

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

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

For HCRS use only

received MAY 21 1982

JUN 17 1982

## 1. Name

historic Ayer-Shea House

and/or common Shea, John F., House

## 2. Location

street & number 1809 N.W. Johnson Street n/a not for publication

city, town Portland n/a vicinity of congressional district First

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Non-Profit

## 4. Owner of Property

name BiT-Tel Investment Company

street & number 905 N.W. 17th Street

city, town Portland n/a vicinity of state Oregon 97209

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Multnomah County Recorder's Office

street & number 319 S.W. Washington

city, town Portland state Oregon 97204

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Portland Historical Landmark has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date January 1970  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Portland Historical Landmarks Commission, 621 S.W. Alder Street

city, town Portland state Oregon 97205

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## 7. Description

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

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The house built for Winslow B. Ayer in 1892 at the northwest corner of Johnson and 18th Streets in the Nob Hill District in Portland, Oregon, was designed in the Colonial Revival Style by Whidden and Lewis, Portland's leading architects of the period. From the 1880s to 1930, the residential area surrounding 19th Street was among the most fashionable in the city, but modern-day commercial-industrial development has encroached on its periphery. The Ayer-Shea House is sited on a generous, double corner lot (100 x 100 feet) lined with mature laurel hedges five feet in height. The house is set back 30 feet from either street curblin. Majestic black willows and silver birches shade the front lawn. The entrance is flanked by large rhododendrons. These plantings help preserve the character of the property despite changes in surrounding land use which have introduced a warehouse, parking lot and printing plant to the immediate neighborhood.

The Ayer-Shea House is of wood-frame construction and is 2 1/2 stories in height on a full basement with concrete floor and brick perimeter walls. Its square ground plan measures 42 x 41 feet. The house is oriented to the south, facing N.W. Johnson Street, and is fronted by an unsheltered terrace 10 feet in depth with brick guardrail. Exterior walls are clad with lapped weatherboards and trimmed with wide cornerboards. The hipped roof is presently covered with composition shingles. On the west elevation is an outside stairway to the upper floors, and across the north, or rear face, is a porch with upper deck and railing. The construction date of these features is uncertain, but the railings have geometric stickwork panels reminiscent of Beaux Arts architecture. At the rear of the property, oriented at right angles to the central axis of the house, is a low, single-story 12 x 36-foot concrete walled utility building and garage. The garage is attached to the house by a passageway extension from the central cross hall. While not a feature of the original development, it is comparatively unobtrusive.

The principal, or south facade, reflects an interior in which the front two thirds is essentially formal in plan. Two tall brick chimneys with flared tops rise on either side of the core of the house occupied by the stairwell. Each facet of the hipped roof is broken by a dormer, those on the street elevations being pedimented gable-roofed types with double-hung sash with six over six lights. Each elevation is trimmed with an elaborate cornice--not a full entablature--including modillions, bed molding and fret molding. Typical window openings are trimmed with classical architraves, those of the ground story having added height created by plain inset panels. All first and second story windows have shutters and are fitted with double-hung sash. Those lighting front rooms have one over one lights. Those lighting rooms in the rear of the house have two over two lights.

The principal facade is organized with strict bilateral symmetry and has two distinctive features. The more prominent of these is a pair of semicircular window bays which are reminiscent of the cylindrical bow windows of the Sears House (1816) in Boston by Alexander Parris, though they are somewhat Richardsonian as well. The other distinctive feature of the Ayer-Shea House facade is the cylindrical portico with its two free-standing columns of the Tuscan order which is reminiscent of the portico of Benjamin Latrobe's Ashdown House (1793) in Berkshire, England. Originally, the Ayer-Shea House

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portico had a balustrade with square balusters and urn finials atop the posts. While the Colonial Revival was based on such Adamesque archetypes, the Ayer-Shea House is more eclectic than it is academic. It clearly reflects the contemporary work of William M. Whidden's former employers, McKim, Mead and White--foremost exponents of the Colonial Revival Style.

