

Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation

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

Spring Newsletter — 2023

If This Building Could Talk...



After last issue's update on West Linn Historic City Hall, Jim Mattis obtained a rather clever 'interview' with the building. According to Jim, here is what the building said...

Lend me your ear as these walls are going to talk!

I was built in 1936 during the Great Depression, thanks mostly to funding by FDR's Works Progress Administration, and was West Linn's first permanent City Hall. My flexible, rather frugal design resulted in restrained frills and gave me a 'boxy' appearance. It was the Depression, after all, and I needed to be judiciously economical. Being flexible meant I served many masters, including a grocery store and meat market; the Post Office; and the library, in addition to city offices. As I approach my ninth decade, I may soon return to my multi-tasking roots. But I am getting ahead of myself – you need to know some other things about me.

By the early 1960s, I had lost some of my commercial friends, but I continued to serve most of the city's needs. However, the construction of Interstate 205 in the late 1960's destroyed many of my neighbors and any hope of building a true city center with me at its heart.

It was becoming increasingly clear by the 1990's that I could no longer adequately serve the growing needs of city government. In 1999 the City moved their offices to new digs up the hill. I then became dedicated to serving our first responders and did my best to house the Police Department for 15 years. But sadly, in 2014, my bones' seismic limitations did not meet Police needs, so the Department moved into new housing in the Willamette Neighborhood.

For the last eight years, I have basically been mothballed and aging like a beloved grandparent. The only person I get to interact with is my Parks & Recreation caretaker, **Jeremiah Kirk**. Fortunately, some farsighted folk recognized in 2016 that I still had much to offer if I was properly preserved. **John Klatt** discovered that while my bones were not adequate to house the police, I do have iron in my bricks, which meant that no seismic reinforcement was needed to maintain my health for public use.

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This fascinating view of the building circa 1930 was when it housed Columbia Food and the Post Office.

(photo courtesy of Willamette Falls Paper Co.)

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The County Tourism folk partnered with the Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area Coalition with plans for me to become a Cultural Center and provide office space for their organization, the Coalition and other non-profits. Over many months and meetings, that effort died along with my hopes of revival. But thanks in large part to the Coalition's Executive Director, **Siobhan Taylor**, the Coalition never gave up and after many more years of negotiations, with two different Councils, I am overjoyed that the last proverbial mile may be in sight. My advocates just need to ink the parking agreement, sign the City/Coalition Partnership agreement for the Coalition to manage me as a Cultural Center, and put out bids for the construction work.

Last August there was a ceremony recognizing my 2021 listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It took city support to acquire that, but it was the vision and passion of West Linn's heritage power couple, **Jody Carson** and **John Klatt**, who worked tirelessly to see that I would remain a vital presence and be saved from the wrecking ball. In the fall, I cleared the last regulatory hurdle when the Coalition went before the city's Historic Review Board to approve the change of use under the city's development code for me to serve as a Cultural Center.

My future is looking brighter than ever and hopefully I will be able to return to serving many users. There will be 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.

I will become the headquarters for the Coalition's Willamette Falls & Landings National Heritage Area after it secures Congressional designation for the 56 river miles. I can also be the catalyst for advancing the city's River Waterfront planning. Who knows, maybe the implementation of those plans can bring back the city center where **Robert Moore** first founded what became West Linn in the early 1840s.

Sadly, I lost two of my great supporters, **Siobhan Taylor** and **John Klatt**, last year. But their legacies live on, and you can donate to them at: wflha.org/donation. Happily, both Siobhan and John have inspired others to be supporters of their vision for me.



Those were the days... Back in 1930, the building was at the heart of West Linn's cultural and economic activities.
(photo courtesy of Willamette Falls Paper Co.)

Reflections

After decades of heritage advocacy at Willamette Falls, we are reflecting on what our mission is moving forward.

Preserving our heritage at the Great Falls of the Willamette is powerful as we consider the present and the future. The spirit of human endeavor at this special place from time immemorial to the first industrial complex in the Pacific Northwest in the mid-1800s, to the present is inspiring and sometimes amazing. We will use our reflections to continue to preserve our powerful past.

Stay tuned for more updates as we move into our next chapter. Thank you for your continued support. Without your help, our efforts are challenged.

Troy Bowers
President WFHF



150th Years Young Celebration!

Willamette Falls Locks 1873-2023

By Sandy Carter

WFHF Board and Locks Authority member

On January 21st the Foundation hosted a very successful 150th birthday party for the Locks at the West Linn Library. Attended by 75 supporters, the happy and historic gathering revitalized community interest in Foundation advocacy. Tribal, State, Regional, County and City partners were serenaded in the lobby by **Jerry Herrmann's** barbershop quartet.

Many thanks are due event co-sponsors Willamette Falls Locks Authority, Portland General Electric, and the Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area Coalition, as well as to Bolton Starbucks, West Linn Market of Choice, and the City of West Linn, which printed the banner.

