

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

National Register of Historic Places

Date Listed: August 28, 2026

NRIS No. RS100013164

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Oregon Casket Company Building

other names/site number Kalberer Hotel Supply Company Building

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

street & number 403 NW 5th Avenue

☐ not for publication

city or town Portland

☐ vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97209

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria: X A B C D


Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

7/27/2026
Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| ☒ | private |
| ☐ | public - Local |
| ☐ | public - State |
| ☐ | public - Federal |

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| ☒ | building(s) |
| ☐ | district |
| ☐ | site |
| ☐ | structure |
| ☐ | object |

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		site
		structure
		object
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

COMMERCE/TRADE: warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

roof: SYNTHETICS

other

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary Paragraph

The Oregon Casket Company Building, located at 403 NW 5th Avenue at the northwest corner of NW 5th Avenue and NW Flanders Street, was built in 1897.¹ The five-story, heavy-timber structure occupies a 50 × 100-foot parcel and is built to the lot lines. The building's two decorative façades are organized in a base–shaft–capital composition (also referred to as a “three-part block”) typical of late nineteenth-century commercial architecture. Character-defining exterior features include its rough-aggregate stucco cladding with pronounced red brick quoins, decorative brickwork at the fifth floor, and original wood sash windows and loading doors. The ground floor storefronts were remodeled in 1954, but the upper stories retain a high degree of integrity. The interior reflects its original use for warehousing and light manufacturing, with largely open floor plates on floors two through five and character-defining features such as heavy-timber posts and beams, perimeter brick walls, and wood floors. Portions of the ground floor, which were historically used for office space in the eastern third, have been altered by successive tenants. The other major alterations are a 1926 enclosed staircase (built after the period of significance) at the west end of the building and the removal of an awning along the south façade. The building's intact character-defining features convey its historic function as a turn-of-the-century warehouse and distribution center and highlight its physical integrity.

Narrative Description

SETTING

The Oregon Casket Company Building is located on Lot 1 of Block 37 in Couch's Addition, at the northwest corner of NW 5th Avenue and NW Flanders Street. NW 5th Avenue runs north–south and includes two southbound travel lanes: one dedicated exclusively to TriMet MAX (the region's light rail public transit system), and the other for general vehicle use. NW Flanders Street runs east–west.

The building stands in the Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood, north of downtown Portland. The general area is characterized by low-rise, unreinforced masonry, early twentieth-century buildings interspersed with larger, modern affordable housing developments featuring ground-floor retail. Immediately across NW 5th Avenue to the east is the eight-block New Chinatown/Japantown National Register Historic District, which spans the centers of NW 5th Avenue to NW 3rd Avenue between NW Glisan Street and West Burnside Street. The downtown commercial core lies directly to the south.

Adjacent to the north of the nominated property is the two-story Tilton Brothers Building, constructed in 1903.² This building does not share the Oregon Casket Company's significance and is not within the nominated boundary (see Section 10). In 1954 (nearly three decades after the period of significance), the Kalberer Company, which controlled both properties, altered the Tilton Brothers Building to visually integrate its primary façade with that of the Oregon Casket Company Building and to create an interior connection between the two. The interior connection has since been infilled with masonry and the two buildings are again functionally and legally separate. Because these alterations occurred after the period of significance and the Tilton Brothers Building was historically independent, it lacks a direct historical association with the Oregon Casket Company and does not contribute to its significance.

¹ “New Building Under Way,” *The Oregonian*, October 18, 1897, 5. See Figure 13 for a screenshot of the article. The date of construction is also supported by the Whidden & Lewis jobs list in Figure 25.

² “Building Permits,” *The Oregonian*, September 5, 1903, 9.

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

Directly across NW 5th Avenue is the Povey Building—a well-preserved contributing resource to the aforementioned historic district, constructed in 1905, occupying a 50 x 100-foot footprint.³ At the southeast corner of the intersection—kitty-corner to the nominated building—stands the Minnesota Hotel, which is a three-story building (also a contributing resource in the historic district) built in 1909.⁴ Across Flanders Street to the south is the Endicott Paper Company Building—a single-story commercial structure built in 1919 and designed by architect John V. Bennes.⁵ Immediately behind the nominated building is a surface parking lot that replaced earlier commercial and residential structures on the site. These buildings are visible in the 1927 image shown in Figure 16.

SITE

The Oregon Casket Company Building is located on a 5,000 square-foot corner parcel on a standard downtown block that is 200 x 200 feet. The building is built to the lot lines and the parcel is generally flat. There are no character-defining landscape features.

STRUCTURE

The Oregon Casket Company Building is 50 feet wide and 100 feet long. It is a five-story, heavy-timber structure with an unreinforced masonry envelope.

EXTERIOR

The Oregon Casket Company Building has two architecturally finished street façades: the east elevation on NW 5th Avenue and the south elevation on NW Flanders Street (Photo 1). Both façades convey the building's commercial importance discussed in Section 8. By contrast, the west and north elevations are plain, painted masonry party walls (Photos 4 and 5).

The two street façades follow a base–shaft–capital composition characteristic of early twentieth-century commercial architecture with belt courses marking the transitions between the first and second floors and between the fourth and fifth floors (Figure 22). The east façade is organized into two structural bays, each bay with two windows at every floor above the ground story (Photo 2). The two bays are separated on the ground level by a brick pier, with corner brick piers on either end of the façade as well. The south façade has seven bays, each containing a single window or door (Photo 3).

As a manufacturing building, the two finished façades served distinct roles. The east functioned as the public, business-facing front with traditional storefronts and office space behind. Historically, the south façade related more directly to manufacturing with its large loading entrance with sliding wood doors and full-length awning.

Within the period of significance, the east storefronts consisted of a paneled wood bulkhead topped by large plate-glass display windows and finished with transoms above. Of note, the area of glass devoted to the transoms was equal to that of the display, making the transoms a prominent feature. Above the transom windows was a molded concrete band followed by eight courses of brick forming a sign panel that, at times, displayed the name of the business occupying the building (Figure 23). A recessed main entry with double doors was located just south of center on the east elevation. A single secondary entry at the north end of the east storefronts was flush with the façade and included a small transom. All storefront elements, except for the paneled bulkhead and entry doors, were repeated within the first two bays in the south elevation.

³ "New Building for Local Glazier Firm," *Oregon Daily Journal*, January 13, 1905, 12.

⁴ "Sold for \$75,000," *The Oregonian*, September 19, 1909, 43.

⁵ "New Paper Company Here," *The Oregonian*, August 31, 1919, 58.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

A clear 1947 photograph (Figure 12) shows these wood storefronts and entries, believed to date from the period of significance, though they are possibly not the 1897 originals. A major neighborhood fire in 1908 affected the building and may have necessitated replacement of the original storefronts.⁶

In 1954, the base of the east façade was remodeled. Everything at and above the level of the transoms was infilled with stucco. Terracotta-colored 12-by-12-inch tiles were applied below the former level of the transoms. New aluminum-framed storefronts with smaller window openings were installed. The secondary entry was likely eliminated at this time (see Figure 18).⁷ At present, and as of 2020, all window and door openings on the east elevation are boarded up.

The ground floor of the south façade, which faces NW Flanders Street, features two large windows at the corner that, in comparison to those on the east elevation, still closely match the transom pattern of the c. 1908 storefronts. However, the lower halves of the windows were infilled, likely in 1954. The transoms above remain, though they are significantly deteriorated. Immediately to the west is a small multi-light window set high on the wall. Adjacent to it is an arched opening containing a pair of original wood loading doors. Each sliding door leaf has nine upper lights arranged with an arched frame (despite the door leaves themselves being square) and two recessed wood panels below (Photo 6). The next two bays to the west each contain a six-over-six wood sash window. Finally, the westernmost bay contains a pair of recessed wood service doors, likely replacing an original window in 1926, providing access to the staircase leading to the upper floors. Each door leaf includes two panels and is topped by a louvered transom. Closer to the exterior wall plane is an additional window, modified from the original six-over-six window, now serving as a transom with six lights (Photo 7).

The south façade originally featured a full-length awning mounted slightly below the belt course (Figure 16).⁸ The awning sheltered loading and staging activities—vital in Portland’s long rainy season—as wood stock arrived and finished caskets departed. At completion of the building in 1897, materials and goods were moved by horse-drawn wagons, transitioning to motor-powered trucks between c. 1910 and c. 1920.⁹ In 1921, a rail spur connecting to NW 4th Avenue was installed along NW Flanders Street in front of the building, allowing direct loading to and from railcars. The awning was removed sometime between 1927 and 1932, after Oregon Casket had sold and vacated the property, when such weather protection was no longer essential to the building’s commercial function.

The shaft portion of the building spans the second through fourth floors and is clad in rough-aggregate stucco painted white on both the south and east elevations. At the corners, pronounced unpainted rectangular red brick quoins frame the façade. Fenestration consists of large six-over-six wood double-hung sash windows that are original to the building’s construction. These window openings are punched and recessed within the masonry, with slightly arched brick headers above. The sashes themselves are rectilinear, and a small infill panel fills the arch above each window.

The capital portion of the building is the fifth floor, defined by unpainted red brick masonry with natural gray mortar. Decorative brickwork includes raised geometric elements at the corners, inset bricks that create textural variation across the field, and an inverted pyramid motif at the cornice line. Fenestration here is similar in style to that of the shaft but scaled smaller to reflect the reduced floor height. The windows are three-over-three wood sash units.

⁶ “Four Blocks Are Swept by Flames,” *The Oregonian*, July 29, 1908, 10.

⁷ 1954 application for building permit on file with City of Portland.

⁸ The outline of the awning also appears as a dotted line on the Sanborn maps and is partially visible in a c. 1920 University of Oregon Libraries photo of the Endicott Paper building, whose windows reflect the south elevation and awning of the Oregon Casket Company building.

⁹ In Portland, horse-drawn drayage was the norm into the 1910s. Motor trucks took over rapidly in the 1910s to early 1920s and, by the late 1920s, horses were essentially gone from freight work in urban areas.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

A full-height metal fire escape, added in 1899, is located on the south elevation in the third bay from the east.¹⁰ It is utilitarian in its design.

INTERIOR

Since no original plans exist, it is unknown exactly how the interior of the Oregon Casket Company Building was demised and finished during the period of significance. However, some information can be gleaned from Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Based on the 1901 Sanborn map (Figure 10), the first third of the building's interior (the eastern portion) was demised on the first, second, and fifth floors. The eastern portion of the first floor was equally divided into office space on the southeast corner while the northeast corner was dedicated to a stockroom. The second floor's eastern third housed a casket display area. On the fifth floor, the eastern third contained a workshop for assembling the various wood pieces into finished caskets. The other two-thirds of the interior on all floors was devoted to warehouse space. Partitions were added on the first and second floors after the period of significance, though it is unclear how these changes may have affected original demising walls.

Given the building's manufacturing use, the mostly open floorplates on the upper floors and the exposed structural elements visible today are part of the historic condition.

On the ground floor, all interior office/showroom finishes have been updated multiple times over the years by subsequent owners and tenants, and no historic finishes remain in the eastern third of the ground floor. Presently, this eastern portion of the ground floor is divided into an open area at the north and a reception-like area at the south. A wood-framed mezzanine, added in 1946, sits above the reception area (Photo 8).¹¹ West of this demised space are three offices along the north side and several small storage rooms along the south wall. The rear half of the ground floor is subdivided along the structural column lines. In the northwest quadrant, there is an open room, while the southwest quadrant provides access to the double doors, an original, non-functional freight elevator, and a stair tower in the far southwest corner (Photo 9). This stair was added in 1926, after the period of significance, and replaced the original stair that is believed to have been located along the north wall near the middle of the building (Photo 11).¹²

Current finishes include a mix of painted gypsum board, painted and unpainted brick, wall-to-wall carpet, exposed unpainted wood flooring, and painted and unpainted ceiling joists.

Floors two through five are generally similar to one another, featuring open, utilitarian floor plans with a single row of heavy timber columns running lengthwise (Photos 10, 12, 13, and 15). Perimeter walls are painted brick. The windows are set in the masonry opening and have no surrounding trim (Photo 14). Flooring consists of exposed, unpainted wood. Ceilings are open to the structure above, with painted framing elements that have become heavily stained from water damage. The freight elevator remains near the center of each floorplate.

ALTERATIONS

The Oregon Casket Company Building has experienced several alterations over time, most of which occurred after the period of significance and are largely limited to the ground floor and interior demising.¹³

¹⁰ "Fire Escapes and Stand Pipes," *The Oregonian*, September 11, 1899, 37.

¹¹ Building permit application from 1946 on file with City of Portland.

¹² Building permit application from 1926 on file with City of Portland and physical evidence still existing of a cut in the floor from original stairs.

¹³ Alterations were determined based on physical examination of the building, review of the historic photo record, review of building permit records on file with the City of Portland, review of Sanborn maps, and longstanding personal knowledge of the building on the part of the preparers.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Known alterations during the period of significance include:

- **1899** – Installation of a full-height metal fire escape on the east façade.
- **1908** – A major neighborhood fire caused significant damage to the ground-floor storefronts. The storefronts were replaced soon afterward with new wood-framed systems.

Known alterations after the period of significance include:

- **1926** – Construction of a new enclosed stair in the southwest corner of the building. This stair replaced the original stair, which is believed to have been located at the north wall mid-building. The adjacent bay was likely converted from a window to a new double-door and transom window at this time, as the recessed design of the door appears as a modification (Photo 7).
- **c. 1930** – Removal of the awning along the southern façade.
- **1946** – Addition of a wood-framed mezzanine in the southeastern portion of the ground floor. This likely coincided with other ground-floor interior remodeling.
- **1954** – Major remodeling of the ground floor. Most of the storefront transoms were infilled with stucco and terracotta-colored twelve-by-twelve-inch tiles were applied below the former transoms on the east elevation. Aluminum-framed storefront systems replaced the wood storefronts on the east façade, and the lower portions of the south-facing corner windows were infilled. The interior finishes were likely remodeled at this time.
- **Post-1954 to present day** – Repeated interior remodels of the ground floor by subsequent tenants, including the installation of new partitions, finishes, and systems.

INTEGRITY ANALYSIS

Alterations to the Oregon Casket Company Building are concentrated primarily at the ground-floor level and represent typical, incremental changes to storefronts and interior finishes over time. These modifications have not compromised the character-defining features that convey the building's historic identity. It retains integrity in all seven aspects. With its distinctive base–shaft–capital composition, intact masonry and stucco cladding, original wood sash windows and loading doors, utilitarian interiors, and surrounding historic context, the property clearly conveys its significance under Criterion A for Commerce as a representative example of early twentieth-century manufacturing and commercial enterprise in Portland.

The following is a detailed analysis of the seven aspects of integrity for the Oregon Casket Company Building:

Location. The building stands on its original site at the northwest corner of NW 5th Avenue and NW Flanders Street in Portland's Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood. There has been no relocation or reorientation. The property's location provides a direct physical link to its historic use as a casket manufacturing and distribution facility during the period of significance. Therefore, the building retains integrity of location.

Setting. The surrounding setting retains a strong sense of the early twentieth-century urban commercial environment from the period of significance. Several period buildings remain on adjacent and nearby blocks with high integrity, including resources within the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District directly across NW 5th Avenue, framing the nominated building within its historic commercial and industrial context. Although there has been some demolition of buildings to the west and modern infill has occurred nearby, the immediate setting continues to convey the historic character

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

of Old Town as a working commercial district with zero-lot-line, masonry buildings from the turn of the century. As such, the building retains integrity of setting.

Design. Integrity of design is expressed through the building's five-story massing, heavy timber and unreinforced masonry structure, base-shaft-capital composition, fenestration patterns, and utilitarian industrial interior layout. These features remain intact above the ground floor. Alterations have been largely limited to the ground floor, including storefront replacements following a 1908 fire, removal of the awning, a 1946 mezzanine addition, and a 1954 storefront remodel that introduced stucco and tile cladding and aluminum-framed systems. The southwest stair was also replaced in 1926. These changes are localized and do not obscure the building's essential design features. Therefore, the building retains integrity of design.

Materials. The building retains the majority of its original exterior materials above the ground floor, including red brick masonry with decorative brickwork at the fifth floor, rough-aggregate stucco, wood sash windows, and original sliding loading doors on the south façade. Interior materials on the upper floors—including exposed timber structure, wood floors, and painted brick perimeter walls—remain from the period of significance. Alterations are concentrated in the ground floor storefronts and interior finishes, which have undergone multiple remodels since 1946. Consequently, the building retains integrity of its materials.

Workmanship. Evidence of early twentieth-century craftsmanship remains evident in the building's brick masonry detailing, arched window headers, rough-aggregate stucco, wood sash windows, and surviving original doors. Interior structural elements, including heavy timber posts and beams, also convey the workmanship of the period. Later remodels have diminished workmanship in ground-floor interiors, but exterior and upper-floor workmanship remains legible. Therefore, integrity of workmanship is retained.

Feeling. The Oregon Casket Company Building continues to express the aesthetic and functional character of an early twentieth-century urban manufacturing and commercial building. Its tower-like massing relative to neighboring low-rise structures, utilitarian detailing, and proximity to other period commercial buildings contribute to a strong sense of historic time and place. Alterations to the ground floor are evident on the east façade but do not overwhelm the building's overall character. Integrity of feeling is still present.

Association. The property maintains a clear and direct link to the historic commercial activities for which it is significant. As the headquarters and assembly facility of the Oregon Casket Company during its period of significance, the building remains physically intact to convey its role in the commercial history of Portland's Old Town, especially on the manufacturing-focused south façade. Character-defining features that communicate this association include the building's base-shaft-capital façade composition; original brick, stucco, and wood sash materials; utilitarian heavy-timber interior structure with open floor plates; and the largely intact fenestration patterns that reflect its industrial and commercial function. Ground-floor alterations on the east elevation modestly temper but do not sever this connection. As such, the building retains its integrity of association.

