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Cavalcade of Front Avenue

Henry Reed

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chandise. Gone are the commodious steamers of the ocean beach service, and the sternwheelers that took picnic parties to Sauvie's Island and Multnomah Falls. Gone are the buildings that formed Portland's first skyline and were admired from the windows of the Roseburg Express as it slowed down at Hawthorne Avenue on its last lap over the long trestles to the East Portland terminus.

But, cherished memories aside, Front Avenue has not died. It is having a rebirth. It will have, when the new highway is completed, more life and traffic than ever before. The older buildings on the west side of the avenue, if they could speak, could tell what the east side of the avenue was like when it was in its prime. One of these merits at least passing notice. It is the old Parrish building, a three-story brick erected in 1864, on the southwest corner of the avenue and Washington Street. It was Portland's first attempt at a modern store and office building. Standing where Pettygrove erected Portland's first building in 1845, and directly west of the shed where Overton made shingles nearly a century ago, it is the silent sentinel of Front Avenue's glorious past. If it is not taken down in deference to its old age and obsolescence, it will witness the rebirth of the avenue.





the Federal Land Act of 1850 was passed, and he alone had the right to prove title. Pettygrove and Lovejoy never had anything to dedicate, and Lownsdale never did by any formal act, such as a plat approved by him, give the so-called levee to the public. On the contrary, he stoutly insisted that the waterfront was his private property. At a time when the public mind was very bitter, Lownsdale, Chapman and Coffin did offer to release their claim to the waterfront between Main and Washington Streets on certain conditions. They did this because they believed that the controversy was retarding the city's growth. Nothing came of this attempted compromise, and Judge Deady of the United States District Court, decided in 1862 that the public did not own the levee. The City of Portland was the defendant in this case.

A parallel case to Lownsdale's is the land in the southern part of the city in three additions named Caruthers. William Johnson settled on this land in 1842, but died in 1848. Elizabeth Caruthers and her son Finice found the land without a claimant in 1849 and took possession. They were called "claim jumpers," but were within their rights, as they were in possession when the Land Act was passed.

When the avenue project is completed, the public will have — with Battleship Oregon Park included — nearly all the land which it believed in early times was public levee, plus the waterfront never in dispute, in Couch's addition northward from Ankeny Street to Glisan Street. The levee advocates opposed any buildings between the west line of the avenue and the river. They regarded all this area as a street — Front Street, as it was known in their time. All

commerce during the controversy and litigation, and for ten years after Judge Deady's decision, was water-borne. That was the only practical form of transportation, for roads were poor and the railroad was a dream of the future. What other view could these old-timers have taken, considering the state of the country, than that of vessels loading and unloading on a levee free to all users and their cargoes passing to and from the avenue and the levee? It was a traffic question, pure and simple. The river was to serve the avenue and the avenue was to serve the river. But the old-timers were mistaken on the question of ownership.

✓ The Front Avenue project is Portland's greatest traffic undertaking, next to the widening and deepening of the channels to the sea, which have made this city a world port. It is designed primarily for through north and south traffic of immense volume, with distribution, as necessary, into cross-town streets. It will serve a class of traffic wholly unknown to the men who laid the foundations of Portland nearly 100 years ago, for the gas engine has replaced the horse and the ox. It will have other economic effects of importance. It will arrest the decline of the old business district, and if property owners show some of the spirit and enterprise of the city's founders, will result, in time, in more profitable use of property, and increased values.

✓ Gone — perhaps for ever — is the long row of wharves between Jefferson and Glisan Streets. Gone are the river steamers that navigated the Columbia, Willamette, Yamhill, Cowlitz, and Lewis Rivers, bringing people and products of those localities to the wharves, and returning with passengers and mer-





1879 by steamer from San Francisco which docked at the foot of West Burnside Street. The General, well known to old Portlanders, was enthusiastically received. He and his party stayed at the Clarendon Hotel, from which the greatest parade in early Portland was reviewed. The General renewed acquaintance with Gen. Joseph Lane, Oregon's first territorial governor, who was the candidate for vice-president of the United States with Breckenridge in 1860. While here, General Grant gave no hint that he would be a candidate for the third term as President before the Republican National Convention of 1880. However, he was, and made a hard fight for the nomination. The cause of his defeat was the underlying sentiment of the convention that no man should be President of the United States for a longer period than George Washington had been.

