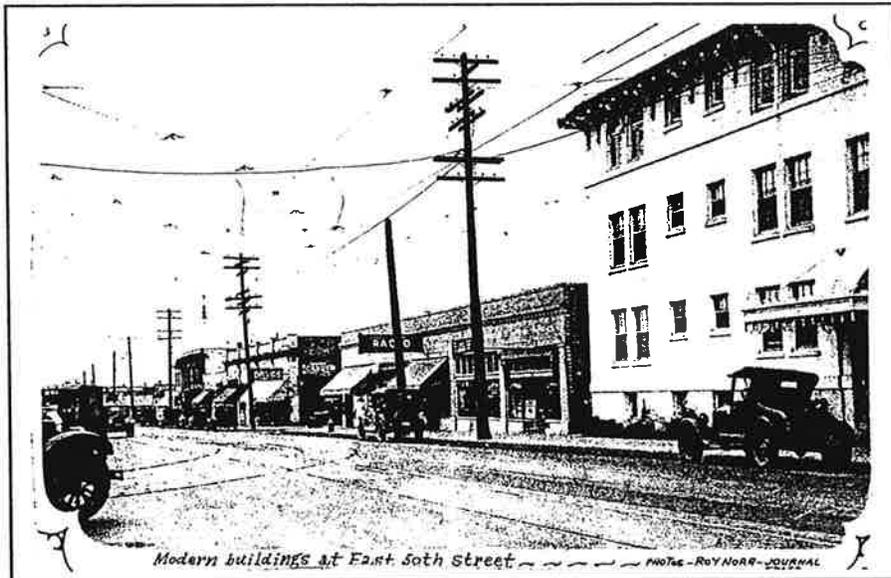


HISTORIC CONTEXT

Hawthorne Boulevard from SE 20th to SE 55th Avenues

Prepared for the Hawthorne Boulevard
Transportation Improvements Project,
Section 106 Documentation



**City of Portland
Bureau of Planning
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INTRODUCTION

The City's Office of Transportation initiated the Hawthorne Boulevard Project following City Council's adoption of the Hawthorne Boulevard Transportation Plan in July 1997. The improvements, which will be constructed starting in 2004, will make safer pedestrian crossings, enhance the boulevard's pedestrian environment, support access to businesses on the street, improve transit access and amenities, provide bicycle parking for cyclists visiting the boulevard, and maintain automobile and truck access. (Questions about the transportation project may be addressed to: Jean Senechal, Portland Office of Transportation, 1120 SW 5th Avenue, Suite 800, Portland, OR 97204; (503) 823-7211.)

This document, *Historic Context, Hawthorne Boulevard from SE 20th to SE 55th Avenues*, supports materials prepared to evaluate historic resources in an area that may be affected by the Hawthorne transportation project. The Bureau of Planning (BOP) prepared the document under an interagency agreement with the Portland Office of Transportation (PDOT), which has undertaken the project in the Hawthorne Boulevard area of southeast Portland. This *Historic Context* is one of the documentation materials submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in fulfillment of federal Section 106 requirements for the PDOT project.

Other Bureau of Planning prepared documents that are part of the Section 106 evaluation include Section 106 Documentation forms for properties in the project area, prepared in February 2003; and Finding of Effect forms, to be prepared in March 2003. All required documents have been or will be submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office in accordance with requirements of the Section 106 process. Questions about the Section 106 process and documents may be addressed to: Christine Curran, 1115 Commercial Street NE, Salem, OR 97301 (503) 378-4168. Questions about the *Historic Context* may be addressed to: Liza Mickle, Bureau of Planning, 1900 SW Fourth Avenue, Portland, OR 97201; (503) 823-7666.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

EARLY SETTLEMENT

Hawthorne Boulevard's historic significance begins with its earliest recorded ownership. Originally held by John McLoughlin of the Hudson Bay Trading Co., the land was subsequently sold to James B. Stephens, who in 1850 designated Hawthorne (then titled U Street) the southernmost boundary of the new city of East Portland. The same year, Stephens established the Stark Street ferry to transport agricultural commodities from fertile eastern areas to the fledgling town of Portland and beyond. Used by farmers as a commercial transit route, U Street was only a small dirt road, extending as far as present day 39th Avenue. During the California and Southern Oregon gold rush of 1849, Stephens' agricultural shipping monopoly made him a handsome profit.