The interior of the Ayer-Shea House is organized around its central entry stairhall. The staircase leading to each of the upper floors is the core of the house. Hardwood flooring is used throughout principal rooms. Wall and ceiling finish is painted plaster, and major spaces are trimmed with elaborate, freely-interpreted classical cornices. Door and window trim is oak. Each of four chimneypieces has brick fire box surrounds and classical mantelpieces. Two of these are found on the north walls of front parlors on either side of the first floor hallway. The other two are located in corresponding positions in the front bedrooms of the second floor. The west, or so-called master bedroom, was divided into two spaces by a stud wall in remodeling undertaken by a recent occupant, the Christian Community of Portland. It was during the time that the Christian Community operated the house as a youth hostel also, that several bathrooms were fitted into minor interior spaces. The existing kitchen and dining facilities are in rear rooms on the second story. Third story storage and sleeping rooms are organized around a central corridor with lateral axis. The basement contains two longitudinal rows of steel pipe structural columns supporting wooden girders. Plaster finished stud walls enclose the furnace room on the east wall. The oil-burning boiler heats water for upstairs radiators.

## 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/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1892 **Builder/Architect** Whidden and Lewis, Architects

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The two-and-a-half-story, weatherboarded frame house at the northwest corner of Johnson and 18th Streets in Northwest Portland was built in 1892 and is among the earliest houses in the Colonial Revival Style to have been erected in the city. The architects were William M. Whidden and Ion Lewis, who were trained at MIT. While Whidden launched his career with the New York firm of McKim, Mead and White--foremost exponents of the Colonial Revival, Lewis was associated with Peabody and Stearns in Boston. Only the Trevett-Nunn House and the Milton W. Smith House--both completed in 1891--are earlier buildings in the Colonial Style still standing in Portland. Both were designed by Whidden and Lewis, and both have been entered into the National Register. The house of 1892 was built in the fashionable Nob Hill residential district for Winslow B. Ayer, wealthy lumberman and patron of the arts who occupied the property until 1904, when a Jacobethan Style house--also by Whidden and Lewis--was completed for his use nearby. The subject property was occupied by successful plumbing contractor John F. Shea from 1915 to 1926. With its hipped roof, symmetrical facade, lapped weatherboards, and shutters; its classical portico and cornice, oval window, and pedimented dormers with double-hung sash with six over six lights, the Ayer-Shea House embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Neo-Adamesque, or Colonial Revival Style. Moreover, it is a distinctive example of its style in Portland and Oregon as a whole because of its facade with formally-placed, two-story semi-circular window bays and cylindrical-shaped portico which are reminiscent of Federal period archetypes by Benjamin Latrobe and Alexander Parris. Nevertheless, the house is essentially a reflection of the contemporary work of McKim, Mead and White. At least one house similar in organization and many details--namely, the three-story brick masonry Lathrop House in Chicago, Illinois--was produced by the New York firm in the same year. Although its condition is currently run down and the portico balustrade with its urn finials is missing owing to a lapse in maintenance in recent years, the Ayer-Shea House is substantially intact. Some interior remodeling occurred during the years it served as the headquarters of the Christian Community of Portland and was operated as a youth hostel. However, the important spaces and features, such as the main staircase, elaborate wood trim and chimneypieces, are unaltered. Interior modifications were limited to the addition of bathrooms, semi-enclosure of the second-story stair landing, subdivision of the master bedroom, and sealing off the stairway to the topmost floor. Exterior changes are minor in nature and confined to side and rear elevations where they are unobtrusive. These include addition of a semi-detached garage on the east elevation, and possibly the addition of a rear porch deck and railing and the outside stairway/fire escape on the west elevation. Current owners, who acquired the property in 1981, plan to restore the house for office use. The Ayer-Shea House is significant to Portland as an outstanding example of the Colonial Revival Style by the distinguished firm which introduced the style to Oregon. It possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with leading Portland businessmen of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

FILE NOT RECORDED

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

FILE NOT RECORDED

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Portland, Oregon - Washington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	0	5	2	4	3	2	5	5	0	4	1	5	2	5
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 Ayer-Shea House occupies Lots 1 and 4 of Block 177 of Couch's 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 n/a code

state n/a code county n/a code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title R. Ilise Gold, Property Manager

organization BiT-Tel Investment Company date August 12, 1981

street & number 905 N.W. 17th Street telephone (503) 295-0166

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

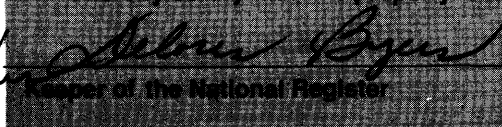
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date April 26, 1982

