

## Statement of Historic Context

### Stayton's Origin

In 1866 a resident of Sublimity, Oregon, Drury Smith Stayton, purchased 41 acres of heavily forested land on a terrace above the flood plain of the North Santiam River, a major tributary of the Willamette River.<sup>1</sup> Ten years before, a group of Salem entrepreneurs had successfully diverted water from the North Santiam into Mill Creek, a seasonal watershed that empties into the Willamette and had been used by the early settlers of Salem as a source of water power.<sup>2</sup> The enhanced stream flow from the Salem Ditch diversion of the Santiam permitted Salem to big larger water powered mills with the expectation of year-round operation.

Drury Stayton's plan was to create a similar but much shorter diversion of the river to provide water power sites on his newly purchased property. He and members of his family began digging the necessary ditches and by 1868 had a small water powered wool carding plant in operation followed in 1870 by a sawmill.<sup>3</sup> A six block town site was platted, named, and given a post office in 1872. By 1878, six water powered industries were operating on the Stayton Ditch and the town had a population of around 300.<sup>4</sup>

More or less paralleling the growth of the town was an increased use of Stayton as a place to cross the North Santiam. Ferry service was available from at least 1870 and an inter-county wagon bridge was completed in 1889.<sup>5</sup>

### Development of Stayton as a Market Town

In 1871, a young Sublimity man, W. H. Hobson, set up a general merchandise store in a vacant building near the Marion County side of the ferry crossing with the intent of disposing of some merchandise that his father had taken to satisfy a debt.<sup>6</sup> Business was so brisk that Hobson soon relocated his store onto one of the lots of the new town

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, Mathilda Siegmund, "History of Stayton," Marion County Historical Society, vol. 1, 1955

<sup>2</sup> Lomax, Alfred L., *Pioneer Woolen Mills of Oregon*, Binford & Mort, 1941

<sup>3</sup> Jones, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Historical Atlas Map of Marion & Linn Counties, Oregon*, Edgar Williams & Co., 1878

<sup>5</sup> "A History of the North Santiam Bridge at Stayton," published by Marion County, 1965

<sup>6</sup> Lockley, Fred, from an interview with W. H. Hobson, *Oregon Journal*, 2 June 1926

of Stayton where he continued in the general merchandise business for some 40 years. Other merchants and providers of service soon followed. A sketch map prepared by an early Stayton resident identifies some 65 buildings in the town ca. 1885.<sup>7</sup> Of these, 15 are retail or service businesses. A 1904 photographic view of the town<sup>8</sup> shows that although the population had remained nearly constant,<sup>9</sup> the number of buildings devoted to commerce had doubled to about 30.

The 1904 photo also indicates mercantile building types and distribution. While the earliest stores were concentrated on Water Street, near the water powered mills, by 1904 there had been a considerable extension northward along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The store buildings were, with one exception, wooden frame structures, mostly one story and usually with the rectilinear façade sometimes called "pioneer false front" concealing the roof gable end. The one important exception shown in the 1904 photo was the appearance of Stayton's first masonry structure, the newly completed Stayton State Bank, about mid way between the Salem and Stayton Ditches. This building would "anchor" the newly developing Stayton business district.

#### Stayton State Bank Construction

The construction of the 1904 bank building was a joint enterprise between members of the Freres family who were organizing Stayton's first bank,<sup>10</sup> and Eugene Roy, a French born jeweler and optometrist who had moved to Stayton in 1891.<sup>11</sup> The new bank was to be located on residential property belonging to Roy and in April of 1904, his house was moved a few feet north to clear the building site.<sup>12</sup> In May, the one story 50' x 60' building was started using the locally available basalt shale. Outcroppings of this shale occur on a ridge about a half mile north and east of the original town site and the stone had long been used as foundation footing material under the older buildings in town.<sup>13</sup> The bank was Stayton's first attempt to use it for an entire structure.

