

# Glazed Terra Cotta Historic District

Portland has a large concentration of buildings faced or decorated with glazed terra cotta, almost all of which are located in the present downtown commercial core. The structures were built between 1905 and 1930, reflecting a remarkable visual unity of materials and scale of detail.

Terra cotta is a hard-baked, fine grained composite clay. Architectural terra cotta is formed in hollow blocks, approximately twelve inches deep, with variously-sized faces, usually twelve by eighteen inches. Glazes are usually applied before the clay is fired. Portland's buildings generally have off-white or cream-colored glazed terra cotta, in keeping with their classical design; some, however, are colored to simulate other materials, such as granite and copper. As can be seen on this tour, architectural terra cotta details — lions' heads, classical motifs, griffins and so forth — can be extremely elaborate. What appears as a single unit from the street is often composed of several closely-fitted units, elaborately connected to the structure by hidden metal anchoring systems.

Although it was considered thoroughly modern during the years it was popular, terra cotta is a handmade building material. It was often used in conjunction with brick, which was used as a "skin" to enclose steel or concrete frames. Portland's buildings featured a number of finely crafted elements that reinforced the era's stylistic tastes, including copper and iron cornices, stone bases, bronze fixtures and elaborate metal and glass canopies. All these elements combined to make downtown a particularly elegant urban environment.

Portland first developed along Front, First and Second Avenues, paralleling the Willamette River. With the arrival of the railroads in the 1880s, and a network of electric streetcars, businesses became less dependent on the river. New, fashionable buildings and public institutions began to rise on Morrison Street in the 1890s, including the Portland Hotel, now the site of Pioneer Courthouse Square. The Lewis and Clark Fair of 1905 served to stimulate rapid development of the present downtown, and a series of glazed terra cotta buildings rose along the major downtown streetcar lines. These light-colored buildings were generally built with steel frames, allowing them greater height than the smaller brick and iron buildings of the city's earlier commercial core.

In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, construction all but halted in Portland. When building recommenced, after World War II, classical styles and handmade materials, such as terra cotta, were generally abandoned in favor of "functionally" expressive buildings which used less labor intensive materials.

## 1 Pioneer Courthouse Square Block Bounded by Broadway, Sixth, Yamhill and Morrison

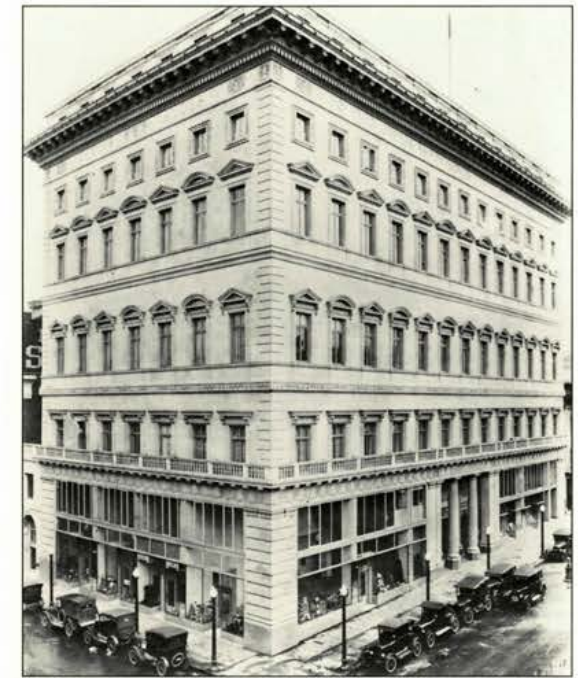
Dedicated in 1984, this public square was the site of Portland's first public schoolhouse. In 1890, the city's first major hotel, the Portland Hotel, opened here. It became the city's cultural center, and by the turn of the century, its geographic center as well. The hotel was demolished in the name of progress in 1952 to make room for a parking lot. The square was designed by the Portland architectural firm of Martin-Soderstrom-Matteson, P.C. It includes twelve monumental terra cotta faced columns with rose capitals, a gesture to the surrounding terra cotta buildings. One set of the Portland Hotel's wrought iron gates has been reinstalled in its original location on Sixth Avenue.

