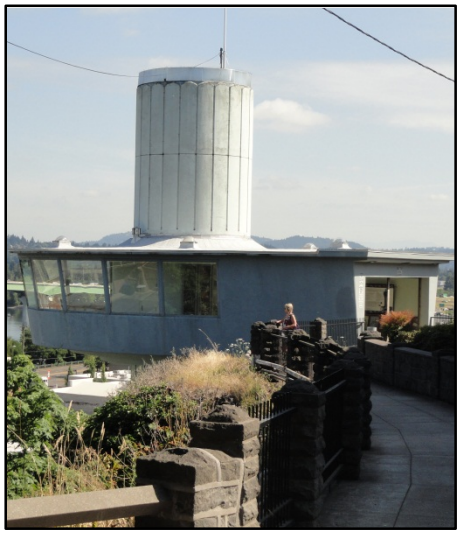
Oregon City
Historic Preservation Program Update
Phase 2: Nominations



Prepared for
Oregon City Planning Department &
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OREGON CITY
HISTORIC REVIEW PROGRAM
HISTORIC SURVEY & UPDATE PROJECT

Introduction

The 2011 Oregon City Historic Preservation Program Update included two phases. Phase 1 consisted of a resurvey of city landmarks; a reconnaissance survey of approximately 1750 buildings built between 1900 and 1960 that had never been surveyed before; and a context statement for Rivercrest, Oregon City's premier midcentury neighborhood. Findings are available in the final report for the Oregon City Historic Review Program Historic Survey & Update Project.

Phase 2 was originally conceived as an intensive level survey of three buildings identified in the reconnaissance survey that deserved more thorough documentation and recognition as city landmarks. The scope of phase 2 has been altered and now consists of background research and drafted full physical descriptions for two city-owned properties that are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The following report includes narrative descriptions for the Oregon City Municipal Elevator and the McLoughlin Promenade. Methodologies appear in both sections and a context statement has been included for the Municipal Elevator. On the request of city staff, this report was prepared to provide guidance and draft language for potential nominations to be completed by city staff in the future.

OREGON CITY
HISTORIC REVIEW PROGRAM
HISTORIC SURVEY & UPDATE PROJECT

The Oregon Municipal Elevator

SIGNIFICANCE

Criterion A: Transportation

Criterion C: Engineering

SUMMARY

Oregon City, Oregon developed along the low, eastern bank of the Willamette River. This narrow shelf became the site of the city's historic downtown. The city then grew to the east, encompassing a series of high bluffs. The Oregon City Municipal Elevator, designed by Gordon E. Trapp of Stevens and Thompson in 1954, was built at the corner of 7th Street and Railroad Avenue in downtown Oregon City to shuttle residents between tiers. It is a unique 130-foot tall "vertical street" (it has been mapped and platted as "Elevator Street" by the city) that carries passengers from downtown up to a ninety-foot basalt bluff that began attracting residents in the late 19th century. The elevator's primary function was to shuttle mill workers from the river up to their homes on the bluff. The current municipal elevator replaced a purely utilitarian 1915 wooden structure that had become unreliable by the 1950s. The current elevator was designed to retain its utilitarian function while offering an observation deck with unparalleled views of the Willamette River. The elevator has since become a tourist attraction and a defining landmark for Oregon City.

From 7th Street downtown, passengers enter a 48-foot long, tiled, pedestrian tunnel that runs east under the Union Pacific railroad track. At the end of the tunnel is a manned single-car elevator. The Otis elevator rises up through the structure's reinforced concrete shaft and deposits users in the center of a rounded observation platform that overlooks the Willamette River. The observation deck's concrete walls are mounted with historic photos on the bottom half. The top half is constructed of an unbroken ribbon of windows providing unobstructed views of the downtown below, the Willamette Falls to the south, the Oregon City Bridge and the Abernathy Bridge to the west and north. On its eastern edge, the observation deck opens to the bluff, which is populated by businesses and homes. The elevator also opens onto the McLoughlin Promenade, a walkway of stone and concrete that meanders along the edge of the bluff.

The elevator's rounded observation deck with canted walls and large windows has been compared to a "flying saucer" for its futuristic style. It is also said to resemble a later Washington state landmark, the Space Needle in Seattle. Oregon City's municipal elevator is promoted as one of only four outdoor municipal elevators in the world and as the only known "vertical street" in North America. However, this claim is difficult to verify. Outdoor elevators in Portugal (1902), Brazil (1930), Switzerland (1905), and Sweden predate the Oregon City elevator.[1] Contemporary examples, including an outdoor elevator in Seattle, have been constructed in the years since.