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<sup>7</sup> Stayton, Ethel, sketch map of Stayton businesses & residences, ca. 1885; unpublished ;manuscript in collection of Santiam Heritage Foundation (hereafter SHF)

<sup>8</sup> unattributed 6" x 15" original print in SHF collection

<sup>9</sup> 1900 census, 324, quoted from City of Stayton Comp. Plan, 1998

<sup>10</sup> *The Stayton Mail* (hereafter *SML*) 6 Jan. 1905 -- organizers, P. C. Freres, N. Freres, & W. L. Freres

<sup>11</sup> *SML* 1 April 1937 from Roy obituary

<sup>12</sup> *SML* 15 April 1904

<sup>13</sup> see *SML* 22 Jan. 1904 & 16 June 1905 for accounts of the Polreis quarry

The local shale is far from being an ideal building material. It was quarried in irregular slabs usually one to four inches thick with relatively smooth but often tapered surfaces. The slab edges were highly irregular and the basalt was so hard and brittle as to virtually defy any close working of the stone. Even carefully laid walls required heavy applications of stucco or plaster to achieve a smooth surface. That the 1904 bank emerged as a tidy, if undistinguished, structure was a tribute to the skill and perseverance of its builders; that the builders chose to use this easily available but intractable material is an eloquent testimony to the problem of transportation of heavy freight that plagued Stayton for most of its early life.

### The Transportation Factor

During the 1880's, two railway lines approached Stayton but each missed the town by several miles. The lack of immediate rail access was a great disadvantage to the town's industries<sup>14</sup> and was almost certainly a factor in the late, rather tentative beginning of masonry construction and was very likely a factor in the eventual choice of concrete stone as the dominant early 20<sup>th</sup> century building material.

### Other Significant Market Town Construction -- 190~~5~~<sup>5</sup>-1908

Between the completion of the Stayton State Bank building and the beginning of the first concrete stone structure, two large wood frame store buildings were added to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. business district. These buildings would be more predictive of Stayton's future streetscape than the bank. In 1905, G. D. Trotter who had been operating a general merchandise store in one of the old false front buildings on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. started construction of a 48' x 80' wooden frame building directly south, across Ida Street, from the new bank.<sup>15</sup> A full two stories high with a low pitch flat roof surrounded by a parapet, the ground floor was divided into a "double store" arrangement.<sup>16</sup> These features would become more or less standard for subsequent business building construction. The following year, a new buggy, wagon, and harness merchant in town, John Mielke, built

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<sup>14</sup> Dozens of promises and pleas for a rail connection can be found in *The Stayton Mail*; the most detailed can be found 3 April 1908 & 1 April 1910; a 22 June 1910 headline proclaimed "Railroad Shortly Reality." A spur would not reach Stayton until 1964, by which time rail transport was irrelevant.

<sup>15</sup> *SML* 16 June 1905

<sup>16</sup> *SML* 1 Sept. 1905

a 50' x 60' double store about a block south of the Trotter building.<sup>17</sup> The next summer, Mielke had his wooden building covered with sheets of metal embossed to resemble the "rock face" pattern of concrete stone.<sup>18</sup> The building was given a well-proportioned metal cornice and adorned with double ball finials and a centered pediment. Mr. Trotter intended to finish his building in a similar material but never got around to it and its unpainted shiplap siding remained as something of an eyesore until the building burned in 1934. Another basalt shale building was put up in 1908 on the eve of the appearance of concrete stone in Stayton. A prosperous blacksmith, Henry Mutchler, had his old 25' x 50' wooden frame shop on Water Street rebuilt with shale walls<sup>19</sup> but indulged in the luxury of a brick trimmed street entry. The building survives at 240 East Water although the exterior walls are no longer visible.

#### Town Growth -- 1905-1910

By 1905, the Stayton State Bank building had four tenants. The south half of the double store layout with a corner entrance was the bank's; the north half with a large display window and an entrance from 3<sup>rd</sup> was Eugene Roy's jewelry store which he soon shared with C. A. Beauchamp who had just opened Stayton's second drug store.<sup>20</sup> And at nearly the same time, Stayton's first telephone switchboard was installed at the rear of the building in a room which had a separate entry onto Ida Street.<sup>21</sup>

Between 1900 and 1910 the population of Stayton more than doubled from 324 to 703.<sup>22</sup> The water powered mills on the Stayton Ditch were operating at perhaps their peak of productivity; a second small flour mill powered by water from the Salem Ditch had been re-activated;<sup>23</sup> and two new water powered industries, a large woolen mill<sup>24</sup> and a wood excelsior shaving plant had been completed in 1906.<sup>25</sup> The relative prosperity and optimism generated by this industrial growth were undoubtedly factors in the

