



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Porteous, Mitchell and Braun Company Building

other names/site number Miller Building

2. Location

street & number 522-528 Congress Street N/A  not for publication

city or town Portland N/A  vicinity

state Maine code ME county Cumberland code 005 zip code 04101

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Carrie S. Peterson* SAPO 8/23/96  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
 State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register.
  - removed from the National Register.
  - other, (explain:)

*Edson H. Ball* 9-27-96  
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
 Entered in the  
 National Register

Porteous, Mitchell & Brawn Co., Bldg.

Name of Property

Cumberland, ME

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/Department Store

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/College

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Renaissance

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Terra Cotta

Brick

roof Asphalt

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

**Period of Significance**

1904-1946

**Significant Dates**

1904

1911

c. 1927

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Varney, Penn, Architect

Burnham, George, Architect

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Porteous, Mitchell & Brawn Co. Bldg.  
Name of Property

Cumberland, ME  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** Less than one

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

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4	8	3	4	2	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3 

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Zone Easting Northing

4 

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 See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Christopher W. Closs, Kirk F. Mohny

organization MHPC date July 1996

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town Augusta, state ME zip code 04333

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Porteous, Mitchell and Braun Co. Building

Cumberland, ME

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The Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building is a five-story, steel frame and load-bearing brick masonry structure located along the main commercial thoroughfare, Congress Street, in the heart of the central business district in Portland. An irregular polygon in plan, the seven-sided commercial structure extends a full block in depth and is expressed with a secondary facade which fronts on Free Street (south elevation) at the rear of the building. The Porteous Mitchell & Braun Company Building covers the entire lot and shares party walls with more recent twentieth century commercial buildings on the east and west elevations, which are two and three stories respectively.

## Exterior

The facade (north elevation) is expressed with six bays and is clad in limestone-colored terra cotta rendered in the Renaissance Revival style. The elaborate cornice is richly decorated with modillions, astragal molding, and dentils; the original copper antifixae which crowned the roofline have been removed. The fifth story is composed of semi-circular windows in groups of three openings per bay; bays are divided here, as they are on the three stories below, by short, fluted, engaged pilasters with Scamozzi caps. The spandrels are adorned with festoons and wreaths and the arched window openings bear archivolt details with carved keystones. The springline of each window arch is ornamented with a carved cap which rests upon a short, engaged, paneled pilaster. The second through fourth stories share a common vocabulary with broad, expanded bays employing Chicago-style windows filled with plate glass and flanked with casement-type operating sash. Luxfer prism transoms with colored glass in leaded comes fill the openings above the principal windows. The former are missing from the second story openings, having been replaced with common plate glass. The composition of these three levels is divided from the fifth story by a classical entablature which spans the entire elevation and is supported upon seven tall, engaged, fluted pilasters crowned with Scamozzi caps. The eastern half of the frieze bears the title "Miller Building 1904," denoting the owner of the company that built the original three-bay section in 1904. The three western bays of the facade (added in 1911) are identical in every detail except their width is slightly diminished from the bay spacing of the prototype structure. The engaged pilasters rise from simple bases, which now rest upon a contemporary (c. 1960) first story storefront system of brown imported marble. A continuous, cantilevered canopy consisting of a steel frame clad with light sheet metal (painted aluminum) extends the full width of the building above the sidewalk and two main entrances. The broad, plate glass-filled contemporary storefront openings are not original but are still defined by the original vertical structural divisions; entrances remain in their original bay locations but now have aluminum frame door and window systems with painted or anodized finishes. It is unknown if the original (1904; 1911) Luxfer prism transoms remain extant behind the present marble facade above the display windows.

