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Portland City Hall
1220 S.W. Fifth Avenue
Portland
Multnomah County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-125

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

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Name: Portland City Hall

Location: 1220 S.W. Fifth Avenue
Portland
Multnomah County
Oregon

Present Owner: City of Portland, Oregon

Present Occupant: Portland City Hall

Use: Offices of Elected Officials
City Council Meetings
City Offices

Significance:

The Portland City Hall is an outstanding example of Renaissance Revival Style architecture and is one of the principal early buildings of public architecture remaining in Portland from the late Nineteenth Century. It is considered to be a masterpiece of the firm of Whidden and Lewis, the leading firm of Portland architects in the period. The building was planned for fireproof construction, central heating, electric wiring as well as gas lighting, and for public telephones and elevators. It is a very early example of a steel framed building in Portland and employed other innovative engineering techniques.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Erected in 1892-1895
2. Architect: Whidden and Lewis, Architects, Portland, Oregon. William H. Whidden and Ion Lewis, formerly employed by the New York City office of McKim, Mead, and White, came to Portland in the late 1880s to complete the Portland Hotel by McKim, Mead, & White, and remained to open their own practice. The Portland City Hall was their first important commission. They were the architects for many of Portland's major buildings and residences. Most of Portland's later leading architects apprenticed in that office.
3. Contractor: Rocheford, Gould, and Gladden Corporation. Mr. Gladden of the firm was the actual contractor.
4. Original Plans: On file with City of Portland. City archives contain copies of most important alterations work and records of that construction.
5. Alterations and Additions: The building has had no major additions. Alterations have been in the nature of interior space changes and partitioning, redecoration, and mechanical, electrical, and elevator improvements to meet the continuing needs of the city. These alterations have continued almost without break from the date of completion in 1895; however, most of the present condition dates from the post WW-II years, a period of rapid growth and change in the city. A chronology of the principal changes is as follows:
 - Original light fixtures removed - replaced with newly designed electric lights, 1930s

Partitioning and enclosure of stairwells, office partitioning, 1940s.

Council Chamber remodeling, 1950s.

Reconstruction and repairs to east portico from bomb damage, 1960s.

General interior rehabilitation, 1970s.

B. Historical Context

Completed in 1895, the Portland City Hall building was a distinct improvement over earlier plans drawn by Henry J. Hefty for another site. The annexation of the cities of Albina and East Portland to Portland caused a reevaluation of the needs for the new building and abandonment of the original design. As originally designed, Whidden and Lewis' design showed the present building with a high central domed cupola which was never built. The completed building minus the planned dome is a much more successful composition in the manner of an Italian palazzo. The building was planned for the administrative functions of the city with the police and jail functions housed away in another building. For the first several decades of the building's life, city offices did not fully occupy all of the space in the building. The top floor had exhibits of the Oregon Historical Society and Museum of Natural History until the mid 1930s. The expansion of Portland's governmental activities in the late 1930s and early 1940s caused the removal of the museum activities and the full use of the building for city offices. The building has housed the offices of the Mayor, Councilmen, City Auditor, City Engineer, Bureau of Buildings, and a variety of smaller city office activities continuing to this day.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior

The main building is 200 feet long by 110 feet wide on a 200 foot square block. The long axis is north-south with the entrances on the east and west sides, facing S.W. Fourth and Fifth Avenues. The building has a basement and three floors composed with the basement and first story rusticated and the second and third floor more delicately detailed.

The building is finished with a stone balustrade surmounting the cornice. A rectangular porte-cochere and drive is centered on the west elevation with doorways and a short flight of stairs to the first floor level lobby. A three story apsidal wing flanked by short one story wings at the southeast and northeast corners of the east facade faces Fourth Avenue. The east entrance is through a double colonnade supporting the upper two floors of the central wing which encloses the Council Chamber. The outer columns of the east wing and of the west porte-cochere are in a rusticated style using red granite blocks and drums. The west proches columns are paired. The inner columns of the east portico are scagliola work simulating a rose breccia. The columns are in a Doric Style. The east porch has an ornamental plaster coffered ceiling. The porte-cochere has a sheet metal coffered ceiling. Windows of the basement and first floors have recessed frames behind the rusticated stone facing and have segmental flat stone arches. The second floor has stone quoins at the corners with stone framed windows and bracketed lintels. The third floor windows have simpler frames with broken label mouldings framing them. Windows are one over one double hung wood framed. Building

stones used are granite base and water table with sandstone (Tenino) for the principal facing. The sedimentary building stone is in poorly maintained condition exhibiting evidence of severe weathering deterioration and misuse of cement mortar repairs and waterproofing treatments. Elements of the balustrades have been replaced with pre-cast concrete members. The structure of the building is steel and wrought iron framing with tile flat arch floor panels finished in the exterior stone work. Interior materials are metal lath and plaster and wood woodwork trim and mouldings.

B. Description of the Interior

Symmetrical plan on each floor with offices on each side of a central lobby flanked by wrought iron and steel stairways, and skylighted, with the public elevators occupying the stairwell open space on each side of the lobbies. Vaults for city records, Auditor's Office, and engineers are on each floor. The original skylights over the stairwells have been enclosed to make attic rooms.

Floors are marble and terrazzo throughout public spaces with battleship linoleum, now vinyl-asbestos tile and carpeting, in office spaces. The original woodwork and doors remain substantially intact with new work planned to match the old, many doors and their trim having been relocated for new functions. The traditional interior decoration has been maintained despite modernization with the most extensive modernization work done in the basement and in the Council Chamber. All of the mechanical and electrical systems have been retrofitted and replaced with modern equipment except for some plumbing fixtures and reconditioned luminaires which have been retained to complement the interior. Replacement fixtures are generally compatible with the old style work. Interior hardware has been preserved.

