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Without a Canoe

Flipping through old Oregon yearbooks, one can't help but notice a place central to student life at the University of Oregon: the Eugene Millrace. If you know what the Millrace looks like today it might be difficult to imagine taking an afternoon jaunt in a canoe down a canal, finding shade under the Alders and splashing your partner to ease the heat of the sun which emerged from months of hiding. Just looking at the sepia toned and black and white photos of laughing students strikes a nostalgia for an easy-going study break. Yet, this nostalgia hits reality as one wonders about the ghost of the Millrace's recreational past. As Jeannie Webb, an alumni of the Gamma Phi sorority that prided itself on its beautiful millrace location notes, "the way we saw ourselves affected the millrace."¹ In other words, the way the millrace was utilized for recreational purposes was a general reflection of the way society valued itself and its free time. Following this logic, the current state of the millrace is a reflection of who we've become: more focused on larger social issues, but in a way this leaves one inattentive and disconnected to oneself, the places, and people directly around him or her.² The cycle of trashing the millrace, its rank aroma, lethargic flow, and its warzone of tree debris begets itself. Weekends don't include an amusing active tug of war game on the millrace, they include parties centered on getting buzzed from alcohol. There's an intensity which exists today, that emerged as Millrace captivating recreational traditions declined. I would argue the Millrace's past

¹ Webb, Jeannie. Interview. 18 May 2017.

² "Canoe Fete". Lane County Historical Society. Youtube. 11 June 2017.

recreational activities were a healthier way to spend time and lended a positive, desired appearance to the University. Furthermore, learning from its past and present recreational uses can guide us to a new recreational vision that reflects both who are and who we want to be, and, in turn, change the way we see ourselves and our relation to the Millrace.

Although the Millrace did not begin as Eugene's waterway recreation mecca, it transitioned into such naturally. Recreation itself, is defined as "a refreshment of strength and spirit after work, or a hobby"³ The dawn of the Millrace began in the year 1850, when Hilyard Shaw with the help of Avery A. Smith connected two natural sloughs, for the purpose of powering industrial mills. ⁴ Thirty years later, in 1884, mother nature brought ice and snow to Eugene. Citizens of Eugene who had built their homes along the race put on their skates and ice skated the surface of the frozen Race. This is the first documented utilization of the Millrace for a hobby. The Millrace, was for sometime, multi-use: sharing recreation alongside its primary use for industry. In the year 1890, a flood tore up the race's intake. The new diversion dam was justified because it meant saving the millrace for the purpose of powering companies such as *Eugene Electric Light Company* and allowing travel for companies such as the *Eugene Canning and Packing Company*. This meant the water kept flowing to power the mills, and people would begin to take advantage of the abundant water in their backyard. In the same year as the flood, Edward J McInahan, whose main occupation was a poultry farmer, capitalized on the rising interest of recreation on the power canal and opened up the first boathouse. ⁵ The boathouse, located on Ferry street at the beginning of the artificial connection between the two natural sloughs was close enough to the university, founded in 1876, to serve students, and close enough

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Web. 11 June. 2017.

⁴ "Eugene Millrace: A History". City of Eugene, 1979, 2

⁵ "Tariff on Eggs to be Urged by Poultry Men" The Register Guard, 22 Jan 1916.

to a growing downtown to serve community members. The rental business allowed for a greater variety of socioeconomic classes to be able to recreate because it cost less than owning a boat - a practice most likely reserved for the wealthier persons with extravagant houses and lawns backing to the Millrace. This rise in recreational interest in the United States had to do with people's relation to their jobs, and how this affected their amount of free time and disposable income. According to *Gale groups* "1878-1899 Sports and Recreation: Overview", due to more jobs in big business that required strict hours and one's lesser personal investment in a company as compared with previous involvement small business, meant the emergence of both more leisure time and more disposable income. Additionally, universities were establishing themselves and initiating sports programs - the first college sport was rowing. In the last few decades of the 19th century, these factors contributed to the increase in the American people's recreational interest and allowed for more people to engage in hobbies. Citizens of Eugene, working in factories along the millrace, then spending their leisure time at the canal were no exception. McClanahan's boathouse initially rented skiffs, a "flat-bottomed row boat" meant for one-person.⁶ When investigating the archives through the end of the 1800's, one still finds pictures of steamboats being used for industrial purposes. The turn of the century brought the transition into the Mill Races recreational heyday .

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Millrace materialized into a well-regarded and popular tradition for students and community members. It held an entrepreneurial, creative, competitive, and romantic spirit - and over the years was a rollercoastering reflection of what people desired the Millrace to be, and how they wanted their University and communities to be.

⁶ Merriam Webster Dictionary. Web. 11 June. 2017.

The decline of industry due to technological advances like the railroad, made leisure time that much more abundant. The Millrace was indeed a convenient, already established place.

