

HAWTHORNE BOULEVARD

When James Stephens platted the townsite of East Portland in 1850, it was bounded on the north by “A Street” (now Northeast Glisan Street) and on the south by “U Street,” a rutted dirt track wending its way east from the Willamette River.

In 1859 Dr. James C. Hawthorne arrived here — from California, where he had served two terms as a state senator — to care for indigent patients at the county hospital. A few years later, on seven acres at what is now Southeast Salmon Street and Tenth Avenue, he founded the Oregon Hospital for the Insane. This hospital served as the state asylum for two decades, and “U Street” became “Asylum Avenue.” The doctor was highly regarded for his humanitarian spirit as well as for the enlightened and conscientious care he accorded his patients. Upon his death in 1881, it was said: “He died at the summit of usefulness, universally regretted, and left behind the memory of a broad-minded, courageous man, gifted with rare talents which he used for the benefit of his fellowmen.”

An 1888 ordinance renamed the street once more, this time in honor of Dr. Hawthorne. When the cities of Portland, East Portland, and Albina consolidated in 1891, many street names — most of them east of the Willamette — were changed in what came to be known as “the Great Renaming.” Local citizens, however, resisted the effort to replace “Hawthorne” with “East Columbia.”

Beginning in the late 1880s, the Mount Tabor Street Railway Company ran a steam-powered streetcar along Hawthorne Boulevard from Southeast Fifth Avenue to Fifty-Fourth. This route was

popular, and a branch line was added at Fiftieth Avenue, extending service south. The wooden Madison Street Bridge and its successor, the Hawthorne Bridge, built in 1910, enabled a direct streetcar commute from Mount Tabor to downtown.

The advent of the streetcar opened the Hawthorne area for residential and commercial development, leading to an increase in population. Along the streetcar line, specialty stores and services — grocers, butchers, hardware stores, beauty parlors, barber shops, bakeries — sprang up to serve the nearby residents. This growth sparked demand for a better road surface, and Hawthorne was paved early in the new century; by 1920 it was one of the city’s busiest thoroughfares. The improved roadway, in turn, coupled with the growing popularity of the automobile, led to the demise of the streetcar, and in the 1940s the rails were covered with asphalt.

As it did elsewhere, the automobile fostered a new sort of commerce, and a handful of large stores were built, accompanied by similarly large parking lots. But Hawthorne was spared the strip development that occurred on Portland’s longer through streets. Its character was already determined, shaped in part by its being just sixty blocks long — contained between Mount Tabor, on the east, and the Hawthorne Bridge, with its inviting access to downtown, on the west. Hawthorne was further defined by the early flowering along the streetcar line, which, in bequeathing to the boulevard an idiosyncratic mixture of residential properties and small, locally owned businesses, imparted an enduring vitality.