



Heritage – a perspective

by Jim Ballard - President

Each of Oregon's more than 250 state parks has its own character. Like several other state heritage areas, Thompson's Mills offers us an opportunity to reflect on the history of our state. At the Mill, visitors can get an authentic picture of life in the Willamette Valley in the 1800s.

I have been privileged to work with many school groups at the Mill during the past several years. Though we're pleased to work with any students, fourth graders especially connect because the school curriculum for that year includes Oregon history.



During this time of numerous shutdowns, my wife and I have been using Zoom to teach our ten-year-old grandson about fur trappers that came to the Pacific Northwest to trap and trade with Native Americans and about pioneers traveling the Oregon Trail. In our discussion of pioneer life in the Willamette Valley, you can be sure we will point out that Thompson's Mills exemplifies the numerous other mills constructed by settlers soon after they arrived.

Investigating history with our grandson in this way has been rewarding (as any readers who are grandparents can imagine); because of our involvement with Oregon State Parks, our own understanding of Oregon's history has allowed us to share our knowledge with him.

Thank you for your continued support of Thompson's Mills Preservation Society.

Request to Members of TMPS

on behalf of the Board - Jim Ballard, President TMPS

Oregon State Parks face budget shortfalls. In fact, the agency is looking at both personnel and material as areas to be cut. Currently, two projects at Thompson's Mills need to be addressed.

1. Training for the head ranger that will enable him to be on the roof to make repairs- necessary to repair leaks and any damage that needs immediate attention.
2. At the moment, the turbine cannot be run because of a broken flume gate. Seeing the turbine operating is a major attraction for visitors.

We are asking for your help in any amount for these projects. I do not have specific amounts, but these projects will require more than \$5000.00. TMPS is concerned about the upkeep of the Mill, and we expect to do all we can to help out in this situation.

Mill Update

by Ranger Tom Parsons

Things are going pretty well here at the mill. We were closed to the public from March 23rd to May 16th but we kept busy for sure.

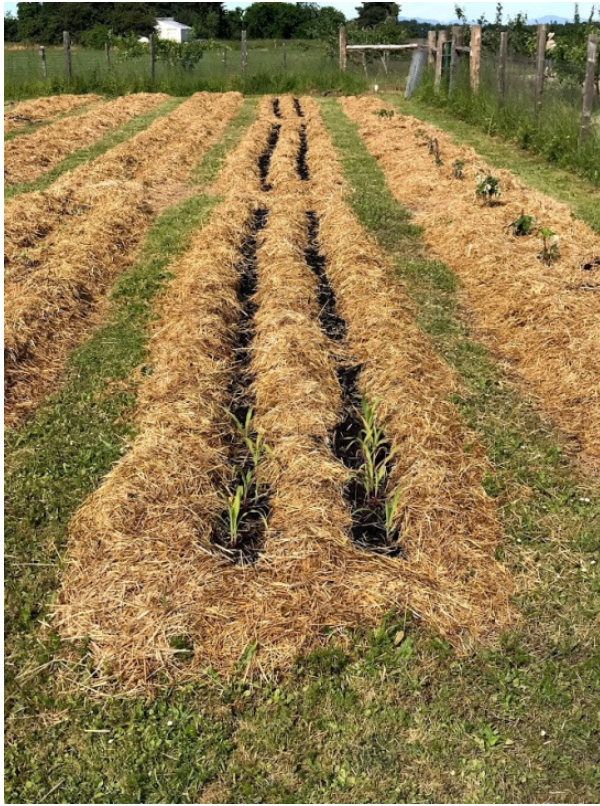
Our current hosts, Don and Penny Powers and Greg Smith, were essentially sheltering in place but puttering around working on projects that allow us all to keep proper physical distance. Greg has used scrap wood and donated screws to build 15 birdhouses for



Western Bluebirds, wrens, tree swallows etc. He also built a beautiful garden work bench that has a built-in sink for washing. Don built a nice frame to hold the "Simmons door", the door that was likely on or in the Simmons house that

has signatures on it from the 1870's. He built a shelter for our generator and a frame for the U.S. and world maps where visitors can pin their home towns. Penny has been tending the poultry and cleaning the coops (not fun!), keeping the driveways and walkways clean and converting feed sacks into reusable grocery bags for sale in the gift shop, but lately turned her sewing skills to making masks.





