



## Linn County Planning and Building

# PRESERVATION NEWS

## MAY IS HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH



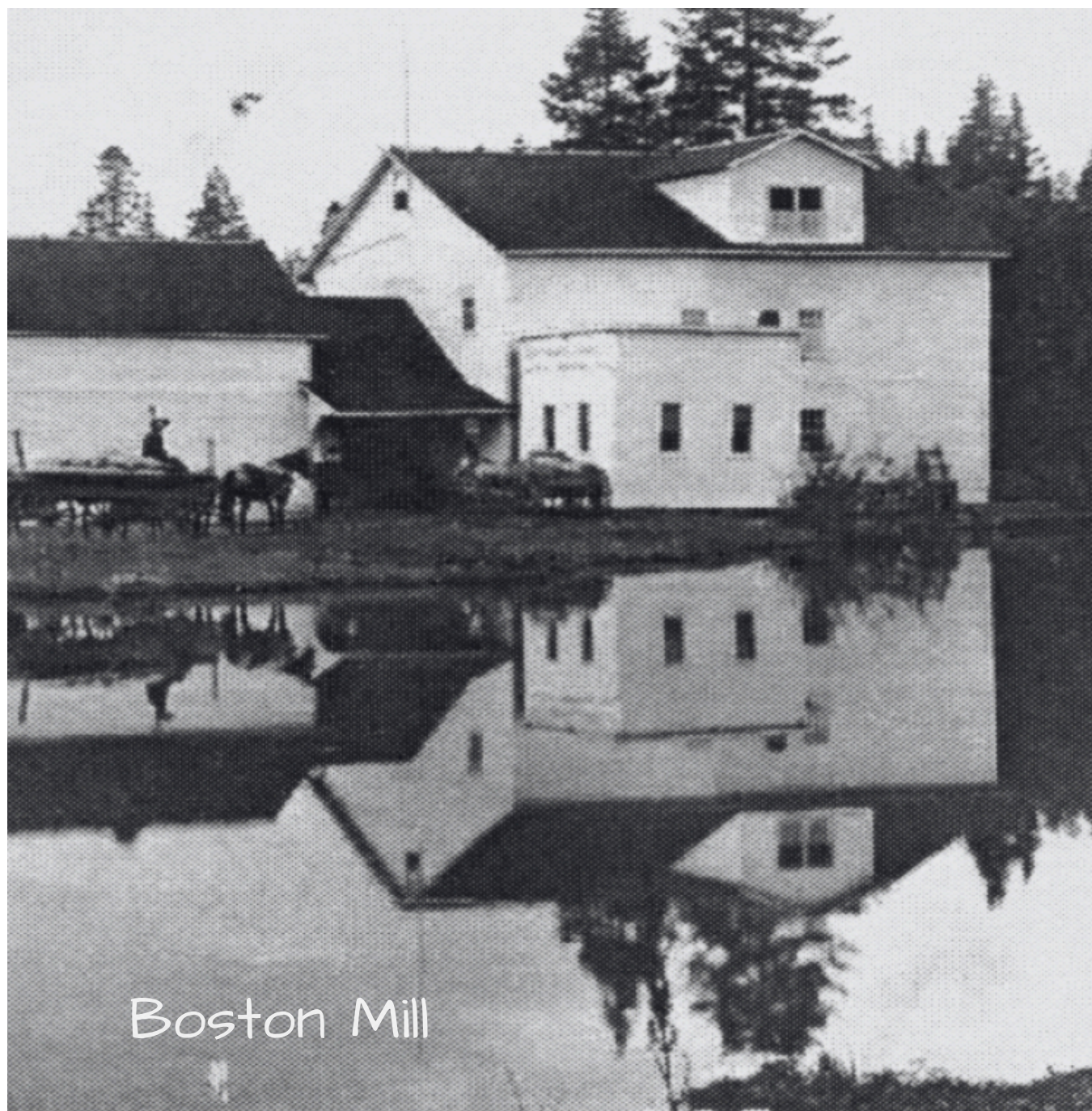
Please join us in celebrating all the amazing work that has been done to preserve our historic spaces in Linn County. From our covered bridges, to our century farms and historic main streets, these places give us a sense of place and connect us to the past. If you have a property you would like to list on the local or national register, we are here to help! Please reach out to our office to learn about the process and benefits of having a property on the historic register.

