

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) Meier & Frank Building

(Historic) + Meier & Frank Building

Address 621 S.W. Fifth
Portland

Present Owner See bottom of second sheet.

Address

Original Use Retail

Date of Construction Retail

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ysical 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 predominently Classical Revival buildings following 1900 featured terra cotta glazed either buff or cream to give the appearance of stone. (con't)

continue on back if necessary

corded by Virginia Guest Ferriday Date Feb. 1980

Sources Consulted: See below.

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+ Primary
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The Meier & Frank Building was built in three stages. The 1909 northwest quadrant was designed by Doyle & Patterson. The second, half-block section along Fifth, built in 1915 and also designed by Doyle & Patterson, replaced an 1897 five-story building designed for Meier & Frank by Whidden & Lewis. The final southwest quadrant built in 1930 following the Doyle & Patterson design was built under the direction of DeYoung, Moscowitz & Rosenburg of New York City, with Herman Brookman as associate.

When the 1897 Whidden & Lewis store building was constructed the location was well beyond the established retail zone. However, the Pioneer Post Office was directly across Morrison and the Portland Hotel, Plaza Hotel, Marquam Building, Oregonian Building and the Olds & King store were all west of Fifth.

At the time of the 1915 construction the 1909 portion was completely refurbished. The store then enjoyed the latest in mechanical equipment: a vacuum sweeping machine with 165 outlets, a complete automatic sprinkler system, a four-stage automatic centrifugal fire pump with 90 hose racks and 7600 feet of hose, 19 elevators, six spiral chutes, thousands of feet of mechanical belt conveyors, and the first escalators in Portland. The grocery department occupied the entire ninth floor.

The basic structure for the 1915 building consisted of a steel framework with concrete fireproofing.

The Thompson-Starret Company were contractors for the 1909 building, Dinwiddie Construction built the 1915 portion and Hoffman Construction Co. the 1930 quarter block. J.D. Tresham did the ornamental plaster work for the 1904 portion.

In 1930 the plaster work for the entire first floor was re-done in the Moderne manner. Stair and mezzanine railings were also replaced at that time. Most of this work is now obscured by the 1977 remodeling, by Assad Design, Inc. of Pittsburg.

Glass panels in the original entrance canopies was replaced with bronze plates in 1930.

All three sections of the store are entirely faced with white glazed terra cotta. Gladding, McBean & Co. was responsible for the 1930 portion which duplicated ornament on the original parts designed by Doyle & Patterson. The 1915 portion required a total of 2,400,000# of terra cotta. Motifs include egg and dart, dentils, [illegible], bead and reel, meandering frets, torus moldings, bead moldings, wave scrolls, and lamb's tongue. The 1915 and 1930 sections, which are two stories higher than the 1909, are topped with a terra cotta balustrade.

The Meier & Frank Co. grew from a small store established by Aaron Meier on Front Street. Sigmund Frank, like Meier a native of Germany, began working for Meier at that location when he arrived in Portland in 1872. Two years later he was made a partner and in 1885 he married Meier's daughter. The store was moved in 1885 to First street and in 1889 it moved to Second and Taylor where in 1891 it was enlarged to Yamhill Street. It remained there until the 1897 move to the present location. When Aaron Meier died in 1889 at age 58 Sigmund Frank took over and managed the store for the next 21 years. The company remained in family hands until acquired by the May Co. in 1965-67. Most widely known of the Meier-Frank families was Aaron's son Julius, who became governor of Oregon in 1930.

Meier & Frank Building - Portland

Albert E. Doyle (1879-1928), whose firm was responsible for the design of 12 glazed terra-cotta buildings in downtown Portland, was apprenticed for 12 years to architects Whidden & Lewis. In 1903 Doyle left Portland for New YOrk where he attended design classes at Columbia Univeristy and worked in the office of Henry Bacon. In the spring of 1906 he sailed for Europe to study and travel. Returning to Portland Doyle opened an office early in 1907. By 1908 he had taken on construction supervisor W.S. Patterson as a partner. J.G. Beach, an engineer, joined the firm for brief periods in 1913 and 1920.

Sources Consulted:

Carey, Charles Henry, History of Oregon. Chicago, 1922.

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Portland Telegram, Aug. 28, 1915, p. 97.