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1897-1925

Significant Dates

1897: construction complete

1925: Oregon Casket Co. vacates the building

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Whidden & Lewis

Builder: unknown

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is 1897 to 1925. It begins with the date of construction and ends when the original occupant, the Oregon Casket Company, vacated the building and relocated all their operations to another site. During these 29 years, the Oregon Casket Company continuously occupied all or nearly all of the building.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The Oregon Casket Company Building is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Commerce as the best surviving example of Portland's historic casket industry and as an important business within that industry—the Oregon Casket Company. Built in 1897 and designed by Whidden & Lewis, the five-story brick-and-stucco building was an early landmark in Portland's North End (roughly encompassing what is now the Old Town-Chinatown neighborhood). The building reflected the economic stature of the Oregon Casket Company—one of the largest undertaker supply dealers in the western United States. Its construction coincided with a period of renewed prosperity in Portland, spurred by a national economic recovery and the city's growing role as the Pacific Northwest's primary distribution hub. Portland's strategic location at the confluence of two major rivers and its expanding rail network made it a natural base for the wholesale and distribution of goods, including caskets and undertaker supplies. Under the leadership of H. S. Tuthill, the company expanded its reach across the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Although several local competitors emerged over time, none matched Oregon Casket Company's scale, longevity, or regional dominance, and the nominated building remains the only extant property purpose-built for its operations and the only surviving physical representation of the company's rise and prominence. The period of significance is 1897 to 1925, beginning with the building's construction and ending when the Oregon Casket Company relocated its operations to a new (now demolished) facility on NW Savier Street.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Introduction

The significance of the Oregon Casket Company Building is best understood by situating it within the broader historical, industrial, and commercial developments that shaped Portland and the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This Statement of Significance begins by establishing the national and regional context of casket manufacturing and distribution—an industry that transformed from small local undertaker and furniture workshops to a specialized, industrialized sector that played a critical role in communities' handling of death. It then narrows in on Portland's unique economic position at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, where its transportation infrastructure and access to timber resources supported the rise of wholesale and distribution enterprises, including the Oregon Casket Company.

From this contextual foundation, the nomination traces the origins and growth of the Oregon Casket Company, charting its development from a branch of a California-based manufacturing firm to the dominant casket wholesaler in the Pacific Northwest. The narrative examines the company's leadership, expansion, and use of the nominated property as its headquarters and regional distribution hub from 1897 to 1925, as well as the building's role in the evolving North End¹⁴ neighborhood and its function during key historic events. It follows the company's subsequent expansion into a large, purpose-built factory and headquarters complex (demolished) within NW Portland—a move that was directly enabled by the success and regional dominance achieved while operating from the nominated property. This progression underscores the building's role as the foundation for Oregon Casket Company's emergence as the largest casket manufacturer in the western United States.

The Statement of Significance concludes with a comparative analysis of other contemporaneous casket companies and properties, demonstrating that the Oregon Casket Company Building is the most significant surviving physical representation of Portland's historic casket industry. Together, these components build the

¹⁴ "North End" is a period term used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to refer to this northern section of downtown Portland. It appears frequently in early newspapers, city directories, Sanborn maps, and police reports, often in reference to the neighborhood's working-class, industrial, and vice district character. It is not used commonly today, and the area is simply referred to as Old Town-Chinatown. However, North End will be used throughout this nomination so as not to create confusion with the two historic districts related to Old Town and Chinatown.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

argument for the property's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Commerce.

Casket Manufacturing History and Context

Prior to the Civil War, coffins and caskets in the United States were typically made and sold by local undertakers and furniture makers rather than specialized manufacturers. The war produced an unprecedented need for caskets, most acutely felt in the border and battleground states where burials and the shipment of soldiers' remains took place on a scale never before witnessed in the nation's history. As embalming techniques advanced and became more widely adopted, particularly within Union armies, it became increasingly common for families to arrange for the remains of their loved ones to be transported long distances by rail for burial in home cemeteries. This practice required more durable, standardized containers than the simple wooden coffins typically made by local craftsmen. In response, early manufacturers in the South and East began producing caskets specifically designed for long-distance shipment, often in centralized facilities located near transportation hubs. These wartime factories and distribution systems laid the foundation for a national manufacturing and supply network that expanded significantly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, providing caskets to both regional and local markets.¹⁵ Over the following decades, the industry grew rapidly, eventually reaching a peak of more than 700 manufacturers nationwide, ranging from small regional operations to large industrial plants.¹⁶

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, caskets were chiefly made of wood, often from high-quality hardwoods in the East and from abundant regional species in the West. Western factories frequently used weather-resistant cedar, which became a hallmark of their products.¹⁷ Timber publications from the period note that the Oregon Casket Company used spruce, hemlock, western redcedar, and Port Orford cedar for their caskets.¹⁸ Western-made caskets were popular in the East due to the quality of the wood and of the workmanship.¹⁹ Regardless of material, casket production was a specialized craft requiring exceptional skill. Even with the introduction of adapted machinery, each casket demanded precise cutting, molding, and joining of dozens of wooden components. Lumber had to remain in perfect condition, and specialized equipment was required for planing, scarfing, dovetailing, and shaping individual components. Casket makers were among the most experienced woodworkers of their era, and the work demanded both speed and exacting quality to meet national commercial standards.²⁰

Early caskets were typically lined by funeral homes using simple fabrics, but as the industry matured, manufacturers increasingly sold caskets with linings or "trimmings" already installed.²¹ These trimmings followed prevailing fashions in household furnishings, with changes in fabric types, colors, and patterns reflecting broader consumer tastes. This evolution marked a shift from individually customized products toward more fully finished, mass-produced goods, bringing the casket industry into alignment with broader twentieth-century trends in consumer manufacturing and distribution.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the price of caskets rose substantially. At the beginning of the century, a typical casket cost the equivalent of roughly \$600 in 2025 dollars. Today, families typically spend

¹⁵ "A Brief History of Caskets," March 4, 2011, <https://northwoodscasket.blogspot.com/2011/03/brief-history-of-caskets.html>, accessed 10/12/2025.

¹⁶ "The Casket Industry," <https://www.cfsaa.org/casketindustry/>, accessed 10/24/2025.

¹⁷ "Collins Building (North Coast Casket Company), Everett," Margaret Riddle, April 12, 2011, <https://www.historylink.org/File/9796>, accessed 10/12/2025.

¹⁸ "An Outstanding Casket Manufacturing Concern," *The Timberman*, Volume 29, San Francisco, M. Freeman Publications, January 1928, 66-67.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Collins Building (North Coast Casket Company), Everett.," Joseph Gaston, *Portland, Oregon, Its History and Builders: In Connection with the Antecedent Explorations, Discoveries, and Movements of the Pioneers that Selected the Site for the Great City of the Pacific*, Volume 3, S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911, Portland OR, 525-526.

²¹ "An Outstanding Casket Manufacturing Concern," 66-67.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

several thousand dollars on a casket. This increase in cost reflected changing national attitudes toward mourning and the desire to commemorate loved ones, which in turn drove demand for more elaborate materials, ornamentation, and construction.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, Americans' preferences began to shift toward metal caskets, particularly after wartime material restrictions accelerated technological change.²² The beginning of the 1950s was the peak in casket manufacturers operating in the United States and represented the height of diversification in the industry. Thereafter, the number of outfits began to decline, with the largest manufacturers being able to weather the changes in the business. Competitors in the South and Midwest began utilizing non-unionized labor putting even more pressure on those that did not.²³ By the time Oregon Casket was disappearing from the record there were about 500 manufacturers. Further, by the mid-1970s, two-thirds of caskets produced in the United States were metal, favoring large national firms and contributing to the decline of smaller regional wood casket manufacturers like Oregon Casket Company. Corporate acquisitions of firms increased consolidation and by 1996, only a dozen outfits produced more than 90% of sales for steel caskets. Today, only about 65 manufacturers remain with two of them producing about 80-85% of the country's total production.

Regional and Local Context

Portland's late nineteenth-century economy was strongly shaped by the wood-products industry. Furniture manufacturers, wood box producers, and mills for home products were common in the city, reflecting its strategic location at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers and its access to abundant forest resources. This thriving timber-based economy, combined with Portland's advantageous transportation position, laid the groundwork for the city's emergence as a regional center for manufacturing, distribution, and trade. It was within this broader economic framework that Oregon Casket Company established itself as a wholesale distributor and assembler of caskets serving a wide geographic region.

Building on this economic and infrastructural base, the Oregon Casket Company engaged in wholesale trade, supplying undertakers in Portland and across the wider Pacific Northwest. Wholesale trade and distribution were critical to Portland's rise as an economic hub, supporting the growth of the entire region. By the 1880s, Portland had become less dependent on San Francisco as an intermediary, increasingly asserting itself as a primary wholesale distribution center for Oregon, Washington, and the vast interior accessed via river and rail along the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Portland's prominence as the Northwest's primary import and wholesale supply center was in no small part shaped by its North End neighborhood where the Oregon Casket Company was located.²⁴

The beginnings of the North End were shaped by its proximity to the Willamette River—the lifeline of Portland's industries and shipping. While the waterfront had abundant warehouses, factories, and wharves, the neighborhood west of the waterfront was an evolving mix of residences, small businesses, and industrial uses. As industries expanded over time, many houses nearest the river were converted to boarding houses or demolished to make way for warehouses and small hotels. Residences gradually, yet continually, moved further west, while industry pushed northward from the downtown core into the North End. Fires in the 1870s led to the replacement of many wood structures with brick and stone buildings, giving the area a more substantial, urban character.²⁵

By the end of the 1880s, railroads also shaped the development of the neighborhood, connecting Portland to California, the Puget Sound, and points east. Rail lines terminated just blocks from the Oregon Casket Company site, further boosting the neighborhood's industrial draw. By the time the building was completed in

²² "Oregon Cedar Held Ideal for Purpose of Making Caskets," *Oregon Daily Journal*, September 29, 1917, 6.

²³ "Look for Union Label in Caskets, Advises Upholsterers Delegate," *Oregon Daily Journal*, April 9, 1957, 4.

²⁴ Old Town-Skidmore updated National Landmark Historic District nomination, 48-49.

²⁵ New Chinatown-Japantown National Register Historic District nomination, section 7, 1.

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

1897, the wider area had developed a diverse and layered mix of uses: single-family homes, duplexes, boarding houses, hotels, warehouses, saloons, blacksmith shops, livery stables, restaurants, stores, and even a slaughterhouse. Together, the North End eventually evolved into a thriving commercial-wholesale district and industrial hub while maintaining a mixed-use character.²⁶ (See the following footnote for more detail on uses and businesses located in the surrounding area, including other wholesalers.²⁷)

The North End of the late nineteenth century also provided temporary housing, cheap entertainment, and services for laborers arriving by sea or rail, including sailors, loggers, miners, and cannery workers.²⁸ Over time, vice businesses increasingly dominated the neighborhood and periodic crackdowns did little to alter this reputation.²⁹ At the same time, the area was home to a diverse population of Chinese, Black, Japanese, Greek, and Jewish residents who lived and worked alongside warehouses, hotels, and small businesses.³⁰ This mix of laborers, immigrants, and commercial activity created a dense, dynamic environment that served as a practical—if rough-edged—base for distribution-oriented enterprises like the Oregon Casket Company.

In the North End, the Oregon Casket Company Building was one of the most visually prominent buildings when built in 1897 because of its five-story height. In fact, in the North End, it was only the second building to rise to five stories.³¹ In the more immediate vicinity of the Oregon Casket Building, nearly all other buildings were dwellings, despite the changing nature of the neighborhood in every direction but to the west. These dwellings were mostly single-story houses with some two-story structures as well. Two exceptions in the immediate vicinity were the 1891 Barr Hotel, a four-story building located on the northwest portion of the block (destroyed by fire in 1908 and rebuilt as a three-story building, still extant) and, in the block to the west, the four-story 1897 Oregon Cracker Company building (extant and individually listed in the National Register).

Throughout the period of significance, the Oregon Casket Company played an active role in the neighborhood's transformation from a largely residential district to a bustling wholesale and industrial hub. The company's proximity to the river and rail networks along with the diversity of people, uses, and building types that surrounded it, contributed to the economic vitality and social complexity that defined Portland's North End. The company's success in this setting underscores the neighborhood's importance to Portland's commercial development and contributes to the property's significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce.

Beginnings of the Oregon Casket Company

The Oregon Casket Company was formed in 1886 in Portland by John Pettis Finley. Finley was born in 1844 in Missouri and traveled by ox-drawn wagon with his parents and five siblings at the age of seven to California. He became a carpenter and started his own business as one of the leading contractors and builders of Central California. Many years later, in 1874, Finley started the Enterprise Mill and Lumber Company in Santa Clara,

²⁶ Jane Comerford, *A History of Northwest Portland: From the River to the Hills*, Dragonfly Press, Portland, OR, 2011, 47.

²⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1908 illustrate the Oregon Casket Company Building's location within a dense, mixed industrial and commercial district in Portland's North End. Nearby uses included wholesale grocery operations (Mason-Ehrman), meat packing, glassmaking, candy manufacturing, sign painting and bill posting, blacksmithing, tin working, and creameries (Hazelwood Cream Company). Other industries present included steam laundries, tent manufacturing, wire and iron works, brass and metal works, sash and door production (Nicolai & Neppach), showcase manufacturing (Lutke), paper box production, hardware warehousing (Honeyman Hardware), musical instrument warehousing, grain storage, bag manufacturing (Neville Bag Co.), machine shops, clothing manufacturing (Mt. Hood Factory for shirts and overalls), awning production (Willamette Tent and Awning Co.), and rice milling. The nearby U.S. Custom House further reflects the area's historic role as a hub of commercial exchange. By the 1910s and 1920s, additional enterprises, such as Endicott Paper Company, reinforced this longstanding industrial and mercantile character.

²⁸ Comerford, 47.

²⁹ New Chinatown-Japantown nomination, section 8, pages 9 & 11.

³⁰ Comerford, 47.

³¹ The other was the New Grand Central Hotel at the southeast corner of NW 3rd Avenue and NW Flanders Street—a quarter-block building with ground-floor retail built in 1892 and demolished in 1978.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

California, which became one of the largest suppliers of wood home products in the state, producing window sashes, doors, and other building components. In 1879, Finley realized the profitability of building caskets and started producing them from redwood along with supplying other undertaking goods.³² His casket factory was possibly the first on the West Coast. The company reorganized in 1880 with additional capital, mainly provided by co-founder William P. Morgan, becoming the Pacific Manufacturing Company. Thereafter, Finley made a wide variety of wood products but principally made caskets, being called a “coffin emporium” and its factory being “one of the most complete of its kind in the country.”³³ The 1880 reorganization and additional capital led to the opening that year of a subsidiary called the California Casket Company, based in San Francisco. As a director of the Pacific Manufacturing Company, Finley became the general manager of California Casket and traveled to British Columbia, Nevada, Utah, Washington, and Oregon, including to Portland, resulting in the expansion of sales.³⁴

Finley eventually moved to Portland in 1886 and, with two others, incorporated the Oregon Casket Company as a subsidiary of the Pacific Manufacturing Company in 1887 with \$50,000 in capital. Its stated mission was to manufacture “coffins, caskets, hearses, and all necessary paraphernalia for the conducting of funerals.”³⁵ The company was reportedly the first casket manufacturer north of California.³⁶ The company’s first Portland location was on NW 4th Avenue between NW Flanders and Glisan Streets (demolished c. 1905), just one block away from the nominated property. It was two stories tall and had an office in the front and a “small workshop” in a single-story section at the rear. However, caskets were only assembled on this site. The wood components were produced in California mills and shipped to Portland where the caskets were assembled and trimmed. After finishing the product, the Oregon Casket Company sold direct to undertakers throughout the Pacific Northwest.³⁷

By 1889, under Finley’s leadership, the Oregon Casket Company had purchased the land on which the nominated building sits, but it would be eight more years until their new casket assembly plant was constructed.³⁸

Finley exclusively operated the Oregon Casket Company for six years, and, in the process, became a “prominent citizen of Portland.”³⁹ In 1892, Finley started the Willamette Casket Company in Tacoma, Washington, adding it to the list of Pacific Manufacturing Company subsidiaries. Willamette Casket soon became the wood milling hub for all the “branch houses” (Oregon Casket, California Casket, and Los Angeles Casket) of Pacific Manufacturing. Casket components were produced in Tacoma and sent south to Portland and California for assembly and wholesaling to undertakers in those local and regional markets.^{40,41} These Pacific Manufacturing subsidiaries were independent legal entities but controlled by the same board of directors and officers.⁴² Oregon Casket Company would remain a branch house of the Pacific Manufacturing Company through the period of significance.⁴³

³² Charles Henry Carey, *History of Oregon*, Volume 2, Pioneer Historical Publishing Company, 1922, 384; “Descendents of John Finley (? – 1783),” <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~cascgs/finley/aqwg11.htm>, accessed 1/30/2024.

³³ *History of Santa Clara County, California: Including its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatography and Description*, Alley, Bowen & Company, California, 1881, 550.

³⁴ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Portland and Vicinity: Containing Original Sketches of Many Well Known Citizens of the Past and Present*, Chapman Publishing Company, Oregon, 1903, 203-205.

³⁵ “A Casket Company,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 10, 1887, 3.

³⁶ “Willamette Casket Company,” *The News Tribune*, January 1, 1896, 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ The exact date is unknown; but it was owned by the company since at least 1889.

³⁹ “Mr. River Again on Top,” *The Oregonian*, December 4, 1892, 5.

⁴⁰ “Covers the Entire West,” *The News Tribune*, January 18, 1904, 8.

⁴¹ “Notice to Undertakers,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 29, 1906, 8.

⁴² “California Casket Company, Petitioner v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue, Respondent. Promulgated October 15, 1952,” *Reports of the Tax Court of the United States*, Volume 19, US Government Printing Office, 1952.

⁴³ “WPB Suspends Casket Company,” *The Oregonian*, July 7, 1945, 9.; “Notice to Undertakers,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 29, 1906, 8.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

At the end of 1892, Finley resigned from Oregon Casket over a business disagreement and disposed of his holdings in the parent Pacific Manufacturing Company. He then partnered with existing Portland undertakers and went on to operate his own funeral home, J. P. Finley and Son, in Portland for decades to come.⁴⁴

H. S. Tuthill Leads Oregon Casket Company and Constructs the Oregon Casket Company Building

Following Finley's departure from the Oregon Casket Company, the much younger (24-year-old) Hance Skillen Tuthill was appointed as its general manager.⁴⁵ Before coming to Portland, Tuthill studied at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and learned about the undertaker trade there.⁴⁶ His father was a merchant of a rural Kansas town store dealing principally in furniture, but also home décor, sewing machines, and later on, in headstones and caskets. As a young adult, Tuthill struggled with "rheumatism" and "lameness" and traveled to California in January 1889 for treatment of his debilitating condition. Upon his healthy return to Kansas later that year, he worked as an undertaker within his father's business.⁴⁷ The next year he returned to California where he worked as both an embalmer and provider of treatments to traveling health seekers. In 1891 Portland became Tuthill's permanent home, to where he was drawn by the abundance of natural resources and business opportunities.⁴⁸ Before taking over as general manager of Oregon Casket Company, Tuthill briefly worked in the city as an embalmer for DeLin and Holman—"pioneer undertakers of the Northwest."⁴⁹

When Tuthill started with Oregon Casket, there were only two employees.⁵⁰ With Tuthill in charge of the company, he expanded the business and transitioned the company to its new headquarters in the nominated property. In less than four years, the Tacoma plant was forced to increase its output to supply the rising demand of the Portland wholesale company, which ultimately led to the construction of the Oregon Casket Building in 1897.⁵¹

The decision to construct the new building coincided with a period of renewed economic growth in Portland and the wider Pacific Northwest. The severe national depression of 1893 had given way to a broad economic recovery by the late 1890s, fueled by increased investment, rising timber production, and expanding rail and shipping networks. Portland was experiencing a construction boom as commercial activity intensified along the waterfront and rail corridors. This generated a climate of optimism that resulted in the city's economic expansion. Conditions became ideal for companies like Oregon Casket to invest in new facilities that reflected their growing regional role.

