

# Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation

*Summer Newsletter July 2018*

## Another Era Dawns at The Falls

It would be an understatement to say that lot has changed since our last newsletter.

The most significant, of course, was the sudden closure of West Linn Paper Company in October. With their operations ceasing, the core of West Linn's industrial base was drastically altered, perhaps forever. The fate of the mill is uncertain at this time.

Other activities on Moore Island are unchanged. While the locks at Willamette Falls remain closed, PGE's Sullivan plant continues to generate clean, fish-friendly hydroelectric power. But access to the site has been severely limited. As owners of the island and mill property, PGE has taken over security and are not permitting any visitors on site. WFHF's popular tours of Mill A have, at least for now, been curtailed.

Yet, our work at Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation continues as we move forward with our goal:

***"Preserving and sharing the stories of human enterprise and the power of the water at the great falls of the Willamette River."***

The Grindstones Public Art project, which was conceived in 2007, has been completed with the installation of a plaque honoring donors and mill workers. A ceremony will be held in July to officially dedicate the display.



Even on a dreary day, the view of The Falls is spectacular as these guests saw during one of our final tours last October.

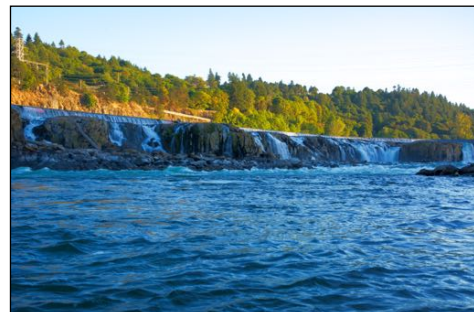


A new state Locks Commission has been formed for the purpose of eventually acquiring the locks from the Corp of Engineers to repair and reopen. The Governor has appointed two WFHF Board members to this commission.

We have selected a consultant to study the feasibility of conducting an on-going tour program at Mill A. This study is being funded by a \$45,000 grant we received from Clackamas County Tourism.

WFHF continues to work with the other entities involved with the Falls, including; Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition, PGE, Corp of Engineers, Clackamas County, and the City of West Linn.

The Foundation is striving to improve our communications outreach by becoming more visible and accessible through social media, an updated website, and more frequent newsletters. And, as seen above, we also have an updated banner and photo that represents the Foundation's mission and areas of interest: the Falls, Mill A, PGE's Sullivan plant, the fish ladders, and of course the Locks. Finally, please check out the newsletter's expanded email version with additional photos and stories about our amazing local treasure called Willamette Falls.



## Heritage Foundation Collections

by Sandy Carter & Joe Bernert

The WFHF collected historical artifacts for several years, including maps, photos, engineering drawings, and books relating to industry and transportation at the Falls. Board members are now working on documenting, archiving and creating digital images of the collection (*as seen in photos at right*) so it can be shared with the public via the internet. The collection is temporarily closed to more donations until the current archive has been ‘processed’.

The most urgent work, started this spring, has been to scan an original set of hand colored engineering drawings of a sulfite mill process. These incredible drawings, on more than 60 large format linen sheets and paper, were donated by **Raymond Thiess**, from his uncle’s estate. We believe the drawings were prepared circa 1915.

