



Why the Mill came to be

by Jim Ballard - President

Early settlers to the Willamette Valley came for a variety of reasons. Some were escaping difficult conditions at home. Others were adventurers seeking free land and the opportunity for a new life. Whatever the reason though, many tasks awaited them once they arrived here...so much to be accomplished.

Arranging for food and shelter was among the first challenges the settlers faced. At the earliest opportunity, most planted crops, crops which, once harvested, would need to be processed. That's why a grist mill popped up in almost every community.

One such mill was constructed at Crawfordsville near today's Brownsville. After a short time, this mill was moved to a location that eventually became Boston. Today, you can visit this site along with family and friends.

Many recent improvements at the mill have been made thanks to members of Thompson's Mill Preservation Society. Your dues and donations make a huge difference, and we thank you for all of your support. We hope that, now the Mill is open once again, you'll be able to visit soon.

Current Mill Schedule (subject to change)

Effective May 26, 2021 – Aug 31, 2021

Guided tours of the mill are available Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays beginning May 28. Tours are available on demand — no reservations required. Tours last about 30 minutes and masks are required. Self-guided tours are not available. The grounds are open from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. daily. One loading dock door is open for viewing the mill from outside.

Call 541-491-3611 with any questions.

Mill Update

from the editor

Was it a labor of love, a moral imperative, or all in the line of duty? Ranger Tom Parsons has been spending some of his COVID-19 Lockdown time painstakingly scraping at layers of paint to uncover the original lettering advertising the Thompson's Garage. The Garage was, at one time, an additional revenue stream for the Thompson family. The sign had been painted over after the enterprise was suspended, but Tom's careful eye, a LOT of patience, and the recollections of the Thompson family, brought it back to the surface.

After Tom had completed the architectural archeology, local artist Lori Rodrigues was again contracted by TMPS for the restoration of the sign. Lori is the artist who, you may recall, did a spectacular job restoring her own artwork on the silos, following the extensive repairs performed to structurally stabilize them. As usual, Lori used period-correct materials and pigments for the sign restoration on the garage.



This activity was supported in part by a grant from the Oregon Cultural Trust, investing in Oregon's arts humanities and heritage and by the Linn County Cultural Coalition.

