

# PORTLAND

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

A FORGOTTEN CITY



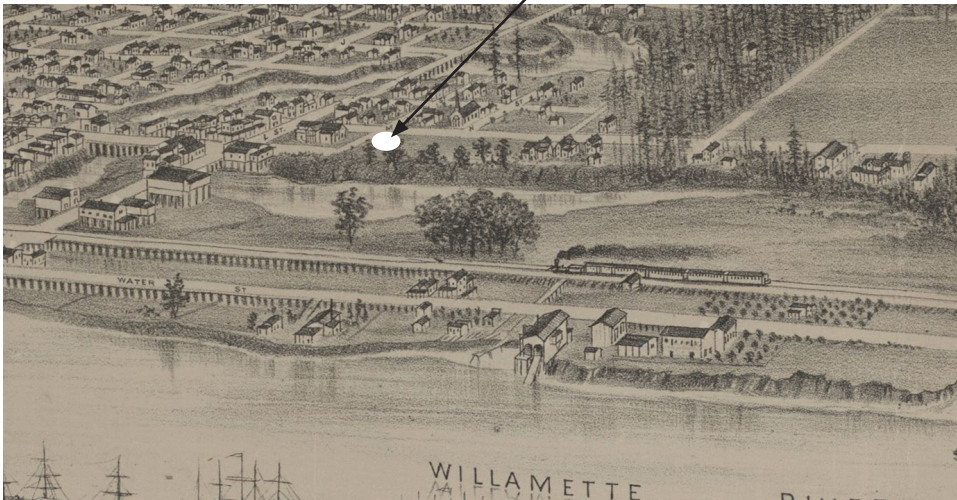
AN EXHIBIT COMPANION GUIDE

# Introduction

What we think of today as Portland covers a broad swath of land on both sides of the Willamette River, but in the late 19th century, that same area contained several mostly independent communities, including Albina, St. Johns, Sellwood, and East Portland, a small city on the eastern shore of the river roughly bounded by Division Street to the south, 12th Avenue to the east, and Sullivan’s Gulch to the north. While people had lived in this area for far longer than recorded history, East Portland only existed as an official city for two decades before merging with Portland and Albina in 1891.

This exhibition explores the little-told story of the historic city of East Portland, focusing on the period from the 1840s to the 1910s. You’ll learn about the people who lived here, factors such as the arrival of the railroad and industry, and the changing of the landscape that in the course of only a few decades turned a flood zone into a thriving city.

The location of the Architectural Heritage Center today.



Detail of Glover, E. S, and A.L. Bancroft & Company. Portland, Oregon, 1879.

# East Portland Prior to White Settlement

For millennia, Chinookan-speaking people inhabited the land we now call Portland's Central Eastside. When Lewis and Clark traveled through the Portland Basin in 1805-06, they documented upwards of 10,000 Native Americans living in dozens of villages along the rivers. Foreign diseases, brought to the Northwest along trading and immigration routes, decimated entire villages, and by the time white settlers began to claim land in the Willamette Valley in the mid-1830s, the Native American population had decreased by as much as 90%.

American and British fur traders built forts in the lower Columbia Basin beginning in 1811, and Dr. John McLoughlin, the Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver, claimed economic control of the region for the HBC, including the territory south of the Columbia River. In 1829, McLoughlin built a mill race and company store at Willamette Falls on land that would become Oregon City. That same year, McLoughlin allowed a semi-retired French-Canadian fur trapper named Etienne Lucier to build a cabin on the east side of the Willamette River in an area filled with creeks, gullies, natural springs, and stagnant ponds. Lucier, his Native wife Josette Nouette, and their children lived there for only a brief time before moving farther south into the Willamette Valley. The location of their cabin is purported to have been near what is now Southeast Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and Morrison Street.

# The Stephens and the arrival of white settlers

After completing their cross-country journeys, some Oregon Trail emigrants chose to settle close to the Willamette River in what is now the central Portland area. Among the families that settled on the east side of the Willamette in this area were James and Elizabeth Stephens, Gideon and Mary Tibbetts, and William and Ann Frush. By 1846, James Stephens had claimed land along the east side of the Willamette, directly across from the newly established townsite of Portland. By the time Portland incorporated as a city in 1851, James Stephens and William Frush were operating a ferry service between their small settlement and the new city across the river.