Outer east side Hawthorne Boulevard was slower to develop than the area closer to the Willamette River. One major event, the 1846 forest fire popularly known as the "Big Burn," had a critical impact on this area's development. The fire, starting at the base of Mt. Scott and spreading almost to the Columbia River, cleared much of the thick forest at a time when settlers had just begun to stake claims.¹ The result was an inviting flat, grassy area that was perfectly suited for pioneering farmers. [Some evidence suggests that the Kalapuya Indians of the Willamette Valley regularly burned the valley's vegetation, producing an already existent pastoral environment.²]

From the late 1840s until 1855, early settlers like Clinton Kelly and Dr. Perry Prettyman staked claims just west of Mt. Tabor. Early farmers most likely did not commute to downtown Portland, but did much of their business through Stephens' Stark Street ferry. The Mt. Tabor orchards made many of these early farmers prosperous. In 1856, exports of apples alone totaled 20,000 boxes, which sold for nearly \$2 per pound.³ In 1851, much of the land that now lies between SE 30th and SE 38th fell under the land claim of farmer Sheldon Murray. After farming sections of his claim for six years, he began to sell off portions for about \$10 an acre. The larger of these portions, the 160 acres that later became part of the Sunnyside neighborhood, went to James and Jane Abraham.⁴

In 1858, another important figure, Dr. J. C. Hawthorne, arrived in Portland to care for many of the county's indigent patients. Impressed by Dr. Hawthorne's devotion and eager to see his town of East Portland grow, Stephens donated seven acres of prime property to the Oregon Hospital for the Insane in 1862. The hospital was constructed on a tract bounded by present-day Hawthorne Boulevard, SE Taylor Street, SE 9th and SE 12th avenues. At this time, U Street became known as

¹ Grant Nelson, "Mt. Tabor – From Forest to Families," *TimeImage* (October 1978), p. 18.

² Ken Ames, "Imagining Mt. Tabor 300 Years Ago," *Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association Newsletter* (Fall 2001), p. 1.

³ Nelson, "Mt. Tabor," p. 20.

⁴ *ibid.*

community transformed from agricultural to suburban. Mount Tabor farmland was purchased for investments and home building; as a consequence, the land was split into relatively small tracts. This made it difficult for any one person to assemble enough land to permit large development. With the exception of the Sunnyside, which was sizeable, many small subdivisions grew up around the base of Mt. Tabor.¹³

THE STREETCAR ERA

By the 1880s, as the east side of the Willamette River surpassed the west side in industry and new growth, land developers were looking east of the river for regional residential growth. The Hospital for the Insane closed in 1883 and the area was converted into an attractive tree-lined park. With the closing of the hospital, the name Asylum Avenue was deemed distasteful by East Portland residents. In April 1888, an ordinance was passed “that the street known as Asylum Street be changed to Hawthorne Avenue.”¹⁴

During the 1880s there was also a tremendous surge in transit-related development. In 1886, the Madison Street Bridge Company was incorporated, followed by the Sunnyside Land and Improvement Company in 1887. The East Portland building boom officially began with the completion of the Morrison Bridge in 1887. By 1888, the Willamette Bridge Company had built a streetcar line running directly to the housing development of Sunnyside, which claimed Hawthorne for its southern boundary. Prior to 1889, Portland had unsatisfactory transportation to developing suburbs and many east side residents found that it was faster to walk downtown than to take horse-drawn cars. Because streetcars brought about street and transit improvements, patronage on the cars was high. The electric and steam cars could be operated at up to half the cost of horse cars and the service was faster, causing commercial and residential real estate along streetcar lines to blossom.¹⁵

