Self-Guided Walking Tour
Portland City Hall and Surrounding Grounds

City Hall History

In 1843 business partners William Overton and Asa Lovejoy filed to claim land on the west bank of the Willamette River in Oregon Country. The community was later named Portland after a deciding coin toss, and on February 8, 1851 the City was incorporated. At the time of its incorporation, Portland measured 2.1 square miles.

By 1890, Portland very much needed a permanent place to house its City government. Every time a new mayor was elected, a new headquarters had to be established and residents grew tired of wandering the City in search of their leaders. However, the construction of a new building was not an easy task as Portlanders, conscious of government spending, kept a strong hold on the City purse strings. City leaders finally approved a $175,000 bond issue to purchase land. Initially the lot on which Pioneer Court House Square is currently located was considered, but it was eventually determined that the lot where St. Helens Hall, an Episcopal girls school, stood would be the place to construct the new heart of City governance.

Henry Hefty, a Swiss immigrant, was given the honor of being the architect of the new City Hall. Hefty proceeded to design a building unlike any other on this continent. Resembling the Russian Kremlin, it had five stories and was layered in porticos, balconies, and ornate decoration. Critics dubbed it the “Hefty mess” or “magnificent mess”. Nevertheless, City leaders approved the plan. Construction had not progressed much further than the foundation level when the builders determined it would take twice the amount of money available. The false start sat as an eyesore for two years until money was again appropriated. Two local architects, Tom Whidden and Ion Lewis, were then chosen and designed the building we have today – with one exception. The original design included a 200-foot clock tower which was later excluded to cut costs. The final cost was $575,000.
The building is distinctive in several ways: it's 16th Century Mannerist Italian renaissance architectural style was considered daring in 1895, and it was one of the first examples of an innovative steel frame construction in which walls carry floor and roof loads. The exterior is sandstone from a quarry in Wyoming, and the Aberdine granite columns at the 4th and 5th Avenue entrances came from Scotland. The architect noted that the stone ornaments on the roof were created to symbolize “the urn of fate from which destiny flows”.

The inside columns are made from plaster covered with scagliola, an imitation marble involving the use of dyes and threads applied to drying plaster. It is a complicated process that today would cost more than real marble. The floors are marble, and the woodwork is white oak. The stairway inside is an intricate plated cast-iron copperwork with original cast bronze stairs and marble treads. Other interesting features were added as time went on. In 1902, Port Orford cedars were planted on the east side grounds. In 1910, ornate iron elevators were added, and the original gas lighting was replaced with electricity. In 1963, an exact replica of the Liberty Bell (brought all the way from Baltimore, Maryland) was presented to the City on the 4th of July. It found a home in the east entrance portico. In 1970, a bomb explosion shattered it. It was repaired and moved across the street to Terry Schrunk Plaza. When the building reopened in 1998, the Liberty Bell was moved back to City Hall.

Today, with the building’s most recent restoration in 1998, the building looks just as glorious as it did in 1895. Installed with climate control, occupants are kept warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It is earthquake safe and meets all other building codes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. A perfect blend of old and new, Portland City Hall is more than a place to conduct City government: it is a symbol of the City of Portland’s rich past and its promising future.

City Hall Exterior and Grounds

Facade: The external sandstone wall appears light in color, which is the result of cleaning and surface treatment. Damaged stonework has been replaced, including sections of the balustrade surrounding the building.

Roof: Up on the roof, decorative 4-foot-high urns are back stand as stone sentinels along the roof line. The original solid limestone urns were removed as a safety hazard. Lighter replicas are now in their place.

A New Entrance Through the Rose Garden: The 4th Avenue entrance is now the main entrance of City Hall. The address has been officially changed to 1221 SW Fourth Ave, emphasizing this point. A Rose Garden and the “Better Together Garden” have replaced pavement. Street trees on Fourth Ave are Saw-leaf Zelkova (Zelkova Serrata).
**Liberty Bell:** The second of two replica Liberty Bells at City Hall. The first was destroyed in a bomb blast Nov 21, 1970 and the perpetrators were never discovered! The first replica was under the portico, and this one now sits on the NE corner of the City Hall block.

