

A Walk in Salem's Historic Downtown in the 1940s.

In the 1940s, before shopping malls and giant parking lots, Salem families could find everything they wanted within a few downtown blocks: buy furniture, appliances, hardware and nursery plants for their homes; keep professional appointments or visit the bank; go to a movie or attend church; have a soda at the counter of a drug store or dine elegantly in one of several restaurants; shop in a variety of small retail establishments answering every household need. People of modest means lived downtown on the second floors above the shops and the more prosperous walked the few blocks from their fine homes. It was, in fact, the model of current Urban Redevelopment. The following self-guided walk will recall that Salem – and typical American towns of that period in our urban history.

Following is a script written for a First Wednesday walking tour event in September, 2006. The guides, representing residents in 1940s Salem, were Virginia Green as a typical lady shopping downtown, and Hazel Patton as Rosie the Riveter. “Rosie” symbolized the patriotic service of local women who took local men's jobs when they were called for military duty during WW II.

Events after the 1940s are in italics.

Begin at the intersection of Commercial and Ferry Street. *(Inside the entrance doors, you will see signage interpreting the historical importance of this location.)*

You are standing in the 1940's entrance of the **Marion Hotel** that was the centerpiece of Salem hospitality for more than 100 years.. *It was destroyed by fire in 1971 after over a hundred years as Salem's hospitality centerpiece.*

At the northwest corner of this intersection was the **Holman Building** where the Oregon legislature had met from 1857 to 1876. In 1946 the old building is occupied by **Valley Welding Supply Company**. In 1949, when the property owners intended to tear it down and build the **Marion Car Rental and Park**, a local group led by the State Archivist, David Duniway, attempted to save the historic building for civic use, but failed. This was one of the first elevated, rooftop parking structures in Salem, providing automobile service and parking in the post-World War II downtown commercial area.

At southeast corner of Commercial and State Streets is the **U S National Bank** at **302 State Street**. Until 1940, this had been **Ladd and Bush Bank**. In 1868 Asahel Bush entered the banking business here in association with William S Ladd of Portland. *The building was completely renovated between 1965 and 1967: the concrete exterior walls rebuilt to match the original and the cast-iron exterior of the demolished Ladd and Tilton Bank in Portland applied.*

Turning to the left at this corner, you will be walking along State Street. In 1946 you see industrial buildings ahead of you at Front Street. The pollution from these industrial sites often caused grey skies over the adjoining downtown enterprises. *This area is now Riverfront Park and the South Block apartment complex.*

On the corner at **260 State Street** was **Hogg Brothers Furniture**. Families bought their household appliances here.

The **Catlin Building** at **246 State Street** was built in 1908. The site has a longer history, being formerly the location of the Tiger Engine Fire House, No. 2 organized in 1869. It continued as a volunteer organization until 1893 when the city of Salem created a paid department that moved into the City Hall fire station.

Manning Company Building at **210 State Street** was part of the original town plat of 1851 and was acquired by Thomas Holman in 1873. In 1905 the brick structure was built for Samuel Manning, the local Studebaker Horse Carriage and farm machinery agent. In 1945 the **Salem Seed and Implement Company** is here.

Cross State at Front Street corner, walk back to Commercial Street:

The Boise Building at **217 State Street** was a warehouse in the mid-1940s. The original owner was R. P. Boise, Jr. a well-known northwest journalist and owner of the *Oregon Statesman* (1879-1934) and the Tacoma, Washington, *Daily News* (1885-7). This 1913 building reflects the original design except for two vehicle access doors.

The Salvation Army Building occupied their Gothic revival building at **241 State Street**. It had been built about 1930 with the fund-raising efforts of the Salem Elks Lodge, replacing a wood-frame building purchased in 1919. The Salvation Army came to Salem in the 1880s during a period of economic depression and has continued its principles of charity to the imprisoned, hungry and elderly in need.

Pioneer Trust Bank at **109-117 Commercial Street** was the first steel and concrete fire-resistant building in Salem. It included all the latest banking conveniences when built in 1909 by J. P. Rogers, owner of the US National Bank of Salem. After acquisition of Ladd and Bush Bank by U.S. National Bank in 1940, the Ladd and Bush Trust Company moved into this building and changed its name to Pioneer Trust Bank. *In the 1950s, the building, long a victim of the nearby industrial pollution, was power-cleaned returning it to its original white color.*

Walk north on Commercial Street:

Capitol National Bank Building at **129 Commercial Street** was occupied by **Huggins Insurance** in the mid-1940s. This 1880 bank building had been remodeled in 1892 to its rusticated stone appearance, reportedly a replica of Philadelphia's 1884 First National Bank of the Republic designed by Frank Furness. The bank occupied the building until the 1920s.

