



Winter Newsletter 2024

The Man Behind the Steam

By Dan Butler

For fifteen years, George Hall was the main man at the paper mill's steam plant.

After graduating from the California Maritime Academy, George went to sea and worked his way up to become a licensed Chief Engineer on merchant ships. In 1975, he came ashore to work as Maintenance Supervisor at Crown Zellerbach's steam plant in West Linn.

In those 70's heydays, the mill employed about 1100 people with the wood mill still grinding out pulp, eight paper machines running and all three boilers online. It was a major operation and George became intimately familiar with the entire system. "I got to know every pipe and valve in the place," he says with a grin.

After a strike in 1978, he became the Steam and Utility Superintendent. This position was not only responsible for the steam plant but also the fresh water, effluent, and fire systems as well as the paper machine drive turbines, drying and condensate systems. He also supervised the mill's compressed air supply, heating for the office and West Linn hotel; hog fuel (waste wood) storage and handling, pressure vessel and safety valve inspections, and steam department accounting.

In addition, he oversaw 40 employees: 22 in the steam plant, four turbine operators, four water and clarifier operators, six millwrights, two fire system millwrights, and two supervisors. Calling this position a big and demanding job would be an understatement!



George Hall (right) visited to the mill in 2019 to provide some valuable operational insights to then steam plant supervisor **Peter Schwarz** (left).

Although the mill no longer burns hog fuel and millwrights come from other departments, current steam plant operations require only two people: a boiler operator and a roving utility person!

George described his biggest challenges of running the plant. "The first was being on-call 24/7... also the availability of mechanical support in off hours to respond to breakdowns. Another challenge was scheduling operators and handling short notice absences." This was in addition to the daily trials of keeping the paper machines supplied with enough steam and the maintaining the vast, convoluted maze of old systems that supported the mill.

As a manager, George was required to work employee positions during the two strikes of his career, both of which lasted almost a year. "I had to cover every job in the steam plant. Mostly boiler operator during the first strike and millwright in the second one." This was in addition to his regular duties as superintendent.



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George said even though he worked seven day a week during the strike, "I actually loved it because I got to do all these jobs I couldn't normally do. I turned a lot of wrenches and even learned to run the dozer on the hog fuel pile."

At that time, the boilers were primarily fired with hog fuel. Although they could burn natural gas, hog fuel produced by the sawmill or trucked in from other mills, was much cheaper. Gas supplies were often curtailed in the winter, so the boilers could also burn heavy #6 bunker oil from large storage tanks.

The mill's steam demand for eight paper machines required all three boilers, all the time – they were never shut down except for annual maintenance.

"We planned our outages around paper machine outages," George explained, "We needed twelve hours to build steam from a cold start, using diesel-soaked rags to get the fires started in each boiler's Dutch oven."

For years, sludge from paper making was dewatered, then added to the hog fuel and burned. George said, "This really impacted our ability to fire the boilers efficiently due to the high moisture and clay content. It was like dumping a pile of mud on a campfire!"

To address this inefficient practice, he designed a sludge press that was used in conjunction with the circular clarifier up on the hill. Sludge was no longer burned, which resulted in a "dramatic cost savings in the amount of hog fuel that we burned." Thanks to him, the processed sludge is now hauled away for agricultural purposes.

George eventually left the mill to start his own automotive repair business. He then moved to central California as an operations manager a biomass plant and later managed two large power plants in southern California. His final career position was with GE Power as a senior professional engineer and consultant in power plant operation.

While he's happily retired now, George *still* keeps his hands on an old steam plant. Volunteering as Chief Engineer aboard the Oregon Maritime Museum's Steamer Portland, George's extensive background and experience is much appreciated in helping run the 1947-built paddle wheeler. He even gets to turn wrenches and get his clothes dirty!



(above) George was invited back to the mill to share his institutional knowledge with Peter and other employees on boiler control systems.

(below) Chief Hall stands watch in the Portland's engine room as the Steamer cruises on the Willamette River.



AWFH's **Alma Coston** and properly attired **Jim Mattis**.

Hard Hats & Hot Dogs!

In January the **Willamette Falls Heritage & Landings Coalition** hosted their first open house at the West Linn Cultural and Community Center, formerly known as Historic City Hall. Dubbed 'Hard Hats & Hot Dogs', this fundraising event gave visitors a chance to tour the building before construction begins.

