

# OSWEGO PIPE WORKS



Illustrations left to right top: Forty to sixty Oswego men worked at the pipe foundry. The man standing fourth from right is Charles Pauling, grandfather of Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling. Courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library.

Pipe stacked outside the cleaning shed. The chimney of the second furnace looms in the background. Courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library.

Switching locomotive at the pipe works. Courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library.

Illustrations left to right below: Cleaning pipe. Illustration from the *West Shore* magazine, November 2, 1889.

O.I.&S. ad from the *West Shore* magazine, November 2, 1889.

## WATER PIPE FOR THE WEST COAST

The Oswego Pipe Works, built by the Oregon Iron & Steel Company in 1888, was the first pipe foundry west of Saint Louis. Located on the south bank of Tryon Creek beside the Willamette River, the foundry was a separate operation from the company's nearby smelting furnace. The foundry operated intermittently for 40 years producing water and gas pipe for Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco. The pipe works closed in 1928.

Portland's first water mains were three-inch wooden pipes, bored out by hand. In 1864 the Portland Water Company installed the city's first cast iron water mains.

To keep up with Portland's expanding water needs, the water company had to ship tons of pipe around the Horn every year. Not surprisingly, the water company owners, who were also stockholders in the Oregon Iron Company, began thinking about manufacturing pipe in Oregon. The opportunity to build a pipe foundry came in 1888 when the Oregon Iron & Steel Company built a new iron works half a mile north of the old furnace.

Until 1895 Portland's water came from the Willamette River and local creeks. Repeated disease outbreaks from dirty water caused a public outcry. In 1885 the Portland Water Committee was formed to search for a cleaner source of drinking water. Six of its 15 members were stockholders in the Oregon Iron & Steel Company and the dominant spirit was William S. Ladd, vice-president of O. I. & S.



After considering options that included Oswego Lake and the Clackamas River, the committee chose Mount Hood's Bull Run River as Portland's water source. Oregon Iron & Steel was awarded a contract to manufacture pipe for the 24-mile pipeline. On January 2, 1895, the first Bull Run water flowed to Portland and within two years there was a phenomenal decrease in the number of cases of typhoid fever. Portland achieved the lowest death rate on record at the time.

## THE DURABILITY OF CAST IRON PIPE



For centuries, cast iron pipe has contributed immeasurably to the quality of life by delivering clean water and removing waste. No form of pipe has proven safer or more enduring than cast iron. Cast iron water pipe installed at the Palace of Versailles in 1664 has been functioning for over 300 years. In 2010 more than 500 North American cities, including

Portland, had cast iron water mains more than 100 years old and at least 12 cities had cast iron mains installed over 150 years ago. In the 1950s ductile cast iron and centrifugal casting replaced vertical pit casting. Ironically, the newer pipes have a shorter life span than the older pipes. Pipe made in the 1950s is expected to last for 150 years, compared to 200 years for heavier pipe made in 1910.