[1] An unidentified newspaper ran an article entitled "Oregon City Elevator One Of Three Such In World," on June 3, 1974. The article, found in the Oregon City Family History Center clipping file, refers to elevators in "Bahio, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Stockholm, Sweden, and Berne, Switzerland." However, at least one elevator, the Santa Justa in

Routine maintenance has occurred over the years. The elevator's mechanical system was recently modernized, and in 2008, the city installed a new public art exhibit in the elevator and retiled the pedestrian tunnel. These projects have not altered the elevator's original setting, its design, most of its historic materials or its workmanship and associations. The site also retains its historic use. There has been a municipal elevator on this site since 1915. The elevator has been well-maintained and appears to be in very good condition.

SETTING

Oregon City's municipal elevator is an innovative solution to a problem related to the city's distinct and challenging topography. The site on the riverbank was chosen by John McLoughlin of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1829 because of the great power of the Willamette Falls, which is the second largest falls in the U.S. These falls, approximately 20 river miles south of Portland, Oregon, are less than a mile south of the elevator. Because of McLoughlin's settlement, Oregon City became the terminus for those coming over the Oregon Trail to the Northwest in the 19th century. As Oregon City grew, it encompassed the surrounding bluffs, which rise sharply east of downtown, providing transportation challenges to those who lived on one tier and did business on the other.

The elevator is situated on the eastern edge of downtown at the terminus of 7th Street where it meets the bluff at the intersection of Railroad Avenue. To the west, the two-block wide downtown stretches almost to the riverbank. Its commercial buildings are within easy walking distance of the elevator. The elevator is accessed through a tunnel that begins at grade, then dips underground and below the Union Pacific Railroad tracks to the east. The tracks are still in use by commercial and passenger rail. The basalt cliff behind the elevator is partially covered by mature trees and shrubs. To the north of the elevator is a set of concrete stairs that mark the original path used by native tribes that came down from the bluff to trade on the river. The stairs run alongside the Singer Hill Creek Falls. The falls include a series of five drops; four are 10-foot drops, one is a 12-foot drop. They are constructed of concrete and stone.

On the bluff, the elevator's observation deck connects to the cliff to form a wide courtyard with benches for public seating. To the north is the continuation of 7th Street, the primary corridor for vehicular traffic, and the historic McLoughlin House museum, the first National Historic Site in the west. Nearby are civic, commercial and residential buildings including City Hall and Oregon City's Carnegie library. Directly to the east are newer commercial buildings, many of which currently stand empty. To the south, commercial buildings give way to residences dating from as early as the 1870s. Many of the late 19th and early 20th century buildings in the elevator's surrounding neighborhood are now part of the McLoughlin Conservation District. The McLoughlin Promenade, a linear park, stretches north to the McLoughlin House and south of the elevator along the bluff.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The elevator's construction took over 751 tons of concrete and steel. The elevator is 130 feet high, and ascends from downtown to the bluff in 15 seconds. The elevator's observation deck was constructed of a lightweight concrete called Haydite, provided by the Smithwick Concrete Product Company to help offset the heavy construction of the observation deck.[2] Haydite "is made by heating carefully selected shale in a rotary kiln to a 2200 degree temperature. Gases within the shale then expand forming air cells which are

Lisbon, Portugal, also predates the Oregon City Elevator. For general information, see http://cruises.about.com/od/europeancruises/ig/Lisbon-Portugal/lisbon014.htm.

[2] Staff, "Lightweight Concrete in Tower," *Enterprise-Courier Elevator Dedication Edition*, May 5, 1955.

retained upon cooling."[3] Designer Gordon E Trapp was with the engineering firm Stevens and Thompson of Portland. The construction company was James and Yost of Portland. The elevator and cage were provided by Otis Elevator Company, which also provided the cage and machinery for the first wooden municipal elevator. The elevator is made up of three distinct parts, the downtown entrance through a pedestrian tunnel; the elevator car and its surrounding shaft, and the observation deck that surrounds the elevator car where it meets the bluff.

Downtown, the elevator is fronted by a tall concave concrete wall. The concrete wall includes a series of vertical channels, providing visual interest and dividing the wall into a series of vertical panels, each of which is hung with a single letter. Together they spell out "Oregon City Municipal Elevator." Metal benches and other street furniture including flower boxes and trash cans sit on a concrete pad in front of the wall. In the center of the wall is an eight-foot tall opening with a polished stone surround. This is the elevator's pedestrian street entrance.

