

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT HISTORY

Shortly after the founding of Albany in 1848, the Monteith brothers moved into their new house on the edge of the present downtown, where they opened a general store. Other businesses soon followed. By 1878, downtown Albany boasted grocers, drygoods stores, a wagon dealer, cigar stores, butchers, livery stables, a tailor, a “shaving solon,” [sic] shoe stores, a printer, saloons, hotels, an agricultural implements dealer, and a furniture dealer who doubled as an undertaker.

The first steamboat came to Albany in 1851, and the downtown quickly developed into the mid-valley’s riverboat landing. By 1866, five riverboats owned by an Albany man made regular trips between Albany, Corvallis and Portland. Remnants of this era of river travel still exist in the former riverbank warehouse and steamboat landing located at the foot of Broadalbin Street. Downtown Albany bears reminders of other modes of transportation as well. Starting in 1851, E.M. Briggs’ ferry crossed the Willamette from the foot of Ferry Street. The ferries charged 75 cents to cross the river with a wagon and team. Pack horses and mules cost 20 cents, foot travelers paid 12.5 cents, loose cattle were 10 cents, sheep and hogs 5 cents, and 100 pounds of freight cost 5 cents. The ferry was replaced by the Albany Steel Bridge in 1892. The footings of the bridge are still visible, carrying power lines across the river.

Street repairs sometimes uncover trolley tracks along First and Lyon streets, yet another form of early transportation. The trolleys were

at first pulled by horses, then steam engines, then horses again (because the steam engines scared the horses on the street), and were finally electrified in 1908. The Straney and Moore building, 321 Second Avenue. SW, was originally one of several livery stables downtown that serviced the trolleys. At the turn of the century, Albany was known as the “Hub City” of the Willamette Valley, with “unrivaled shipping facilities, railroads radiating in nine different directions, and a passenger service with fifty trains per day.” During Albany’s early commercial building period, impressive and ornate structures sprang up downtown. When it was built in 1887, the Flinn Block, 222 First Avenue, boasted one of the most ornate French Second Empire facades in the Northwest. The Straney and Moore Livery Stable is a fanciful Queen Anne structure built in 1891. The S.E. Young Building, 136 Lyon SW, was built in 1887 and rolled on logs to its present location by two horses and a “capston pulley” winch in 1912.

Architectural styles of the Downtown Historic District include: Italianate, Queen Anne, American Renaissance, Commercial Brick, Art Moderne, Twentieth Century Period Revivals, and a modified French Second Empire. Stability marks the history of Albany’s Downtown Historic District. Many of the buildings and businesses pictured in fading old photographs still exist as evidence of the downtown’s continuing vitality and charm. The Downtown District remains the civic, commercial, and social center of Albany.

Below: Looking East on First Ave from Washington Street in 1907. There were 2 movie theaters in this block and the streets were illuminated with strings of lights. Photo Courtesy of the Albany Regional Museum, from the Robert Potts Collection, Remembering When Vol 1 #122.



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