Hayes, the first President to visit Portland while in office, came in 1880 with Gen. W. T. Sherman. Landing at the foot of Flanders Street from the railroad ferry, a parade escorted him to the Esmond Hotel. In order that he might have a good view of Portland, he was taken up in the cupola of what is now Pioneer Post Office. If President Hayes had any of the protection now given presidents of the United States at all times, it was not noticeable. When he came up the ferry incline in company with Governor Thayer and Mayor Thompson there were neither police nor civilian guards to keep people away from his carriage. When he visited Chinatown, the hospitals, public schools, and merchants — conversing freely with all who wished to talk to him — no restraint was put on anyone. But his chummy way of

meeting a President ended with the assassination of Garfield in 1881.

President Harrison, who came in 1891, made his headquarters in the Hotel Portland. To enable him to see the city, he was given a ride on the cable cars to the vicinity of Ainsworth School. He was the last President to enter Portland by way of Front Avenue. In 1891, relations with Chile were strained, with war possible, and the President, while here, was in constant communication with the state department.

The Front Avenue project now under way takes in nearly all of the river front which was long considered a levee belonging to the public. For over 95 years a belief, feeble now, has persisted that the people were euchred out of this land by some act of legal legerdemain. The truth is that, with the exception of the public levee between Clay and Jefferson Streets which was given by Coffin and which is now Battleship Oregon Park, the public never had any ownership in the waterfront that could have been stolen. The belief of public ownership rested in the main on the supposed intent of Pettygrove and Lovejoy, who acquired the Portland land claim in 1845, to dedicate a portion at least of the waterfront as a levee. Lovejoy said that such was his understanding, but Pettygrove denied it. These two men, like Overton before them, held the naked possession of the land under the laws of the Provisional Government, and this possessory right was good against anyone but the rightful owner, which, up to the settlement of the Oregon boundary in 1846, might have been the United States or Great Britain. Pettygrove, who had become sole owner of the claim, sold it to Lownsdale in 1848. Lownsdale was the actual settler when





taking of deadly weapons from passengers on the San Francisco steamers during the Civil War for fear that they might become fifth columnists if the vessel were attacked by a Confederate privateer; the returned Californians swaggering under their sacks of gold, too rich and too lazy to re-enter production, and compelled to pay \$24 a barrel for flour imported from South America; the famous hotels of the time — the Columbian, American Exchange, California, Russ, Lick, Cosmopolitan, St. Charles, Esmond and Clarendon; the miners outfitting for the diggings and later sending their gold through Portland to the San Francisco mint at the rate, at times, of \$2,000,000 a month; the Indian camps on the South Portland bottoms and among the cottonwood trees at the foot of Ash Street; the floods, particularly the winter flood of 1861, which destroyed a large part of the capital of Oregon; the big wind of 1880 which raised the waves in the river so high that no one dared to cross; the convicts from the penitentiary in convict clothes mingling with customers in the stores and attending the theatre.

Holladay in his time had immense power in transportation, politics, and business, and was conscious of it. One of his ambitions was to crush the Oregonian. He really did have The Oregonian scared; so much so, that Mr. Pittock offered to sell to him for \$20,000.00. Holladay grandly answered that he would wait until The Oregonian was put up at sheriff's sale and he would buy it as junk. He sank \$200,000.00 in his own paper, The Bulletin, and failed.

The most tragic event in the history of the avenue was the execution of Danforth Balch in the yard of

the first Court House at Salmon Street in 1859. Balch had killed his son-in-law. About 500 people witnessed the execution, among them Balch's wife and the daughter whom his shotgun had widowed.