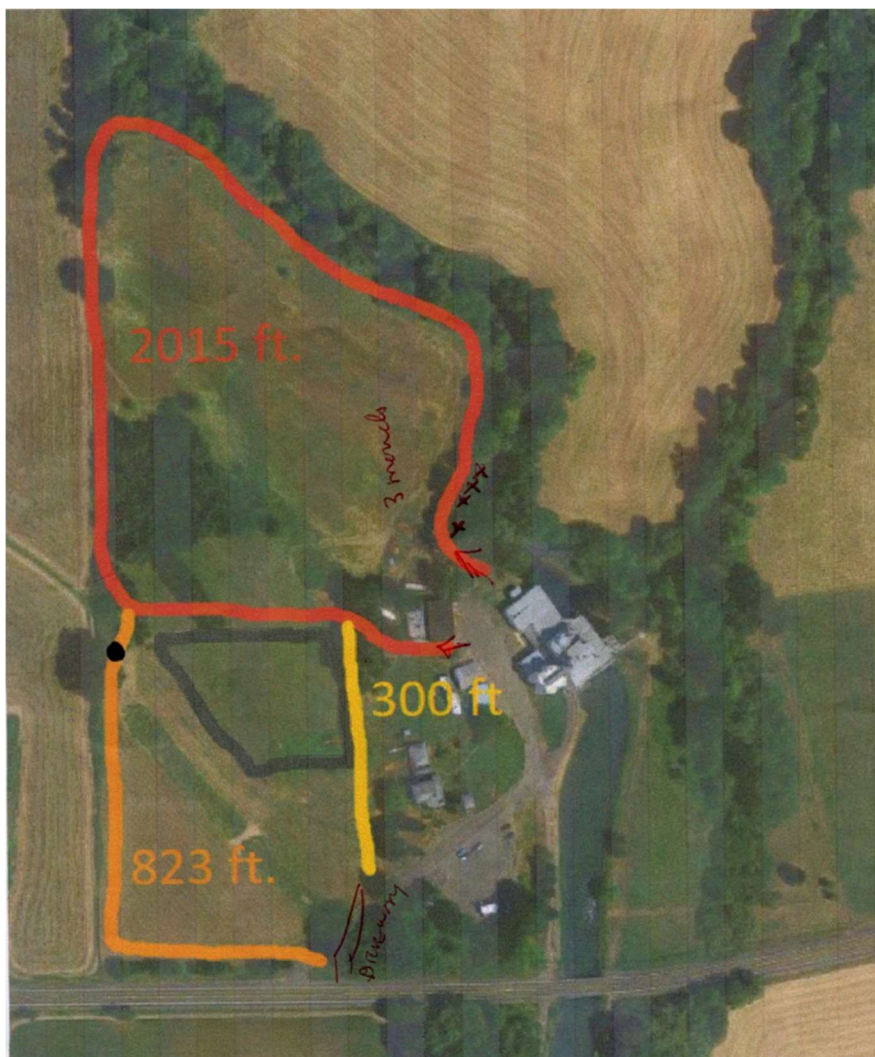


The Trail at Thompson's Mills

by Don Lyon

Thompson's Mills State Heritage Site is a mere infant as a state park (2007) but a grizzled old-timer when it comes to having lived through much of Oregon's history. The 20-acre site has stories to be told --all part of an exciting new project underway by Ranger Tom Parsons and the Board of the Thompson's Mills Preservation Society. A trail is being planned that will encircle the park property, telling stories of the Kalapuya Indians, the flora, fauna and riverine ways of the Calapooia and the birth and demise of the village of Boston. There are other stories too--the cider orchard and the 1930's garden clamor for your attention.

The Trail will be accessible to all--including those with limited vision or mobility. Handrails and a wheelchair-friendly hard packed surface are planned. Signboards will explain natural and man-made features in ways appropriate to both young and old. Benches will encourage leisurely observation and contemplation.



The Trail is almost one mile in length beginning at the Mill, following the Calapooia River, then passing through the site of Boston township before cutting through the Cider Orchard and Garden.

Let's imagine we are out for a stroll along the almost one-mile path. What will we see and experience? As we walk west from the old mill buildings and the newly painted Thompson's Garage we see where the tailrace rejoins the Calapooia River, a small but often feisty river, that rises in the Cascades (midway between the larger McKenzie and Santiam watersheds) and forces its way down a narrow canyon before entering the Willamette Valley at Brownsville. It finally discharges into the Willamette River at Albany. (Signboard: "The River creates a Community").

For over 14,000 years the Kalapuyan people spent the wet winters in multi-family long houses along the shores of the Calapooia River. They sat close to the fire to keep warm and were sustained by camas bulbs and other foods they had preserved. The men spent much of their time making arrowheads and knives from chipped obsidian. Over the centuries the favorite campsites rose from the marshy surroundings with the accumulated detritus of daily life. More than thirty mounds marked the course of the river. (Signboard: "The Centuries and Seasons of the Kalypuya People").

As the Trail follows the western edge of Park property it encompasses the site of a small settlement that has disappeared from view. By 1858 when Richard Finley and two partners found the ideal spot to locate their gristmill, much of the Willamette Valley had been claimed under the Oregon Donation Land Act of 1850 (and later variations). Nearby settlers were producing grain but getting it ground into flour was another matter. The new Boston Mill (as Thompson's Mills was originally called) was a godsend. Other services were needed too, and what better location for the enterprising entrepreneur than close to the gristmill--blacksmith, feed and seed, general mercantile and, of course, a church or two and a school. Boston was platted in 1861. The stage stopped at the New England-style town square and Boston Mills Post Office was established September 22, 1869, with William Simmons as Postmaster. Efforts to have the railroad routed through town failed, though, and when the right-of-way was established further west, businesses relocated, lock, stock and barrel, to the new community of Shedd's Station, 1.5 miles to the west. There is no physical trace of that original settlement, but the dreams and aspirations of those early entrepreneurs cry to be told (Signboard: "The Ghosts of Boston").