From behind the wall, the shaft of the elevator appears to rise out of the base of the bluff. The shaft (approximately 13'6" in exterior diameter) is minimally ornamented with concrete panels that make the shaft appear fluted. The shaft includes no fenestration. Near the top of the 100' bluff, the shaft rises through the bottom of a rounded observation deck. The bottom of the deck, visible from the street, includes three concentric concrete rings that appear to radiate from the shaft. The deck's floor ranges in thickness from 30 inches at the tower to six inches at the outer wall. The exterior of the observatory is otherwise minimally ornamented. The observation deck's walls are visibly canted with large fixed windows providing a more than180 degree view of Oregon City's downtown and the Willamette River. The observation deck is not entirely round. Tangential lines extend from the round deck to provide a connection to the bluff to the immediate east. The eastern wall of the observation deck is parallel to the bluff and includes a retractable door so that the observation deck can be closed during non-operating hours. Above the deck, the shaft continues at the same diameter. The concrete panels end in petal like forms along the top of the shaft, which is capped in metal. The concrete shaft's walls vary in thickness from 16 inches at the base to 12 inches at the top.[4]

Though the exterior is uniform gray, interior spaces are ornamented with public art. To enter the elevator, the visitor walking east on 7th Street enters through the opening in the concrete wall. He or she travels down a 48' long tiled pedestrian tunnel that passes under the Union Pacific railroad track to the elevator lobby, which is below track level.

The tunnel's floor is smooth painted concrete. The walls are covered in large, rectangular ivory ceramic tiles, and are hung with historic lenticular prints that show the evolution of the elevator's construction. Lenticular printing uses lenses to change an image as it is viewed from different angles. Here, each individual print incorporates three historic images. As the viewer passes in front of a print, three distinct images become visible one after another. Metal railings on either side of the tunnel help navigate the change in grade. The ceiling is hung with white ceiling panels and a series of seven overhead lights. Directly at the back of the pedestrian tunnel is a pair of metal elevator doors. They are set deep into the eastern wall of the tunnel and are flanked by two convex wall forms. These small, rounded wall forms are covered in small, square ivory tiles. Three multi-colored tile stripes divide each wall into three horizontal ribbons. Within each of the convex wall forms are additional pedestrian doors that lead elevator staff to a private utility sink and spaces around and below the elevator car. Each door includes metal vents, signs

[3] Ibid.
[4] Staff, "Elevator Statistics Impressive Figures," *Enterprise-Courier Elevator Dedication Edition*, May 5, 1955.

and metal handles. They are painted the same color as the tile. Call buttons are on the south wall along with a wall-mounted bullet-shaped metal ashtray.

The tunnel leads to both the elevator and a separate route up the bluff. At the elevator doors, the tunnel turns left and heads north to a set of concrete stairs that rise to grade and meet what is known as the "grand staircase," a set of concrete and stone stairs that lead up the bluff along the original path used by native tribes. The tunnel leading to the stair is also clad in ivory tiles and has painted cement floors, lenticular historic photos on the walls and white ceiling panels and lights above.

Inside the elevator car, the walls and doors are brushed metal with stone panels adhered to the walls. Corners are generally rounded. Lighted panels are inset into the ceiling. The car includes an operator's station set off by a rounded plexiglass barrier. It is manned during operating hours.

The elevator car rises through the round concrete shaft and the doors open to the rounded observatory. A simple metal callbox is mounted on the southern wall of the elevator car's surrounding shaft. An overhead light illuminates the entry. The elevator car is encased in an oblong concrete shaft that continues floor to ceiling through the observatory. As below, the elevator car is flanked by convex wall forms, but these are finished in smooth, painted concrete. The eastern wall of the elevator shaft is covered by two sets of four tall, vertical photographic panels. Between them, a historic plaque tells the history of the elevator. Below the plaque is a metal water fountain which echoes the rounded forms found throughout the structure. On the south wall of the shaft is a door to a staff restroom and supply closet.