The great fire of August 2, 1873, was disastrous to that part of the avenue south of Morrison Street. This fire destroyed about 20 blocks of Portland's business area. On the west side of the avenue it cleaned out everything from Clay Street to Yamhill Street. On the east side it swept everything to the river from Clay Street to Morrison Street. Fortunately for the fire fighters, a fire in the latter part of December, 1872, destroyed the two blocks between Morrison and Washington Streets and spread to the southwest corner of the avenue and Alder Street. This old burn proved a fire stop. But for this circumstance, the fire would undoubtedly have spread northward and proved very destructive. The gross loss was \$915,000.00, of which \$245,000.00 was covered by insurance, leaving the net loss \$670,000.00. Henry Failing, who was then mayor, declined all offers of assistance from outside sources and appointed a committee which raised nearly \$15,000.00 for the relief of the sufferers. Many people thought that the mayor should have issued a nation-wide appeal for relief, to the end that contributions might be received and applied, not only to relief, but to reconstruction of the destroyed buildings. A disgruntled element was thus formed in the community, and the soreheads went to the polls in the city election of 1875 and succeeded in defeating Mayor Failing, who was a candidate for re-election, by six votes.

The most notable visitor in early days was General Grant at the end of his world-wide tour. He came in





Indian War; of the discovery of gold in California; of the great Indian uprising of 1855; and of the admission of Oregon to statehood. To the boats at the wharves marched the volunteers for the Indian War behind banners, donated by the women of Portland, and bearing such soul-stirring mottoes as "Be True to Your Country; Never Surrender," and "Go, Your Country Calls; You Have Our Prayers."

On the avenue the Unionists and the Confederate sympathizers had heated arguments during the Civil War, and on it were celebrated the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, and Lee's surrender at Appotomax.

Businesses still in existence started on the avenue. Among them are The First National Bank, The Oregonian, Portland Gas & Coke Company, Meier & Frank, and J. K. Gill Company. Of all the firms that were once proud to be located on the avenue, but one remains — the Kahn hide store at Taylor Street. It has been on the same side of the street, in the same block, for 76 years.

In the cavalcade, we see nearly every man of prominence in business or politics, and in the army in early Oregon. A few who may be mentioned are Dr. John McLoughlin, father of Old Oregon and founder of Oregon City; Gen. U. S. Grant when he was a young lieutenant at Vancouver and after he had been President; Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, who was more than 20 miles away when the Indians attacked the Cascades in 1856 and gave Portland a big scare; Gen. Winfield Scott, the conqueror of Mexico; Gen. W. T. Sherman who marched from Atlanta to the sea; Col. Edwin D. Baker, Oregon's

United States Senator who fell at the battle of Ball's Bluff; Gen. Isaac I. Stevens, Washington's first governor, who fell at Chantilly; fighting Joe Hooker, the hero of the battle of Lookout Mountain; Gen. George B. McClellan, democratic candidate for President against Lincoln in 1864; Gen. Nelson A. Miles, to whom Chief Joseph surrendered in 1877 when his Indian uprising proved a failure; Gen. O. O. Howard, Indian fighter and commandant at Vancouver; Ben Holladay, once master of transportation in Oregon; Henry Villard, who succeeded Holladay and was a still greater master of transportation; Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison when they were in the presidency; Henry Ward Beecher, the famous minister; Robert G. Ingersoll, the famous atheist; and lastly, but of a different type, the one and only John L. Sullivan, in his high hat and diamond pin, the center of admiring sports in Joe Taylor's combined saloon, prize ring and cock pit at Alder Street.