Originally reported to be only four stories in height, a fifth story was added to the design of the nominated building seemingly just before commencement of construction. Seed & Bingham were the brick contractors with 24 bricklayers working at a time and the carpentry was performed by Felix N. Findley. Built in only three months and completed around November 1, 1897, for a cost of \$14,815.42, it was said to be the quickest construction of a large building in the city at that time.⁵²

The economic prosperity of the company was reflected in the relatively large size of the building, the quality of the materials, and the cache and caliber of its designers. Although the architect was not identified in contemporary reports and no original building plans survive in City of Portland archives, one key piece of evidence points to the firm of Whidden & Lewis: a 1969 list of the firm's completed projects compiled by Herb

⁴⁴ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Portland and Vicinity*, 203-205.

⁴⁵ Tuthill was born in Warsaw, NY in 1868. His parents moved the family to Cawker City, Kansas c. 1880.

⁴⁶ Gaston, 525-526.

⁴⁷ "George Tuthill," *Cawker City Public Record*, January 16, 1890, 3.

⁴⁸ Gaston, 525-526.

⁴⁹ Portland, Oregon City Directory, R. L. Polk & Co., 1892, 937.

⁵⁰ "Know Your Banker," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 31, 1929, 25.

⁵¹ "Willamette Casket Company," *The News Tribune*, January 1, 1896, 14.

⁵² "New Building Under Way," *The Oregonian*, October 18, 1897, 5; Herb Fredericks [sic], "Work of Whidden and Lewis," vertical stack, architects file, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, accessed January 12, 2025.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Frederick (Figure 25), which includes the nominated building.⁵³ Frederick was a draftsman for Whidden & Lewis in the 1910s. In the absence of other evidence and given that the building's design aligns closely with the scale and character typical of Whidden & Lewis's commercial work, it can be attributed to the firm with strong confidence.⁵⁴

William M. Whidden and Ion Lewis "dominated architectural design in Portland" between 1890 and 1910.⁵⁵ Both Massachusetts-born, they established their partnership in Portland in 1889 and were commissioned by many of the city's most prominent institutions and individuals.⁵⁶ Over the next two decades, they designed numerous residences as well as major commercial, public, and civic buildings, 29 of which are now individually listed in the National Register. The firm was Portland's leading architectural office at the time the Oregon Casket Company commissioned its new building.⁵⁷

While the Oregon Casket Building is not a particularly noteworthy design in the Whidden & Lewis portfolio and therefore is not being nominated under Criterion C, what is noteworthy is that the building was built in an area of the city during a period that did not attract the attention of prominent architects. Commissioning Whidden & Lewis is an indication of the rising prominence of the Oregon Casket Company in the city.

Use of the Oregon Casket Company Building During the Period of Significance

During the period of significance, the Oregon Casket Company used the nominated building as the central warehouse, assembly space, showroom, and administrative hub for its regional wholesale operations. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and contemporary reports document how the building functioned as an assembly plant for caskets and as a distribution center for those caskets and a wide variety of undertaking supplies. The 1901 Sanborn identifies the structure as a warehouse, with an office located in the southeast corner of the ground floor and a stockroom immediately to the north. A showroom occupied the second floor, while a workshop was located on the fifth floor. The 1908 Sanborn specifically labels the fifth floor for "gluing," likely referring to the assembly and affixing of casket components and trimmings. One report from the period noted that the company's offices and sales rooms were "elegantly appointed."⁵⁸ The building's design facilitated these operations through open floor plates that allowed flexible arrangement of assembly and storage areas, regular fenestration that provided natural light and ventilation throughout the workspace, and large sliding doors that enabled efficient movement of materials and finished products.

Based on historical documents, it is known that the company sold the following from the nominated building: horse-drawn hearses, caskets made of wood and metal either trimmed or untrimmed, robes, casket liners, casket hardware (handles, pedestals, lowering straps, body wraps, screws and plates), tacks, fragrance and atomizer, funeral register books, burial gloves, embalmers' instruments, and general undertakers' supplies.⁵⁹

⁵³ Herb Fredericks [sic], "Work of Whidden and Lewis."

⁵⁴ Local architectural historian Edward H. Teague used the difficult-to-find jobs list of Whidden & Lewis projects for some of his own research and noted that it was compiled by Herb Frederick. The list appears to be an authoritative compilation with descriptive detail provided for each work that includes the owner, class of building cost of building, cost per cubic foot, and year built. Teague's own research confirms that Herbert "Herb" Wal Frederick (1895-1976) had the background necessary to form an authoritative inventory. Teague's research notes that, in the 1915 city directory Frederick is listed as a draftsman for Whidden & Lewis, and, in the 1920s, he worked for P. T. Ainge Company, a firm that specialized in the design of bank interiors. See Edward H. Teague, "A House of Stone for Dr. Mackenzie: Rebuilding Portland's Architectural History," <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/e13ff367-a5c9-4b9e-ac7d-a5c51cf0a105/content>, accessed 10/8/2025.

⁵⁵ Brandon Spencer-Hartle, "Whidden and Lewis, architects," https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/whidden_lewis_architects/, accessed 5/22/2025.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Richard E. Ritz, *Architects of Oregon*, Lair Hill Publishing, Portland, Oregon, 416.

⁵⁸ "Oregon Casket Company," *Portland Labor Press*, April 28, 1905, 11.

⁵⁹ Oregon Casket Company invoice, March 15, 1905, <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/pg-1905-billhead-invoice-oregon-4650514159>, accessed 1/23/2024.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

In a 1905 article, the Oregon Casket Company announced that they and their parent corporation produced all of the goods they sold.⁶⁰ (This likely was the case during all of the years during the period of significance.) It is possible that some of these aforementioned undertaker supplies were manufactured in the building or, like the casket components, were shipped from affiliates in Tacoma and California.

The Oregon Casket Company is believed to have occupied all or nearly all of the building continuously throughout the period of significance. In addition to its principal use for wholesale casket operations, the building housed a secondary enterprise between 1903 and 1912, when H.S. Tuthill operated a separate wholesale jewelry business on site.⁶¹ One or two workers are also believed to have resided in the building during at least part of this period, reflecting the mixed-use character of the North End at the time.⁶²

The building also influenced the outcome of Portland's major historic fires. In 1908, a multi-block conflagration threatened the neighborhood and the Oregon Casket Company Building itself, drawing 236 firefighters and upwards of an estimated 50,000 spectators. The structure not only survived but was credited with helping prevent the fire from spreading further south. While "tongues of fire played on the walls of the building," reaching around to the front where "the casements" were caught in the blaze, the north and west walls of brick halted the fire's advance. Six streams of water were concentrated on the primary façade to save the building, resulting in only minor damage.⁶³ The greater part of the North End was saved by the actions of the firefighters and the solid brick secondary elevations of the nominated building.⁶⁴

Additionally, the company's work intersected with some of the Pacific Northwest's deadliest events, underscoring its role in the region's social and economic fabric. After the catastrophic 1903 Heppner flash flood—one of the deadliest natural disasters in Oregon's history—Oregon Casket Company dispatched an undertaker by train to Morrow County to assist in preparing victims for burial.⁶⁵ In 1918, the company cleared out its stock to rush caskets to Alaska following the sinking of the *Princess Sophia*, which claimed 336 lives. Lastly, during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920 that caused a high number of deaths, employees worked extended hours to meet unprecedented demand for caskets.⁶⁶

Oregon Casket Company's Continued Growth and Economic Role

Under H.S. Tuthill's leadership as general manager, the Oregon Casket subsidiary rapidly expanded, eventually dominating the parent company's transactions. Tuthill became president of Oregon Casket Company in 1908, then general manager of California Casket Company and Los Angeles Casket Company, and ultimately president of the parent company and its other subsidiaries.⁶⁷

The casket and undertaker supply industry was a largely understated presence in American communities. As one Oregon Casket Company salesman described it, the business was "almost an unknown industry" due to the somber nature of its products.⁶⁸ The company did not advertise, selling exclusively wholesale to undertakers, and intentionally avoided drawing public attention. Tuthill emphasized that the company never made any kind of "display" of its business and consistently declined to disclose sales volumes, lest it appear to profit from death.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ "Oregon Casket Company," 11.

⁶¹ Gaston, 525-526; "Portland, Ore.," *The Jewelers' Circular*, March 20, 1912, 105, https://archive.org/details/sim_jck_1912-03-20_64_7/page/104/mode/2up?q=%22h+s+tuthill%22, accessed 1/23/2024.

⁶² R. L. Polk and Co. Portland, Oregon City directory search results for "101 NW 5th."

⁶³ "Four Blocks Are Swept by Flames," *The Oregonian*, July 29, 1908, 10.

⁶⁴ "Great Fire in Portland Sweeps Several Blocks," *Morning Astorian*, July 29, 1908, 1.

⁶⁵ "Damage to the Railroad," *Morning Oregonian*, June 16, 1903, 6.

⁶⁶ "Editor's note: 'Fat,' 'Dummy,' 'Dutch' Considered Jobs of Gravest Import," *The Oregonian*, September 27, 1981, 115.

⁶⁷ Gaston, 525-526.

⁶⁸ "Mackay Country Sees Bright Side of 4-Year Cloud," *Idaho Statesman*, March 16, 1922, 7.

⁶⁹ "The Oregon Casket Company," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 20, 1916, 6.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Despite this quiet public presence, by 1911 Oregon Casket Company and Tuthill were identified as key commercial actors in Portland, having created what newspapers called an “extensive” industry on the West Coast.⁷⁰ In 1918, Tuthill added another branch house in Seattle—the Pacific Coast Casket Company—cementing his reputation as “a leader in manufacturing and merchandising circles” throughout the region.^{71,72}

One measure of the company’s significance was its dominance of the regional market. Oregon Casket Company was the first casket production company in Portland, Oregon but also the entire region—the “pioneer coffin manufactory of the [Pacific] northwest.”⁷³ For decades after its founding, it was the city’s only supplier of undertakers and remained the only significant operation of its kind until 1913.⁷⁴ This early start allowed the firm to dominate the regional market by default and, even after competitors emerged, they all operated on a smaller scale. Even as Oregon Casket relied on factories elsewhere for casket components, the nominated building was still described as “one of the largest casket factories in the United States.”⁷⁵

The company’s geographic reach also demonstrates its commercial importance. Oregon Casket’s wholesale trade extended throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Utah, supplying most of the undertakers in the wider Pacific Northwest. In Portland alone, the company supplied between six and ten local undertakers during the period of significance. Its sales force included traveling agents who lived in Portland and other cities, regularly visiting towns throughout the region. By way of example, salesman George W. Ashford was described as “one of the best known commercial men on this coast and was known to the trade throughout the country,” who worked for the company from at least 1894 until his death in 1914 while on business in La Grande, Oregon.⁷⁶ During the period of significance, Oregon Casket distributed its products throughout the Northwest and interior states and, only four years after the end of the period of significance, it was shipping to all regions of the country.⁷⁷

Workforce size and longevity further reflected the company’s economic role. When Tuthill took over the company in 1893, it employed only a few workers. By 1911, that number had grown to 26 and, following the establishment of mill and manufacturing operations in Portland in 1920, employment approximately doubled. The company planned to employ 75 workers towards the end of the period of significance when it operated both the nominated property and the new factory site, and by 1929 the payroll had grown to 90 employees.⁷⁸ Oregon Casket Company fostered long-term employment—some workers stayed with the company for nearly 50 years—and during the Depression the firm avoided layoffs by reducing employees’ hours to three out of every four weeks.^{79,80} The company was large enough to support its own indoor baseball team for many years during the period of significance, reflecting both its scale and its role as an employer in the city’s industrial economy.⁸¹

⁷⁰ “Mackay Country Sees Bright Side of 4-Year Cloud,” 7.

⁷¹ “Know Your Banker,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 31, 1929, 25.

⁷² Tuthill’s prominence and success were further evidenced when he became a director of the new West Coast National Bank in 1923 and US National Bank in 1935. See: “Directors of New National Bank Elected,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, November 2, 1923, 2.

⁷³ “Mackay Country Sees Bright Side of 4-Year Cloud,” 7.

⁷⁴ *Chamber of Commerce Bulletin: Official Organ of the Portland Chamber of Commerce*, Volumes 18-19, 1913, 43.

⁷⁵ “Factory Was Just Getting on its Feet,” *Daily Capital Journal*, March 30, 1911, 4.

⁷⁶ “Shipped Home in His Own Casket,” *La Grande Observer*, May 29, 1914, 1.

⁷⁷ “Know Your Banker,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 31, 1929, 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*; “Casket Company to Erect New Factory,” *The Oregonian*, August 24, 1919, 60.

⁷⁹ Some examples include Stephen Watson who covered and lined caskets from 1908 to 1952. Another employee, Fred W. Birkemeier, worked for Oregon Casket for 45 years, 30 of which were as a superintendent. Ronald Derr was with the company for at least 36 years, starting as a stock boy in the mill on NW 21st Avenue, working in every department, and finally serving as plant manager and purchasing agent between 1953 and until at least 1962.

⁸⁰ “Editor’s note: ‘Fat,’ ‘Dummy,’ ‘Dutch’ Considered Jobs of Gravest Import,” 115.

⁸¹ “Indoor Baseball Games,” *The Oregonian*, December 9, 1908, 7.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

The company's leadership and participation in civic and professional life also positioned it within Portland's commerce development. Tuthill was a longtime member of the Portland Chamber of Commerce and was listed among the city's "captains of industry" in 1916.⁸² During the period of significance, Oregon Casket Company participated in regional professional organizations, including the Northwest Funeral Directors' Association and, later, the Oregon Funeral Directors' Association.^{83,84} The company regularly sponsored banquets, luncheons, and excursions, including a moonlight ship outing during the 1919 association conference.⁸⁵ Tuthill delivered speeches at association meetings, including in 1918 when the state association partnered with the Red Cross during World War I.⁸⁶

Oregon Casket Company Outgrows the Nominated Property

The company's success in Portland eventually rendered the Oregon Casket Company Building inadequate for its growing operations. In 1919 the firm began construction of a new plant between NW 21st and 22nd Avenues and between NW Raleigh and Savier Streets (now demolished). This facility marked a turning point for the company. Unlike the nominated property, the new site incorporated a mill and factory, enabling the company to undertake full manufacturing operations in Portland for the first time.

The new facility occupied a double block site and consisted of an 80 x 160-foot three-story factory building, accompanied by a two-story accessory power plant and two single-story buildings for drying of lumber, all designed by Sutton & Whitney (Figure 19).⁸⁷ When it opened in April 1920, construction costs totaled \$175,000—a substantial sum for the period. It was described as the largest casket factory in the West and one of the most modern and best equipped in the country.⁸⁸ The scale and cost of the plant reflected the company's strong market position and growth during its years in the nominated property.

This expansion allowed Oregon Casket to begin milling its own wood and producing caskets from start to finish in Portland. It made the facility the largest division of the parent company and the primary mill for all subsidiary operations. It began supplying casket shells to other divisions and eventually to buyers as far away as Boston and South Carolina.⁸⁹

The company initially planned a second construction phase immediately after completing the factory: a four-story concrete warehouse and office building also designed by Sutton & Whitney, projected at \$150,000.⁹⁰ For unknown reasons, this phase did not begin until several years later, and the company continued to use the nominated property in the interim.⁹¹ In 1921, Oregon Casket installed a 100-foot spur track along NW Flanders Street between 5th and 6th Avenues, connecting to the United Railways/Southern Pacific mainline on NW 4th Avenue.⁹² This may indicate an intention to continue occupying the property or an effort to enhance its value.

⁸² "Know Your Banker," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 31, 1929, 25; "Portland Captains of Industry Guests of City of Grants Pass," *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, September 20, 1916, 1.

⁸³ "Funeral Directors of State Assemble in Annual Meeting," *Oregon Daily Journal*, September 3, 1919, 2.

⁸⁴ Finley was elected as treasurer of the association when the association began in 1887. See: "The Coffin Builders," *Oregon Statesman*, October 21, 1887, 6.

⁸⁵ "Undertakers at Dance," *The Oregonian*, September 3, 1919, 7.

⁸⁶ "Funeral Men Meet," *The Oregonian*, October 5, 1918, 13.

⁸⁷ "An Outstanding Casket Manufacturing Concern," *The Timberman*, Volume 29, San Francisco, M. Freeman Publications, January 1928, p. 66-67; "Oregon Casket Co. Factory Will Hold Own Among Leaders," *Oregon Daily Journal*, April 4, 1920, 25; "Casket Company to Erect a Warehouse Costing \$150,000," *Oregon Daily Journal*, October 5, 1924, 24.

⁸⁸ "Oregon Casket Co. Factory Will Hold Own Among Leaders," *Oregon Daily Journal*, April 4, 1920, 25; W. H. Rohr, "The Latest Thing in Casket Factories," *The Wood-Worker*, October 1920, Volume 39, S. H. Smith Company, 1920.

⁸⁹ "A Visit Inside Morgan Wood Products," *Cloverdale Reveille*, September 13, 1973, 1 and 5.

⁹⁰ *The American Architect*, Vol 116, Swetland Publishing Company, 1919, 20.

⁹¹ City directories during these years confirm Oregon Casket Company was still based at the nominated property as it had since 1897.