The side or party walls (east and west elevations) are unremarkable in design and are composed of common red pallet brick laid in plain mortar. On the east, only the upper three stories are exposed where there are twenty-two bays. The terra cotta ornamentation and window details are returned around from the facade and expressed in a single bay at the north end of this elevation (third through fifth stories only). The fenestration and brickwork of this elevation reveal the evolutionary development of the building through the various building campaigns of 1904, 1911, and the period 1927-1953. Fenestration is regular, but window types and sizes of openings vary widely and at least

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three profiles of the rear portions of the building during earlier periods may be observed through differentiated brick type and mortar patterns. Window types on both the 1904 and 1911 sections consist of modern replacement aluminum one-over-one double-hungs as well as awning type. The strongly-defined rectangular lintels and sills appointing each opening are of cast concrete. A clear vertical line in the brickwork between bays 11 and 12 delineates the original rear wall of the 1904 structure. Windows openings on this portion of the elevation are both full-size and half-size rectangles that are defined also with cast concrete lintels and sills. The third story contains only five bays compared with the full eleven bays of the two upper stories. The southeast corner of this elevation carries a tall, plain brick furnace chimney, square in section, which services the adjacent building to the east. Rooftop mechanical systems or elevator over-ride penthouses are visible above the roofline of this elevation. The only other detail of historical significance is a painted sign on the parapet of the 1904 structure bearing the parent company's name "P. M. & B. CO." This sign is now quite faded, but readable from the street.

The west elevation (1911; 1953) is composed of common red pallet brick with fifteen bays on the fifth story level, and ten bays on the fourth. The third story bears only eight bays. The mass of the adjacent commercial block to the west obscures all but the fifth story of the 1911 structure, and covers the first two stories of the 1953 addition at the rear. Fenestration in the 1911 portion is regular and consists of six bays of rectangular openings defined with cast concrete lintels and sills and filled with aluminum awning and double-hung windows. An additional two bays (bays four and six) are somewhat smaller openings with segmental arches. On the fourth story of this portion of the building there are two segmental arched openings and a single rectangular bay, both detailed typically as described above. On the third story, there is a single rectangular opening in bay eight, which repeats the details of the foregoing. The original line of the rear wall of the 1911 structure is delineated by the furnace chimney (1911) which is now flush with the exterior wall. South of this chimney there are seven bays per story, punctuating the wall in a consistent, even grid pattern. These openings are defined with more diminutive cast concrete lintels and sills. A massive, square brick exterior furnace chimney shaft rises vertically through this elevation between bays twelve and thirteen and is painted below the fourth story level. The roofline of this elevation is interrupted by a large (sixty foot length) penthouse capping the 1911 structure; three elevator over-ride penthouses, and the two aforementioned chimney stacks. A large painted sign, in fair condition, is applied to the wall of the large penthouse and bears "Porteous, Mitchell & Braun CO."

The south elevation, which fronts upon Free Street, incorporates both a customer entrance and display storefront with a delivery and receiving bay for service vehicles. This elevation is five stories in height and five bays in width - one less bay than the facade. The curtain wall facade consists of two colors of yellow iron-spot brick, laid in plain Portland-based mortar. Six engaged pilasters of brick, crossed with brick spandrel panels and a continuous belt course of limestone at each level, control the rigid, evenly apportioned grid composition of this elevation. The roofline is delineated with a short brick parapet, capped with limestone coping. The fourth and fifth stories have homogenous fenestration, with aluminum framed one-over-one windows grouped within each of the five principal bays. The brick color on these levels is more variegated than that found at the second and third stories below and is a consequence of this facade being united in a single design in 1953, from earlier (1927) elements at the first,

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Porteous, Mitchell and Braun Co. Building

Cumberland, ME

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second, and third stories below. The bays of the second story contain tripartite wooden windows composed of a large central display window framed by one-over-ones (plans call for the replacement of these windows with units that match those on the upper stories). In contrast, the bays on the third story feature glass block with a single operable sash in the center. The upper stories are further adorned with a reticulated pattern of header brick of contrasting color in each of the spandrel panels beneath the windows. The window sills are continuous across the entire elevation and each pilaster is embellished with a limestone base block at each level. The first story consists of two large bays, the more westerly opening a thirty foot opening for delivery and service vehicles which entered from Free Street to access the interior loading dock is filled with an aluminum-framed storefront display window and entrance system, with four, aluminum-framed customer doors at the center, flanked by four plate glass units on either side. A large, continuous open transom exists above the storefront composition. The facade of the first story is faced with limestone and bears the company name "Porteous o Mitchell o & Braun o Company" above the aluminum storefront and entrance.

