INTRODUCTION

The Thompson’s Mills historical site stands on a quiet bend of the Calapooia River, just outside the small town of Shedd, Oregon. Originally a grist mill, it played an important role in the history of the area. It was built in 1858, a year before Oregon became a state (Shedd 10). For many years it ground the flour that was the staple diet of the early pioneers. As times changed, the mill changed with them, adjusting its focus to continue making a profit when local farmers began to grow other crops. Forward-thinking owners allowed the mill to keep operating while other mills from the same era were abandoned or destroyed. The mill continued to operate until 2004, when it was sold to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, and it is now open to the public.

This paper will describe how the mill was built, the background of its founder, and the town that briefly stood next to it. It will discuss the changes made by different owners, and the effect of various world events on the operation of the mill. Finally, it will explain why this site was chosen as a State Heritage Site.

SUMMARY

The Thompson’s Mills site is an important window into Oregon history. It was built by a man who persevered despite adversity and setbacks to achieve his goal. The mill helped to feed the early pioneers in the area. It managed to survive for over one hundred fifty years, by adapting as the world around it changed. It played a role in significant world events. It still stands today, as one of the few local buildings from its time that have been preserved. Its status as a State Heritage Site means that it is open to all visitors. Modern audiences can learn about resilience and flexibility as they observe the rough, hand-cut timbers and the steady chugging of the machines that run by the power of the water, just as they were designed to do so many years ago.