⁹² "City Hall Briefs," *Oregon Daily Journal*, April 19, 1921, 2.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

In 1922, the Oregon Casket Company increased its capital stock from \$50,000 to \$100,000. In early twentieth-century corporate practice, such an increase reflected a formal expansion of the company's authorized capitalization, allowing it to issue additional shares or convert accumulated profits into permanent capital. In Oregon Casket's case, the timing coincided with the company's expansion into its new NW 21st Avenue site, suggesting that the increase in capital stock supported or formalized the resources needed to sustain this significant enlargement of operations.⁹³

The second phase of construction on the new site was completed in 1924 and added a four-story building containing offices, shipping rooms, a casket display room, textile workshop, trimming department, and space for hardware and parts (Figure 22). The new complex carried out all casket manufacturing processes except the fabrication of casket hardware. It was considered the largest plant of its kind west of the Mississippi River and competed with eastern factories in Ohio and western New York.⁹⁴

During the second phase of construction of the new plant in 1924, the company sold the nominated property for \$85,000 to George W. Schulmerick who leased it back until the new building was completed. After the new building was completed in 1925, the Oregon Casket Company fully vacated their 1897 building.⁹⁵

(Tenants of the building following the Oregon Casket Company are documented in the following footnote.⁹⁶)

The Decline of the Company

After relocating from the nominated building, the Oregon Casket Company continued to thrive through the 1920s but, like many businesses, faced challenges during the Great Depression. Next, labor struggles emerged in 1939 when Casket Workers' Local No. 1777 organized strikes affecting all Portland casket manufacturers. Finally, the company's longtime leader, H. S. Tuthill, who had been praised as "a man who sees ten years ahead," passed away in 1943, marking a turning point for the business.⁹⁷ In 1944, Oregon Casket Company merged with its affiliate company, California Casket Company, though it continued operating much as before.⁹⁸ In 1945 work at Oregon Casket Company was briefly suspended by the War Production Board for violations of limits on the use of lumber.⁹⁹ In 1950, the company sold its plant in NW Portland to Consolidated Freightways and moved its mill operations to Cloverdale, California under the name of Morgan Wood Products, supplying casket components to assembly plants across the country.¹⁰⁰ Although Oregon

⁹³ "Bakery Firm Organized," *The Oregonian*, August 25, 1922, 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid; "Portland Captains of Industry Guests of City of Grants Pass," *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, September 20, 1916, 1.

⁹⁵ "5-Story Building is Sold," *The Oregonian*, May 4, 1924, 22.

⁹⁶ In April 1925 the building was available for lease. An ad touted its steam heat, elevator with a capacity of 1,500 pounds, and access to the spur rail line that Oregon Casket had built a couple of years prior. Schulmerick sold the building in 1928 to Harry Mittleman for an undisclosed amount. By 1926 the Hunt Transfer Company, a moving and storage outfit, started using the building as a warehouse and storage space, an arrangement that lasted until 1935. During their tenancy, they subleased some of the space to at least four other businesses that sold diverse products such as tiles, tires, roofing materials, and musical instruments, pianos, radios, and speakers. Starting in 1939 Boxer Fixture Company made use of the building. Boxer Fixture provided food serving equipment for a wide variety of businesses that sold groceries and/or prepared foods. Boxer Fixture vacated the building in 1944, and Kalberer Hotel Supply took over the building, occupying it for 31 years, selling tableware and restaurant equipment. Kalberer started in early 1944 by brothers Frank and Gus Kalberer. At the end of 1975 Kalberer vacated the building but retained ownership of it until at least 1999.

⁹⁷ Tuthill's funeral was held at J. P. Finley and Son, the mortuary of Oregon Casket Company's original founder and president who Tuthill took the reins from in 1892. "Know Your Banker," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 31, 1929, 25.

⁹⁸ "California Casket Company, Petitioner v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue."

⁹⁹ "WPB Suspends Casket Company," *The Oregonian*, July 7, 1945, 9.

¹⁰⁰ The company's mill operations and roughly half of its 60 mill employees moved to Cloverdale, California in early 1951 to be closer to the redwood forests that supplied much of a casket's raw material. The mill division not only left Portland but was cleaved from Oregon Casket Company's operations and became known as Morgan Wood Products, another subsidiary of California Casket Company. At this time, the parent company, California Casket, was one of the

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Casket maintained a scaled-back Portland presence after the sale, initially leasing half of its former plant and, within a couple of years, relocating to SE Hawthorne Boulevard, records of its activities are increasingly scarce.^{101,102}

One other factor contributing to the decline of the business was cremation, which had always been just a tiny fraction of an undertaker's work (less than 4%) during the period of significance and the decades that followed. The percentage of people choosing to be cremated, however, rose significantly by the 1970s, with one-third of all deaths resulting in cremation rather than a casket burial in 2006.¹⁰³ As of 2025, nearly two-thirds of Americans are cremated.

Comparative Analysis: Contemporaneous Casket Companies

The Oregon Casket Company Building is the best surviving example of the casket industry's historical presence in Portland. For many years, Oregon Casket was the first and only large-scale casket and undertaker supply firm in the Pacific Northwest, maintaining regional dominance well into the period of significance. While competitors gradually emerged—including the Great Northern Casket Company, Parelius Manufacturing Company, and Portland Casket Company—none matched Oregon Casket's scope, longevity, or prominence. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office database lists no other known extant "casket" manufacturing or sales properties, but research reveals that approximately ten other casket companies operated in Portland during the first half of the twentieth century. This comparative analysis catalogs these companies and their associated buildings to contextualize Oregon Casket's preeminent role. None of these buildings possess the significance or integrity of the Oregon Casket Company Building.

In 1916, H.S. Tuthill, Oregon Casket's president, stated that the company was virtually the sole supplier of undertakers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Utah.¹⁰⁴ Early competitors were short-lived or limited in scale. The Pacific Burial Case Company, founded in 1907 at SE 9th Avenue and Belmont Street, went bankrupt the same year.¹⁰⁵ Columbia Casket Company, which took over that site, was destroyed by fire in 1908 and never resumed operations.¹⁰⁶ Miller & Tracey, a full-service funeral home at 714 SW 20th Place, produced its own caskets from about 1915 to at least 1935; however, this production remained small-scale and

oldest casket companies and the oldest on the coast. Morgan Wood Products would supply the five assembly plants of the parent company (Oregon Casket, Pacific Coast Casket, Los Angeles Casket, Empire Casket in Denver, Morgan Wood Products in Cloverdale). The new Cloverdale plant immediately started sending casket shells as far as Rockwell, NC and New Haven, CT, meaning the same shipments were almost certainly taking place from Portland as well.

¹⁰¹ "B-Mike," *Oregon Daily Journal*, September 23, 1953, 23.

¹⁰² It is suspected that the Oregon Casket and Great Northern Casket companies entered a partnership by this time as the latter also moved to the SE Hawthorne location around the same time. City directories suggest that by the mid-1950s, the company's visibility had sharply declined, with its name mostly absent starting in 1955. However, when the leased building sold in 1957 it was noted that Oregon Casket was one of three lessees. (See "Two Big Commercial Buildings Sold Here," *Oregon Daily Journal*, January 6, 1957, 19.) While Great Northern Casket continued operations at the SE Hawthorne location into the late 1960s, Oregon Casket's final years remain more difficult to trace. The company was still operating as of 1968 selling their own caskets as well as caskets under the name of other companies in a jobbing operation to funeral directors around the Pacific Northwest and northern California. (See: Jacwil Mfrs. V. Batesville Casket Company, Inc in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division, Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 1962). The company was likely dissolved as early as the 1970s, reflecting both local challenges and broader shifts in the funeral industry. A photo on Dead Memories Portland, a private Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/129942427034587), has a c. 1990s photo of 6524 N. Albina Avenue showing a building with a standalone sign with "Oregon Casket Company" on it.

¹⁰³ "The Casket Industry," <https://www.cfsaa.org/casketindustry/>, accessed 5/20/2025.

¹⁰⁴ "The Oregon Casket Company," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 20, 1916, 6.

¹⁰⁵ "Information Bureau Becomes Corporation," *Oregon Daily Journal*, February 5, 1907, 10.; "Building Permits," *The Oregonian*, March 26, 1907, 2.; "Coffin Factory in Straits," *The Morning Oregonian*, June 21, 1907, 12.

¹⁰⁶ "Fire Causes \$10,000 Loss," *The Oregonian*, November 12, 1908, 4. There is no further record of the company's operation until 1967 when it was likely an entirely different company.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

strictly tied to its in-house funeral services.¹⁰⁷ Among these early competitors, only the Miller & Tracey funeral home building still stands, but its small scale does not make it a worthy comparative property to the Oregon Casket Company Building.

More substantial competitors emerged later. The Great Northern Casket Company, founded as Willamette Manufacturing Company in Salem in 1910, relocated to Portland in 1917 to reduce shipping costs.¹⁰⁸ It constructed a \$20,000 factory, warehouse, and office at the northeast corner of S. Macadam Avenue and S. Gaines Street (demolished) and operated there for decades.¹⁰⁹ This investment was modest compared to Oregon Casket's later expansion. When Oregon Casket completed its new complex, the total cost was more than sixteen times what Great Northern had spent. Great Northern supplied undertakers as far away as Arizona, British Columbia, Wyoming, Montana, and Utah.¹¹⁰ By 1952, the company opened a second site at 600 SE Stark Street—an extant single-story commercial building—while continuing to operate the S. Macadam location.¹¹¹ Around 1953, Great Northern likely merged or co-located with Oregon Casket at 103 SE Hawthorne Boulevard, sharing operations while retaining separate identities for some time. Neither their Stark Street nor Hawthorne Boulevard properties represent the late nineteenth/early twentieth century commerce history that is reflected in the nominated property, which was purpose-built in 1897 for Oregon Casket Company's growing casket assembly and wholesaling operations.

The Parelus Manufacturing Company, established in 1889 as a producer of high-end interior woodwork and fixtures, briefly added caskets to its product line around 1917.¹¹² They operated from their factory at 2506 NE Multnomah Street—a c. 1915 building that has been added onto and modified extensively yet remains standing despite decades of apparent disuse.¹¹³ Parelus ceased casket manufacturing after about three years, returning its focus to woodwork and fixtures. Because Parelus was only briefly engaged in the casket business, this building cannot compete with the nominated property in terms of reflecting commerce significance related to the casket industry.

The Portland Casket Company was founded in 1924 as an offshoot of Portland Chemical Company and operated for at least 50 years at a scale that, research suggests, came the closest to the dominance of Oregon Casket.¹¹⁴ Its primary address was 4202 SE Division Street, where it shared a building with Portland Chemical.¹¹⁵ That building still stands but has been significantly altered on both the interior and exterior, including the combining of four contiguous structures (not all originally used by Portland Casket nor Portland Chemical) into one.¹¹⁶ Due to its lack of integrity, the Portland Casket building no longer conveys its potential significance, whereas the Oregon Casket Company Building retains high integrity and more clearly reflects the history of casket wholesaling in Portland.

¹⁰⁷ "Funeral Shipments," *The Oregonian*, November 19, 1920, 20.; "Miller & Tracy," *Oregon Daily Journal*, September 1, 1933, 2.

¹⁰⁸ "Factory Was Just Getting on its Feet," *Daily Capital Journal*, March 30, 1911, 4.; "Caskets Distributed from Oregon to All Points in the West," *Oregon Daily Journal*, November 17, 1917, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *The Oregon Country: Formerly the Chamber of Commerce Bulletin ... Devoted to the Upbuilding of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, An Independent Development Magazine*, Volumes 26-27, 120.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Portland, Oregon City Directory, R. L. Polk & Co., 1952, 1719.

¹¹² "Oregon Cedar Held Ideal for Purpose of Making Caskets," *Oregon Daily Journal*, September 29, 1917, 6.

¹¹³ "See Us for High-Grade Mill Work," *The Oregonian*, January 1, 1915, 42.

¹¹⁴ "John H. Gilbaugh Dies at Home of Hemorrhage," *Oregon Daily Journal*, May 9, 1943, 83.

¹¹⁵ Portland, Oregon City Directory, R. L. Polk & Co., 1926, 1594.

¹¹⁶ Sanborn fire insurance map from 1924 shows three separate buildings, one for Portland Chemical and two for an automobile repair garage. The Sanborn map for 1950 shows some additions to the previous complex with most of the space used by Portland Casket and the rest by Portland Chemical.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

Other companies emerged after the period of significance but were relatively short-lived and small-scale. Therefore, none of them are contemporaries of the Oregon Casket Company that are appropriate for comparative analysis.¹¹⁷

Comparative Analysis: Other Buildings Used by Oregon Casket Company

In addition to competitors, it is also necessary to examine the company's own former properties to further underscore the nominated building's relative significance. Of the buildings that the company occupied during its rise to prominence and during its peak period of casket manufacturing, only the nominated property still stands. Further, it is the most important and best-preserved example, embodying the company's rise and regional impact. With the demolition of the NW Raleigh plant in 1972 and 1973, the only other known standing site is at 103 SE Hawthorne Boulevard, which is a c. 1946 concrete, single-story structure with a daylight basement, reflecting the company's late phase of diminished prominence. Further, Oregon Casket occupied only part of this building, which, in addition to others, also housed Dennis Uniform (a Portland company since 1920) starting in 1947 until 2024.

Comparative Analysis and Nomination Conclusion

The Oregon Casket Company Building is the most significant surviving physical representation of Portland's historic casket industry. At the turn of the twentieth century, caskets were an essential commodity and the West Coast's timber species were especially prized for their durability, making Portland a natural hub for this industry to grow. This was furthered by the city's strategic position at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, coupled with excellent rail connections. Constructed in 1897 during a period of expanding prosperity, the five-story building signaled the company's success through its scale, its prominent urban presence in the North End, and its design by Whidden & Lewis—the city's leading architectural firm of the era. From this building, Oregon Casket continued its status as the dominant supplier of caskets and undertaker goods in the Pacific Northwest, serving multiple states and shaping a key but often overlooked industry. The company's subsequent construction of a major new plant and headquarters elsewhere in Northwest Portland in the 1920s reflected the substantial growth made possible by the nominated property. Comparative analysis confirms that no other surviving property in Portland comes close to equaling this building's ability to convey the commercial history of the casket industry in the city. Competitor buildings have been demolished, heavily altered, or lack the scale and integrity of the Oregon Casket Company Building. As the only extant property directly tied to Oregon Casket's formative and dominant years, it stands as the best remaining example of this once-important sector of Portland's industrial and commercial history. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for Commerce.

¹¹⁷ Empire Casket Company operated near SW 3rd Avenue and SW Salmon Street from approximately 1938 to 1941. Rose City Casket Company ran at 2041 N. Argyle Street from roughly 1936 to 1940. Additional smaller or later companies included American Casket (by 1954—at least 1971) at 5406 N. Albina Avenue (extant, unremarkable single-story commercial building); Columbia Casket (by 1947—at least 1973) at 3503 N. Mississippi Avenue (extant two-story 1908 commercial building); Stan's Casket (1948–1997) at 5202 N. Albina Avenue (extant small, single-story commercial building); Crown Casket Company (listed in 1974 city directories) at 6402 NE Halsey Street; and Willamette Casket Company (by 1983) at 1726 NE Alberta Street (extant two-story commercial building), founded by a former Oregon Casket employee in 1969. Batesville Casket Company, now the largest casket manufacturer in the country, entered the Portland market by 1970, operating from the same SE Hawthorne Boulevard location that Oregon Casket and Great Northern Casket had used, suggesting a potential acquisition or succession of operations. By 1976, Batesville relocated to 530 SE Tenino Street—an extant but unremarkable single-story building—and eventually moved to Milwaukie, Oregon, by 1984.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

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Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

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Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

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New Chinatown–Japantown National Register Historic District Nomination. Section 7, p. 1.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other
Name of repository: Historical Newspapers

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>45.526111°</u> Latitude	<u>-122.675840°</u> Longitude	3	<u></u> Latitude	<u></u> Longitude
2	<u></u> Latitude	<u></u> Longitude	4	<u></u> Latitude	<u></u> Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is the property's full tax lot, which is comprised of lot 1 of Block 37 in the Couch's Addition (#1N1E34CA 01700).¹¹⁸ Beginning at the southeast corner of the building at NW 5th Avenue and NW Flanders Street, the boundary runs 50 feet north to the northeast corner of the property. The boundary then runs 100 feet west. From there the boundary runs 50 feet south. Finally, the boundary runs east 100 feet back to the southeast corner.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary was selected because it encompasses the building, which fills the entire 5,000 sf lot, and has remained unchanged since the period of significance (1897-1925).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Erik Hovmiller and Jessica Engeman, Historians date April 9, 2026
organization Continuum Preservation Consulting LLC telephone 971-221-6796
street & number 3135 NE 23rd Avenue email Jessica@continuumpreservation.com
city or town Portland state OR zip code 97212

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Regional Location Map**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Tax Lot Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

¹¹⁸ Multnomah County Assessor Data, https://www.portlandmaps.com/detail/assessor/403-NW-5TH-AVE/R140445_did/, accessed 10/6/2025.

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR

County and State

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Oregon Casket Company Building

City or Vicinity: Portland

County: Multnomah **State:** Oregon

Photographer: Shane Boland

Date Photographed: June 15, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photograph 1 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0001
South and east elevations; camera facing northwest.
- Photograph 2 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0002
East elevation with door and windows from the 1954 renovation boarded up since 2020; camera facing west.
- Photograph 3 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0003
South elevation; camera facing north.
- Photograph 4 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0004
North elevation; camera facing south.
- Photograph 5 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0005
West elevation; camera facing east.
- Photograph 6 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0006
Original double sliding loading door on the south elevation; camera facing northwest.
- Photograph 7 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0007
Doors with transom windows above at southwest corner; camera facing northwest.
- Photograph 8 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0008
Eastern portion of ground floor; camera facing southeast.
- Photograph 9 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0009
Ground floor showing elevator on right, double door at center, and demised space on left; camera facing south.
- Photograph 10 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0010
Second floor showing some demised walls and, at center, the elevator; camera facing southwest.
- Photograph 11 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0011
Staircase at the second-floor level; built 1926.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

- Photograph 12 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0012
Third floor showing elevator at middle and staircase enclosure at right; camera facing southeast.
- Photograph 13 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0013
Fourth floor showing elevator at middle; taken from door to stairs; camera facing northeast.
- Photograph 14 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0014
Window on the fourth floor; camera facing southeast.
- Photograph 15 of 15:** OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0015
Fifth floor; camera facing south.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah County, Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 31

List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.)

