

HISTORY OF THE ALBINA PLAN AREA



**WINTER, 1990
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING WORKSHOP
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES AND PLANNING**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Planner's problem is to find ways of creating, within the urban environment, the sense of belonging. - Leo Marx

The 1990 Comprehensive Planning Workshop team would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Deborah Howe, AICP and Michael S. Harrison, AICP for their time and commitment to our project. It has been an invaluable experience and a great learning adventure.

We also would like to acknowledge the following people for their special contribution to this project:

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Albina Volunteer Fire Department 1883

PREFACE

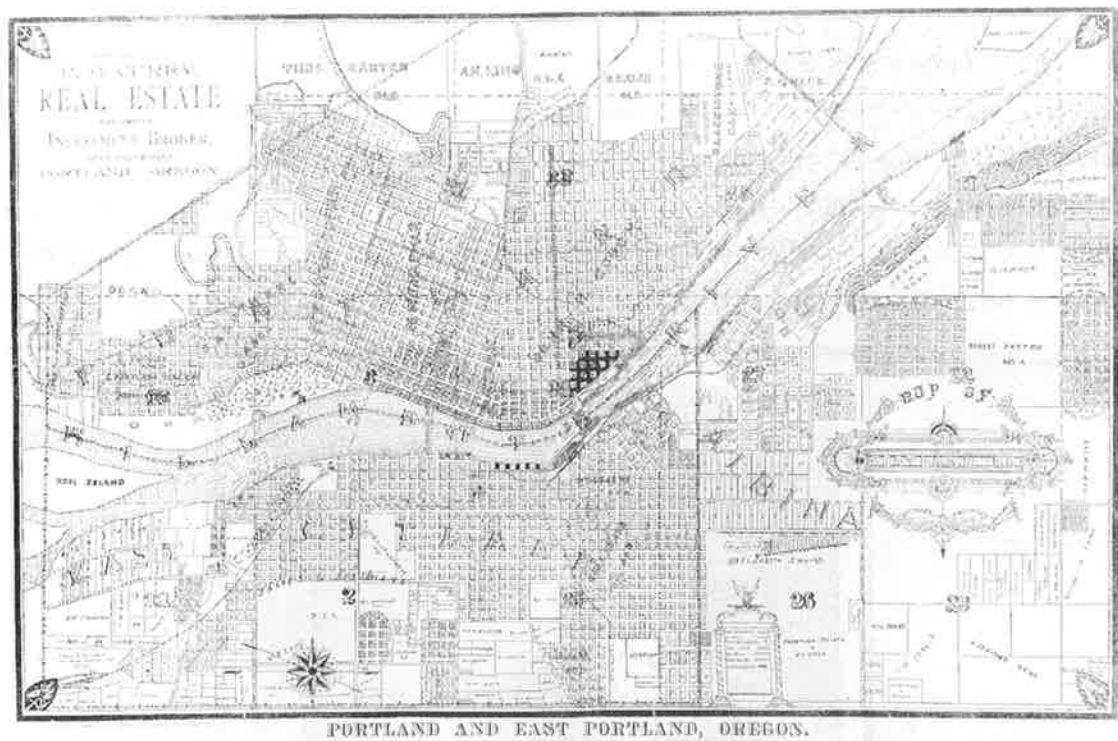
The Comprehensive Planning Workshop is the capstone of the Portland State University's Master of Urban Planning program. The workshop projects are planning studies that have a practical use long after the school term is over. Last year, the workshop focused on housing in Southeast Portland, and the previous year produced a plan for the Homestead neighborhood.

Michael Harrison, AICP, Chief Planner for the Albina Community Plan, proposed that the students in the 1990 Comprehensive Planning Workshop examine historic preservation issues that will impact the revitalization of inner North/Northeast Portland as part of the Albina Community Plan.

Originally, the workshop intended to research Albina's history as a background piece to our main research efforts. It quickly became clear to us that there was a rich, fascinating story to be told about Albina, one that we wished to develop and make accessible to more people. Therefore, we produced two documents, this history as a separate document, designed to stand alone, and a companion document which presents our findings and recommendations.

It is our feeling that preserving the past and using that past to anchor and enhance revitalization of inner North/Northeast Portland is of critical importance to the future of this area and to the City of Portland as a whole.