## 2 Pacific Building North Half of Block Bounded by Fifth, Sixth, Taylor and Yamhill

A.E. Doyle's architectural firm designed the building in 1926 for the H.W. Corbett estate, once one of the largest non-corporate investors in downtown real estate. The Italian Renaissance "palace" has a glazed terra cotta cornice and a three-story rusticated terra cotta base. The main lobby, faced with marble and appointed with cast bronze fixtures, is basically intact.

## 3 Journal Building Southeast Corner of Broadway and Yamhill

The 1912 white glazed terra cotta and brick building and freestanding tower — a popular form for newspaper buildings — was designed by the Reid Brothers of San Francisco, for the *Oregon Journal*. It was renamed Jackson Tower for C.S. Jackson, publisher of the *Journal*. The newspaper occupied it until 1948. At night the building is lit by 1,800 light bulbs, which were turned off during World War II and not relit until 1972. The rusticated stucco base is a 1975 replication of the original terra cotta.



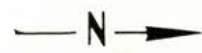
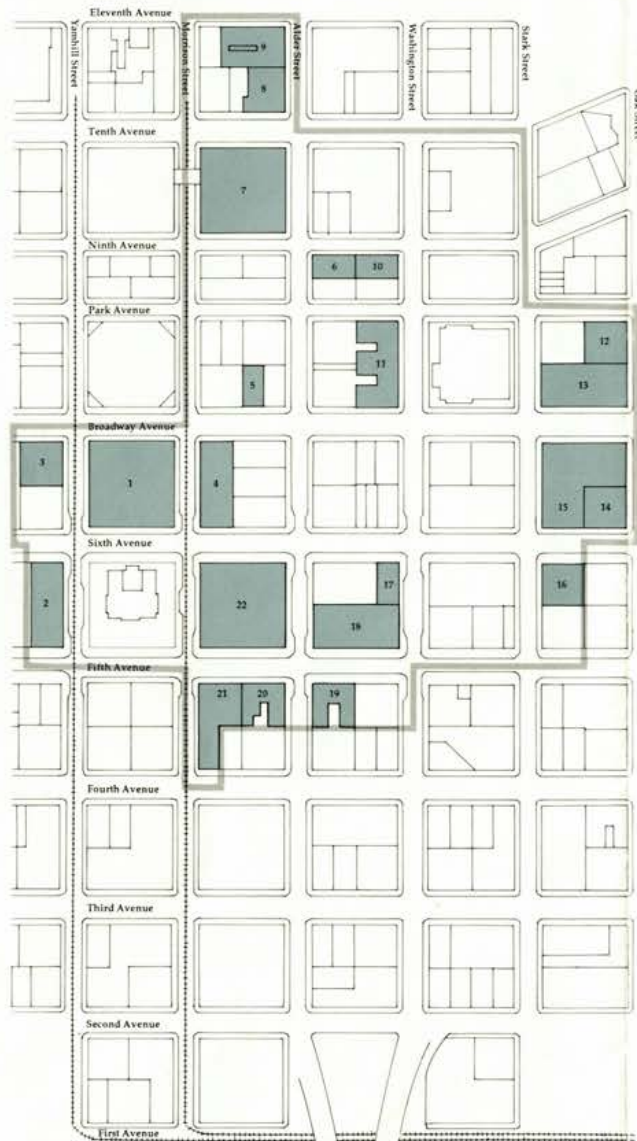
#9 — Elks Temple, c. 1922

## 4 Northwestern National Bank South Half of block bounded by Broadway, Sixth, Alder, Morrison

The Northwestern National Bank was organized by Henry L. Pittock and his son-in-law, Frederick Leadbetter, who together controlled a vast timber and paper empire and were involved with real estate and banking. The 1913 bank and office tower has an off-white glazed terra cotta base and upper floors detailed with classical details, griffins and eagles. Designed by Doyle, Patterson and Beach, its entry and lobby were remodeled by A.E. Doyle's office in 1936-37.