Partnering with the City of West Linn, the Coalition is responsible for transforming the building's interior into a welcoming and functioning interpretive area. There are plans for AWFH to have an office in the restored space. Contractors have already commenced work on the building.



Update: Willamette Falls Lock Authority

By Sandy Carter

Since last summer, when the Willamette Falls Locks Authority (WFLA) hired Executive Director **Reed Wagner**, the Authority has been knocking over many of the bureaucratic dominos that lead to being a successful public corporation.

Preparations are being made for the transfer of US Army Corps of Engineers ownership of the navigation canal, locks, and adjacent federal property to the WFLA's future stewardship and management. The Authority has established important contracted legal and accounting relationships. It is also developing a budget, key policies and procedures to guarantee a successful, ethical and transparent operation. They will launch new website early this summer.

Last year, the WFLA also built partnerships and monitored the Corps' contracted work on a seismic retrofit to the walls of the canal at the Sullivan Power Plant and the guard lock areas.

At their January meeting, after months of research and discussion, the Authority approved a path forward with the Corps on protecting the Locks' most important historic values. The process will involve the development of perpetual preservation agreements and facilitating partnerships to ensure responsible stewardship while operating a viable marine transportation resource.

On the recruitment side, the eleven-seat Authority is still researching its options and key qualifications for a Marine Representative, which is the only vacant seat.

Clackamas County Board of Commissioners **Tootie Smith** and WFLA Secretary **Sandy Carter** are in the process of being reappointed to second terms.

Meetings of the Authority are on the fourth Wednesday of the month at the Oregon City Library, from 2-4 p.m. and on Zoom to interested parties. Please contact Sandy at sandy.carter@wordscount.biz to be added to the interested parties list.



Willamette Falls Locks
AUTHORITY



A rare view of the lock's original stone wall as seen from PGE's Sullivan plant. Their fore bay had been dewatered last October for the COE to perform a seismic refit of the canal's east wall.

(photo by Sandy Carter)



“Don't Give Up the Ship... or Tugboat!”

The clock is ticking! An April 30th deadline looms to save the tugboat **Lady B** from the scraper's torch.

In spite of ongoing efforts by the Advocates, their – and the boat's owners – commitment of raising \$40,000 to deliver the tug to a city-suggested storage site, AWFH's proposal to save the **Lady B** is stalled in the West Linn city council.

It isn't for lack of trying. The tug's owner graciously extended their deadline to remove the vessel several times last year. The Oregon Historical Society, Oregon Cultural Trust, Maddax Woods, Museum of the Oregon Territory, Restore Oregon, Kramer & Company Historic Preservation, and Willamette Falls Heritage and Landing Coalition, have all submitted letters of support to save the tug.

The Advocates met with the city council in January to make them aware of the pending deadline and to address the City's liability concerns. City staff was instructed to investigate liability and storage costs. As of now, it does not appear that this has happened.

The City indicated their hope is that the Advocates find another recipient or storage location for the tug. However, this path was thoroughly pursued in 2023 and none were found.

AWFH will attend the council's March 11 meeting to address these concerns and make a final plea.

**“Forward and On and On...
Hail to thee, Land of Heroes, My Oregon”**
(from Oregon’s State Song)

AWFH is extremely proud and excited about the progress at The Falls!

Contracts for Locks Repairs and Historic City Hall Renovations are both underway. It has taken years of vision, leadership, team building, and collaboration to get to this point. We are still engaged monitoring the current progress and helping with next steps for each of these important historic icons at the Falls. It is grand to see them moving forward.

We are at the same time pushing up against critical deadlines in our effort to save the future of the Lady B tugboat, which plied the Willamette at The Falls for decades. We are leading the effort and coordinating with interested parties in order preserve and display this icon of industry and livelihood. We are hopeful that the City of West Linn can help us in this effort as we ask for their support. With their support, we will continue to raise funds and lead the way for the rescue and then the installation. We trust our efforts will not be in vain.

We thank you for your continued support as we continue our work to save the future of our past at The Falls.



By
Troy Bowers
President AWFH

The Tug Lady B



*photo by Tom McCauley
Wilsonville Concrete Products*

AFWH depends on the support of people like you to drive our mission!

Help Us Keep History Alive
Please Donate!

Advocates for Willamette Falls Heritage
is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization
send your **tax deductible** contributions to:

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