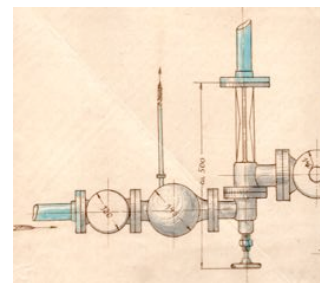
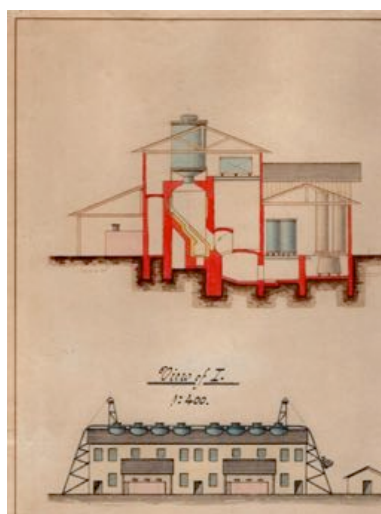
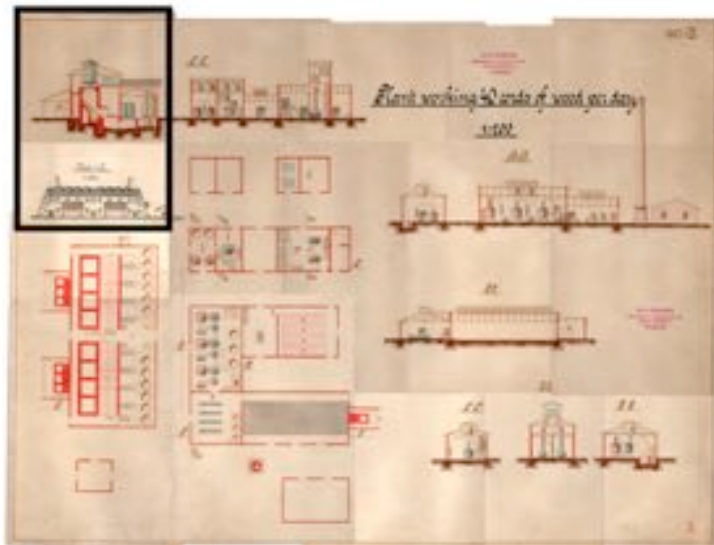
Each drawing bears the stamp of **Dr. Rolof Jürgensen** from the Technical Bureau for the Chemical Industry, in Prag-Zizkof, Austria. They were discovered at and rescued from a closet at Publishers Paper mill in Oregon City, shortly after that mill was purchased from Hawley Pulp and Paper in 1948.

One drawing provides an overview of Mill Buildings and labels each building for reference with related detail drawings.

Additional detail for each building is provided in other indexed drawings. The drawings get to incredible detail with some at a scale of 1:5, such as the spent lime injector.

Detailed information is being collected off each drawing and entered into a museum collection and contact management program (PastPerfect software), which the Foundation was able to buy through a 2016 grant from the Oregon Community Foundation. The future goal is to have a complete online digital museum with all of the WFHF collection available to the public to view and explore.

The Foundation would welcome a skilled PastPerfect user to volunteer to aid us in this work.



**Troy Bowers,**  
President WFHF

### President’s Message

*The Foundation and its Board members continue to lead the way in advocacy and progress for protecting and preserving the rich economic history at Willamette Falls. Our mission and updated goals for 2018 can be found at our website at [willamettefalls.org](http://willamettefalls.org)*

*We continue to be focused on reopening of the civil war era locks, preserving key elements of the historic Mill A, and establishing public access to the best vistas of the Falls. In addition, we seek to celebrate the first power generation this side of the Mississippi (Tesla) and the first long distance power transmission in the world (Oregon City to Portland).*

*It is a critical time as much is at stake and much is in flux as the West Linn Mill’s status remains uncertain and the future of the Locks are in the balance. We are working hard to save the best elements of our past at the Falls, and we need your continued, sustained and increased support if we are to find success. Thank you.*



## Upcoming events: *Save the Date!*

**July 20-22:** The **City of West Linn** hosts the **West Linn Old Time Fair** at Willamette Park, Friday 5-10pm, Saturday 11am-10pm, and Sunday 11am-6pm. WFHF will have a booth at Fair — please stop by to check it out and say Hi!

**July 21:** WFHF will officially dedicate the **Grindstones Public Art** display at 3pm to recognize the project's donors and honor the mill workers.

**July 27:** The **Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition** will host, in conjunction with the **City of Oregon City**, a free concert by *The Trial Band* celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first big wagon trains that came over the Oregon Trail. The concert will be at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City, 6:30-8:30pm.

