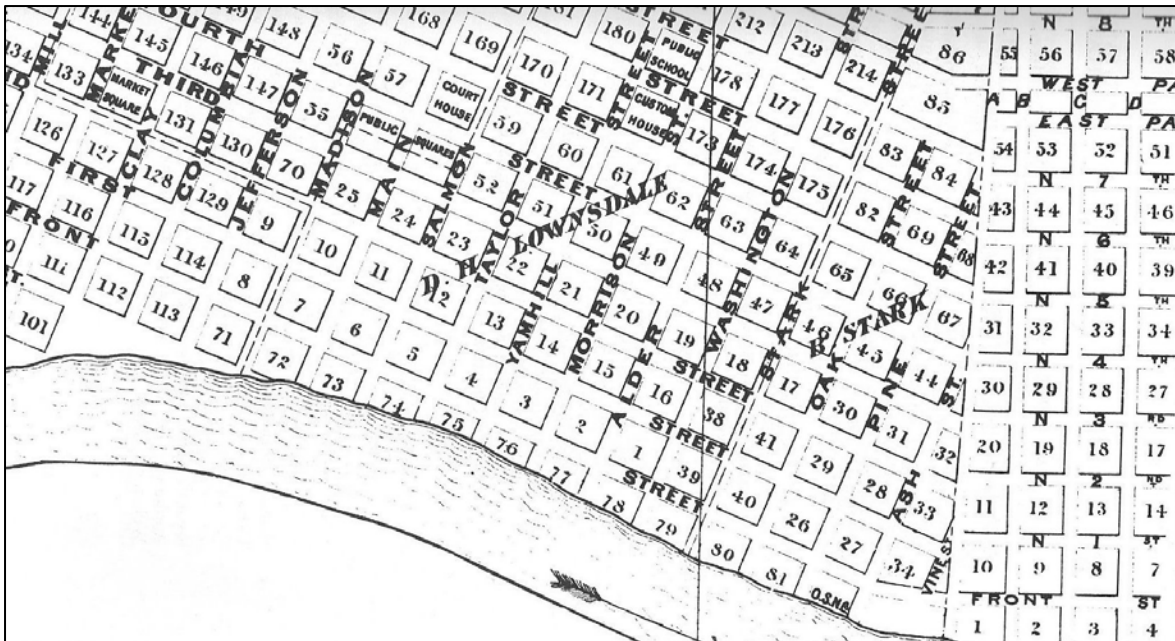


Portland's Historic Old Town

A Guidebook for Visitors

June 2021*



**The future as it could and should be - adaptive reuse of historic cast iron in Portland's first National Historic Landmark District*

As difficult as it may be to believe today, not more than 25 years ago Portland's Old Town was still a neglected backwater of dilapidated buildings and surface parking lots where the 19th century commercial heart of the city had once stood. It was the advent of the automobile that spelled what was thought to be the death-knell for Old Town in the 1940s and 50s, with highways and parking lots thought to be more important than the city's magnificent collection of cast-iron fronted buildings (which then constituted the second-largest in the nation, exceeded only by New York City). Many now regard the recent recovery of this area as near miraculous. Today the district (which includes the Classical Chinese Garden) is the number one tourist destination in the region. A number of the current buildings in Old Town are careful reconstructions of the originals, using cast iron saved from demolitions in Portland, both within and outside of the current boundaries of the National Landmark Historic District. Not all of these could be rebuilt at the original locations, but in those cases new sites were chosen with great care to be consistent with the structures originally on those sites. For many years the construction of replica buildings such as these was out of favor among architects and many preservationists, but perhaps encouraged by the example of the Classical Chinese Garden, itself a close replica of a 16th century Suzhou-style garden, such opposition dissipated. We can be thankful for the result.

We start the tour at the SE corner of First Avenue and Oak Street.

Standing at the SE corner of First and Oak, you are next to the 1907 Lawrence Building, designed by the firm of Whidden and Lewis, who also built Portland's City Hall, the (demolished) Portland Hotel, and numerous other well-known buildings in the city. Diagonally across the street is the 1886 Henry Failing Building, home to numerous businesses over the years and currently the location of the first McCormick and Schmick's Restaurant, now a national chain. Directly across Oak Street is the modest but handsome Freimann Building, reconstructed in 2007 (the original structure had survived but had been so badly altered that it was necessary to dismantle it and rebuild using an old lithograph as a guide, while salvaging as much of the original material as possible).