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<sup>17</sup> SML 9 Nov. 1906

<sup>18</sup> SML 28 June 1907

<sup>19</sup> SML 14 Feb. 1908

<sup>20</sup> SML 16 June 1905

<sup>21</sup> SML 23 June 1905

<sup>22</sup> Census figures from City of Stayton Comp. Plan, 1989, p.7 The 14 Feb. 1908 edition of *The Stayton Mail* claimed a population of about 800 and that it had doubled in the last five years.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> SML 3 Nov. 1905 & 16 Feb. 1906

<sup>25</sup> SML 28 Dec. 1906 & 14 June 1907

astonishing re-figuring of the market town between 1908 and 1911. That the re-figuring would be done in concrete stone was in part coincidence and a rather logical convergence of factors of transportation, availability of materials, and an understandable local attitude: the business men who commissioned these buildings just liked the idea.

In December of 1906, Eugene Roy purchased a large plot of ground two blocks north on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. and prepared to move his house which was next to the bank building,<sup>26</sup> and in June of 1907 had an old barn on the property torn down.<sup>27</sup>

In April of 1908 the first of a series of ads appeared in *The Stayton Mail* announcing the local availability of "cement stone" from L. P. Brown,<sup>28</sup> and the following week, a news story reported that L. P. Brown's cement stone machine would supply the blocks for Eugene Roy's new double store.<sup>29</sup>

Lloyd Brown was a nephew of Leander Brown who had owned the local sawmill since 1884.<sup>30</sup> Lloyd Brown's cement stone yard was located at 1<sup>st</sup> and Ida, not far from Eugene Roy's building site, and not far from the Santiam River.<sup>31</sup>

### The Concrete Stone Era

The pre-cast concrete building block was an exciting technological innovation during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1906, over 300 designs of block casting machines were available<sup>32</sup>, ranging from large, steam operated casting lines mass producing blocks to the relatively inexpensive, two man, "face down" casting boxes that were used in Stayton.

The concrete building blocks used in Stayton were made locally. Two "yards" have been documented, one at 1<sup>st</sup> and Ida, the other in the 200 block of West Water Street.

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<sup>26</sup> SML 24 Dec. 1906

<sup>27</sup> SML 7 June 1907

<sup>28</sup> SML 3 April 1908

<sup>29</sup> SML 10 April 1908

<sup>30</sup> SML 1 Jan. 1909, Brown obit.

<sup>31</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Stayton, Oregon, 1913 ed.

<sup>32</sup> Rice, Harmon Howard, *Concrete Block Manufacture*, John Wiley & Sons, 1908 (OSU Library TP885-C7-R5)

The blocks for some of the buildings may have been cast on-site as this was commonly done. It is possible that hand-mixed concrete was used by some of the builders. The blocks were, essentially, hand made and, with the exception of the cement, of local material. Sacks of Portland cement were brought by wagon from the nearest railway connection at West Stayton. Sand and gravel was hauled from the nearby Santiam River and hand sifted if necessary--no mechanized crushing and sifting facilities existed locally until the 1920's.<sup>33</sup>

The blocks used in Stayton are generally 8" x 8" x 16" with two hollow cores. The "rock face" casting plate was favored for the building facades, laid with torus mortar joints. Side walls used plain face blocks although some interesting combinations of the two faces and other ornamental patterns can be found on several of the buildings described in Section F.

Of the twelve concrete stone buildings that were built in Stayton, nine survive within a block and a half radius on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. between High and Water streets.<sup>34</sup>

Isolated examples of concrete stone construction can be found all over the state but Stayton seems to possess a remarkable concentration of these buildings which also exhibit interesting varieties of detail.

None of the concrete stone buildings in Stayton were painted originally; that practice started in the 1950's.

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<sup>33</sup> Lau, Ernst *The Waterways of Stayton* Santiam Heritage Foundation pub. 2001

<sup>34</sup> See *Sanborn* and City of Stayton property maps with keyed locations of these buildings.