

## **The Long, Illustrious History of Sullivan's Gulch**

By John Scott

Timothy Sullivan, born in Ireland in 1805, seems to have traveled widely during his life. On January 8, 1841, while in Tasmania, he met the woman who would be his wife, Margaret.

In January 1851, he arrived in East Portland and filed a Donation Land Claim for 320 acres. He was made a citizen of the United States on April 16, 1855 and received title to his claim at the same time. He built a cabin on the south edge of the gulch, which was in the northern part of his claim, near NE 19th Ave.

The gulch of 1851 is not the Gulch of today. To begin with, it is now called Sullivan's Gulch. Back then it was mainly a forest of fir trees with a beautiful stream running through it and an occasional waterfall. Cougars and bears lived in the forest, too.

"Sullivan's Spring" was located near their cabin and became a popular site for picnickers. A mural depicting this bucolic scene appears on the outside back wall of the pub at 1700 NE Broadway. It was a project of Grace Academy, only one block away on NE 17th Avenue, that received a \$5,000 grant from Confluence Project for public art projects in 2006.

Sullivan died in 1865. His wife moved to Vancouver, Washington, and died in 1890. Their daughter Marie inherited the property. She joined the Sisters of Providence Order and upon her death in 1904, she left the property to the Order.

The gulch often was prone to flooding, sometimes as far east as NE 16th. When the railroad came in 1881 the gulch was filled in to stop the flooding. As a result, land became available for an industrial zone and became the home for companies such as Doernbecker Furniture Factory and Hyster equipment manufacturing (located where Fred Meyer is today).

Many old-timers may have heard their parents or grandparents talk about Train #17, which headed into Portland in mid-afternoon everyday bringing cargo from the East. It passed right through their play areas in the gulch with its whistle blowing. You can still hear the whistles blowing in the night as trains pass through Portland.

As early as 1926 Portland's city planning commission began studying the feasibility of building a high-speed expressway through the gulch. The commission said, "The plans as visualized contemplate an outgoing speedway on the right-hand side of the railroad tracks, an incoming lane on the left-hand side. The object would be to carry the speedway under all viaducts and to have only a few lateral streets, probably one every quarter or half mile to feed the through highway." The plans lay dormant until after World War II.

During the Great Depression in the early 30's Shantytowns sprung up in the gulch, and it brought with it the first "Hooverilles". The biggest settlement was near Grand Avenue with another one just east of NE 21st Ave. They eventually merged. They were self-contained "villages" governed by an elected mayor who forbade any liquor in the Shantytown. In 1933,

there were 333  
men living in 131 shanties in Shantytown.

The Dairy Cooperative Association provided daily deliveries of milk to the men. One of the mayor's jobs was to make the rounds of nearby bakeries, grocery stores, and clothing stores to pickup donations. Portland Police Officer Howard, from Precinct #1, kept an eye on Shantytown and was helpful in making contacts for the mayor.

As the Depression began to end, the men in Shantytown began to drift away to find jobs that were beginning to open up in the logging mills. The population dropped to 100, and the final end to Shantytown came in 1941 when the shanties were deserted. A fire burned to the ground what was left.

After WWII ended, the plans for a freeway were revived in 1947 and won the approval of the state highway commission. The chairman of the commission was T. Harry Banfield. A campaign to have the name changed to "Sullivan Gulch Pike" failed.