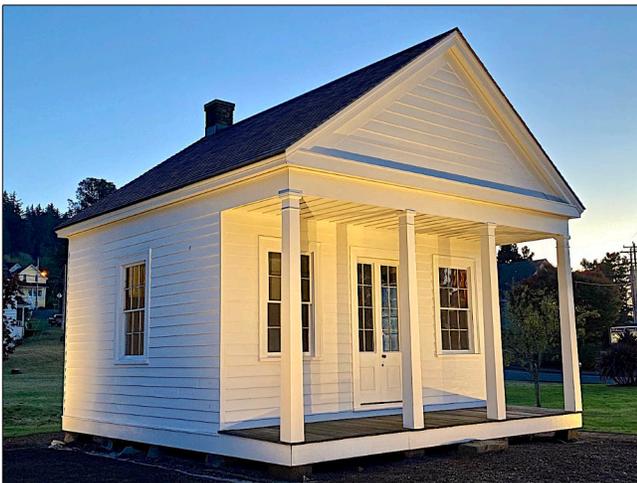


RESTORIA

THE LOWER COLUMBIA PRESERVATION SOCIETY SEEKS TO PRESERVE THE HISTORY, SITES, AND CULTURE OF COMMUNITIES BORDERING THE COLUMBIA RIVER IN CLATSOP, PACIFIC, AND WAHKIAKUM COUNTIES

LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD

After several years of restoration projects, the custom house reconstruction received a fresh coat of paint in September. The custom house looks excellent in its stark white, but many owners of historic buildings have been braving new, bright (or darker!) colors for their homes and businesses. The transformations are mesmerizing. Email us a photo of your favorite color transformation, and we will award 'Kudos' to them on our social media pages.



The freshly painted 1852 Custom House Reconstruction located at 3455 Leif Erikson in Astoria, Oregon

Our focus for the remainder of 2022 is the 100-year commemoration of the Great Fire that destroyed Astoria's downtown business district and set the stage for the dramatic rebuild of the 1920s. In our research, we took a deep dive into the well preserved downtown Astoria pre-fire buildings that avoided destruction and how Astoria evolutionized from 'ashes to concrete.' In addition to the self-guided walking tour and an article in this edition of Restoria, November's Topics in Preservation explores themes related to the fire. We will also be collaborating on additional fire-related events with other local organizations in December. We strongly encourage you to visit the Heritage Museum's excellent exhibit, "'This Has Been A Terrible Day,' The Great Astoria Fire of 1922."

Please join us on the evening of December 21st at 6:30 pm at the LCPS office (389 12th Street in Astoria) for a holiday open house. We will be hosting a holiday cookie potluck, acknowledging our top volunteers, and would love to discuss board or committee service with LCPS members who wish to become more involved.

RESTORATION F THE 1852 CUSTOM HOUSE 2018 - 2022



LCPS board members work on the front facade of the Custom House

LCPS has been maintaining Custom House Park since 2018 and managing the restoration of the 1852 Custom House reconstruction. LCPS Board members and volunteers have held several work parties, and LCPS has partnered with the Clatsop Community College Historic Preservation Program (CCC HP) to use the site for several restoration workshops. Additional specialty work, such as the roof and landscaping, has been contracted out.

The first custom house in Astoria, built in 1849, was destroyed by fire in 1852. Customs agent John Adair had a new structure built in 1852, which remained in use until 1861. After many years of abandonment, the community tore down that historic structure in 1901. The current building was built between 1992 and 1994 to commemorate the bicentennial of the U.S. Customs Service. Based on historical documentation, it was reconstructed using materials, tools, and methods similar to those of 1852. These include hand-hewn logs, mortise and tenon joinery, hand-planed siding and woodwork, lath and plaster interior finish, steel cut nails, and hand tools.

During the fall of 2018, CCC HP students assessed and documented the structure and developed a preservation plan for the building. Those projects that students could learn from were tackled in several workshops over the past few years. These projects provided opportunities for students to learn traditional woodworking and construction techniques while restoring a local public building. This is one of the ongoing partnerships between CCC HP and the Astoria Parks Department.