**Suzhou Stone:** Across 4th Avenue in Terry Schrunk Park is the Suzhou Stone, a sister city gift from Suzhou, China.

**Portlandia:** The idea for Portlandia, a classical allegorical figure representing the spirit of Portland, came from the official Portland City seal. The seal depicts a wilderness scene including mountains, forest, and the sea. In the foreground Lady Commerce stands on the shore with a trident in her right hand as a ship enters the port behind her. A sheaf of grain, a cogwheel, and a sledge hammer lie to her left in the foreground. Together these figures symbolize the origins of the city including its culture, agrarian base, and industry.

Architect Michael Graves suggested a statue of Lady Commerce as part of his design for the neighboring building to the north, the Portland Building. Raymond J. Kaskey, a sculptor from Washington D.C., won the commission through the City of Portland's Public Art Program. The sculpture is made of hammered copper sheeting—about the thickness of a dime—formed around a steel armature. The artist spent three years creating the massive work. It is the second-largest copper repousse statue in the United States, after the Statue of Liberty. Approximately one-third of the size of the Statue of Liberty, Portlandia stands 36' 10" tall and weighs 6.5 tons. Portlandia was shipped across country by rail in eight pieces. After being assembled in a local shipyard, she rode by river barge and truck to her final destination and was welcomed by thousands of Portland residents along the riverbank, streets, and bridges. Portlandia was dedicated to the citizens of Portland on October 8, 1985.

**City Hall Interior Building Design**

Before the most recent renovations, the interior of City Hall was dark and gloomy due to many modifications made over the years to create more worker and storage space on each of the four levels. Restoring City Hall's light courts and stairways as part of the renovation brightened the interior the way the original architect intended.

**Elevator and Stairs:** In detailing reminiscent of City Hall's early days, wrought ironwork details decorate the open-air stairwell and elevator shafts. The decorative copper plating along the stairway is original – a surprise discovery when walls added enclosing the stairwell were removed.

**Woodwork and Windows:** Wherever possible, original doors and moldings were restored in the public areas. Only the north side of the building features reused single pane windows. All new double-pane windows were installed throughout the rest of City Hall.
**Floor Tile and Colors:** Original marble floor tiles have been restored. Three-quarters of the original marble tiles were saved and reinstalled in the hallway and open areas of the first three floors. Replica tiles were needed only on the top floor. Throughout the building, warm earth tone colors - gold, rust, and green - have been used.

**Time Capsule**

Almost immediately after entering City Hall, visitors can see a Placed upon the completed renovation of City Hall in 1998. It includes:

- Portland environment handbook including the Portland plant list (Suggested by Charlie Shimpman)
- Water samples: tap water, rain water, Willamette River (Suggested by Richard Wagner)
- GIS Map of Portland 1889 – 1998 (Donated by Bureau of Planning)
- 1998 Rose Festival Pin and coupon book (Donated by the Rose Festival Association)
- Irvington elementary school: letters to students of 2098, photo of school and class, t-shirt (Donated by Cathy Percich’s 3rd and 4th grade class)
- Bubbler fountain pin (Designed and donated by Robert W Parsons)
- 1898 1998 U.S. coins, one 1998 silver dollar (Donated by Columbia Coin Company Inc)
- Model of City vehicle with logo “The City that Works” (Donated by Bureau of General Services)
- Portland Marathon medal (Donated by Lee Smith, the Portland Marathon Director)
- Letter to Portland Citizens of 2098 (Written by Frances B. Caldwell)
- The Portland Building Pin (Donated by Bureau of General Service)
- City Hall 1995, Christmas ornament (Designed by Betty Woods Gimarelli, donated by Bureau of General Services)
- Various renovation construction photos (Donated by Bureau of General Services)
- Time Capsule media release, City hall press kit, Renovation master plan, Renovation project goals, Taking care of City Hall, City Hall note cards, growing better, a report to the planning commission on phase I of the Livable City project (Donated by Bureau of General Services)
- Share your fondest memories cards (From attendee’s day City Hall Gala Fundraiser)
- Portlandia Marquette #418/500. From the original sketch model (Sculpted by Raymond Kaskey, donated by Charles Hall)
- City Hall Renovation videos (donated by Bureau of General Services)
First Floor

Security Desk: Just to the right, upon entering City Hall's main doors, guests will pass by security personnel charged with maintaining the safety of the building and its inhabitants.