**July 29:** **West Linn Historical Society** presents “Ignite Talks: History on Fire”, 4:00pm at Willamette Cider House.

**November 13:** **Clackamas County Historical Society's** “Murdock History Series” will feature **Sandy Carter** at the Museum of the Oregon Territory. Sandy was the West Linn Historical Society's April “Author Series” speaker, reading from the Foundation's published oral history of paper making at the West Linn mill under the reign of Crown Zellerbach. Her book “*\$1.09 and Hour and Glad to Have It*” is available as a reference resource in Clackamas County libraries.

## Locks Commission begins work

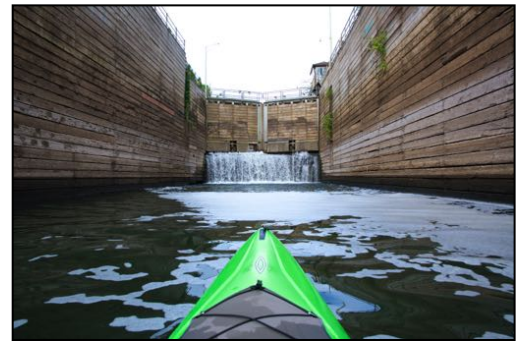
By Sandy Carter

A new State commission, headed by West Linn Mayor **Russ Axelrod**, has begun its mission of moving the Willamette Falls Locks toward repair, reopening and transfer of ownership from the Corps of Engineers. The Commission convened at West Linn City Hall in April and May and discussed the economic and non-economic benefits of an open lock canal again connecting upper and lower river communities.

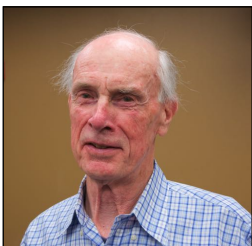
The locks have been closed since December 2011, except for a few special lockages needed to pass the Canby and Buena Vista Ferries around the falls on voyages to the metro Portland area for inspections and upgrades. Foundation board members **Sandy Carter** and **Joe Bernert** are appointed members of the Commission, representing County citizens and the affected County business community. Carter and Clackamas County Commissioner **Martha Schrader** were elected as co-Vice Chairs at the April meeting.

The Locks Commission is staffed for 2018-2019 by Oregon Solutions and supported by a contracted Project Team of consultants that will work behind the scenes researching and fleshing out potential funding sources and operations models for the canal, as ideas are developed by Commission members. Minutes and materials from the first two meetings are available on the Oregon Solutions website, under Willamette Falls Locks Commission. This project marks the second time Oregon Solutions has staffed a project benefiting the future of the locks.

Many of the appointed Commissioners and contracted support team had not had the opportunity to actually visit the locks. A tour was requested (*photo at right*) to let them see what work is needed.



## WFHF Featured in the News



Board member  
David Caraher

In May, the Foundation received some positive recognition with a Pamplin Media article that ran in both the *West Linn Tidings* and the *Clackamas Review*.

The story detailed how WFHF is working toward the goal of establishing on-going tours of the site. But it was the personal angle that made the article especially interesting. Last December, Board member **David Caraher** agreed to tour of Mill A, even though he'd taken a tour 20 years ago and wasn't particularly enthused about doing it again — until he went. Once there, David's appreciation of the site was reignited as he “was stunned with the immensity of the place.”

While there, he met a young photographer named **Amani Duncan**, who was also on the tour. He discovered they shared a mutual fascination with the mill and was impressed with her photography. After discussing it with Amani, David contacted the Tidings and encouraged them to use her photos in an article on the potential opportunities a permanent tour program could provide. Thank you David and Amani for making this happen!

The following oral history donors from Sandy Carter's book "*\$1.09 an hour... and glad to have it*" will be featured on the Grindstone's plaque.