The larger surrounding observation deck is also a rounded structure that allows pedestrians to circumnavigate for a view of Oregon City's downtown and the river. The walls of the round observatory are neatly divided. On the top of the canted wall is a ribbon of 13 six-foot, fixed steel windows that provide excellent views. Beneath these windows is a ribbon of 68 lenticular photographs placed into simple wooden frames. A sign on the southern wall of the observation bay describes the historic and modern views represented. A sign on the northern wall describes recent renovations and the installation of the current photographs. The deck is open to the east during operating hours. The floor of the deck is painted to resemble a simplified section of an early plat map. Streets, blocks and the river are represented by different colors. Street names are engraved in the concrete. The walls are painted concrete and stucco and the picture frames are painted wood. The ceiling, like the deck's base, is hung with concentric concrete panels, providing minimal ornamentation. The concrete roof of the view tower tapers from 19 inches at the tower to six inches at the outer edge. A florescent light illuminates the eastern entry.
The elevator was referred to as "ultra modernistic" in early newspaper articles. With its rounded concrete forms, minimal ornamentation and smooth concrete surfaces with expanses of glass, it reflects both the city's desire for a modern municipal elevator and the evolution of futuristic architecture in the 1950s.

ALTERATIONS

Recent renovations include a 2001 elevator modernization project performed by Centric Elevator Corporation. "The repairs helped bring the elevator in line with health and safety codes and made the elevator more energy-efficient. The ride is also now ten seconds faster."[5] The elevator also received a new art installation in 2008. It was designed by Michael Asbilt, who used historic photos to create lenticular prints that shift from one image to another as the viewer moves in front of them. This installation replaced a series of 16 murals painted directly onto the walls of the observatory in the 1980s. They had

[5] Staff, "Oregon City's elevator back after months of upgrades," *The Oregonian*, January 15, 2002.

deteriorated over time due to dampness. The tile in the pedestrian tunnel was also replaced in 2008 due to deterioration. Additional lighting was added, along with security cameras.

TIMELINE

1912: Resolution was passed by the City Fathers to build an elevator
1913: Engineer hired and site below Mrs. Sarah Chase's property was agreed upon
1914: Mrs. Chase received $1,651.20 for her land
1915: The first elevator was constructed
1924: Electric power was provided to the first elevator
1954: New elevator to cost $165,000 and reach a height of 130 feet
1954/55: The second elevator was constructed
1968: Bond for elevator construction paid off; city owns it
1980s: Murals added to observation deck
2008: Murals replaced by lenticular prints; floor painted; panels added to elevator exterior

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The Oregon City Municipal Elevator is a singular building that is promoted as the one and only vertical street in America and one of only four outdoor municipal elevators in the world. To assess its significance, this section of the report provides a discussion of architectural trends and themes associated with the period of its construction (1954-55) and with other buildings of its type. Though the Municipal Elevator is unique, its design reflects a set of futurist principles shared with other buildings of its era. As with many modernist buildings, it also incorporates some of the innovative materials from the early 20th century that freed architecture from its historical roots. It also features an observation deck, an added bonus that became the primary function for a number of later landmark buildings, many of which incorporate aerodynamic, space age forms. Some examples are discussed below.

***Futurism*[6]**

The elevator's rounded observation platform, its canted walls and its swift elevator have roots in the principles and ideals of futurism as it was conceived in the early 20th century in Italy.[7] As with all modernists, the Futurists wanted to break with classical forms, transcend tradition and create a new aesthetic to reflect a new age. To achieve their goals they turned their attention to technological innovations in speed, travel, technology.

New technologies inspired designers like Antonia Santa'Elia who, in 1914, called for a "futurist architecture of calculation, of audacity and simplicity; the architecture of reinforced concrete, of iron, of glass… and of all those substitutes for wood, stone and brick which make possible maximum elasticity and lightness."[8] In what became known as the Futurist Manifesto, Santa'Elia and his colleagues claimed emphatically that "oblique and elliptical lines are dynamic by their very nature and have an emotive

[6] For a broader discussion of Futurism, see "Futurism," Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1964.
[7] www.solarflarestudios.com/demosites/architecture/futurist.htm
[8] For an annotated copy of the manifesto, visit web.mac.com/davidrifkind/fiu/library_files/santelia.futurist.architecture.pdf

power a thousand times greater than that of perpendicular and horizontal lines," and that "decoration, as something imposed upon architecture, is an absurdity."[9]

Midcentury American designers were inspired by many of the same ideas. They envisioned a new aesthetic made possible by new materials, nonlinear forms, and the ability to transcend gravity and move into space.[10] These ideals appear to emerge in the design of the municipal elevator, which relies on the versatility of reinforced concrete for the "lightness" of its cantilevered observation deck that appears to hover above ground. Its shape is defined by its oblique and elliptical lines. It is also a very simple structure when compared to earlier 20th century forms. The designer refrained from obscuring the aerodynamic curves of the structure with added exterior ornament. As in most modern structures, the form and expression of materials were considered ornament enough.

