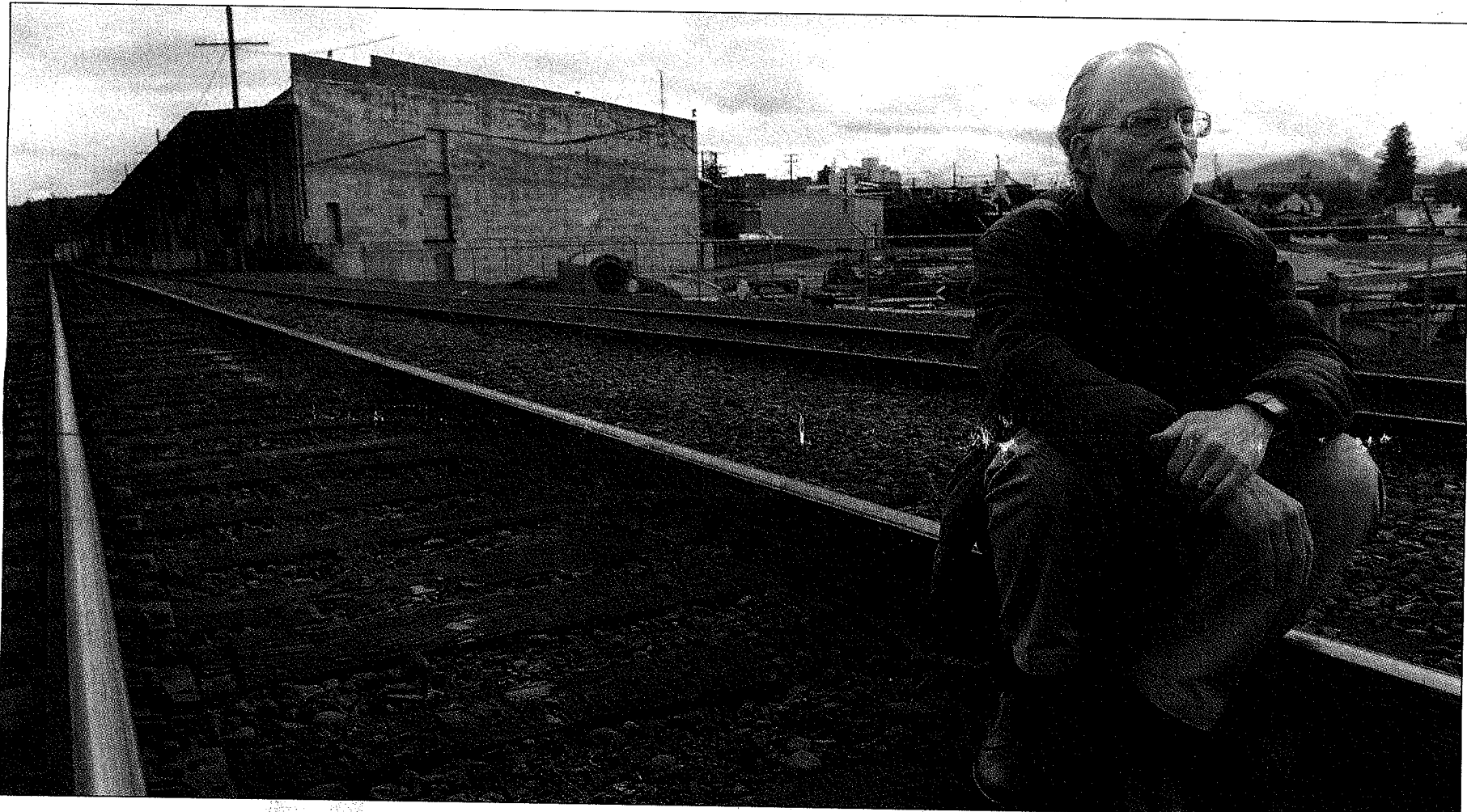


BURIED TREASURE?



Retired UO professor Jerry Diethelm would like to see the millrace restored near the new U.S. courthouse: "Our finest architecture, reflected in our history." NICOLE DeVITO / The Register-Guard

Millrace: underground history

■ **Redevelopment:** Some hope a piped segment of the waterway will again see the light of day.