In the picture we see the men and women who left Portland to found the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and Port Townsend; the California stages driven pell mell on the avenue on the last lap of their trip from Sacramento to Washington Street; Father De Smet escorting the Indian chiefs from the Inland Empire after the war of 1855 and showing them the might of the whites and the futility of further warfare; the merchants pushing their trades, paying without complaint \$7.20 for a ten-word telegram to New York; defying the powerful Pacific Mail Steamship Company when it attempted to change its terminus to St. Helens; and cursing the slickers who settled their accounts in 40-cent greenbacks instead of gold; the





ers, many Indians, and a sprinkling of Chinese, Sandwich Islanders and Negroes. All had ambitions — some to make a stake and return to the States (which was their concept of civilization); others to remain in Oregon. In their relations with one another, especially with the Indians, they spoke the Chinook jargon, a poor medium of communication, consisting of English, French, Russian and Indian words. The parade covers almost 100 years of Portland's life.

The beginning of the avenue, and also of Portland, was the shed that William P. Overton, a carpenter, built at the foot of Washington Street. Overton came to Oregon in 1841, and after short stays at the Whitman and Dalles missions, went to Honolulu for his health. He returned to the Portland area in June, 1842, and soon after, very likely the same year, located here. It was long believed that Overton was a desperate character and that he was executed for horse stealing, or some other crime. There is no proof of this supposition. Overton was welcomed as a friend when he arrived at the Whitman mission, and when he returned East in 1845 he carried a letter from Mrs. Whitman to her sister in Illinois. The last heard of him he was working at his trade in Honolulu in 1847. In the light of known facts, I think we can safely acquit Portland's first settler of having been a desperado, or having perished as a criminal.

Pettygrove and Lovejoy bought Overton's land claim, and Daniel H. Lownsdale acquired it in 1848. Under the leadership of these three, and Lownsdale's later associates — W. W. Chapman, Stephen Coffin and Benjamin Stark — Portland's career began on the avenue.

In speaking of the avenue, I must confine the name Portland to the original city on the West side centering at the foot of Washington Street and stretching two miles along the river by about one mile deep. The avenue was the scene of all the great events for fully the first 25 years of Portland's history. Here raged through 17 years of controversy and litigation, accompanied by acts of violence, the question of whether or not the waterfront between Market and Ankeny Streets was a public levee or private property. It was on the west side of the avenue somewhere between Alder and Taylor Streets that the first city election was held outdoors in April, 1851, and where a week later the first city government began business in a rented dwelling with an assessed valuation of \$581,000.00 as a basis for taxation. It was at Taylor Street that Dr. Ralph Wilcox opened the first day school in 1847. On the avenue Steve Maybell and Sam Simpson drew the inspiration for their verse — Maybell for "The Bridge Across the Willamette," and Simpson for "Portland," wherein Sam visioned a growing and prosperous Portland until Mt. Hood should blow its top off. In early times the avenue was a speedway for young sports on horseback, which caused the city council to enact an ordinance against riding or driving at a furious rate of speed. It was a 300-yard race that caused "John Phoenix," who was George H. Derby, an army officer, to write his humorous lines telling how all Portland bet on the wrong horse.

To the avenue from the river side of it, came the news of the settlement of the Oregon boundary between the United States and Great Britain; of the Whitman Massacre and the outbreak of the Cayuse





cult to realize that no street west of the Rocky Mountains has played so notable a part in our history as has Front Avenue. In saying this, I must make a concession to two of Oregon City's streets — Main and Water. Oregon City rose long before Portland did. Its water power was its magnet and believed by many to be the all-controlling force for the location of a great commercial city. Towards it surged — as did the Indians to catch salmon and sell slaves — all the early explorers, travelers, and traders, beginning with Franchere in 1811. The site of Portland, forest clad and seamed with gullies, drew scant notice from them. Oregon City was the mecca of the covered wagon people and of the trappers from the Rocky Mountains. It was the seat of government of the old Oregon country from 1843 to 1852. The culture developed in our neighboring city; the legislation there enacted by the Provisional and Territorial governments; the conduct of the Cayuse Indian war following the Whitman Massacre; the sturdy Americanism of the people; their hospitality to the weary and hungry continental trail-blazers; and the zeal of the pioneer missionaries, are beacon lights of history.

