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# Cultural Heritage

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*In this early 1950s Ranch design (Richard and Helen Rice House, near Hillsboro), a sweeping horizontal roof line contrasts with the strong vertical element of the chimney. Adding to the emphasis of the structure's "ground hugging" appearance is a broad façade of ashlar stonework.*

## Oregon's mid-twentieth century architecture: The recent past is here and now

*by Ian Johnson, Historian, SHPO National Register and Survey Program*

When you hear the phrase "historic building," what do you think of? It may call to mind a rustic farmstead, a grand Victorian-era mansion, or perhaps a charming bungalow. It's time to think again: any building built before 1959 now meets the minimum fifty-year age requirement for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Buildings built in the postwar WWII period, 1945 through the early 1970s, incorporated new design principles and construction materials pioneered by avant garde architects and designers in the 1930s. Domestic and commercial buildings of this period also reflect America's prosperity, growing reliance on the automobile, and the historic events of this period. Currently, only a handful of Oregon's National Register-listed properties reflect the development of the region's unique architectural aesthetic and the profound changes of the mid-twentieth century.

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## It's Party Time: Oregon turns 150

After 150 years, Oregon is commemorating its statehood sesquicentennial with activities in all parts of the state.

*Oregon 150*, a nonprofit organization, has been coordinating efforts around several key programs: Take Care of Oregon Days, Oregon Stories, Youth Legacy Projects, Travel Oregon 150, Oregon! Oregon! and the Imagine Oregon dreams blog. Find out more at the Oregon 150 website, [www.oregon150.org](http://www.oregon150.org).

Other sesquicentennial activities are listed on the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's (OPRD) [events calendar](#). The *Oregon 150* logo appears on each of the sesquicentennial-related activities at parks around the state. You can also look at some of the sesquicentennial efforts of OPRD's Heritage Programs division at [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org).

And, check out a special [heritage driving guide](#) that highlights historic places, cemeteries, museums and other sites both in and near state park locations.

Sesquicentennial activities will continue throughout the summer culminating in an official finale at the Oregon State Fair. Be sure to participate in at least one activity – it's the only year you will ever have to be a part of Oregon's sesquicentennial.



[WWW.OREGON150.ORG](http://WWW.OREGON150.ORG)

## OPRD Director appoints Historic Cemeteries commissioners

Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD) Director Tim Wood has appointed Kendell Phillips of Cave Junction and Lynn Reagan of Vale to the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries.

Phillips has long experience with local museums and cemeteries, with an emphasis on genealogical records. Reagan is a school administrator with personal interest and cemeteries and knowledge of Malheur County history. “The commission is pleased to welcome these enthusiastic individuals to the group,” said Chair Judy Juntunen of Portland. “They bring ideas and skills to enhance the resources offered by the commission and the historic cemeteries program.”

The seven-member Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries supports OPRD [historic cemetery preservation](#) efforts by offering training, educational resources, coordination and grants. Its other members are Robert Keeler of Portland, Diana LaSarge of Pendleton, Col-Lea Lane of Yachats and Dirk Siedlecki of Jacksonville.

## 2009 Oregon Heritage Conference: Rendezvous at the Extravaganza!

The Oregon Heritage Conference will take on a new, larger format for its 10th edition April 15-18 in Portland.

The conference, which last year attracted 300 participants to Eugene, will grow significantly for its statehood sesquicentennial edition. That's because it will take place in conjunction with the 62nd annual Pacific Northwest History Conference as well as the annual meetings of the Northwest Archivists and the Northwest Oral History Association.

This multi-organization gathering is being billed as the Northwest History and Heritage Extravaganza.

"We want to attract extra attention to our annual conference this year as people will be more interested in history and heritage during the 2009 statehood sesquicentennial," said Kyle Jansson, who has coordinated the Oregon Heritage Conference since 2003. "The Extravaganza will also allow people who have interest in more than one heritage sector to have easier access to professionals in related sectors."

The Extravaganza will have the theme of "Rendezvous" to reflect the sharing of ideas, perspectives, skills and cultures in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The mix of offerings that would normally be presented at the separate events will be exceptionally exciting when they are combined.

