

**MARION DEAN ROSS/PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SALEM, OREGON, OCTOBER 18-20, 2013**

By Bernadette Niederer, Chapter Secretary



Oregon State Capitol (1938, Francis Keally, Trowbridge & Livingston)

In addition to reviewing paper presentations, booking venues and caterers, and arranging tours, the conference committee arranged for the weather to be on its best behavior for the Annual Meeting and Conference of the Marion Dean Ross Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians.

Centered on Salem, Oregon the Conference was themed "The Willamette River Valley: Settlers and Founders" and began with a tour of GeerCrest Farm, located roughly fifteen miles to the east of downtown. The site includes the R.C. Geer Farmhouse, built in 1850-51 and currently operates as a working farm and educational center run by a non-profit agency. Participants noted that while the farming and education programs are lively, much work is still needed on the historic house, particularly citing the need for a preservation plan.

The evening's events started with a tour of the Willamette Heritage Center which includes not only the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill (1895), but also several of Oregon's earliest houses that were moved to the site in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to development pressures. The substantially restored Jason Lee House (1841) and the associated Methodist Parsonage (1841) are considered the oldest houses in Oregon.



On tour at the Mission Mill. The 1847 Boon House in the background.

Following restorative socializing and snacking, the conference began in earnest with a panel session on the "State of the Willamette Valley Settlement Era Homesteads." The panel represented a collaborative effort between the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and Restore Oregon (formerly the Historic Preservation League of Oregon or HPLO) to preserve some of Oregon's oldest architectural resources. Moderator Brandon Spencer-Hartle, Restore Oregon's (RO) field programs manager reported that in the last two years he had received an increasing number of concerned phone calls regarding settlement era resources. Indeed, one of RO's programs, the "Oregon's Most Endangered Places List," has consistently featured settlement era resources since its inception in 2011, culminating in a listing for all "Oregon Trail Pioneer Farmsteads" in 2013. With support from the National Trust, RO subsequently commissioned a study that would provide a context for the past, present, and future of these resources. The resulting document was created by Liz Carter, preservation consultant, adjunct faculty at the University of Oregon, and the panel's first presenter.



Ed Teague introduces the presenters. Left to right: Peggy Moretti, Roger Roper, Kenny Gunn, and Liz Carter.

Liz defined the geographic parameters for the study as the Willamette Valley in order to have a manageable region as well as because the Valley was the primary goal of early settlers. The temporal boundary, 1841-1865 spans the time from the construction of the Jason Lee House and Parsonage to just before the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869. In terms of resource types, those studied were focused on pioneer-era dwellings and farm groupings in order to promote thematic, technological and stylistic cohesion. In general, settlers

initially built a rough shelter, followed by a cabin, a "good barn" and then a lumber house, a sequence that could take upward of six years to complete and result in ensembles of ten to fifteen buildings. Construction technology ranged from round and hewn logs to timber frame, box construction and finally to balloon framing. Stylistically, designs reflected the geographic origins of the settlers, but lagged behind those popular on the east coast.

The data for the conclusions drawn by Liz Carter's context statement was largely provided by Kenny Gunn, the evening's second speaker, working under the aegis of the State Historic Preservation Office. Kenny was tasked with re-surveying the known settlement era properties as well as with identifying additional resources that had been previously overlooked. The results were somewhat alarming, of the 311 known resources, 56 (18%) had been demolished since the 1970s. Another 38 had been substantially altered, to the point that they would no longer qualify for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Roger Roper, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, then talked about what SHPO can do in addition to surveys, including encouraging the creation of a Multiple Property Document (MPD), which would make it easier to list additional properties to the National Register. The final presenter, Restore Oregon's Executive Director Peggy Moretti discussed the search for creative solutions to ensure the continued use and thereby the existence of Settlement Era structures. She particularly emphasized that House Museums, once a stalwart of preservation, are rarely viable these days.

Saturday's paper sessions took place at Pringle Community Hall, a venue supplied courtesy of the Salem Historic Landmark Commission. Following introductory remarks by Chapter President Ed Teague and Joy Sears, representing the Salem Landmark Commission, Bill Booth read a salute to our chapter's founding members that was written by Miriam Sutermeister and Grant Hildebrand. The full text thereof will follow in a future blog post. Greater detail on individual presentations will follow as well, but for now here's a brief summary.