BEFORE INCORPORATION OF THE CITY OF
ALBINA



Portland & East Portland Map - 1886 (Oregon Historical Society)

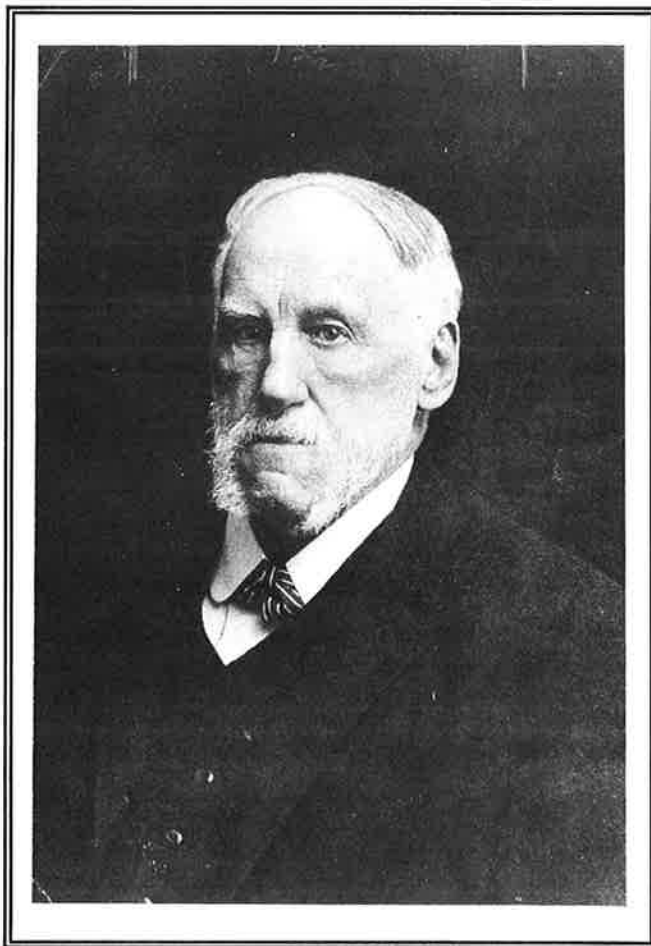
The first inhabitants of the area that came to be known as Albina were the local Indian tribes. The Albina area falls within the tribal grounds of the Clackamas tribe whose lands extended from the Willamette River east to the Cascade mountains.

Little is known about the tribes in the Albina area. We do know that most of the Indians living north of Willamette Falls were Chinookan-speaking salmon fishers and that they occupied large semi-permanent villages (Aikens, 1975). As with most Native American peoples, their way of life was destroyed by the coming of whites with their plans for expansion as well as their diseases.

Many of the original white settlers reached Albina via the Barlow Road, which ended on the east side of the Willamette River, south of Albina (Gaston, 1911). In 1840, Willamette

Valley settlers wanted to build a ship which they could sail to California and sell at Yerba Buena. A company of nine men was formed to build the ship on the east side of Swan Island. The Star of Oregon was the first ship built in Oregon. It was fifty-three feet eight inches long and measured ten feet nine inches at the beam.(Maddux, 1913).

During the early years small river barges called batteaux plied the rivers of the area (Gaston, p.201). The first ferry service across the Willamette River was begun in 1845 and consisted of a canoe with intermittent service (Maddux, 1913). Three years later, regular service was established and in 1850 a second ferry began operation. A general camp and headquarters was set up in East Portland in 1855 during a war against the Indians, which created an early center for economic activity in the area (Gaston, 1911).



George H. Williams, Mayor 1902-05 (OHS)

Downstream from the 'Albina Yards' is the site of the "bone yard", the place where steamboats out of service were moored. Two ferries operated between Albina and Portland - one from the foot of Albina Street to Union Station, and the other from Russell Street to Fifteenth Street. (Scott, 1890).

The history of Albina reflects the great economic opportunities available and exploited by early movers and shakers in Portland. Many of Portland's pioneers acquired property through the Donation Land Act of 1850. The act granted free land to settlers who would agree to live upon and cultivate their claims for four consecutive years. Every male citizen over 21 years of age who arrived in Oregon before December 1, 1850 was given 320 acres; a married couple received 640. After December 1, 1850, the allowable acreage decreased to 160 to 320 respectively. This offer of free land expired in 1855.

