

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) Six Twenty Southwest Fifth
 (Historic)⁺ Failing Building
 Address 620 S.W. Fifth Ave.
Portland
 Present Owner New York Life Insurance Co.
c/o J.J. Newberry Co.
 Address 888 Seventh Av., New York, N.Y.
10019
 Original Use Retail/Office
 Date of Construction 1907/1911(?)1913(?)



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 Jan. 1980

Sources Consulted: See below.

Please enclose map Township N E
 W Section

The Failing Building, designed by Whidden & Lewis, was constructed as a six-story structure for the Henry Failing Estate in 1907. Later, in 1911 or 1913, six stories were added and the cream colored glazed terra cotta apparently re-installed at the top two stories.

Specifications for the 1907 portion called for sill courses of even-colored Tenino stone; street walls faced with standard pressed face brick of Gladding, McBean & Co.'s make, laid in colored mortar with ruled joints; floors of reinforced concrete; and poultry netting around columns. The brick is of a yellowish hue, popular in Portland around the turn of the century. A rendering by Wilding dated 1913 shows a sidewalk canopy along the full length of both street facades. The rendering also shows columns and spandrels at the first two floors faced with terra cotta and the bays in this retail base completely filled with glass. Terra-cotta decoration at the upper windows includes a keystone with fishscale design and window surrounds with laurel leaf design.

The lower floors were remodeled for Newberry's in 1951 using extruded glazed terra cotta. Glenn Stanton was the architect. 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 grew up in the Boston area and graduated from MIT. He worked briefly for Peabody & Stearns. He was born in 1858 and died in 1933.

Gevurtz was the original tenant in the Failing Building. Later it housed part of Meier & Frank while their half block addition was under construction. It did not actually become known as the Failing Building until the 1901 Failing Building was re-named the Postal Building.

Henry Failing (1837-98) was born in New York City where he went to work at age twelve in a New York counting house. In 1851 at age 17 he came to Portland with his brother John and father Josiah. Within two years Josiah had established a business, J. Failing & Co., on Front Street and had been elected mayor. In 1858 Henry married Henry W. Corbett's sister and five years later he and Corbett bought control of the First National Bank. In 1871 the brothers-in-law merged the two family merchandise houses into the Corbett-Failing Company which became the largest hardware supply business in the Northwest. Henry Failing was a generous supporter of cultural and religious activities. He was widely read in literature, science and the arts. He was twice elected mayor of Portland. At his death in 1898 his estate listed 38 lots of prime downtown property.

Failing Building - Portland

Sources Consulted:

MacColl, Kimbark, The Shaping of a City. Portland, 1976.

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.

Portland Oregonian, Jan. 27, 1907.

Portland Oregonian, March 31, 1907, p.30.

Portland Oregonian, Jan. 1, 1907, p. 2.

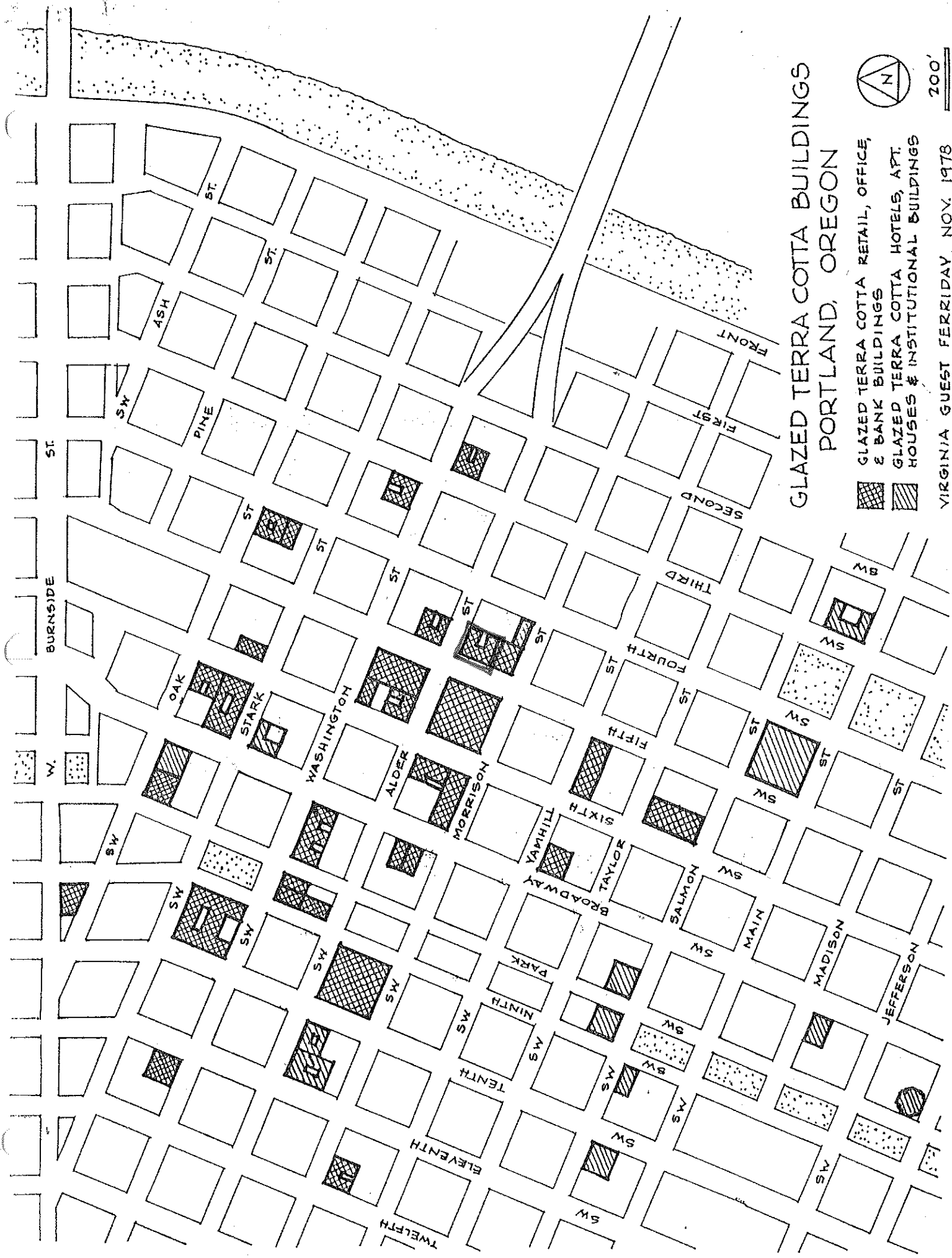
Portland Oregonian, Jan. 1, 1908, p. 4.

Inventory Form, Portland Historical Landmarks Commission.



Microfiche of Working Drawings, City of Portland Bureau of Buildings.

Shop Drawings, Dec. 9, 1937, Oregon Brass Works, Portland.

Manuscripts Collection, Oregon Historical Society (Original rendering by Wilding).



GLAZED TERRA COTTA BUILDINGS PORTLAND, OREGON

-  GLAZED TERRA COTTA RETAIL, OFFICE & BANK BUILDINGS
-  GLAZED TERRA COTTA HOTELS, APT. HOUSES & INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS



200'

VIRGINIA GUEST FERRIDAY, NOV. 1978