

# Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

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**While masonry buildings have their strengths, they also have their vulnerabilities that can threaten their appearance, livability, and even their longevity.**

## Masonry Buildings in Forest Grove

Article and Photographs by Neil Poulsen, Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board

Masonry buildings form a centerpiece of Forest Grove's historic architecture. While there are significant masonry buildings in less central areas of Forest Grove, the large majority of these buildings comprise the downtown area. We do business in them, we live in them, and we enjoy their timeless beauty. They protect us from the elements, and they provide us with a unique barrier to fire. Given their importance to our community, it benefits us to be aware of these buildings and to understand some of their needs.

### Forest Grove Examples

Forest Grove has many examples of interesting masonry buildings. The view down Main Street displays the most obvious presence. The west side of Main Street is lined with 10 masonry buildings, all of which include brick construction.



The First National Bank of Oregon on the left side of the photo below left was built in 1913. The Anderson Building across the street was built in 1917 as a clothing store. The building is constructed of bricks that rest on a concrete foundation.



Of special architectural interest is the Masonic Lodge Holbrook #30 building built in 1923. Included on Forest Grove's List of Historic and Cultural Landmarks, this building is owned by the oldest Masonic Lodge in the state of Oregon.



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Another interesting example of masonry construction is the Holroyd Building built in 1936. This building is located at 1937 Pacific Avenue.

Whereas most Forest Grove masonry buildings were built using brick, this building has poured concrete walls that are several inches thick. Its main beam consists of a steel rail taken from the Forest Grove streetcar line. The awning on the building's front appears to be original.



architecturally styled building located on the northwest corner of 18th Avenue and Elm Streets.

From Sanborn maps, we know that the exterior walls of this building consist of two, three-inch thick concrete walls that are separated by a two-inch wide vertical space.

Built in 1923 for the Alpha Zeta Fraternity, students occupied the building until the 1930s, when the owners were

forced to sell because of poor economic conditions. After extensive renovation, the building became Forest Grove General Hospital between 1937 and 1949. During 1949, the state of Oregon upgraded their standards, and Forest Grove General was unable to comply. About a year after the hospital ceased operation, the building became home for the Gamma Sigma Fraternity. The fraternity occupied the building at least through 1965. Prior to moving into the building, the fraternity temporarily resided in the Rogers Mansion across 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue on land now known as Rogers Park.

**John Taylor Buildings**

One cannot discuss Forest Grove's masonry buildings without giving special mention to John Taylor's hollow concrete-wall constructed buildings. A Forest Grove resident, he received a patent for his method in 1924. He and his brothers formed the Thormost Building Corporation in 1923 to promote and build these buildings. Their construction consists of two shells of concrete that are separated by a vertical air-space. Horizontal, metal reinforcing rods extend between the two concrete shells to maintain their proper alignment and add strength. Copies of Thormost Building Corporation promotional materials are available for review in the Eric Stewart Collection at the Forest Grove Library.

An excellent example of Taylor construction is this large, east-facing arts and crafts



**Masonry Building Vulnerabilities**

While masonry buildings have their strengths, they also have their vulnerabilities that can threaten their appearance, livability, and even their longevity. Among them are the following.

*Scaling:* This occurs when water enters crevices in the outer walls of masonry buildings and then freezes. Over time, this can cause blemishes and surface defects.

*Efflorescence:* This results in the chalky-white substance that can appear on the surface of concrete or brick surfaces. It can be caused by excessive moisture, and if not stopped, can eventually cause structural damage. For example, efflorescence can occur on brick fireplaces

that are not used.

*Uncontrolled Water Runoff:* Water runoff can leave terrible stains on masonry surfaces. The obvious prevention is to have sufficient drainage away from these surfaces.

*Corrosion:* This occurs where concrete or brick surfaces are adjacent to metal surfaces. For example, ferrous-based metals can rust, and this can affect the appearance and even structural integrity of a masonry building.

*Leakage:* Water can enter and damage a masonry building at places where masonry components in a building join. For example, this was a problem on the south wall of the Masonic Lodge mentioned above. Their solution was to protect the wall with a non-masonry siding. Unfortunately, this solution detracted from the architectural character of the building.



## Earthquakes

This is the most serious threat to our historic masonry buildings that we face. They are not designed to move sideways! What may have stood the test of time for decades can be demolished in minutes during a serious earthquake. This is especially the case for unreinforced masonry buildings, which comprise an alarmingly high percentage of historic architecture.

Oregon State building codes require seismic upgrades to any building, if a renovation adds more than a 10 percent increase in weight to the outer walls. These seismic upgrades don't necessarily protect the building; rather, they're designed to enable occupants to safely flee the building in case of an earthquake.

Even with seismic upgrades, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain earthquake insurance for a masonry building. Like Portland, Forest Grove has its geologic faults, and insurance companies are wary of providing this kind of insurance. Based on geological evidence in the Pacific Northwest, a large earth-

quake occurs about once in every 300 years. While impossible to accurately predict, the Forest Grove area is chronologically due for one of these catastrophic events.

Only within the last few decades have architects and engineers learned how to fortify masonry buildings against earthquakes. While this knowledge was not available at the time, designers of the Hoffman Building on the northeast corner of Council Street and Pacific Avenue took steps to protect this building from earthquakes.

According to a previous owner, a large metal plate was installed between the building and its neighbor, Theater in the Grove, with this purpose in mind.

With changes in materials, building practices, and codes, Forest Grove's historic masonry buildings stand as a window into the past. Buildings will never be built like these historic structures again. Preserving these buildings helps to preserve our architectural heritage, which is a fundamental component of Forest Grove's identity.



# Community Enhancement Grant Funds

If your house is on our local historic register, or a contributing building in one of the three historic districts, your house may be eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding. The Historic Landmarks Board may have funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work, have structural work to do such as foundation or porch repairs, even exterior painting or re-roofing, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant, up to \$1,000 (less for painting and roofing). We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to challenges you may have. Contact James Reitz at 503-992-3233 or jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov.

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### In this Issue:

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