<p><b>Williams "Rosie" Schultze</b> B. 1909, D. 2006 1927 — 1972</p>	<p><b>Henry Herwig</b> B. 1938 1964 — 1998</p>
<p><b>George Droz</b> B. 1927 1947 — 1983</p>	<p><b>Delbert Herndon</b> B. 1929, D. 2015? 1947 — 1986</p>
<p><b>Olaf Anderson</b> deceased 1952 — 1985</p>	<p><b>Mary Lefebvre</b> B. 1954 1974- — to end</p>
<p><b>Roy Paradis</b> B. 1925 1951 (service briefly interrupted) 1983</p>	<p><b>James Bonn</b> B. 1932 1951 — 1990</p>
<p><b>Ed Witherspoon</b> B. 1927 1950 — 1984</p>	<p><b>John Hanthorn</b> B. 1925, D. 200? 1947 — 1987</p>
<p><b>Paul Miken</b> B. 1926 1946 — 1983</p>	<p><b>Mary Gifford</b> B. 1941 1959 — 1987</p>
<p><b>Milton Wiese</b> B. 1926 1946 — 1984</p>	<p><b>Harold King</b> B. 1921, D. 2010 1948 — 1978</p>
<p><b>Arthur Dorrance</b> B. 1928 1947 — 1989</p>	<p><b>Charles "Chuck" Calhoun</b> B. 1927, D. 2008 1948 — 1985</p>
<p><b>Robert Kunz</b> B. 1936 1956 — 1994</p>	



### Celebration of the Grindstones

Please join us on **Saturday, July 21 at 3pm**, as we dedicate this impressive display and recognize the donors and contributors who helped make it possible. We also want to especially honor the mill workers, many of whom often spent their entire working career at the West Linn paper mill.



An old, discarded grindstone still sits at the base of the tailrace below Mill A's Grinder Room 3.

### Yes, please continue my Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation newsletter

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I prefer to have my newsletter mailed to me

I prefer to receive my newsletter by email Email address \_\_\_\_\_

I am also enclosing a donation in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_  
(donations may also be made online at [www.willamettefalls.org](http://www.willamettefalls.org))

*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.*

Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation • PO Box 635 • West Linn, OR 97068  
VoiceMail (503) 650-9570 • [www.willamettefalls.org](http://www.willamettefalls.org)



# Remembering the Mill...

1889 — 2017

By Dan Butler, Editor

Those familiar, billowing clouds of steam over West Linn Paper Company have ceased. The constant hum of productive activity is no more. But I still haven't got used to it.

Last October 16th, the company announced its historic mill would close. Two weeks later the fires were cut and the last boiler went cold. Shutting this amazing, 128-year old factory was sad in a historical sense and tragic in the loss of local employment. The mill's closing is kind of like the gruff old man across the street who suddenly passed away; beneath that crusty, rough exterior was a decent neighbor whom you didn't really appreciate until he was gone.