## 5 Charles F. Berg □ 615 Broadway Between Morrison and Alder

The sole example of Art Deco style glazed terra cotta in Portland was a 1930 remodel of the 1902 Dolph building. The Grand Rapids Store Equipment Corporation designed the terra cotta "face lift" for Charles F. Berg. The black terra cotta is textured with "... real gold of 18 karat fineness," one of only three buildings in the U.S. at that time to feature this finish. Its polychrome exterior terra cotta details include rain clouds, sunbursts, spirals and peacocks. The entrance and first floor, which once featured a large atrium, have been altered.



Proposed Historic District Boundary



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## 6 Woodlark Building Northeast Corner of Ninth and Broadway

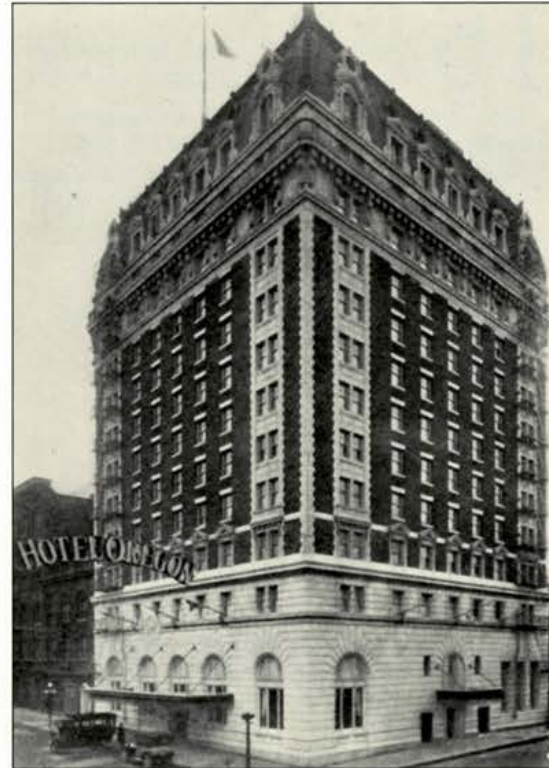
The building was designed by Doyle, Patterson and Beach for Woodard, Clark and Company, a retail drugstore which occupied all nine stories. Glazed terra cotta window arches and a galvanized iron cornice graced the 1912 brick building. Rosettes that once held chains supporting metal marquees are still visible. The glazed terra cotta entrance dates from 1924.

## 7 Olds, Wortman and King Block Bounded by Tenth, Ninth, Morrison and Alder

Designed by C.R. Aldrich for Olds, Wortman and King, a dry goods store established in 1878, this department store building was said to be the only retail store in the Northwest to occupy an entire block when it was built in 1910.



#10 — Stevens Building, c. 1945



#13 — Oregon Hotel, 1913

## 8 Seward Hotel Southwest Corner of Tenth and Alder

The off-white glazed terra cotta motifs in this 1909 building have geometric forms, unusual for the time. The shield-like elements were the trademark of Portland architect William C. Knighton. The copper marquee, leaded-glass panels, onyx wainscoting and mosaic tile floors of the entrance and entry vestibule are original features.

## 9 Elks Temple □ Southeast Corner of Eleventh and Alder

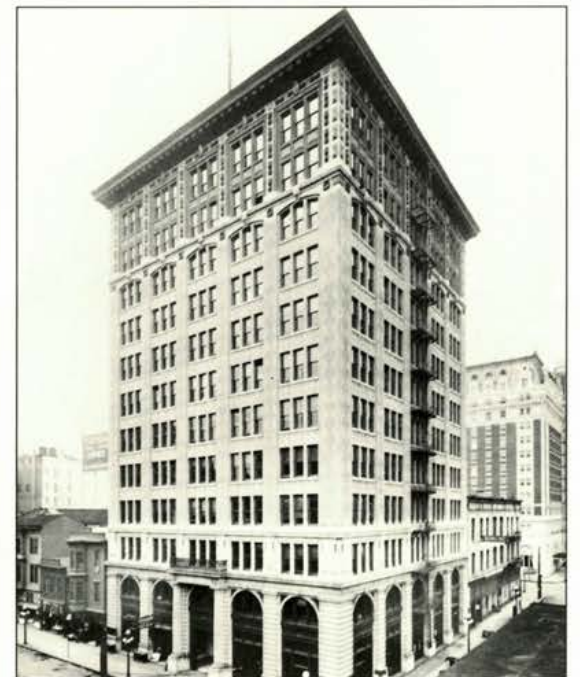
Described as the largest Elks Temple in the country when it was completed in 1920, the building's design was adapted by Portland architects Houghtaling and Dougan from the Farnese Palace in Rome. Close inspection of the pink-glazed terra cotta facade reveals a rich variety of plant and animal forms, including tiny lions' heads in the sheet metal cornice, and a variety of inscriptions. The interior is lavishly decorated with murals and ornamental plasterwork. The structure was renovated in 1984-85 for use as offices.