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

 Entered in the National Register date 6/14/82

Keeper of the National Register

Chief of Registration

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William Whidden and Ion Lewis made up Portland's foremost architectural firm from 1890 to 1910, though the firm continued in business past Whidden's retirement in 1920 until Lewis' death in 1933. Both men were educated at MIT and launched their careers on the East Coast--Whidden with the prestigious New York firm of McKim, Mead and White, and Lewis with Peabody and Stearns in Boston. Whidden also was trained in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He was sent to Portland by his employers to oversee construction of Henry Villard's Portland Hotel in 1883. When the project was halted by the collapse of Villard's financial empire, Whidden returned to the East Coast. In 1888, the unfinished hotel project was rescued by a local syndicate, and Whidden was hired to finish the work. In 1889, Whidden was visited in Portland by his MIT classmate, Ion Lewis, who was persuaded to stay on and enter into the partnership with Whidden which was established in 1890.

Whidden and Lewis were responsible for most of Portland's finest buildings of the turn-of-the-century period. It was they who introduced up-to-date architectural fashions to Portland. In addition to their residential work in the Colonial Revival Style, the firm introduced in their Portland City Hall (1892-1895) the Renaissance Revival Style exemplified by McKim, Mead and White's New York City Houses for Henry Villard (1882-1886) and the Boston Public Library (1888-1892).

Winslow B. Ayer (1860-1935), for whom the subject property was built, amassed a fortune in the lumber industry. He arrived in Portland from New England in 1883, and, following a brief association with the J. K. Gill Company, he founded the Portland Cordage Company. In 1895, he formed the amalgamated Eastern and Western Lumber Company, which he headed as President for many years. Ayer was prominent in civic as well as business affairs. He was a founder and President of the Library Association of Portland, remembered for his establishing a pension system for library employees; a member of the Oregon State Library Committee, and a member of the Board of Regents of the State Normal School. A knowledgeable collector, he was an influential trustee of the Portland Art Association. He is honored still for his bequests of \$250,000 each to the Portland Art Museum and the Multnomah County Library. In 1904, having occupied his house at 18th and Johnson for twelve years, Ayer moved to a larger house at 19th and Johnson, designed by Whidden and Lewis in the Jacobethan Style. Nineteenth Street was the most fashionable street in the Nob Hill district from the 1880s to 1930.

T. W. B. London resided in the Ayer House at 18th and Johnson from 1905 to 1912. London was an executive of Balfour, Guthrie and Company, leading grain exporters with branch offices in San Francisco, Tacoma and Seattle.

The house appears to have stood vacant in 1913 and 1914, but was acquired in 1915 by John F. Shea (1856-1926), another prominent citizen who contributed to the upbuilding of Portland in the Progressive Era. Shea was a native of Ohio. After finishing his training at Dayton University, at the age of 21, he headed west. Settling first in

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San Francisco, he worked in a managerial capacity for Dunnerberg Plumbing Company. Following his entrepreneurial instinct, he chose the city of Portland in which to open his own plumbing company. His first shop was at the corner of 6th and Washington. After ten years, he built another outlet at 2nd and Ankeny Streets where the enterprise prospered until Shea's death in 1926. In 1906, Shea had broadened his scope and entered the field of contracting. His firm installed the plumbing in many of Portland's finest residences and public buildings. He was married in 1880 to Anna M. McGinn, a native of Portland. They had nine children. Shea is remembered for the quality of his work, good management and ethical standards.

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Bibliography

- Lockley, Fred, History Of The Columbia River Valley From The Dalles To The Sea, The S.S. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago: 1928, Vol. 3, pg. 534.
- MacColl, E. Kimbark, The Growth Of A City: Power & Politics In Portland, Oregon 1915-1950, Georgian Press, 1979, pg. 150.
- Marlitt, Richard, Nineteenth Street, Oregon Historical Society, 1978, pgs. 86 and 87.
- McMath, George, "Portland Landmarks Commission Inventory," data sheet, 1970.
- "Nob Hill," Portland Historical Landmarks Commission file.
- "The Honeyman House," Rodger K. Jones Realtors promotion article.
- "Winslow B. Ayer (1860-1935) Lumberman Who Served Public Interest Bountifully," unidentified newspaper clipping, Oregon Historical Society file.
- "Winslow B. Ayer, Jan. 26, 1860-March 3, 1935," tribute by Portland Community Chest, Oregon Historical Society file.