

# Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation

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

Fall Newsletter — 2022

## 100 Years of The Arch Bridge!

Once called “The Most Beautiful Bridge in America,” this year marks the Arch Bridge’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening. Dedication ceremonies for the new river crossing took place on December 28, 1922 with an estimated 10,000 people attending the daylong festivities.

Prior to 1889 the only way to get between Oregon City and West Linn was on an expensive toll ferry. A pedestrian suspension bridge was constructed in 1887-88 and was the first such bridge built west of the Rockies. This particular design was used due to it being in one of the river’s deepest sections (just up stream the Willamette is over 110-feet deep!) and the difficulty of building a cofferdam to construct piers.

During the 1918-1920 biennium, plans were made for new, vehicular bridge comprised of a 350-foot steel arch encased in concrete with a total length 850-feet.

Designed by engineer Conde B. McCullough, the Arch Bridge was his second bridge built in Oregon and one of 23 major bridges he designed for Oregon highways. Symbolic of his style, it consisted of fluted Art-Deco piers, Gothic spires, Romanesque arches, and balustrade railings. It is one of only four, half-through arch designs in the state.

A. Guthrie and Co. of Portland was awarded the winning bid in June 1921 and work began July 29, 1921. Construction costs totaled \$324,658.01 and were shared by Clackamas County (47%), the State of Oregon (38%), Oregon City (8%), and West Linn (7%).



10-3-21 Oregon City Bridge - Drilling inside Cofferdam.

(Ralph Eddy photos, courtesy of ODOT archives)



(above) This image shows the new arch sections ready for installation using the old bridge’s suspension cables. Note the workers being hoisted above by the crane and a steamer working its way up river.

(below left) Workers drilling into the bedrock inside the cofferdam —Oct. 3, 1921.

Contractor Guthrie used an unusual construction method by retaining the old span’s suspension cables to help place and support the arch rib sections until they were all in place and self-supporting.

It is the only bridge in Oregon covered with a sprayed-on concrete called gunite. This method was not just for aesthetics but also to protect the steel structure from the corroding effects of paper mills’ sulfur dioxide emissions. Since they ceased using sulfite digesters to produce wood pulp in the late 1960’s, that issue no longer exists.

Public restrooms and a wonderful viewing gallery were included in the piers below the deck but they were closed in 1937 due to vandalism.

Built and maintained by the Oregon Department of Transportation, the bridge was placed on National Register of Historic Places on July 1, 2005.

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In March 2009, an inspection revealed damage to deck beams that resulted in ODOT placing a 14-ton weight limit on the bridge, restricting TriMet buses from using it. A \$15 million restoration project in 2010-12 removed weight limits but buses no longer use the bridge. Yet, even at age 100, it continues to serve as a vital link between the two communities.

While other, newer bridges may have taken the official title, the Arch Bridge will always be *'Our Most Beautiful Bridge'*!

(left) The final piece of the arch is about to be lowered into position, completing the bridge's structural integrity. Note the white building on the Oregon City side, just above the bridge. Supposedly used by a fraternal organization, it caught fire the day before the bridge's grand opening event.

## Willamette Falls Locks Authority News

By Sandy Carter

WFHF Board member and Locks Authority member

At the August meeting of the Locks Authority, we received good news that the Portland District Corps of Engineers has solicited bids for its anticipated stabilization upgrades to the upper portion of the canal walls. Bids closed on September 12, and the Corps hopes to choose a contractor by October 5<sup>th</sup> in order to fast-track the signing of the contract by October 30<sup>th</sup>. Prospective bidders viewed the future work site in late August.

Authority members also heard from the Corps' architectural historian on the progress of the updating of the Locks Section 106 findings, which will address any potential 'adverse effects' of the future transfer of the Locks to the Authority.

If adverse effects exist, public input on possible mitigation strategies is dictated by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). One promising tactic to avoid having to conduct a second public process is for the Corps to prepare what amounts to a rule-book or instruction manual on the future maintenance and preservation of the canal and locks and include it in the deed, for perpetuity.