By **BILL BISHOP**
The Register-Guard

THE VIEW of an abandoned parking lot littered with skeletons of cannery equipment doesn't block Jerry Diethelm's vision for the area that someday will be a new business district linking Eugene's downtown to the Willamette riverfront.

He sees the image of a new federal courthouse reflecting in the water of the city's historic millrace, confined for the past half-century to 30-inch underground pipe on its last stretch.

"Our finest architecture, reflected in our history. It's a piece

of civic art," says Diethelm, a retired University of Oregon professor of landscape architecture and a longtime advocate for rebuilding the hidden section of millrace.

The city's industrial birthplace just east of the Ferry Street Bridge shares a 150-year history with pioneers whose names are immortalized on area streets and landmarks: Hilyard, Chambers, Skinner, to name a few.

But the Eugene millrace hasn't powered a factory since 1928. The last six blocks of its two-mile length haven't seen daylight since they were buried under a road

improvement project in 1949.

What to do with the millrace is an old issue, stagnating for decades between the forces of pragmatism and nostalgia. With plans now in the works for a new courthouse district, the community will once again — and perhaps for the last time — wade into the matter.

INSIDE

■ **The history of the millrace / 6A**

argument again likely will be the cost, now estimated at \$5 million.

The money would pay for unearthing a four-block length, increasing the water volume, reshaping banks and routing the new channel under an existing railroad track and new roads

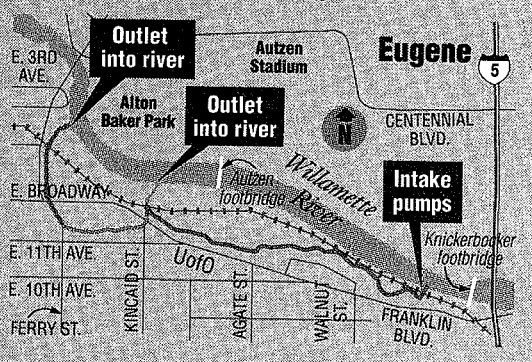
So far, the pragmatists have been winning the debate. Their strongest

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The Eugene Millrace

Redevelopment plan could bring the tailrace back to the surface, but it would cost about \$5 million.

Lower section, (tailrace) drains in 30-inch underground pipe. Middle section drains slowly before going underground. Upper slough has separate outlet to river.



MILLRACE

Continued from Page One

planned in the area.

"It's always been a matter of money," Diethelm says. "I haven't heard anyone who doesn't like it."

Diethelm has been active in every citizen effort to restore the millrace over the past 30 years. The courthouse project should rally community pride in its past as well as its future, he says.

"Great cities remember themselves — who we are as a society," he says. "Eugene has a tendency to forget that. Autzen Stadium (improvement cost) is \$90 million. Where are our values? This will be the only chance to do the millrace."