## MEET THE HISTORIC PLANNER FOR LINN COUNTY

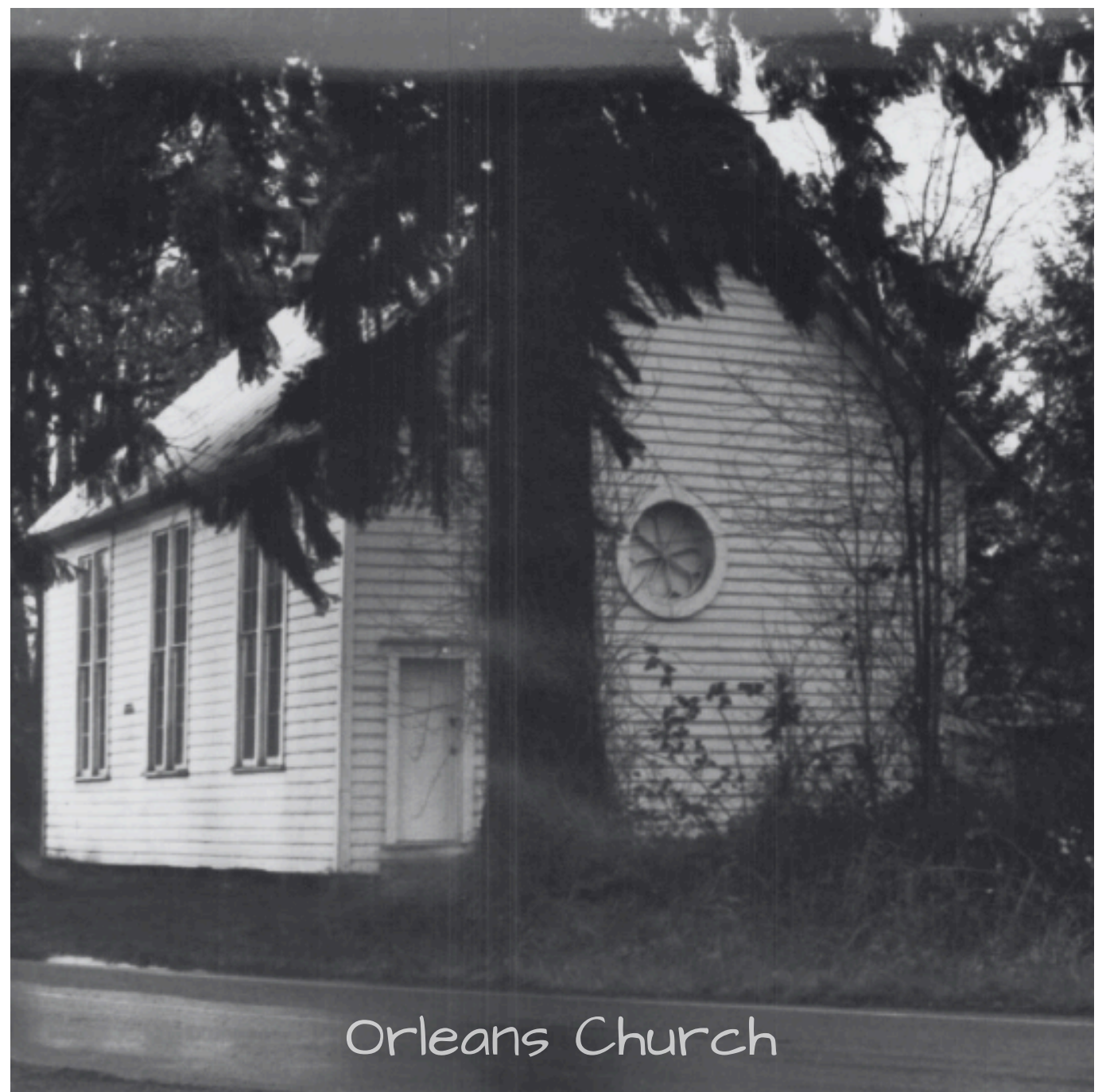
Julia Fox is a Texas transplant to the Pacific Northwest and currently resides in Albany. She obtained her Bachelor's Degree in History from Oregon State University, and her Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Oregon. Throughout her college education, she worked at the Benton County Museum in Philomath, the Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Eugene, and the Special Collections and Archives Research Center at Oregon State University. She has been the Historic Planner for Linn County since 2024.