The Presenters: Bill Booth, Liz Carter, Holly Borth, Don Peting, Doug StanWiens, Kirk Ranzetta/Leesa Gratreak/Patience Stuart, Chris Bell.

The first group of paper presenters was introduced by Phillip Mead, Associate Professor, University of Idaho. After participating in the panel on the previous night, Liz Carter returned to the podium once again to present "Searching for the Charles and Melinda Applegate Cabin in Yoncalla." The project was an

interdisciplinary undertaking between archaeologists and University of Oregon Historic Preservation students to locate the sites for these two features using oral histories, Applegate family records, a systematic grid search, and metal detectors.

The 2010 demolition of the Angell-Brewster House built in 1855 near Lebanon spurred the re-survey of unincorporated Linn County, Oregon by a group including our second presenter Holly Borth. Of the 87 resources identified only 53 appear to remain. This survey was also used as a resource for the SHPO-led survey conducted by Kenny Gunn and discussed during the previous night's panel.

Don Peting's presentation, "Mahlon Harlow, Willamette Valley Pioneer: His Influence and Legacy" highlighted the life of an extraordinary man, but perhaps a typical early settler. Harlow's succinct diary entries rarely fail to mention the weather, and also note his lending aid to the construction projects to numerous of his fellow pioneers, as well as his own progress in constructing his house.

After a brief intermission, Diana Painter, National Register and Survey Coordinator for the Oregon SHPO introduced the next set of presenters beginning with Doug StanWiens, a teacher at Boise High School whose paper titled "Along the Oregon Trail: Using Architectural History to Connect National History Curriculum to Boise's Past and Present," described an innovative approach to education using architecture to illustrate local and nation-wide patterns in history. His interdisciplinary approach introduced students to architectural history while developing photography, social media, and photography skills and made students more aware of the community they live in.

Patience Stewart, Leesa Gratreak and Kirk Ranzetta of URS Corporation, a world-wide engineering, construction and technical services consulting firm, presented "Pioneers of Place on Portland's Suburban Frontier: The Oak Hills Subdivision." While the title would seem to indicate adherence to the conference theme, Oak Hills was established in the 1960s rather than the 1860. However, their witty titular attempt to conform is greatly appreciated. Through the attempts of the presenting team, Oak Hills was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the first Mid Century subdivision to gain that distinction in Oregon. Factors that contributed to the high level of integrity that made the listing possible include careful planning at the outset to create a community that would be appealing over a long period of time, leading to both long-term residencies and limiting the desire for alterations.

"Cascadians atop the Cascades: Public Ski Lodges Designed for the Willamette Valley" by Chris Bell of the Oregon Department of Transportation. A total of three lodges were built in the Santiam and McKenzie Pass areas to support the emergence of recreational skiing in the 1930s. Unlike Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, which continues to delight visitors to this day, these were less

successful ventures, with one demolished at an early date, one repurposed, and one mothballed.

The paper presentations were followed by the annual general meeting. The highlights: Elections! Diana Painter was elected to the chapter Presidency, with Mimi Sheridan continuing on as Treasurer and Bernadette Niederer continuing as Secretary. The Vice Presidential position remained vacant as no one was willing to commit. Anyone reading this is encouraged to apply for the position. Really, it isn't all that much work.

The Board announced that the 2013 Elisabeth Walton Potter Research Award was given to Liz Carter (Eugene, Oregon) to further her project on African-American Pioneer residences in Oregon and to Anne Marshall (University of Idaho, Moscow) for her continuing work on the Native American Museum at Warm Springs. Congratulations to both! The Board also decided to lend publication support to Thaisa Way (University of Washington, Seattle) for her pending book on landscape architect Richard Haag. The Board is looking for committee members to assist with the 2014 Potter award selection as well as to work on establishing a new award named after our stalwart Treasurer emeritus Shirley Courtois. The latter is designed to encourage new membership by aiding potential presenters to travel to our conference and annual meeting.

Our 2014 meeting is slated for Seattle. Suggestions for 2015 include Vancouver, B.C.; Jacksonville, OR and Astoria, OR. Note that while we do rotate among our member states (theoretically British Columbia should be our next venue), the conference location is generally determined by the willingness of volunteers at a given location to set the program.



