

# SALEM LANDMARK

Newsletter of the Salem Historic Landmarks Commission



## THE RAILROAD COMES TO SALEM ~ Ian Johnson, Commissioner

Before the arrival of the railroad in Salem in 1870, moving the valley's agricultural and lumber products to the Portland docks was difficult. Most goods were sent down the Willamette River, which required carrying freight by land around Willamette Falls. To ease that passage, construction of two competing rail lines from Portland south to Salem began in April 1868, with a group of Portland financiers building along the west bank of the river and a Salem partnership on the east. Each held the hope of being the first to meet the Central Pacific Railroad and its western leg of the transcontinental railroad. The Salem Company prevailed and bought the failed competing line to become the Oregon & California Railroad, and later the Southern Pacific.



Salem's first railroad depot was constructed in 1871 over a mile east of downtown since the townspeople refused to pay the \$30,000 required to build the station closer to downtown. After fire destroyed the depot in 1885, a new Queen Anne-style depot was built in 1889 at the same site. Salem's citizens complained about the station being "way out on 12th Street;" however, horse-drawn street cars and later electric trolleys spanned the distance carrying passengers from the station to various destinations. The location of the depot shifted the city's development from along the river to inland toward the station. Soon a network of trolley and train tracks surrounded downtown in an "iron ring" along 12<sup>th</sup>, Union, Trade, and Front Streets.

The Salem, Falls City, & Western Railroad arrived on the other side of the river in September 1909, connecting West Salem with the region's outlying towns and logging camps. There still was no rail bridge across the river. To address that need, Southern Pacific crews designed and constructed the Union Street Rail Bridge.

To allow for ships to pass, the structure was designed with a vertical lift. A newspaper article in the *Oregon Statesman* of March 3, 1913, celebrated the opening of the span stating, "Salem is destined to be a railroad center and the principal city in the state outside of Portland."

With the expansion of the local rail system, the State's bustling capitol was a major destination, and in 1918 the Southern Pacific Railroad designed and constructed the current Beaux-Arts style depot as a "gateway" fitting of an ambitious and prospering town. The only station of this style in Oregon, the building features a symmetrical two-story blond brick façade decorated with colossal columns encompassed by large Roman arched windows. The interior included decorative plasterwork, Terrazzo marble floors, and, a special feature--a women's waiting room. The freight house from the 1889 station was kept on site, and still sits just south of the station.



Ironically, the construction of the Union Street Railroad Bridge and Southern Pacific Railroad Station corresponded with the rise in automobile ownership and an ever-expanding network of all-weather roads and highways. Although the railroad's importance continued, Salem's rail network was largely dismantled by the mid-twentieth century.

## ***From the Chair of the Historic Landmarks Commission*** ~~Ian Johnson

Summer is the best time to make necessary repairs and long-planned improvements to your home. If you're planning a project, there is a good chance that that project is now either exempt from review or can be approved quickly by City staff under the revised Historic Preservation Ordinance passed last year by the City Council.

Most work that requires a building permit requires design review, and some other projects--like window, siding, and door replacement -do not require a permit but may need to have historic design approval before the work can begin. Be sure to contact the city if you have any questions.

For those who plan to restore the street-facing side of

their buildings, matching grants of up to \$1,000 are available through the Residential Toolbox Grant Program. The pilot project will offer a maximum of 10 grants using funding from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and a private donor. Further details on how to apply for the grant along with the application materials are available on the Historic Preservation page of the City's website: [www.cityofsalem.net/Historic](http://www.cityofsalem.net/Historic).

If successful, and as funds allow, we would like to continue this program. It is our hope that it will help individual property owners improve their homes, while enhancing the irreplaceable historic character of our neighborhoods.

## **What's New with Salem's Preservation Program**

~~Kimberli Fitzgerald, Historic Planner

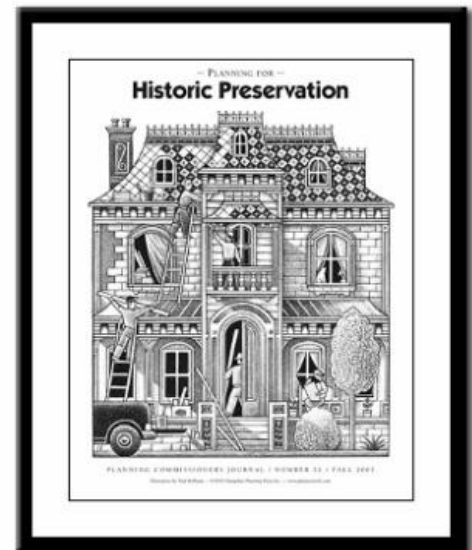
Since the adoption of our Historic Preservation Plan, we have successfully adopted a new historic preservation code which addresses some of the major concerns historic property owners had, such as increased administrative reviews and more flexibility for non-contributing properties.

We have also implemented a new property owner notification system for buyers of historic properties. This was identified as a priority in the Plan, as well as by City Council. Now when a property is being sold, the potential buyer receives a letter from us explaining the responsibilities (and benefits!) of owning a historic property--prior to them signing on the dotted line.

