Historic Resource Inventory
CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



1-005-00621

621 S.W. Fifth Avenue

Portland, Block 173, Lots 1-8
QUARTER SECTION MAP #: 3029.5
Downtown Community Association

ORIGINAL NAME: Meier and Frank Company Building

ORIGINAL FUNCTION: Retail

DATE BUILT: 1909, 1915, 1930

STYLE: Twentieth Century Classical

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS BY: Doyle and Patterson

ORIGINAL OWNER: Meier and Frank Company

TAX ASSESSOR'S ACCOUNT #: R-66771-7660, R-66771-7720, R-66771-7740, R-66771-7700, R-66771-7760

ZONING: C1Z
DESIGNATION: NATIONAL REGISTER
HISTORIC DISTRICT: Glazed Terra Cotta (potential)

SPECIAL FEATURES AND MATERIALS:
Ten-story classically composed facade topped by two-story addition. Steel-frame structure faced with off-white glazed terra cotta. Windows of plate glass with metal frames at street level and double hung with wood sash above. Glazed terra cotta ornament includes balustrade, decorative panels, meandering frets, torus moldings, lamb's tongue, beed and reel, and wave scrolls. Entrance marquises and wrought iron fire escapes.

SPECIAL F/M - ORIGINAL REMOVED:
Roof sign of large lighted individual letters, mounted on trusswork. Glass in entrance marquise replaced with bronze panels.

SPECIAL F/M - SIGNIFICANT ALTERATION:
Northwest quarter block built 1909; east half blockreplaced 1897 Meier and Frand store by Whidden and Lewis, 1915; southwest quarter, 1930.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Commerce; Commerce, Government in association with Julius L. Meier

Architecture: Glazed terra cotta was used as an exterior sheathing material and for individual decorative elements in buildings in Portland from about 1900 to 1930. Terra cotta blocks (which are similar in size and configuration to concrete blocks but have decorative glazed faces) were made by pressing fine clay into plaster molds. The clay blocks were then glazed, dried, and fired.

Because terra cotta was fireproof, lightweight and, compared to carved stone, inexpensive to produce, it was the favored material for the large commercial structures built during Portland's era of rapid growth. However, cast stone ornament (concrete), developed in the late 1920s, was even less expensive, and gradually gained popularity over terra cotta. Later, with the introduction of mass-produced aluminum and glass-wall systems, the use of decorative masonry ceased altogether.

Although most terra cotta buildings in Portland are found around the downtown retail core, there are numerous schools and apartment buildings with glazed terra cotta decoration scattered throughout the metropolitan area.

Commerce, Government in association with Julius L. Meier: Meier was born in Portland and graduated from the University of Oregon in 1895. After earning a law degree he established a practice with George Joseph, but joined the family department store business in 1896. In 1910 he became vice president and general manager of the store. He was active in promoting the Columbia River Highway and public power. He invested in hotel properties and started the ill-fated American National Bank. In 1930 he ran for governor as an independent and was elected.

The corner of this block at Sixth and Morrison was site of the home of Captain Richard Hoyt. Captain Hoyt's widowed daughter, Mary Francis Carr married Judge L.B. Stearns, who arranged a ninety-nine year lease of the property with Meier and Frank.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Corning, Howard M., DICTIONARY OF OREGON HISTORY (Portland, 1956).

McMath, George, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1982.

Spencer, Arthur III, unrecorded interview by Virginia Ferriday, 1983.

Carey, Charles Henry, HISTORY OF OREGON (Chicago and Portland, 1922).

Cheney, Charles H., "The Work of Albert E. Doyle, Architect of Portland, Oregon," THE ARCHITECT AND ENGINEER, 58:1 (July, 1919).

MacColl, E. Kimbark, THE SHAPING OF A CITY: BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN PORTLAND, OREGON 1885 - 1915 (Portland, 1976).

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Meier and Frank Company Building, exterior photographs, OHS Collection.

Oregon Brass Works job list, Oregon Brass Works Collection.

OREGONIAN, Jan. 1, 1910, sec. 2, p. 2; sec. 3, p. 10; Sept. 11, 1977, sec. 6, p. 7.

PORTLAND ARCHITECTURAL CLUB YEARBOOK, (1909, 1910, 1913).

TELEGRAM, Aug. 28, 1915.

Riggs, Kay, unrecorded interview by Marcia Olson.

Scrapbooks #66, #72, #122, OHS Collection.

Vaughan, Thomas and Ferriday, Virginia Guest, editors, SPACE, STYLE AND STRUCTURE: BUILDING IN NORTH AMERICA (Portland, 1974).

Withey, Henry F. and Rathburn, Elsie, editors, BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTS (DECEASED) (Los Angeles, 1956).

Doyle and Patterson, Meier and Frank Company Building, working drawings, 1915, City of Portland Buildings Bureau Microfiche Collection.

DeYoung, Moscowitz, and Rosenberg, architects, Herman Brookman, associate architect, Meier and Frank Company Building, working drawings, 1930, City of Portland Buildings Bureau Microfiche Collection.

OLD ADDRESS: 145-149 Fifth Street

ORIGINAL BUILDING PERMIT #: 53620

MAJOR ALTERATIONS: 1930/210942/DeYoung, Moscowitz and Rosenberg, with Herman Brookman

Present owners, as of May 1980: Arba F. Stearns, Robert E. Stearns, James E. Stearns, David B. Charlton, Mary H. Clair, Mary E. Labadie, Meier and Frank Company
MAILING ADDRESS: c/o Meier and Frank Company, 621 S.W. Fifth Avenue, Portland 97204

No Preservation Funding

Negative: 121-1, 121-12, 122-15