In 1888, the Mt. Tabor Street Railway Co. ran a steam-powered streetcar down Hawthorne Boulevard between present-day SE 5th and SE 54th avenues.¹⁶ Until then, the street had been a country road, with a number of adjacent orchards and berry fields. The new route proved popular and was eventually extended south along SE 50th Avenue to the Lents neighborhood. The track divergence at 50th is the cause of today’s irregular intersection at 50th and Hawthorne.¹⁷ The Madison Street Bridge (the predecessor of today’s Hawthorne Bridge) was completed in January 1891 and allowed for a direct streetcar commute westward from Mt. Tabor to downtown Portland.

With regular streetcar service to downtown, the Hawthorne Boulevard area continued to transform from a rural agricultural community to an expanding streetcar suburb. Subdivisions with homes formed to the north and south of the

¹³ Paulson, “Mount Tabor – Development Followed the Streetcar,” *Portland Neighborhood Stories*, V. 2. (OHS)

¹⁴ *Oregonian*, 10 September 1951, “Hawthorne Once Called Asylum Street,” p. M3.

¹⁵ Percy Maddux, *City on the Willamette: The Story of Portland, Oregon* (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1952) pp. 98-100.

¹⁶ Zisman, *Portland Oregon’s Eastside Historic and Architectural Resources, 1850-1938*, Section E, p. 12.

¹⁷ *East Portland Community Plan Project Summary Report*, 25 August 1997, p. 45.

The influence of the streetcar lines on the east side is very perceptible. There has been a steady appreciation of all kinds of property. They have stimulated the building of cottages for rent. The demand for cottages on the east side does not flag even now. But it may be stated that outside of those mentioned very little effort is being made to supply the demand. It is estimated that there are 2,000 acres of vacant land inside of the city. In fact, East Portland spreads over almost as much ground as Portland.²⁵

The new streetcar line coincided with the annexation of East Portland into the city of Portland in 1891. This resulted in a number of infrastructure changes: the streets on the east side of the Willamette were renamed to allow for continuity and a new and improved water main and sewage system was installed. The Asylum-creek sewage district was the largest in the city in 1895.²⁶ These key developments further facilitated population growth in the Hawthorne area. Overcrowding in West Portland caused a greater demand for affordable housing on the east side, and, as stated in the *Oregonian*, developers were hardly keeping up with this demand.

Other plattings in 1888 were Glencoe Park, Second Electric Addition, and the Crystal Springs Park Tract. A year later, the tracts of Dolan's Addition, Cherrydale, Brookdale, Bowne Addition, Hawthorne Addition, and Hawthorne Place were platted along Hawthorne Boulevard. By 1892, 19 of the 35 plats along Hawthorne were registered. Although platting continued at a brisk pace, the area still retained a relatively rural feel and actual building construction lagged. One local woman recalled that Sunnyside "was sparse back then." The upper area consisted mainly of cow pastures, and the horses that pulled the wagons for a local dairy were kept in stables where Sunnyside Elementary School sits today. "There were plank sidewalks and a place where horses could get a drink," the woman recalled. "I remember the streetcars and the saloon."²⁷

Employment opportunities accompanied platting. For example, a shoe factory was built in 1889 at SE 36th and Main, promising to employ workers from the surrounding neighborhood [the building was destroyed by fire after only a few months in operation]. The development company of J. Fred Clark & Son used this as a selling point in their Sunnyside advertisement: "1500 inhabitants to be added within six months, by reason of the shoe factory located there. Now is the time to buy, as every building put up in the tract increases values. If you want a home or desire to make money, call and see."²⁸ To appeal to homebuyers, real estate agents hoped to portray Hawthorne as a bustling boulevard with a more urban feel.²⁹ This kind of advertisement was highly effective for increasing the value of undeveloped land along Hawthorne. However, land and real estate speculation seemed to take precedence over actual commercial and home site construction and full-scale development did not occur until after 1905.