Walk one block east along Oak St. to the corner with Naito Parkway (Front Ave).

In the middle of the block across Oak is the 1859 Dielschneider Building. Originally two stories tall, a third story was added in the 1870s. To the immediate right of this building is the 1857 Hallock and McMillan Building¹, the oldest original standing structure in downtown Portland.

¹ Inside is the Old Town Interpretive Center, with a diorama of 19th century Portland, a ten minute film about the early history of the city, a gallery of historic photographs, and a book and gift shop.

Cross Oak Street.

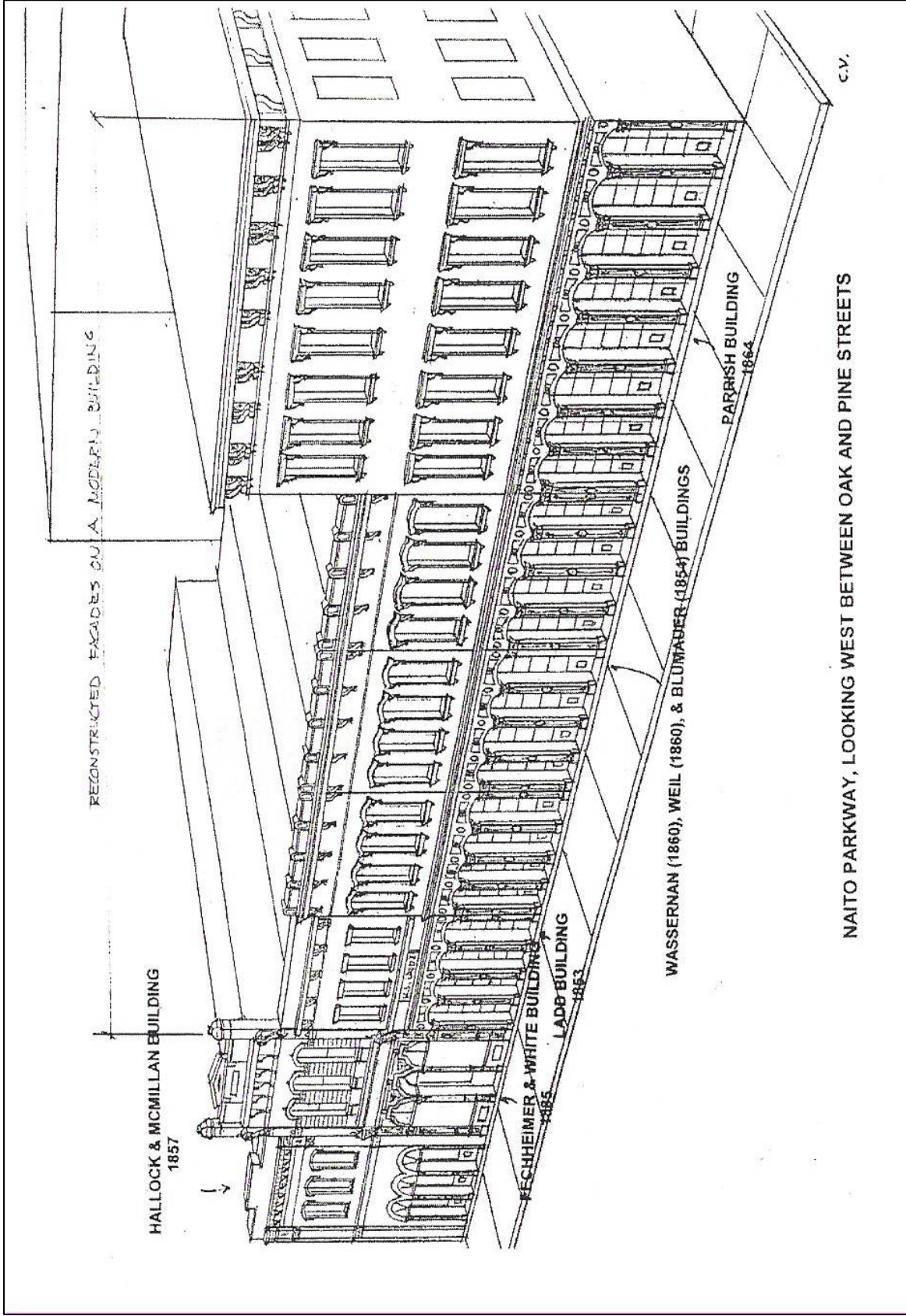
You are now standing in front of the restored façade of the Hallock and McMillan Building, the cast-iron original of which had been removed in the 1940s in a disastrous attempt at “modernization”. Immediately to your right stands the beautiful, and original, 1885 Fechheimer and White Building. Prior to the 1940s, similar cast-iron buildings lined the other side of Front Avenue (which was only half the width of the current Naito Parkway). All were demolished in the 1940s to make way for the automobile.

