





## HISTORICAL TIMELINE of the WILLAMETTE FALLS CANAL & LOCKS v7



- ✚ **1850** Construction of the first horse drawn portage around the Falls in Oregon City as the Willamette Valley began to shift from subsistence farming to an export agriculture industry.
- ✚ **1862** Construction of a short railroad portage by the “People’s Transportation Company” around the Falls in Oregon City.
- ✚ **1868** The Willamette Falls Canal and Locks Co, with \$300,000 authorized capital, was created “to locate and construct a canal and suitable boat locks at the Falls of the Willamette River on the west side of the falls so as to pass boats from Lower to Upper Willamette River so as to insure the speedy transit of freight and passengers up and down the Willamette River.” Legislation was passed granting a subsidy of \$150,000, on condition that it would not for a period of 19 years after its completion charge a toll greater than \$.75 per ton of freight and \$.25 per passenger. Work was to be completed by January 1, 1871. State recognizes lack of funds and time.
- ✚ **1870** Additional legislation was enacted by the state to provide an additional \$200,000 in gold bonds bearing interest rate of 7% payable over 10 years. The limit of the tolls was made to \$.50 per ton of freight and \$.10 per passenger, and the work was to be completed by January 1, 1873. Bernard Goldsmith, Portland Mayor, businessman, and partner in the Willamette Falls Canal and Locks Company, privately invested an additional \$200,000, the final third, to see the Locks completed.
- ✚ **1871** The People’s Transportation Company, seeing the end to their monopoly, was sold to the investor building the Oregon Steam Navigation Company.
- ✚ **1872** Blocks of basalt from the quarry at Stone (now Carver) were rafted down the Clackamas River and towed back up to the Falls by steam-tugs. Contracted East Coast engineers and blacksmiths designed and forged the hardware and tie-off rings and European stonemasons hand-fitted the rock for the walls of the canal excavated from bedrock by Chinese, Native American and white laborers.
- ✚ **1873** Construction of the locks completed. The little steamboat, *Maria Wilkins*, loaded with Governors and other VIPs locked through the Canal just before the deadline on January 1, marking the first significant navigational improvement on the Columbia-Snake river system and immediately cutting freight rates by 50%.
  - Steam-powered sternwheelers tailored to fit the Lock chambers and navigate the mud and shallows were built at shipyards above and below the falls. Transporting people was also an important service.
- ✚ **1875** The Willamette Transportation & Locks Company was incorporated with authorized capital of \$1,000,000. Deed March 8, 1875 shows the Willamette Falls Canal and Locks Company conveyed all its property to Willamette Transportation & Locks Company for the sum of \$500,000.
- ✚ **1871-81** Opening the locks in 1873 pulled 25,000 tons of freight off the portage railroad in the first year of operations, but the arrival of the first railroad to serve the Valley in 1871 caused freight to begin a shift from the river to rail. By 1904, agricultural river traffic was reduced dramatically, leaving the transport of logs, pulp and paper as the predominant remaining products. Giant Oregon log rafts made their way to Asia.
- ✚ **1892** Willamette Falls Electric Company--the predecessor of Portland General Electric (PGE)-- sent power from Station A on the east side of Willamette Falls to Portland and lit up Oregon City and West Linn. PGE purchased the Canal and Locks from the Willamette Transportation and Locks Company in recognition of the value of the Willamette Falls for electric generation at Station B on the canal.
- ✚ **1899** The Army began negotiations with PRLPC/PGE to buy the locks. Major Fisk felt that by obtaining the locks and offering toll-free passage, trade monopolies would be broken, opening resources from the fertile Willamette Valley to the rest of the world. When PGE’s price was \$1.2 million, the Corps declined. The Corps felt that the actual value was \$465,000, about a third of PGE’s asking price, due to the required repairs.
- ✚ **1912** The USACE drew up designs for a competing Canal and Locks on the Oregon City side of Willamette Falls that would have destroyed most of the buildings and industry on the current Blue Heron site. In 1912-13, the Oregon Legislature and the US government each appropriated \$300,000 for additional improvements to the Locks.
- ✚ **1915** The USACE bought the Canal and Locks for \$375,000 from Portland Railway Light and Power, thereby providing free passage around the Falls. Thousands gathered in a parade to witness the transfer of the locks from private to public ownership.
- ✚ **1930s** Locks became a bottleneck on the Willamette, clogged with giant old-growth log rafts that had to disassemble to get through the 210 x 40’ chambers.