## 10 Stevens Building Southeast Corner of Ninth and Washington

The structure was designed in 1914 by Portland architects Whidden and Lewis for Theodore B. Wilcox, who parlayed an administrative assistant job at the Portland Ladd and Tilton Bank in the 1880s into a \$10 million fortune. The top two stories of the buff-colored brick office building are faced with off-white glazed terra cotta. The deep overhanging cornice includes classical details and lions' heads. The storefronts have been remodeled.

## 11 Morgan Building North half of block bounded by Park, Broadway, Alder and Washington

Doyle, Patterson and Beach designed the 1913 office block for Morgan-Bushong Investment Company. The red tapestry brick-faced building has a variety of terra cotta details, including dolphins and Neptune's trident in the frieze above the first floor. The storefront level columns are faced with a ceramic veneer in an attempt to emulate the original terra cotta.



#14 — Wells Fargo Building, c. 1914



#15 — U.S. National Bank, c. 1930

## 12 Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company

Southeast Corner of Park and Oak

Designed by San Francisco architect Edwin V. Cobby to complement the Oregon Hotel to its west, the office building's north half was erected in 1914, and the south half in 1926. It is one of the few glazed terra cotta buildings in Portland that has not had its exterior altered.

## 13 Oregon Hotel

Southwest Corner of Broadway and Oak

Built in 1913 for Portland lumberman Simon Benson, the hotel was renamed "Benson" soon after completion. Architects Doyle, Patterson and Beach selected the French Baroque style for the building. The copper-colored mansard roof is part copper and part terra cotta, glazed to look like weathered copper.

## 14 Wells Fargo Building

Southwest Corner of Sixth and Oak

Portland's first skyscraper, constructed in 1907, was designed by Benjamin Wistar Morris, a native Oregonian who practiced architecture in New York City. It has a variety of materials, and colors which are unmatched in Portland. Elements include a blue terra cotta belt course, keystones and wreaths and "Wells Fargo" above the top story.

## 15 U.S. National Bank

South half of block bounded by Broadway, Sixth, Stark and Oak

In 1917, Portland architect A.E. Doyle designed this banking temple. It has fifty-four foot high Corinthian columns which symbolized "the soaring power of finance in a wealthy civilization." The entire structure, except for its granite plinth, is sheathed in a pinkish-gray matte-glazed terra cotta, specifically developed for the project. The design of the doors is based on the theme, "The Development of the Oregon Country."

## 16 Bank of California

Northeast Corner of Sixth and Stark

The exterior of the 1925 Italian Renaissance bank is sheathed in rusticated terra cotta, glazed to simulate granite. The plinth and frieze — which has been plastered over — are marble. Although the interior hall has been remodeled, it retains its original marble floor and polychrome plaster ceiling. Portland architect A.E. Doyle designed the building for the Bank of California, which first established offices in the city in 1905.



#16 — Bank of California, 1925



#19 — Yeon Building, 1911

## 17 Wilcox Building

Southeast Corner of Sixth and Washington

Architects Whidden and Lewis, who designed this brick and terra cotta building, relocated their offices there upon its completion in 1911. The terra cotta frieze and cornice feature a variety of ornamental motifs, including lions' heads and fruit-filled urns. The storefronts, originally faced with terra cotta, are now sheathed with travertine. Theodore Wilcox (see #10) was the original owner.