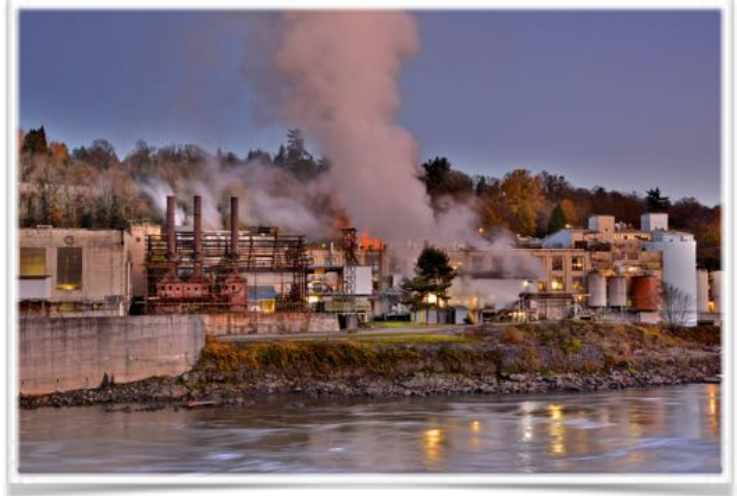
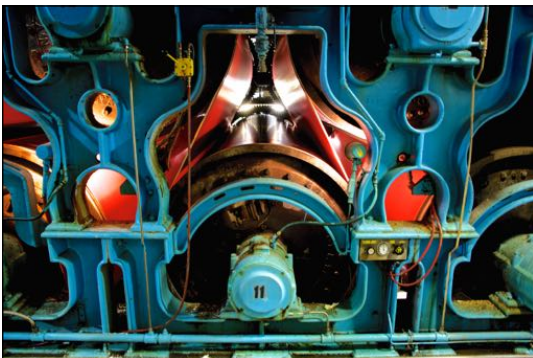
The abrupt closure received surprisingly little press. A blaze two days later at a Bingen, Washington warehouse that put 250 workers temporarily out of work commanded more TV news coverage than the permanent loss of some 270 family-wage jobs at West Linn. I guess the decline of traditional, 'blue collar' manufacturing jobs doesn't elicit the public concern it once did. Perhaps we've lost our connection to this type of economic activity — or maybe we'd just as soon see vibrant industrial sites turned into high-priced condos and wifi-equipped coffee shops.

Some folks are already applauding the demise of this "eye sore" and anticipate returning Willamette Falls to its pre-development condition. As a kayaker, I can understand why some may view the sprawling complex a blight upon the Fall's natural splendor. But I don't.

While stark, concrete monoliths may lack inspiration, these iconic structures symbolize a time when aesthetics tended to follow function. Attractive or not, they are a part of our past. West Linn's massive facility stands as the last of the classic, pre-war mills and represents an all but vanished industrial legacy.

The remarkable history of paper making on West Linn's Moore Island began in the late 1800's and helped establish the region's early commercial growth. For over the 100 years, the mill produced a variety of paper products, employed generations of workers, contributing heavily to the local economy and tax base.

In 1889, Willamette Pulp & Paper and Crown Columbia both opened mills on the west side of Willamette Falls. They merged in 1914 and became Crown Willamette, which then joined Zellerbach Paper in 1929 to become Crown Zellerbach. In addition to making ground wood pulp, the mill was the first on the West Coast to introduce the sulfite pulping process to manufacture stronger, higher quality paper.



In 1947, Crown Z began producing glossy, coated papers for magazines and advertising. It soon became one of Oregon's largest employers. The James River Company acquired the mill in 1986, followed by Simpson in 1990. After a brief closure in 1997, West Linn Paper Company began operations, becoming the largest producer of coated paper west of the Mississippi.

During its heyday in the 1950's, the mill employed over 1500 people and ran ten paper machines. Last year, it produced more paper than it did then but with only 270 workers and three machines.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, the current mill wasn't a polluter. The smelly old sulfite plant closed in the late 1960's and the nasty practice of dumping wastewater into the Willamette stopped, thanks to stringent environmental laws and the installation of modern treatment facilities. In recent years, its boilers were fired exclusively with clean-burning natural gas and those white plumes streaming overhead was merely water vapor from the paper driers. West Linn Paper Company invested heavily to become an efficient, safe, environmentally friendly plant.

Before closing, the mill was a fascinating study of industrial archeology, engineering history and modern technology. Dungeon-like basements and cavernous structures reveal layer upon layer of change from earlier eras of construction. Long retired wood grinders, water-powered turbines, and towering pulp digesters stood in stoic repose, in dramatic contrast to computer-controlled paper machines and automated transport vehicles moving massive rolls of finished paper around.

