

DAYTON HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY

ASSESSOR MAP NUMBER: 4-3-17 DA TAX LOT NUMBER: 2600

PLAT NAME: Original Town of Dayton LOT: NA BLOCK: NA

PROPERTY ADDRESS: Block bounded by Third and Fourth, Ferry and Main Streets

CURRENT OWNER: City of Dayton

P.O. Box 338, Dayton, OR Contributing: 1 - Blockhouse
1 - Fountain
1 - Park Site

ORIGINAL OWNER: Joel Palmer

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: NA Non Contributing: 1 - Rest Room

STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE: NA YEAR BUILT: 1850

HISTORIC NAME: Courthouse Square HISTORIC USE: Park

CURRENT NAME: Courthouse Square Park CURRENT USE: Park

CONDITION: Good ALTERATIONS: NA

PHOTOGRAPH ROLL FRAME: 4-37 INTERVIEWEE: _____

RESOURCE NUMBER: 15 RECORDER: Rees DATE: 11-10-84

SITE DESCRIPTION: _____ THEME: Exploration/Settlement

The Courthouse Square Park is bounded by Third and Fourth, Ferry and Main Streets. The Street frontages along Third and Ferry are developed with commercial buildings except for the Gabriel-Will Residence (Resource #4). Ferry Street is Dayton's commercial mainstreet and designated as the Dayton-Amity Highway; Third Street is officially designated as the Dayton-Salem Highway, #221. Along Fourth and Main, to the northwest and southwest of the park, are older residential buildings. The park is situated on level ground at the edge of incline which slopes down to the Yamhill River.

1.79 acres.
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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The park is a grassy square, planted with a grove of native maples and oaks near Fourth and Main, and an extensive wood of native evergreens, primarily douglasfir, across the northern half of the park. The southern half of the park is more open and planted along both street frontages with mature, native maples and, along Ferry, mixed with exotic tree species. One, a Weeping Cherry, was planted as a memorial to John and Isabella Grieve Mitchell in 1934.

The park is filled with memorials, historical mementos and park related structures. At the northern corner, the Fort Yamhill Blockhouse is located in amongst the douglasfirs. The blockhouse is a two story structure, built of hewn logs. In the 1930's Historic American Building Survey, its form was described as follows, "The upper block is of the same size as the lower, but turned on a true diagonal, with small hipped roofs on three corners of the lower part and the entrance platform on the fourth." The roof is a low pitched hip and sheathed with hand split shakes. The entrance to the first story is located on the north side of the building underneath a cantilevered corner of the second story. Midway up in both stories, a course of logs is notched out with small square holes to accomodate defense by gun.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Courthouse Square and Blockhouse and Historical Marker within it are all dedicated as memorials to Joel Palmer. In the early 1850's Palmer offered this block as well as certain monetary inducements if Dayton was chosen as the site for the Yamhill County Courthouse. A number of other citizens also pledged money and property toward the construction cost of the courthouse, however, in 1858 Lafayette was chosen as the county seat. Subsequently, the block was used as a park and as a site for the City Hall and other public structures, such as the water tower.

In 1911, John Lewis, son of Benjamin, (Resource #37), initiated the idea of acquiring the Fort Yamhill Blockhouse from the U.S. government, moving it to Dayton and dedicating it as a memorial to Palmer who had been the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at the time of its construction in 1856. Originally, located at Fort Yamhill, it appears to have been built by Second Lt. Wm. B. Hazen and his soldiers as a defense against Indian treachery. Ruth Stoller, local historian, speculates "Hazen had just taken part in the Indian Wars in Southern Oregon and was basing his assessment of Indian character on his experiences there rather than any incidents at Grand Ronde. He had observed the advantages of heavy wooden buildings in the war on the Rogue. Finding none at Grand Ronde, he built one." In about 1866, Fort Yamhill was abandoned by the army and the government property was auctioned off. A few years later the Indian Agency at Grand Ronde acquired the building, disassembling and moving it to the reservation. It was used for everything from a jail to a pigpen. In the spring of 1911, the blockhouse was disassembled again and on June 9th, a long procession of teamsters carried the dismantled relic into Dayton 25 miles northeast of its original location. It was reassembled in the Park and was dedicated on August 13, 1912. The relocation and restoration of the blockhouse as a memorial to Joel Palmer in 1911-1912 is one of Oregon's earliest historic preservation projects of record and is evocative of the romantic temper of its period.

SOURCES:

Dayton Centennial 1880-1980, Edit, June Bienz, 1980, p. 34-5.

"Historic Background of Some Dayton Structures", Ruth Stoller.

"Some Chapters in the Oregon History", Dayton Reading Club, 1955, pg. 6 & 16.

"State of Oregon Inventory of Historic Sites and Buildings: Fort Yamhill Blockhouse and Joel Palmer Landmark", Yamhill County, Stephen Beckham, 1976.

"Yamhill County Cultural Resources Inventory: Fort Yamhill Blockhouse and Joel Palmer Historical Marker", Yamhill County Planning Department, 1984.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Dayton, Oregon, 1893, sheet #2; 1912 sheet #3.

"Dayton Blockhouse Renewed", Capitol Journal, Salem, Oregon, January 5, 1974.

"A Bit of Early Day Precaution", Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, April 16, 1939.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: (continued)

To the east of the blockhouse there is a basalt marker with a bronze plaque honoring Joel Palmer. At the southern corner of the park is a replica of the City's firebell which was housed in the water tower, and on Ferry Street near Third is a World War II cannon. The cannon was given to the City of Dayton as a replacement for a World War I cannon which the community gave, along with the original fire bell, to the war cause as a scrap. In the center of the park is a bandstand, the roof of which was destroyed in the Columbus Day Storm of 1962. Along the major approach to the bandstand from Ferry Street is located a memorial Fountain dedicated to Martin Miller in 1917. A basketball court, childrens play equipment, drinking fountain and restrooms are also located in the Park.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION: (continued)

The inscription on the basalt marker to the southeast of the blockhouse, reads: "This pioneer park and blockhouse honor General Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Oregon Territory from 1853 to 1857, appointed by President Franklin Pierce. Frontiersman, author, legislator, and friend of the Indian, his journal Travels Over the Rocky Mountains", published in 1847, was used as guide by the immigrants to Oregon. This pioneer leader dedicated this publication to "the Pioneers of the West and their descendants, the bone and muscle of the community, who improve and enrich the country in peace and protect and defend it in war". In his words, this memorial is presented to the town of Dayton by Omar C. Palmer and dedicated by Thomas McCall, Governor of Oregon, this 25th day of July 1971."

SIGNIFICANCE:

Courthouse Square Park, and Fort Yamhill Blockhouse are associated with Joel Palmer, one of the founders of Dayton and donator of the park square. The blockhouse is significant in Dayton as an example of early commemorative activities. The Courthouse Square Park is an example of typical town planning practices in the 19th century. Criterion a.