In 1861, Stephens platted lots on land he claimed along the Willamette's eastern bank, west of First Avenue between present day Lloyd and Hawthorne Boulevards. Through the donation Land Claim system begun in 1862, Stephens was able to further expand his real estate holdings, and in 1865, platted what would become the basis of a new city, extending to the east as far as 12th Avenue, with a corner set aside for the Oregon Hospital for the Insane, established by doctors James C. Hawthorne and Abraham M. Loryea in 1861.

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**IN THE EXHIBIT** Look for the 1865 plat map to see how East Portland was developing at the time of early settlers.

## Ann E. “Aunty” Frush (1809 – 1888)

In the middle of what was once James Stephens’ East Portland land claim is Frush’s Square, a six block rectangle bounded by Oak and Ash Streets between First and Third Avenues. Stephens sold the blocks to William and Ann Frush sometime prior to his 1865 platting of East Portland. Between 1850 and 1864, Stephens and the Frushes also ran the first ferryboat, the Stark Street Ferry, with service between East Portland and the fast growing city of Portland directly across the Willamette. The ferry was powered using oars and mules until 1865, when Ann Frush purchased a steam powered ferryboat.

After her husband’s death that same year, Aunty Frush, as she came to be known, continued to operate the ferry as well as the boarding and “eating” house located at the family residence at what is now Southeast 3rd and Pine. In the early 1870s, Aunty Frush’s boarding and eating house was one of just four businesses on the east side, the others being two grocery stores and a saloon. Aunty Frush was active with the Ladies’ Relief Society, a Christian philanthropic organization that managed Portland’s Children’s Home. Until her death in 1888, Aunty Frush served as treasurer for the Children’s Home.

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### IN THE EXHIBIT

Find the 1913 Portland Realty Atlas map, which outlines Frush’s Square.

# The Chinese in Early East Portland

When Ben Holladay purchased the Oregon Central Railroad in 1868, he brought in hundreds of Chinese immigrants to build his east side railway. News reports reveal that Holladay went so far as to purchase steamships to bring workers from China to Portland. Despite their contributions to Portland's industrialization, Chinese laborers were notoriously underpaid and exploited. The vast majority of Chinese residents lived downtown, due to restrictions against Chinese ownership of real estate, but by 1889 there were several Chinese businesses east of the Willamette, including two laundries on L (now SE Washington) Street.

In 1891, the City & Suburban Railway purchased a full city block at the southwest corner of the Lone Fir Cemetery, in which to bury deceased Chinese workers. The site became known as the "Chinese Burial Ground" in reference to the Chinese sojourners who had constructed Portland's railroads and other infrastructure. Few of these workers were ever identified by name and their legacy and contribution to Portland was both poorly documented and underappreciated. In the late 1940s, Multnomah County voted to bulldoze the Chinese Burial Ground and construct a maintenance building in its place. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Portland exhumed hundreds of graves, sending remains back to China.

Today, the Cultural Heritage Garden at Lone Fir Cemetery offers recognition to the Chinese workers who toiled on foreign soil, enduring rampant racial discrimination, all while making invaluable contributions to Portland's urban development.

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## IN THE EXHIBIT

Look for the 1889 Sanborn maps to see how Chinese businesses were becoming an integral part of East Portland.

# The Founding of a City

Throughout the 1860s, East Portland remained a small farming community. Much of the land remained undeveloped and west of present day Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, the area was prone to flooding. Creeks and spring-fed ponds crisscrossed the area as far east as 11th Avenue. The east side of the Willamette also lacked



IN EXHIBIT: Looking SW from SE 6th and Oak St. (c.1875). Norm Gholston Collection.

the natural harbor, suitable for ocean going trading vessels, that helped establish Portland as an important regional city. Things began to change in 1868, when Benjamin “Ben” Holladay began building his Oregon & California Railroad through East Portland, running the line along present day Southeast 1st Avenue. Holladay’s

railroad established a direct connection between farms and orchards in the Willamette Valley and markets in the Portland area and beyond.

Encouraged by construction of the railroad, Stephens led the incorporation of East Portland as a city in 1870. Over the next decade East Portland grew steadily. Newly constructed trestles, some as much as 20 feet high, kept the roadways and railroad out of the lowlands near the river. Commercial buildings near the rail line were also built atop pilings so as to keep them high and dry. Residential areas were built mostly to the east of 4th Avenue, (Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard), while East Portland’s city offices and fire station were located at 3rd and I Street (Southeast Pine Street).