Turn of the (19th) Century photographs of the Mill reveal a cider orchard west of the Mill buildings. Those original apple trees are gone now but Ranger Tom Parsons along with Roy and Larry Thompson, have recreated a cider orchard grafting 23 apple varieties that might have been planted at the Mill and are noted for cider production. Having a number of varieties makes for the tastiest cider and extends the apple harvest from August through December. Fermented Cider was important to the pioneers for whom clean drinking water was not always available. In early land grants signed by President George Washington, applicants were required to plant a portion of their land in apples. John Chapman (aka Johnny Appleseed)

traveled the expanding territories west of the Mississippi creating apple tree nurseries to sell seedlings to settlers intent on claiming land (Signboard: "Cider--Pioneer Beverage of Choice").

Also, to the west of the Mill, lies the Garden-- still in its early stages of development. The garden has been fenced against the depredations of deer and the Mill's resident chickens. The clay soil is being amended with manure and compost. It will reflect the crops that were planted here from 1900 to 1930 as the Mill transitioned from Boston Mills to Thompson's Flouring Mills and the Mill Keeper's House was enlarged to accommodate hungry employees as well as the Thompson Family. We don't know for sure what plants and vegetables were planted here but old timers recollect that sturdy crops which could be dried or stored in a root cellar were included. Potatoes, tomatoes, squash, beets, onions, carrots and beans would be obvious choices for winter soups and stews. Volunteer Celinda Miller has compiled a detailed list of vegetable varieties that would have been available to the early gardeners. Kentucky Wonder beans would be eaten fresh and dried while the Great Northern variety would be dried for later use. Cabbages such as Wakefield and Savoy date to the late 1800's. For carrots it was Nantes and Danvers. Certainly, plenty of Boston pickling cucumbers were grown and Black seeded Simpson would have dominated the lettuce varieties. Old standbys like Laurentian rutabaga, Blue Hubbard squash and Swiss chard could always be relied upon and we imagine that Brandywine and the famous Mortgage Lifter tomato varieties would grace the table in August. (Signboard: The Mill Keeper's AA Garden).

Well, hikers--we have traversed The Trail and are back at the Mill Keeper's House. Our little stroll has provided a bit of history, a bit of ecology and an appreciation for the struggles that the early inhabitants overcame to make their life in this Willamette Valley--and we've enjoyed a bit of exercise, too! Come and visit and ask about The Trail.

Some Events of the 40's and 50's

Top salesman at Thompson's Flouring Mills

by Larry Thompson

Ronald Warren Townsend came to work for Ott Thompson during the summers while in high school in Turner, Oregon. He learned the functions of the mill from the bottom up during those summer days. When offered a full-time job at the mill he was elated. As it turned out there was a more tempting reason for accepting the job. He was smitten with the boss's daughter, Sylva. Turns out she was very receptive to his advances and they were married. They settled in a small house in Plainview, but when the two children arrived, Laurena and Clarence Ronald, they moved to a larger house in south Shedd and later to a larger home on Highway 99. Little did he know then that he would continue at the mill his entire life. Marrying the boss's daughter seemed to provide job security.

He soon became the fulltime truck driver at the mill developing a route and friendships with customers located within approximately a 100-mile radius of the mill. His truck driving job quickly developed into the Salesman position for the mill. While delivering the various mill products, he would stop by offering grain and feed supplies to all the stores, dairies, and local farms. Soon his customer roster was full, and his days grew longer. With his new position as salesman, he didn't drive the delivery truck anymore but graduated to a pickup. He was always up before 5 am every day and worked a long day. His grandson (Dr. Ronald Townsend) said he followed suit with grandpa's hours while practicing as a radiologist and still does even after retirement. Years later, when the grandchildren came to visit, they loved to go in the pickup truck with grandpa. He would make his stops where everyone was now a good friend. He would flirt with the ladies, eat a homemade meal now and then and always homemade pie.

Ron was grateful to have a job during the depression. He worked long hours during those days (six and a half days per week) and only took some time off to drop the family off and go pick them up from the coast during the summer vacation. He himself had no vacation days. Things changed slightly in 1947 when the mill stopped producing the flour on site. The flour was then purchased from Centennial Mills in Portland. At this time the wholesale price list included nearly 90 different products. These included cereals, seeds and mill feed, concentrates (molasses, bone meal and lime) hay and salt.

Ron's career finally ended when he retired in 1974 because the mill was sold and by then Ronald and Sylva owned a small percentage of the mill. In retirement one of his favorite snacks was popcorn with parmesan cheese which he often had with family and friends. Finally, he had time to enjoy the family.

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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Newsletter 7, August 2021

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 carry 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

(Please print clearly.)

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