Elisabeth Potter inspires the troops.

On a tour of Salem's Capitol Precinct one might expect, in addition to the advertised Capitol, an occasional dignified church, an august Willamette University building, or the creation of a name brand architect. However, under the guidance of Elisabeth Potter, such a tour quickly evolves into a primer on being aware of one's surroundings. While there was indeed the Oregon State Capitol (main building 1938, by Francis Keally, Trowbridge & Livingston), the First United Methodist Church (1871 plans by Cass Chapman), and the YWCA Building (1952-1954, by Pietro Belluschi), there was also the Church Street Sewage Pumping Station (1954), the Robert Lindsey Tower Senior Apartments built as part of the urban renewal movement in 1976, and the "Theatrical Heartscape" mural painted in 1984 on the back of the historic Elsinore Theater.

More touring followed, with a visit to the Oregon State Hospital including the Dome Building (1912, by E.M. Lazarus) and the new Museum of Mental Health in the historic J Building (1883, by W.F. Boothby). The J Building was the subject of a protracted preservation battle that led to the listing of the State Hospital Complex on the National Register in 2008. The Dome Building, which is included in the listing as a contributing resource, is currently considered one of Oregon's most endangered buildings by Restore Oregon. Currently in use by the Oregon Department of Corrections, the state plans to sell and redevelop the property.



Preservationist Hazel Patton leads a tour of the new Museum of Mental Health in the rehabilitated J Building.

The chock-a-block full day concluded with a dinner at Gamberetti's Italian Restaurant followed by a keynote address, "Oregon's Capitol: The Intersection of Tradition and Modernism," delivered by Leland M. Roth. After an overview of the development of capitol buildings as a distinct building form, Roth presented selected entries from the 1936 competition to construct a new Oregon State Capitol.

The conference concluded on Sunday October 20 with tours of the Deepwood Estate and Historic Downtown Salem. Many thanks to all who participated in the 2013 Annual Meeting and Conference of the Marion Dean Ross Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians.

Links!

More Photos:

- SAH/MDR Flickr Group: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/mdrsah/>

Tours:

- GeerCrest Farm and Historic Society: http://www.geercrest.org/GeerCrest_Farm/Welcome.html
- Mission Mill/Willamette Heritage Center: <http://www.willametteheritage.org/>
- Dome Building "Most Endangered" Listing: <http://restoreoregon.org/dome-building-salem/>
- Oregon State Hospital Museum of Mental Health: <http://oshmuseum.org/>
- Deepwood Estate: <http://www.historicdeepwoodestate.org/>

State of the Willamette Valley Settlement Era Homesteads Panel Discussion:

- Pioneer Farmsteads of the Willamette Valley “Most Endangered” Listing: <http://restoreoregon.org/pioneer-farmsteads/>
- Context for Settlement Era Properties of the Willamette Valley http://restoreoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Pioneer-Houses-and-Homesteads_web.pdf
- List of resources, Oregon Historic Sites Database, go to http://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_main and under “Group Name” search for “Settlement Era Resources of the WillametteValley.”

Paper Sessions:

- “Searching for the Charles and Melinda Applegate Cabin and Blacksmith Shop in Yoncalla,” by Liz Carter: http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/entry/view/applegate_house/
- “The Linn County Survey,” by Holly Borth: List of resources, Oregon Historic Sites Database, go to http://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_main and under “Group Name” search for “Linn County Settlement Era Survey.”
- “Mahlon Harlow, WillametteValley Pioneer: His Influence and Legacy,” by Don Peting. First Baptist Church of Eugene “Our Story,” <http://www.fbceugene.com/discover/history>
- “Along the Oregon Trail: Using Architectural History to Connect National History Curriculum to Boise’s Past and Present,” by Doug StanWiens: <http://boisearchitecture.org/>
- “Pioneers of Place on Portland’s Suburban Frontier: The Oak Hills Subdivision,” by Patience Stuart, Leesa Gratreak, and Kirk Ranzetta: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak_Hills,_Oregon, Oregon Historic Sites Database, go to http://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_main and under “Group Name” search for “Oak Hills Neighborhood RLS 2011.”

Keynote Address:

- Oregon State Library, “The Competition for a New Capitol” http://www.oregon.gov/osl/GRES/Capitol_Anniversary/Pages/Competition.aspx