Canoeing remained the cinch of recreation as Frank Chamber opened a second boathouse at the intersection of 8th street and the millrace in 1906. Its owner was F.L. Chambers, who had recently been sued by affluent residents along the Race for his company's dredging actions. The skiffs were replaced by canoes, which could have contributed to the community aspect of two to four people enjoying a canoe ride.⁷ The most popular boathouse to open was The Anchorage: its time of nearly fifty years it held outdoor dining, canoe rentals, hosted tea parties for sorority and banquets for clubs and community members, swimming, and even Bill Hayward was said to have slid from his room on top of The Anchorage into the Race for a morning swim.⁸ Paul Bonds, the original builder of the "shack" (The Anchorage) said he "intended to make the raceway the recreational spot of Eugene"⁹ Likewise, the UO canoe club formed in 1913, and hoped "to be one of the most worthwhile clubs at the University"¹⁰. With high aspirations for the recreational future of the Millrace on the mind of many Eugenians, alongside the Race's declining industrial use - students at the UO began an enduring tradition which invited creativity and community: the canoe fete.

The canoe fete was a sign of the times for the Millrace. It was a glitzy, vibrant parade that kept the Millrace beautiful and helped maintain interest in the Millrace during the later half of the 20th century. According to the 1913 Oregana yearbook, the newly formed UO Canoe club hoped to "make the favorite spring pastime (canoeing) more attractive... the club will cooperate

⁷ Eugene Millrace: A History

⁸ Tweedell, Bob. "Ducking Stool' was once Millrace Equipment" 28 April 1949.

⁹ Tweedell, 1949.

¹⁰ Oregana yearbook, 1913.

with the Junior class in holding a spring canoe carnival and regatta”¹¹. Thus, with leisurely play in mind and an eye toward enjoyable tradition, the canoe fete was set for the annual “Junior weekend”. The first fete happened in 1915, and drew a crowd of over 2,000.¹² Canoe fetes had an annual theme, involved lighting, music and plenty of chicken wire and colored tissue paper. The plethora of pictures and newspaper clippings available in archives goes to show the draw of the event’s unique floats. The canoe fete even garnered national attention on multiple occasions over the years: Bing Crosby endorsed it in 1935, Jimmy Rodgers “entertained” in 1962, and Nat King Cole and his band were present in 1964¹³ and “newsreels and coast to coast broadcasts were made”¹⁴. Fete activities included students, mostly from Fraternity and Sorority houses, visiting family members for Junior weekend festivities, and community members. Scott Taylor, a resident on 16th and Hilyard as a boy, recalls feeling like a mascot to the fraternity houses and helping build the floats for the canoe fete of the early 50’s.¹⁵ This kind of collaboration between houses and the community meant that during times of distress for the Race’s fluctuating flow and continued maintenance, it had enjoyed support from multiple segments of the community. Floods in the early 1940’s left the Millrace race dry - but thanks to a collaborative effort on the part of UO students, alumni, city of Eugene citizens, and the Millrace association, the Mill was temporarily restored. Unfortunately, the emergence of highways after the second World war created culverts which stopped a sufficient flow of water.¹⁶

¹¹“ Canoe Fete”. 2006.

¹² “Eugene Millrace: A history”,6,, lists the year 1915 as the first time the “night parade” was held. This would align with the 1913 Oregonian’s note that canoe club member began discussing a “spring canoe carnival” with the Junior class. However, a Eugene Register Guard newspaper article titled “Annual canoe fete scheduled for May 12th” from April 25th, 1961 notes it is the fete’s “50th anniversary”.

¹³ “ Canoe Fete”. 2006.

¹⁴ “Eugene Millrace: A History”. 1979, 6

¹⁵ “Eugene Millrace: A History”. 1979, 6

¹⁶ “Millrace Dreams near Reality”. The Register Guard. 06 May 1949

The stories of past recreation don't stop at canoeing and the canoe fete; the Millrace Olympics were also held on Junior weekend: swimming races, freshman-sophomore tug-of-war battles, and canoe jousting all appear in the pages of 20th century Oreganas. Less officially, getting "Millraced", or dumped in water was a common occurrence. Additionally, in UO journalism student Bob Tweedell's series of articles about the Millrace in 1949, he notes a practice called "ducking": a practice reserved for freshman and sophomore fraternity pledges in which one would sit in a chair- the "ducking stool"- which was secured to a long plank. The plank would then be "finessed" into the water and fully submerge the unlucky duckee. This was practiced year round.¹⁷ The possibility of fishing was present, but the Millrace was no longer a desirable place to do so by the mid 60's.¹⁸