All work, except as noted, was completed by CCC HP students during workshops conducted between 2018 and 2022:

- **Siding 1** (October 2018): All siding was assessed. Deteriorated siding on the south and east facades was repaired or replaced with hand-planed siding.
- **Porch** (October 2018): Loose porch boards were refastened with cut nails, several boards were replaced. All were treated with linseed oil. Temporary wood and epoxy repairs were made to the main porch support beam (it will need to be replaced in the future).
- **Windows** (November 2018): The west, weather side, window was in very poor condition. The sill was replaced and the sashes reconstructed. The east and north (front) windows required minor rot repair and spot glazing-putty repair. The most damaged window casings were replaced with reconstructed material, the rest were repaired. This work was done by students working on their individual projects.
- **Lighting** (July 2019): The non-functional lighting was removed and replaced with new LED lighting. Trench digging was done by volunteers. The lighting was replaced by a contractor.
- **Siding 2** (July 2020): All the siding on the west, weather side, needed to be replaced due to rot. New siding was made by hand-planing fir boards. Siding and trim were hand cut and attached using steel cut nails.
- **Roof** (September 2020): The roofing was removed and, after minor rafter repairs, was replaced with cedar shingles. In addition, the top of the chimney was sealed with a copper cap to keep out rain and birds. This work was contracted out.
- **Wainscoting and interior woodwork** (May 2022): Untreated tongue and groove wainscoting and trim were water stained. It was lightly hand sanded and treated with traditional hand-mixed shellac.
- **Floor** (May 2022): The floor was water stained. It was sanded and treated with linseed oil.
- **Painting** (September 2022): Much of the prep work was previously done during repair/replacement of siding. Loose paint was hand scraped, bare wood was treated with penetrating epoxy, and minor repairs made. The entire building was primed and given two coats of semi-gloss white paint to match the original color. This work was done by LCPS board members and volunteers.



The interior flooring before & after

KUDOS!

SEVERAL HOUSES AND BUILDINGS WERE FRESHENED UP WITH A NEW COAT OF PAINT THIS SUMMER. LOOKING GOOD!



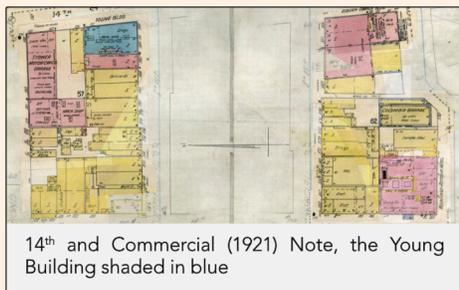
ASTORIA'S 1922 GREAT FIRE CENTENNIAL

PRE-FIRE BUILDINGS THAT STILL STAND TODAY

December 8, 2022, marks 100 years since the fateful night the downtown business district of Astoria, Oregon, burned to the ground. Few structures survived this great disaster, and the preservation of those few buildings provides evidence of downtown's dynamic past.

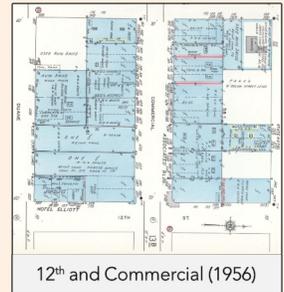
Built to Last: Commercial Street Bookends

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps are color-coded to indicate the materials used in constructing each building. Yellow represents wood, pink is brick (framed in wood unless otherwise noted), and blue is concrete. Notice the dramatic transition between a mixture of building materials in the pre-fire map to the all-concrete post-fire map. Only two pre-fire buildings within reach of fire on Commercial Street exist today; both utilized reinforced concrete.

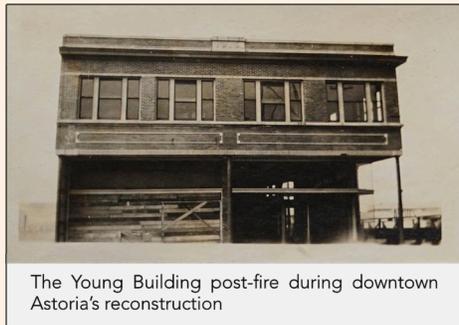


14th and Commercial (1921) Note, the Young Building shaded in blue

The 1921 map to the left shows a single concrete framed building on Commercial Street between 12th and 14th streets. The Young Building was the only structure within the fire's path on the east end of Commercial Street to survive the fire. Although flames gutted the interior of the building, its concrete frame, foundation, and exterior brick were able to be salvaged during Astoria's rebuild.



12th and Commercial (1956)



The Young Building post-fire during downtown Astoria's reconstruction

Designed by Astorian architect John Wicks, the Young Building, built in 1916, is one of the city's few masonry buildings. Credit for protecting the building cannot necessarily be given to its brick exterior, as many other brick buildings in the fire's path were destroyed. As firefighters struggled to slow the spread of the blaze, buildings were dynamited in an attempt to create a fire break. This effort proved problematic as the explosions unintentionally caused window glass from nearby buildings to shatter. Most brick buildings downtown still used wood framing, so once embers slipped through the empty window openings, each building was doomed.