The photo picture frame display was courtesy of the Portland District Corps of Engineers, and the wonderful Shutterfly photo-book showing 20 years of people in and at the locks was the product of collaboration between Carter and skilled West Linn graphics volunteer **Rachel Tillman**.

Board volunteers who helped make the event a success were **Jim Mattis, Dan Butler, Alma Coston, Betty Folmsbee, David Taylor, Jeff Jones, Jim Stallcup** and **Jim Edwards**. **Russ Axelrod** and **Jody Carson** saved the day on New Year's Eve by assisting in the hanging of the images. Metro Councilor **Christine Lewis** spoke of the future transfer of ownership and stewardship of the canal to the Locks Authority.

Thanks to Office Depot for deeply discounted printing services and to Library Staff for booking the exhibit for its January slot. And huge recognition goes to **Diane Harju**, who stepped in to manage party arrangements when Carter had to step back temporarily for health reasons.

Library staff reported that during its month in the Community Room the Locks display attracted many members of the public who came to the library specifically to see it. The exhibit and event were curated and planned by Carter, who is now looking for other appropriate venues in which to share all or part of the 30 featured images in public spaces around the Falls.

For information on this partnering opportunity, contact Carter at sandy.carter@wordscount.biz.



Oregon City mayor **Denyse McGriff** and **Sandy Carter** rock the party with a great tee-shirt, a piece of cake, and a very appropriate sign!



The Locks Authority is Recruiting

The Authority is actively interviewing candidates for the Executive Director position. A job description is posted by PSU's Regional Solutions' / Office of Community Consensus.

Interested parties can contact **Turner O'Dell** at todell@pdx.edu. Separately, the Authority would welcome inquiries from individuals with experience and involvement in marine-related industries/ river-based commercial ventures about joining the Authority.

Please contact O'Dell or Sandy Carter (Locks Authority Sec./Treas.) for information on the application process. Successful applicants are appointed by the Governor.

LADY B: *Still Waiting for a Home*

The Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation continues to explore options as we search for a place to store the former Bernert Towing tugboat LADY B.

Wilsonville Concrete offered to donate the 40-foot, 1947-built steel-hulled tug so that it could be preserved and eventually displayed for public viewing.

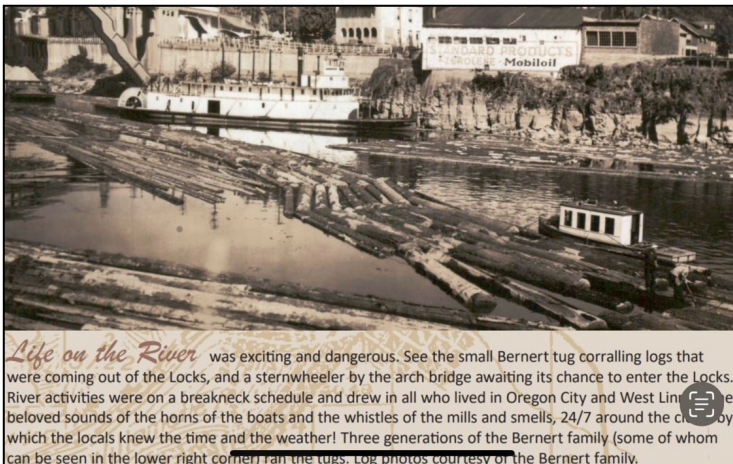
Ideally, the boat would be located somewhere along the banks of the Willamette where it worked for so many years. Unfortunately most suitable locations are owned by PGE or occupied by Willamette Falls Paper Co. where even temporary space is not currently unavailable.

WFHF project leader **Jim Edwards** has been in discussion with local municipalities about potential park sites but this will be a lengthy and challenging process.

If a proper site can not be found the historic vessel will be scrapped. Let's hope not!



WFHF board member **Jeff Jones** looks for a permanent home for The LADY B as she waits patiently in Wilsonville.



Life on the River was exciting and dangerous. See the small Bernert tug corralling logs that were coming out of the Locks, and a sternwheeler by the arch bridge awaiting its chance to enter the Locks. River activities were on a breakneck schedule and drew in all who lived in Oregon City and West Linn. The beloved sounds of the horns of the boats and the whistles of the mills and smelters, 24/7 around the clock, by which the locals knew the time and the weather! Three generations of the Bernert family (some of whom can be seen in the lower right corner) ran the tugs. Top photos courtesy of the Bernert family.

An undated and unknown newspaper photo of a Bernert tug working below The Falls.



Like the LADY B, the tugs BILLY and LINCOLN, were similar to the many small boats that once worked the log rafts above and below The Falls.



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 at right!

P.O. Box 635
West Linn, OR 97068
email: willamettefalls@msn.com
phone: 503-650-9570
Newsletter editor: Dan Butler
dtb17@me.com
(All photos by the editor unless