The Oregon Heritage Conference seeks to inform and inspire Oregonians involved in the state's cultural heritage efforts. Attendees include community leaders, staff and volunteers from historical societies, museums, historic cemeteries, ethnic organizations, schools, historic preservation commissions, humanities groups, the tourism industry, economic development, history buffs and professional historians, archaeologists, youth, and local, tribal, state and federal governments. All will be welcome at the Extravaganza.

The Extravaganza also will include the third annual Oregon Heritage Excellence Awards and presentations by university students who have been selected as Oregon Heritage Fellows.

The Oregon Historical Society will also assist with planning. The conference hotel, the Portland Airport Holiday Inn, has a special conference rate for reservations made before March 23.

Extravaganza information and registration is online at [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or by contacting David Bogan at 503-986-0671 and [heritage.programs@state.or.us](mailto:heritage.programs@state.or.us)

## Main Street re-routed to SHPO



*The tasteful traditional design of a modern building in one section of La Grande's downtown is a good example of how old and new can be successfully blended without detracting from the area's historical and shopper-pleasing ambience.*

and the emergence of big-box retailers located outside traditional town centers. There are more than 1,600 *Main Street* communities nationwide. A broad coalition of organizations worked successfully to win legislative approval for establishing an Oregon *Main Street* program in 2007.

Gary Van Huffel, coordinator of the Oregon Main Street program, has spent the past year developing a program structure that accommodates the full range of communities interested in revitalizing their historic downtowns. A handful of communities competed for designation as full-fledged affiliates—"Performing Downtown" communities. These include Albany, Baker City, Oregon City, and Roseburg. Many other cities qualified for lower rungs on the *Main Street* ladder, with the expectation of moving toward affiliate status when they have met all of the requirements.

*Main Street* is a natural extension of existing SHPO programs. SHPO's Certified Local Government (CLG) program provides a partnership relationship with cities and counties, and provides annual grants to support their historic preservation efforts. Top-tier *Main Street* communities have all achieved CLG status. While effective, the CLG program is not structured to assist communities with business development issues in their historic downtowns. *Main Street* picks up where CLGs leave off and offers tools to help communities reshape their historic downtowns to become successful commercial centers.

"We're excited to have *Main Street* join us," notes Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Roger Roper. "It allows us to extend our offerings to communities beyond just the designation and restoration of historic buildings. *Main Street* helps put these buildings back to work as economic contributors. It blends the idealistic goals of historic preservation with the practical realities of downtown business success."

"SHPO is a great 'adoptive parent' for the *Main Street* program," says Van Huffel. "I work with SHPO staff on a regular basis already, so being part of the SHPO family will only enhance that relationship."

Stay tuned to see how current plans for the SHPO-*Main Street* alliance play out during the legislative session.

The new, but rapidly growing, *Main Street* program is slated to move to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) from the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department (OECDD), which is going through a major reorganization. A number of OECDD programs have been tabbed for transfer to other agencies as that department redefines its mission. The Governor's Office has endorsed the shift of *Main Street* to SHPO, which is housed in the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, and OPRD has embraced the proposal. The 2009 Legislative Assembly will ultimately decide the issue.

*Main Street* is a program sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation that has proved to be a successful formula for revitalizing historic downtowns that have suffered from being bypassed by freeways

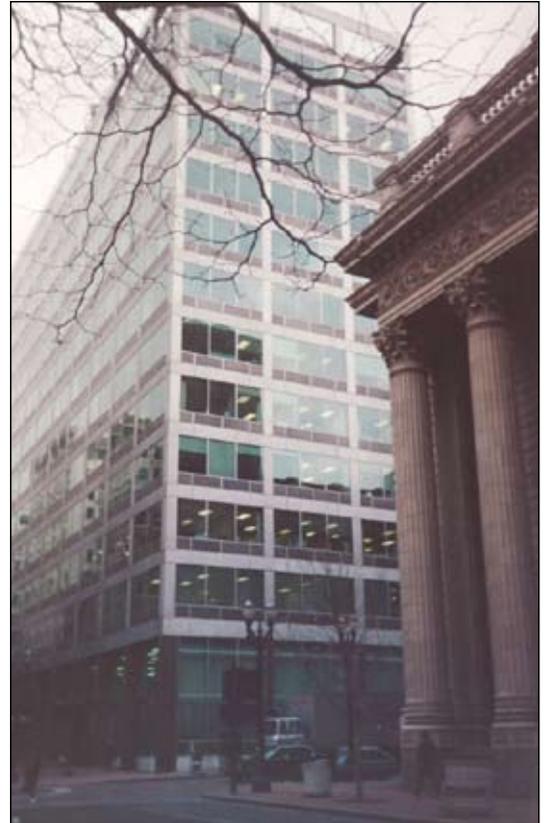
OREGON'S MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE: THE RECENT PAST IS HERE AND NOW . . . continued from page 1