## 18 Lipman, Wolfe and Co.

East half of block bounded by Sixth, Fifth, Alder and Washington

Sheathed entirely in white glazed terra cotta, the store building has a variety of classical motifs including lions' heads. It was designed in 1912 by Doyle and Patterson for merchant H.W. Corbett and the O'Shea brothers. It originally housed Lipman, Wolfe and Co., a department store first

established in Portland in 1880 by Solomon Lipman and his nephew, Adolphe Wolfe.

## 19 Yeon Building

Northeast Corner of Fifth and Alder

Except for its retail base, the building is entirely faced with off-white glazed terra cotta. Its decorative terra cotta cornice with light bulbs was removed after city building inspectors required all downtown building cornices to be repaired or removed following the fall of a terra cotta lion head from the neighboring Lipman, Wolfe and Co. building. Designed by the Reid Brothers of San Francisco, the structure was built in 1911 for Portland lumber magnate John B. Yeon.

## 20 Failing Building

Southeast Corner of Fifth and Alder

Architects Whidden and Lewis designed this building for the pioneer Failing family, co-owners of the largest hardware supply company in the Northwest. The lower six floors of this ochre-colored brick building were built in 1907 and the upper six floors in 1913. The main entrance, with bronze door frames and Verde Antique marble surround, dates from 1937.



#22 — Meier and Frank Company, c. 1930

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## 21 S.H. Kress and Company Northeast Corner of Fifth and Morrison

Designed in 1928 by architect E.J.T. Hoffman, an S.H. Kress and Company employee, the building is faced with cream-colored glazed terra cotta. The name "Kress" can still be seen in the two parapets at the rooftop.

## 22 Meier and Frank Company Block bounded by Sixth, Fifth, Morrison and Alder

The company grew from a small store established by Aaron Meier at Front and Taylor. It officially became Meier and Frank Co. when Emil Frank joined the firm in 1873. The company moved to its present location in 1898. The original building was replaced by the east half of the present building in 1915. The northwest portion was built in 1909, and the southwest portion in 1932. The 1909 design, by Doyle and Patterson, was inspired by Chicago's famous Carson, Pirie, Scott and Co. Department Store.

**A handful of Portland architects with formal training in classical architecture designed most of the buildings on this tour. William Whidden and Ion Lewis, former M.I.T. classmates formed a partnership in Portland in 1889, after Whidden completed construction supervision on the Portland Hotel for the Boston architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. Among their many buildings was the 1895 City Hall. Albert E. Doyle, who apprenticed with Whidden and Lewis, later studied at Columbia University and then in Europe. In 1907, he opened an office with construction supervisor William Patterson, and within months was hired to design the 1909 Meier and Frank Company building. He had the largest and most prestigious architectural practice in Portland; many of the buildings on this tour were done by his office.**

The City of Portland is committed to preserving historic sites and structures within the city. To this end, the Portland Development Commission and the Portland Historical Landmarks Commission have worked to identify the city's cultural heritage, to preserve its significant landmarks, and to renew its historic areas.

Established in 1958, the City of Portland Development Commission has played a significant role in the revitalization of Portland's downtown. Many of the rehabilitated buildings on the tour have been funded with Commission Urban Conservation Fund loans. The Commission has also funded a variety of urban amenities in the historic districts, including: street lights and flower baskets in Yamhill Historic District; Ankeny Arcade and Park in Skidmore/Old Town Historic District; and street signs, brass plaques and sidewalk stamps that identify the boundaries of the two districts. Historic markers identifying sites of buildings and events contributing to the city's heritage are located throughout the districts.

The Historic Preservation League of Oregon is a private, non-profit statewide organization dedicated to the promotion, protection and preservation of Oregon's historic and cultural resources. Buildings on the tour whose descriptions are marked with the symbol "□" have facades protected, in perpetuity, by a conservation easement held by the Historic Preservation League of Oregon.

This brochure was produced by the Portland Development Commission, in cooperation with the Historic Preservation League of Oregon. All photographs, unless otherwise noted, are courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.

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**PDC**  
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1988

# Glazed Terra Cotta Historic District

A Walking Tour of Historic Buildings