I've been doing some of the usual office work but also servicing the mowers, helping finalize the installation of the new drinking water system, scheduling service for the fire alarm and prepping windows on the house for painting. You may have heard about the flume gate stem breaking back in February- we had a contractor lined up to build a new stem and get the gate and turbine operational again but we're in a financial freeze so keeping the turbine running is on hold. With the amazing weather and the need to maintain mental health I've taken some time to make progress in the garden. Two Eagle Scouts (Mark Workman and Hayden Glen) got the fencing up over the winter then I built a gate and then Greg built a gate finally making the garden 99% chicken proof (one of our chickens can fly over the fence). I got the beds and paths lined out

and volunteer George Price got rid of the visible PVC pipes so the irrigation system will be our secret in the authentic historic garden (shh!). Volunteer Joel Hanson started seedling veggies last month and has been planting them. George also came through with straw for mulching the beds. Thanks to lots of work from lots of people, going back to 2013, the garden is back and ready to help visitors connect to what life was like at Thompson's Mills.

As for the future we as an agency are facing an extreme financial situation but the Mill grounds are still open every day. The mill building itself is not open yet- all visitor centers, museums, statewide are still closed. At this point the agency is planning to keep all of its parks open so I have set out lots of picnic tables, spaced appropriately throughout the grounds.

Bonus quiz photo: what animal climbed up on the head gate deck and jumped back into the water? Answer: OTTER

I hope you're all well and hanging in there.



Flu at the Mill 100 Years Ago

by Kristine Deacon

The 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic killed approximately five percent of the world's population, including 3,675 Oregonians. On November 7, 1918, Lizzie Wimmer became the first person in Albany to die of the flu, which quickly moved into Shedd's. When the epidemic hit Thompson's Mills, it changed the family for generations.

Patriarch Martin Thompson had died in 1910, leaving the mill to his sons Ott and Leo, and to his wife, Sophia. In 1918, Ott and his children lived with Sophia in the mill's house. Ott's brother Charles Peter and his wife, Caddie Carlton Thompson, and their children, ran a candy store in Shedd's and lived above it. Leo had died years before, leaving his share of the mill to Ott's son, Myrle.

The Thompson's Mills' archives show how the epidemic affected family feuds and finances for generations.

Caddie Thompson, 31, caught the flu in the winter of 1920. It appeared she had recovered, but the first day she came downstairs to the candy shop she dropped dead at the foot of the stairs. Charles Peter was unable to care for their children, who were raised by their Carlton relatives.

The archives contain a typewritten copy of a letter from Ott to the Internal Revenue Service, scheduling an appointment with an IRS agent to audit the mill's tax returns. The mill had difficulty filing its business taxes, Ott explains, because of the flu's impact on family and staff.

When Sophia died in 1928, Ott became sole operator of Thompson's Mills, in control of Myrle's share of the mill, since Myrle was a minor. Two decades of letters between Ott, John and Charles Peter were donated to Thompson's Mills by Martin Thompson, Charles Peter's son with Charles Peter's second wife. In one letter from John to Charles Peter, John writes that Sophia nursed Ott's family through the Spanish Flu.

Carefully gleaning information from the family papers provides a picture of how the Spanish Flu affected Thompson's Mills. It caused Caddie Carlton Thompson's death. We know that Ott's mother, Sophia, nursed Ott's family through the epidemic. And we know that the sickness in both the family and the mill's office staff led to an IRS audit, all this while World War I raged. Ott, perhaps anticipating that the United States would provide food to Europe during the war, had the silos built in 1917, greatly increasing the mill's capacity. During the war, the mill had its most profitable period, operating 24 hours a day, enjoying financial success while reeling from a global pandemic.

Are There Ghosts at the Mill?

by Carl Browning

A previous newsletter article introduced “The Haunted Mill”, a book for young readers that is for sale at the mill store. This small book was written by a previous resident of the Mill House, and the obvious question is, did she write this book from her personal experience? I don’t know if Margriet had any ghostly experiences in her several years at the mill, but I have heard from others on the possibility of possible haunting activities.