“Modern” architecture is notable for its lack of ornamentation in favor of straight-forward functional design and clean lines. In the early-twentieth century the European-inspired Arts and Crafts movement signaled this shift and spawned both the Craftsman and the Prairie styles. While not eliminating references to the classical architecture, professionals “modernized” their buildings by emphasizing organic design. Architects of this period favored simpler shapes over decorative elements such as classical columns. By the 1930s, the emerging Modernistic and International styles rejected all reference to traditional architecture. These “Machine Age” designs featured rectangular and curved shapes, smooth wall surfaces, and flat roofs.

In Oregon two buildings capture the aesthetics of the years preceding WWII. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1959, the 1964 Gordon House is based on Wright’s “Usonian” model of small house construction developed in the 1930s. Another noteworthy example of this period is the National Register-listed 1937 Aubrey Watzek House by influential native architect John Yeon. The rambling single-story building has a minimal amount of external detailing, makes use of a variety of natural wood products, emphasizes natural light, and shows strong Scandinavian and Asian influences. The design was praised both in and outside the US, and is widely recognized as an influential milepost in the development of the Northwest Regional Style.

Buildings constructed in the years after WWII integrated the innovations of pioneering architects like Wright and Yeon in their emphasis on clean lines, modern materials, and efficient design. In the same period, the widespread use of automobiles led to the popularization of new building types and plans, including drive-ins and houses with attached garages. These buildings were constructed in huge numbers in response to unprecedented demand. To keep up, developers borrowed processes and materials from wartime assembly-line manufacturing to reduce the cost and the time needed to complete a project. Government-guaranteed home mortgages from the Federal Housing Administration and the movement of families from cities to the suburbs heightened demand. In Oregon, local architects influenced by these trends designed buildings that reflected national tastes and a unique regional sensibility.

In 1948 well-known Portland architect Pietro Belluschi utilized a revolutionary arched frame of laminated wood beams to support the hipped-roof of Zion Lutheran Church in Portland. The innovation allowed for the extensive use of a new material, glass block, to be used in the exterior sanctuary walls. In the same year, Belluschi pioneered the use of the exterior curtain wall in the construction of the thirteen-story Equitable Building, which was Portland’s first international-style commercial building. Unlike traditional construction, the curtain wall does not support the weight of the building. The design allowed Belluschi to create an almost smooth exterior with natural-colored aluminum sheathing and spandrels and double-plate green-tinted glass — a distinct departure from the more ornate structural-masonry commercial buildings of the early-twentieth century.



*The smooth, flat exterior surface of Portland's Equitable Building—typical of many mid-20th century commercial building designs—is made possible by non-supporting curtain wall construction.*

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## Links to the Recent Past

The architecture of the postwar period, also known as the “recent past,” is a growing passion among many historic preservation advocates and professionals. Some have started a number of new organizations to identify and preserve postwar buildings and landscapes, while others are adding to the growing number of websites, books, and magazines dedicated to the topic.

### Recent Past Preservation Network

<http://www.recentpast.org>

RPPN is an advocacy-oriented online community dedicated to protecting the buildings and landscapes of the postwar period. Members of the organization actively engage in identifying important resources and developing strategies for their preservation and reuse.

### Recent Past Initiative

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/recentpast/index.htm>

Hosted by the National Park Service, the “Recent Past Initiative” includes scholarly articles, books, restoration guides, and links to other websites about the architecture and history of the twentieth century.

