

Butteville Store

By Benjamin Williams

The Butteville Store was not the first trading post or mercantile in the community of Butteville in Marion County, but it was among the earliest and the only to have survived, in some form, to the present day. It is considered the oldest continuously operating retail establishment in Oregon on record. The store came into its own during the heydays of the state's sternwheeler era—nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and survived for over a century as a local general store. The property is now part of Champoege State Park, and as of 2016, the Friends of Historic Butteville run the concessions.

Butteville is an unincorporated community located along the Willamette River just south of Wilsonville on the homelands of the Kalapuya people. The first non-Native residents settled in the 1840s to take advantage of the steamboat traffic on the Willamette and to run a ferry. In 1876, George Fleckenstein purchased a house on the corner of Butte Street and Butteville Road and converted it into a small store. He also operated a bourbon distilling business in the alley behind the store, locally known as Still Flats. In 1881, Fleckenstein sold out to Joseph J. Ryan, an immigrant from Norfolk, England.

Ryan prospered as a local farmer and merchant and expanded the JJ Ryan Store to include a saloon selling Henry Weinhard's beer. The store operated as a general mercantile, and Ryan served as a commodity trader for crops. Upon Ryan's retirement, the store was taken over and operated by his son Josie. The saloon closed when Oregon enforced its Prohibition laws in 1916, and the saloon building was relocated after the Ryan family sold the business in 1943.

The Ryan Store became the Butteville Store and was operated by a variety of owners during the 1900s as both a general store and community center. It survived various calamities, including a fire in 1955 that burned down the Butteville Hotel across the street and the Columbus Day storm in 1962. There was a near miss in 1975 when a driver struck a gasoline pump out front, causing a five-alarm fire that burned the front of the building. Fortunately, the store was rebuilt and continued to operate.

In 1994, Butteville Store was purchased by Sydney Ann Springer, who donated the property in 1999 to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). The store is now a designated site within Champoege State Park. The store was occupied by various concessionaires, including Rob and Barbara Forrest who operated an art gallery there from 2002 to 2006, and Dianne Ruff, who from 2008 to 2016 catered to campers and tourists with expanded food offerings and live music.

The OPRD conducted a cultural resource study in 2006 to document the history of the store property and determined it to be the state's oldest continuously operating retail establishment. In 2013, the store celebrated the 150th birthday of the original store building. The nonprofit Friends of Historic Butteville, which was formed in 2016 to preserve and document the history of the community, manages the concessions for the Butteville Store café and the renamed Acoustic Music Venue, with a focus on the historical significance of the property.

Sources

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Friends of Historic Butteville.

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