Figure 1: Regional location map

Figure 2: Local location map

Figure 3: Tax lot map

Figure 4: Site plan

Figure 5: First floor plan

Figure 6: Second floor plan

Figure 7: Third floor plan

Figure 8: Fourth floor plan

Figure 9: Fifth floor plan

Figure 10: 1901 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the Oregon Casket Company building a few years after its construction

Figure 11: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the Oregon Casket Company building eleven years after its construction

Figure 12: Photograph of the east and south elevations of the Oregon Casket Company Building circa 1947

Figure 13: *Oregonian* newspaper article from October 18, 1897, about the construction of the Oregon Casket Company Building

Figure 14: c. 1900 photograph of NW Portland looking north-northeast shows the south elevation of the Oregon Casket Company building in the context of surrounding buildings

Figure 15: 1903 photograph of NW Portland, facing east showing the west elevation of the Oregon Casket Company building in the context of surrounding buildings

Figure 16: 1927 photograph of NW Portland, facing northwest, showing the Oregon Casket Company in the context of surrounding buildings

Figure 17: Undated photograph (but likely c. 1930), taken on NW 5th Avenue looking north, showing the nominated building three blocks away

Figure 18: May 1980 photograph showing the east and south elevations of the Oregon Casket Company building

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah County, Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 32

- Figure 19:** Photograph from c. 1920 looking northeast from near the intersection of NW 22nd Avenue and NW Raleigh Street following the first phase of Oregon Casket Company's new plant on NW Savier Street
- Figure 20:** Ad in the *Oregonian* on August 17, 1932 showing a rail car parked near the double-loading door of the nominated building
- Figure 21:** 1923 photograph looking south from NW Savier Street between NW 21st and 22nd Avenues showing some Oregon Casket Company employees in front of the 1919 factory building
- Figure 22:** 1950 photograph looking southwest from the intersection of NW 21st Avenue and NW Savier Street showing the completed plant of the Oregon Casket Company
- Figure 23:** February 8, 1940 photograph during a celebration of Chinese New Year showing detail of some of the east elevation of the Oregon Casket Company Building
- Figure 24:** Photo c. 2006 bird's-eye view, looking northwest, of the south and east elevations of the Oregon Casket Company Building
- Figure 25:** Alphabetical list of architectural works by Whidden & Lewis, compiled by Herb Fredricks in 1969, showing Oregon Casket Co.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah County, Oregon

County and State

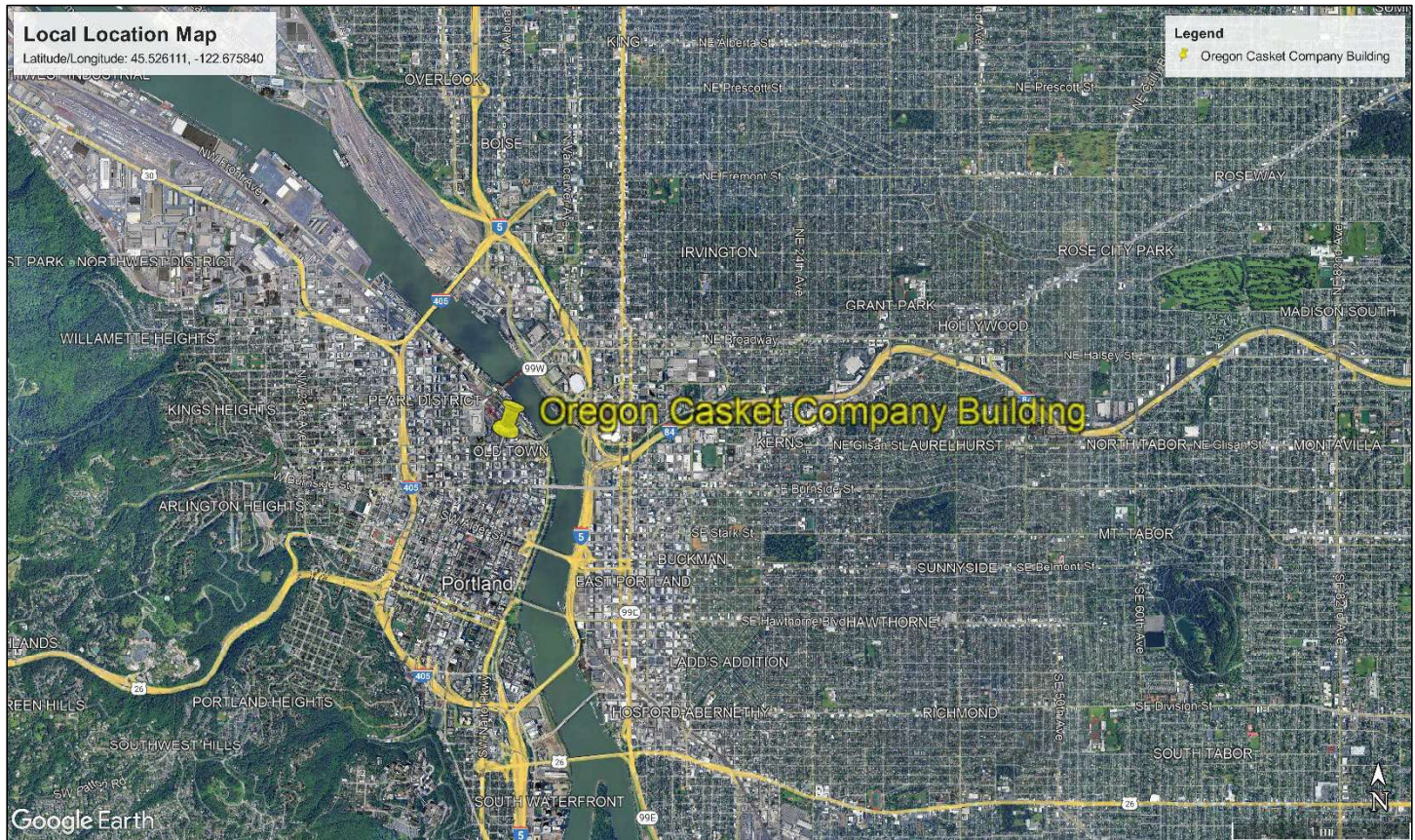
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 33

Figure 1: Regional Location Map. Latitude 45.526111°, Longitude -122.675840°.



National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Page 34

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

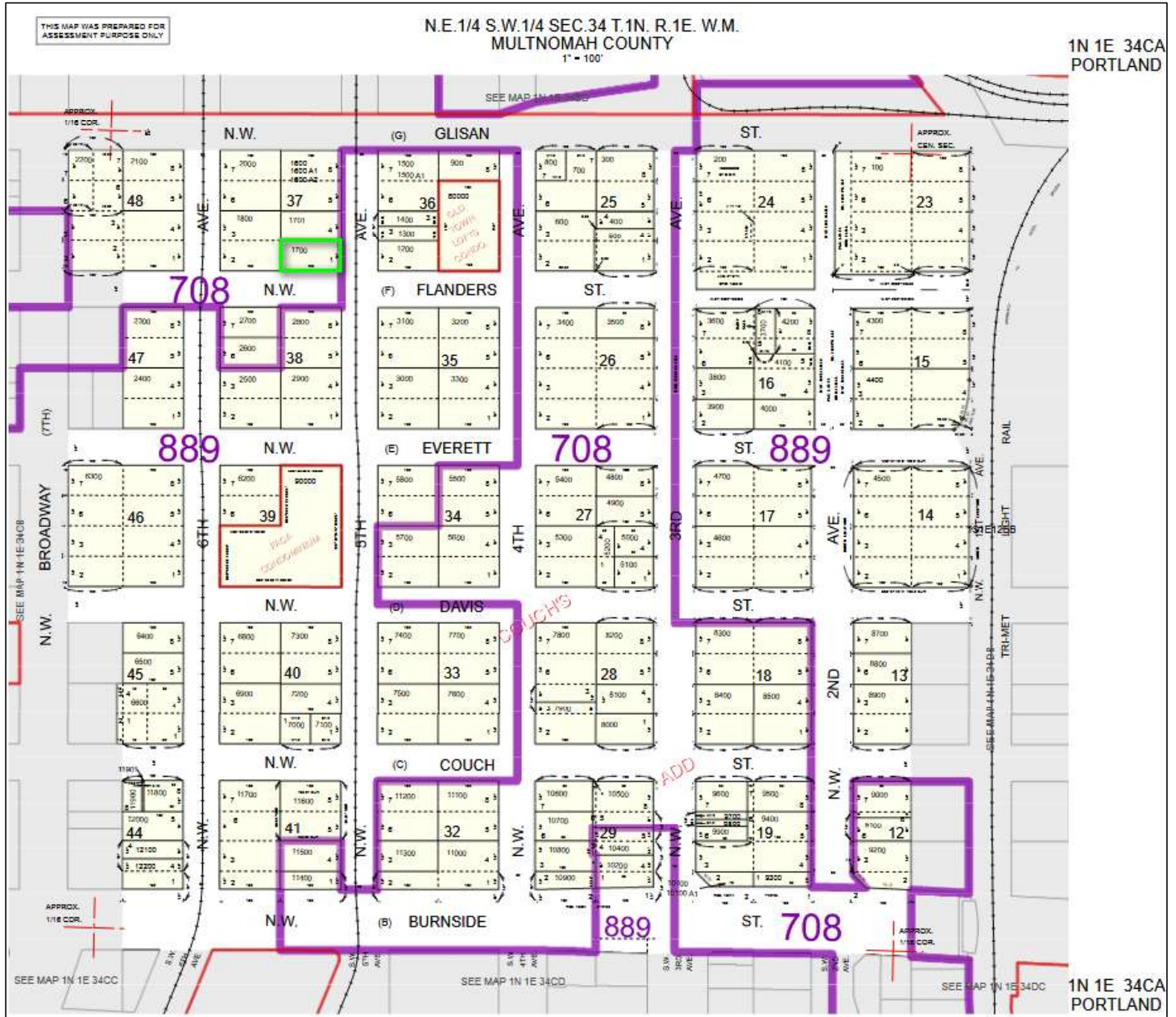
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 35

Figure 3: Tax lot map, accessed May 18, 2025. Nominated property outlined in green.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

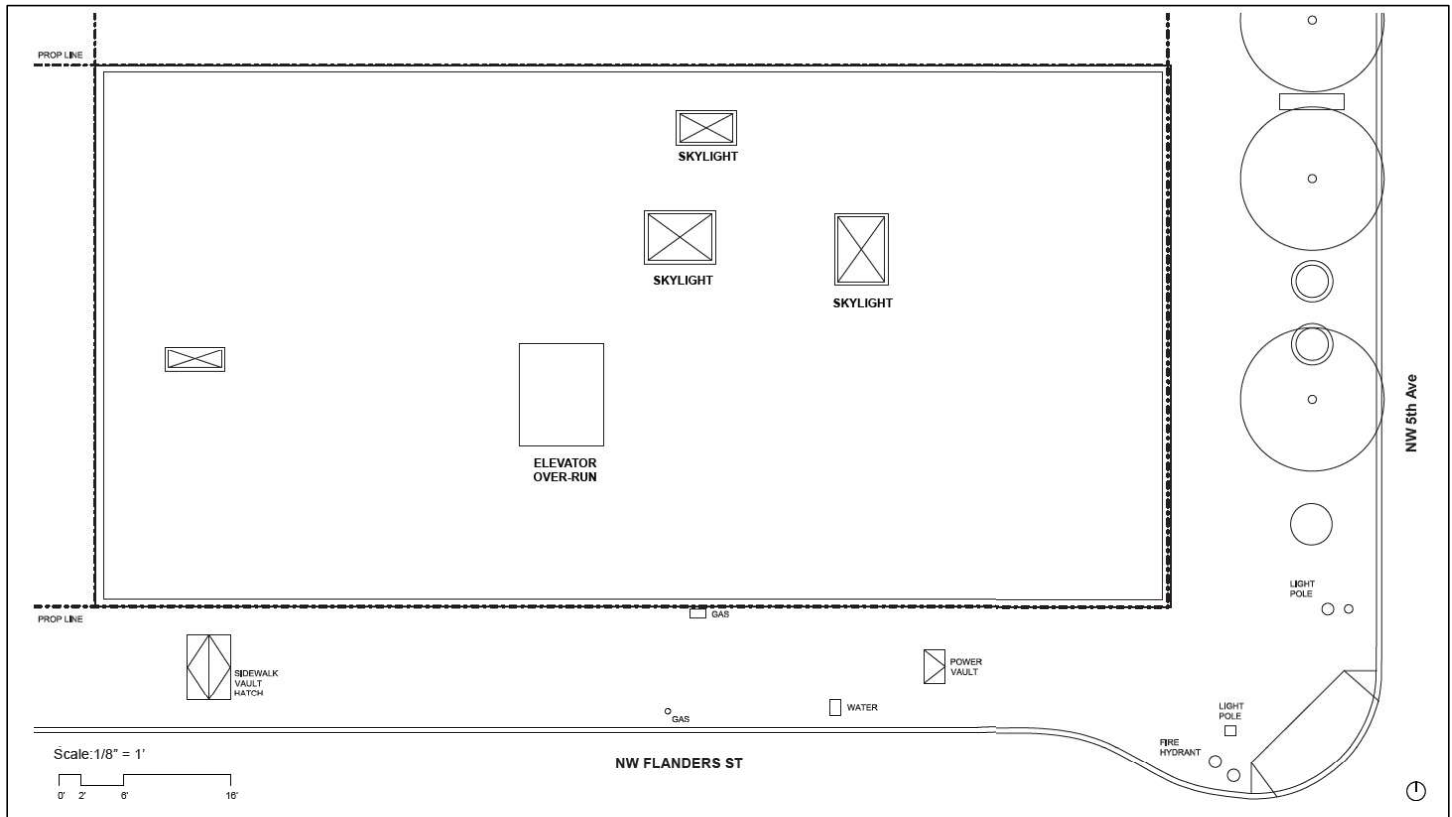
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 36

Figure 4: Site Plan; nominated boundary corresponds to building footprint.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

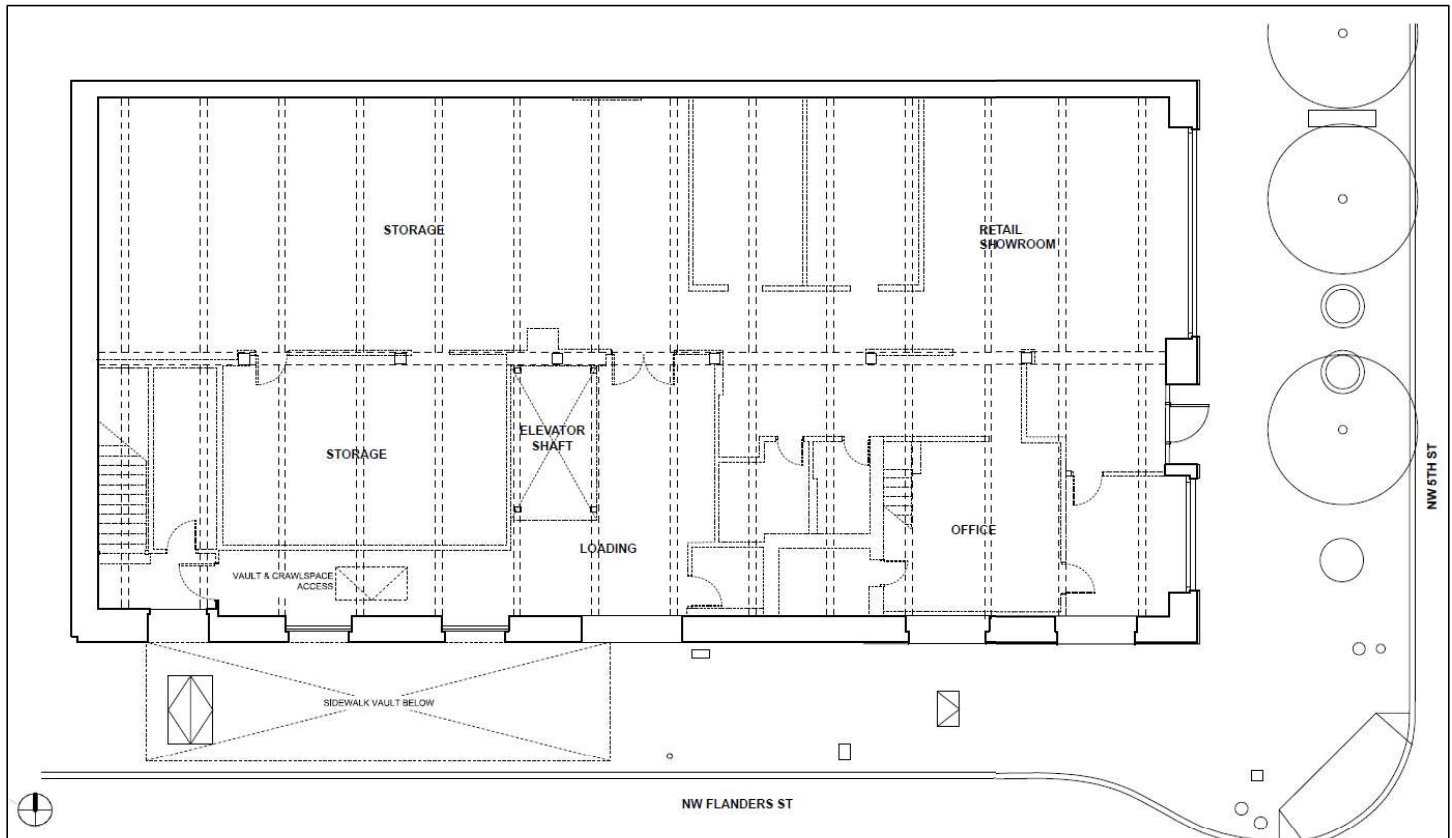
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 37