In the United States at mid-20th century, these principles, paired with an infatuation with the space age, were seen in playful Googie forms that appeared along roadsides, at coffee shops and throughout dynamic cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles. But the municipal elevator does not go that far. It incorporates bold, curvilinear shapes and smooth aerodynamic lines, but refrains from adding starbursts and neon, oversized, jutting roof forms and other pop culture references.[11]

Observation decks built since the 1960s also incorporate futuristic forms and many of them are defined by their flying saucer shapes, as is Oregon City's elevator. But this was not the case for earlier municipal elevators. The Oregon City Municipal Elevator calls itself one of only four in the world. Other well-known outdoor elevators include the Santa Justa in Lisbon, a Neo-Gothic tower often compared to the Eiffel Tower;[12] the Elevador Lacerda in Brazil, built in the 1920s;[13] and the Hammetschwand Lift in Switzerland, completed in 1905.[14] All are square structures more similar in shape to the utilitarian elevator that was built in Oregon City in 1915. None of them could be called futurist.

Futurism's Form and Function

In the last half of the 20th century, futuristic observation decks celebrated speed, power, technological mastery and advanced engineering. Good examples include the Space Needle, built for the 1962 World Fair in Seattle. Like Oregon City's municipal elevator, the Space Needle includes a round observatory similar to the iconic UFO. It's placed atop a narrow elevator shaft that's been compared to an hourglass. The Astro-View Observation Towers are another example. These were built for the 1964 World Fair in New York. They include three slender towers topped by round observation decks. These too have been compared to flying saucers. The shape speaks both to the function of observation platforms – to see 360 degree views – and to the mid-century interest in futuristic space age forms. The design was said to be inspired by the "buildings of Krypton in the Superman comics."[15]

[9] Ibid.
[10] For a brief history of innovations in reinforced concrete, see "Reinforced Concrete," Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1964.
[11] Hess, Alan, *Googie Redux*, *Ultramodern Roadside Architecture.* San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2004.
[12] For pictures and general information on this elevator, visit www.golisbon.com/sight-seeing/santa-justa.html
[13] For pictures and general information on this elevator, visit http://brazilgeeks.com/brazil-travel-info/elevador-lacerda-salvador-brazil/
[14] For pictures and general information on this elevator, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammetschwand_Elevator
[15] For pictures and general information on the Astro View towers, visit www.conlab.org/acl/thereallybigmap/exhibit/astroView.html

While futurism embraced space age forms, the round, aerodynamic shapes also had a practical use. The shape of Oregon City's observation deck appears specifically designed to allow the best views of the river, the falls and the city below. And the cant of the walls improves these views. Sheltered under an eave and facing downward, the glazing does not catch the glare of the sun. The look of the walls, although modern and futuristic, has the practical advantage of improving the building's function.

The elevator has a functional goal. It moves people from one level to another. But this function could have been performed by a square tower similar to the 1915 version it replaced. Instead, it appears to make a statement on the 20th century's ability to overcome traditional forms of construction. This elevator's observation deck emphasizes how modern materials like Haydite made it possible to hover over open space. This elevator was also built to be fast, cutting the ride down to 15 seconds. The elevator's observation platform was also designed to celebrate the views from the bluff. Here we move away from moving people and focus on what people see when they arrive at their destination. The windows, which cover only a portion of the exterior wall, face south, west, and north. The views provided by these windows were carefully chosen. To the south is the industrial development on the river, the mills and the great Willamette Falls, the primary power-generator for early Oregon City. To the west is downtown Oregon City, the commercial center, and to the north are Oregon City's primary bridges. All these landmarks speak to the historic success of industry in Oregon City. These views emphasize not just the city's history, but the source of its success.

Industry, Movement, Water and Power

There are numerous examples of viewing platforms designed to showcase our engineering prowess in the mid-20th century. The Grand Coulee Dam Visitor Center was built in the late 1970s to resemble a generator rotor.[16] It looks out to the enormous dam. The Vancouver Lookout (1977) provides views from another saucer-like observation deck. At its opening ceremony, astronaut Neil Armstrong cut the ribbon. The Stratosphere Tower Observation Deck in Las Vegas was opened in the 1990s, but very much resembles the Space Needle.[17] It too has a rotating restaurant with a view of 360 degrees. Observation decks with their sky restaurants, however, tend to be more entertaining than practical, unlike the Oregon City Municipal Elevator.