City Attorney's Office: Located along the Fifth Avenue side of the first floor, Suite 120 it is now inhabited by City Attorney's Office and is not open to the public.

Office of Community & Civic Life (OC&CL): The Office of Community & Civic Life, located in Suite 110, is one of the first offices visitors will see as they enter City Hall and pass through security. OC&CL is comprised of programs that fulfill the bureau's mission of promoting a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting all Portlanders working together to build inclusive, safe, and livable neighborhoods and communities.

City Auditor: Suites 130 & 140 house members of the City Auditor's Office and are found on the north side of the building, running along the Madison Street side. The City Auditor is one of the six elected city officials with the mandate of ensuring City business is conducted efficiently. Suite 130 houses the Auditor's Independent Police Review staff, and Suite 140 the City Recorder and Council Clerk.

The Evolution of the City: This piece is a display of photos depicting old Portland scenes gleaned from public and private collections. “Evolution of the City – a photographic tour through time” was produced by Jim Blashfield and Carol Sherman. These digital images continuously flip across the screen of a large television monitor.

Artist's statement: “Evolution of the City” is a way to present Portland's past to itself by unearthing and exhibiting, in an interesting and unusual way, a vast collection of historical still photographs taken over the past hundred years in various parts of the city.”

Suspended Migration: This installation is made up of glass and mica pieces, oil drawings and sculpted wire forms that are covered in more than a million glass beads. It is a visual poem that alludes to the interweaving notions of transformation, life, birth and beauty.

Visual Chronicles Photo Exhibit: Selections from the “Visual Chronicles of Portland” are located in the first-floor lobby display cases. These photographs are an archival collection of artworks on paper which portray an artist's view of what makes this city unique. The Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC) began the collection in 1985 and continues to add new works each year.

Community Access: Following its renovation, City Hall has become even more of a downtown destination. The historic building is not just City Hall, it is also a great venue for public and private community events complete with flexible seating arrangements and high-tech communication tools. Public spaces at City Hall are available for rent by contacting Facilities Dispatch at 823-5252 for information about schedules and rates.
Second Floor

Council Chambers: The renovated meeting hall is dramatically different. Much of the original design and character has been restored. More natural light luminates the room because main floor windows have emerged from behind the old wood paneling that covered the east wall. The hall seats 80 persons on the main level as well as another 100 persons in the balcony area.

Chamber Public Art: A whimsical tribute to Portland citizens entitled “Our Time” by Don Merkt combines bronze, steel, paint and light. Merkt has another work behind the council dais entitled “PORT-LAND” done in enforced plaster and paint.

**Artist’s statement on “Our Time”:** “Ironically, this is a timeless piece which honors the citizens of Portland who occupy the council chambers with their time and vision, in order to build a better Portland and enrich “our time.”

**Artist statement on “PORT-LAND”:** “This diptych paraphrase the name “PORTLAND” by Illustrating our city’s topography as a place defined by interaction of its natural resources, water and land.”

Chamber Lobby Art: A work in bronze, aluminum and plaster entitled “Brief Cases” by artists Norie Sato, Tad Savinar and Bill Will is located in the chamber lobby.

**Artist's statement:** “The formalities of the city government are often seen in contrast to the idiosyncrasies of the individual lives that make up its population. Brief Cases offers a view of the interweaving of the personal and the civic that is the core of city's character.”

Pettygrove and Lovejoy Conference Rooms: There are two conference rooms along the 5th Avenue side of City Hall; the Pettygrove and Lovejoy rooms seat up to 50 people each. The rooms are named for City founders Francis Pettygrove and Asa Lovejoy.

The Pettygrove Room has an ornate circular staircase leading to an old safe room where the City used to store valuables. Both rooms are available for community events.

