

We are sometimes confused by the Salem Ditch, the Stayton Ditch, the Santiam River, the Main Canal, and of course Mill Creek. Well, I am. Usually *creeks* are natural watercourses; *ditches* (or *canals*) are man-made (dug). I have quoted two fine articles here to clarify. The **bolding** is mine. Photos and comments follow these articles.

First article: Ernst Lau and Gregg Olson, Santiam Heritage Foundation, Historic Downtown Area of Stayton, Multiple Property Submission, nomination document, 2006, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

In 1866, Drury Smith Stayton, an early resident of the community of Sublimity, Oregon, purchased 41 acres of heavily forested land near the North Santiam River, about two miles south of Sublimity. The land had originally been part of the Donation Land Claim (DLC) of Stephen Porter but at the time of the sale was owned by James Lynch whose DLC bordered Porter's on the west.

Ten years before Stayton's transaction with Lynch, a group of Salem, Oregon entrepreneurs had acquired an easement across Lynch's property to dig a ditch to divert water from the North Santiam into Mill Creek, a seasonal watershed that runs through a valley between Sublimity and Stayton. Mill Creek empties into the Willamette at Salem and had been used by the early settlers of Salem for waterpower.

The enhanced stream flow from the successful 1857 *Salem Ditch* diversion permitted Salem to build larger water-powered mills with the expectation of year-round operation.

While giving rise to several mills in Salem including the Willamette Woolen Manufacturing Company and the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill, these diversions point to the significance that water power held for Stayton as well as other communities in the Willamette River Valley.

Drury Stayton's plan was to create a similar but shorter diversion of the river to provide water power opportunities on his newly purchased property. He and members of his family began digging the necessary ditches and by 1868 had a small water-powered wool carding plant in operation followed in 1870 by a sawmill. A six-block town site was platted, named and given a post office in 1872. By 1878, six water-powered industries were operating on the *Stayton Ditch* and the town had a population of around 300.

More or less paralleling the growth of the town was an increased use of Stayton as a place to cross the North Santiam River. Ferry service was available from at least 1870 and an inter-county bridge was completed in 1889. Stayton's 1st Ave. is the north-south road leading to the river crossing.

By 1878, a fairly comprehensive and yet primitive road network had been established in Marion County. Stayton was advantageously situated within this network at the intersection of two important roadways. Stayton's 1st Ave., for instance, is connected to the older town of Sublimity via the only foothills north/south route on the east side of the Willamette Valley. This route is now called the Cascade Highway. Washington Street, situated four blocks north of the original town grid, was the only Marion County route leading from Salem to Mehama and into the Cascade Mountains. While Stayton was located at a strategic road intersection, it had the misfortune of being largely bypassed by the early railroads. During the 1880's north/south and east/west rail lines each missed Stayton by several miles.

Goods shipped by railroad had to be picked up and hauled up to ten miles from the nearest rail links in Kingston and Turner. The lack of immediate rail service was a serious disadvantage for the town's industries and arguably hindered its development. While larger communities such as Salem and Albany were comparably well served by railroads and road networks, many smaller Willamette Valley

communities, such as Scio and Lebanon, were completely missed by the railroad. In response to railroad alignments, some communities, like Jefferson and Shedd, relocated themselves entirely, while others such as Silverton constructed narrow gauge rail connections to larger trunk lines. The residents of Stayton never took the rather drastic and expensive steps of relocating their community or building a trunk line (at least until 1965). Serviced by good network of roadways and plentiful sources of water power, Stayton was able to weather economic strains while others failed.

Despite these shortcomings, Stayton still drew merchants to service the various industries in town and the people who worked there. In 1871 a young Sublimity man, W. H. Hobson, set up a general merchandise store in a vacant building near the Marion County side of the Santiam ferry crossing with the intent of disposing of some merchandise his father had taken to satisfy a debt. Business was so brisk that Hobson soon relocated his store onto one of the Water Street lots of the new town of Stayton and continued as a storekeeper, in various locations, for 40 years. Other merchants and providers of service soon followed.

Second Article: The Creeks of Salem

Salem has had an abundance of waterways from its earliest days. It is believed that in ancient times the North Santiam River emptied into the Willamette River by flowing through what is now downtown Salem rather than flowing south of the city as it does today.

Mill Creek, perhaps Salem's best known creek, originates in the hills on the south edge of Silver Falls State Park. In the period 1840 to 1841 missionaries built Salem's first grist and saw mill along this waterway. Unfortunately, the mill was frequently idle because of the light flow of water in Mill Creek.

In 1855 this situation was rectified when settlers cut through the gravel bar at Stayton, east of Salem, thus bringing Santiam River water into Mill Creek. It is said there was great celebration at the newly-established Willamette Woolen Mill when the first surge of water passed. (Today this man-made canal is known as the Salem Ditch.)

In approximately 1864 a dam was built in the vicinity of present day State and 20th Streets; it was reconstructed in about 1915. At Waller Dam (so named because the land was donated by Reverend A.L. Waller) Mill Creek splits into "the millrace" and North Mill Creek. The millrace runs along Ferry Street, (where it once powered the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill) and through the campus of Willamette University.

The millrace, a man-made channel, was originally constructed in 1864 for power generation. Over the years it has been utilized by a lumber mill, Boise Cascade, an oil company, and a power generation station.

North Mill Creek winds its way in a generally northwesterly direction through Salem until it empties into the Willamette River near the foot of "D" Street NE.

Shelton Ditch, also a man-made canal, was built in the mid-1800's. It flows from Mill Creek east of Airport Road, through a corner of the Main Post Office property, and through the southern edge of downtown Salem. Shelton Ditch continues along the north side of Pringle Park before merging with Pringle Creek to form South Mill Creek.

Pringle Creek is formed from several smaller streams. It flows between Bush's Pasture Park and historic Deepwood estate and along the south side of Pringle Park. Each Spring a stretch of this creek displays wild blooming camas blossoms used by Native Americans and pioneers as a source of food.

Other creeks in Salem include Clark Creek, Jory Creek, Battle Creek, Croisan Creek, and Claggett Creek. Glen Creek and Brush Creek flow through West Salem.

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But the Salem/Stayton Ditch had other uses. Following the natural watercourse of Mill Creek, it runs through our backyard a mile and a half east of Aumsville. We exercise our water rights for irrigation as many others do.



photo©Henry Strobel

Early Stayton, besides the Catholics, had a good selection of other churches. Indeed its founder, Drury Stayton, also one of the original trustees of Sublimity College, had become a Baptist minister in Stayton. He died in 1875, but this leads me to the charming photo on the next page, illustrating another of the uses of the Stayton Ditch as it flowed through the town of Stayton. Henry Strobel

(see next page)



BAPTISM: The waterways in Stayton were credited with helping provide an early industrial base of mills in the city. But they also served as baptismal sites, such as this religious experience of about 1895. Stayton's Baptist congregation is shown using the Salem Ditch for its immersion ritual. Special to the Statesman Journal / Photo courtesy of Ernst Lau

According to the July 20, 1972 *Stayton Mail*, Mrs. James S. Taylor is being baptized. Moses Alexander Stayton 1846-1919, son of Drury Smith Stayton 1818-1875, is standing by the tree in the center. Mrs. Nettie Jones remembered seeing this ceremony many times. The congregation would gather across the ditch from where the hotel was later built.