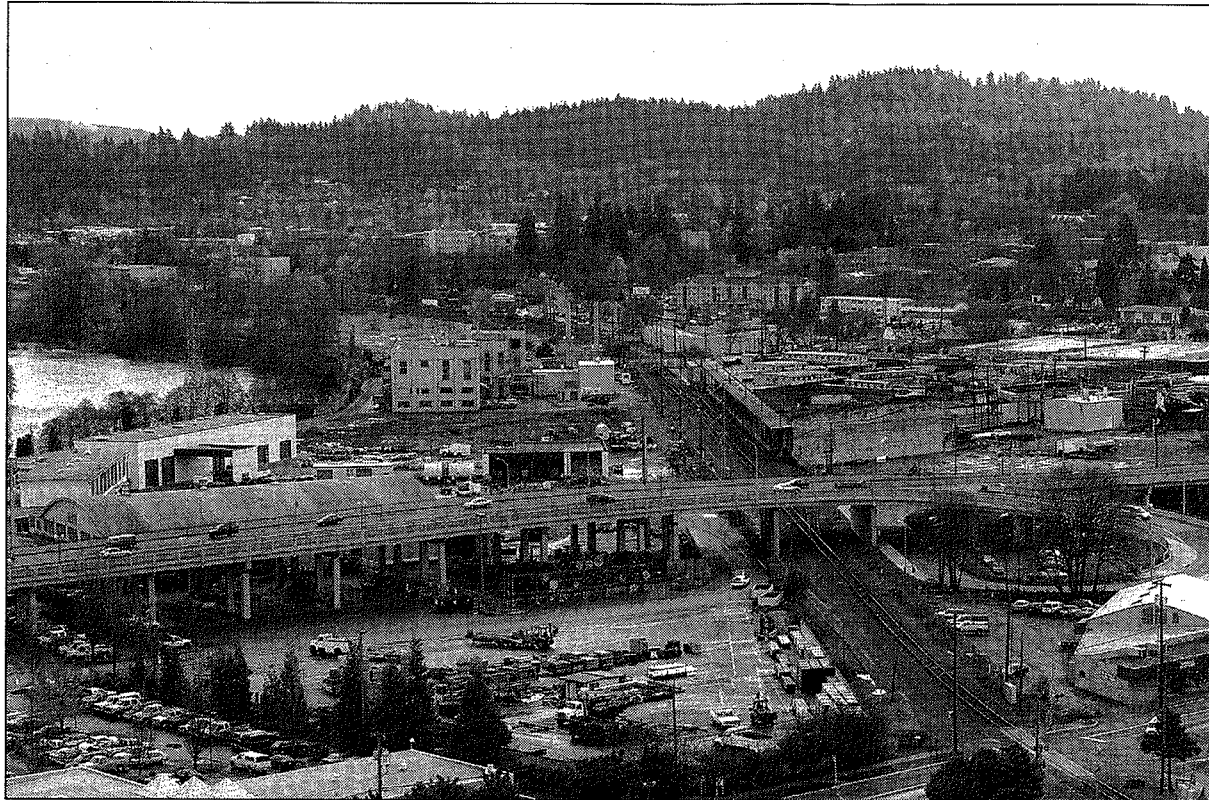
Not a high priority

But a new millrace is by no means crucial to the new courthouse district design, city planners say. Much more important is the relocation of Sixth and Seventh avenues and the extension of Hilyard and Patterson streets to reroute heavy traffic around the district, says Nan Laurence, one of the city's lead planners on the project.

The estimated \$7 million cost of the street work could be paid by federal, state and local road funds. The area already is within the Riverfront Urban Renewal District, where property taxes are earmarked for improvements inside the district, such as development loan funds, sidewalks, lighting and stormwater treatment. It's doubtful the renewal district's taxes could stretch to cover the millrace project.

No one yet knows where money might be found for the millrace, Laurence says. And the first questions to ask are whether the public wants it and how badly.

Putting off the decision probably will seal its fate because development would swallow the end of the millrace once the courthouse district takes shape and the cost of digging it out would skyrocket, she



NICOLE DeVITO / The Register-Guard

A segment of Eugene's historic millrace is piped underground near the former Agripac cannery and the future site of the federal courthouse. Restoring the waterway could figure into redevelopment of the area.

says.

"Leaving it for later means it most probably won't happen," she says. "There are many ways to do it if we decide to do it."

People will have plenty of opportunity to talk it over. The city Planning Commission and City Council will look at the district design and take public comment over the next few months. Meeting dates and times will come later.

"This is community-building," Laurence says. "The public involvement that goes into this plan is the primary way citizens get a say in what happens in our community. There is still a lot of discussion that has to go on."

City Council member Gary Rayer says the millrace would be a good feature for the district, but probably not immediately affordable. The best idea might be to plan for the millrace, build the new district in phases and be ready if money becomes available, he says.

"This site is going to need to be developed in stages," Rayer says.

Complex, costly undertaking

There certainly is more than one way to resurrect the millrace, says Bart Johnson, a UO assistant professor of landscape architecture hired by the city as a consultant for the district design.

And there certainly are a few

wrong ways, he adds.

For instance, the millrace now carries a surge of toxic pollutants from city streets and parking lots on 400 acres of urban landscape at the start of rainy periods. Opening it up to sunlight would merely warm the dirty water before dumping it into the Willamette River — making a bad situation worse, Johnson says.

The city would need to take steps to cleanse storm runoff before it enters the waterway, he says.

Another obstacle is finding enough space. The millrace pipe runs 6 feet below ground. Cutting back and shaping the banks for vegetation and pedestrians would

"Great cities remember themselves ... Eugene has a tendency to forget that. ... This will be the only chance to do the millrace."