**Interior**

There are two principal entrances on Congress Street (1904; 1911), one of which provides access to a new main stairwell that extends from the first to the fifth floors, creating a visual section of the building's interior. The second entrance opens into proposed retail space in the first story of the 1911 block. On the first floor there is two feet difference in floor levels between the 1904 and 1911 sections (which does not exist on the upper floors). The dominant feature in all of the floors are the columns. Columns are spaced on eighteen foot to twenty-two foot centers and consist of steel cores encased in concrete masonry and finished with hard plaster in classical motifs. Space usage in the building was originally organized in the following manner:

**Basement** - Retail, storage, mechanical, heating

**First through Fourth Floors** - Retail, stock, dressing rooms

**Fifth Floor** - Stockrooms, offices, employees' facilities (washrooms; lounge; kitchenette);  
packing

The interior of the Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Building underwent successive remodeling campaigns during the period 1911-1991, in response to changing consumer demands and evolving marketing strategies for retail goods and service. Surviving features and finishes from the period 1904-1943 include decorative pressed metal ceilings in the future library space; coffered ceiling beams with ornamental plaster details; and classically adorned columns (both circular and square in section) with Tuscan capitals. There were originally four stairways; all of which had been altered in varying levels of degree. The 1904 central stair, located along the party wall, has been preserved in its original location and design only between the fourth and fifth floors. However, prior to the present remodeling all detail had been removed from the lower four levels. In its recent conversion to a college of art, the interior has been substantially reconfigured from when it served as a department store. Based on the frequent remodelings that had been made to the interior in the past, however, it does not appear that these spaces were of particular significance.

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Initially constructed in 1904 from plans drawn by the Lynn, Massachusetts architect Penn Varney and enlarged in 1911 and later, the Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building is a handsome Renaissance Revival style building located on Congress Street in Portland. The block long building is significant within the broad pattern of events related to the commercial growth and development of the central business district of Portland during the first half of the twentieth century, and for its innovative design and extensive use of ornamental cladding. It meets National Register criteria A and C.

The Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building was originally constructed for the Portland dry goods firm of Watson, Miller & Company. Judging from Portland city directories, this firm was established on Congress Street sometime between 1897 and 1901 by James W. Watson and William L. Miller. Although the exact nature of their partnership is unknown, by 1903 Watson had relocated to Newburyport, Massachusetts, whereas Miller embarked on a plan to build a modern store building. In its February, 1904 edition, the *Industrial Journal* (Bangor) noted that the contract had been let for the new building which it referred to as "The Boston Store". Upon its completion in 1904, the new store was named the Miller Building. Within two years, however, Watson, Miller & Company had been acquired by Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company, and William Miller had apparently retired (the directories after 1906 only list a residential address).

Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company was a Connecticut department store chain whose principal officers were John Porteous, John B. Porteous, Archibald Mitchell, and Robert Braun. The *Portland of To-day Souvenir* (1909) stated that the company at that time owned stores in Norwich, Connecticut, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Fort Wayne, Indiana (in addition to their Portland store). The *Souvenir* described the store as "Metropolitan in every essential...", and went on to note that "The company represents the highest achievement in merchandising, comprising under one roof, varied and extensive departments, that are as distinct in themselves as retail stores devoted to specialties." At the time, the store employed 120 people throughout its six floors and 50,160 square feet of retail space. In 1911, in response to continuing business growth, Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company doubled the size of the original building by adding three virtually identical bays to the west side of the building (on the site of an earlier three-and-one-half story nineteenth century structure known as the Blake Bakery). Under the direction of prominent local architect George W. Burnham, the terra cotta Renaissance Revival style facade was extended and unified, creating the present configuration.<sup>1</sup> Successive expansion campaigns (1918-1927) at the rear of the property as business grew, carried out under the guidance of architect E. Leander Higgins (Burnham's' partner and later successor), eventually extended the mass of the building all the way to Free Street, thus making the structure, by 1953, a full city block in depth, with five stories throughout.

Paralleling Portland's growth as Maine's largest city, Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company emerged as the city's premier downtown department store and maintained this position for most of the twentieth century. In response to shifting demographics and more dispersed marketing trends influenced by development in suburban areas, the company closed the Congress Street facility in 1991, ending 85 years of continuous operations. Since 1994 the Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building has been undergoing rehabilitation by the Maine College of Art for



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use as its primary facility.