Figure 5: First Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

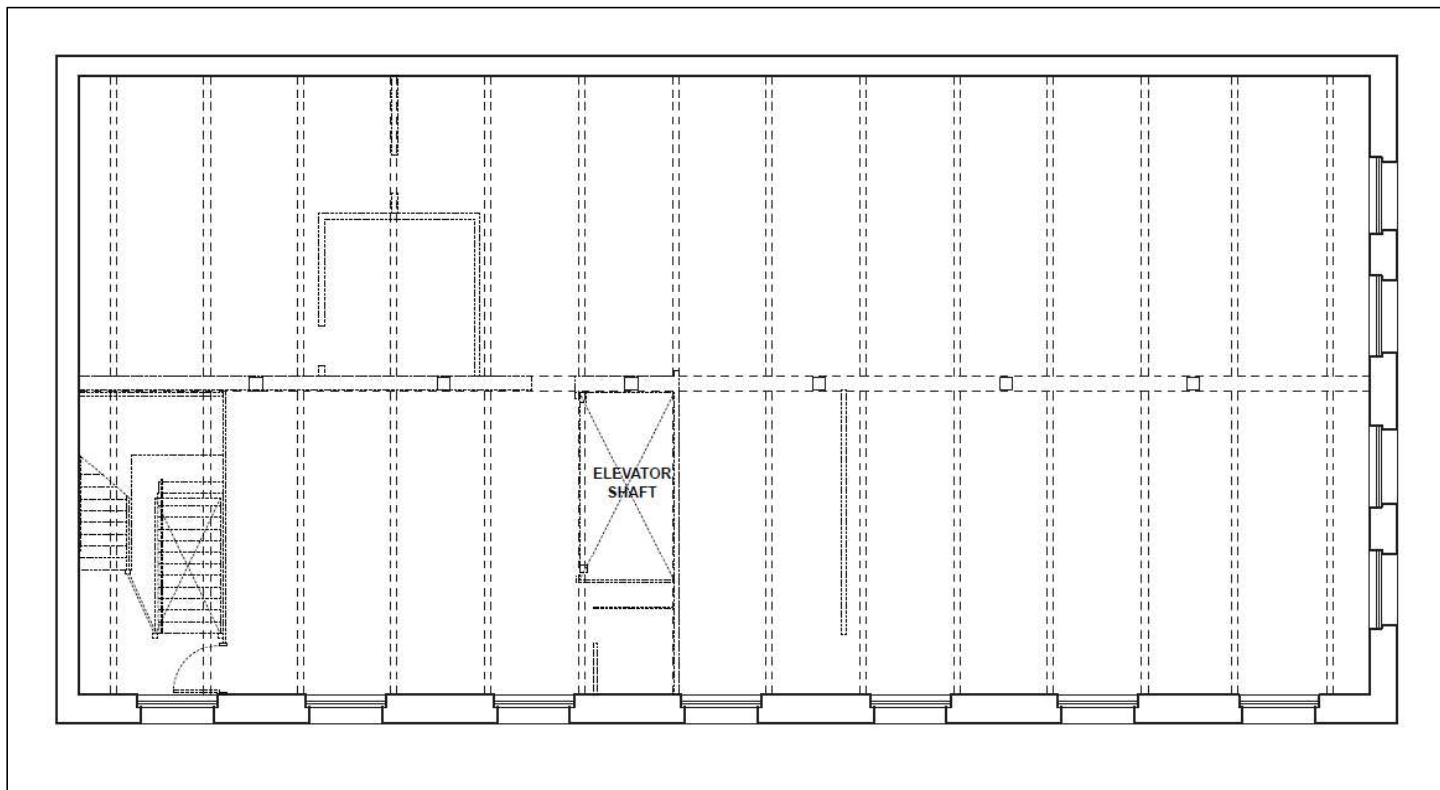
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 38

Figure 6: Second Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

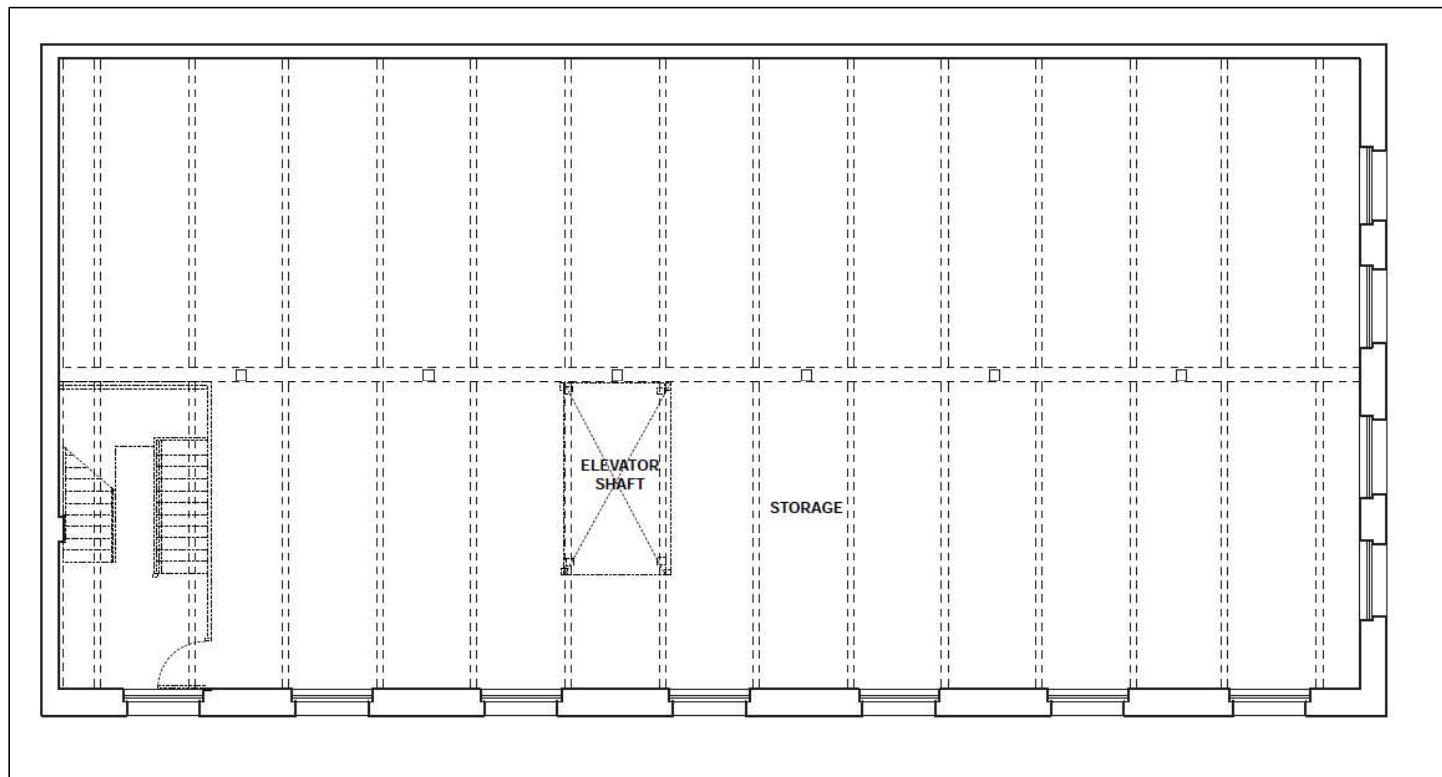
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 39

Figure 7: Third Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

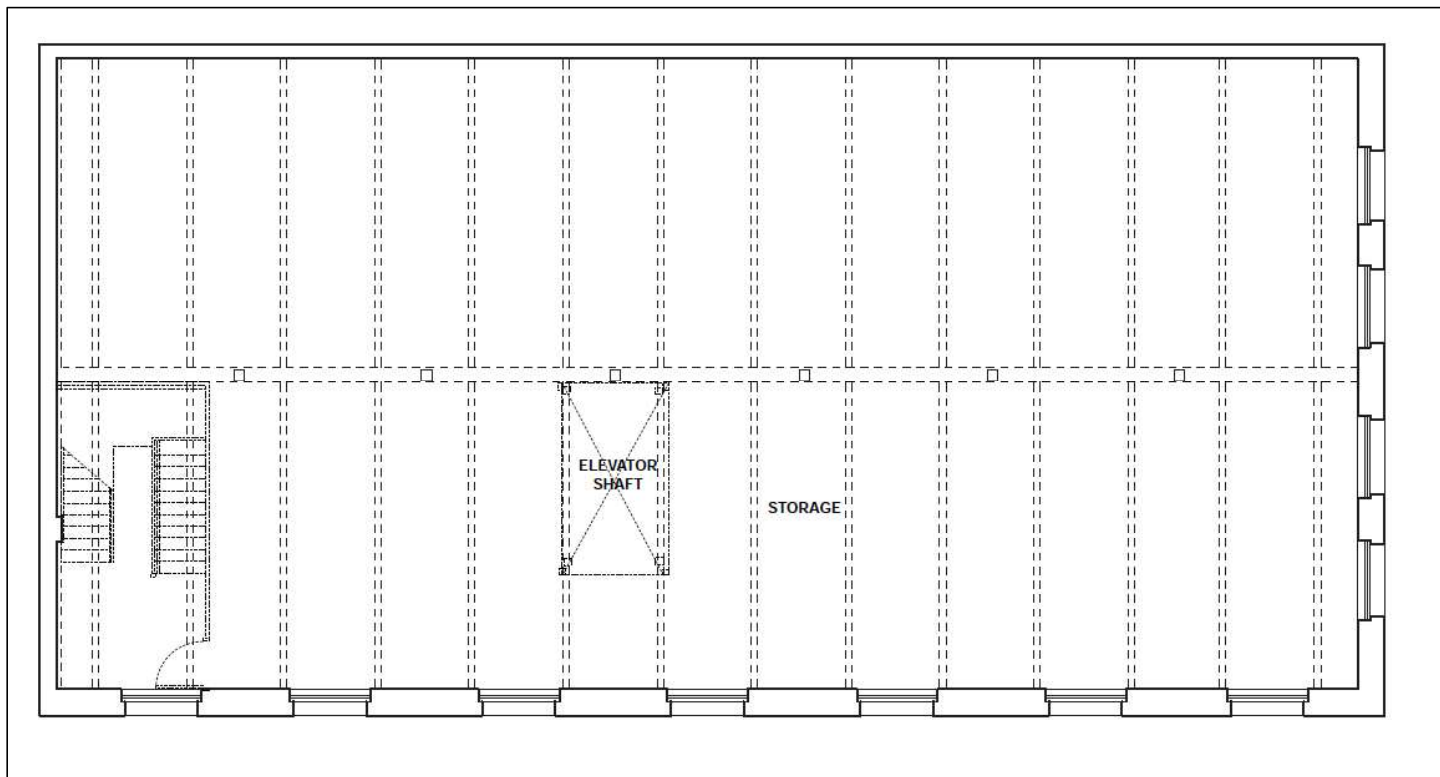
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 40

Figure 8: Fourth Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

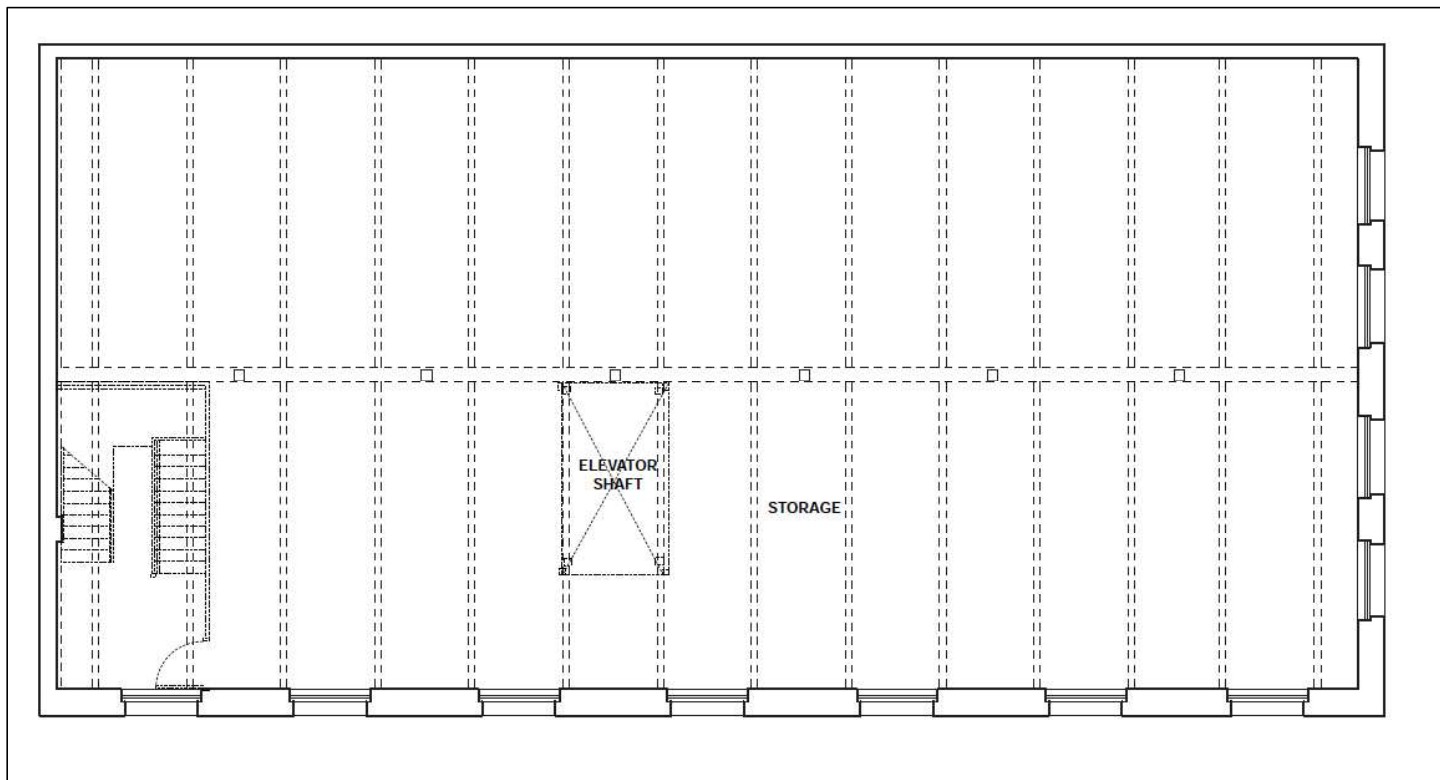
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 41

Figure 9: Fifth Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

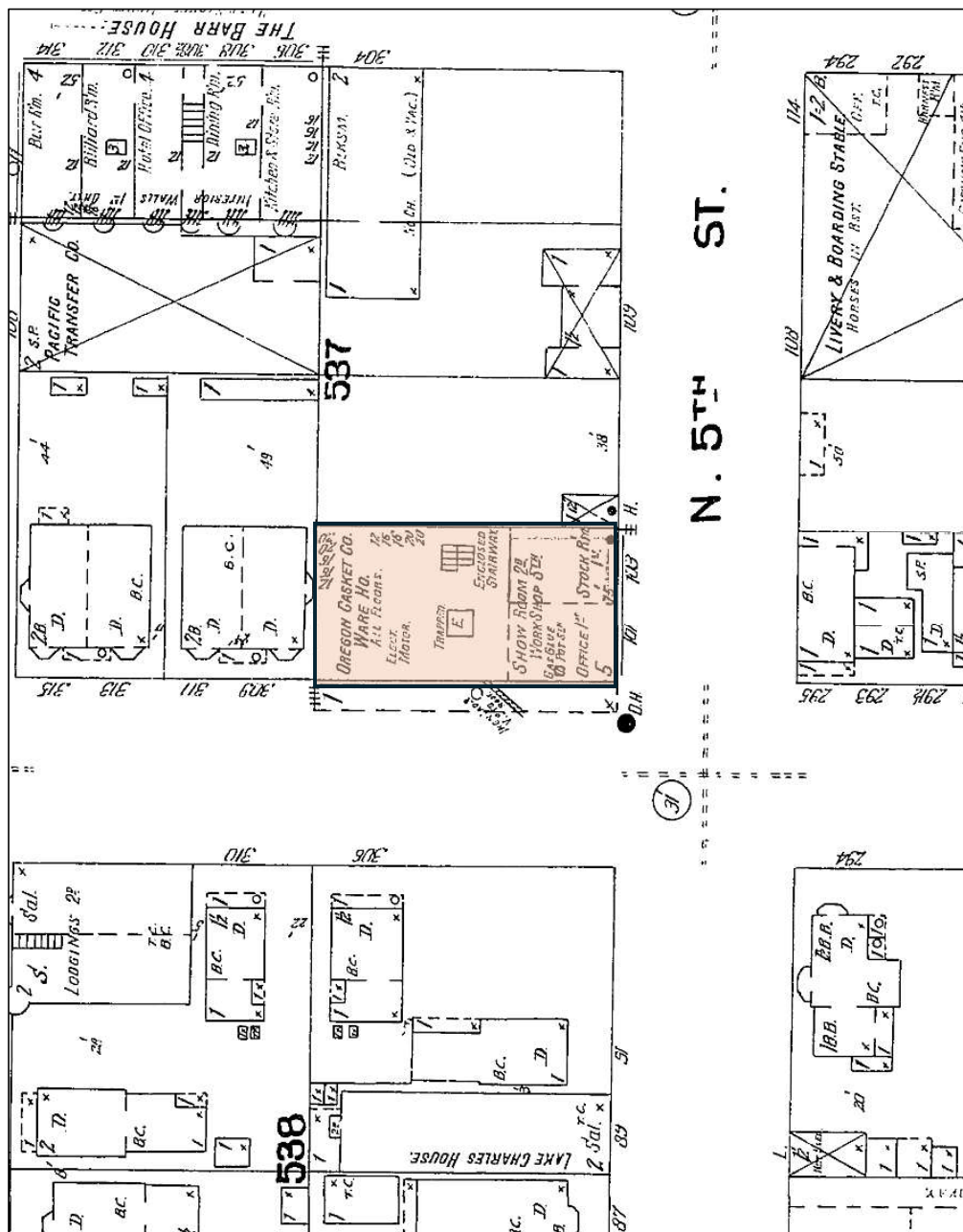
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 42

Figure 10: 1901 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the Oregon Casket Company building a few years after its construction.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