### DOCOMOMO/US

<http://www.docomomo-us.org>

DOCOMOMO is an international organization with Chapters in the U.S. that seeks to increase awareness and appreciation for the architecture and landscape design of the “Modern Movement.” The national and local chapters are excellent resources for historical, technical, and advocacy information.

### Atomic Ranch Magazine

<http://www.atomic-ranch.com>

A monthly lifestyle magazine dedicated to the residential design, interiors, and furnishings of the mid-century era. Monthly features include photo spreads of architecturally intriguing, and often historically important, Ranch-style homes throughout the nation.

Of particular note is the career of Portland architect Herman Brookman. Previously known for his period revival designs in the 1910s and 1920s, Brookman experimented with the Northwest Regional style in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1954 he designed the Grace Kern House that incorporated formal Georgian Revival detailing into a thoroughly modern family residence. A few years later, in 1959, Brookman combined his signature design elements, prominent rock chimneys, complex roof forms, fine crafting, and strong site planning into the Japanese-inspired Goldsmith House.

Another notable Oregon property is the Richard and Helen Rice Residence in Washington County near Hillsboro. This sprawling, custom-built beauty is the first ranch house in Oregon to be listed in the National Register. Built in 1953, the Rice Residence’s natural materials, open plan, rambling footprint, and highly evocative decorative features clearly convey its associations with the historical trends that bred the staggering popularity of the ranch house in this country between 1940 and 1960.

While only a handful of Oregon’s mid-century resources are recognized in the National Register, two Willamette Valley communities are already taking steps toward identifying, studying, and documenting the buildings of this important period. Led by community activists Doug Sackinger and Lyn Larson, advocates for mid-century architecture in Corvallis produced a walking tour brochure entitled “Atomic Ranch.” The publication features nine buildings constructed between the late 1940s and early 1950s and short architectural descriptions and occupant histories for each home. Corvallis City planner Bob Richardson notes that efforts like this are community generated and appear to be growing as the buildings from the 1950s and 1960s gain character with time.

In neighboring Eugene, city planner Ken Guzowski sees mid-century resources as “the next generation of work for our preservation professionals.” Like Corvallis, the effort to understand these resources is propelled by interested citizens. In 1999, the City of Eugene Historic Preservation Advisory Board noted the increasing importance of mid-century resources and commissioned a study, “Eugene Modernism 1935-1960.” Among those buildings identified were restaurants and motels, residences, downtown

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high-rises, public buildings, and industrial sites that communicate the aesthetics history, and spirit of the period. "It is a growing reality that this generation of architecture is becoming significant," notes Guzowski.

While not every property is individually eligible for the National Register, the State Historic Preservation Office expects an increasing number of innovative and unique architect-designed buildings to be listed in the Register. However these are not the only resources of this period that are historically important. Road-side architecture such as drive-ins, neon-signs, and motels may be listed individually, or as part of a historic district. Subdivisions of ranch-style houses may be eligible for their collective significance as examples of a type of housing or for association with a noted builder, architect, or historic event.



*A combination of classical detailing and modern proportions distinguishes the Grace Kern House in Portland as an excellent design example of the "recent past," evidenced by noted architect Herman Brookman's signature curving walls.*

Domestic and commercial buildings of the mid-twentieth century represent a critical period in Oregon's history, telling the story of a unique architectural aesthetic that was a departure from all that came before it. Forward-looking communities are already looking to the next generation of National Register-eligible buildings as a way to document their recent past.

## Heritage Programs grants highlight

The Lane County Historical Society and Museum is one organization that has completed work on both its Heritage Grant and Museum Grant awards. These grants supported the museum's photo conservation and digitization project.

"The spontaneous combustion and explosive hazard which deteriorating (nitrate) negatives represent has been reduced significantly with their identification, removal and segregation," said museum executive director Bob Hart. "The digitization project has brought unexpected interest from the public and media, so the work is now being done where the public can view it."

Hart also listed some pointers for similar projects: organizations should not underestimate publicity opportunities; using students (who usually have varying schedules) to scan photos can result in a cyclical rather than a constant flow of work; and, organizations involved in long term projects should pay close attention to technical and mechanical equipment requirements as well as their warranty periods.

