

Hops Scene, South Yamhill River

By Southern Pacific Railroad Collection

This photograph was taken about 1910, depicting a field of hops along the South Yamhill River near Sheridan. The photographer most likely worked for Weister & Co., which photographed many Oregon scenes for the Southern Pacific, the major railroad in western Oregon.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Oregon's agricultural production blossomed and changed. Grains, especially wheat, held primacy before 1900, along with apples and other orchard fruits. Hops, used as a flavoring agent in beer, began to be grown commercially in Oregon in the 1870s, and by 1910 the state was a major national producer. The female hop plant produces a resin-infused cone which is dried to produce the product used by brewers. The plant itself is a vine that is grown on tall trellises.

Drying hops for shipment required the construction of dryers, usually tall wooden structures filled with racks on which the cones were spread to dry. A wood-fueled heater sped the drying process. Dryers were a vernacular building type, and similar structures were built to handle various fruits, especially prunes, and nuts, including walnuts and filberts (hazelnuts), which were also increasingly popular crops. Oregon Agricultural College—now Oregon State University—helped produce basic plans for such buildings, which were sometimes cooperatively owned or shared with other farmers.

The photograph depicts a region that had been farmed since the 1850s, but it was used in a railroad company program to attract new farmers and residents to Oregon. Dozens of similar photographs were used in promotional brochures issued by the Sunset Magazine Homeseekers Bureau, an arm of *Sunset Magazine*, which was founded by Southern Pacific in 1898. In cooperation with local commercial clubs and chambers of commerce, the program spread throughout the West between about 1908 and 1915.

Further Reading: Dole, Phil. "Farmhouses and Barns of the Willamette Valley," in *Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America*, Portland, Ore., 1974.

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