

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **SEP 12 1986**
date entered **OCT 9 1986**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Wells Fargo Building Number of contributing resources 1
and/or common Same Number of non-contributing resources 0

2. Location

street & number 309 SW Sixth Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Portland N/A vicinity of
state Oregon code 41 county Multnomah code 051

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name First Realty Reserve
street & number 8 West 40th Street
city, town New York N/A vicinity of state New York 10018

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Multnomah County Courthouse
street & number 319 SW Fourth
city, town Portland state Oregon 97204

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title City of Portland
Historic Resource Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1981-83 federal state county local
depository for survey records Portland Bureau of Planning, 1120 SW Fifth Avenue
city, town Portland state Oregon 97204

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u> N/A </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Constructed in 1907, the Wells Fargo Building is an Italian Renaissance-style skyscraper located in the banking district of downtown Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. The property is a twelve story-plus-basement, steel-framed masonry building, embellished with polychrome glazed architectural terra-cotta. It was built by the Wells Fargo & Company Express Department for joint occupancy by that business, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company. Designed by noted Oregon native architect Benjamin Wistar Morris, it is considered to be Portland's first "skyscraper." The Wells Fargo Building received highest category rating in local evaluation of the Portland Historic Resources Inventory (Rank I).

Located at the southwest corner of SW Sixth and Oak Streets, the building occupies a 100' X 100' parcel and is specifically situated on Lots 1 & 2 of Block 85, Portland Addition to the City of Portland.

Oriented to the east, the building is essentially square in shape. The major elevations are located on the east and north elevations. The building is divided vertically into four sections; the two story ground level, and attic story, the seven story shaft, and a two story capital.

Rising from gray granite plinths, the ground story of the building consists of 11 piers connected by 10 semicircular arches (five on each facade) which form a two-story arcade. These piers are sheathed with rusticated, coursed ashlar limestone, all but two of which take the form of pilasters. The two piers flanking the main entrance on 6th Avenue have engaged classical columns with an entablature above. The columns and entablature are of the Tuscan order. Cast-iron window or door frames are set into the bays or spaces created below each arch.

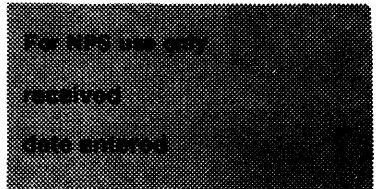
The main entrance to the building is located on the east elevation and is framed by a central two-story portico of the Tuscan order, the architrave of which was re-inscribed within the name of the United States National Bank, which occupied the building after 1922. The two-story base of the facade is organized as a colossal, five bay arcade divided by rusticated limestone piers. The vertical organization of each bay is as follows: street level plateglass window and bulkhead, transom, spandrel, and Diocletian window under the arch head. The central entrance gates are of cast bronze and are thought to have been produced by Prior Bronze works.

The ground level of the north elevation duplicates the east elevation with the exception of a freight entrance, with rolling metal door, which is located in the westernmost bay.

At the attic story, glazed architectural terra-cotta sheaths both east and west facades, forming the surrounds for 30 windows (15 on each facade) with 1-over-1, double-hung sashes. These windows are grouped into three-unit modules coinciding with the arched openings below, and are separated by terra-cotta-clad panels which extend the upward movement of the pilasters (or piers) at the first and second stories.

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Immediately below the attic story windows is a stone belt-course or molding coincident with and similar to the Tuscan-order entablature over the main entrance. Above these windows is another belt course or molding of glazed terra cotta ornamented by a blue wave-scroll motif.

From the fourth story upward to the tenth, the two street facades are identical, except for a fire escape and standpipe on the north side. Buff-colored brick is used for spandrels and pilasters, which are decorated with buff colored brick in diamond and cross patterns. The windows are all grouped in modules of three, which are further grouped into seven story vertical bays (21 windows per bay). Cement sills run continuously under each window module. The windows have gauged-brick flat arches.

The 10th-story windows differ from the windows of the lower stories in that each three-window module is under a segmental arch sheathed with glazed terra-cotta, including green decorative keystones and wreath motifs at the top of each pilaster. These keystones and motifs are directly below terra-cotta cornices which form belt courses along both facades and separate the lower stories from the capital.

At the 11th and 12th stories, the window openings are grouped into three-unit modules aligned with and similar to those of lower stories. Above the second story, all windows have 1-over-1 double hung sashes. But unlike their lower counterparts, the windows at the topmost stories have red brick surrounds, which in turn are divided vertically into 10 bays (five per facade) having six windows each (three above and three below). Each six-window grouping is surrounded alongside and above by panels sheathed in polychrome glazed architectural terra-cotta, which is ornamented with green stylized pine cones and the words "Wells Fargo" above each top-story window.

At the roof line there is a prominent copper cornice, with dentils below, and topped by a terra-cotta parapet.

The south and west facing walls of the building are constructed in utilitarian brick which is devoid of ornamentation. Windows on these elevations are mostly 1-over-1, double-hung sash.

The overall condition of the exterior is good.