Bush-Breyman Block at **147 Commercial Street** has always housed retail stores. When built in 1889, the original building was twice the size: the Bush portion (southern half) was damaged by fire in 1960 and subsequently demolished. However, in the 1940s, the soda fountain of **Schaeffer Drugs** in this building was a favorite for the after-school ice cream cones enjoyed by students waiting for a city bus transfer on their way home. Remodeled in 1928, it retains its High Victorian Italianate architectural integrity above the ground floor display windows.

Upstairs at **162 1/3 Commercial** was the exotic **Chinese Tea Garden**. Although Asian foods were unfamiliar to most Salem residents, one could always order tea and fortune cookies with confidence.

The 1889 **Bush and Bray Block** at **179-197 Commercial Street** was occupied by the popular **Busick & Sons Grocery** (on the corner). Adjacent was **Newmans** with **Burroughs Electric** next door to the south.

At **261 Commercial Street** was **Fitts Market**, advertising "Fish, Poultry, Oysters, Clams and Crabs, Wholesale and Retail, Established 1901." Senior citizens recall the fish sign above the door, with a fascinating moving tail.

Starkey – McCully Building at **223-233 Commercial Street** housed the **Army and Navy Store**. Although only 70 of the original 120 feet of the building remain, it is notable because the cast iron decoration is believed to be the oldest of its kind in Oregon. It was built in 1867 by Asa McCully and John L. Starkey with money from the California Gold Rush.

The **South First National Bank Block** at **247 Commercial Street** was built in 1887 when wooden buildings were being replaced by brick. It was later known as Benjamin Forstner Store Building.

On the other side of Commercial, now walking south, is the **Eldridge/Greenbaum Building** at **240 Commercial Street**. This was the home of "**Greenbaums**", a popular variety store supplying the needs of local households. Originally it extended south to the end of the block. Wilbur Boothby developed the property in 1890. In 1919 the local merchant partnership of Rostein and Greenbaum bought the building where they had conducted business since 1900.

Pearce Building at **305-321 Court Street** was occupied by the **Moderne Gift Shop and Moderne Modes Women's Clothing**. In early 1940s, a dancing school on the second floor taught young ladies and gentleman the art of ballroom dancing. This building was remodeled in 1940 for two sisters, Helen and Dorothy Pearce, well-known local educators. The sisters had acquired the property in 1918 from Wade and Pierce Company. George Pearce, their father was president of the firm when it was incorporated in 1885.

Breyman Brothers Block at 174-188 Commercial Street was originally two Italianate buildings constructed thirty years apart. They retain their original second floor exterior appearance. The brothers Werner and Eugene Breyman purchased the northern part of the property in 1869, constructing the present building in 1874. This block, painted white in contrast to the darker color of other commercial buildings, was known as the "White Corner". The buildings retained their original appearance until the late 1940s when the Breyman/Boise family had the exteriors updated and modernized, unifying their appearance.

Turn the corner into Court Street:

Court Street Dairy Lunch at **347 Court Street** has been here since 1929. *It was owned and operated by the Morris family until recently.*

Across the alley were several retail stores including, in earlier years, the **Central Cigar Store** at **377 Court Street**. This establishment sold food and drinks with billiards and cards in the back, becoming a meeting place for farm and transient laborers, the manager serving as banker for the transients. Before 1889, it was the site of **Sung Lung Washing and Ironing**. Between 1880 and 1910, several hundred Chinese labors, who had come to Oregon as railroad workers and farm laborers, lived and worked in downtown Salem.

Millers Department Store was on the corner of **Court and Liberty Streets**. Now, restored to its original name, it is the **The Reed Opera House**. Constructed for Cyrus A. Reed in 1869, the Oregon Supreme Court and State Library were located on the third floor, a 1,500 seat auditorium was housed on the second, and seven stores were at street level. Its closing in 1900 was the result of the opening of the Grand Theater Opera House. The interior was then redesigned for Joseph Myers and Sons (and later Miller's) Department Store. The overhead vacuum tube system which sent cash flying up into the offices, was a delight to youngsters. *After a major rehabilitation of the building in 1976, the building became the focal point of a major downtown redevelopment.*

Looking down Liberty Street at this corner, you will see the site of the 1940's **Montgomery Ward** (1936, Robert Rowe) at **155 Liberty Street**. Lansing S. Skiff, a pioneer in Oregon dentistry, bought this property in the early 1860s. His son Mark contracted an agreement with the Montgomery Ward Company to construct a catalog store at this location. The Colonial Revival style building was occupied by this national retail enterprise for several decades.

