

# Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation



Summer Newsletter — 2019

*“Preserving and sharing stories of human enterprise  
and the power of the great Falls of the Willamette River.”*

## 130 Years of Paper Making History Continues!

Former West Linn Paper Co. employee and current WFHF Board member **Peter Schwarz** was recently hired by the mill's new owners to run the steam plant. In his own words, here is Peter's unique perspective on restarting this historic and amazing mill nearly two years after it shut down.

### Willamette Falls Paper Company Startup By Peter Schwarz

I got the call in late June. The newly formed Willamette Falls Paper Company was looking for former employees to help get the mill back into operation. When they offered me the position of Steam Plant Supervisor, I accepted the job and went back to work on July 4.

But it was going to be real challenge! Not only did I have to train a nearly green crew on the fine points of steam generation, the plant managers wanted to have everything running by month's end. This was a tall order!

Getting the old, idled plant up and running is a lot like waking up a 79-year old from a two-year nap and then expecting them to climb Mt. Hood! Everything from relays to steam lines and valves had to be checked – and not just in the steam plant, but the whole mill.

I had my hands full getting ready to fire the boilers up while training the new crew – who also take care of the mill's fire system, air compressors, raw water treatment, filtered water for the paper machines, as well as the effluent system. Accomplishing all this required working 34 days straight!

During this time boiler inspectors found damaged refractory on the firebox wall, which necessitated contractors making immediate repairs. The mandated hydrostatic test of the boiler failed on the first attempt but tightening a few bolts on a relief valve quickly corrected that problem. The second hydro test was a success.

All the hard work paid off on August 6 when we lit the first pilot burner. Taking all day, we slowly built up steam pressure and soon had steam coursing down the lines to the factory. For the next couple days we gave the old mill a nice, gentle warm up. *(continued on page 2)*



### Steaming again!

*(above)* Boiler #2 is hot once more and venting steam as it stands by for the paper machines to begin spinning.

*(below)* The first roll of paper winds onto a spool as the newly formed Willamette Falls Paper Company begins production.

*(both photos courtesy of Peter Schwarz)*



*(continued from page 1)*

But, we could not relax yet. Bearing noises began coming from the forced-draft fan. The boiler was shutdown and millwrights tore into the fan to repair it. I returned that night to help the crew restart the boiler, and by morning we had steam again.

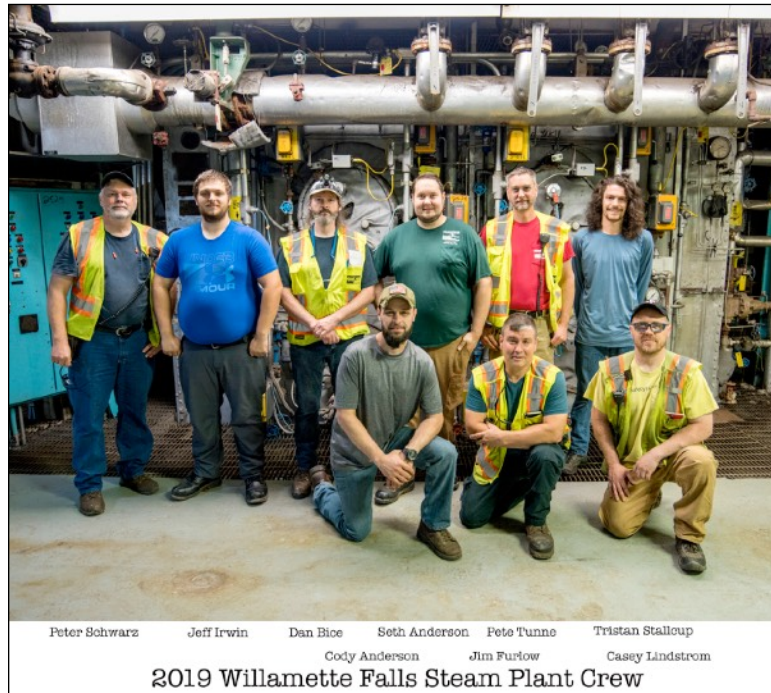
On Friday, August 9, the line shaft that drives the paper machine began to roll again. Another big milestone! But other problems popped up. Electrical issues on the burner relays kept tripping the gas supply, which meant we had to secure the boiler to do the repairs and then begin another six-hour restart process.