We've been keeping busy with our new Residential Toolbox Grant Program, where we are offering \$1,000 grants for residential front façade improvements and we're already looking for other funding for next year.

We just wrapped up a survey of Fairmount property owners, trying to see if they are interested in pursuing a new National Register Historic District. The neighbors are split regarding what they'd like to do, so we'll be looking into options for moving forward.

We are also updating our current photographs of every designated historic property in the City. You may have seen our photographer in her orange vest out in your neighborhood. These pictures are geo-coded at the time they are taken, and are then being integrated into our ArcGIS mapping system. This is part of a longer range project, where we are planning to have an interactive map available for the public where you will be able to click on your property and view all the historical information we have available here at the City.



On an informational note, we've discovered that so far this year the HLC and staff have already completed 31 historic review applications. That is the same amount as the total completed cases for all of 2010. Historic preservation is indeed alive and well in the city of Salem. Thanks to all of our property owners who work so diligently to preserve our special heritage.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about your historic property or our program.

## SAGA OF SALEM'S BRIDGES

~~Kurt Roedel, Commissioner

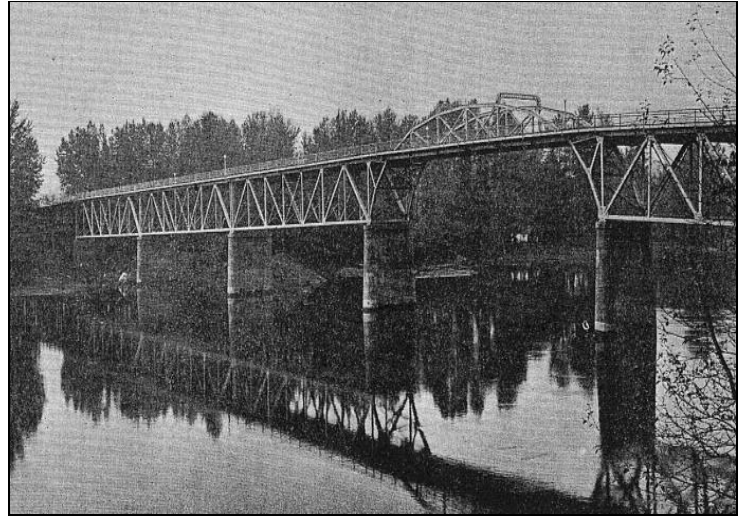
Transportation envelops our culture, past, present, and future. From Native American trails, wagon roads, ferries, railroads, rural highways and interstates, to mass transit, transportation is everywhere. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is currently considering constructing a third bridge over the Willamette River. This article examines the history and future of Salem's Willamette River Bridges.

In 1886, Marion and Polk County citizens joined together to construct the first bridge over the Willamette River, replacing a ferry operating since the 1850s. Although flooding destroyed the bridge in 1890, another bridge was completed shortly thereafter. The second bridge was truly a multi-purpose structure, providing transportation for automobiles, motorcycles, bicyclists, pedestrians, horse-drawn vehicles, and livestock.

During the early 1900s, an increase in population and the growing popularity of the automobile allowed the expansion of residential areas beyond Salem's core. In 1913, the Southern Pacific Railroad constructed a railroad bridge over the Willamette River, which has recently been rehabilitated to serve as a pedestrian/bicycle bridge connecting our fair city. The 1891 bridge was not designed for motorized traffic and required the construction of the Center Street Bridge. When the bridge opened in 1918, it was one of the largest highway bridges erected in the United States.

During the 1940s, the combined Marion/Polk County population reached almost 100,000 people, West Salem was incorporated into the City of Salem, and discussion of traffic congestion and the need for a second bridge was underway. The Oregon State Highway Department completed the Marion Street Bridge, the longest girder bridge of its type west of the Mississippi, in 1952. In the mid-1960s, a Salem Area Transportation Study recommended construction of a third bridge, and even a fourth bridge, with potential crossings ranging as far north as Pine Street and as far south as Mission Street. As funding was unsuccessful, ODOT reconstructed the Center Street Bridge and widened the Marion Street Bridge to four lanes.

Although plans to construct another Willamette River crossing have been simmering for 50 years, the same holds true as was stated in 1972, the ultimate location of a third bridge "will largely determine the city's growth and direction of growth" for the future. It seems most of that growth will be realized in West Salem and Polk County.



Center Street Bridge; 1918. (State Highway Commission)

Below: Rush hour on The Center Street Bridge, 1948.  
(Greater Oregon Bridge Association)



Today, as the population of Marion/Polk Counties reaches nearly 400,000 people, ODOT, the City of Salem, and its partners are forging a renewed effort to ease congestion across the Willamette River by constructing a third bridge, as the bridges support about 150,000 more people than when they were widened in the early 1980s, and current bridge traffic already exceeds ODOT's standards.

Salem and her bridges are intertwined in history. The third bridge, whenever it is constructed, will add a long-awaited chapter to our city's story.

For more information on the Salem River Crossing Project, please visit <http://www.salemrivercrossing.org>.

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We're on the Web!  
[www.cityofsalem.net/historic](http://www.cityofsalem.net/historic)

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