The current Memorandum of Agreement between the Corps, NHPA, the State Historic Preservation Office and other Locks stakeholders was reached in 2016 in response to the closure of the canal in 2011. The coming transfer would normally require a second period of public involvement.

One question that arose at the meeting and is being researched relates to whether the canal and locks fall within a tribal cultural property boundary and what impact that might have on the Authority.

On basic organizational questions, the Authority support team is collecting members' nominations for officers and will try to arrive at a slate to propose to the October meeting. Other ordinary business included approving the bylaws and discussing banking and record-keeping questions.

Another small good news item is that the Authority now has its own EIN number with the State and will soon be listed with the Secretary of State's office as a form of local government.



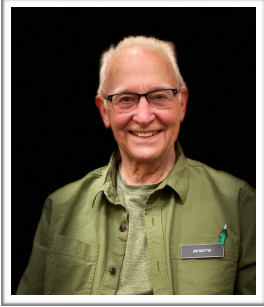
Sandy Carter prepares to cut the celebration cake at the figurative passing of the baton from the Willamette Falls Locks Commission.

(photo courtesy of WFLA)



Ribbon-cutting by West Linn Mayor **Jules Walters** and immediate past mayor, **Russ Axelrod**.  
*(photo courtesy of Sandy Carter)*

## *Update:* **West Linn's Historic City Hall**



**By Jim Mattis**  
WFHF Board member  
WF&LHAC Board member

**In August, the City of West Linn threw a ribbon-cutting party in recognition of the placing of a plaque** on the building memorializing Historic City Hall's listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Securing the national listing occurred in 2021, however COVID prevented any crowd getting together until recently. Part of the first floor of the building was opened so guests could view design renderings for what work is to occur on and in the building. Light refreshments and wine were served.

It took city support to acquire the national listing, but it was the vision and leadership of West Linn's Jody Carson and John Klatt who early on worked tirelessly to see that the building would be preserved. It was John who did the initial research into the many details needed for an application for the building to be listed. Jody is a founder of the Foundation and persuasive advocate for historic preservation.

In June of this year, the building cleared the last regulatory hurdle for it to become a regional Cultural Center. The City then applied for a land-use change under its development code. Representatives of the Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area Coalition successfully prevailed on the City's Historic Review Board to change the building from government use to a category to one that will allow it to serve as a Cultural Center.

Signing a parking agreement and a partnership agreement between the City and the Coalition and putting out bids for the construction work are the remaining pieces to be put in place. But as of this writing, everything looks promising for those elements to happen soon.

After construction work is complete, the Cultural Center will have community meeting space; office space for the Coalition and the Foundation; a gallery for the John Klatt Old Oregon Photo collection; a library of historical books related to the Oregon Territory; and room for exhibits of Cultural significance, among other things.

Historic City Hall will become the headquarters for the Coalition's 56-river mile Willamette Falls & Landings National Heritage Area after the Coalition secures the Congressional designation. And it is hoped that the repurposed building will be a catalyst for advancing the city's River Waterfront planning. There are even dreams that implementation of those plans might bring back a city center where Robert Moore first founded what became West Linn in the early 1840s. Stay tuned!

### **Planning for the Future of Our Past**

After a couple of years meeting virtually, we are once again gathering in person! We have been revisiting our path forward by identifying and weighing our successes, strengths, and weaknesses. We have confirmed to stay on the path we've been on for the past quarter century.

We'll refine and formalize our plan by year-end. We are excited about the progress of the Locks Authority as it stands up and we look forward to Historic City Hall improvements and its opening as a cultural center at The Falls.

We are also working with the owner of a river tug used on the Willamette and several local jurisdictions to create a static display of the tug honoring the history of river traffic and the log rafts that supported the paper mills at Willamette Falls.

We appreciate your continued support as we do these and other activities in support of our mission!



