

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) Benson Hotel  
 Historic) + Oregon Hotel  
 Address 309 S.W. Broadway  
Portland  
 Present Owner Benson Hotel  
 Address 309 S.W. Broadway, Portland, 9720  
 Original Use Hotel  
 Date of Construction 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 Feb. 1980

Sources Consulted: See below.

Please enclose map Township            N E  
 W Section           

*+ primary*

Designed by Doyle, Patterson & Beach for Simon Benson this 12-story red brick and cream colored glazed terra-cotta hotel was renamed for its owner soon after completion. The site, owned by Benson's close friend, lumberman John Yeon, was in 1913 just to the north of the main commercial core. The old Oregon Hotel, later demolished to make way for an addition to the Benson, originally stood directly to the north. French Baroque in style, the design of the Benson was derived from Chicago's famous Blackstone hotel. The exterior remains essentially intact, having recently undergone a thorough restoration. A large metal and glass entrance canopy which collapsed in a heavy snow has, however, never been replaced. The interior has also been recently refurbished and much of the original ornamental plasterwork and wood paneling cleaned and refinished. Paneling in the lobby is Circassian walnut, the originally planned Paranzzo marble having been eliminated due to its high cost. The gilded coffered cast-plaster ceiling is a particular fine example. \*

Sound Construction and Engineering Co. Inc. of Portland and Seattle were the original contractors. The Washington Brick, Lime and Sewer Pipe Co. furnished both the brick and terra cotta. E.C. McDougall was the plastering contractor. The Phillipine mahogany was furnished by Hanford & Sutthoff of Seattle.

Simon Benson, a native of Norway, made his fortune in the lumber business. After working for a number of years in the Northwest as a farmer and logger he began to acquire forest land in the St. Helen's Oregon area. He built donkey engines, constructed a logging rail line, and rafted logs to southern California. In 1910 he sold his timber holdings for \$4.5 million. When, soon after its opening, the Benson Hotel was losing money Benson assumed management and shortly had it operating at a profit. He moved to Beverly Hills in 1921. Portlanders know Benson, not only for his hotel, but also for the bronze drinking fountains which he donated to the City and for Benson Polytechnic High School for which he donated \$100,000 to construct the initial unit. He also gave Madrona Park to the City. He was one of the most active supporters of the good road movement in Oregon.

Albert E. Doyle (1879-1928), whose firm was responsible for the design of 12 glazed terra-cotta 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 University 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 W.S. Patterson as a partner. J.G. Beach, an engineer, joined the firm for brief periods in 1913 and 1920.

\* Fred Baker designed the original fixtures in the interior, which were manufactured by a firm in Chicago. He remembers that the exterior brackets were purchased by "someone from G.E." from

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Interviews: Fred C. Baker  
Paul Himmelman

