

Historic
Resource
Inventory
CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



2-916-02741

2741 N.W. Vaughn Street

Section 29, 1N, 1E, Tax Lot 29
QUARTER SECTION MAP #: 2826
Northwest District Association
Northwest Industrial Neighborhood Association

ORIGINAL NAME: Montgomery Ward Company

ORIGINAL FUNCTION: Warehouse, Retail

DATE BUILT: 1922

STYLE: Reinforced Concrete Utilitarian

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS BY: McCaully, W.H., Montgomery Ward Company

ORIGINAL OWNER: Montgomery Ward Company

TAX ASSESSOR'S ACCOUNT #: R-94129-0290

ZONING: M2

Rank II

SPECIAL FEATURES AND MATERIALS:

Nine-story reinforced concrete frame building. Brick spandrel panels.
Steel-sash windows.

803

OREGON INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM
COUNTY: MULTNOMAH COUNTY

HIST. NAME: Montgomery Ward & Company
COMMON NAME: Montgomery Park
ADDRESS: 2741 Northwest Vaughn Street
CITY: Portland
OWNER: Norwest China Company
ADDRESS: 55 West Burnside Street, Portland,
OR 97209

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1922
ORIGINAL USE: Commerce: retail/warehouse
PRESENT USE: Commerce: retail/warehouse
ARCHITECT: W. H. McCaully
BUILDER:
THEME: Commerce: Distribution of Goods
STYLE: Commercial

T/R/S: T1N R1E S29
MAP NO.: 2826 TAX LOT: 29
ADDITION: Montgomery Park
BLOCK: NA LOT: NA
ZONE: M2
ASSESSOR NO.: R941290290

RESOURCE TYPE: Commercial:
retail/warehouse
CONDITION: Good
MOVED (DATE): No

PLAN TYPE/SHAPE: U-shape
FOUNDATION MATERIAL: Concrete
ROOF FORM & MATERIALS: Flat w/parapet
WALL/FRAME: Concrete

OLD ADDRESS: 935 Vaughn
RANK: National Register

NO. OF STORIES: 9
BASEMENT: Yes

PRIMARY WINDOW TYPE: Multi-pane casements, metal
EXTERIOR SURFACING MATERIALS: Concrete; brick

DECORATIVE FEATURES: Simple parapet with cap divided by pilasters extending up past the parapet cap; industrial steel windows with some translucent and opaque panes; atrium court projects over steel and glass entry on west elevation; main facade is bisected by atrium and entry bay; sides of building consists of bays divided by pilasters with corbel projections near the top of the window line; entry bay with diagonal cables across the exterior of tension members; a small gable bisects the entry bay with glass at the roof line.

EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: A wing was attached to the northwest corner in 1935, forming a U-shape; the interior court was enclosed by a multi-storied bridge covered with glass; completely renovated in late 1980s.

NOTEWORTHY LANDSCAPE FEATURES: Montgomery Park was built on the site of the Lewis and Clark Exposition adjacent to the Forestry Building (now the Old Forestry Commons Condominiums); decorative post-modern posts with fan shaped banners and steel balls dot the periphery of the building along the sidewalks (purchased from the New Orleans World's Fair and designed by Charles Moore); parking on west, east, and north sides; U-shape drive on west side accesses some commercial enterprises.

ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES: None.

SETTING: The building faces west off of Northwest Vaughn Street, a busy two-way arterial. The lot is a large sized parcel and is in a primarily mixed use neighborhood.

RECORDED BY: Donovan and Associates
Prohaska and Associates

SHPO INVENTORY NO.:
DATE: Spring, 1993
NEGATIVE NO.: Roll 5 #21

5764

**OREGON INVENTORY OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM
COUNTY: MULTNOMAH COUNTY**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places
(See *National Register Nomination for more detailed information.*)

Montgomery Ward Building: Located at 2741 NW Vaughn Street, Portland, is a nine-story-plus basement, reinforced concrete structure built between 1920 and 1936. The building was designed by W. H. McCaully of Montgomery Ward & Company, and is one of seven similar facilities built by the company around the United States. All are standing. The building is locally significant and eligible under Criterion "c" as the finest extant example of period reinforced concrete industrial architecture in the city. When constructed, the massive building, a landmark juxtaposed against the west hills of Northwest Portland, contained the greatest floor space of any building in Portland, and was claimed at the time to be one of the largest reinforced concrete buildings west of the Rockies. The building is also notable for the extensive use of steel-framed industrial sash windows, classically-inspired disposition of compositional elements on its elevations, and for its massive steel-framed roof sign, the largest in Portland.