The 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition provided a jolt to Portland's economy, the benefits of which were largely realized in an ensuing east side housing boom. From 1905 to 1912 the population center for Portland was permanently shifted to the

²⁵ *Oregonian*, 29 August 1888, "Growth of the East Side," p. 3.

²⁶ *Oregonian*, 1 January 1895, "The Sewerage System," p. 31.

²⁷ Suzanne Richards, *Oregonian*, 1988, "Bertha Green Black." Sunnyside vertical file. (OHS)

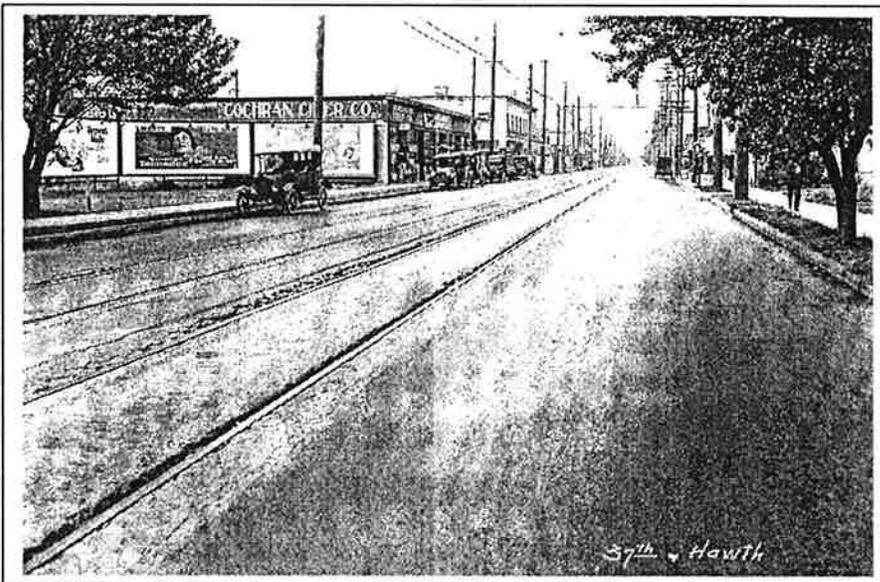
²⁸ *Oregonian*, 5 July 1889, Advertisement Section.

²⁹ *Oregonian*, 10 June 1889, Advertisement Section.

THE MOTOR AGE

The early 1900s building boom lasted for less than a decade. Although Portland ranked thirteenth in the country for new construction in 1912, the real-estate market collapsed in 1913-14 due to mounting tensions in Europe and the outbreak of World War I.³⁶ Many residential properties built along Hawthorne during the Streetcar Era were converted to retail or mixed-use.

With the foundation of the AutoBus Co. in 1915 and a steady increase in personal automobiles, streetcar ridership declined. In that year, Portland had the third most extensive electric railway system in the country but it was no competition for the convenience of the automobile.³⁷ Streetcar tracks aged and maintenance costs grew. With a rising minimum wage and higher maintenance costs, streetcar companies were forced to raise the fare from five to six cents. This defied City law that firmly established railway fare at a nickel. After a legal battle the fare remained at six cents, but the railways companies had already suffered financially.³⁸ A less expensive transit choice was to replace some railway lines with diesel buses.³⁹ An inevitable result was a doubling of vehicular traffic on city bridges between 1913 and 1916, with commuter automobiles and private motor cars running adjacent to old tracks.⁴⁰ In 1918, city planners deemed Hawthorne one of the city's busiest thoroughfares for vehicular traffic.⁴¹



View looking west on SE Hawthorne Boulevard from SE 38th Avenue, mid-1920s. The property at upper left was demolished to make way for the Bagdad Theater, constructed in 1927.