Futuristic designs also made their way into modernist residential design. For instance, John Lautner's Chemosphere (1960) is an octagonal house raised off the ground on a concrete pillar anchored into a hillside. It's been described in terms similar to those that describe the municipal elevator: "The Chemosphere balances on a single stilt, like a flying saucer resting on its docking mast. Inside, the 360 degree views of Los Angeles are enhanced by the slanting of the glass windows to prevent reflection that might detract from the sensation of floating."[18] Interestingly, John Lautner's design for the Chemosphere reflected the fact that his client was an aircraft electronics engineer.[19]

Conclusion

The Oregon City elevator appears to be one of the earliest futuristic observation towers, and perhaps the only futuristic outdoor elevator of its time. It predates many of the futuristic observation towers that now

[16] For pictures and general information, visit www.usbr.gov/pn/grandcoulee/gcvc/visitorcenter.html
[17] For an introduction to the Stratosphere, visit www.vegas.com/attractions/on_the_strip/stratospheretower.html.
[18] Cattermole, Paul. *Buildings For Tomorrow*, New York: The Overlook Press, 2006, 10.
[19] For an excellent introduction to Lautner, see Dave Weinstein's article, "Beyond Flash and Fancy: Architect John Lautner" at http://eichlernetwork.com/article/beyond-flash-and-fancy-architect-john-lautner#.TlubDVYvZls.email.

populate the west and breaks from the classical traditions found in its predecessors around the world. It was also designed to pair the function of the elevator itself with the function of providing views of Oregon City. Its large windows emphasize framed views of Oregon City's industrial and commercial center, turning the viewer's attention to the engineering feats of the 20th century. Though critics compare its aerodynamic form to a flying saucer, it is also a very practical design appropriate to its function. Though the elevator's design reflects the ideals of the futurist movement, it was constructed after the movement emerged in the early 20-th century. It is worth noting that the late 20th-century version of this architectural aesthetic is sometimes called retro-futurist, as the larger movement is said to have died in 1944 with one of its proponents.[20]

The elevator is significant for its associations with Oregon City's pattern of development, but it is also significant for its architectural style and engineering.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preparation of this report involved consultation with the staff of the Oregon City Planning and Public Works departments; the staff at the Family Research Center; the staff at the Museum of the Oregon Territory, and the research librarian at the Oregon City Public Library. Special thanks to Karin Morey of the Chamber of Commerce for her help at the Family Research Center, and to Nancy Kraushaar and Kathy Griffin of Oregon City Public Works.

Original research and on-site survey work included the following:

- Two site visits were conducted in August 2011, and photographs taken to document the municipal elevator as it exists today.
- Primary source material on the elevator was obtained from the Oregon City Planning Department and the Department of Public Works. These included measured field notes, an elevator floor plan, a letter from the architect's wife, historic photos, documents related to the elevator's modernization and documents related to the newly installed public art exhibit.
- Newspaper articles on the construction of the elevator were obtained from the "Municipal Elevator" clipping file housed at the Family Research Center at the Museum of the Oregon Territory and from the Oregon City Planning Department.
- Information on the architect Gordon E Trapp and his work was obtained from the AIA Historical Directory of American Architects and from a letter provided to the city on the anniversary of the elevator's dedication.
- Information on the elevator's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places was obtained from the Oregon City Planning Department.

[20] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retro-futurism

OREGON CITY
HISTORIC REVIEW PROGRAM
HISTORIC SURVEY & UPDATE PROJECT

McLoughlin Promenade

SIGNIFICANCE

Criterion C: Engineering

SUMMARY

Oregon City is built on a series of bluffs east of the Willamette River, the first a 100-foot cliff above the historic downtown. The McLoughlin Promenade consists of a 10-foot wide concrete multi-use pathway that extends 2300 feet along this bluff. Coursed rubble stone piers and reinforced concrete rails provide a barrier to the cliff's edge on the west. The promenade offers stunning views of the Willamette River and the historic Willamette Falls. To the east and encompassing the walkway is a 7.8-acre linear park donated to the city by Dr. John McLoughlin, Oregon City's founder, in the mid-19th century. This manicured park is wide enough to include picnic areas, trees and benches. Though some buildings are visible on its eastern edge, the park provides a peaceful, green landscape for those walking along the path.

At its northern edge, the promenade veers west at a sign for the Singer Hill Trail. The path becomes a set of concrete stairs known as the grand staircase that lead down the bluff. The grand staircase was constructed along the path once used by Native Americans who descended from the bluff to trade and fish on the banks of the river. At the bottom of the first flight of the grand staircase, the path splits. One path continues down the bluff, while a pedestrian tunnel leads east under Singer Hill Road and up to terminate near the historic McLoughlin House. The McLoughlin House was moved from its original location nearer the water in 1909, but retains much of its significance as the former home of Dr. John McLoughlin. Singer Creek flows from the east and follows the grand staircase down the bluff through a series of manmade concrete steps.