Just beyond was the **Bishop's Clothing Store** at **145 Liberty Street**. Built by the Gray brothers in 1894, the building was purchased by Eugene Eckerlen in 1909. From 1936, when the building was remodeled, until 1960 it was occupied by Bishop's. Charles P Bishop came to Salem in 1889 and helped build and operate the woolen mill owned by his father-in-law, Thomas Kay, Sr. *The family now owns the Pendleton Wool Company.*

Continuing on Court Street:

In the eastern, 1895 Queen Anne section of the Skiff Block at **429 Court Street**, was the **Fashionette**, a ladies' clothing store. The western building was constructed in 1906 and contained offices and shops. *The property remained in the Skiff family until the late 1980s.*

At the corner of Court and High Streets, you turn north and be at the ornate Victorian **City Hall** at the end of the block. This was also the city jail. *This building was demolished and the present new one erected in 1972.*

For this tour, turn south on High:

The Grand Hotel and Theater was at **195 High Street**. Formerly the **Odd Fellows Hall**, the main building was designed in Richardson Romanesque style. It adjoined the Central Stage Terminal/Hotel, both built by the Odd Fellows: the income from rentals in these properties supported the work of this fraternal order. The Grand Theater opened in Odd Fellows Hall in 1900, providing popular movie entertainment. Salem residents still remember the drinking fountain in the lobby, dedicated to Will Rogers. Its use gradually declined after the Elsinore was built in 1927 and closed in 1950. *After a period of temporary use by other renters, it has now been extensively renovated.*

Masonic Temple at **101 High Street** was built in 1912 in Mediterranean/Moorish style. This six-floor building was vacant for a period of years, but has recently been remodeled and renamed as The Franklin Building. It contains offices with a ballroom on the upper floor.

Elsinore Theater at **170 High Street** was built and owned by George Guthrie, a local attorney. It opened in 1926 with a DeMille silent film, "The Volga Boatman". This theater featured film, stage shows and, for a time, movies with vaudeville. In the 1930s,

Salem youngsters enjoyed performances of “Zollie’s Gang” and, in later years, the Mickey Mouse Club. *The Elsinore has been restored as one of the few remaining examples of Tudor Gothic theater design.*

Back on State Street, walking west:

On the southwest corner of Liberty and State Streets was the six-story **Guardian Building** containing, among other stores and doctors’ offices, **Quizenberry Pharmacy**. The building burned in the late 1940s. The popular **Man’s Shop** was next door.

Hartman Jeweler was located across the street at **105-135 Liberty Street**. In this 1891 Italianate style building was known as the Gray Building. Three Gray brothers operated hardware and contracting businesses. Russell Catlin obtained ownership of the building and by 1914 it had been broken up into four shop on the ground floor with offices above.

Pomeroy Jewelry was at 379-383 State Street (next door to Hartman’s) In 1860 this building was constructed as a rooming house. In 1925 Charles T. Pomeroy, a jeweler, and A. A. Keene purchased the building and remodeled it into two retail stores. A jewelry store at this location was managed by Audrey Pomeroy into the 1990s. Her brother had an adjoining optical shop.

Cross State Street at the alley.

Cooke’s Stationary was at **360 State Street**. After a fire, three brick buildings were constructed here in 1880 to replace the wooden ones that had been destroyed. In 1935 J. L. Cooke moved his stationery business next door in this building known as the Adolph Block. James A. Henery purchased the business in 1957. It is now operated by his son and daughter. The **Spa Restaurant**, in the same block, was popular for family dining in the 1930s and 1940’s.

The First National Bank Building at **388 State Street** has been our highest commercial structure since 1926. This 11-story building was financed (through the bank) by Thomas Livesley who was mayor, member of the Board of the bank and local hops dealer with an international business. The bank was housed at ground level (also Stevens and Sons Jewelers from 1940s to 1982), the upper floors by offices of the medical profession.

Walk south on **Liberty to Ferry Street**. At the southeast corner was the **Crystal Ballroom**. With dancing on the main and second floors, and a swimming pool in the basement, this was a center of entertainment for many years.

*Across the street you will see we have arrived at the Grand Hotel. Walk through the lobby and into the **Convention Center** where the walk began.*

This ends the walk script as it was composed in 2006. In 2022, the downtown is much changed, but still features many of these historic buildings. If it is not the retail center of earlier days, it has other attractions. Apartment complexes and Riverfront Park attractions have taken the place of industrial sites, making it attractive to residents and visitors. The restored Union Street Bridge and the recently constructed Peter Courtney-Minto Brown Bridge allow pedestrians easy access to parks on each side of the Willamette River.

And tradition is still remembered in 2022: a new hotel rises where the historic **Holman Building** once housed Oregon's first legislature.

Our belated thanks to the late **MaryLou McKay Green** for her recollections of life here in the 1940s period of local history. She was an invaluable guide as we began research in a community where she had lived all her life, but was unknown to us as recent residents in Salem. Her excellent memory, as well as her wit, made composing this walk a pleasure.