# Jefferson & Jennette Perry Family

The 1870 census for East Portland, then with a population of around 2,000 shows very few non-white residents, most of whom were individuals working for the railroad, restaurants, or in domestic service. In fact, only one African American family is noted as residing in East Portland at that time. Oregon's notorious anti-black legislation discouraged African-Americans from relocating to the state, but that did not deter the family of Jefferson L. and Jennette Perry from coming to Portland in the late 1860s. In 1870, the Perrys were living on the west side of Southeast 6th Avenue near what is now Alder Street.



SEE EXHIBIT FOR ARTICLE:  
Newspaper image of Robert  
B. Perry from a 1910 article.

Jefferson Perry was born around 1830 in Tennessee, where he was likely enslaved. Jennette (Smith) Perry was born in Canada. By the end of the Civil War, the Perrys resided in California where their first daughter was born. After coming to the Portland area, they had at least three more children. The family resided in East Portland for only a short while, as by 1874 they were living on the west side of the river. When the Perrys first arrived in the Portland area, Jefferson worked as a railroad porter. He later worked for many years as a janitor for Portland's Ladd & Tilton Bank. The Perry's son Robert followed in his father's footsteps at the bank, and in 1910 he became the first African American in Oregon to serve on a trial jury.

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## IN THE EXHIBIT

See the 1870 census record of the Perry family, and the 1910 news article on Robert Perry.



## East Portland in the 1880s

In 1880, East Portland had a population of around 4,000, roughly the same size as Salem, the state capital. In contrast, Portland had a population of over 21,000. Although there was still no bridge across the river, by this time the outer edges of East Portland and beyond were beginning to take shape as residential suburbs for working and middle class residents. Meanwhile, most of East Portland's waterfront was being transformed into an industrial area that included sawmills, iron works, an early electric power plant, and a fruit and vegetable cannery. Over time, the fruit and vegetable industries, along with grain mills, meat packing facilities, farm implement dealers, and food and beverage manufacturers turned East Portland into a city bustling with workers and residents alike.

After many years of deliberation, a bridge over the Willamette was finally constructed. The first Morrison Street Bridge opened in 1887 and among the improvements that soon followed was the arrival of the electric street-car. That same year, the city of Albina, to the north of East Portland, also incorporated and the eventual consolidation between the two east side cities and their larger west side counterpart became a frequent topic of discussion throughout the community.



Postcard of the First Morrison Bridge (c.1905), AHC Library.

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### IN THE EXHIBIT

Look for the 1889 Sanborn maps to see the development of industries in East Portland.

# Thomas & Janet Jones Family

Probably the most important architect practicing in East Portland at the end of the 19th century, Thomas J. (T. J.) Jones, with his wife Janet, immigrated to the US from Wales in 1880. The Joneses and their five children lived in a large Queen Anne style house that stood at SE 3rd and Mill St. Around 1889, T. J. became the Portland school district's chief architect, and over the course of 23 years he was involved in the design or remodel of as many as 20 schools, including Washington High School (burned 1922) and Stephens School (demolished in 1940) both in East Portland. The Barber Block at SE Grand and Washington (1890) is one of Jones' few remaining buildings. T. J. and Janet's son, George H. Jones, followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming the chief architect of many Portland schools in the 1920s.

The Joneses were proud of their Welsh heritage. T. J. led a local Welsh language choir, and the family was known for large gatherings at the family house where the entire choir would regale the neighborhood with their singing. The Bryn Seion church in the community of Beaver Creek, outside Oregon City, was purportedly designed by T. J. Jones and continues the Welsh singing tradition to this day.



Jones Family in front of their house on SE 3rd (c.1890).  
Doug Magedanz Collection.

# Consolidation

Entering the 1890s, talk of consolidation between East Portland, Portland, and Albina steadily increased. With the West Hills hemming in the city, it was widely understood that Portland's best chance for continued economic growth lie in an eastward expansion. Real estate speculation led to the development of east side streetcar suburbs, like Sunnyside, that were fueled still further by the addition of more bridges across the Willamette, including the first Steel Bridge (1888) and the Madison Street Bridge (1891). Meanwhile, the commercial and industrial district of East Portland thrived, but was still challenged by its own physical landscape. It was no surprise when in the spring of 1891, East Portlanders overwhelmingly voted in favor of consolidation. The three cities were officially consolidated on July 6, 1891.

Among the first big changes to occur after consolidation, was the renaming of streets. Back in the 1870s, James Stephens had assigned East Portland's east-west streets letter names starting at the north end of town and working southward, beginning with A (now Glisan). By the 1890s, 4th and 5th Avenues in downtown Portland were fast becoming the center of that business district, so on the east side, 4th and 5th were renamed Union and Grand respectively.