- ✚ **1938** Flood Control Act authorized USACE to replace the four-tandem lock system with one huge, 47'-lift, single-chamber lock, but funding was never appropriated.
- ✚ **1941** The original wooden lock gates were replaced with steel miter gates and hydraulic machinery replaced the original hand-cranks to operate the locks.
- ✚ **1943** More than 2.2 million tons of commerce passed through the locks.
- 1944** Flood Control Act authorized public, recreational use of park and recreational facilities, opportunities to visit Locks and historic information center, and to safely use the recreational features.
- ✚ **1964** Average annual number of lockages was 8,100 and average annual tonnage locked around the Falls was 1,100,000 commercial tons. Low-priority recreational and passenger-carrying boats locked through last.
- ✚ **1974** At 100 years old, Willamette Falls Canal and Locks listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- ✚ **1985** Willamette River Greenway and Willamette River Trail created by Oregon State Parks
- ✚ **1989** 1.4 million tons of commerce passed through the locks. US Forest Service put a third of NW timber sales on hold. Four forests in Oregon halted timber sales.
- ✚ **1990** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Northern Spotted Owl and National Marine Fisheries listed the winter Chinook salmon as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
- ✚ **1991** Locks designated as State Historic Civil Landmark by the History and Heritage Committee of the American Society of Civil Engineers
- ✚ **1992** Forest Service stopped planning timber sales
- ✚ **1994** 200,000 tons of commerce passed through the locks (85% drop from 1989 levels)
- ✚ **1997** West Linn Paper Company analyzed their transportation needs, concluding that moving material by truck would provide substantial cost savings and ceased using barges.
- ✚ **1999** 893 recorded tons of commerce passed through the locks (over 99.9% drop from 1989 levels); Willamette designated as an American Heritage River
- ✚ **2000** Total vessels counted locking through: 1,478 (230 of them are commercial vessels)
- ✚ **2002** Annual appropriation curtailed from \$1.3 million to \$175K; started seasonal operations (May thru October) due to reduced usage and economic benefits.
- ✚ **2004** Lawmakers at first did not authorize the Corps to operate the locks; Caretaker status discussed. Congress at the last minute earmarked \$420,000 for seasonal operations.
- ✚ **2005** "\$0" in President's Budget. Congress added back \$210K; seasonal operations were maintained.
- ✚ **2006-08** First year Locks received "Caretaker" funding: \$65K. Seasonal operations resulted from partnership with federal ISTEA grant for historic transportation facilities and funds from ODOT and Clackamas County. Total vessels locking through in 2006 was 537 (144 = commercial), 2007 is 667 (118 = commercial), and 2008 is 6 (5 = commercial).
- ✚ **2008** Locks closed for Hydraulic Structural Steel Inspection of the gates.
- ✚ **2009** Gates are inspected and repaired with \$511,000 from USACE and \$118,000 from ODOT plus \$2.37 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (stimulus money).
- ✚ **2010** Last year for congressional earmarks, which helped fund seasonal operations. Total vessels locked through: 492 (107 = commercial). USACE initiated Facility Evaluation Report. National Register listing updated by WFHF-funded consultant.
- ✚ **2011** Facility Evaluation Report identified three significant issues: seepage, seismic, and safety issues around Gudgeon Anchor assemblies. Locks closed in December under emergency authority to protect life and property. Total vessels locked through: 64 (58 = commercial). Locks moved to "non-operational" status. Grounds and museum are also closed to the public.
- ✚ **2012** Willamette River National Water Trail designated by US Dept of Interior Secretary Salazar. The trail stretches from Creswell to the Columbia River, but closed Locks prevent passage between upper-river communities and Portland.
- ✚ **2013** USACE allowed two unmanned lockages to move the Canby Ferry to a downstream dry-dock (Jan 2013) for inspection, retrofitting, and back to its location upstream (July 2013).
- ✚ **2014** USACE initiated a stakeholder consultation process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) with the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to address adverse effects on this property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. First stakeholder meeting took place in February.

-  **2015** Corps continues to receive Caretaker funding while Locks remain in non-operational status. Willamette Falls area received State Heritage Area designation.
-  **2016** Oregon Senate Bill 131 created State Locks Task Force convened by Oregon Solutions and former Governor Barbara Roberts. Task Force proposed creation of a Locks Commission to develop operational and funding plans and identify a transferee. Legislature allotted \$100,000 for an economic opportunity analysis and \$400,000 for interim repairs to the Locks. President's FY17 budget appropriated \$270,000 to fund a Disposition Study, in addition to \$60,000 in FY16 USACE Work Plan. USACE released signed NHPA Sec106 MOA in December for 2011 closure.
-  **2017** Oregon Senate Bill 256 created a Locks Commission. USACE released the "Draft Willamette Falls Locks Integrated Disposition Study and Environmental Assessment" in May for public comment.
-  **Into the Future** Multiple efforts are underway to develop and preserve the resources at Willamette Falls, and recognize and honor the historic and cultural significance of the area. Independent but synergistic efforts include "Unlock the Locks" to repair and reopen the Locks, "Falls Legacy" to redevelop the former Blue Heron mill site and create public river access, and the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition which has secured State Heritage Area designation and is pursuing National Heritage Area Designation.

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