

Tualatin Riverkeepers Celebrate River History Day

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Arising in the foothills of the Coast Mountain range, the muddy Tualatin River meanders along for some 83 miles, draining the fertile Tualatin Valley until it finally flows into the Willamette river near West Linn. On September 30 the Tualatin Riverkeepers will present the history of our local waterway at the Winona Grange.

Natives canoed or rafted the river, fished in its waters, and brought down geese and ducks in the nearby wetlands with bow and arrow. Herb Lafky once found an Indian grinding bowl lodged upside down in the bank where Fanno Creek joins the Tualatin.

When the settlers came, they also traveled the river, moving their rafts with long poles. A dam on the river near the town of Willamette caused a few mishaps during those early years. In 1861 Dr. Nathaniel Robbins was drowned when his raft was swept over the dam at floodtide. When the Tualatin reached the Willamette the river was shallow and rocky and boats could not pass, so a canal was dug by Chinese laborers to connect the river to the Willamette via Sucker Lake, now known as Lake Oswego.

Tales of the river can go on and on, like the two boys who drowned on a June day in 1916 when jumping into the cold river after a hot and hard day's work in the onion fields. A fellow named Knuteson used to catch crawfish in the river to sell to Jakes Crawfish restaurant in Portland. Old Knuteson drowned in the river one day when his rowboat tipped over and legend has it that the crawfish took their revenge.

When the great old growth Douglas fir forests covered much of the area, logs were drug to the river by ox or horse teams and dumped in where they floated down to mills and were sawed into lumber to build homes and barns for a growing population.

The 1930s, 40s and 50s were the era of the river parks. Most anybody who owned land along the river opened up for business with swimming, boating, picnic and ball parks. Roamers Rest, Avalon, Elsner's Jurgens, Louie's Paradiso and Fischer parks were near Tigard and Tualatin. Old timers say there was a swim park in the present Community Park, as well as a dance hall,



Covered bridge over the Tualatin River.

owned by a communist or "pinko" group. Further east was Slawson's Park, close to Wankers Corners.

The most famous of the parks was Roamers Rest. My sisters and I joined the other neighborhood kids in walking up to Roamers, paying a dime or so to get in, and playing in the swimming tanks. Roamers had a chute-the-chute, a paddling swan and boats to rent. They also rented swim suits, and sold snacks. You can read lifeguard Bill Gilham's story of the river parks in the historical society booklet War, Growth and Change.



This footbridge connected Tualatin and Durham around 1900. The Smith sawmill was on the Tualatin side. Logs were floated down the river from upstream to the mill site.

In the 50s river became quite polluted, and the parks shut down.

Much more information about the Tualatin River will be available on
SEPTEMBER 30 FROM 2 TO 5 PM
when the Tualatin Riverkeepers present

**"THE HISTORY
of the TUALATIN RIVER"**

including a slide show and an extensive photo display at the
Winona Grange,
8340 SW Seneca Street in Tualatin.
Co-sponsored by the Grange, the Tualatin Historical Society
and the Tualatin Riverkeepers

the event is free and open to the public.



Anita Gilham giving swim lessons at Roamers Rest swim park in 1949.



Tualatin's young ladies, inspecting the flooding river. I suspect, from their clothing, that it was around 1910.



Elsner's Swim Park was on the North side of the Tualatin River west of Roamers Rest.



The Tualatin River, taken from the current bridge.