Slowly walk north along Naito Parkway.

Next after the Fechheimer and White Building is the reconstructed Ladd Building façade of 1853², followed by those of the Wasserman (1860), Weil (1860), Blumauer (1854), and Parrish (1864) Buildings. All were originally located where the Morrison Bridge ramps are today, but their façades closely resemble those of the structures first built on this block (long ago demolished to make a parking lot). Here we see an excellent example of the re-use, in a historically and aesthetically sensitive fashion, of salvaged cast iron on otherwise new mixed-use structures (completed in 2017). At the corner, directly across Pine Street is the 1884 Cook’s Block³, rebuilt in 2012 - the original was located three blocks away at Second and Oak.

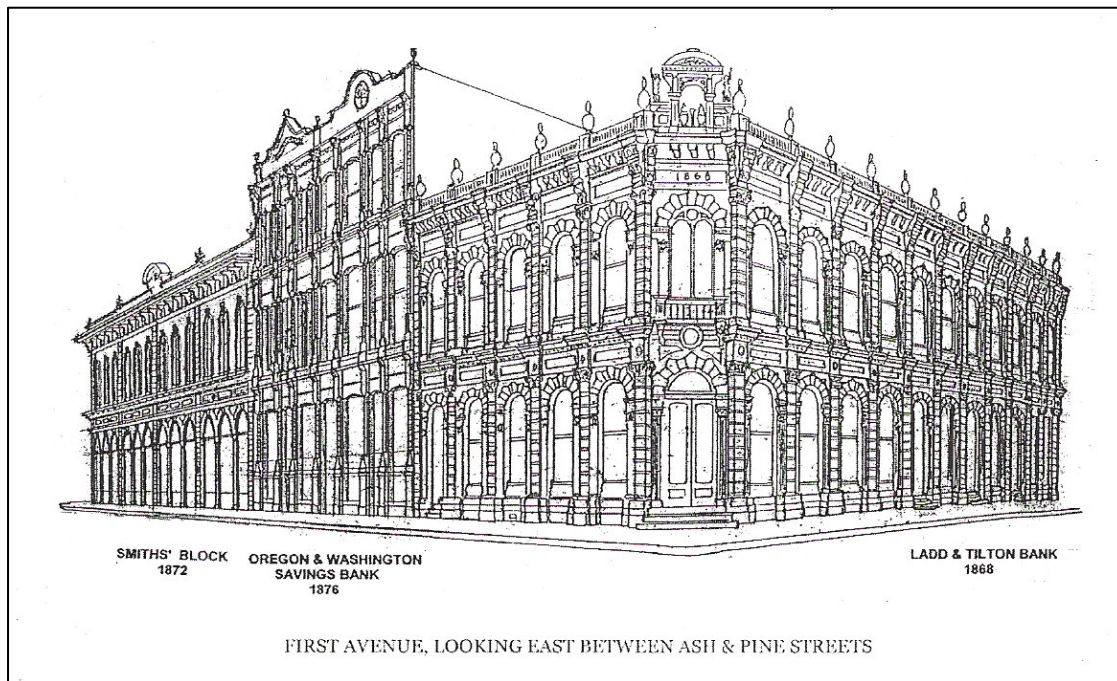
² The Ladd Building was the first commercial brick building in the city. Later on the tour we will see the Glisan Building of 1889, the last building of Portland’s cast iron era.

³ Robert Duncan Plaza now occupies its original site.



At the corner of Pine Street, turn left and return to First Avenue, crossing to the SW corner of the intersection (beware of the MAX train!).