The building is additionally eligible under Criterion "a" for its association with the growth of Montgomery Ward & Company in Portland and the Pacific Northwest. The company, the nation's first mail-order merchandiser, established its first warehouse on the west coast in July, 1913, in Portland, to service customers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, and California. After World War I, the company chose the city as a base to expand their business to Alaska, Hawaii, and Pacific rim countries. Initially constructed in 1920 for 1.5 million dollars, the building was expanded in 1936 by 230,000 square feet, and in its heyday, employed 1000 employees. The Montgomery Ward Building was rehabilitated and is currently used for warehouse space, offices, and an exhibit hall.

OTHER SOURCES: National Register Nomination, Montgomery Ward & Company Building, Heritage Investment Corporation, 1984.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP HISTORY

The property is associated with the following Portland families or businesses: Aaron Montgomery Ward and Montgomery Ward & Company

OWNERS BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Aaron Montgomery Ward: (1843-1913) was born in February, 1843, in Chatham, New Jersey. Several years later he moved with his parents to Miles, Michigan, where his father established a cobblers shop. Aaron attended public school until the age of 14, when he became a cobbler's apprentice. Disliking the job, he worked in a barrel factory and brick yard as a laborer until he obtained a position as a shoe clerk and decided on a career in retailing. In 1862 he moved to St. Joseph, Michigan, clerking in a general store and became the store manager in three years. In 1866 he moved to Chicago, where he clerked in a dry goods store for two years and later became a representative for a dry goods wholesale company in St. Louis, Missouri.

Aaron developed his idea for a mail order catalog business while visiting small towns in the rural Midwest, imagining customers selecting goods from a catalog, then ordering from a centrally-located store which would buy in large wholesale lots, thus keeping prices reasonable. Ignoring criticisms of his friends who claimed no one would buy merchandise sight unseen, Aaron launched

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his business in August, 1872, with two partners and \$1600 in capital. He launched Montgomery Ward & Company from a small rented room in Chicago. His one page catalog listed 163 items and was advertised primarily in farm periodicals. The first year of business was very slow. His partners gave up and Aaron continued to support himself by working in a dry goods store. The slow start did not last long, however; in 1874 the company sold \$100,000 worth of merchandise and issued its first bound catalog, 24 pages in length. His first big order came from the National Grange. For many years much of the business came from farmers. Whoever the customer, Aaron's success and reputation were based on his concept of providing the customer with good service and a variety of good merchandise at a low price. His company became the largest mail order firm in the nation. Aaron died in 1913.

OTHER SOURCES: National Register Nomination Montgomery Ward & Company Building, Heritage Investment Corporation, 1984.

Montgomery Ward & Company: The company established its first warehouse on the west coast in July, 1913, at NW 18th and Upshur streets in Portland. The Portland warehouse serviced Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, and California. The store featured only catalog sales. After WWI, Montgomery Ward & Company purchased eight acres of the Lewis & Clark Exposition grounds and built a new store in 1920 with the largest floor space of any building in the city. With the auto, more and more of its local customers preferred driving to the store location to order and pick up merchandise.

In 1936 the store added a separate building on Vaughn Street for selling mounting and balancing new tires. At this time the company had established over 500 small catalog chain stores across the United States. Also in 1936 the company added 230,000 square feet of floor space to the original building. During the WWII worker strikes were avoided by the Army taking command of the store which was deemed a national interest. After WWII the company moved with the public demand for more and more retail sales on the premises. A separate warehouse was constructed at NW 35th and Yeon streets, while more of the main location was given over to retail departments. Retail outlets were built in the shopping malls sprouting along highways in the 1970s, and in 1976, the famous Vaughn Street store was closed to retail business, continuing only as a catalog overstock outlet. Ironically, in 1978, a new 300,000 square foot warehouse was constructed in the Rivergate area, to serve as a distribution center for Oregon, southwest Washington and parts of Alaska and Utah.

The company had undergone many changes since 1913 when they first established a store in Portland. Merchandise began being moved by workers with forklifts instead of miles of conveyor belts to freight elevators. Inventory control came to be controlled by computers rather than by workers on roller skates. Montgomery Ward customers, once served by railroads and parcel post, began to serve themselves. Shoppers who once purchased by catalog from a regional warehouse began to choose their goods in person at a decentralized, suburban store. Montgomery Ward continued to try to maintain Aaron Montgomery Ward's goal when he launched his business in 1872: To provide good quality merchandise at a reasonable price.

OTHER SOURCES: National Register Nomination, Montgomery Ward & Company Building, Heritage Investment Company, 1984.