**By Troy Bowers**  
President WFHF

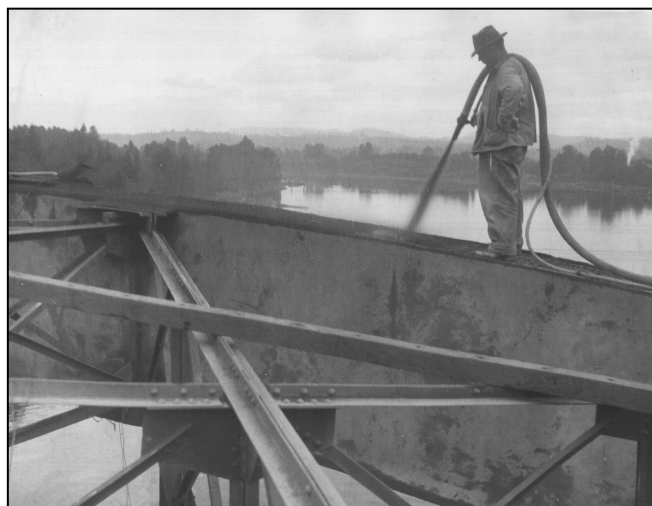


# Arch Bridge: 100 Years Ago...

(Ralph Eddy photos,  
courtesy of ODOT archives, WFHF collection)



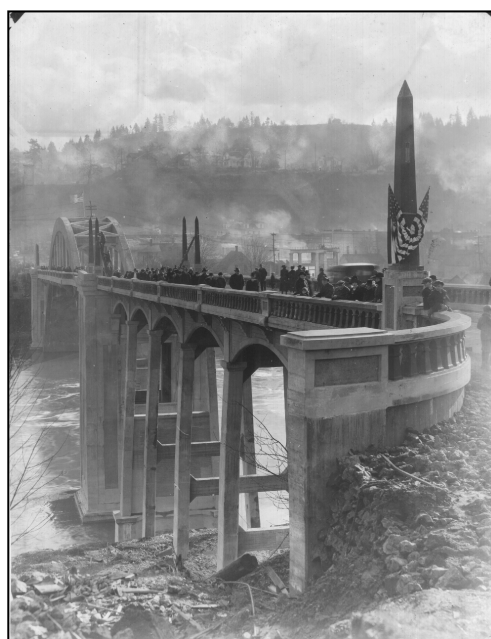
Framework for the building of the west side cofferdam. —Sept. 8, 1921



Shooting gunite onto the top of the steel arch. In those pre-OSHA days, safety gear was not required on this job!



The back-breaking work of delivering concrete by hand formed the bridge's driving surface.



Opening day festivities —Dec. 28, 1922. Note the smoke coming from the still smoldering building!

**The Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation depends on the support of people like you to drive our mission!**

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

*The Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation  
is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization.  
Please send your **tax deductible** contributions to the  
address below!*

P.O. Box 635  
West Linn, OR 97068  
email: [willamettefalls@msn.com](mailto:willamettefalls@msn.com)  
phone: 503-650-9570  
Newsletter editor: Dan Butler  
[dtb17@me.com](mailto:dtb17@me.com)

*(All photos by the editor unless otherwise noted)*

## **Did you know...**

The **Cultural Trust Tax Credit** is a unique way for the state to fund cultural activities in the state into perpetuity. To qualify, you need to first make a donation to **WFHF** or to one of the 1400 nonprofits on their [list](#). Then make a matching gift to the Oregon Cultural Trust on their website or via mail. Oregonians who pay state income tax will get the credit back – dollar for dollar – on their tax return. *It costs them nothing!*

A tax credit reduces what you owe the State of Oregon. It's a much greater savings than a deduction, which only reduces the income on which you are taxed.

For example, if it appears you owe \$200 in Oregon taxes but you made a \$100 contribution to the Cultural Trust by Dec. 31 of that tax year, your final tax bill will only be \$100!