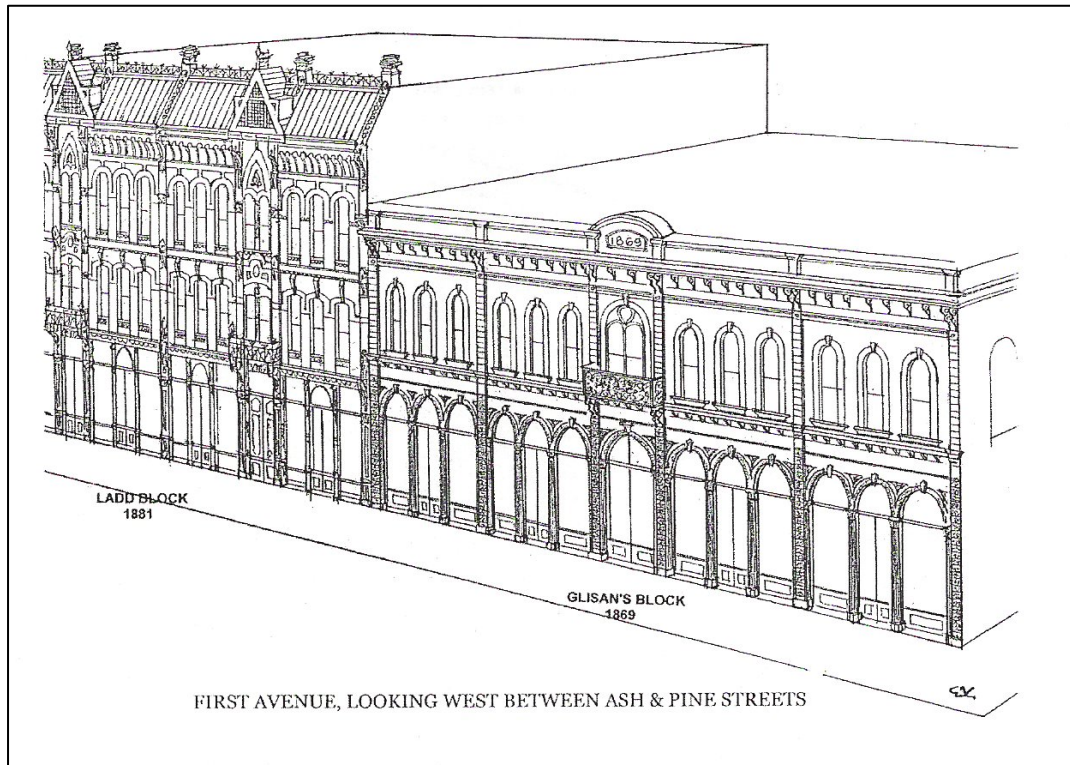
Diagonally across from you stands a replica of the 1868 Ladd and Tilton Bank. The original stood two blocks south, at the SW corner of First and Stark. Demolished in 1954 to make a parking lot⁴, we can be grateful that much of its cast iron front was saved. This reconstruction was built in 2017. To the left stands the original 1876 Oregon and Washington Savings Bank and the 1872 Smith's Block, the furthest section of which is a new reconstruction completed in 2011.



⁴ Located just outside the boundaries of the National Historic Landmark District.

Proceed slowly north along First Avenue toward the corner with Ash Street.

You are passing two new structures (both completed in 2015) that incorporate cast iron saved from the demolitions - first that of the 1881 Ladd Block and then that of Glisan's Block of 1889 (which occupies the same site as the original; the original Ladd Block was located at SW Fourth Ave and Columbia⁵). The all cast-iron Italianate aspect on both sides of this street, as it leads toward Ankeny Square and the Skidmore Fountain, is particularly fascinating and is one of the most photographed streetscapes of the city. If it seems familiar it is because it is now a favorite locale for both local and Hollywood filmmakers.



