



Photo by Ian Poellet

NATIONAL REGISTER *of* HISTORIC PLACES

McLoughlin Promenade



THE
MCMCLOUGHLIN
PROMENADE
1851



THE MCMCLOUGHLIN PROMENADE is a historic park site along the edge of Oregon City's prominent bluff which was donated to the people of Oregon City by Dr. John McLoughlin in 1851. Between 1936 and 1939, the contributing park site was improved by three distinct but connected contributing structures constructed of locally quarried basalt and concrete. These structures are locally significant, as examples of Oregon City's direct response to trends in local, state and national history. The first element is a 2,300-foot-long basalt stone and concrete pathway that runs along the prominent bluff, approximately 100-feet above historic downtown Oregon City. The second element is known as the Grand Staircase. It consists of a stone and concrete stairway at the north end of the path that leads down the bluff and curves south to meet the Municipal Elevator tunnel. A second leg of the Grand Staircase, known as the Singer Hill Road underpass, crosses below Singer Hill to the east of the Promenade, and rises through two short flights of stairs to the grassy lawns surrounding the McLoughlin House. The third structure is Singer Falls, a man-made waterfall consisting of five concrete tiers that takes Singer Creek from the top of the bluff to downtown. It sits just north of the Grand Staircase and the two intertwine on the steep descent.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA), a Depression-era federal agency that employed artists and skilled workers on public works projects, assisted with the construction of the Promenade during the Great Depression and completed the work in 1939. All three elements had been constructed on the site of features that predate Euro-American settlement, including paths used by Native Clowewalla, Cashhok and Molalla tribes for hundreds of years.

The park has been well maintained by the City of Oregon City, as well as by local residents who take pride in caring for its landscaping. The Promenade was recently restored by stone masons who were able to repair degraded stone and concrete elements while retaining the rustic character of the original materials. The landscape features and the three contributing structures retain excellent integrity.



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HISTORIC LANDMARKS *in* OREGON CITY

THE PROMENADE WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1937 in an effort to beautify the park donated by Dr. John McLoughlin and to provide work for Oregonians during the Great Depression. Construction of the basalt wall along the Promenade was one of three WPA projects from 1938 to encourage city-wide growth, development, and beautification. The stone masonry wall and railing structure are also significant for their style and means of construction. Park architecture of the Great Depression often followed principles of rustic design developed by the National Park Service during the early decades of the 20th century. The McLoughlin Promenade is an excellent, regional example of the rustic style. It expresses its character through natural materials, rough-hewn surfaces, and subtle ornament that blends into the landscape to enhance the natural beauty of the site.

The Promenade structures are significant park enhancements built by WPA workers to highlight the beauty of Oregon City's dramatic bluff, to enhance a historic park enjoyed by Oregon City residents since it was donated in 1851, and to put Oregonians to work during the nation's most severe economic crisis to date. The McLoughlin Promenade has received in-kind repairs over the years, and a small number of non-contributing improvements, including light standards, have been added to the park land. The stairway was altered near its termination at the foot of the bluff to accommodate a new municipal elevation in 1955, but the pathway, the stairs and the waterfall otherwise retain their original design, materials and workmanship. They remain in their original locations and retain integrity of site and setting, continuing to enhance the natural assets of the park.

The Promenade also retains significant integrity of feeling and association. The WPA was a nationwide, federal program that helped states and local communities respond to the Great Depression with a combination of construction and service projects designed to provide work relief for men and women of various skill levels. Federal programs had a tremendous effect on Oregon, building the Bonneville Dam (1933-38), Timberline Lodge (1937), and Oregon's state capitol building (1938). The WPA also employed researchers, writers and artists through programs like the Oregon Federal Theater Project and the Oregon Federal Writers Project.

In Oregon City, the urban landscape was permanently altered, including road work on Oregon 99E, the construction of an underpass through Singer Hill (1937), the construction of the Clackamas County Courthouse downtown (1937), and the construction of the McLoughlin Promenade (1939). The Promenade project was managed by Oregon City's City Manager, J.L. Franzen, and constructed using public funds over a period of three years in one of the most significant parks in Oregon City. The park's improvements met a number of the WPA's primary goals: it put people to work near their homes; it employed skilled and unskilled craftsmen; and it improved a city park with compatible structures that highlight the city's natural assets, including the Willamette River, the bluff, and Singer Creek. Projects like the Promenade were also thought to have a positive psychological impact on both workers and park visitors. The Promenade features views of the city's industrial district, providing residents with an opportunity to reflect on the historic downtown and its patterns of commercial and industrial growth. Added viewpoints look over the Willamette Falls, the historic inspiration for the early settlement site. The project also provides opportunities for visitors to engage with the natural landscape of the bluff, enjoying unique views from the walkway and from the Grand Staircase.



The Promenade's primary walkway runs largely north and south along the western edge of the city's steep basalt cliff. This location provides spectacular views of downtown, the power-generating Willamette Falls, and the Oregon City-West Linn bridge, one of the first bridges designed by Oregon's renowned state bridge engineers, Conde McCullough. The path also provides views of the natural vegetation growing along the basalt cliff.

The Promenade is a unique park site and a unique amenity in Oregon City. The WPA project highlighted the park's assets and provided a lasting legacy for residents and visitors. The walkways, stairs and waterfall improved public access and safety along a city park donated by Dr. John McLoughlin to the people of Oregon City in 1851. The Promenade appears in local newspaper as early as 1866, when the Oregon City Enterprise noted that *"all the open or vacant space fronting on lots and blocks west of High Street have been donated for the use of a public promenade. This was truly a wise provision. The principal portion of residences in Oregon City will eventually be upon the bluff, and the view is most commanding for miles up and down the river. Even now, in its primitive state, a grand sight is presented to the public from this promenade."* The site has been used as a public park continually since the city's platting. The site retains unparalleled views of downtown and the Willamette River, and provides places to walk, run, or ride a bike. Because of McLoughlin's donation, development was restricted along the bluff. McLoughlin's foresight allowed Oregon City to retain public ownership of one of its greatest scenic assets, and to preserve the public's access to this dramatic location. The park not only provides views of the city and the river, but it allows the bluff to retain its distinctly rustic qualities, providing some continuity between the paths walked by Native tribes and the park's contemporary users, who walk a similar path today.



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