I remember a conversation I once had with an OPRD employee who lived in the Mill house for a while. Almost in jest, asked him one day if he thought the house was haunted. Without a moment’s hesitation he said YES! While my question was generally meant as a joke, I could tell his answer was serious. Another person who lived in the mill house had a similar story. Within the mill house, there is a wall of cupboards with glass doors between the kitchen and living area. This person told me she was sitting in the parlor area one night and saw someone walking through the kitchen. There was no other living person in the house at the time. During the time I lived in the house I had guests who were sure they “felt” the presence of others. I have had people tell me they saw shadows moving through rooms. I explained I thought they just saw the shadows of bugs on the light fixtures, but that explanation was not accepted.

The mill and the house certainly meet the basic requirement of a haunted structure. They are old; there are unexplained noises when the wind blows. The floors squeak and curtains blow away from the windows and sometimes a cupboard door might open up at night. For some of us, these are the conditions we would expect, but they have different meanings to others.

The question of the property being haunted caught the attention of a paranormal group and some years ago they brought their various spirit finding devices to seek answers. I do not understand the techniques they employed, but they did report they found and photographed orbs of energy, and were convinced they recorded conversations from the resident spirits. In one case they saw the hem of a dress hanging in a closet move, followed by the sound of someone saying “Don’t touch that”. They had photographs and recordings of other similar effects from both the mill and the house. While I found it a bit of a challenge to accept their conclusions, I do believe they were fully convinced that Thompson Mill is indeed haunted.

So is Thompson’s Mill and the mill house haunted...I’ll let you decide for yourself.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Q5eqnj3GYk>

The Thompson Mills Preservation Society web site (<http://www.tmpsonline.org>) has a link to this and other Thompson’s Mills content on YouTube. From the title menu click LINKS and scroll to the bottom of the list.

Some Events of the 40's and 50's

at Thompson's Flouring Mills

recalled by Larry Thompson

I remember 1953 as the year that Grampa Ott built the concrete dam on the Sodom Ditch, 500 yards below the fork of the Calapooia river. The Sodom Ditch was built in the mid 1890's to relieve the flooding in the winter. A Fresno-scraper and oxen were used to build the five-mile-long ditch to Butte Creek, which flows into the Calapooia River downstream from the mill. The ditch was three to five feet wide; however sixty years later when the Sodom dam was constructed, this ditch had grown to 90 feet wide.

Upstream from where the dam was located, the river deposited hundreds of yards of mixed sand and gravel. Grandpa Ott used this to make concrete for the mill dam. This wasn't top quality, but it worked. Several truck-loads of cement were hauled from Portland to the dam site to feed the five yard "Slate Mixer," It took about three to five weeks to mix and pour the concrete to fill the forms of the dam and the wings that penetrated about thirty feet in front and back of the nine-foot-high dam. My job at 12 years of age was to toss 10 to 15-pound rocks into the forms to save on the concrete consumption. Whew!

This work was done in June of '53 when the weather was warm. After a ten-hour day the boys were tired and oops, they forgot to clean out the mixer. On Monday morning they had to use a jack hammer to remove the dried concrete.

Later in July, I would accompany Grandpa Ott, in his 1949 Buick Straight-8 Dynaflow Roadmaster, over harvested fields of stubble to inspect for drift wood that would back up on the river. He was heavy on the metal on those rides (70 mph) which made it pretty exciting.

There will be more stories to share in the next newsletter.

Thompson's Mills Preservation Society

formerly known as the Boston Mill Society

In cooperation with the Oregon State Parks & Recreation Department, we support the mill, the other buildings, and the grounds that comprise Thompson's Mills State Heritage Site.

Thompson's Mills is the oldest operable water-powered grist mill in Oregon. We are dedicated to the preservation of the history of Thompson's Mills, its supporting structures, and the way of life that developed here from its inception. We also look towards the future by aiding efforts to educate the public about the significance of the mill and its impact on the history of agriculture in our region.

MEMBERSHIP – We thank all of you for your past and present support of the Thompson's Mills Preservation Society (formerly Boston Mill Society). Our dues structure is \$20/year for a single membership and \$30/year for a couple. We hope you will continue to support us in helping to preserve Oregon's last water-powered mill.

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Membership / Renewal / Gift (Please circle one)

Our dues structure is \$20/year for a single membership and \$30/year for a couple.

Note: Dues paid after Aug. 31 carries through the following year.

Mail this completed form, along with your check payable to:

Thompson's Mills Preservation Society
PO Box 1, Shedd, OR 97377

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**Thank you for helping to preserve
Oregon's last water powered mill.**