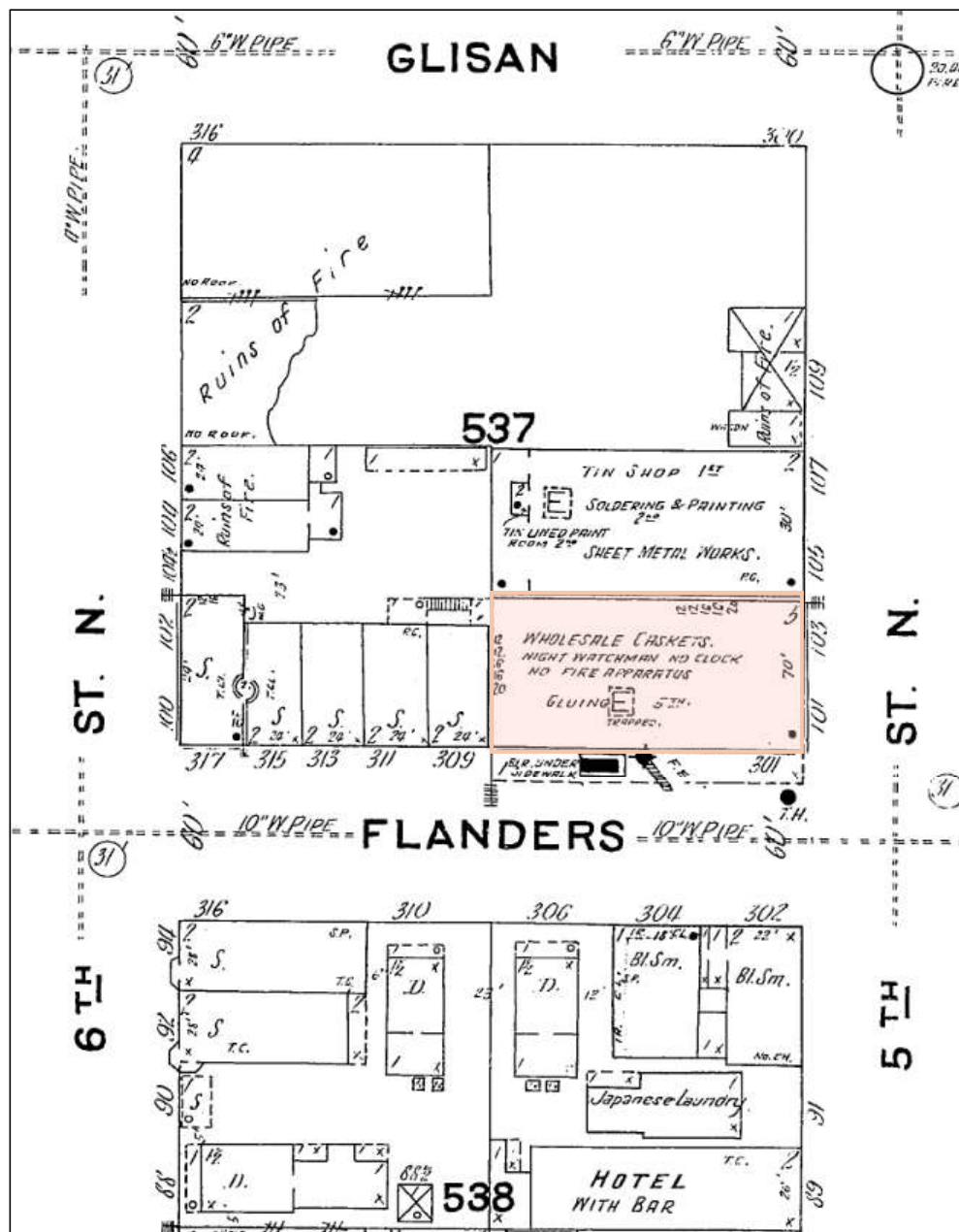
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 43

Figure 11: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the Oregon Casket Company building eleven years after its construction.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

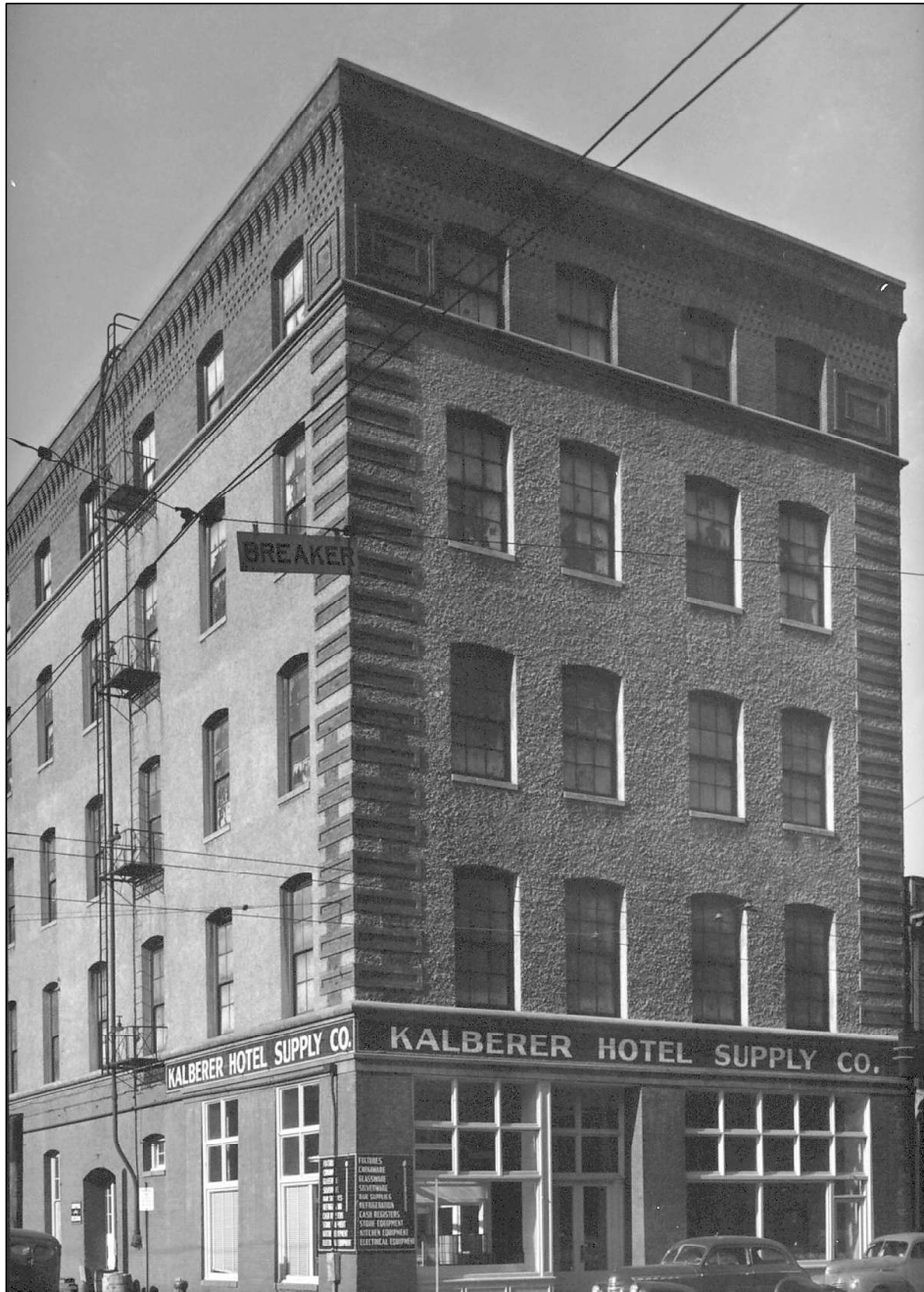
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 44

Figure 12: Photograph of the east and south elevations of the Oregon Casket Company Building circa 1947.¹¹⁹



¹¹⁹ Photo obtained from owner's files.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 45

Figure 13: *Oregonian* newspaper article from October 18, 1897, about the construction of the Oregon Casket Company Building.¹²⁰

NEW BUILDING UNDER WAY.—The building of the Oregon Casket Company, at Fifth and Flanders streets, will be completed about November 1. It is 50x100 feet, of brick. Instead of four stories, as intended, it is five stories in height. It was commenced only two months ago, and Seed & Bingham, contractors for the brickwork, and F. Finley, contractor for the carpenter work, have made about the quickest time ever made on such a job in this city. Practically, they have averaged a story a week, and had the roof on before the rain had a chance to delay them. Twenty-four bricklayers and a proportionate number of carpenters were employed. The last foundation-stones of the McCracken warehouses, on the custom-house block, have been removed, and this morning the work of constructing a warehouse 100x100, at the rear of Colonel McCracken's present warehouse, on Irving street, will be begun. The stone and brick removed from the custom-house block will be used in the construction; also the roof of the warehouse from which they were taken, which was 50x200 feet. This roof was cut in two and moved down to Irving street, and just answers for a double roof on a warehouse 100x100.

¹²⁰ "New Building Underway," *Oregonian*, October 18, 1897, 5.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

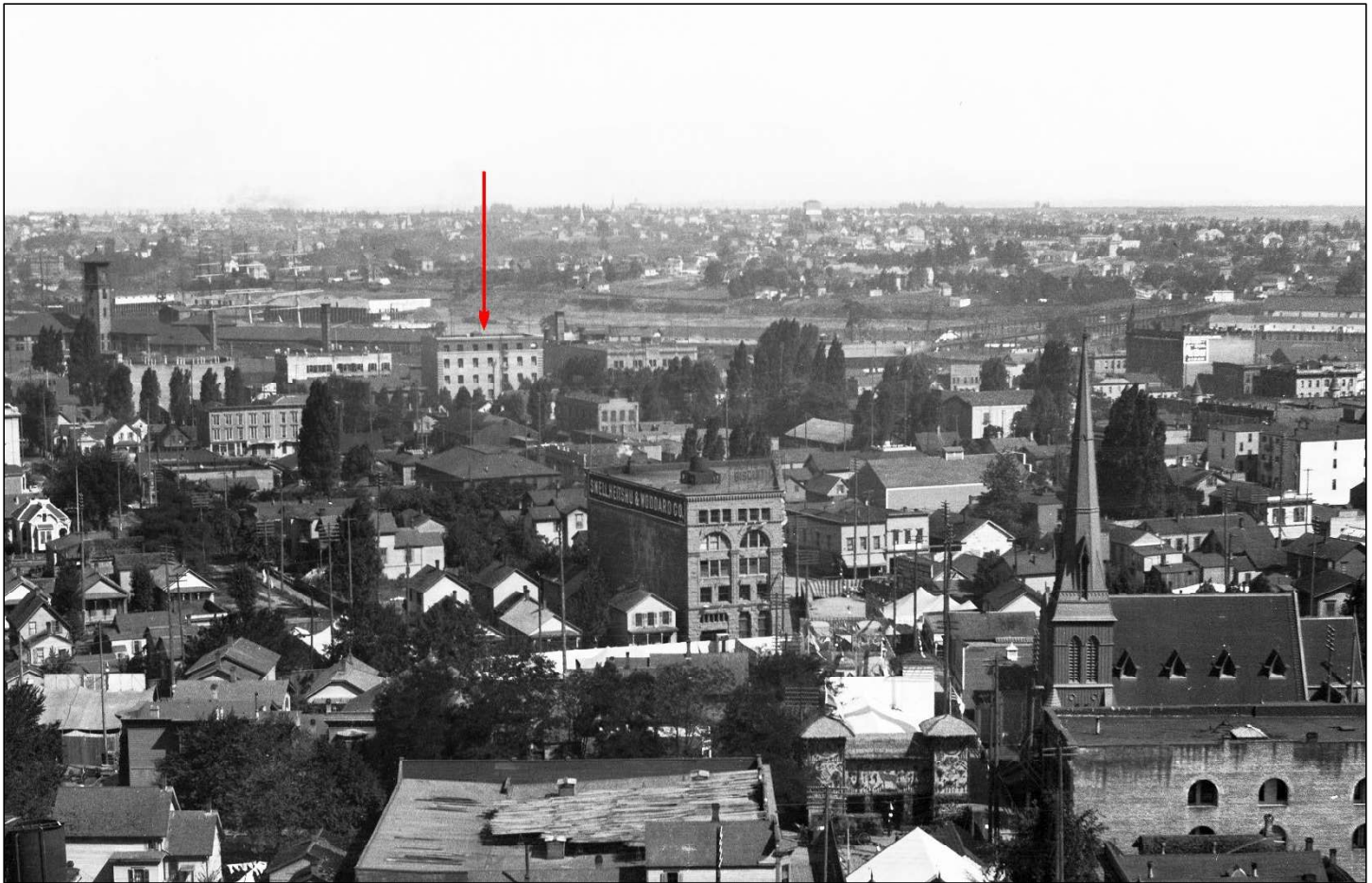
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 46

Figure 14: This c.1900 photograph of NW Portland looking north-northeast shows the south elevation of the Oregon Casket Company building (red arrow) in the context of surrounding buildings. This photo shows it was one of the tallest buildings in the vicinity.¹²¹



¹²¹ Photo source: <https://www.historicphotoarchive.net/image/I0000nxpR2roYI4E>, Historic Photo Archive by Vintage Roadside, Oregon. Circa 1900.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

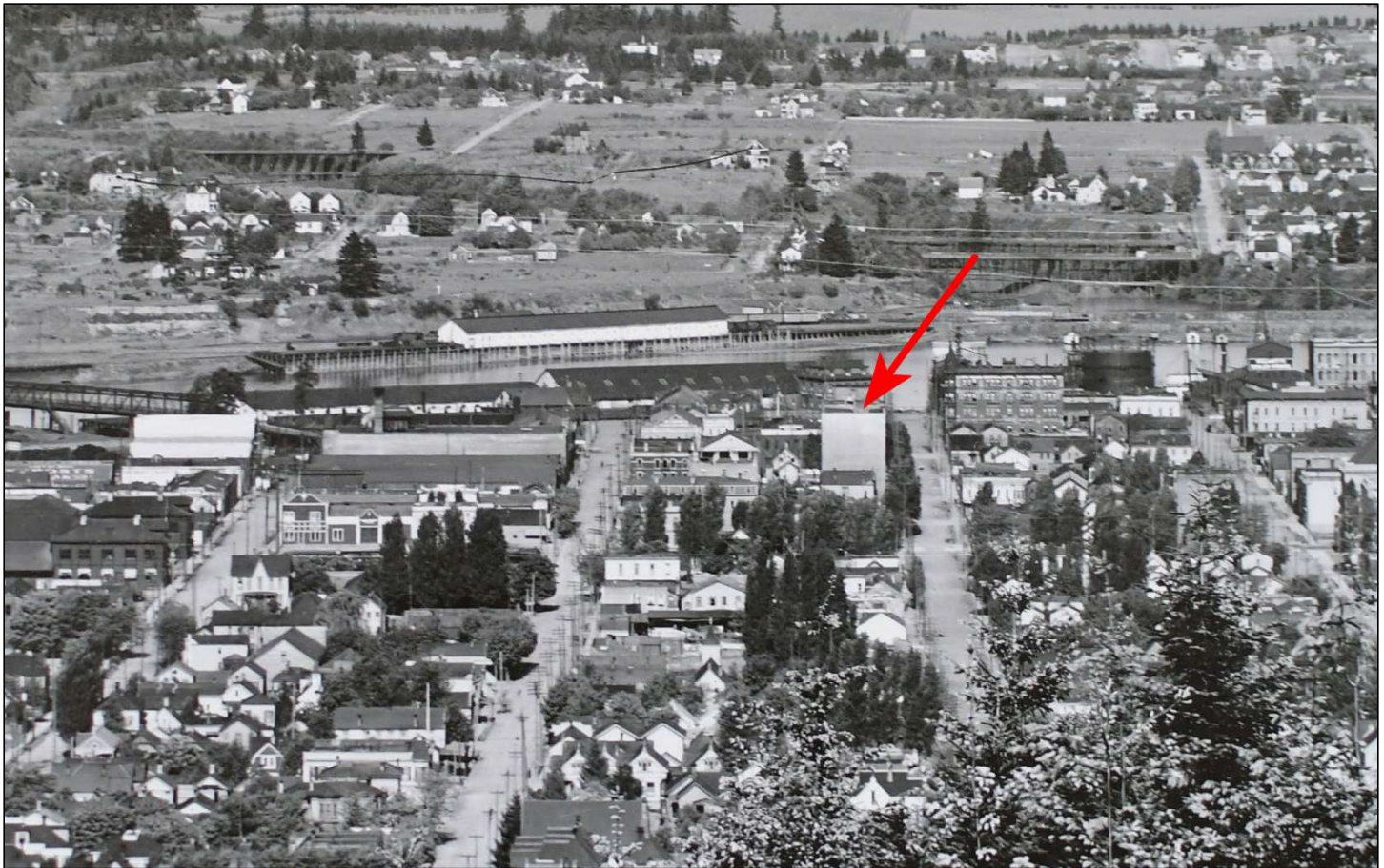
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 47

Figure 15: 1903 photograph of NW Portland, facing east showing the west elevation of the Oregon Casket Company building (red arrow) in the context of surrounding buildings. This photo shows it was one of the tallest buildings in the vicinity.¹²²



¹²² Photo source: Vertical File—Portland—General Views, 1900-1909 folder, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, accessed January 2, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

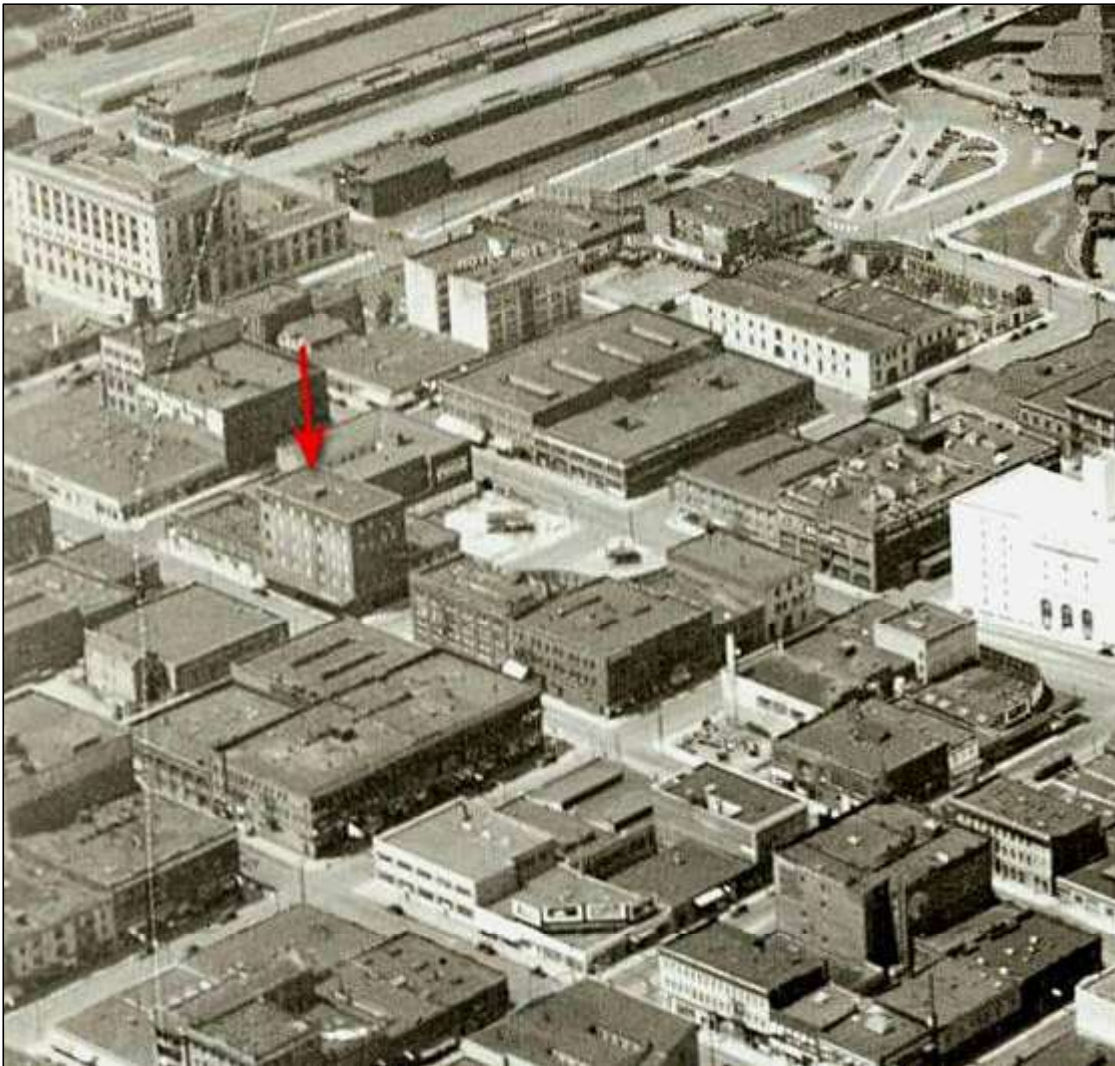
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 48