At the west end of the fire's reach on Commercial stands the Spexarth Building, at the corner of 8th. This four-story reinforced concrete structure has housed professional offices for over a century. Plain in ornament, the Spexarth was one of Northwest's earliest reinforced concrete structures. The 1910 structure, considered relatively modern and nearly fireproof, claimed concrete as the material used for its walls, floors, and ceilings. Although its walls and stairways were also concrete, details of the Spexarth's interior still received heavy damage due to the fire climbing in through broken windows. Had this building been equipped with protection over its windows, it could have escaped the entire disaster seemingly untouched.



The Spexarth Building pre-fire

The Spexarth and Young buildings' continued presence downtown helps to illustrate the narrowness of Commercial Street before the rebuild. The block between 8th and 9th is narrower than the remaining strip of Commercial St. going east. Since the Spexarth building survived the fire, and couldn't reasonably be moved, there is only room on one side of the street for parking on this block. Near 14th Street, the front of the second floor of the Young Building is now suspended on steel posts to allow foot traffic below. This unique feature will enable you to visualize the initial setback of commercial structures downtown.

Acts of Devotion

The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. Building on Exchange Street was also designed with disaster in mind, but the heroic effort and quick thinking of its 1922 staff deserves undue credit for its continuing existence. At the sound of the 2:10 A.M. fire alarm, the lone switchboard operator called for reinforcements as calls began to flood the operation. At 3:25 A.M., through the cacophony of dynamite explosions and amid the heavy telephone traffic, Astoria mayor, James Bremner made the call to Portland requesting help prompting a special train with a work crew and more supplies to the disaster zone. At the same time, the telephone



Exchange Street between 11th and 12th

company’s construction foreman began recognizing the brevity of the situation and organized his crew to load up the company truck with the necessary fixtures to move the entire operation to the Clatsop County Courthouse. The operators were vacated out the back stairway and promptly transported to their temporary headquarters. Due to these steadfast efforts, the phone lines never ceased to connect Astorians to the outside world.

Protection for the building itself, too, remained, without fail. Most windows of the brick structure were indeed equipped with fireproof metal shutters, all except for the front elevation, which would soon be face to face with the encroaching flames. In haste, the maintenance and construction crew attached the rear shutters to the front windows only to then realize that the openings did not match in size and the front windows required larger shutters to provide full protection. Since they knew that any exposed glass would invite destruction inside, some of the workers brilliantly thought to retrieve sheet iron from a nearby hardware store and nail it over the gaps and the transom window above the front entry. In the final moments before abandoning the building, one repairman climbed up to its flat roof, blocked up all the drains to the down spouts, then left their garden hose running to create an aerial bath that achieved a water barrier between falling embers and ultimate vulnerability of the previously flammable roof. The company’s employees were celebrated for their effective efforts. During the subsequent years of downtown Astoria’s reconstruction, the 1909 Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. Building saw multiple additions with fireproof material.

The 1920 Arcade Building is well known in Astoria for its longevity through the lore of its former building owner, Sherman Lovell, using intimidation tactics to deter firefighters approaching with their dynamite. Recognition must also be given to Lovell’s dedicated employees who demonstrated bravery similar to that of the telephone operators. By working in groups, the auto workers organized a system



The Lovell and Young Buildings stand amid the rubble

to carry away large burning timbers that had fallen on the roof while others who were supplied with several canisters of extinguisher powder, which had incidentally been ordered in surplus just weeks prior, to snuff out small flames all around the building. It was not long before the fire advanced eastward and the Arcade Building remained mostly intact. Mr. Lovell temporarily relocated his enterprise to establish this auto building as Red Cross relief headquarters as a well as space to house displaced businesses and professional offices. The upper level was quickly transformed into Blue Mouse movie theater keeping spirits up with several Christmas movie showings.

Fundraising to build the 1914 YMCA building at 12th and Exchange took a lot of community spirit, which carried over to saving Astoria’s beloved “Y” on the night of the fire. The facility’s janitor, C.A. Page, affectionately known as “Dad” to the kids the gymnasium served, used quick thinking to start a bucket brigade by organizing young men to douse approaching flames with pool water. As one of the few buildings to withstand the disaster, the YMCA transformed into official relief headquarters for the general welfare committee while also supplying beds and food for displaced citizens. It became temporary quarters for the *Astoria Evening Budget* and several other professionals to keep the city up and running until reconstruction began the following year.