Beyond the natural disasters and political Millrace battles that contributed both to canoe fete and recreational relevance at different times between the years of 1915 till the mid 1980's, it also fluctuated with the highs and lows of the University's interest and involvement. Because the problems or lack thereof in society were often reflected in how the student body chose to spend its time, it meant the manifestation of more or less time spent advocating and planning an extensive, expansive canoe parades.¹⁹ While the canoe fete was designated a "way of life" in one Oregana yearbook during its early years, the same could be said on why the Canoe Fete declined. Even before the last Canoe fete was held, in 1971 it was noted by the Daily Emerald "in view of the time, Canoe Fete does seem a little extraneous"²⁰ A former Alphi Phi noted during her time at the University from 1959-1963, "we ... d[idn't] go too overboard, d[idn't] get in much

¹⁷ Tweedel, "Ducking Stool' was once Millrace Equipment" Register-Guard, Eugene, OR, 20 April 1949

¹⁸ "Canoe Fete". 2006.

¹⁹ For more information on how WW2 affected the Millrace's use and decline in popular use, refer to Sylvia Titterington's Millrace project.

²⁰ "Canoe Fete". 2006.

trouble, and d[idn't] do anything that w[ould] change things too much".²¹ Thus, as the 1970's political movements emerged, the canoe fete, and even canoeing as a leisurely recreation activity definitely declined.

Presently, after decades of dreaming of "a revival, generating artists renderings, piles of planning documents and hundreds of inches of newspaper columns about the 2-mile-long stream "²² the Millrace is at a standstill. While the culture at the University, remarks a past Canoe Fete participant Malcolm Scott, is "less calm, [less] cohesive" the Millrace's potential for revitalization to its past character is either an afterthought or absent from the majority of this generation's thinking. Yet, in a way the Millrace has become what it can be. During a time when little care and cost has gone into maintaining the Race, students and community members have found a way to utilize it. For example, a video of the "Millrace Race", reveals a tradition held by by the Alpha Omega house in the early 2000's, in which members are jumping in the race and swimming for a stretch.²³ Similar stories can be heard of other fraternities and sororities. Today, the highest student use of the Millrace appears to be appease jokes, bets, and initiations, and not always out of the influence of alcohol. Just to note, in an era of legal proceedings being a popular case of action, leaving the Millrace as it is seems to be potentially legally damning. Another example of its current recreational uses is birding. As the vegetation along the Race has increased, community members and interested professors enjoy Bird watching and taking plants identifications. Afterall, learning is a hobby for some. If its previous traditions are

²¹ Margo Peterson, qtd in "Canoe Fete". 2006.. Jeannie Webb, '63 graduate and Gamma Phi alumni noted women were "raised to be submissive creatures" and women tended to go to school "not to get an education but to find a husband"

²² Deitz, Diane.

²³ Alpha Omega millrace race III video

too frivolous for today's society, what is the new vision for the Millrace, and how does a city and a University decide to make change?

Although a return to previous traditions can be seen as too posh in today's world, a modern recreational vision could be the guiding light in saving the spirit of the Millrace and reinvigorating the student body and the community. In 1962, a student in his fourth years noted: "when I was a freshman, the Millrace is just like it is today- slow, sluggish, muddy. They were talking about improving it just like they are now....The Millrace is still the same and always will be until a substantial amount of money can be used"²⁴. This statement, coupled with the fact there has always been a plan, an idea, or someone grasping to continuing the Millrace's dream, shows that it isn't for a lack of desire, rather a lack of proper timing for funding the project. Fifty-five years later, and this statement still rings true, yet the opportunity has risen: Phil Knight just donated \$500 million dollars - a sum to be matched by private donors. The new Knight campus abuts the Millrace, and Campus architect Michael Harwood affirms the Millrace will not be left alone. With previous canal restoration in his tool belt, he recognizes the Mill Race's potential to be an attractive draw for scientists who could choose any school to work at.²⁵ With a complete trail system in tact and a large river running through it: working next to a Millrace canal that was enjoyed recreationally and aesthetically upkept could be the answer. Although the idea for revitalization is spurred by the new Knight campus, the community as a whole can choose to be involved. While the University is in charge of pumping water into the Race and owns the Race near Campus, the City of Eugene still owns a chunk of the canal. A collaboration between the City and the University with potential help in achieving its goals with the upcoming

²⁴ 1962 Spring Oregana p394

²⁵ Deitz, Diane. "University of Oregon architect Michael Harwood.."

EWEB project, the park system, local environmental restoration and outdoor groups means the next decade could unveil a new Millrace. One that holds true to the nostalgic spirit of recreation, but advances the population to a happier, healthier state.