Figure 16: A 1927 photograph of NW Portland, facing northwest, showing the Oregon Casket Company in the context of surrounding buildings. Note the awning, barely visible, on the south façade.¹²³



¹²³ Photo source: Portland Memories Facebook group, www.facebook.com/groups/296569815544787, accessed October 6, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 49

Figure 17: Undated photograph (but likely c. 1930) taken on NW 5th Avenue looking north, showing the nominated building three blocks away.¹²⁴



¹²⁴ Photo source: Vertical File—Portland—Streets, SW/NW 5th Avenue folder, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, accessed January 2, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 50

Figure 18: May 1980 photograph showing the east and south elevations of the Oregon Casket Company Building.¹²⁵



¹²⁵ Photo source: Historic Resource Inventory Form, City of Portland, 1980.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 51

Figure 19: A c. 1920 photograph of the first phase of Oregon Casket Company's new plant on NW Savier Street. The photo is taken looking northeast from near the intersection of NW 22nd Avenue and NW Raleigh Street.¹²⁶



¹²⁶ Photo source: City of Portland photographs collection, Org. Lot 50, Business Firms—O (folder 1736), Oregon Historical Society Research Library, accessed January 2, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 52

Figure 20: Ad in the *Oregonian* on August 17, 1932, showing a rail car parked near the double-loading door of the nominated building, utilized by Hunt Transfer Company.¹²⁷



¹²⁷ *Oregonian*, February 22, 1933, 13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 53

Figure 21: 1923 photograph looking south from NW Savier Street between NW 21st and 22nd Avenues showing some Oregon Casket Company employees in front of the 1919 factory building.¹²⁸



¹²⁸ Photo source: Employees of the Oregon Casket Company panoramic photograph, 1923; Org. Lot 199, Oregon Historical Society Research Library Catalog.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 54

Figure 22: A 1950 photograph looking southwest from the intersection of NW 21st Avenue and NW Savier Street showing the completed plant of the Oregon Casket Company.¹²⁹



¹²⁹ Photo source: Historic Photo Archive by Vintage Roadside, <https://www.historicphotoarchive.net/>, accessed May 4, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 55

Figure 23: A February 8, 1940, photograph during a celebration of Chinese New Year showing details of the east elevation of the Oregon Casket Company Building.¹³⁰



¹³⁰ Oregon Historical Society website, <https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/man-holds-dragon-during-chinese-new-year-celebration>, accessed January 16, 2025.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page 56

Figure 24: A c. 2006 bird's-eye view of the south and east elevations of the Oregon Casket Company Building, camera facing northwest.¹³¹



¹³¹ Photo provided by owner from their building files.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Oregon Casket Company Building

Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 57

Figure 25: Alphabetical list of architectural works by Whidden & Lewis, compiled by Herb Fredricks in 1969.¹³² Oregon Casket is the 10th property on this page of the four-page list.

	<u>Class of Bldg.</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Cost per cu. ft.</u>	<u>Built</u>
Mills, A. L.	Two story frame dwelling	13,343.78	17.0¢	1891
Montgomery, J. B.	Frame warehouse - dock	35,757.84	4.8¢	1899
Morris, E. A. & King, F. S.	One story garage	3,554.65	10.6¢	1909
Muirhead & Muirhard	Two story frame building	4,810.00	4.8¢	1901
Muirhard, G.	One story brick building	3,293.90	2.8¢	1895
Neustrander Bros.	Two story brick factory building	39,012.83	5.8¢	1902
Nunn, W. H.	Two story frame dwelling	3,351.90	9.4¢	1901-2
Nurses Home	Three story brick building	20,969.64	8.0¢	1901
Oliphant, D. D.	Two story frame dwelling	5,450.88	11.3¢	1891
Oregon Casket Co.	Five story brick building	14,815.42	4.3¢	1897
Pacific University Lib.	One story brick library bldg.	19,930.95	13.5¢	1912
Page, J. H.	Two story frame dwelling	13,119.30	17.9¢	1890
Page and Son	One and one half story frame bldg.	7,641.90	2.3¢	1901
Palmer, E. F.	Two story frame dwelling	5,846.87	10.7¢	1891
Paul, A. J.	Two story frame dwelling	3,458.05	7.3¢	1902
Pierce, O.	One & one half story frame stable	909.80	3.0¢	1896
Portland Academy	Two story brick school	38,184.06		1895
Portland Gen. Elec.	Two story brick building	8,702.28	6.4¢	1894
Portland Hotel	Six story brick hotel building	464,840.69	17.1¢	1889-1900
Reed, S. G.	Four story brick store building	41,462.07	7.4¢	1892
Rush, R. S.	Two story frame dwelling	7,103.50	16.0¢	1902
Russell, J. M.	Two story frame dwelling	9,638.50	15.4¢	1903-4
Russell & McLeod	3 two story frame dwellings	3,792.83 ea.	8.4¢	1890-1
Sabin, R. L.	Two story frame dwelling	5,501.55	12.5¢	1903-4
Sargent, H. A.	Two story frame dwelling	4,707.32	11.4¢	1903
Shelton, Ada L.	Two story frame dwelling	6,051.40	13.3¢	1903-4
Sibson, Wm. S.	Two story frame dwelling	9,112.35	16.0¢	1891
Simon, David & M. D.	Two story brick building	10,114.16	8.0¢	1896
Sladen, Capt. J. A.	Two story frame dwelling	7,426.81	10.8¢	1897
Smith, David	Two story frame dwelling	5,036.17	8.1¢	1895
Smith, Henry E.	Two story frame dwelling	8,635.70	11.0¢	1891
Smith, Milton W.	Two story frame dwelling	9,559.61	14.4¢	1898 ?
Smith, P. C.	1-1/2 story frame cottage	2,990.50	18.0¢	1889
Smith, et al, R.	Three story brick building	47,258.12	29.2¢	1910
Snow, Zera	Two story frame and brick dwel.	33,829.64	25.4¢	1891
Stevens Bldg.	Twelve story steel frame bldg.	385,154.24	48.4¢	1913-14
Therkelsen, L. W.	Two story frame dwelling	5,627.99	6.7¢	1897
Trevett, T. B.	Two story frame dwelling	10,091.11	16.6¢	1890

¹³² Herb Fredericks [sic], "Work of Whidden and Lewis," vertical stack, architects file, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, accessed January 12, 2025.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR



Photograph 1 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0001
South and east elevations; camera facing northwest.



Photograph 2 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0002
East elevation with door and windows from the 1954 renovation boarded up since 2020;
camera facing west.

**Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR**



Photograph 3 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0003
South elevation; camera facing north.



Photograph 4 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0004
North elevation; camera facing south. Note that only the upper floors of the nominated building show above the two-story Tilton Building.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR



Photograph 5 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0005
West elevation, camera facing east.



Photograph 6 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0006
The original double loading door on the south elevation; camera facing northwest.

**Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR**



Photograph 7 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0007
Doors with transom windows above at southwest corner; camera facing northwest.

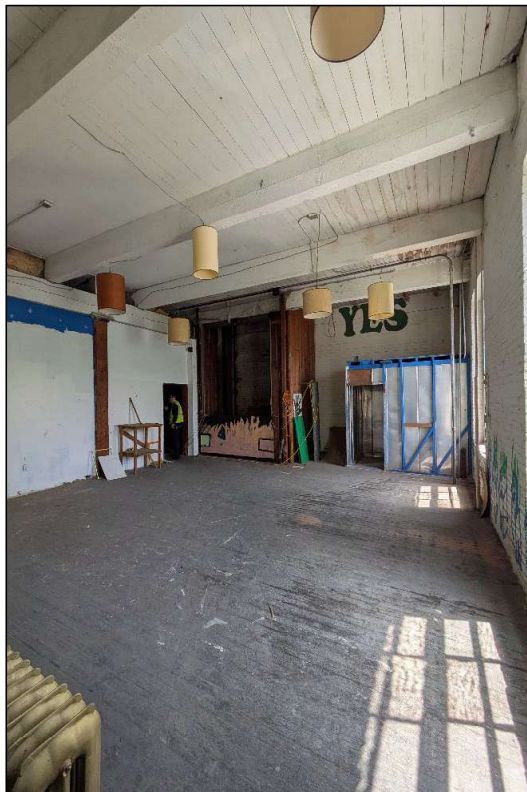


Photograph 8 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0008
Eastern portion of ground floor; camera facing southeast.

**Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR**

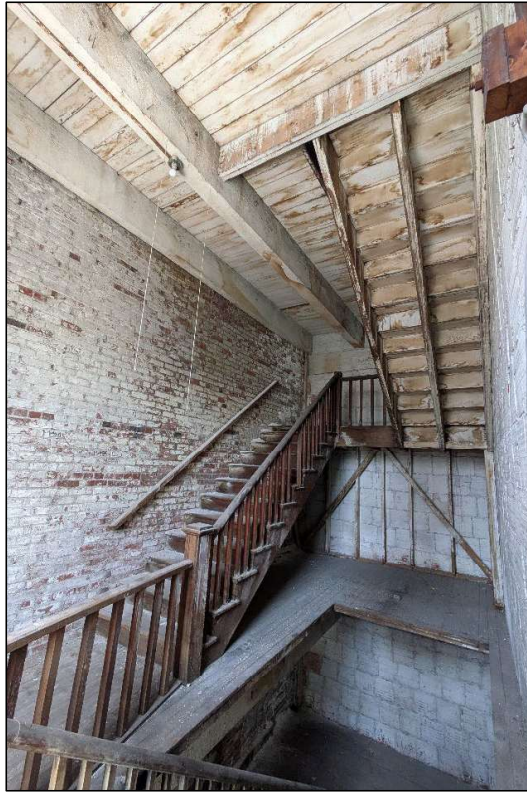


Photograph 9 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0009
Ground floor showing elevator on right, double door at center, and demised space on left;
camera facing south.



Photograph 10 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0010
Second floor showing some demised walls and, at center, the elevator; camera facing
southwest.

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Multnomah County: OR**

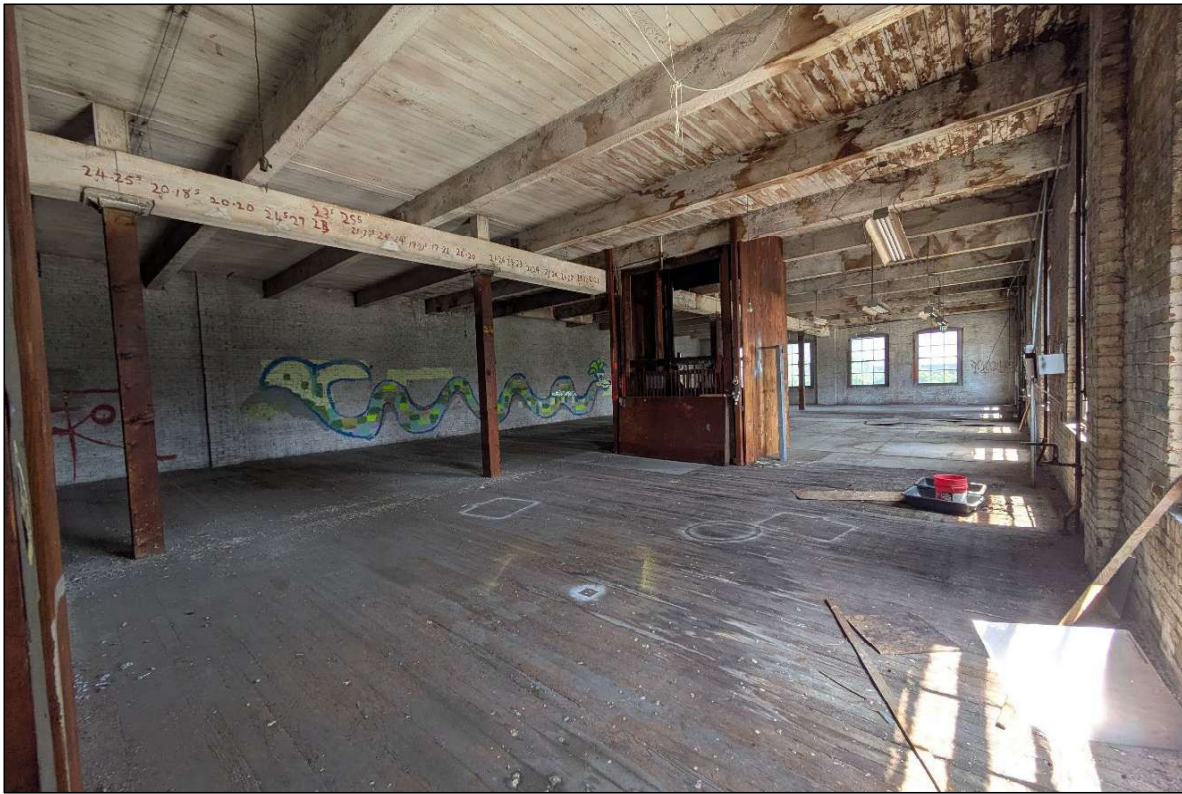


Photograph 11 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0011
Staircase at the second-floor level; built 1926.



Photograph 12 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0012
Third floor showing elevator at middle and staircase enclosure at right; camera facing southeast. Ghost marks on the left wall and framing modifications at the ceiling indicated the location of an older staircase.

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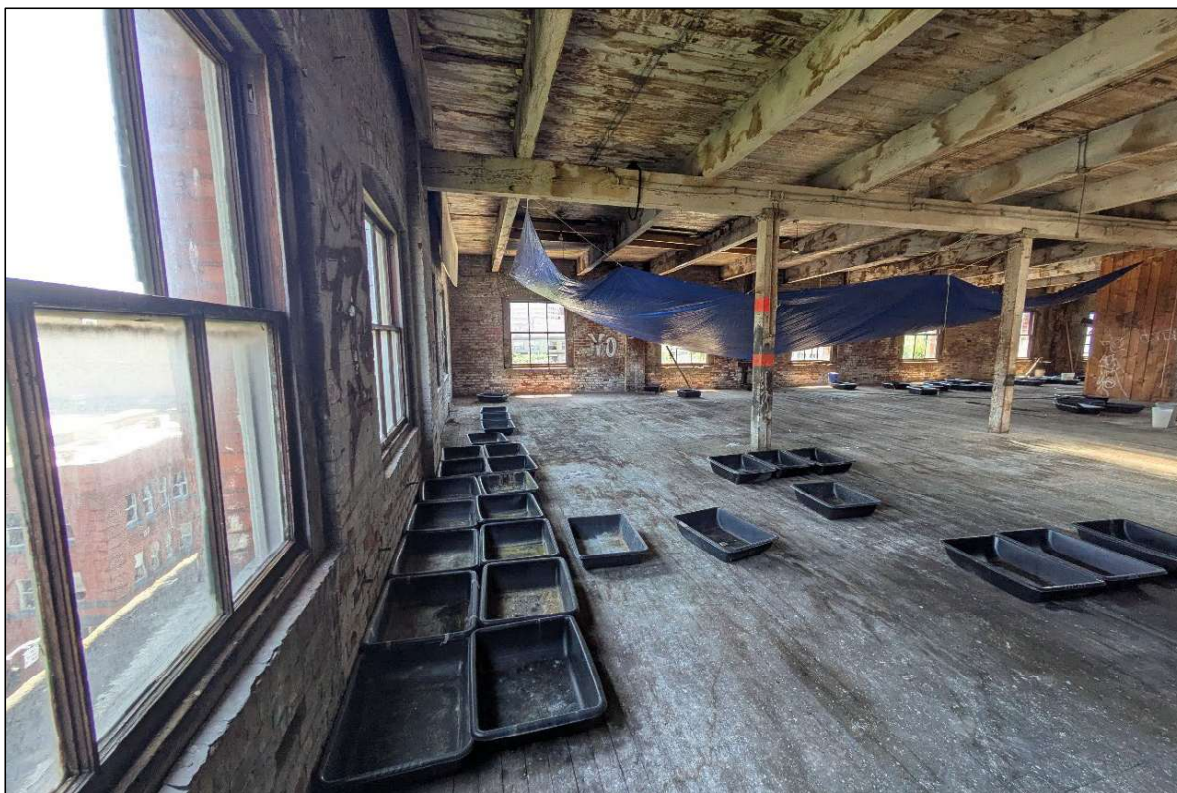


Photograph 13 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0013
Fourth floor showing elevator at middle; taken from door to stairs; camera facing northeast.



Photograph 14 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0014
Window on the fourth floor; camera facing southeast.

Oregon Casket Company Building
Multnomah County: OR



Photograph 15 of 15: OR_MultnomahCounty_OregonCasketCompanyBuilding_0015
Fifth floor; camera facing south.