Boston Mill



Orleans Church

## THE LOST TOWNS OF LINN COUNTY

Linn County is home to several ghost towns and pioneer settlements that vanished off the map long ago. Of all the lost towns that have come and gone, Orleans and Boston are some of the most well-known.

### ORLEANS

Orleans is the oldest ghost town in Linn County, with a brief existence and sudden ending. Settlers first began arriving to the area that would become Orleans in the 1840s, and by 1849 the Orleans voting precinct was established. The town was officially founded in 1851 by pioneer Isaac Moore. The town was strategically settled along the Willamette River across from present-day Corvallis. Before the presence of trains, commerce and travel was done along the Willamette River, and Isaac Moore seized the opportunity to open a ferry for the town.

For the next several years, the town's economy thrived on farming, on their ferry and riverboat landings, and on trade. By the 1860s, Orleans was known up and down the Willamette River, and some settlers predicted the town could grow to rival Corvallis. Little is known of what the town of Orleans was like. At its peak, Orleans had its own main street, then a county road that would later become Highway 34. The town had at least 15 blocks and boasted several businesses, including a brewery, a sawmill, and a gunsmith. Many of the town's residents were German immigrants.



A porcelain doll's head found at the Orleans townsite. This type of doll, known as a "flat-top" because of its hair style, dates back to the late 1850s-early 1860s.



Early settlements like Orleans were established along rivers for several reasons, including easy access to water, power, travel and commerce. But like any river, the Willamette could become an unpredictable and powerful destructive force. In the winter of 1861, the residents of Orleans experienced a devastating flood. The water rose quickly in the night, and inhabitants of Orleans reported being awakened by the sound of drift logs knocking against their houses. Many buildings were destroyed or washed away. Some families were evacuated and escaped to higher ground, while others sought safety in the haylofts of barns. There were no documented casualties in Orleans, but property damage was severe and widespread.

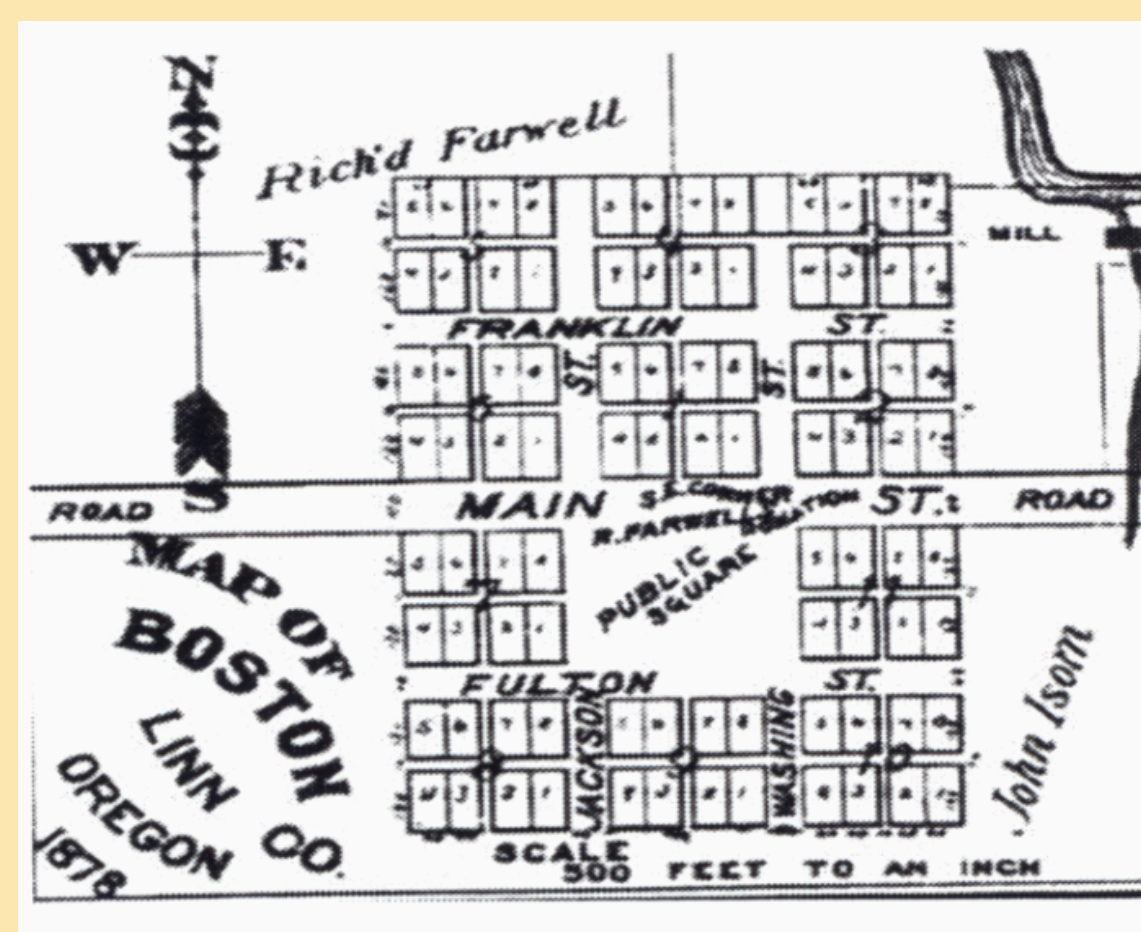
“All that Sunday night there was a shouting of men, cries of distress from women, and firing of guns for help as the mad waters created havoc in the town of Orleans and elsewhere.”