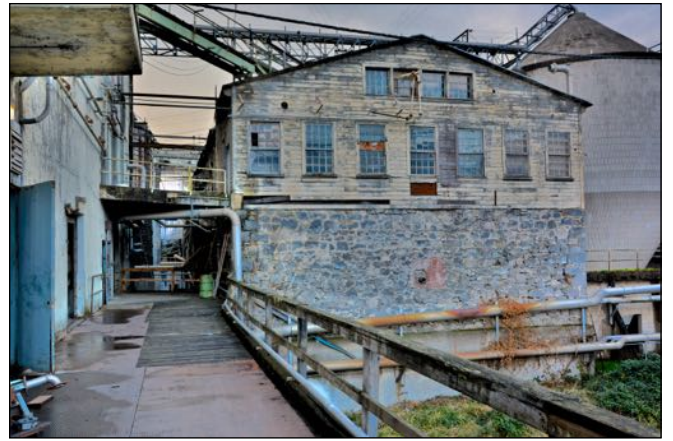
On the Oregon City side, the Willamette Falls Legacy Project has plans to reopen public access to the Falls with a river walk through the abandoned Blue Heron mill. A private firm hopes to redevelop the rest of the site and restore riverside habitat. The future is less certain across the river in West Linn.

After more than a century of churning out paper, the West Linn mill now stands in darkened silence, a looming tribute to the thousands of local residents who kept her going. Ideally, they will find a way to reopen this once productive facility. If not, I hope that some of the amazing complex can be preserved. But I'll still miss its steamy glory.

— **Photo Gallery** —  
*Scenes around The Falls*



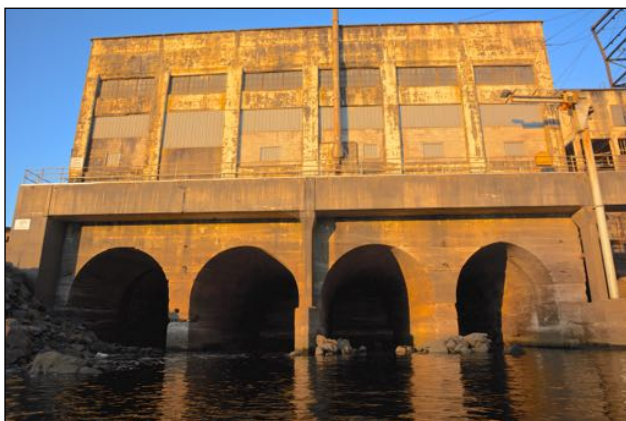
Looking downriver toward the Arch Bridge from the shadowy depths of the tailrace beneath a grinder room.



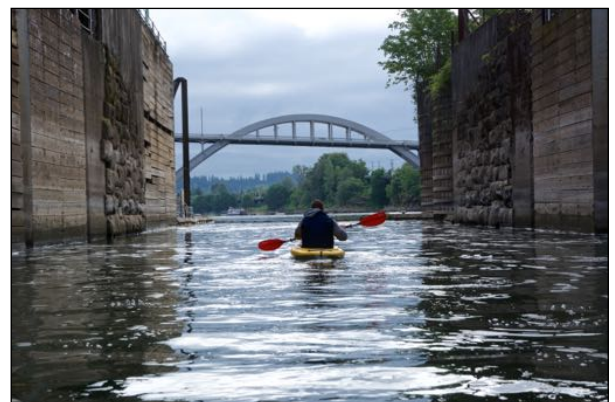
Nearly forgotten and rarely seen, Mill J sits hidden deep within the confines of West Linn Paper's bleach plant and stock-prep tanks. Long retired, it is the oldest structure on site.



Remember LockFest 2010? On May 15, **Capt. Paul Simonis** maneuvered his STERNWHEELER ROSE through the locks with a load of happy passengers.



Grinder Room 3 basks in the warm glow of a summer sunrise. With PGE's Sullivan plant down for maintenance, the normally churning waters of the tailrace are eerily quiet and still.



Symbolic of The Lock's current status, a lone kayaker paddles out of its lower chamber and into a cloudy, uncertain morning. As we paddle ahead, WFHF looks forward to a clear path and brighter future at The Falls.