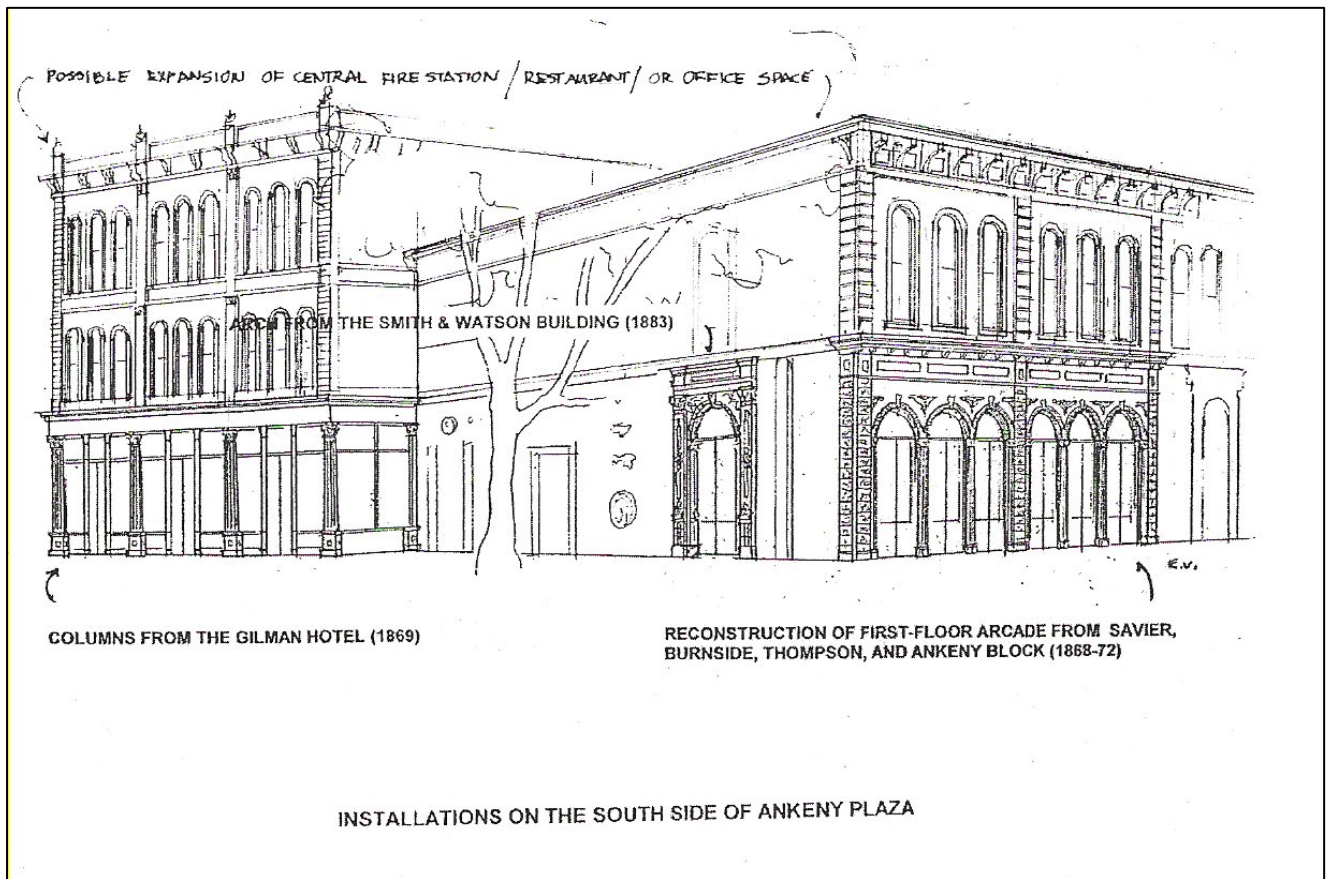
⁵ The Wells Fargo Tower now occupies the site.

Cross Ash and continue north on First Avenue.

Passing first the 1871 South Wing of the New Market Theater block, we now stand in front of the theater itself, built on 1872. Close to demolition in the 1960s, the New Market Theater was one of the first historic buildings in the District to be restored.



Turning to look east across Ankeny Square, we see two reconstructions, both of which make good use of cast iron from more demolished buildings, in this case, the 1869 Gilman Hotel⁶ and the Ankeny Block of 1868-72⁷. They hide from view Fire Station No. 1, which dates from the 1950s.



⁶ The Bank of America Building now occupies this building's original site.

⁷ Originally located a few yards away facing Front Ave, where the fire station is today.

Turn toward the west and look past the Skidmore Fountain to Leonard's Block (1878). Long a parking lot, the building was reconstructed in 2019 guided by the use of historic photographs such as the one shown here. Just to the left of Leonard's Block across Ankeny Street is the restored 1873 North Wing of the New Market Theater Block (completed in 2018).



Walk north along First Avenue, under the Burnside Bridge.

(continue with Skidmore, Blagen, Bickel, etc... Return along Second Ave., discuss Erickson's, Wachsmuth, Phoenix, Glisan, Haseltine Bldgs...

This vision of Old Town Portland in 2021 is not an idle fantasy – it can be brought to life. In addition to the surviving buildings we have an unparalleled collection of cast iron that was saved through the efforts of incredibly dedicated individuals over three decades – iron that invites its reuse on living buildings in Old Town. It will only take will, vision, and patience for the current generation of civic decision-makers to undo, at least in part, the untold damage done by earlier leaders who only looked to the next day and the bottom line. Join us in resolving to resurrect this most significant aspect of Portland’s history and in the process create a destination of national importance.



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