Oregon Historical Society photo #1678
COP 01846

Private auto ownership exploded after World War I. While Multnomah County registered fewer than 10,000 cars in 1916, by 1920 it had grown to 36,000, and over 90,000 by 1929 (approximately one car for every four residents). This also had an impact on the use of the city's streets. During the heyday of public

³⁶ MacColl, *Merchants, Money and Power*, p. 443.

³⁷ MacColl, *Growth of A City*, p. 103.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁹ *East Portland Community Plan Project Summary Report*, p. 144.

⁴⁰ MacColl, *Growth of a City*, p. 120.

⁴¹ <http://www.trans.ci.portland.or.us/about/History/1918TRAFFICFLOW.html>

The popularity of the automobile forced commercial establishments that had previously served local clientele to compete in a more regional market. Social changes brought on by the automobile, coupled with the 1930s stagnant economy, led to fierce competition amongst small business. Fred Meyer closed his first grocery store at 36th and Hawthorne, relying upon business from a large-scale bakery at 12th and Hawthorne throughout the 1940s.⁴⁵

The automobile and attendant social changes clearly had an impact on pedestrian traffic. Until the 1930s, Hawthorne had wider sidewalks. The original sidewalks were 12 feet wide and in many places had a three-foot wide planting strip next to the curb. However, as the automobile became an increasing presence on Portland's roads, it became evident that more space was needed on the roadway for travel lanes and on-street parking to support businesses. Streetcars were still operating at this time, and drivers had to navigate around them as they drove along the boulevard.⁴⁶ Also changed by increased automobile usage was the character of surrounding residential neighborhoods. In the Sunnyside area, many homes were razed to make way for parking lots, especially on and near SE Belmont Street. Much of this demolition was encouraged by City zoning.⁴⁷



Looking west on Hawthorne Boulevard from SE 39th Avenue, with the Sunnyside Masonic Temple at left and a typical sidewalk and planting strip at right, circa 1920s.

Oregon Historical Society photo # 1678, OrHi 74885

Portland's first zoning code in 1920 had a significant effect on Hawthorne neighborhoods. Whereas houses in Ladd's Addition and Mt. Tabor were considered "medium-grade," properties in the older areas of Sunnyside and Buckman were known as "working class."⁴⁸ In addition, the 1924 city building code placed much of Hawthorne in multifamily (Zone 2) and business-manufacturing (Zone 3) categories. Although it was City policy to place streetcar routes within Zone 3, the application of single-family or multifamily zoning had additional political and economic undertones. Well-organized and affluent neighborhoods, like Mt. Tabor, received single-family status, while working class neighborhoods like Sunnyside, with its preponderance of rental housing, were given over to multifamily use.

⁴⁵ *Oregon Journal*, 10 September 1951, "Hawthorne Boulevard, Meyer Not Strangers," p. 12M.

⁴⁶ Portland Office of Transportation, *Hawthorne Boulevard Project Summary of Recommendations For Design and Construction*, May 30, 2002, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *East Portland Community Plan Project Summary Report*, p. 296.

⁴⁸ MacColl, *Growth of a City*, p. 45.

37th, catered to the increasing working-class residents during and immediately after WWII.

Portland received a large economic and population influx in 1941 with the entry of the United States in WWII. Portland shipyards won war contracts, and the city's population grew considerably during the war years. The 1948 Vanport flood in north Portland left 17,000 people homeless and placed further pressure on working class residential neighborhoods like Sunnyside. Bus and mass transit use increased sharply with the influx of working families. Since the streetcar lines were decidedly outdated (the Mt. Tabor streetcar line, the last of the lines, ceased operation that year), the city compensated for the greater number of commuters by purchasing new buses.