Albina was located on a donation land claim owned by J.L. Loring and Joseph Delay. The land was later sold to attorney William Winter Page, who in 1872 sold the land to Edwin Russell, manager of the Portland branch of the Bank of British Columbia, and George H. Williams, former senator, U.S. Attorney General, and future mayor of Portland. Today Northeast Russell Street and Williams Avenue bear their names.

The original town site of Albina as platted in 1872 by Williams and Russell was close to the waterfront on the bend in the Willamette River. The town was named for William Page's wife and daughter, both of whom were named Albina (which the family pronounced "Al-BEAN-ah".) Russell had controlling interest in the venture but it was Williams who laid out the general dimensions of the community. In 1872 Albina was a virtual wilderness without any graded streets and with heavily forested land to the east and north (MacColl, 1976). When Russell went bankrupt and fled to San Francisco in 1874, James Montgomery and William Reid acquired the property and began developing residential sites (MacColl, 1988).



Albina School on Russell between Vancouver & Williams - 1884 (OHS)

CITY OF ALBINA - 1887 to 1891

The City of Albina was incorporated in 1887. Before its consolidation with Portland and East Portland in 1891, Albina was one of a series of independent river towns seeking prominence on the Willamette River. In 1880, the population of Albina was 143; by 1888 it was 3,000 and by 1891 it had reached nearly 6,000. Its brief history is basically that of a company town, the company being the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Co. (OR&N), which owned the extensive Albina railroad yards.



Albina from Vancouver to Russell (OHS)

Two main factors in the rapid growth of the east side were the opening of the Morrison Bridge in 1887 and the proliferation of the street railways. Improved transportation spurred speculators to promote subdivisions for the middle-class. These subdivisions were sited on high ground away from the rough, ramshackle waterfront. Housing was built in the Boise neighborhood dates from 1888 and in Woodlawn from 1889. Arbor Lodge and Piedmont were heavily promoted for housing development in the 1890's (Abbott, 1985).

In April, 1887, the Oregonian observed that Albina was growing rapidly and quoted William Killingsworth, a major residential real-estate investor in Albina: "Albina has been selected as the place to build industrial enterprises." The selection of Albina as an area ripe for industrial development was made by Portland's westside powers hand in hand with the banks, transit and utility companies, with the support of local government (MacColl, 1988).