C. Site

The building occupies a full block in the southeast section of the city's central business district, just west of the new Schrunk Plaza block and southwest of the city's first two park blocks, Chapman and Lownsdale Squares. The area has become the civic center for the city with the County Courthouse and new Federal Office Building presently in the area and the new Public Service and Public Safety Buildings under construction on adjacent blocks.

The building sits on the western two-thirds of its block with the basement story level with the Fourth Avenue street level and landscaped lightwells and planted beds below the Fifth Avenue grade. The site is bounded by a stone balustrade on the Fifth and Fourth Avenue sides. The north and south ends of the building are on the Madison and Jefferson street property lines. A vehicle driveway provides access to the Fifth Avenue porte-cochere. There is a driveway and paved parking and walkway area on the east yard with lawn areas in the northeast and southeast corners of the east yard. A large monolith with indian petroglyphs stands in the southeast corner of the yard.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Copies on file with City of Portland from original drawings and subsequent alterations.

Oregon Historical Landmarks Commission Inventory For 3-6

Oregon Historical Society

Whidden & Lewis, Architects, 1895

B. Early Views:

Photographs attached

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources:

National Register of Historic Places Inventory -
Nomination Form

2. Secondary sources:

Steve Jennings, "Aging City Hall still retains
original design features," The Oregonian,
Vol.130, No.37,277,P.D5, December 1979

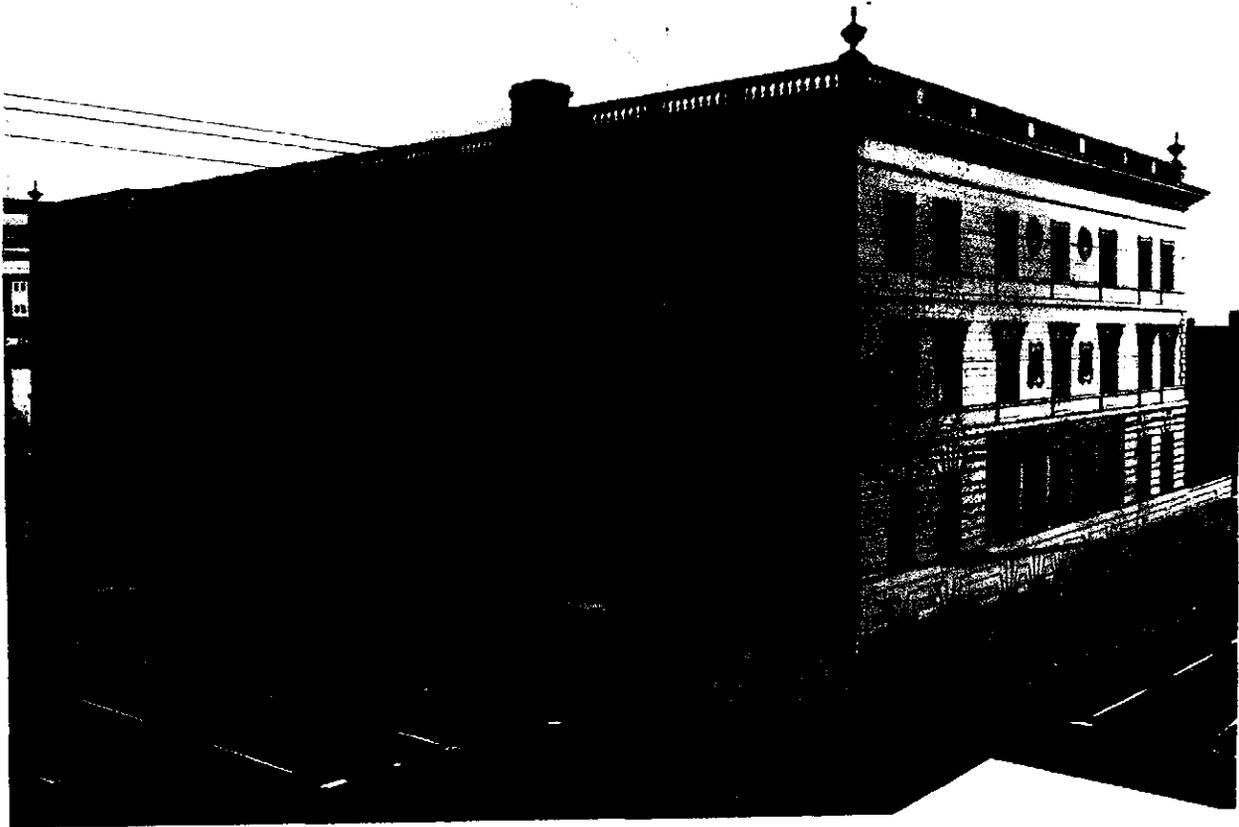
City Auditor Council Documents Series 1-(2001-11)
Portland Archives and Records Center

Credits

The greatest portion of the information was prepared by
Mr. Alfred Staehli, A.I.A., Portland, Oregon.

Mr. Dallas Swogger, City Photographer for the City of
Portland took the more recent photographs of City Hall.

Wini Hansen, Staff Assistant from the Mayor's Office,
City of Portland, researched and varified portions of
the historical information.



Portland City Hall, 5th Ave. side from New Equitable Building
1965, Monner (?), photographer
Source: Oregon Historical Society