JERRY DIETHELM
Retired UO professor
of landscape architecture

require a lot of land in a business district where property values will be very high for office buildings, stores, restaurants and housing.

Also, the district is criss-crossed with a century's accumulation of utilities — power, steam, telecommunications, water and sewer lines. The cost of moving them adds up, Johnson says.

The main north-south rail line running west of the Cascades cuts right through the district. Digging a millrace channel underneath it would be a spendy option.

"We're not talking any cheap solutions here," Johnson says.

The Eugene Water & Electric Board is cramped on the land it owns north of the rail line between the river and the new courthouse site. The utility may consider moving some or all of its operations after it completes an economic feasibility study in March, says Deborah Brewer, EWEB's government affairs coordinator.

EWEB's leaders are well aware that the city's vision for its new business district also will shape EWEB's future on the site, especially on the river's edge, she says.

"A new vision"

The most affordable way to resurrect the millrace may be to do it on EWEB's land north of the rail line to avoid expensive digging

under the rails and through the new district, Johnson says.

That's also a good spot to accomplish the more important goal of demonstrating how to build a major urban development with an environmentally sustainable riverside habitat, he says.

Johnson already is designing ways to naturally filter stormwater runoff from the district and to restore the riverbank ecosystem with native plants and adequate building setbacks. Opening the millrace would be another way to connect the urban and river settings, another opportunity to do something the right way and show people how it can work, Johnson says.

"We need a new vision for ecological understanding," Johnson says. "You don't need the millrace to enhance ecological values along the river. But it can be a compelling part of it."

But from a purely ecological standpoint, the community could improve a lot more river habitat for a lot less money on less valuable land someplace else with fewer utilities to move, he says.

So if the millrace is to be reborn, it must serve more than one purpose, Johnson says. And all of its roles must add up to significant value if it is going to appeal to the city's pragmatic side.

Diethelm says a millrace through the district would raise property values, draw people to the area, create a more environmentally friendly cityscape, and display the city's character and history.

But he nevertheless thinks the question will be a close call, and it could be a long time before it comes up again.

"You only get a chance every 50 years to do this. It takes something big, like a change in the transportation system, a new bridge, a \$100 million courthouse, to make it happen."

Millrace played important role in Eugene's history

By **BILL BISHOP**
The Register-Guard

The Eugene Millrace was the platform for the city's industrial birth and later became one of its playgrounds when electricity eroded the channel's value as a power source. While it remains a historic water feature along two-thirds of its length, the millrace has long been neglected, polluted, buried — but not forgotten.

With the coming transformation of the old millrace district into a downtown neighborhood anchored by a new federal courthouse, the end of the millrace may yet surface to link the downtown with its past.

Historic highlights show how the millrace flows through the city's heritage.

The beginning

1852: Hilyard Shaw and Avery Smith dig a canal connecting two muddy sloughs, creating a millrace to power Shaw's sawmill in an area east of the present-day Ferry Street Bridge.

1855: First gristmill built on the millrace.

1856: Eugene City Distilling Co. becomes the major industry, paying more taxes than any other while producing 70 gallons of whiskey per day at a time when the city's population numbered about 200.

1870s: Industries along the millrace include a furniture factory, tannery, cider and vinegar factory, woolen mill, gristmills, lumber mill, sash and door factory. Railroad development further spurs industrial growth.

1887: Eugene Electric Co. builds a 100-horsepower generator on the millrace.

1890: Boat rentals begin on the millrace. A flood destroys millrace intake on the Willamette River at Judkins Point near present-day Interstate 5 bridge. Flood also changes the course of the Willamette River to run in the current channel south of its former riverbed.

The peak

By **1900:** University of Oregon students adopt the millrace for romantic rowboat and comical canoe excursions. Homeowners along its banks install landscapes to capitalize on the waterway. City's

population is 3,236.

1910: Millrace owners Frank Chambers and George Midgley expand millrace capacity and clash with homeowners who claim the work is flooding their basements and destroying their yards. Some homeowners confront millrace workers at gunpoint. Years of legal battles commence.

1913: The Anchorage, a popular campus hangout across from UO's Villard Hall, begins renting canoes on the millrace. Citizens form the Millrace Protective Association with 100 members.

1915: UO holds its first Canoe Fete, a night parade on the millrace, as part of Junior Weekend.