Finally, the big day came for the first paper to roll off the paper machine. A news crew was invited to watch and record the historic event. Unfortunately, at this crucial moment, all you can hear is me calling the paper machine crew over the radio telling them to secure the turbine and steam lines because we'd just lost the boiler again!

Maintenance crews tackled the problem and we managed a five-hour restart. It was time to make some paper. But when we tried to cut out the pilots and cut in the main burners, the same thing happened: safety devices kicked in and shut off the fires. Thankfully, our amazing electricians diagnosed the problem and fixed some misplaced wires.

The crew warmed the boiler up through the night and on the morning of August 16, I returned at 4:00am to finish bringing it up to operating pressure. At 7:40am, we were proud to have steam going to the factory two hours earlier than planned. We held our breath as the main burners were lit off and – it all worked! Success!

A little after 11:00am, the paper makers had their first sheet of paper moving across the wire and onto the reel. We are back in the paper making business!



*Photo by Peter Schwarz*

*Meanwhile, Across the River...*

## **Grand Ronde Purchases Blue Heron Site**



On August 15, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde completed its purchase of the 23-acre Blue Heron Mill property in Oregon City.

The Tribe purchased the site from Washington developer **George Heidergerken**, as well as another parcel of riverfront land upstream of the mill. The purchase price of the mill site was \$15.25 million, according to the Clackamas County Recording Office.

“This is a historic day for the Grand Ronde Tribe and our people,” said Tribal Council Chairwoman **Cheryle A. Kennedy** in a press release.

The Tribe intends to continue working with the Willamette Falls Riverwalk Project which will allow better public access to the falls. They have also submitted a plan with the Oregon DEQ and committed \$3 million for clean up of on-site hazardous waste.

Plans for long-term redevelopment off the property have not been announced, although tribal officials have indicated that building a casino is not an option.

The \$35 million Riverwalk Project is slated to begin next year with completion by 2022.

# Collections News

The Foundation's Collections Team of **Sandy Carter** and **Joe Bernert** are continuing the time-consuming task of scanning photographs, documents, and blueprints. These images are then cataloged and organized into the collection's database.

One of their recent finds was an article in *Makin' Paper*, a bimonthly publication from Crown Willamette mills. The September 1918 issue reported on the nearly completed West Linn Inn.

*(below left)* WFHF has blueprints for the Inn in its collections that are also being scanned and digitally preserved.

*(below right)* A tour group stops in front of the West Linn Inn, circa 1950.



**Troy Bowers,**  
President WFHF

## President's Message

Thank you for your continued interest and support of the rich history at Willamette Falls. It has been an active summer as things continue to evolve at the Falls. Here are some key highlights:

- The West Linn mill is under new ownership as Willamette Falls Paper and has signed a lease with PGE to restart operations.
- The Oregon City mill site has been purchased by the Grand Ronde Tribe.
- The City of West Linn is moving forward with bike and pedestrian corridor improvement planning to provide better access along Willamette Falls Drive.
- Historic West Linn City Hall renovation is in the design phase to house historic, cultural, and tourism partners including WFHF.
- The Moore's Island study commissioned by WFHF identifies historic themes and strong tourism potential.

My thanks to our Board and supporters as we continue to save the future of our past!

Troy

**Summer isn't over yet!** There is still plenty of time and low water conditions to view the second largest waterfall in the country up close, if you have something that floats!

Just remember that boats can't go any further upstream than a diagonal 'line' that runs across from the old Hawley Powerhouse to the corner of Grinder Room 3.

*So get up there, have fun, and be safe!*



# Locks Commission Update

By Sandy Carter



**The pace of work ahead of the Willamette Falls Locks Commission picked up at the July 10 Commission meeting at West Linn City Hall.** With the Corps of Engineers Director's Report on the disposition of the Locks finally signed in Washington DC, the COE is moving locally to do the engineering necessary to seismically upgrade the canal basin and guard lock, from PGE's north boundary to the upper entrance to the canal.

