



ROY T. BISHOP INTERPRETIVE WALK

CONNECTION TO LAND



Members of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde still live in the area, and are directly descended from the Clackamas people who lived around Johnson Creek. This is their ceded homelands.



Paul Kane painting, Courtesy of the Museum of Art

Circle of Life

Many groups of people have lived close to Johnson Creek over the centuries, and each used the land and the creek in different ways. The local Clackamas Chinook people of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde fished for cutthroat trout, steelhead, and salmon and hunted black-tailed deer. They gathered many kinds of native plants, including wapato and camas for food and others for medicines.

Over the years, the members of many different communities have gathered around Johnson Creek. Its water carries the memory of generations.

Pioneers Arrive

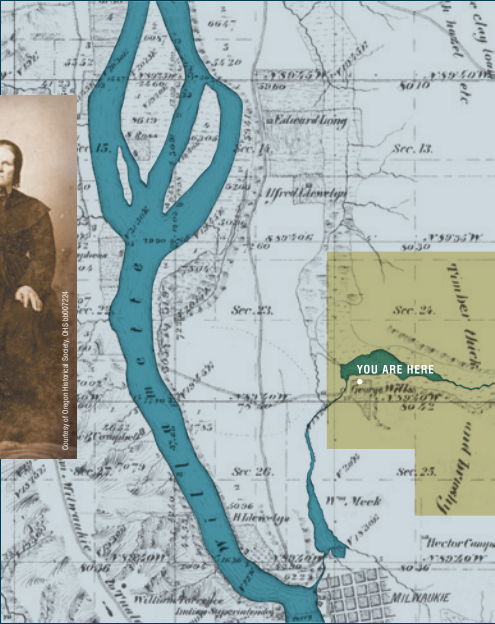

Johnson Creek was named after William Johnson, who came to Oregon from Maryland in 1847. He built a sawmill on the creek several miles east of here.


George and Jacob Wills and their families arrived on the Oregon Trail that same year. You're now standing on their original Donation Land Claim. They chose land with a creek running through it, lined on each side with old growth trees.

Jacob Wills built a 10-foot dam and a sawmill on the creek just north of here. By the time the Gold Rush came in 1849, Wills lumber was being shipped to San Francisco by way of a wharf on the Willamette River.

(below) George and Sarah Wills settled on their land with son Jacob and daughter Martha.

In this 1852 land claim map, you can see that the Wills' Donation Land Claims were near the junction of Johnson Creek and Crystal Springs Creek. "Timber thick and brushy" was identified as a prominent feature.






Courtesy of Patrick S. Babin

Johnson Creek Watershed Council

ROY T. BISHOP INTERPRETIVE WALK

AN INDUSTRIAL TOWN




Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society photo 222

Demand for woolen uniforms remained high throughout WWI. Oregon Worsted Company grew to 300 employees and ran 3 shifts by the 1930s. The company went on to supply woolen blankets during WWII.

In 1868, the Oregon & California Railroad was built through the Wills' land. Jacob and George took full advantage of the railroad, with its easy access to and from Portland for both people and goods. They platted the new town of Willsburg along the railroad tracks in 1870.


Willsburg soon had homes as well as a dairy farm, store, post office, and school. Jacob Wills built a new brick factory and kept his sawmill running. The Shindler furniture factory moved into the area. In 1902, the Willis Mohair mill was built next to the creek.

When the Willis mill failed, co-founder of Pendleton Woolen Mills Roy T. Bishop and several Portland businessmen purchased it to fill the need for woolen uniforms for WWI. Bishop installed new machinery in the old mill and established the highly successful Oregon Worsted Company in 1917.



JACOB WILLS, Manufacturer of Pressed Brick. Willsburg, Or.


After 1868, bricks and lumber were hauled out of the Wills' land along the railroad tracks instead of by boat or wagon. They were shipped across the Willamette River on the Stark Street Ferry.



Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society photo 1038

(above) The photo above shows Willsburg homes on "B Street" (SE Tacoma) in 1933, just before the little town was torn down to make way for McLoughlin Boulevard.

(below) In this 1893 map, the 16-block plat of Willsburg is shown, just north of here. Its railroad station was at the corner of what is now SE Tacoma and the Union Pacific line.



N. W. L. & T. Co.

300 A.

WILLSBURG

Jacob Wills Hrs.

