

Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation

“Preserving and sharing stories of human enterprise and the power of the great Falls of the Willamette

Spring Newsletter — 2021

News From Around The Falls



For being a COVID-restricted year, there is no shortage of news items to report. While each of these stories could warrant a full article, here are a few highlights of what has been happening around The Falls since our last newsletter.

New Pedestrian-Bicycle Bridge

The WFHF is supporting the Oregon Department of Transportation's concept plan study for a pedestrian-bicycle bridge that would connect downtown Oregon City to West Linn. There are six options on the placement of this new bridge, locating it below, adjacent to, and above the Arch Bridge.

WFHF believes the most desirable placement is the upper most alignment (option 1c in ODOT's concept plan) because it would afford the best view of the falls; it would not impact the aesthetics of the Arch Bridge; it provides the most direct connection for both communities; it would tie the future River Walk to the West Linn Waterfront Project; and it would allow for access to Moores Island and the mill complex for future tours.

Blue Heron Mill fire

On December 6 of last year, a fire broke out at the old Blue Heron mill in Oregon City. The serious blaze quickly became a 3-alarm fire that was confined to the former Mill E building at the upstream end of the complex. A suspect was apprehended on the site and charged with setting the fire.

A 1940's era sawmill once occupied this site but the current building contained pulping equipment, maintenance shops, and mill offices. Although extensively damaged, fortunately the building is not historically or architecturally significant. *(photo right, above)*

West Linn's Historic City Hall

The city of West Linn is proceeding with plans to partner with the Willamette Falls and Landings Heritage Area Coalition to turn the historic former city hall building into a multicultural community center. The WFLHAC would be the main tenant with other local groups renting office space.

Renovating the building will cost about \$1.65 million with around 1.3 million provided by the city and the balance from grants obtained by the Coalition. Plans call for the downstairs to be used as an exhibit space by local artists to showcase their work with upstairs for offices and a large community meeting room.

The city is also seeking to list the building in the National Register of Historic Places. WFHF President **Troy Bowers** attended the April 12 City Council Meeting and presented our case for encouraging this project to proceed. *(photo 2nd below)*



Locks Commission Update: April 2021



By Sandy Carter

Two significant items will be of interest to followers of the Willamette Falls Locks' Commission.

First, the 2021 Locks Bill—HB 2564 (“Establishes Willamette Falls Locks Authority as public corporation”) – has strong bipartisan support but will probably be amended at the request of the Building Trades Council to add a prevailing wage requirement. This was agreed to by Locks' Commission leadership in March and will slow down the progress of the bill through the Legislature.

Second, the Corps of Engineers process for repairing and transferring the canal and locks complex has hit a fiscal snag. With updated cost estimates for federal seismic upgrades to the upper lock basin and Guard Lock area, it has tripled the funded budget of \$3M-plus for the work.

You can sign up on the Oregon Legislature's website to check on the bill's progress and read can read supporting testimony submitted so far at this year's hearing of the Joint Committee on Transportation. Please follow along as we continue to work towards the creation of this new public entity to which the Corps would transfer ownership of the canal and Locks.

Late Breaking News! On May 11, HB 2564 passed the House on the third reading and now moves to the Senate. This is a positive development in the process!

(Sandy Carter is co-Vice Chair of the Willamette Falls Locks State Commission)



The last commercial use of the locks took place in 2013 when the Canby ferry passed through en route to a much-needed engine replacement in Portland. Closed since 2011, the Army Corp of Engineers granted a special permit allowing the ferry a round trip passage through the locks.

(photo courtesy of OregonLive.com)



Troy Bowers,
President WFHF

President's Message: WFHF Stays the Course...

Thoughtful and persistent. That's the recipe for success when advocating for the future of our past.

Whether it is the Locks or Historic City Hall, having people with a passion to preserve and celebrate these one of a kind resources has been the key to achieving success. We have made great strides at the Falls. Preserving the Locks appears to be coming to fruition with the support of the Oregon Legislature. Additionally, the City of West Linn has agreed to partner with Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area Coalition to turn the Historic City Hall into a cultural center and gateway facility for the Falls, and historic and cultural resources in the surrounding area and up river.

These heroic efforts were birthed at WFHF and have been shepherded for years and decades. My thanks go out to these, our heroes. Please help us as we continue to make a difference in saving the future of our past. Thank you!

Honoring Mayor Russ Axelrod

By Jim Mattis

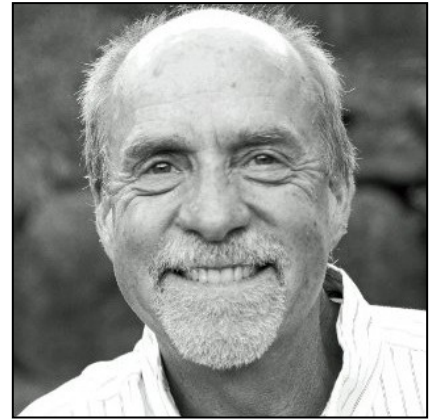
Former West Linn Mayor **Russ Axelrod** was recently honored by several West Linn heritage advocates, including the Executive Director of the Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area Coalition, **Siobhan Taylor**; the President of the Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation, **Troy Bowers**, and the Co-Presidents of the West Linn Historical Society, **Roger Shepherd** and **Beth Smolens**.

