

Oregon Historic Site Record

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME			
address:	300 7th St (approx) Oregon City, Clackamas County		historic name: Oregon City Municipal Elevator
assoc addresses:		current/other names:	
location descr:		block/lot/tax lot:	
		twshp/rng/sect/qtr sect:	2S 2E 31
PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS			
resource type:	structure	height (stories):	2.0
elig evaluation:	eligible/significant	total elig resources:	1
prim constr date:	1955	NR Status:	Individually Listed
	second date:	date indiv listed:	05/15/2014
primary orig use:	Pedestrian Related		orig use comments:
second orig use:			
primary style:	Modern Commercial (Type)		prim style comments:
secondary style:			sec style comments: Futurist
primary siding:	Concrete: Other/Undefined		siding comments:
secondary siding:			
plan type:	Other/Undefined		architect: Gordon E. Trapp
			builder: James & Yost, Inc.
comments/notes:			
Additional RLS survey completed 5/1/2000 Official address is 610 Bluff Street but Main Street Entrance is on 7th; also known as "Elevator Street"; recommend featuring this structure! One of only two vertical streets in the US, replaced earlier water-powered wooden structure that was constructed in 1915, Features a central round shaft with a single car that shuttles 120,000 riders annually. At the top of the structure, a small overlook balcony surrounds the shaft with a long row of fixed windows overlooking the city below. It is one of 4 municipal elevators in the world and remains only "vertical street" (Elevator Street) in North America. It is 130' high and is accessed from downtown via a 35' tunnel under the railroad tracks.			
GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS			
Survey/Grouping Included In:	Type of Grouping	Date Listed	Date Compiled
Oregon City Central Business District Resurvey 2009	Survey & Inventory Project		1999
Oregon City Main Street RLS	Survey & Inventory Project		2009
SHPO INFORMATION FOR THIS PROPERTY			
NR date listed:	05/15/2014	106 Project(s):	None
ILS survey date:		Special Assess Project(s):	None
RLS survey date:	01/19/2009	Federal Tax Project(s):	None
ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION			
<i>(Includes expanded description of the building/property, setting, significant landscape features, outbuildings and alterations)</i>			
<p>The Oregon City Municipal Elevator is a 130-foot-tall, public elevator tower rising from an underground tunnel in downtown Oregon City to connect with the city's second level atop a bluff to the east. The elevator is a Modern, reinforced concrete structure designed by Gordon E. Trapp (1915-2009) of the engineering firm, Stevens & Thompson of Portland, Oregon. It was constructed by the Portland engineering firm, James & Yost in 1955. The elevator was designed to be futuristic in style and to incorporate minimal ornament. From downtown, the elevator is accessed through a tunnel aligned with the intersection of 7th Street and Railroad Avenue or via a tunnel that runs east under the Union Pacific railroad tracks at the base of Singer Hill. Metal elevator doors are embedded in the tunnel's eastern wall. These doors access a staffed Otis elevator that rises through the elevator's narrow, cylindrical shaft into the center of an observatory. The horseshoe-shaped observatory has canted walls and large windows offering unobstructed views of the city below, including the Willamette Falls to the south. From the observation deck, pedestrians exit east to the paved McLoughlin Promenade, a linear park with a concrete pathway that runs north and south along the edge of the bluff. The elevator is backed by the natural vegetation and basalt outcroppings of the bluff, and is constructed of reinforced lightweight concrete. Routine maintenance has occurred over the years, but the tunnel, shaft and observation deck retain excellent integrity of design, materials, workmanship, site, location, feeling and association. In 2008, the City of Oregon City installed a permanent, non-contributing art exhibit designed by artist Michael Asbill. The observation deck's floor was painted with a map of Oregon City, and the tunnel and observation deck walls were hung with framed historic images of Oregon City.</p>			
HISTORY			
<i>(Chronological, descriptive history of the property from its construction through at least the historic period - preferably to the present)</i>			
<p>The Municipal Elevator is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a locally significant structure, eligible under Criterion A: Transportation, as an ingenious solution to a topographical challenge. Oregon City was built on a series of three bluffs. The first and the second levels are separated by a sheer basalt cliff. A railroad track hugs the base of the cliff. This elevator was designed to swiftly move passengers between one level and the other while helping them cross safely below the railroad tracks. The elevator is therefore a unique and highly practical response to the city's dramatic landscape and its intrinsic challenges for pedestrians. Furthermore, the elevator is eligible under Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation. The elevator's observation deck was designed to be a public attraction, as well as to provide unparalleled views of the city below and the Willamette River. The elevator is also eligible under Criterion C: Architecture as an intact and unique example of a Modern, futuristic approach to design in Oregon City. The elevator uses modern materials like lightweight concrete to create the illusion that its observatory is hovering in space, providing sky-high views of the city below. The elevator's designer, Gordon E. Trapp, broke with historic architectural traditions to create a new, sleek, Modernist icon for Oregon City. The Municipal Elevator retains a very high level of integrity in design, workmanship, materials, location, site, and setting, feeling and association. Criterion A: Transportation Oregon City's Municipal Elevator was designed for the City of Oregon City to help pedestrians travel between the city's two levels. Oregon City's site along the riverbank was chosen by Dr. John McLoughlin of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1829 because of the great power of the Willamette Falls, which is the second largest falls in the U.S. in volume. These falls are less than a mile south of the elevator. However, Oregon City soon outgrew the narrow shelf of the riverbank and expanded atop the surrounding bluffs. Development along the first bluff began as early as the mid-19th century, providing transportation challenges to those who lived on one tier and worked, shopped, or attended church on the other. Moving between levels was further complicated by the existence of railroad tracks that ran north and south along the bluff's lower edge. Pedestrians had to move between tiers, but they also had to safely cross the tracks. Residents devised a series of solutions to these topographical challenges. The first included foot paths, later improved by the construction of wood stairs. In 1915, the city's first municipal elevator was constructed at this site, but by 1954 it had deteriorated and needed to be replaced. The current Oregon City Municipal Elevator not only improved on the speed and reliability of the first elevator, but its futuristic design made it a popular tourist attraction and local icon. The Oregon City Municipal Elevator incorporates a high-speed Otis elevator car, allowing passengers to move swiftly between levels. It also provides a destination, unloading passengers into the futuristic observatory that seems to hover above the city, providing sky-high views of Oregon City's most distinctive assets, the Willamette Falls, the historic, commercial downtown, the bridges over the Willamette River, and the industrial center, which has supported Oregon City with goods and jobs since the early-1800s. Since its completion in 1955,</p>			

