

# 'A Shady Place By The Old Millrace'

By BOB TWEDELL

After the 1937 war between Oregon and OSC on its banks, the old millrace flowed placidly along again until 1945, when floods tore out retaining walls and completed the destruction begun by a 1943 flood which destroyed the intake. The race went dry.

In the meantime, in 1938, the University bought property on the north side of the race, and east of the Anchorage, with the idea of converting it into the Junior Weekend Festival site.

During the next three years, plans developed for the relocation of the Southern Pacific railroad and for the construction of the new four-lane highway which is now being completed.

The University revived its plans, and Fred G. Cuthbeht, associate professor of landscape architecture at the University supervised the drawing of plans to convert the University property, and other property owned by the city, into a park area.

"The SP tracks will be replaced across the present race about halfway between what is now the race and the Willamette river," Bob Frazier wrote in the September 26, 1941 Emerald.

"Establishment of this right-of-way will probably be the first work on the project. The University, then, will have full use of the area between the right-of-way and the race. The area will extend east of Onyx street about 125 feet and west to the intersection of the race and the right-of-way.

"The race will be moved about 150 feet north of its present location at certain points near the east end of the campus. This will straighten the channel and allow widening near the Anchorage.

"A stage for canoe fete presentations will be built on the north side of the newly-channeled race about in a line with University street. Bleachers, planned to seat about 5000, will be built across the race from the stage. Wings on the bleachers will provide for an estimated 1000 auxiliary seating capacity. Up the race from this canoe fete area will be

an area in which the floats may be built."

An underpass was planned to provide safe transit across the new highway.

North and east of the stage was to be an informal sports area, and west of this a "passive sports" field, partly landscaped. A water garden was planned, to be tapped from the race, and situated below the race level, so that it would drain into the Willamette.

Two footbridges were to connect the "mainland" with the canoe fete area, and vehicular traffic on the "island" was to be prohibited, with the exception of University trucks servicing the area.

World War II put a temporary halt to the planning. When the war ended, and work was resumed on the highway and the railroad, the millrace was temporarily left in the lurch.

Finally, on May 16, 1946, after a determined drive by University students and townspeople had restored interest in the millrace, Eugene voters cast a majority of ballots favoring the proposal that the city should acquire the millrace property for highway relocation and improvements which had been planned before the war.

Two weeks later Earl M. Pallett, executive secretary of the University, said that a topographical survey of the millrace area had been planned for the summer in conjunction with the plans of the state highway department.

The millrace area was scheduled to become a University park in the plans for the "enlarged University." The campus section was



THIS 1909 PHOTOGRAPH of the millrace was taken east of the Anchorage. It shows the old stream in all its lovely pastoral beauty—shimmering tranquil waters, shaded glens, and grassy banks on which at night moonlight once traced lacy patterns through the trees.

to remain operative, but from Broadway to the tailrace, pipes were to be laid to carry off the flow, and then the race filled in.

Legal and financial problems stood in the way of these plans. As long as the city did not own the race, it could not spend any money on improvements and repairs. At the time, negotiations for the purchase of the "millrace property" were still going on with the Eugene Power company.

It was proposed that the University purchase the right-of-way and take over maintenance of the millrace, including repair costs, but Dick Williams, educa-

tional activities director, said, such a plan was beyond the financial ability of the University.

On October 30, 1946, at a hearing crowded with townspeople and students who went to argue for the purchase and restoration of the race by the city, the council voted to exercise its option to buy the millrace property.

For \$50,000 the city of Eugene acquired one of the most potentially beautiful and unique park areas in the United States.

The Emerald bannered the council's action with the headline "City Saves Millrace" and there was rejoicing around the quad as students excitedly discussed the possibility of renewal of canoe fete activities.

In July, 1947, the re-organized Millrace Protective association learned from city manager Deane Seegar that the city council wanted to give the millrace above Broadway to the University, if the University would maintain and operate it. One of the arguments for this plan was that the University would save \$3000 annually in water costs for irrigation purposes.

In spite of the obstacles, plans proceeded apace.

An editorial in the Oregon Sun (weekly summer edition of the Emerald), issue of July 3, 1947, commented, "Everybody says he wants the millrace back. It's like American womanhood, home, and mother. Everybody is for it.

"If everybody gets behind this thing, if we prod the city, the millrace property holders, and the University; if we give 'em no peace, then, and only then, have we a good chance of getting water in the millrace."

The MPA kept the ball rolling. There were frequent meetings with the city manager and the council. Engineers were consulted. Plans were discussed to incorporate the millrace area into the city park system, and to provide swimming places along its shady banks.

By the end of 1947, the picture looked somewhat like this:

The MPA had been granted \$10,000 in the city's 1947-48 fiscal budget for repair of the race.

Estimated costs of restoration ran as high as \$46,000, which included cleaning and repairing the race, and installing a chlorination plant so that swimming could be allowed.

Complicating the financial problems was the necessity of securing easements from property owners along the stream.

Part of the money worries was removed in the May, 1948 primary elections, when a special provision on the Eugene ballot authorizing sale of bonds up to \$20,000 was passed by voters to help finance the millrace project. However, it was also provided that the Millrace association had to match the city funds dollar-for-dollar.

The MPA drive got off to a fast start. At the first meeting, pledges of financial support sent the MPA's "paper larder" soaring to almost \$11,000. Seven fraternities along the race promised \$200 each; individual subscribers contributed \$1975. Tom Hazzard, speaking for the University, pledged \$3500 from students and \$4000 from alumni.

By October 1, 1948, the millrace future looked good. In cash, bonds, and pledges, the MPA and the city council had about \$40,000 to complete the restoration project.

The principal remaining problem was to decide whether the intake canal would be repaired or a pumping installation made to put water back into the dry stream-bed. The final, complete engineer's report was made at the December 13, 1948 council meeting, and the previous recommendation for the pumping installation was supported. The only changes made in the restoration plans was an upward revision of estimated cost.

The fund-raising and easement-signing continued, and 1949 began to pass by.

The "Battle of the Millrace" began on the morning of February 23, when owners of property where the millrace intersects Broadway began to fill the dry stream-bed with dirt. The owners, Thomas I. Chapman and Joseph H. Coke, told reporters they

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A FAMILIAR SIGHT to anyone who remembers the millrace when—, Branches of weeping willows brushing student couples as they paddled their way upstream. Purple grapes and blackberries hung over the water, and yellow water iris bloomed profusely in the shallows.