From its northern boundary, the main stretch of the promenade runs south past the Oregon City Municipal Elevator, reported to be the nation's only "vertical street," and terminates at a parking lot near the Museum of the Oregon Territory, just north of Tumwater Avenue. The Promenade was built by local engineers hired as part of the Works Project Administration project in 1936 and 37. This federal emergency agency for relief of American unemployment was created by order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on May 6, 1935, under authority of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act created in 1935.

SETTING

Oregon City grew along a narrow shelf of basalt on the eastern bank of the Willamette River about 20 river miles south of Portland, Oregon. The site was chosen for its proximity to the powerful Willamette Falls, the second largest falls in the United States. As the city grew, it spread over two bluffs to the east of the river, incorporating steep cliffs into its topography. The commercial downtown remained on the low bank of the river while residences began to populate the 100-foot bluff to the east in the 1870s. Dr. John McLoughlin dedicated 7.8 acres of bluff land to the city in 1851 to be used as a public park. This land along the edge of the bluff provides spectacular views of the Willamette River, the Willamette Falls, and downtown Oregon City. The path also provides views of the natural vegetation growing along the basalt

cliff. In the 1930s, the park was improved by a new promenade along the edge of the bluff, a manmade waterfall, and new concrete stairs down the bluff.

To the east of the park, the bluff is now populated by commercial, civic and residential buildings. These include City Hall, Oregon City's Carnegie library and the historic McLoughlin House museum, the first National Historic Site in the west. Many of the late 19th and early 20th century buildings in the surrounding neighborhood are now part of the McLoughlin Conservation District. Landmark residences that look toward the promenade and the cliff include the 1877 G.R.H. Miller House and the 1914 Arthur Howland House.

The narrow park east of the pathway is manicured and includes mature shade trees, plantings and grassy lawns. Picnic areas and resting points are fitted with metal benches and signage commemorating the nearby conservation district, the Kiwanis Club and the volunteers who donated time and materials to the landscaping of the park. Viewpoints and picnic areas allow for public use. The promenade can be easily accessed from north-south streets that terminate at the park.

To the west, the views to the lower tier of Oregon City are breathtaking. The southern edge of the promenade looks directly over the Willamette Falls, which is dominated by historic buildings associated with the Blue Heron Paper Mills and the paper mills that preceded it. North and south of the falls, the Willamette stretches without interruption and can be clearly seen from the path. Standing on the promenade, one looks west to the river, the historic downtown, the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, which are still in use by commercial and passenger rail, and a small stretch of Highway 99 East.

Near the northern boundary is the Oregon City Municipal Elevator, a unique futurist outdoor elevator that carries passengers between the bluff and the historic downtown below. The northern section of the promenade runs along Singer Hill Road, which turns into 7th Street, a major traffic corridor. Though a portion of the promenade runs along the roadway, the promenade soon heads west down the bluff, where it is surrounded by vegetation and the tranquility of the Singer Hill Creek Falls.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Promenade features a ten-foot wide concrete walkway with a variety of low stone and metal wall types along its 2300-foot length. The primary length of the promenade follows the contours of the bluff. This pathway forms the western edge of a 7.8 acre linear park. However, at its northern boundary, near a sign commemorating the Singer Hill Trail, the promenade veers west to the grand staircase, a wide, shallow set of concrete stairs leading down the bluff. Here, the wall consists of a 15-inch high concrete base topped by two horizontal metal rails at the three-foot level. Square piers are constructed of rock-faced stone. Walls and piers are ornamented with prominent beaded joints. This wall follows the western edge of the curved grand staircase down the side of the bluff. The eastern edge is defined by a solid wall of coursed, rock-faced stone. At the bottom of the first flight of the grand staircase, a landing leads east to a square opening in the wall, a pedestrian tunnel with walls of coursed, rock-faced stone. This tunnel, lit by lights inset into the smooth concrete ceiling, runs under Singer Hill Road and climbs up a series of concrete steps to the grounds of the McLoughlin House. Here, wall types are similar to those of the grand staircase. As it rises, the stair splits into two flights, one rising east toward the McLoughlin House and one rising south to connect with pedestrian sidewalks on 7th Street, which begins downtown and continues on the bluff.