The subject property is architecturally significant as a small-scale example of a major building type - the skyscraper - which emerged in the 1890s in the principal cities of Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, and New York and which rapidly displaced load-bearing masonry construction for urban high-rise buildings. Formerly, the maximum height of tall structures was limited by the compressive constraints and other physical properties of masonry materials. Introduction of the wrought iron, and later steel internal frame, combined with lighter-weight curtain wall construction (of non-load-bearing masonry), revolutionized the development and proliferation of a new building type called the skyscraper. The Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building, which combines the aforementioned technological innovations with Chicago-style windows, is one of the first examples of its kind in Portland. The Chicago-style window, made possible through larger bay spacing allowed by greater frame strength, permitted maximum penetration of natural light within the building, thus creating greater utilization and flexibility of deep interior spaces.

The application of architectural terra cotta, a relatively recent late nineteenth century development which embodied plastic qualities much sought after by designers seeking to manipulate form, is significant in the exterior design and stylistic treatment of the Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building. Terra cotta, consisting of fired but unglazed clay, could be molded in virtually any form. Use of this material permitted the exterior to be ornately expressed, and inexpensively built compared to traditional masonry, in a popular, monumental style of the period inspired by classical forms called Renaissance Revival. Terra cotta cladding, to which glazing was applied after molding and firing, offered the advantages of not only plasticity and the ability to create intricate classical forms more cheaply than with brick or carved stone, but light-weight and superior water resistance. The Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building is the most elaborate example of its kind that survives in Portland.

The building is associated with three different architects: Penn Varney (1859-1949) of Lynn, Massachusetts; George Burnham (1875-1931), of Portland; and E. Leander Higgins (1879-1936), also of Portland. Penn Varney received his initial architectural training beginning in 1882 as a draftsman for the Lynn architect H. K. Wheeler. By 1889 Varney had gone into practice with Alfred W. Call, and two years later had established his own practice. His known work in Maine includes the Sanford Town Hall (1908) and the First National Bank in Skowhegan (1909, Skowhegan Historic District, NR 2/19/82). George Burnham is credited with the design for the 1911 expansion on Congress Street which doubled the size of the original building. Burnham unified and balanced the combined facades, while sensitively employing the same architectural vocabulary even while handicapped by reduced lot frontage dimensions. This accounts for the differential bay spacing within the composition of the present facade, although this is barely noticeable. Burnham was among the state's most talented early twentieth century architects. An 1898 graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Burnham initially worked in architectural firms in Boston and New York before returning to his native Portland in 1902. In 1904 he won the design competition for the Cumberland County Courthouse, a significant achievement considering that his competitors included the well established Portland architects John Calvin Stevens, Francis H. Fassett, and Frederick Tompson.

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In 1909 Burnham took on a fellow MIT graduate, E. Leander Higgins, as a draftsman. Three years later they formed a partnership that lasted until Burnham's retirement in 1918 or 1919. Thereafter, Higgins maintained a successful practice in which he developed an expertise in ecclesiastical architecture. Surviving architectural drawings entitled "Addition to Store of Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Co. Portland, Maine, and dated May 10, 1927, indicate that Higgins designed the original elements of the building's Free Street facade.

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Porteous, Mitchell and Braun Co. Building

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### Bibliography

*Congress Street - Portland, Maine. A Guide for Building Rehabilitation and New Construction.* Portland, ME: Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc. ND. pp. 78-79.

*Directory of Portland and Vicinity.* Portland, ME: Portland Directory Company. 1897-1908.

*Portland of To-day Souvenir.* NP. 1909.

Reed, Roger G. "George Burnham, 1875-1931". *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine.* Vol. 1, No. 1. Augusta, ME: Maine Historic Preservation Commission. 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Edward Leander Higgins, 1879-1936". *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine.* Vol. II, No. 12. Augusta, ME: Maine Historic Preservation Commission. 1985.

Varney, Penn. Architect File. Maine Historic Preservation Commission. Augusta, Maine.

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# **National Register of Historic Places**

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### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building occupies the City of Portland Tax Map 37, Block H, Lot 6-001

### **Boundary Justification**

The boundary is drawn to encompass the entire city lot historically associated with the Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Company Building.