THE CORVALLIS TIMES, JAN. 31, 1903

Some families rebuilt after the flood and stayed in the area, but the town of Orleans did not survive this natural disaster. In the town across the river, flood damage was much less severe. Corvallis, being a few feet higher in elevation than the town of Orleans, escaped the worst of the flood and continued to grow. Today, the Orleans Church and Cemetery mark the general area where the town once stood.

## BOSTON

Pioneer settlers first came to the area that would become Boston in the 1850s. The town of Boston was officially platted in 1861. One of the first landowners to settle the area was Americus Savage, who hailed from Massachusetts. It is believed that he had the town platted, hence why it was named Boston. The townsite was strategically located on the Calapooia River, where the water source provided irrigation for wheat farmers and power for the town's flour mill. The town's location along early pioneer travel routes allowed it to flourish in the coming decades.



A map of the Town of Boston, 1878, with the Calapooia River on the northeast corner of town.

Throughout the 1860s, Boston became an important trading center for Linn County farmers. The first Linn County Fair was held in the town of Boston, hosted at the Savage Ranch between 1863 to 1865.



At its peak in 1869, Boston had a post office, a general store, a blacksmith, a tavern, and a flour mill. By the end of the 1860s, word had spread of the construction of a railroad through the Willamette Valley, and early discussions identified Boston as a potential town to build the rail lines near. Boston residents grew excited at the prospect of a rail road, and the prosperity and growth a railroad could bring with it.

Ultimately, the railroad company did not build the rail road near Boston, which would lead to the end of the pioneer town.



Shedd's Business Street ca. 1907, now 1<sup>st</sup> Street in present-day Shedd

In 1871, construction of the Oregon and California Railroad began 1.5 miles to the west of Boston, an event which gave rise to the community of Shedd. Many Boston residents chose to move to Shedd to be closer to the railroad. In some cases, they physically moved their houses and businesses to Shedd as well.

Soon after the completion of the railroad, most of the town of Boston and its residents were gone. What remains of Boston today is the water-powered flour mill, which was erected in 1863.



Boston Flour Mill, or "Thompson's Mills" in 1970

Very little remains of the original town of Boston, except for the flour mill. The mill operation was not affected by Boston's decline. After the town disappeared, the mill continued to operate at full capacity until 1987. Today, the mill is a designated historic heritage site, cared for by the Oregon State Parks Department. Visitors can tour the still-functioning water-powered mill and see what life would have been like in rural Linn County over 150 years ago.

## SOURCES

- HR-10-86/87: Orleans Presbyterian Church, 34120 Riverside Drive, Albany OR 97321.
- HR-15-91/92: The Edward Farwell House and Granary, 32569 Boston Mill Dr., Shedd, OR 97377.
- HR-17-91/92: Halsey Shedd Rural Fire Protection District, 31922 "B" Street, Shedd, OR 97377.
- HR-2-93/94: Bunker Hill Cemetery, T13S, R3W, Section 8, Tax Lot 100, Shedd, OR 97377.
- The Corvallis Times, "The Flood of 61-62", Jan 31, 1903, University of Oregon Library, Eugene. Accessed 4/3/2025.
- Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) of Oregon, "History of Linn County", ca. 1941, pp. 76-78, 80-81.