a terminal one mile south of Forest Grove on land donated by A.T. Smith, at a spot that today roughly corresponds to 9th Avenue and Elm Streets, south of Highway 47. The community in this area was initially known as South Forest Grove.



The area got a large boost and its later namesake when the Pacific Coast Condensed Milk Co. opened a plant in 1902, using the railroad to ship out carloads of Carnation Cream, the company's flagship product. In 1904, the Carnation Hotel was built on what is now the northwest corner of 9th and Elm. Carnation received a U.S. Post Office in 1905. Its first postmaster, Clarence Bump, was also proprietor of the Carnation store in which the post office was located, somewhere along present day 12th Avenue.

In 1906, the Forest Grove Transportation Company, under proprietor E.W. Haines, started an ambitious service running a streetcar line from the Pacific University campus in downtown Forest Grove to the Carnation rail terminal. The Washington County News crowed "A Metropolis At Last," and claimed the newfound connection to the depot and therefore Portland "leaves very little to be desired." Use of the streetcar was not as high as had been hoped, however, and the company soon tore up the tracks.

Ironically, the decline of Carnation was ushered in by development, in the form of new rail lines servicing downtown Forest Grove. In 1908 the Oregon Electric Railroad began traveling from the Forest Grove Depot, located at 19th Avenue and Ash Street, into Portland. Starting in 1912, the Southern Pacific Railway ran a line out of Forest Grove from a station at Main and 19th. These developments made the Carnation rail depot somewhat superfluous and drew further development in the direction of Forest Grove. In fact, many maps from the 1920s onward would refer to the rail route as the "Carnation Detour," a sideline and minor locale barely worth stopping at.

Being demoted to detour status was not the greatest blow the community would suffer, however. In 1929, the Carnation plant was shut down.. The post office was shuttered in 1933, and when the lumber industry fell on hard times in the ensuing decades, other Carnation businesses also closed their doors.

The landmark Carnation Hotel caught fire and burned to the ground in November of 1969. Carnation Road, which once traveled over Gales Creek, was cut off, its bridge destroyed Highway 47 was built a few hundred feet to its north. No longer a bustling transportation hub or industrial center, the community had lost everything that had built it up in the first place.

While Carnation was declining, Forest Grove was expanding and annexation seemed likely. Due to overlapping areas of responsibility between Metro and the City of Forest Grove, the process proved to be a convoluted one, but ultimately, Forest Grove platted the area in 1994, and several new structures and houses were built.

Today, the area contains a few residences and several businesses, ranging from ProBuild Lumber, the latest in a long line of lumber yards dating back to Carnation Lumber and SakeOne, the nation's only American-owned sake brewery, which was established as Momokawa Brewing in 1997.

Several historic structures still remain, including the train station, which has since been relocated a few hundred yards to the south, and the A.T. Smith house, built in 1854. The Smith house has been purchased by the Friends of Historic Forest Grove, and renovations are underway to restore it to its original condition.

The City of Forest Grove has also expressed interest in turning some of the remaining land into a recreational area contiguous with the adjacent Fernhill Wetlands.

The area remains in a state of transition, in ways certainly not foreseen by the residents of Carnation, who lived and worked in this small industrial community over a century ago.

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