[Heritage Programs grants](#) include Certified Local Government Grants, Museum Grants, Historic Cemetery Grants, Heritage Grants, and "Preserving Oregon" Grants. Also, grants coordinator Kimberly Dunn suggests taking a look at the [grant management standards](#), one of several informative web-accessed [Heritage Bulletins](#).

## State Parks preservation and archaeology specialists report on 2009 plans

Following the mission to preserve and protect Oregon's cultural and historic resources, Oregon State Parks will be implementing a number of repair, restoration and preservation projects throughout the state parks system during 2009 as well as collaborating with one of Oregon's federally-recognized tribes to host an archaeological training event.

State Parks historic preservation specialist Ross Curtis has outlined the following "built environment" projects scheduled to take place this year:

- Along the coast a number of buildings are slated for work including a new roof on Old Yaquina Bay Lighthouse, new iron railing at Heceta Head Lighthouse (and possibly a more extensive restoration if funding can be secured), on-going restoration work at Coquille River Lighthouse, floor and chimney repairs at the Hughes House, window repairs at the Shore Acres Caretaker's Cottage and repair of windows at the Port Orford Head Officer In-Charge Residence.
- In southern and eastern Oregon work will include Collier cabins restoration, Wolf Creek Inn porch repairs, Emigrant Springs cabin restoration, Peter French Round Barn roof, Frenchglen Hotel condition assessment and preservation plan and Kam Wah Chung Museum's textile restoration.
- Willamette Valley area preservation projects include a new roof for Thompson's Mills, a State Fair Poultry Building historic structure report as well as on-going window repair at the Poultry Building as part of the University of Oregon's [Pacific Northwest Preservation Field School](#).



*Roof repair of the Peter French Round Barn, located near Frenchglen in eastern Oregon, is just one of several historic rehabilitation projects slated for 2009 within the Oregon State Parks system.*

State Parks archaeologist Nancy Nelson has announced that OPRD is partnering with the Coquille Indian Tribe to conduct a regional Archaeology Training Conference, April 20-22, on the southern Oregon coast. The training will provide OPRD staff with an integrated perspective from both the scientific and Native American communities and will broaden the cultural awareness of OPRD employees and provide information on the tribal consultation process. Additionally, the training recognizes both prehistoric and historic sites, and addresses the importance of archaeological preservation, and applicable federal and state regulations.

Curtis and Nelson are both members of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's (OPRD) Heritage Programs staff, located at the agency's headquarters in Salem.

## Arch Cape cannon conservation plans move forward

The two historic cannon discovered in February 2008 off the beach of Arch Cape are still being protected by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). Efforts to seek a professional conservator to remove the concretions that covered both cannon and to prepare them for long term curation and interpretation have culminated in a contract with Texas A&M University's Conservation Research Laboratory in College Station, Texas.

While the contract is being finalized the cannon have been moved to Salem to prepare them for shipping. It is expected that the conservation process will take four years before they can be returned to Oregon. An advisory team will monitor the conservation process and post updates on the conservation process on the OPRD web site. The team will also begin considering where in the state that the cannon will be located after the conservation process has been completed.



▲ The Arch Cape cannon's discovery and temporary display before being immersed in a protective water bath attracted lots of curious folks and the media.



◀ This X-ray image at the breech end of one of the cannons clearly demonstrates that beneath the heavy encrustations of time lies a remarkable historical artifact.



▲ A delicate conservation process of at least four years will be necessary to hopefully free all parts of the Arch Cape cannons from their concremented surface.

## SHPO website improvements to benefit preservationists

The [Federal Tax Credit program web page](#) has been recently redesigned and updated, and Joy Sears, the State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) Federal Tax Credit coordinator, invites you to check it out.

Also, later this year, the SHPO [Contractor/Consultant Directory](#) will convert to a searchable web database of names and specialty categories to make it easier to find such information. Sears, who doubles as the SHPO restoration specialist, is currently working on yet another web page improvement that will provide technical information for preservationists, contractors and consultants—the “Repair and Maintenance of Historic Buildings.”