

Introduction

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Portland, Oregon is one of five major cities along the west coast of the United States. Most Americans have heard of it and know approximately where it is located. Yet if you were to ask them to tell you something about the city they would probably find it difficult to do. Portland is generally considered the least major of the west coast cities. There is nothing distinctive that symbolizes it as the Space Needle does for Seattle or the Golden Gate Bridge does for San Francisco. It is not nestled along a beautiful deep water bay with ships anchored offshore and ferries moving from place to place. Instead there is a river spanned by bridges with tugboats comprising a large part of the water traffic. Still, when this scene is combined with the nearby hills, it makes for an extremely attractive setting, especially with the distant high Cascade volcanoes as background. It is also within this river setting that the Port of Portland exports more wheat than any other port in the country. In fact, when measured on the basis of total tonnage, Portland is the largest export port in the United States.

The population of Portland (1,341,000 for the SMSA) is about a million less than Seattle and several times less than San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. During the decade of the 1970's, however, Portland gained population faster than any of them except for San Diego. Still, congestion and crowding are not a problem. The cost of housing is less than in Seattle and considerably

less than in the larger California cities. Portland is a big place but retains many of the attributes of a smaller place. This quality was nicely capsulized in an article published in the October 21, 1985, New Yorker: Portland... "combines the intimacy of a town with the density and the richness of a city." It is this character, in fact, the juxtaposition of big and small, the built and the natural, that is the essence of the place.

The economy of Portland is not dominated by a single industry as in Seattle; consequently it projects a less distinctive image focused around wood products and diversified manufacturing and commerce. And yet the intellectual and industrial climate of Portland has combined to produce the recent blossoming of the "Silicon Forest," which has become a recognized force in the world of computers, instruments, and related software. Portland is becoming known as an important center of innovation and high technology.

On a cultural basis Portland cannot compete with San Francisco; we did not host Tutankhamen. We have no world class marina or aquarium. However, there is a good symphony, zoo, museums, and a new performing arts theater. Portland has a high reputation for jazz and is the home of several nationally known jazz musicians, e.g., Tom Grant, Mel Brown, and David Friesen. We do not have a professional football team, but the Trail Blazers have put Portland on the basketball map. The number of world class authors

who live in Portland and Oregon is impressive; those more recently in the limelight include Ken Kesey, Jean Auel, and Ursula LeGuin. Portland is an outstanding book town with more used bookstores per capita than most cities, including one of the single largest used-new bookstores anywhere.

Oregon has received substantial publicity in recent years because of its innovative approaches to land use, and its concern with the environment and the quality of life. The "Oregon Bottle Bill" is perhaps one of the best known expressions of the seriousness of this concern. In the 1960's a major commitment was made to clean up the Willamette River. The success of that effort is reflected in a virtual renaissance of interest in the river with a number of recent housing and recreational developments being focused there. During the late 1960's Portland also condemned and removed a formerly heavily traveled downtown highway next to the river and transformed it into a park. This is now the site of the annual Rose Festival. To improve air quality, a limit was set on the number of automobiles that could be in the downtown. Portland has been more successful than most places in integrating activities and reducing the duplication and overlap of services and functions that occur between the central city and suburbs. Similarly, Portland has designed innovative ways of using taxation and public monies to carefully restructure and build the downtown.

National competitions have been held to attract the most creative designs for buildings and structures. Among the more notable that have changed the face of the downtown in recent years are: the Pioneer Courthouse Square completed in 1984, already a symbolic center for the city; and the post-modern

massif of the Portland Building designed by Michael Graves. The addition of the huge (38 ft. tall) and beautiful hammered copper sculpture of "Portlandia" by Raymond Kaskey to the west entrance of this building makes it a "must see" for visitors.