The passing of commercial supremacy from Oregon City to Portland, and from Main and Water Streets to Front Avenue, was apparent early in 1845. It was then that John H. Couch, F. W. Pettygrove and others concluded that the Ross Island shoals and Clackamas Rapids were effective barriers to ocean vessels and that the deep water in front of Portland was the best for navigation. On October 14, 1845, the bark *Toulon* landed at the foot of Washington Street, with a cargo from the Atlantic Coast. Oregon City men who inquired where the *Toulon* would

unload its merchandise, were told at Portland. There and then the word Portland came into general use, but the name of the settlement — consisting then of a few houses under construction — had been decided less than three months before. By 1848, Portland, spurred by the California gold discovery and the demand for goods which it was able to supply, had outdistanced all rivals. Oregon City, however, continued to be the political center until the territorial legislature met in Salem in 1852.

The potentialities of Oregon City's water power were early recognized. When Henry Villard was at the height of his career in 1883, he employed P. Miescher, a civil engineer, to survey the power. While the engineer considered several ways of transmitting power — among them electrical transmission — he reported in May, 1884, that the cheapest and most effective way to transmit horsepower was by endless wire ropes running over large pulleys at a speed of 33 to 105 feet a second. Five years later, almost to a day, Front Avenue was lighted by electricity brought from Oregon City by electrical transmission.

The "Cavalcade" of Front Avenue is what the word signifies — a parade — not merely of mounted men like a troop of cavalry, but of all sorts of homespun people. It is a parade of people afoot, on horseback, in horse- and ox-drawn carts, sleds, wagons, drays and trucks; of people in canoes, flat-bottomed batteaux, ocean and river steamers, and sailors. It is a parade of a cosmopolitan horde of explorers, traders, trappers, settlers, gold seekers, merchandisers and adventurers. It is a parade mainly of native Americans, with a small percentage of white foreign-





Portland Flouring Mills on the East side, and to where the Oceanic Terminals now are, on the West side.

In its days of glory Front Avenue indeed was a great street. Here were enterprising merchants, both wholesale and retail; exporters and importers, quartered mainly in low, but substantial buildings. The basis of all business was "long credits." Allen & Lewis' sales in 1864 were \$800,000.00 — "all on credit," said Mr. Lewis, "and we cannot tell how it will come out until we get our money."

The long isolation of Portland ended with the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883. "We are now incorporated with the rest of the world," wrote Donald Macleay, president of the Board of Trade. "The day of long credits is past."

It would be interesting but lengthy to discuss the business buildings of Front Avenue, so reference is made to only a few of them. The oldest building there (until it was recently demolished) was the three-story brick on the west side of the avenue near Stark Street, which was built in 1853. It was completed in 20 days. After the height of the building had been increased, the Ladd & Tilton Bank — now out of existence — and the First National Bank of Portland, began business there.

The first professional architect was W. H. Williams, who died many years ago. Prior to his coming to Portland, most of the buildings were both designed and built by contractors. There are many fine specimens of Mr. Williams' work on the avenue. The most conspicuous is the Starr Block on the east side between Oak and Pine Streets. It was erected in

1881 at a cost of \$145,000.00 — the most costly building ever erected on the avenue — and up to that time, was the most costly one ever built in Portland, with the exception of the Pioneer Post Office, opposite the Hotel Portland.

Architect Williams' chief draftsman was Richard Martin. Martin made the plans for the Starr Block and for other buildings on the avenue while he was in Mr. Williams' employ. After Mr. Williams' death, he formed a partnership with the late W. F. McCaw, and the firm of McCaw & Martin designed many buildings in Portland, which are still standing.

On the northeast corner of the avenue and Madison Street stands a brick building erected by George W. Vaughn, one of Portland's early mayors, and bearing on its front a metal plate carrying the date April 27, 1865. However, this was not built in 1865. The date evidently commemorates some event in Mr. Vaughn's life or business experience. The entire block on which this building stands was swept clean by the fire of 1873, so it must have been built after the fire.