1916: Oregon Supreme Court rules on disputes over millrace property easements, deciding maximum canal width could be 50 feet and allowing retaining walls to be built on residential properties.

The evolution

1920s: As electricity becomes more available, mills convert. The millrace diminishes in importance as a power source. Simultaneously, its role as an aquatic park for UO students and city residents expands.

1922: Canoe rental business grows to have 50 canoes on the millrace. Property owners have an estimated 50 more.

1925: To preserve millrace's idyllic character, citizens and students rally to stop plans for a dance hall on the shore.

1928: All mills have stopped using millrace water power. Flood again destroys millrace's intake.

1938: UO buys land north of the millrace to build a park and amphitheater.

1941: Canoe Fete is so popular, plans are drawn for 5,000-seat bleacher and stage. Larger development plans call for moving the Pacific Highway (now Franklin Boulevard) and the railroad tracks. But projects are halted by World War II. A series of floods again destroy millrace intake.

1943: Highway and rail work completed. Millrace work is neglected.

1945: The millrace becomes a dry channel.

1946: Eugene voters buy the millrace for \$50,000, but sale is



Register-Guard

The millrace has served Eugene's recreational needs for many years.

disputed. Court rules in 1951 that the city bought only the right to move water in the millrace to generate power; property owners retain right to install culverts and bury the millrace.

1947: Millrace Protective Association reactivates to lobby at city budget hearings. City OKs \$20,000 for millrace restoration; UO students raise matching funds.

The decline

1949: To accommodate highway expansion in the Ferry Street Bridge area, the lower millrace is confined to a 30-inch pipe buried 6 feet between Broadway and the Eugene Water & Electric Board complex on the river. The Anchorage closes down.

1950: UO demolishes the Anchorage and builds a new physical

plant on the north bank of the millrace. City's population is 35,879.

1952: Millrace is described as "a half-filled muddy slough, clogged with debris." The 30-inch pipe at its end limits flow to 25 cubic feet per minute, a fraction of its estimated 350 cubic feet per second capacity half a century earlier. A portion of the flow is diverted back to the river through an outlet at the end of the UO's duck pond on Franklin Boulevard, helping water quality on the upper half of the millrace.

1955: Pumps proposed to increase flow in millrace. UO's Canoe Fete comes back to the millrace.

1957: Pumps installed. First proposal made to connect lower millrace to Amazon Slough to increase water flow, a proposal that would resurface periodically for 40 years.

1962: A volunteer group of

Eugene architects draws up a plan to remove the lower millrace from its 30-inch pipe, recreate the channel, install native landscape and walking paths. The millrace is described as "stagnant and smelly" because of limited flow through the piped lower section.

1965: Cost of proposal to reconstruct the millrace as a pedestrian walkway from downtown to UO is estimated at \$359,000. City Council balks at the expense. Little has been done to the sluggish channel for 20 years despite nearly continuous interest among citizen and student groups. Lack of water flow and lack of money to take action are perennial problems.

1967: City Council approves tying millrace to the city storm sewer system.

1971: UO's Canoe Fete abolished because of student apathy. The fetes begin again in 1973 and continue off and on. Students voice concerns about capsizing in the stagnant water, polluted by stormwater runoff and trash.

1974: Millrace is identified as the most unsanitary place to swim in Lane County. Redevelopment of UO duck pond begins.

1988: Last remnant of original

millrace mills is torn down.

1990: Citywide observance of National Historic Preservation Week focuses on millrace history and restoration proposals. Stalemate over the millrace is described as conflict between nostalgic-minded citizens and pragmatic-minded ones. Canoe rentals at the UO's EMU topped 2,500 in 1989.

1996: Millrace boosters again propose connecting lower millrace from 10th Avenue and Mill Street to Amazon Creek near 17th Avenue to create "The Emerald Canal." Project also would boost quality of Amazon channel water in summertime. As envisioned, the canal would feature waterfront shops, restaurants and apartments. Cost was estimated at \$35 million.

2001: Chiquita Brands International sells its 8.7-acre property to the city for \$4.1 million, making original millrace industrial area available for new \$70 million federal courthouse. Stage is set for redeveloping the area as a part of downtown with pedestrian links to the river. Designers consider possibility of resurrecting the lower millrace channel as a link to the city's history and to foster awareness of water quality and river ecology.

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