From a student standpoint, having access to a recreational Millrace would mean improved health and happiness. A study done by Stanford has shown being out nature is a prescription for increased emotional health. Nature, well, is a natural antidepressant. Their findings suggest “It is essential for urban planners and other policymakers to understand the relationship between exposure to nature and mental health”²⁶. Some of the most popular activities, glancing around the Instagram and Facebook photos of students are the outdoor recreation possibilities afforded to them in the Eugene area: a hike up Spencer’s Butte or around Hendricks Park, floating the Willamette river, cycling or rollerblading along the Bascom river bike path, or running on Pre’s Trail and Amazon. A renovated Millrace would be a valuable addition to this list as it is close to campus, and could offer unique possibility of trying new activities such as paddle boarding, canoeing, or kayaking.

The students whose histories are tied closely to the Millrace, and whose presence has the power to help the potential Millrace revitalization become a success are those in the seven fraternity and sorority life bordering the canal. Between Alder Street and Patterson Street, the University sanctions six of these houses: Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Phi Kappa Psi, Chi Psi, Gamma Phi Beta, Alpha Phi, and the new Kappa Alpha Theta. Beta Theta Phi’s house, one of the oldest along the race, is lived in by University Students, but is no longer affiliated with FSL due to violations. The benefits of involving the estimated 800 members of these houses would be

²⁶ Jordon, Rob. “Stanford researchers find mental health prescription: Nature.” 30 June 2015.

substantial. Most obviously, their house's placement along the race means a vested interest in the Millrace aesthetics and possibilities. The lawns and courtyards at Gamma Phi, Phi Psi, Chi Psi, Sigma Epsilon were all utilized at one point to enjoy the Millrace, whether that meant through swimming, canoeing, or just a relaxing summer's eve. In more recent years, the fences between backyards and the race, or building without lawns, indicate a lost interest in their backyard canal- as it has diminished into a stagnant, stinky channel. Houses along the Millrace used to be considered "quite choice": their location gave them "bragging rights" and "improved their position for pledging"²⁷. This former draw for rushing, could once again be used to assemble potential collaboration between FSL and the managers of the new Millrace plan. One potential concern and present day reality is the trashing of the race by house members. Jeannie Webb, alumni of Gamma Phi Beta, thinks improving the Millrace would in turn create a culture that respected the Millrace, and reprimanded those who did not. To achieve a greater respect for the Race would mean attaching greater meaning to it: through both learning their house's history of recreation along the Millrace, and seeing a new Millrace emerge for their enjoyment and use. In turn, these houses could pledge to commit required community service hours to cleaning up the Millrace. Another option for collaboration is having a household hold a philanthropic event to raise funding and awareness for Millrace restoration and tradition. Lastly, alumni of the University and Fraternity and Sorority houses have for decades called for the Millrace's restoration. During this effort to revitalize it, they are potential important financial and historical contributors. Overall, the number of students involved in Fraternity and Sorority life, especially those residing in houses on the Millrace itself, have an opportunity to engage in meaningful

²⁷ Margo Peterson, "Canoe Fete". 2006.

community service and University Millrace restoration, while having it benefit their lives and Fraternity or Sororities vitality.

Although the new and improved Millrace could be an enjoyable and healthy new recreation site for students and the community to spend the afternoon, especially with economic feasibility in the upcoming years, the list of considerations doesn't stop at who pays the bill. For instance, despite the general notion the Millrace is a dirty, sludge half the year, it's a habitat to many plants and animals. This is why birding along the canal is available for those interested.²⁸ Changing any aspect of the race, means changing a habitat for certain creatures. It's a biological haven, and those with this knowledge will put up reasonable, scientific fight to conserve its habitat. Another important consideration is the legal issue of who owns rights to what, and how water rights work. Similarly, there is a question of who would be responsible for safety accidents if someone wasn't signing a waiver for a rental. Another essential review are the geologic considerations: what is the necessary amount of flow, and with current operational pumps and culverts is this feasible?²⁹ These, and many other factors are being considered in feasibility studies of making the Millrace a place aesthetically beautiful, and available for recreational hobbies.

The history of the Millrace provides insight into the way members of the Eugene community and the University of Oregon student body utilized public resources and took advantage of old infrastructure to make it a multifunctional recreational entity. In its heyday, the town and college itself was smaller, and the American people were finding more leisure time and

²⁸ For more information on what plants and animals reside on the Millrace, reference Spring 2017 Oregon Abroad biology place projects.

²⁹ Leah Youngquist's paper about past and present flow and Ethan Niyangoda's about sediment depth may assist in answering questions about geologic considerations

spending money that were to be spent on activities for enjoyment purposes. This culminated into a culture of mixed-use recreation along the Millrace that was a quintessential aspect of life for University students and the Eugene area as a whole for many decades. Like a lot of old traditions, the peak of the Millrace recreational experience has a mystifying nostalgia that most current Eugenians can only dream of. However, using the cultural and natural history of the Millrace, coupled with the current development initiatives on campus, one can conjecture the possibilities to revamp the Millrace to improve not only the natural ecosystems and surrounding aesthetics, but to improve the culture on campus that values a clean and safe place to recreate in the beautiful outdoors.

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