The homes of many of our pioneer merchants, as well as those of many professional men, occupied one or more acres with gardens and conservatories. The atmosphere of confidence and well being thus presented, excited the admiration of Eastern and foreign visitors. Gone is this hive of industry, and with it the socialite promenaders — the men in their new beaver hats and the women in their crinolines.

One who remembers the avenue in its happier days, and who sees it now in its decline, finds it diffi-

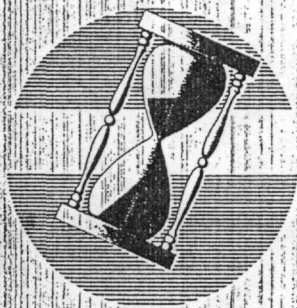




SEVENTY years ago, on March 5th, 1871, I arrived in Portland, in one of those pitching, rolling, sea-going tubs that Ben Holladay operated as a steamship, 105½ hours from San Francisco. My parents, with me as their first-born, had made the long trip from New York to California by the Isthmus of Panama. Western America loomed so large in my father's eyes that he seemed unable to decide where to settle and grow up with the country. After a brief residence in Kalama, Washington, our family returned to Portland in 1873, and my father proposed to go to Puget Sound, but my mother concluded that she had had enough of sight-seeing. "Portland suits me," she said, "and here I stick." That decision is the main reason why I am still sticking around.

Many of the incidents I will relate came under my personal observation. Others are from the records and legends of men and women to whose footsteps the wooden sidewalks of old Front Avenue echoed in days long past. Once I lived on the avenue near the old penitentiary at the foot of Hall Street, and on five other occasions within a stone's throw of its busy wharves. In my school days the Willamette River was the boys' playground; there we found our principal recreations of sailing and rowing boats; fishing and swimming. Later, when I started out as a young newspaper reporter, my city editor gave me the toughest job on the paper — that of covering the wholesale and produce markets on Front Avenue, the entire waterfront north of Jefferson Street to the





Cavalcade of Front Avenue

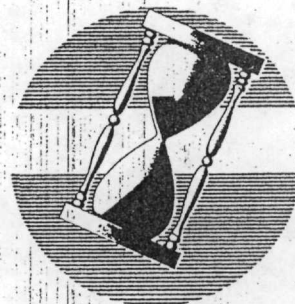
By HENRY E. REED
Pioneer Portland Realtor

is based on an address by Mr. Reed delivered before the Lang Syne Society of Portland at its recent 1941 annual dinner meeting.

Mr. Reed has played an active part in the growth of our city, having served as real estate editor of both the *Portland News* and the *Oregonian* in the '80s and '90s. He was executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce at the turn of the century, a director of exploitation of the Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905, served as County Assessor, president of the Lang Syne Society, and charter member and president of Portland Realty Board.

Wakefield-Fries & Woodward is, this year, celebrating its 75th Anniversary. Mr. Reed's recollections seemed an appropriate memento of such occasion. We have therefore caused it to be presented in this little booklet for distribution to our friends, and we hope that you, as one, will enjoy having it.

Donald L. Woodward
Leroy D. Draper



Wakefield-Fries & Woodward, Portland Realtors, entered the real estate field under the name of Parrish & Atkinson on Southwest Morrison Street, between Front and First Avenues, in 1866. The city's population then was less than 6,500.

This year is their seventy-fifth anniversary of continuous business. Contemporaneously, it marks the start of actual work on the Front Avenue Project — a milestone in Portland's history and a project ranking among Portland's greatest developments.

The requirements of present day traffic, unforeseen in the era of the flat-boat, the river steamer, the ox-drawn farm wagon, and the four-horse stage coach have made it necessary. It is a monument to the progressive spirit of our City.

The interesting book for which these lines are introductory is an anniversary tribute to a virile Portland. Its theme, "The Cavalcade of Front Avenue," will renew our acquaintance with our first citizens and their problems, and inspire us with confidence to build surely and securely on the foundations laid on Front Avenue almost 100 years ago.

L. E. Lily
MAYOR
CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON

June, 1941