

STATE OF OREGON INVENTORY
 HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
 State Historic Preservation Office
 Oregon State Parks, Salem 97310



County Multnomah
 Theme Glazed Terra Cotta
 Name
 (Common) Imperial Hotel
 (Historic) Imperial Hotel
 Address 400 S.W. Broadway
Portland
 Present Owner Albert W. Gentner and Albert W. Gentner Jr.
 Address 400 S.W. Broadway, Portland, 97205
 Original Use Hotel
 Date of Construction 1909

Physical description of property and statement of historical significance:

This glazed terra-cotta building is one of approximately 50 constructed in Portland's downtown area between 1900 and 1930. During this period major commercial development shifted away from the strip of land along the Willamette River to border the principal street car routes on Morrison and Washington. As the street car system spread into outlying residential areas (Portland Heights, Willamette Heights, Ladd's Addition Laurelhurst, etc.) it brought increasing numbers of workers and shoppers downtown. And as the demand for office and retail space increased the construction of taller buildings became economically feasible. These taller buildings required a light weight and fireproof facing. Terra cotta met these requirements. It was also relatively inexpensive and could accommodate varying degrees of ornamentation - traits which fostered its use for public buildings of all heights. While unglazed terra cotta had been used for the Romanesque buildings constructed before 1900, the predominantly Classical Revival buildings following 1900 featured terra cotta glazed either buff or cream to give the appearance of stone. (con't)

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Recorded by Virginia Guest Ferriday Date Jan. 1980

Sources Consulted: See below.

Please enclose map Township N E
 W Section

+ PRIMARY

its longtime manager,
The Imperial Hotel was built for Phil Metcham, Jr., whose father was owner and manager of the original (1894) Imperial (now Plaza) directly to the south, and for Theodore B. Wilcox. The two Imperial structures with the Benson cater-cornered across Broadway and Stark, formed a small hotel cluster just south of the Morrison-Washington streetcar commercial core. Opened on Dec. 15, 1909, the Imperial Hotel was designed by Whidden & Lewis.

A nine-story fire-proof structure, it cost \$238,603.87, or 40.5¢/cu.ft.¹ On a 100' x 100' site the L-shaped plan encloses an interior light well onto which approximately one-third of the rooms face. Up until a 1927 remodelling all rooms shared connecting baths.

The basic structure, designed by Northwest Bridge Works, is a combination of riveted steel columns, flat slabs and ribbed slabs. The first floor slab utilized "The Turner Mushroom System."² Ribbed slabs were formed around integral terra cotta tiles.

The exterior wall is faced with buff colored brick. Cream colored glazed terra cotta at the upper story blends with the sheet metal cornice and brackets. Quoining is also glazed terra cotta, as are the belt courses. The first floor terra cotta disappeared at the time of the disastrous 1956 remodeling, when fieldstone veneer was applied to the Broadway facade.

There were once lovely metal and glass canopies over both the Broadway and Stark Street entrances. Windows of the hotel dining room, originally located in the first floor corner, were made by Povey Bros. of Portland.

According to Fred Baker guest room lighting fixtures were the "One and One" type (one gas light and one electric light) manufactured in Chicago.

A coffee shop designed in 1929 by Johnson and Wallwork included murals by Portland artist George Sewall. They are no longer in existence.

The firm of Whidden & Lewis was responsible for the design of eight glazed terra-cotta buildings in downtown Portland.

William H. Whidden (died in 1925) came to Portland from New York in 1882 to supervise construction of the Portland Hotel for McKim, Mead & White. When construction on the hotel ceased Whidden went back East, returning to Portland in 1888 when work resumed. In 1889 he was joined by his friend and classmate Ion Lewis and the two established an office. Ion Lewis (1858-1933) grew up in the Boston area and graduated from MIT. He worked briefly for Peabody & Stearns.

Theodore Burney Wilcox (1856-1918), for whom three glazed terra cotta buildings in downtown Portland were built, was born in Agawam, Massachusetts. Shortly after 1877 while working in a bank in Westfield, Massachusetts, he so impressed visiting Asahel Bush of Portland that Bush offered him a job - which he promptly accepted - at the Ladd & Tilton Bank in Portland. W.S. Ladd made Wilcox his administrative assistant in the early 1880s and later general manager of the Albina Flour Mills.

Wilcox became a major shareholder in the Ladd & Tilton Bank and used it as a tool to enhance his fortunes. At his death his estate was estimated to be worth over \$10 million. Wilcox

Imperial Hotel - Portland

was one of the promoters of the Rose City Park development in Portland. The approximately 160 acres of the Peter Smith DLC which he bought and later moved onto in 1917 was subsequently developed as Wilcox Estates. He served as President of the Oregon Development League, Chairman of the Water Board, Commissioner for the Port of Portland and Chairman of the Auditorium Commission.

Phil Metchan, Jr. was a native of Canyon City and later lived in Heppner where his father was in the hotel business. In his twenties Metchan bought and ran a small hotel in Heppner. He became a local power in the Republican Party serving as Chairman of the Republican State Committee from 1929 to 1930. In 1930 he ran unsuccessfully for governor. He was a Port of Portland Commissioner for 16 years, the last ten as treasurer. Metchan bought out the Wilcox Investment Company's interest in the Imperial in 1926. Perhaps because of Metchan's roots in Eastern Oregon the Imperial has been the traditional stopping place for cattlemen and houses the offices of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association.