The mayor was presented with a framed photograph (*right, below*), taken in 1929, of the steamer Beaver in the Willamette Locks. The historic photograph was chosen because Russ has been the Chairperson of the Willamette Falls Locks Commission. The Commission leads the fight for legislation to create a local entity authorized to take a transfer of ownership of the Locks from the US Army Corps of Engineers.

This dramatic photograph was accompanied with a letter praising Russ's leadership of the city. His advocacy for incorporating West Linn's historic structures (in the heart of where the city began) into plans for development of the city's waterfront future was specifically singled out as inspiring. No doubt that his advocacy for how the past can help make West Linn's future better will be a legacy of his tenure as Mayor.

The Heritage leaders commended Russ for being a public servant who served with professionalism and respectful regard for anyone who appeared before the Council or with whom he had contact. They also said they were doubly grateful to call him their friend in heritage.

The letter ended with: "*We could not be prouder to have called you our Mayor who represented the best of West Linn.*"



Mayor Russ Axelrod
(photo courtesy of LinkedIn)



(photo courtesy of
OregonLive.com)

Paul Miken: August 24, 1926 — April 28, 2021

Life-long Oregon City resident and former Crown-Zellerbach employee Paul Miken passed away on April 28.

Born in Willamette, Oregon on August 24, 1926, Paul started at Crown Z in 1946 and retired in 1983 after almost 37 years. His first job there was parking cars and as a gardener and later worked as a tour guide. He then went to work on the company's tug boats towing logs to the mill and eventually became the sawmill superintendent at both the West Linn and Lake Oswego operations.

Paul was among those who provided their oral histories of the West Linn mill in 2006 and was featured in Sandy Carter's book "*\$1.09 an hour and glad to have it*".

This issue was printed on **Willamette Falls Paper Company's** revolutionary *new* paper called **reHarvest**.

The company generously donated this product which is manufactured right here at the West Linn mill. The Foundation is committed to promoting their locally-produced and environmentally sustainable paper.



Who *knows* what lurks beneath?

Last February’s disastrous ice and wind storm caused the widespread loss of power and downed trees. But it also revealed a hidden mystery above the West Linn mill. When several large trees below the employee parking lot toppled over, a long-forgotten piece of history was suddenly exposed.

Previously hidden on the slope below, six arched stone openings could now be seen. Older mill employees were aware of their existence and referred to the place as ‘the vault’. The purpose of these arches is unclear but a curved rock wall (*photo below*) above suggests that it could’ve been for creek drainage beneath an old road grade. Years ago, the mill manager’s house stood near this site so it may have also had something to do with that.

A couple of the mill’s ambitious employees decided to explore this generally unknown feature. Upon clambering up the steep, ivy-choked embankment, they were amazed to find some vintage glass bottles lying inside the opening and entwined in a tree root.

As the photo (*left*) shows, these bottles were apparently of local origin; one labeled as ‘C.G. Huntley Pharmacist’ of Oregon City. The other was stamped as ‘Burnett’s Standard Flavoring Extracts’.

The intrepid explorers turned over these finds to the mill’s resident curator of historical artifacts for safe keeping and display.



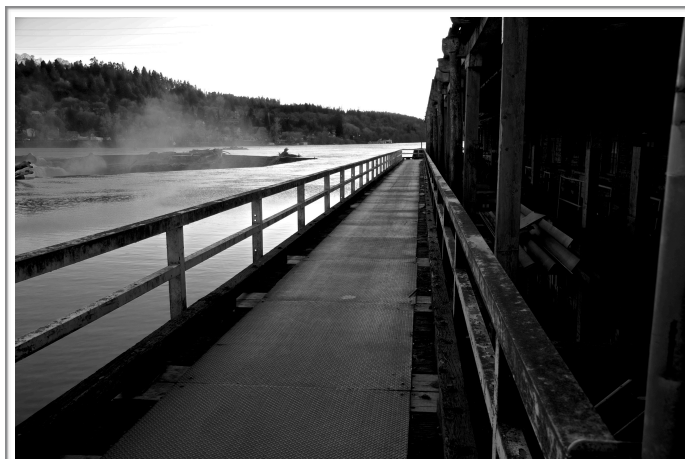
(Photos by WFPC’s Steam Plant Manager and Foundation board member **Peter Schwarz**)

**Help WFHF Keep History Alive:
Donate Now!**

*The Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation
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Please send your tax deductible contributions to
the address below!*

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(All photos by the editor unless otherwise noted)



The future of Mill A’s wooden structures is about as gloomy as this scene along the Falls side of the mill.

Please check out other news and stories on our webpage at: www.willamettefalls.org