the elevator has been celebrated as an effective transportation enhancement that greatly improves connectivity between the city's two primary districts, thereby facilitating social and commercial interaction among city residents. The elevator has become a city icon and tourist attraction, shuttling approximately 120,000 riders between levels annually. Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation The Municipal Elevator is also eligible under Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation. The elevator was constructed primarily as a means of transportation. However, the construction of the observation deck, designed to provide nearly 360-degree views of Oregon City and the Willamette River, raises the structure above its utilitarian function. The observation deck, which is not functionally necessary, has only a single purpose: to provide access to views and to celebrate Oregon City's unique topography. Located on the banks of a river, near an impressive water fall, the city is an aesthetic gem. The observation deck, with canted windows that allow the viewer to lean forward and look down into the city below, was specifically designed to share the qualities of the location with the viewer, and provide a thrilling opportunity to get a bird's-eye view of the city and river below. Though the elevator was constructed as a utilitarian structure, its current iconic popularity speaks to its dual use. Criterion C: Architecture Oregon City's Municipal Elevator also meets eligibility requirements for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C: Architecture. The elevator is not only a practical solution to a transportation challenge. It was also designed to replace an aging, utilitarian elevator of 1915 with a sleek, Modern tower and observatory that addressed topographical challenges while celebrating Oregon City's dramatic landscape, providing unobstructed views of the city's primary assets. Its futurist form was made possible by the incorporation of one of the new materials from the early-20th century that helped free architecture from its pre-modern roots: lightweight concrete. The Municipal Elevator's design reflects a post-war interpretation of early 20th-century futurist principles, which it shares with other buildings and structures of the era. Among its features is an observation deck, an asset that has appeared in other landmark buildings, many of which also incorporate aerodynamic, space age forms similar to that of the Oregon City Municipal Elevator. The Oregon City Municipal Elevator is unique, however, in that it is first an elevator, and only secondly a Modern observation tower. It reflects Oregon City's desire, at the time, to celebrate its industry and build a modern tower that spoke to its future, while continuing to move people from the lower levels to the upper levels of the city.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Title Records	Census Records	Property Tax Records	✓ Local Histories
Sanborn Maps	Biographical Sources	✓ SHPO Files	✓ Interviews
Obituaries	✓ Newspapers	State Archives	Historic Photographs
City Directories	Building Permits	State Library	