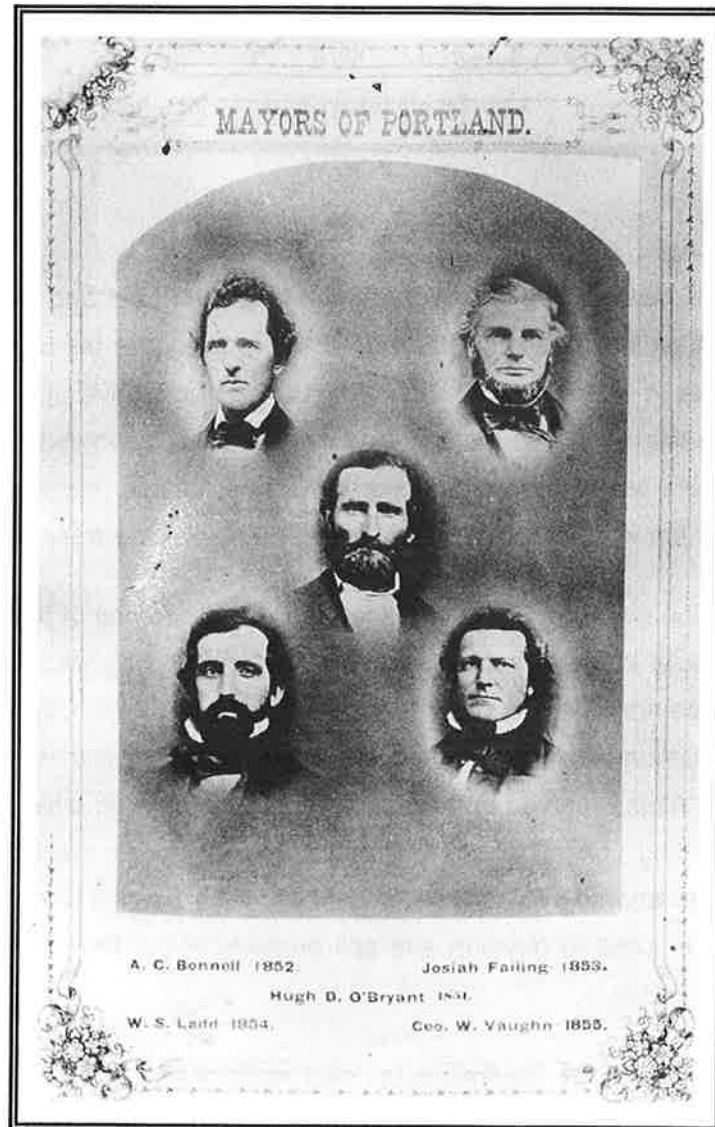
CONSOLIDATION WITH THE CITY OF PORTLAND

At the time of consolidation, Albina covered more land than East and West Portland combined: 13.5 square miles with a population density of 450 per square mile. The economic interest of property owners in Albina and St. Johns influenced legislative approval of city consolidation in 1891. Many of the property owners were downtown Portland businessmen and bankers; others were corporations like William S. Ladd's Portland Flouring Mills and the OR&N, which between them held nearly two miles of waterfront in Albina.

Annexation of Albina and East Portland placed the vast resources of these areas under the political and financial leadership of the City of Portland and its wealthy business interests. As further reinforcements in the drive for consolidation with the City of Portland, OR&N attorney Joseph Simon was state senate president in 1891, while Henry Villard, a large property owner in Albina, served in the House session that year, which was devoted primarily to promoting consolidation. The state senator whose district included the Albina-St. Johns area was attorney P. L. Willis, a partner in the Electric Land Company, which had been established in 1889 to develop and sell property in the Portsmouth district of St. Johns (MacColl, 1988).

Pressure was applied to the legislature by local realtors and westside interests in 1889 and again in 1891 to permit Albina to annex territory that was nine times greater than its original incorporation. Much of this land was still covered with forest or wetlands (MacColl, 1976). The vote for consolidation produced overwhelming approval. In Portland and Albina, the voter response was three to one in favor, in East Portland, it was six to one (MacColl, 1988). The final vote count was 10,128 for consolidation and 1,714 against.

By 1900, Albina consisted of three areas: the low-lying riverside land developed as industrial land to serve the railroads; the central commercial strip which developed along the streetcar lines; and the adjoining residential area on the hillsides to the east.



Early Portland Mayors (OHS)

Large industry and investment did find a profitable home in Albina. The OR&N invested over \$1.5 million in the construction of the Albina rail center. By 1909, five transcontinental rail lines ran through the heart of Albina and were serviced by the railyards. As many as 900 cars a day passed through a labyrinth of sidings, car shops and roundhouses. An 800-foot oceanic dock was constructed north of the OR&N shops in the 1880s. In 1883, William

S. Ladd incorporated the Portland Flouring Mills. The seven story milling operation located by the railyards and docks, became the largest in the Northwest.



Transfer Point for St. Johns Steam Train (OHS)

By 1891, the extension of gas, electric, and trolley services from downtown Portland into Albina gave physical evidence of westside interests in Albina (Klooster, 1987). Albina's city ordinances from 1887 to 1891 served private economic development without regard for the city's fiscal responsibility to provide public services made necessary by rapid expansion of residential and industrial areas. Charles F. Swigert's Willamette Bridge Railway Company is one example. It gained four franchises, three of them two months before consolidation. The last one, on June 30, 1891, was of 50 years duration. It constituted a carte blanche for the company: all designated routes were to be extended as the city limits themselves were extended.

In 1889, the Albina Water Company received a franchise to lay water pipes and it contracted to provide fire hydrants and cisterns. Re-incorporated as the Albina Light and Water Company in 1890, it obtained the franchise to erect electric poles and wires once the power plant was completed. Its primary purpose was to generate power for the Willamette Bridge Railway Company (MacColl, 1988). The day before consolidation with Portland, the Albina City Council approved an exclusive contract with Edgar Quackenbush's Investment Company for lighting the recently developed Piedmont District adjacent to the Portland & Vancouver Railway line (MacColl, 1988).

Starved for funds, Albina's municipal services were rudimentary at best and upon consolidation with Portland, the citizens of Portland had to take on the weight of the obligations made by the City of Albina for the benefit of private interests.