Like most cities, Portland lost population to suburbs in the years following World War II, but recently it has been successful in attracting people back to the central city. This includes creating more "people places," e.g., the mall, the square, and the fountains; creating attractive middle income housing especially along the river; and promoting an interesting old town, Saturday Market, and other urban renewal projects. In the late 1970's a major decision was made by then Mayor Neil Goldschmidt to cancel a planned freeway development to the southeast side and divert the allocated federal funds to mass transit. This eventually resulted in a new light rail system which runs from downtown to Gresham (MAX). Although controversial, this development has been far more successful at the outset than even the most optimistic could have hoped.

The concern for quality of environment was perhaps voiced best by former Governor Tom McCall, in his famous comment "come visit but don't stay." What he meant was, "we like it the way it is." Portland has embraced newcomers, however. This can be seen in the number of immigrants who have settled here. While Portland does not support the large ethnic communities of New York or Chicago, smaller enclaves exist. There is a "China Town" (although few Chinese live there), and a distinct black community. Still, homogeneity is far more characteristic than ethnic discontinuity. Portland has fewer blacks, hispanics, and orientals than the other west coast cities. The 1980 Census indi-

cates that 93.3 percent of Portland's population is white; compared to Seattle's 89.4 percent, and Los Angeles' 73.5 percent. Although less in actual numbers than either Blacks (33,385) or Hispanics (24,341), the nonwhite minority with the largest impact on the Portland landscape is East Asian (23,971). A strong oriental influence can be seen in local architecture, landscaping, and in the abundance of specialty restaurants and grocery stores. Portland supports one of the better public Japanese Gardens in the country.

Portland recently gained notoriety by being voted "the most liveable city." The ramifications of this claim are pursued in the last chapter which explains how Portland combines the amenities of a big city with the atmosphere of a town. We can have our cake and eat it too. This is countered by the discomfiting fact that Portland has one of the highest reported crime rates in the country. Most Portlanders do not sense this, however; residents typically think nothing of walking down city streets after dark.

Another of the amenities and characteristics of Portland is the closeness and quality of nature. One of the impressions that newcomers often mention is the greenness of things. This, of course, is a function of the climate and dominance of evergreen vegetation, but it is also because of ample open space and parks. There are many places in Portland where one can be surrounded by woods yet within throwing distance of houses and stores. Macleay and Forest Parks in the West Hills comprise 4,682 acres of more or less wild and natural woods, making it the largest natural urban park in the United States.

The surrounding countryside adds to the closeness of nature. Mount Hood looms skyward 60 miles to the east and

beckons like a backyard playground. It is one of the few places in the country where one can ski throughout the summer. The coast, with its pounding surf and spectacular headlands, is equidistant to the west. The Columbia Gorge, with its waterfalls and rapidly changing environments, serves as an exciting change of place. In winter when it is raining in Portland, bright and sunny skies can usually be found within two hours drive to the east of the Cascades.

Oregonians are big on nature. The local Audubon Society is well subscribed; native plant societies thrive. Mushroom hunting is a practiced science. The growing of roses, camellias, and rhododendrons is pursued as cult-like activities. The relative number of people who belong to environmental organizations, e.g., the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy, is among the highest in the country. Wetlands and other natural habitats in the city are watched with careful eyes. The Great Blue Heron nests in oak trees along the Willamette with equanimity. Portland has become reknowned as a top town for runners. The Mazamas, a local mountain climbing club, is one of the oldest and most respected such organizations in the country. Oregonians love to hunt and fish; the American Rifle Association finds high membership here.

In short, two threads are woven through the tapestry of the following essays. One is that Portland is a big city but with many of the attributes of a small town. The second is the accessibility of city and nature. The problem, of course, is how to nurture and maintain the one without harm to the other. The evidence is clear that most major American cities have not been able to achieve this. Only the future can tell how Portland will fare. The focus of

this book is on dynamics and change in the landscape. Each author has approached the problem from his or her own perspective, but the net result is a taking stock, an accounting of where we have been and where we are going. When viewed as a whole the book should provide a better view than we have had of the nature and character of this special place.