

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



County Multnomah
 Theme Glazed Terra Cotta
 Name Wilcox Building
 (Common)
 (Historic) Wilcox Building
 Address 506 S.W. Sixth
Portland
 Present Owner Sol, Lee, Ralph and Sidney
Schlesinger; Rae C. Bloomberg
 Address Theodore Sanford
c/o Norris & Stevens, 610 Broadway
 Original Use Office/Retail Portland
97205
 Date of Construction 1911

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)

 continue on back if necessary

Recorded by Virginia Guest Ferriday Date March 1980

Sources Consulted: See below.

Please enclose map Township N E
 W Section

+ primary

By architects Whidden & Lewis for Theodore B. Wilcox the design for this steel-frame office tower was repeated in a simplified form for the Stevens Building (by the same architects and also built for Wilcox). Twelve stories high on a 50' x 100' lot, the Wilcox Building cost \$326,730.32 or 41.1¢/cu.ft. to build.

The main body of the building is sheathed with smooth-faced, greize-colored brick. Off-white glazed terra cotta was used at the lower and upper floors and for window sills. Terra-cotta elements at the upper stories include a cornice with antefixae, lions' heads, ^{block} modillions, dentils, and egg-and-dart; fleur-de-lis; spandrels with scrolls and faces; and vertical panels with putti and fruit-filled urns. Except for a wave scroll belt course above the second story all the original terra cotta at the lower floors has been replaced with travertine (probably in 1947).

The street floor shop fronts originally were glass set between terra-cotta-faced columns, with the area above the transom divided into five parts and awnings hung at the transom.

The second floor had smaller windows with rusticated terra cotta and a band of terra-cotta fleur-de-lis.

There were originally two copper and glass canopies - a semi-circular one on Washington Street and a rectangular one on Sixth.

Architects Whidden & Lewis moved their offices into the Wilcox Building upon its completion.

The building lobby, elevators and corridors underwent extensive remodeling in 1956.

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 was one of the promoters of the Rose City Park development in Portland. The approximately 160 acres of the Peter Smith DLC which Wilcox 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.

Wells Fargo Building - Portland

Benjamin Wistar Morris III (1870-1944), son of Oregon Bishop Benjamin Wistar Morris II, was born in Portland and educated at St. Pauls in Concord, New Hampshire. He received his architectural training at Columbia University, where he graduated in 1894, and at the Ecole des Baux Arts. On his return to New York he worked for Carrere and Hastings, assisting with plans for the New York Public Library. He started his own practice around 1900 with Butter and Morgan, but soon withdrew and practiced alone until 1910. From 1910 to 1915 he was associated with Frant La Farge and from 1915 to his death with Robert O. Conner.

Sources Consulted

Job List; Shop Drawings; Oregon Brass Works.

MacColl, E. Kimbark, The Growth of a City; Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915 to 1950. Portland, 1979.

Microfiche of Working Drawings (alterations only), City of Portland Bureau of Buildings.

Portland Oregonian, June, 7, 1905, p.14.

Portland Oregonian, Sept. 20, 1905, p. 14.

Portland Oregonian, Jan.1, 1908.

Portland Oregonian, Sept. 8, 1974.

Scrap Books #60, p. 162 and #67, p.125;
Photographs; Vertical File; Oregon Historical Society.

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.

Interview: Fred F. Baker
Bob Franklin