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## IN THE EXHIBIT

Look for the bridge postcards to see the original Steel and Morrison bridges.

## After Consolidation

Street names had been changed and the city no longer had its independence, but physical changes to the former city of East Portland occurred very slowly in the first several years after consolidation. Property owners wishing to have improved roadways or sidewalks had to pay for them on their own. This led to sometimes dangerous conditions on elevated roadways, including one built on Grand Avenue, over a ravine between Stark and Pine Streets, which was so poorly built that it was closed and reconstructed not long after it first opened.

Two projects that had a big impact on the former East Portland were the construction of sewer lines and the development of the Bull Run water supply, both starting around 1893. By this time, interurban electric streetcars connected East Portland with Milwaukie and Oregon City to the south. Dredging of the Willamette also made it possible for larger ships to dock on the east side of the river, as the area became increasingly industrialized. By 1896, all bridges and the remaining ferries across the river were free to the public, but there were still large swaths of mostly unusable land. It would be another five years before any serious efforts were made to begin filling in the lowlands, creeks, and ponds of East Portland.

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### IN THE EXHIBIT

Find the Russell and Co. postcard to see how elevated the streets of East Portland were until the lowlands and ponds were filled in.

# Italian Immigrants and the Birth of Produce Row

As the railroads continued their expansion throughout the Pacific Northwest, the need for labor also increased. Efforts to encourage immigration to Oregon from outside North America began in 1874 and within a decade, a growing number of Australians, Scots, Germans, and Italians, among many other nationalities, began settling in the Portland area.

While initially coming to the city to work with the railroads, many of the Italian immigrants began leasing property on the outskirts of East Portland, where they set up small farms and began supplying area residents with produce. From Ladd's Addition south, acres of undeveloped land were turned into small farms. By the early 20th century, a thriving Italian community had emerged and East Portland became a center for the local wholesale grocery and produce industry.

## Entering a New Century

By the end of the 1890s, business and property owners near the river were weary of the costs associated with repeated repairs on busy elevated streets like Morrison, Water, and Washington. Their concerns were exacerbated by frequent flooding, coupled with an ever-increasing amount of rail, streetcar, and horse-drawn vehicular traffic. Instead of continually seeking the City's support for road repairs, the East Side Improvement Association and others began advocating for the filling in of the lowlands in the former East Portland. Such a project would make the roadways more stable while creating entire new blocks of buildable land. The first such efforts began around 1901 using sand and gravel dredged from the Willamette.

Over the course of the next two decades, most of the lowlands, ravines, and sloughs west of 11th Avenue and between Sullivan's Gulch and Division Street were filled. The fill work made the development of commercial areas, at locations like the intersection of Grand Avenue and Stark Street, possible for the first time. Meanwhile, on the blocks closest to the river, new buildings, with direct connections to the railroad, continued the expansion of the area as a center for wholesale goods and services, with particular emphasis on agriculture. Over the next few decades, Portland's Central Eastside Industrial District was born from what was once the City of East Portland. Houses, commercial buildings, schools and churches, some of which dated to the 1860s, made way for new warehouses and industrial buildings as far east as 12th Avenue.

*Examples of standing buildings from the time of the city of East Portland include the West's Block building (home of the Architectural Heritage Center and this exhibit), the Barber Block on SE Grand and Washington, and the Cully Building on MLK and Oak.*

# Pre-1891 East Portland Street Names

## Original Street Name

4th  
5th  
A  
B  
C  
D  
E  
F  
G  
H  
I  
J  
K  
L  
M  
N  
O  
P  
Q  
R  
S  
T  
Asylum

## Current Street Name

Martin Luther King Jr.  
Grand  
Glisan  
Flanders  
Everett  
Davis  
Couch  
Burnside  
Ankeny  
Ash  
Pine  
Oak  
Stark  
Washington  
Alder  
Morrison  
Belmont  
Yamhill  
Taylor  
Salmon  
Main  
Madison  
Hawthorne

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EXHIBIT TEXT BY VAL C. BALLESTREM AND EVA LOVE  
EAST PORTLAND COVER GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM 1889 SANBORN FIRE  
INSURANCE MAP, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

COVER PHOTO: PORTLAND CIGAR BOX MANUFACTURING CO. (C. 1900), NORM GHOLSTON  
COLLECTION.

**Architectural**  
**HERITAGE CENTER**

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