Astoria Conflagration: Astoria Oregon: December 8, 1922 (Oregon Insurance Rating Bureau)
 Astoria Evening Budget, Friday December 8, 1922
 CUMTUX Spring 1985, Fall 1986 & Spring 2011

Pacific Telephone Magazine January, February, & October 1923
 Restoria April 2009 Astoria’s four Spexarth Buildings

TOPICS IN PRESERVATION & TOURS



LCPS board member and founder of Craftsman Design and Renovation, Wade Freitag, speaks about historic home exteriors

In August, LCPS board member Wade Freitag presented “Unwrapping your house: What to expect to find when you peel back the exterior layers of your home.” Using examples from his many years of experience with the professional restoration of Craftsman style historic homes in Portland, he demonstrated through photographs and descriptions, the most commonly uncovered conditions after removing vinyl or asbestos siding from an old home. One great take-away from this presentation was the suggestion to, if absolutely necessary to replace wood siding on a historic home, remove the siding from only the worst side of the house and use any good wood from that side to patch deteriorated areas the other three sides. This way, original historic material can be retained on the majority of the home — and it is spared from the landfill.

In October, two popular events brought people to the LCPS office and won us about a dozen new

members! Volunteer Eric Wheeler and LCPS staff Jaime Lump led a walking tour of downtown Astoria, focused on auto-centric development during the 1940s. The tour drew a crowd of 30 people and will likely be offered again. Eric Wheeler will be presenting the content from this tour at a Seaside Historical Society “History and Hops” event at Seaside Brewing Co. on November 17th.

In the spirit of the spooky season, we also presented our findings from our request for ghost stories. The top three entries were chosen, researched and they included the P.L. Cherry house, the Ross-Howes residence (Clementine’s Bed and Breakfast) and a charming vernacular home on Niagara. The first two, Italianate homes built in the mid-1880s, turned up the usual suspects, Ellen S. Cherry (Mrs. P. L. Cherry) perhaps occupies her favorite home, a gift from her husband, and her memories and the sound of the four Cherry boys running up and down the stairs, linger on. She looks out the front bay window, perhaps mourning her husband, whose ashes were spread at sea.

At Clementine’s - the lights are flickering and noises are heard. We don’t believe this to be the ghost of the original owners, William B. Ross and his wife Clemmie. We did uncover, however, that subsequent owners, Captain Richard E. Ross and his wife Eliza both died in the home. The Captain, a Bar Pilot, was a beloved and kind man who once spent 33 hours floating on loose deck boards after his ship and crew were lost at sea. He may be having a little fun in the home spooking the guests, but we sure think it’s harmless. For more info on the findings from the Niagara house, see the article, “The McIrvin Residence and the development of Peter Pan neighborhood.”

A vernacular craftsman home built around 1910 at the summit of the hill on Niagara Avenue has recently undergone a beautiful restoration by Sharon and James Stanovich. The work done, however, was occasionally interrupted by many occurrences: visions of a man, lights turning off, mysterious footsteps, rearrangement of things, and disembodied voices. Although we aren't sure which of the characters we ran across might be causing the commotion, we are delighted to delve into the history of Peter Pan neighborhood.

Historically the home was that of Morton B. McIrvin and his wife, Bertha. Bertha died in 1929, soon after she and Morton incorporated their new mortuary business. Morton was her undertaker. He then married Signe Koller, who raised the two McIrvin children (an infant son had passed away). When Morton and his family moved to Vancouver in 1929, his brother, Jared C. McIrvin, his wife Belvia, and their children moved into the home. Poor Jared had recently lost his young daughter, Majorie, at 16, and his nephew, whom he had raised, Donald Anderson, at 19. Both were high school students at the time of their deaths.

The McIrvin family certainly had more than their fair share of tragedy. Still, the family brought much joy to the hilltop neighborhood of Astoria, as Jared and Belvia purchased the Peter Pan store in 1928 when it was a confectionary shop. They expanded it into a grocery and, in 1939, had the building remodeled into the "modern" store you see today. When Jared retired from the grocery business in 1945, he sold the store to two of his daughters, Bernice and Dorothy. The McIrvin family lived in the Niagara house from 1915-1945. An entire neighborhood still holds on to the name given it by the McIrvin's store.

Join us every third Wednesday of each month for our Topics in Preservation discussions. To stay up on all LCPS events check our website:

www.lcpsociety.org/events



LCPS volunteer, Eric Wheeler, talks about the history of Duane Street as Astoria's former 'Automobile Row.'

THANK YOU!

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Know a nonprofit that needs money for a preservation project? Check out the LCPS grant program! Projects in any of the following categories will be considered:

- Documentation of historic architecture and sites
- Preservation, restoration, or rehabilitation of historic resources
- Education of community members

Learn more at
www.lcpsociety.org/grants

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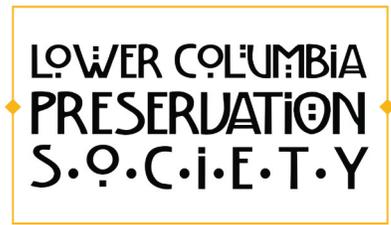
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