

September 15, 2002 Issue

## In Search of Windmills



Can you believe this weather? Summer in Washington goes on and on. In my garden, the tomatoes are so plentiful I have trouble keeping them picked. My blueberry bushes still have bountiful fruit on them. The Italian prunes are bending the heavy laden branches of the tree. My first crop of Jonagold apples is nearing time for harvest. Fall is in the air. As I look around, I see leaves beginning to turn yellow, gold and bronze. The nights are a little crisper, the sunshine a bit more hazy. I hear that the new Farmers' Almanac is predicting a colder winter this time. I could have told you that. 'Cat' is putting on a dense coat. Squirrels are busier than ever putting winter's store of nuts in the sweet earth of my garden and pots. Soon flocks of geese will be soaring on high, winging their way south. But wait! I want summer to stay! Can you blame me? I so enjoy sitting in my lawn chair, facing the sun and breathing in the delightful fragrance of the roses. This is Summer's pause. She is holding on tight, reluctant to give up her place to the inevitable. Ah, summer. Please stay!

Next Issue: The Clever Corvid

Windmills are an enduring part of the American scene. New, high tech wands are sprinkled across the Eastern Washington landscape, turning many glistening blades to provide service to remote areas as well as communities and cities around the Northwest. Their gleaming presence is an awesome sight.

But I search for an older, more nostalgic form of American windmill. I have found them in Oregon, Washington, and California. No doubt, as I eventually travel across this great nation of ours, they will turn up in the hills, valleys, and plains of nearly all the states of the union.

### "I have found them in Oregon, Washington and California"

My first painting of a windmill was of one located near Elkton, Oregon. Standing in a tangle of blackberry brambles and nearly obscured by tall trees, there she was! Her softly patinaed red blades were gently rotating in an early summer breeze. I spent as much time as possible photographing the windmill, focusing as closely as my camera would allow to get the details of its architecture. It was a delight to paint this wooden structure in gouache. Her muted tones were a pleasant counterpoint to the colorful background.

Heading south on highway 101 recently, my husband, Ed spied another old wooden windmill near Klamath, California. It was early on a golden morning. We stopped and took a lot of pictures. Close-up shots of the structure assured me that I would be able to paint it accurately. Both of these wonderful windmills were soon printed in limited edition and on my website.

It was then I heard from John Cox. Mr. Cox lives in Southern Oregon, not far from Medford. He purchased one of my windmill prints, and through e-mail correspondence, I learned that he collects, restores and repairs vintage metal windmills. My husband and I were invited to visit his ranch to meet him and research his collection.

In May of 2002, we drove to Eagle Point, Oregon and met John. The day was stormy and huge thunderheads loomed on

the horizon as we neared the ranch. Mr. Cox met us with pleasant greetings and immediately escorted us to the "windmill field". There before us were his seventeen 90 to 100 year old windmills of differing sizes and shapes. As John talked about each one, I took notes as fast as my pencil could fly. Ed took pictures. Gusts of wind set the slashing blades to whirling on the working windmills. ( For practical reasons, not all of them were set up.) In his twelve years accumulating these towers, John Cox has become quite an expert on them. He told me of their manufacturers, how one differs from another, the date they began service, and more.

### "(Mr. Cox)... collects, restores and repairs vintage metal windmills"

There was the 10' Gem, (the only complete one known to exist.); the circa 1900 Steel Star;; the Mast Foes & Co. Imperial; and my favorite, the Hummer Elgin with 10' span. (She is a steel vaneless section mill with a chicken perched atop of the counterweight.) His knowledge was impressive, his windmills exquisite. As we stood and talked, the wind picked up and we headed for his covered porch. Suddenly a flash of lightning flamed the dark sky, followed almost instantly by a deafening clap and roll of thunder. Hailstones clattered everywhere and the working windmills responded in a furious blur of activity. What a glorious display on a memorable day! Reluctantly we said goodbye to John and filled with fresh ideas for paintings, continued on our journey.

*Carol Thompson*

## Featured Artwork

**Three Windmills**



"On a high windy hill in south central Oregon, three vintage windmills stand ready to catch the wind of the oncoming storm."

**Old Pals**



"Nearly lost in a tangle of blackberry briars, an aging piece of farm equipment rests beneath a faded windmill. These 'old pals' once worked together to produce bountiful harvests on a now long neglected farm."

**Windmill**



"South of Eureka, California, U.S.A., on a golden summer day, an old windmill stands sedately. It seems to be patiently waiting for the wind to pick up so it can get back to the work it has been doing for so long."