The Commission's 2019 request for Lottery bonding dollars to repair and update the canal wasn't approved this session because a future owner had not yet been solidly identified. But the Commission was encouraged in its vision for reopening the historic canal and locks under a new Public Corporation that would oversee repair contracts, select the operations model and determine the funding mechanisms.

Commission leadership and the Project Team, in consultation with the State Department of Justice, are creating language for a second version of a Legislative Concept for a Locks Public Corporation, based on the discussion at the July meeting.

The introduction of the concept draft in Salem in the Fall is a key step in the Commission's work plan. Currently, in order to lock in Lottery funding during the Short Session in 2020, all energy is focused on answering the questions posed by lawmakers in the 2019 Session.

The next meeting of the Commission will be September 11 at West Linn City Hall, and the Commission will also meet in October and November.

The draft legislation describes the function, goals, authorities and makeup of a potential Public Corporation that could take ownership of the locks.

Much thanks must go to the Project Team's **Lisa Naito**, **John Southgate** and **Michelle Giguere**, who met with Oregon State Fair board members in their research on the nuts and bolts of establishing and running an actual Oregon public corporation. Deep appreciation must also go to **Turner O'Dell**, the Commission Facilitator at Oregon Solutions, whose staffing budget, included in the Portland State budget request in June, was approved for another two years. For a look at the Commission membership roster, including newly appointed legislators, please visit the Oregon Solutions website for Willamette Falls Locks Commission 2019.



**Will the past return in the future?** We look forward to a time when we can once again access a viable and functioning Willamette Falls Locks alongside a working and productive paper mill!



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Newsletter printing generously donated by:



# One Last Visit to the Mill

By Dan Butler

I still kick myself. Back in September 2011, I'd missed attending the auction when Blue Heron's paper mill closed. Soon after, the machinery was sold and salvage crews began ripping out everything that remained. This once-in-a-lifetime moment to document the place while it was still intact had slipped away.

When I heard about a similar auction preview at the closed West Linn mill last June, I jumped at the chance. Although I'd made numerous trips to the old mill in recent years and captured many images, I just couldn't pass up what would no doubt be my last opportunity to explore this amazing, historic complex. The Moore's Island site faced an uncertain future but this much was certain: it would never again host an operating paper mill. 128 years of production was over.

The preview was a two-day event with an online auction slated for June 19. The day before, I checked in at the main gate and received a thick, multi-page packet of hundreds of auction lot items. The list included everything from forklifts to fans, ladders to lathes, and pliers to paper machines. Virtually everything that produced paper or kept the mill running was for sale – except the boilers and buildings.

Walking down to the mill, it felt as if I had the place all to myself! There may have been a dozen people on site at the time but they were quickly swallowed up within the looming structures.

Stepping inside Mill D, I was struck by the eerie silence that enshrouded its cathedral-like grandeur. Unseen voices, faintly echoing from above, drifted through the vastness. Whispering seemed appropriate. It was strange seeing these machines that once roared 24 hours a day and their spinning, hot rolls now cold, silent, and still.

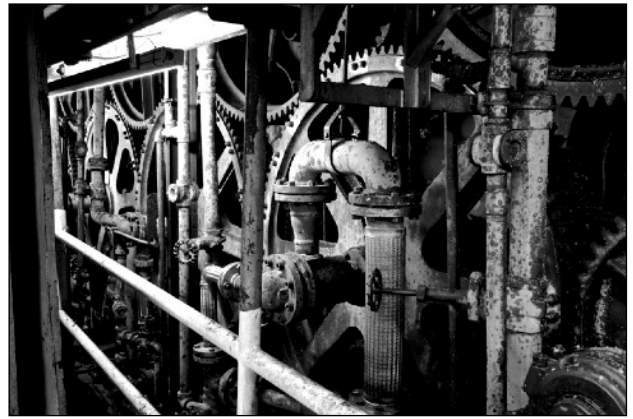
We basically had the run of the mill (pun intended!) In addition to the machinery, the various shops, parts areas, pump rooms, and warehouses were all open for inspection. Orange lot tags decorated every tool and piece of equipment, including the massive paper machines that sat in quiet repose, grimly awaiting their fate. It was obvious that the auction company put a lot of work into organizing and tagging literally thousands of items for bidding.

