Rast Brewery

The inaugural issue of the Roseburg *Ensign*, on April 30, 1867, advertised "Lager Beer, Apple Brandy, Peach Brandy, Whiskey, Cider, Etc., Etc.," sold by one of the earliest businesses in town, the Mehl and Rast Brewery. Gottlieb Mehl had started the business in the 1850s after filing a Donation Land Claim in 1851. John Rast, a native of Switzerland whose family had immigrated to Oregon in 1853, bought into the brewery in 1866.

The brewery stood on the west bank of Deer Creek, near the confluence of the creek with the South Umpqua River, near where Diamond Lake Boulevard and Stephens Street intersect today. Rast purchased land on the courthouse block (where the Douglas County Courthouse now stands) because of the spring that was there. Water from the spring ran down to a 12-by-8-foot redwood tank.

The brewery malted its own barley and had a sprouting, drying, and grinding operation. A horse circled endlessly around a sweep, grinding the grain for the beer. Kegs were delivered by wagon to customers as far away as Glendale.

In 1871, a fire in the malt house did $5,000 worth of damage, and Mehl sold out his interest to Rast. In 1875, when Rast married Clara Jones, he built a home close by, on what is now Rast Court.

In 1872, there were five saloons in Roseburg. In 1880, historian George Abdill wrote, Roseburg supported a number of "thirst emporiums," where customers "could wash away the dust...with liquid in sparkling glasses pushed across polished mahogany bars." By 1884, there were twelve such establishments in the town—more than the bakeries, hotels, drug stores, and variety stores combined.

The fate of the brewery is unclear. According to the 1904 *Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon*, Rast sold his interest in the business and became senior partner in the Rast and Criteser gristmill across Deer Creek. But Stanley Kidder, a grandson of Clara Rast, claims in *Historic Douglas County* that Rast owned the brewery until his death in 1898, whereupon it was closed by his widow.

The Rast home was moved to the west side of Stephens Street in 1936, but all that remains of the brewery today are a few flagstones that paved the floor—which Kidder saved for walkways around his yard—and foundation stones in Deer Creek.

Written by David Loftus

Further Reading:

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