Footnotes:

1. Herb Fredericks, "Whidden & Lewis Job List," Oregon Historical Society (vertical file).
2. Working Drawings, City of Portland Bureau of Buildings

Sources Consulted:

MacColl, E. Kimbark, The Shaping of a City. Portland, 1976.

MacColl, E. Kimbark, The Growth of a City. Portland, 1979.

Vaughan, Thomas and Ferriday, Virginia Guest, Space, Style and Structure; Building in Northwest America. Portland, 1974.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles, 1956.

Fredericks, Herb, "Whidden & Lewis Job List," Oregon Historical Society (vertical file).

Portland Architectural Club Yearbook, Second Annual Exhibit, 1910.

Photographs, Oregon Historical Society.

Working Drawings, City of Portland Bureau of Buildings.

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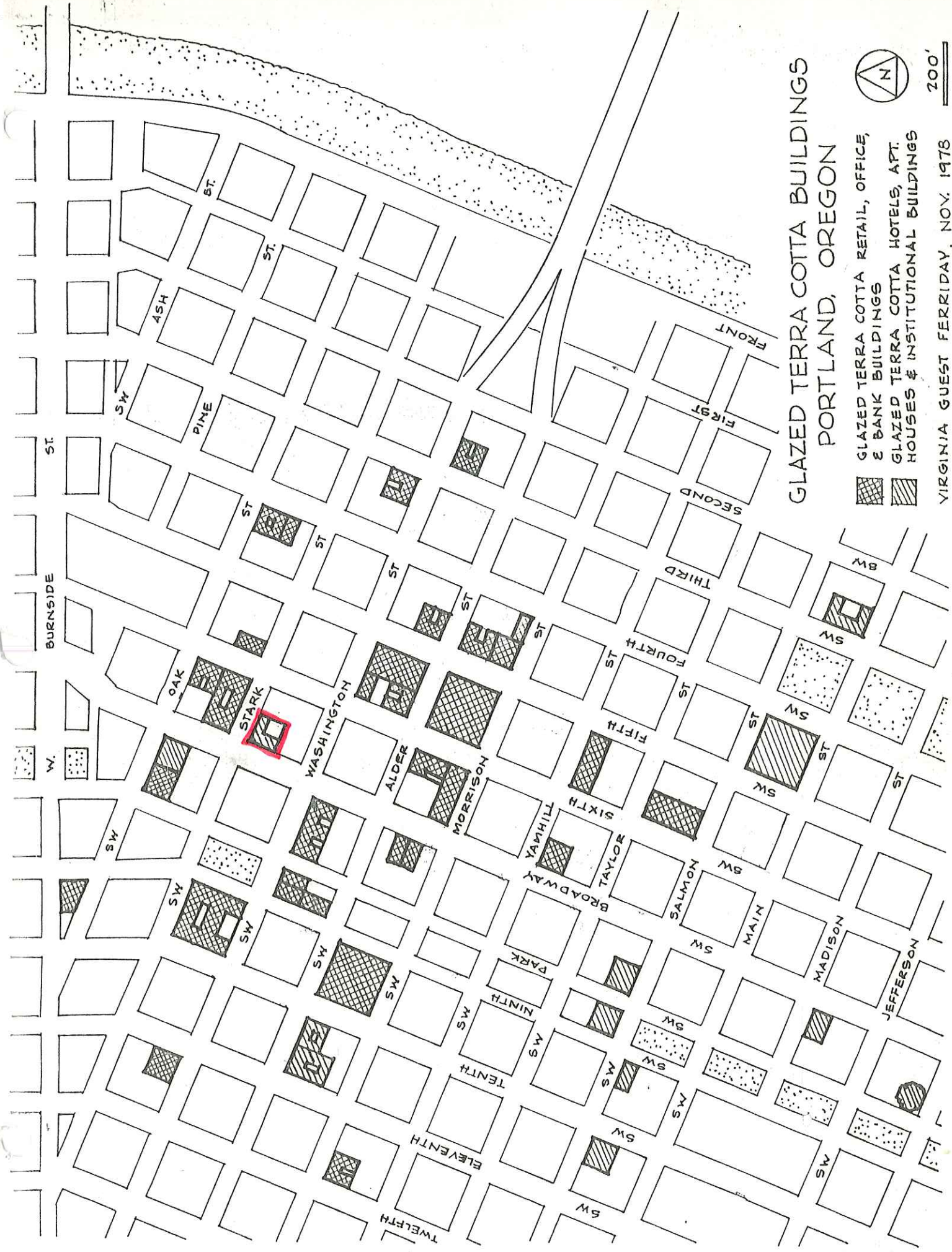
"Reminiscences of Fletcher Linn," Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Oregonian, Jan. 1, 1909, p.4.

Oregonian, Jan. 1, 1910, p. 3.

"Howard Sewall, Oregon Artist 1899-1975, Exhibit in Retrospect"
(no publishing date or place)

Interviews: Fred C. Baker
Al Gentner



GLAZED TERRA COTTA BUILDINGS PORTLAND, OREGON

GLAZED TERRA COTTA RETAIL, OFFICE,
& BANK BUILDINGS
GLAZED TERRA COTTA HOTELS, APT.
HOUSES & INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS



200'

VIRGINIA GUEST FERRIDAY, NOV. 1978