I worked my way toward the steam plant through the cavernous basements, thankful for knowing the route from previous trips. Like the other end of the mill, the boiler house was hauntingly quiet; its massive boilers towered into the gloom overhead. With their furious fires long extinguished, the constant hum of blowers and hiss of steam just a memory.

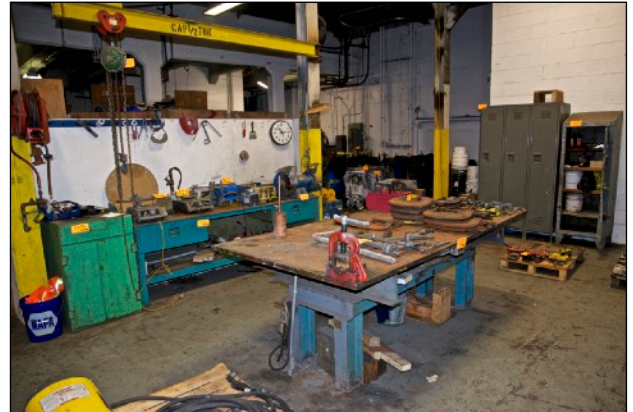
After several hours of purposeful wandering, I reluctantly left, grateful for the experience but saddened that the mill would never steam again.

My glumness was short-lived. By the next day, I received notice from the auctioneer that a single bidder had purchased the *entire* mill! In an unbelievable turn of events and at literally the eleventh hour, the old mill had been given a new lease on life to emerge as Willamette Falls Paper Company.

Thank you Mr. Ken Peterson and Columbia Ventures Corporation for your vision and commitment!



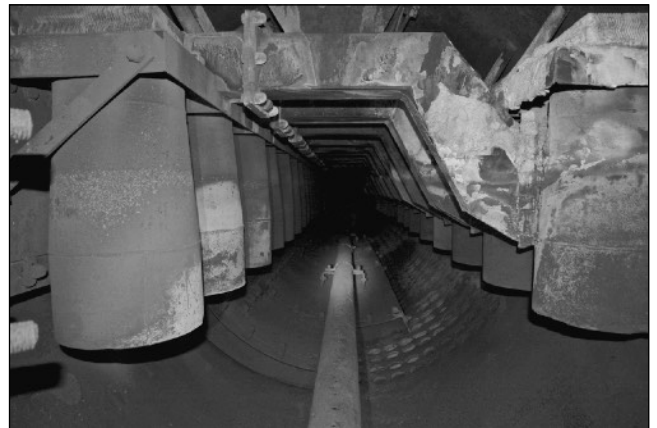
Paper machine drive gears wait in somber silence.



A shop area with dotted with orange auction tags.



This drive belt hangs loosely with a tag indicating "Removed 10/25/2017", shortly after the mill's closure.



Open and empty: a rare look inside Boiler 3's main steam drum.

# A Look at the Past



This fine image, courtesy of *Yesterday's Trails Historical Photos*, captures some incredible detail from 1958.

In the center foreground is the old Hawley Powerhouse, then operated by Publishers Paper Co. To the right is their Mill A and the site of the original PGE power plant, Station A.

Across the river is Crown Zellerbach's mighty West Linn mill, clearly identified by their massive sign and logo. Note how all the buildings and tanks appear to be freshly painted and well maintained. At this time the sulfite plant in Mill B was still in operation as evidenced by the steam venting from atop the acid towers. Water vapor is also billowing out from the four paper machines still running in Mill C (beneath the sign) as well as from ancient Mill J (just left of the bleach plant, at the right).

## **Please help support Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation with your donation!**

*Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation is a 501(C)(3) non-profit Oregon corporation established for educational purposes and heritage preservation, and is on the Oregon Cultural Trust's list of qualified Oregon nonprofits.*

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Donations may also be made online at: [www.willamettefalls.org](http://www.willamettefalls.org)