Initially the lower level housed the Wells Fargo express offices. With the exception of the lobby, a major renovation of the ground floor interior occurred in 1923 under the direction of A.E. Doyle at the same time the U.S. National Bank was enlarged. The vestibule and elevator lobby are basically original and combine ornamental plasterwork and vari-colored marble. Later alterations to the interior have been executed by Annand & Kennedy and by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The current tenant of the building is the U.S. National Bank of Oregon, which entity recently sold the building to the current owner. Office space of the upper floors is undergoing renovation.

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Because the vestibule and elevator lobby are the only public spaces of the building to have remained unaltered since construction was completed in 1907, they bear more particular description. The vestibule is lined with white marble and black and pink travertine. The elevator lobby is a comparatively small space measuring about 20 feet square, where three elevators with ornamental brass doors occupy the wall opposite (or west of) the main doorway. The elevators have surrounds of white marble framed by a classical architrave. The south wall, also faced with white marble, is divided into three bays by four pilasters having enriched ovolo capitals. On the south wall, the two outer bays are occupied by wood and glass double doors; the center bay, a window. The north wall mirrors the organization of the south.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1907 **Builder/Architect** Benjamin Wistar Morris, III, architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Wells Fargo Building in Portland, Oregon, located at the southwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Oak Street, in what developed as the city's financial district, was erected in 1907 from a design by New York architect Benjamin Wistar Morris, III, a native Oregonian. It is a steel-framed masonry construction, 12 stories in height, showing the direct influence of Chicago School architecture. Its exterior, among the least altered of Portland's commercial buildings of this period, is organized and embellished in the style of the Italian Renaissance. The organization of the Sixth Avenue and Oak street facades into three sections, including an arcaded base of rusticated limestone and upper stories faced with buff-colored brick and glazed terra-cotta, is a convention of early skyscraper design. The Wells Fargo Building is primarily significant under National Register criterion "c" as the earliest and among the best-preserved skyscrapers in the state, one which is noteworthy for its use of polychrome architectural terra-cotta. The building is secondarily significant under criterion "a" as a manifestation of the height of power and influence wielded Wells Fargo & Company in Portland for over 50 years. It was designed as the joint branch office building of Wells Fargo & Company Express Department, the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company. The architect, Benjamin Wistar Morris, was born in Portland, educated in the East and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He developed a national reputation for office building design from his early commissions for banking and insurance firms in Hartford, Connecticut and his work in New York City.

Following the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905 Portland witnessed great commercial growth. As the city began to grow, its commercial center continued to move west, away from the river. New commercial buildings began to replace the Victorian mansions, churches and smaller wood structures. One of these new buildings was the Wells Fargo Building located at SW Sixth and Oak Streets.

The significance of Wells Fargo & Company in the state's history is that it was preeminent among numerous private express companies eager to serve southern and eastern Oregon mining districts during gold excitement of the 1850s. Because the principal business of express companies was receiving and forwarding gold dust and other valuables, some companies naturally evolved as agencies for deposit and safe-keeping. When the San Francisco-based Wells Fargo & Company established a branch office in Portland and acted in the capacity of bankers and exchange brokers, it became a major force in the financial center and contributed materially to the upbuilding of the state through the era of railroad development and the period of industrial growth surrounding the turn of the century. With the rise of national banks and the movement toward government regulation after 1900, the company divested itself of its Oregon banking operation and thereafter focused exclusively on its express service. By the time of the First World War, the expansion of United States government postal facilities rendered express companies superfluous, and Wells Fargo & Company was finally eclipsed.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Portland, Oregon-Washington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	0	5	2	5	2	8	0	5	0	4	0	7	5	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification The Wells Fargo Bank Building occupies a 1/4 block, 100 foot square parcel legally describes as Lots 1 and 2 of Block 83, Portland Addition to the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John M. Tess, President

organization Heritage Investment Corporation date December, 1985

street & number 123 NW Second Avenue #200 telephone (503) 228-0272

city or town Portland state Oregon 97209

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

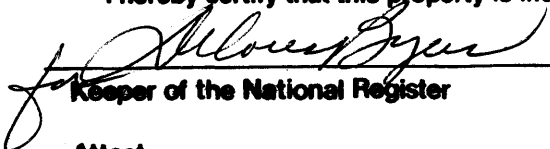
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date August 14, 1986

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register


Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 10-9-86

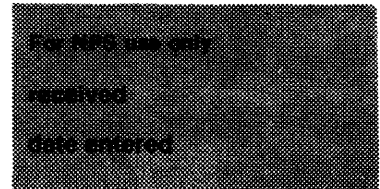
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Wells Fargo & Company had established itself in Portland as early as 1853 with an office at the foot of Front and Morrison Street. With other partners, Henry Wells and William G. Fargo had organized the American Company in 1850 in the East. In 1852, shortly after the discovery of gold in California, they established another firm in the West, Wells Fargo & Company.

After the initial gold rush of the late 1840's Portland began to see the influx of other types of immigrants to the city. The small and young city of Portland was growing steadily and becoming an important trade center. During this period, Portland took over Oregon City's role as the "Metropolis of the Pacific Northwest," largely due to its accessibility to the Pacific Ocean and ability to provide goods to the new markets created in California as the result of the discovery of gold. It was logical therefore that the newly formed Wells Fargo & Company would open an office in Portland.

