

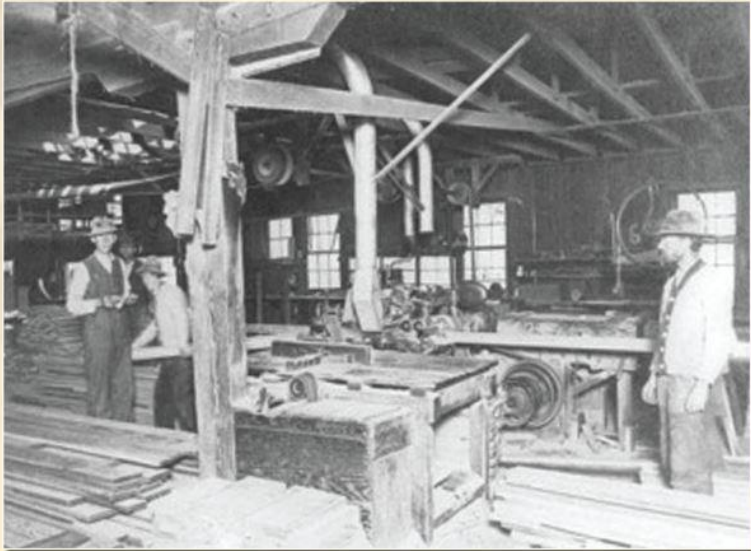
# Eugene Millrace: History

Title bar photo: Head of Mill Race (c. 1933)  
Provided by Lane County Historical Museum

## Industry on the Rise

Along the banks of the Willamette River, clusters of eroding concrete and moss-covered walls are all that remain of a once-definitive structure for the city of Eugene: the millrace. By definition a millrace is a channel engineered to concentrate gravity-fed current to drive water wheels. The Eugene Millrace was built in 1851 to power a single sawmill. Over the following 30 years, more than a dozen additional mills and factories sprang up along the millrace, harnessing hydropower for their operations.

By the 1870s and 1880s, the millrace had become the industrial heart of the city and boasted many thriving businesses, including a furniture factory, a tannery and a brewery. In the image below, you can see the inside of the Midgley Sash and Door Factory (c.1910), whose machinery was driven by the millrace.



Midgley Sash and Door Factory. Photo provided by Lane County Historical Museum



Water Wheels. Photo provided by Lane County Historical Museum



Ice Skating. Photo provided by Lane County Historical Museum

## A Thriving Millrace

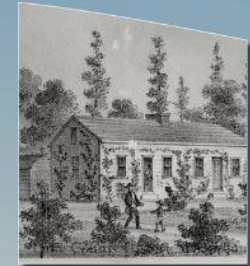
During the 1890s and 1900s, the importance of the millrace continued to increase as an industrial power source, as well as a recreational destination. Pictured above are water wheels common to millrace structures (left) and ice skaters enjoying the channel (right).



Razing the Barr Bros. Factory. Photo provided by Lane County Historical Museum

## Decline of an Era

With the arrival of electric power during the 1920s, the industrial importance of the millrace began to diminish. The 1948 razing of the Barr Bros. Factory is pictured above.



Shaw's Home. Image provided by Lane County Historical Museum

### Hilyard Shaw: The man behind the millrace

After a failed gold mining effort in California, Hilyard Shaw moved to Eugene in 1849. In 1851, Shaw made the most of his riverfront, 640-acre donation land claim by constructing a millrace that ran through what is now downtown Eugene. Seventy years before Eugene received electricity, the powerful force of the millrace drove large water wheels, which in turn helped power industrial machinery.

By 1852, Shaw had a sawmill operating off the millrace and a gristmill by 1856. Thanks to the quality of its product, Shaw's gristmill helped Oregon become recognized for having some of the finest flour in the nation at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

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