CREEK

JOHNSON

ROAD

SCHOOL DIST. NO. 78

M.A. Schuyler

Delia Wright

Delia Shrinier

G. Shindler

Mrs David Price

W.E. Wills

Alfred N. Wills

Edwin C. Wills

B.H.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY


CLACKAMAS COUNTY

YOU ARE HERE

Johnson Creek Watershed Council

ROY T. BISHOP INTERPRETIVE WALK

MODERNIZATION



This photo, taken at SE Tacoma Street, shows WPA workers excavating the creek's channel to a uniform 15 feet. For the first 14 miles, they reinforced the creek walls with granite blocks to protect them from erosion.

By the 1920s, the creekside forest was gone. The old Wills claims along Johnson Creek had been sold and turned into neighborhoods like Ardenwald, Sellwood, and Eastmoreland.

The creek regularly overflowed its banks. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) arrived in 1933 to straighten the creek's course and line sections of it with rock to reduce flooding. Soon after the project was complete, Willsburg was torn down to make way for the new McLoughlin Pacific Highway No.1E, the state's first "super highway."


Preserving some of the natural creek became increasingly important as the population increased. Telmer Johnson, son of Tideman Johnson and his wife, Eva, opened six acres of his creekside land for public recreation in the 1920s. In 1942, the family donated the land—between SE 34th and SE 39th—to the City of Portland.

(above) The WPA built a bridge across the creek on the land Johnson had opened for public use. The waterfall and fish ladder they built at 45th Avenue are still in place today.

(below) This 1937 photo, taken from the Bybee overpass, shows the brand new Pacific Highway (now McLoughlin Boulevard). It connected people to Milwaukie and Oregon City in the south and Portland in the north. New bridges over the Willamette offered access to and from downtown.

“This is a beautiful place, with a running stream for fishing and swimming and with lovely beaches and an ice-cold spring of pure water.... All these years, Mr. Johnson has let us enjoy this place...”

— Letter to the Editor,
Oregon Journal, January 1931



Johnson Creek Watershed Council

ROY T. BISHOP INTERPRETIVE WALK

TODAY & TOMORROW



The Springwater Corridor offers many miles of bicycle and pedestrian trails and side trails. Close by, buses and light rail offer viable and inexpensive alternatives to cars.

Over the years, thousands of buildings and roads have been built in Johnson Creek’s floodplain. Their hard surfaces have increased the stream’s natural tendency to flood. Work to channelize the stream in the 1930s only made flooding worse.

Fortunately, we’ve learned a great deal about stream function since the 1930s. We’ve designed natural ways to give the creek the room it needs when its waters run high. In recent projects, we’ve created areas of planned floodplain, where water can safely overflow. Logs have been used to stabilize the creek banks, enhancing fish habitat at the same time.

Ongoing restoration projects are built on a foundation of many hours of hard work. For decades, local volunteers and grassroots organizations have been removing invasive weeds and planting native trees and shrubs next to the creek. The streamside forest they are restoring provides habitat for wildlife and improves water quality.



(above) Johnson Creek starts in the foothills of Mount Hood and meets the Willamette in downtown Milwaukie. As of 2012, 180,000 people lived in its watershed.

(below) Creek stewards like these volunteers from Johnson Creek Watershed Council are building healthy habitat along the creek. As more people join in caring for Johnson Creek, its future looks bright.

Watershed councils like the Johnson Creek Watershed Council are active all over Oregon.


Get involved in your neighborhood!





ROY T. BISHOP INTERPRETIVE WALK

RESTORED HABITAT




The beavers are back! These natural architects need areas of slow water along the creek and build dams that provide healthy habitat for young salmon.


This stretch of Johnson Creek was restored when the light rail line was built. Using boulders as anchors, logs were inserted into the stream channel to provide shelter for native fish. The logs also serve as hosts for insects and other microorganisms that salmon and trout like to eat.

An excavated side channel offers more fish habitat when the creek is running high in the winter. The replanted streamside forest shades the creek and keeps it cool while providing habitat for birds and other animals.

From great blue herons to songbirds and woodpeckers, you'll hear and see many kinds of birds along the creek. Come at dawn to see black-tailed deer and at dusk to see little brown bats in summer. And if you're especially patient, you may catch a glimpse of spawning coho salmon in autumn, and Chinook salmon and steelhead trout in spring.




Downy Woodpecker




Townsend's Warbler

Salmon Life Cycle
The health of migrating fish is based on cold, clear water, places to hide, and access upstream to spawning grounds. Wild Coho salmon are spawning further upstream than they have in many years thanks to ongoing restoration projects.





Courtesy of Pierce Native / Crystal Springs Partnership

Red Flowering Currant



Great Blue Heron



Johnson Creek Watershed Council