As the company continued to grow throughout California and the Pacific Northwest, miners picking up parcels and mail began leaving gold with the company offices for safe keeping. Soon Wells Fargo established itself as the leader in both the banking and express industries. Wells Fargo became a name associated with security and reliability. As the company continued to grow, it bought smaller companies and other competitors until it owned or controlled all of the stage lines from the Missouri River to California.

As America continued to grow and the railroad began to make an impact in the West, Wells Fargo turned its attention to the railroad industry. Prior to the advent of the railroad, Wells Fargo had concentrated its staging activities in the West. In the new era of railroads, Wells Fargo was able to extend its sphere of influence to the Midwest and Eastern markets. So successful was the company that prior to its demise, it controlled over 80,000 miles of railroad in addition to its local staging and water transport.

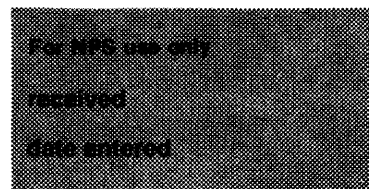
Just after the turn of the century the company had been split into two separate companies, the Wells Fargo Bank and the Wells Fargo Express. In 1905, as part of the reorganization of the company, the Portland Branch of the Wells Fargo Bank was sold to the U.S. National Bank. In that same year the company purchased the land to build the Wells Fargo Building for its Express Department.

The company's plans to construct the building were disclosed as the result of a court case wherein two real estate agents argued their claim to a sales commission on the property, which had sold for \$100,000. At this time the actual height of the building had not been determined. However, it was contemplated that the building would be the largest structure in the city when completed.

Construction of the building began in 1906 and was completed in 1907. Portland took pride in the fact that 1906 marked a shift from wood framed construction to steel framed and concrete construction. Reasons for this shift included the move towards more fireproof construction and the growing cost of lumber.

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Upon completion, the Wells Fargo building became Portland's first skyscraper. The building's size and beauty marked the high point of company fortunes, since shortly thereafter, the company was to see its end come with remarkable swiftness.

Shortly after the United States entered the First World War, the government took over control of the railroads. In addition, as part of the war effort, the government, by an order of Congress, combined the nation's major express companies into one governmental agency with the name American Railway Express. With this action Wells Fargo ceased to exist.

In 1922 the building was purchased by Andrew Porter, a prominent Portland investor, lumberman and director of the U.S. National Bank. In 1946 the property, which had come to be known as the Porter Building, was purchased by the U.S. National Bank of Oregon, which had already expanded its operations into the neighboring building.

Benjamin Wistar Morris III, FAIA, (1870-1944)

Born in Oregon in October 1870, and raised in Portland, Benjamin Wistar Morris was the son of the Reverend B. Wistar Morris, second Bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Oregon. He left Portland at the age of 18 to attend college (Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut) in the East. He obtained his architectural education at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris.

Morris entered the New York office of Carrere and Hastings on his return to the United States and assisted in preparing prize-winning plans for the New York Public Library competition. He entered independent practice about 1900 and organized the firm of Morris, Butler and Morgan from which he withdrew after a short time. He was working independently at the time of the Wells Fargo Building commission. He was associated with Grant LaFarge between 1910 and 1915. Later, he worked in partnership with Robert T. O'Connor (Morris and O'Connor); the latter firm carried on until the time of his death in New York in 1944. Morris was elected to The American Institute of Architects College of Fellows.

Early in his career, Morris gained a reputation for the banks and insurance company buildings he designed in Hartford. Later works, produced by the Morris and O'Connor firm, included notable office buildings, commercial buildings, banks, and public buildings in New York. A list of the architect's noteworthy works is as follows:

Connecticut State Arsenal and Armory, Hartford
Home Office Building, Aetna Life Insurance Company, Hartford
Phoenix Fire and Life Insurance Company Building, Hartford
State Savings Bank, Hartford
Mechanics Savings Bank, Hartford
Morgan Memorial Building, Hartford
Cunard Steamship Building (1921), New York

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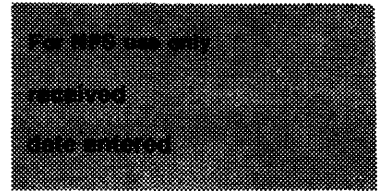
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Seamen's Bank for Savings, New York
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company Building, New York
Continental National Bank, New York
Union League Club, New York
Pierport Morgan Library Annex (1929), New York
Westchester County Courthouse, White Plains, New York
Avery Memorial Art Museum (1934), Hartford

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MacColl, E. Kimbark, The Shaping of a City; Business and Politics in Portland, Oregon 1885 to 1915. Portland: The Georgian Press Company, 1976.

Roth, Leland M., A Concise History of American Architecture. New York: Harper and Row, 1980.

Vaughan, Thomas, and Virginia Guest Ferriday (eds.) Space, Style and Structure: Buildings in Northwest America. Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1974.

Withey, Henry F., and Elsie Rathburn Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.

WELLS FARGO 309 SW Sixth, Block 83, Lot 1&2