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ARCHITECT: W. H. McCaully

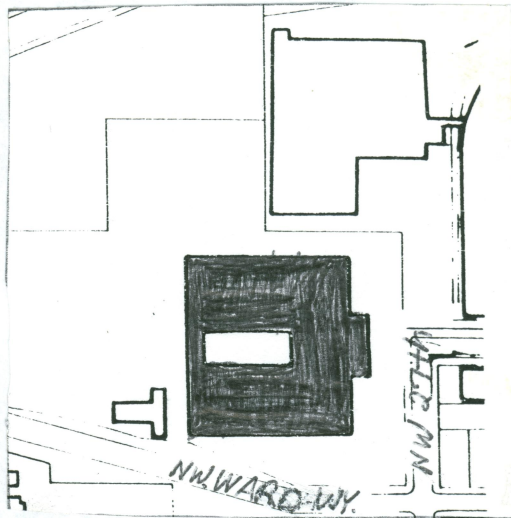
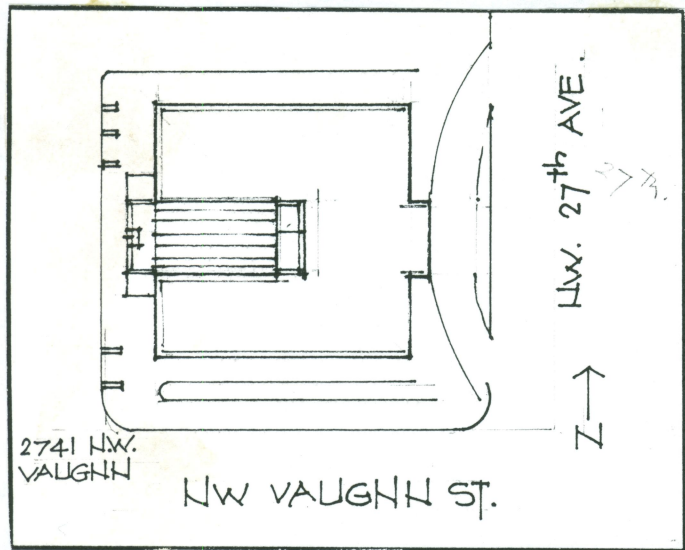
Sources: Ticor Title Company Records
Multnomah County Tax Assessor Records
City of Portland Building Bureau
Portland City Directories
Portland Block Books

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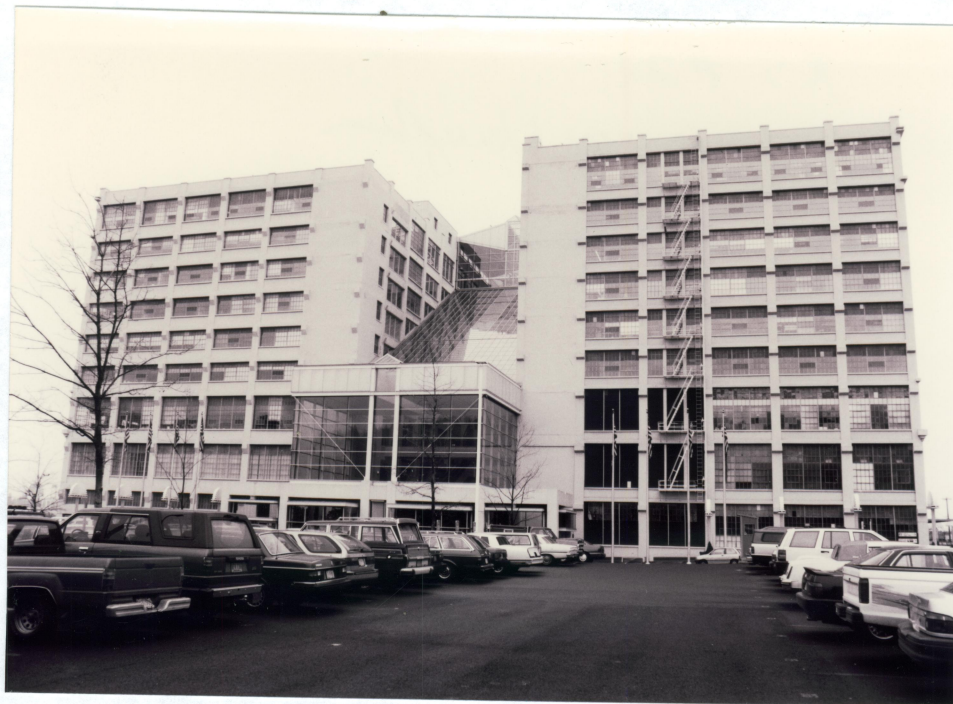
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NEGATIVE NO.: Roll 5 #21



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