The main leg of the grand staircase continues down the bluff to its terminus at the Oregon City Municipal Elevator's entrance at 7th Street and Railroad Avenue downtown. From the bluff and the grand staircase, Singer Creek is visible as it flows from the east, dropping through a series of man-made concrete pools and falling down the cliff to street level below, then flowing underground until it empties into the Willamette River just to the west of Downtown Oregon City.

From the northern boundary, the promenade's 10-foot wide path meanders south past two signs commemorating the McLoughlin Promenade, veers to the west of commercial buildings, and then passes the Oregon City Municipal Elevator. From 100 feet north of the elevator to 100 feet south, the western wall consists of a 44-inch high metal fence comprised of vertical, inch-square rods and accented with rock-faced stone piers measuring 4 feet by 14 inches set about 10'-6" apart. This is the only portion of the promenade that also includes an eastern wall, providing a barrier between the promenade and private property. The slightly curved stone wall extends from the Municipal Elevator tower about 100 feet south. This wall is constructed of coursed rock faced stones and stands 16 inches wide and 42 inches high, with a concrete cap, and square piers measuring 18 inches by four feet.

The remaining southern portion of the wall consists of sections made up of a 15-inch tall concrete base with a long, square reinforced concrete element set horizontally at the two foot level; the concrete bar is angled to resemble split rail fence. Coursed, rock-faced stone piers 28 inches high and 18 inches across mark each section measuring a total of ten feet. The Promenade's concrete path follows the bluff overlooking the Willamette River to the west, Willamette Falls, and the industrial complex in and on the Willamette River. Natural landscaping and rock outcroppings enhance the rock wall. The east side of the walkway abuts the yards of several historic houses situated on the prominent bluff. Approximately three hundred feet south of the elevator landing, the wall forms a semi-circular area with a metal plaque placed there by the local Kiwanis Club in 1972 listing contributors to a fund for the restoration of the Promenade. At that time, twelve lights on metal standards and a flagpole were added to the Promenade. About one block from the south end of the Promenade a metal walkway and stairs extends across Highway 99E to access the area on the west side of the highway. The Promenade ends at a large parking lot just north of Tumwater Avenue.

CONDITION

The city has maintained the Promenade since it was built in 1938, but deterioration has occurred over time. By the turn of the 21st century, the Promenade's stone wall and rail (1,400 linear feet) were in desperate need of restoration in order to maintain the safety and usability of the facility. The multi-use pathway overlooks a steep cliff and the wall's concrete rails, ledges and the rock mortar were spalling. The reinforcement rebar was failing. A contractor completed a survey of the Promenade's condition in 2001 and found severely weathered mortar joints, rusted iron railings, cracked and spalling concrete, missing and broken concrete rails, and rusting rebar.[21]

The City took a phased approach to restoration. Phase 1, completed in 2004, refurbished iron rails, replaced portions of sidewalk, and repaired large holes and missing stair nosings. Phase 2, completed in 2005, resulted in the mortar joint restoration on the outside facing wall of the grand staircase. Late phases, completed in 2010, included stonework (graffiti abatement, repointing of joints, resetting of cracked stone); concrete repair (repaired spalling; replaced failed railings); and repairs along the grand staircase (replacing concrete slabs; rebuilding the grand staircase).

[21] Condition assessment is taken from former city surveys.

No documentation has been found regarding earlier restoration work. However, local historians believe there was a restoration project on the Promenade in the 1960s.

TIMELINE

1851: McLoughlin dedicates 7.8 acres of bluff land to the city for a public park; it remains unimproved

1935: The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act was passed

1938: The Promenade walkway is constructed and stone walls added

1960s: Possible restoration project

2004: Phase 1 restoration completed

2005: Phase 2 restoration completed

2010: Final restoration completed

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preparation of this report involved consultation with the staff of the Oregon City Planning and Public Works departments; the staff at the Family Research Center; the staff at the Museum of the Oregon Territory, and the research librarian at the Oregon City Public Library. Special thanks to Karin Morey of the Chamber of Commerce for her help at the Family Research Center, and to Nancy Kraushaar and Kathy Griffin of Public Works.

Original research and on-site survey work included the following:

- Two site visits were conducted in August 2011, and photographs taken to document the Promenade as it exists today.
- Primary source material on the Promenade was obtained from the Oregon City Planning Department. These included previous surveys, condition assessment, and details of phased restoration projects.
- A small number of newspaper articles on the McLoughlin Promenade were obtained from the "Municipal Elevator" clipping file housed at the Family Research Center at the Museum of the Oregon Territory.

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