Local Library: Oregon City Library

Historical Society:

University Library:

Other Repository:

Bibliography:

Books Cattermole, Paul. Buildings For Tomorrow. New York: The Overlook Press, 2006. Clausen, Meredith L., Pietro Belluschi, Modern American Architect. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994. Hess, Alan. Google Redux, Ultramodern Roadside Architecture. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2004. Lynch, Vera Martin. Free Land for Free Men: A Story of Clackamas County. Portland: Artline Printing, Inc., 1973. Pehdt, Wolfgang, Editor. Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1964. Ritz, Richard Ellison. Architects of Oregon: A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased – 19th and 20th Centuries. Portland: Lair Hill Publishing, 2002. Rowland, Kurt, A History of the Modern Movement Art Architecture Design. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973. Newspapers and Magazines AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, "Trapp, Gordon E" in the American Architects Directory, <http://communities.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1045355.aspx>, accessed July 28, 2013. Oregon City Enterprise-Courier, various editions, as cited in text. Oregon City Enterprise-Courier Elevator Dedication Edition, May 5, 1955. Portland Oregonian, various editions, as cited in text. Life Magazine, undated clippings from the City of Oregon City's clipping file. Portland Tribune. Gordon E. Trapp Obituary, September 16, 2009. Lynnwood Enterprise. "Pavilion's 'Design Excellence' Noted," Vol. 11, No 36, May 7, 1969. Timberg, Scott, "John Lautner's Chemosphere," Los Angeles Times, July 23, 2011. Weinstein, Dave. "Beyond Flash and Fancy: Architect John Lautner" Eichler Network, <http://eichlernetwork.com/article/beyond-flash-and-fancy-architect-john-lautner#.TlubDVYvZIs.email>, accessed August 2011. Public Documents Beckner, Chrisanne, Diana Painter. Oregon City Historic Preservation Program Update, Phase 2: Nominations. August 2011, held by the City of Oregon City. Curran, Christine A. Determination of Eligibility for the Oregon City Municipal Elevator and McLoughlin Promenade, Oregon Department of Transportation, October, 1994, accessible from the Oregon State Historic Sites Database. Dennis, Michelle L. Historic Resource Survey Form for The Bluff at 8th Street, May 2000, held by the City of Oregon City. Historic Photos, Municipal Elevator Construction Project, City of Oregon City records, May – September 1954, held by the City of Oregon City. Oregon City Commission Minutes, 1913-1955, held by the City of Oregon City. Terway Laura, planner with the City of Oregon City. Interviewed by the author, Oregon City, Oregon. February 9, 2013. Wright, Sally and David Pinyerd. Eugene Modernism, 1935–65. City of Eugene, OR, June 2003, held by the City of Eugene, OR.