**Note on Pettygrove and Lovejoy:** Francis Pettygrove and Asa Lovejoy are best known for holding the coin toss that determined Portland’s name. Pettygrove (from Portland, Maine) and Lovejoy (from Boston, Massachusetts) both wanted to name the fledgling city after their home towns. In 1845, Pettygrove won two of the three decisive coin tosses and was granted the honor of naming the city Portland. The coin used in the toss (The Portland Penny) is now on display at the Oregon Historical Society Museum.

Commissioner’s Offices: All four Commissioners and their staff are found on the second floor. Their suites are located in each corner of the four corners of the building. As of 2019, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly is in Suite 210, Commissioner Amanda Fritz is in Suite 220, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty is in Suite 230, and Commissioner Nick Fish is in Suite 240.
**Third Floor**

**Mayor's Office:** As you face the entrance to the balcony, the Mayor’s Office (Suites 340/330) is located to the left along Madison Street. The Mayor’s suites have been reconfigured into a more efficient office space.

**Office of Community & Civic Life 3rd Floor:** Along the 5th Avenue side, you find the 3rd floor office of the Office of Community & Civic Life in Suite 325.

**City Auditor:** In addition to the offices located on the first floor, the City Auditor has two additional offices located on the Jefferson Street side of the third floor, Suites 310 and 320.

**Rose Room:** Located on the 5th Avenue side of the third floor, the Rose Room is a spacious meeting facility with seating for 94 persons. It is available for community events.

**Council Chambers Balcony Public Art:** An oil and canvas work by Michael F. Brophy entitled “Lower Willamette working through the arch: River and Forest” is located at the balcony arch directly above the screen.

**Artist’s statement:** “Portland is a city founded on a river in the middle of a forest and my intent is to depict the sweep of the river valley and a nod towards its history. Stretching from the lower left across the canvas up river the 20th 19th and pre-settlement centuries are presented. The foreground trees are Douglas Firs, the state tree, and rise like columns supporting the region and defining its character and prosperity.”

**Approach to Balcony Art:** Visitors to the balcony lobby are greeted by a 106-piece wood carving by Jack McLarty entitled “The Portland Story”.

**Artist’s statement:** “The mural is a mix of old and new Portland history. The Willamette River is the heart of the city and so the central section of the mural is the Rose Festival River. The side sections represent incidents, people and buildings important in Portland’s history. Some still stand others have vanished forever.”

**Fourth Floor**

**Fourth Floor Art:** On the east wall of the lobby are two paintings by Lucinda Parker entitled “Rose City, City Rose”. They are composed of acrylic on canvas and wood.

**Artist’s statement:** “The Rose two versions of the classic concentric spiraling form which challenges the painter to see it fresh: not a copy of nature, which already does it better, but a re-invention based on a collision between geometry and gesture.”

**Fourth Floor Offices:** The City Attorney’s Office and the Government Relations Office occupy most of the fourth floor.
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Landmarks Mentioned In This Tour

1. City Hall
2. Portlandia (and The Portland Building)
3. Suzhou Stone

Some Important Dates for Portland

1851: The City of Portland was incorporated. At the time, the City measured 2.1 square miles, had 800 inhabitant, a steam saw mill, and a newspaper, The Weekly Oregonian.

1892: Construction of Portland’s City Hall began. Construction was shortly halted due to financing problems and restarted in 1893.

1895: City Hall was opened to the public.

1974: City Hall was entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

1910: Iron elevators were installed and the original gas lighting was replaced with electricity.

1970: A bomb exploded beneath the Council chambers at City Hall, destroying the Liberty Bell. It was repaired and moved across the street to Terry Schrunk Plaza.

1982: The Portland Building, an example of post modern architecture, was built to house City employees.

1985: Portlandia was dedicated to the citizens of Portland on October 8, 1985 before being perched atop the Portland Building’s entrance.

1998: City Hall underwent a renovation. Upon the renovation’s completion, a time capsule was placed into the first floor. When the building reopened in 1998, the Liberty Bell was moved back to City Hall.

2018: As the Portland Building underwent a reconstruction, Portlandia was covered by protective scaffolding. As of September 2019, she is viewable again.

Since time immemorial, Portland has been home to various indigenous peoples including the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, and Molalla tribes.

Today, Portland is home to the ninth largest urban Native American population in the U.S., including more than 58,000 people from over 380 tribal nations.