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

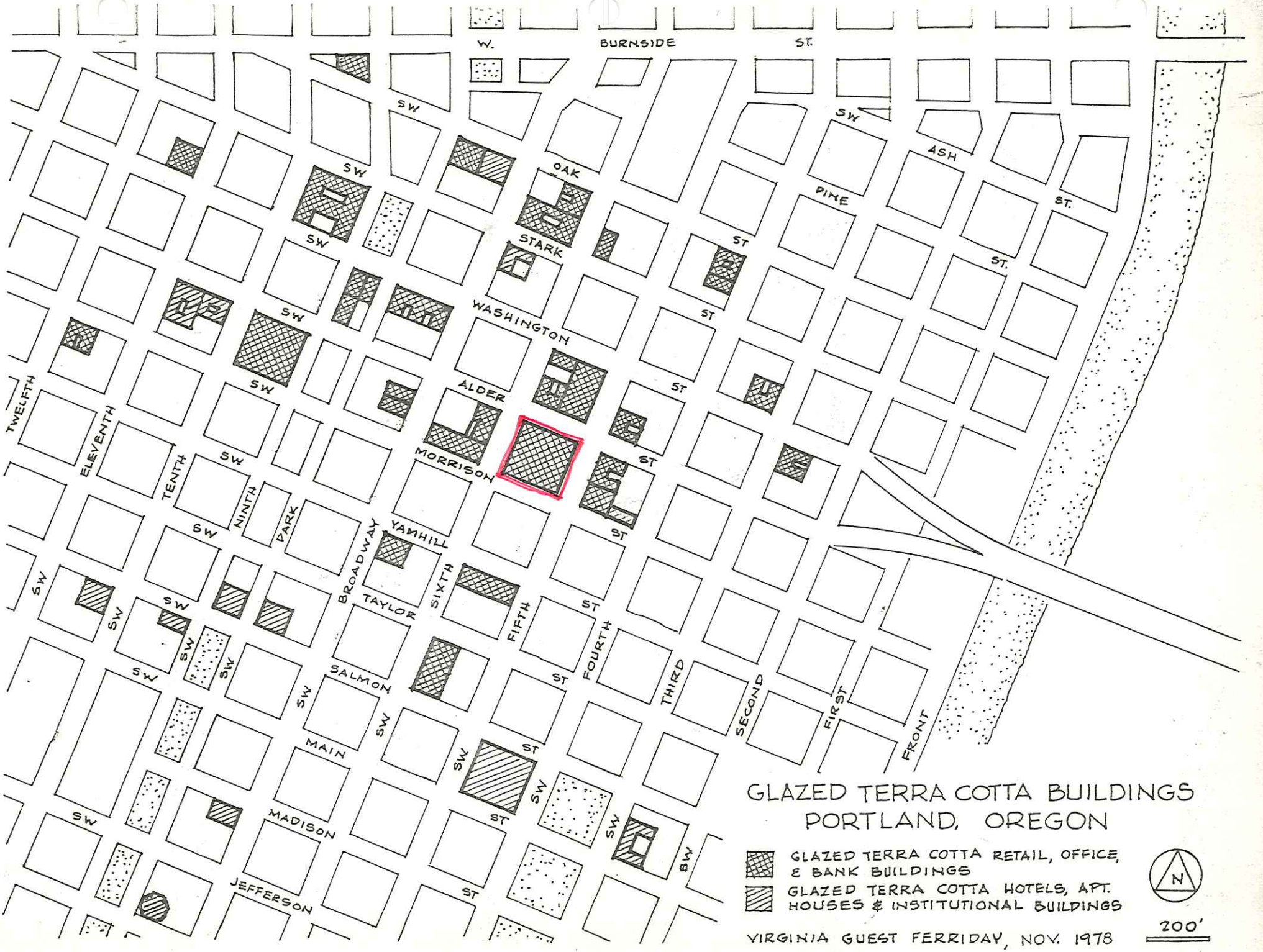
Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles, 1956.

Working Drawings, City of Portland Bureau of Buildings.

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Photographs; Scrap Books 366, 369 and 122; Oregon Historical Society.

Present Owners: Meier & Frank Co. Inc. et al; Arba F., Robert E., and James E. Stearnes; David B. Charlton; Mary Clair; and Mary E. Labadie. c/o Meier & Frank Co. Inc., 621 S.W. Fifth, Portland, 97204.


W. BURNSIDE ST.
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SIXTH
FIFTH
FOURTH
THIRD
SECOND
FIRST
FRONT
GLAZED TERRA COTTA BUILDINGS
PORTLAND, OREGON
GLAZED TERRA COTTA RETAIL, OFFICE, & BANK BUILDINGS
GLAZED TERRA COTTA HOTELS, APT. HOUSES & INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS
VIRGINIA GUEST FERRIDAY, NOV. 1978
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