In 1950, SE 39th Avenue was widened between Hawthorne and Belmont, leading to increased commuter vehicle traffic on both Hawthorne and SE 39th. The thoroughfare changed to become more exclusively commercial, and several private residences were either converted to commercial use or demolished. (According to City building records, approximately 12 buildings were demolished on Hawthorne Boulevard in the 1950s.) Hawthorne Boulevard's appearance also changed a great deal during this time. Streetlights replaced the stop sign at SE 39th and other busy intersections, and traffic flow grew heavier.⁵³



Looking north on SE 39th Avenue at the intersection of Hawthorne Blvd., with the new Fred Meyer store at left, 1951. The Street widening project was completed at this time.

City of Portland Maintenance and Construction Projects, Job No.16556 file.

The current face of Hawthorne was further defined by changes mentioned above and evidenced by the opening of the modern, multifaceted Fred Meyer superstore in 1951. The Hawthorne Boosters, whose 175 members were drawn from the Hawthorne Merchants Association, anticipated that the new store would promote increased development in the Hawthorne Boulevard area.⁵⁴ Ideally located at the intersection of Hawthorne and SE 39th, Fred Meyer drove many smaller businesses

⁵³ Joanna Ames, "The Old Days of Hawthorne: Twyman's Grocery," *Mt Tabor Neighborhood Association Newsletter*.

⁵⁴ *Oregon Journal*, "Hawthorne Club Does Real Job For Community," p. 3M.

resources were constructed. Between 1940 and the present, another third of the construction activity occurred, half of this by 1953. The available construction dates indicate that two-thirds of the properties were constructed prior to 1953 and are at least 50 years old.

The Craftsman style is the most predominant residential style represented in the study area, appearing in approximately 1905. Characteristic elements of the Craftsman style include a rectangular plan, wood frame construction, a one and a half to two story, box-like volume, and a low-pitched hip or gable roof with wide overhanging eaves. Rooflines often include dormers, exposed rafters and decorative brackets. Porches were almost always present. Sometimes, rustic materials such as clinker brick and cast stone were incorporated. Variations of the style incorporate classical elements such as cornerboards, columns, and modillions. Examples in the study area include multidwelling residences, particularly duplexes and fourplexes. Duplexes were often designed to look like single-dwelling residences, the only distinction being paired entrances. In terms of plan, multidwelling residences along Hawthorne Boulevard include block, split-block, and courtyard-style apartments. The Bungalow style, generally one and one-half stories high, is a variation of the Craftsman style. Characterized by horizontality and Craftsman-inspired woodwork details, it sometimes incorporated elements of the Shingle style.

Examples of the Colonial Revival style represented in the study area are not “pure” examples of the style, but many do include characteristic elements such as applied Classical details and formal façade organization. Other characteristic elements include a square or rectangular plan of wood frame construction, horizontal siding, low-pitched hipped, gable or gambrel roofs, an entrance portico, and glazing such as oval windows, lattice glass, transoms and sidelights framing the entry door. The Dutch Colonial is a variation of this style.

The Queen Anne style is confined almost exclusively to buildings constructed as single-dwelling residences. The style is generally characterized by two and a half stories, wood frame construction; front-facing gable roofs; asymmetrical arrangement; decorative woodwork and shingles; a vertical emphasis; and polygonal bays and verandas, to name a few of the defining accents. Queen Anne/Shingle, Queen Anne/Vernacular, and Queen Anne/Cottage variants of the style were common in the residential areas surrounding Hawthorne Boulevard. The Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style is one of the Historic Period styles in the study area. The commercial buildings are brick or concrete construction, rectangular in plan, with a low-pitched tile roof and wood frame construction with a stucco surface or brick facing. Similar stylistic details such as curvilinear parapets were applied to both commercial and residential buildings.

The English Cottage style is a historic period style that followed traditional cottage designs for inspiration. It includes typical elements such as an asymmetrical plan, usually one and a half or two stories; brick construction, sometimes with stucco, or wood frame construction with shingle siding. Often there are picturesque storybook details such as rolled or curved rooflines, imitation half-timbering, and round-arched openings.

Small multi-dwelling residences are an important part of the fabric of the inner southeast residential neighborhoods. They were constructed during the area’s most

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