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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Yeon Building

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 522 SW Fifth Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Portland N/A vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97204

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.)

James Harnish December 1, 1993  
Signature of certifying official/Title Deputy SHPO Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
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:)

for Signature of the Keeper Entered in the National Register Date of Action 1/21/94  
August M. Lapsley

Yeon Building  
Name of Property

Multnomah, Oregon  
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	
<u>1</u>		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	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**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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

Commercial/Trade: business

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

Commercial/Trade: business

**7. Description**

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

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American  
Movements: Comercial Style skyscraper

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation steel

walls concrete, terra cotta

roof asphalt: built-up

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

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### SETTING

The Yeon Building stands on a 100'x100' lot on the northeast corner of S.W. Fifth and Alder Streets. The building is specifically located on Block 63 on Lots 5&6, Portland Addition to the City of Portland. The building fronts S.W. (Fixth) Avenue to the west and Alder Street to the south. (Ap?)

When constructed, the area surrounding the building was emerging as the commercial center of the city. A gradual westerly movement of the commercial district of Portland had been occurring since the great fires of 1872 and 1873, which destroyed major sections of the city along the waterfront. Spring flooding of the city, until the construction of the sea wall in 1929, further spurred the movement of the commercial section of the city to move west away from the river. Following the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905, the City of Portland grew by leaps and bounds. This period of growth is marked by the construction of many commercial structures following the Exposition until the stock market crash of 1929 which led to the Great Depression.

The Yeon Building replaced three, two-story wood-frame commercial buildings on its 100x100 foot site. Two of them were undistinguished, but the building on the Fifth and Alder corner, larger than the other two, had the distinction of an octagonal tower at its second floor with a steep, conical, wood-shingled roof. The streetcar lines went by on Fifth Streets and on nearby Washington and Morrison Streets.

Next door, at the corner of Fifth and Washington Streets, was the new seven-story Swetland Building, completed in 1907. Across Washington Street from the Swetland was the 1890 Perkins Hotel, with its golden bull enshrined within a niche on its corner tower. Across Alder Street, on the southeast corner, the Failing Building, then only seven stories high, built for the Gevurtz Furniture store, would not be increased to its present 12 story height until 1913. Directly across Fifth Street from the Yeon and Swetland buildings the Lipman & Wolfe Co. department store was to go up the next year, replacing the old Olds, Wortman & King department store at the corner of Fifth and Washington. On the next block south, between Alder and Morrison Streets, Meier & Frank's old five-story building was still standing, although their 10-story addition at Sixth and Alder had been completed in 1909. Across Morrison Street on Fifth, the Corbett Building had been completed in 1906.

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Today, the Yeon Building continues to be situated in the heart of Downtown Portland fronting the Transit Mall to the west and Alder Street to the south.

#### DESCRIPTION

Then, as now, the construction of a new office building was an event in the city, and competition to be first to take advantage of a window of opportunity in the leasing market was fierce. As described in a 1910 Oregonian article:

There is a building race on in Portland between . . . the Yeon and Selling Buildings, and the public is watching with interest. . . . The spectacular rate at which the terra cotta facing was placed on the Yeon Building was the subject of general comment, but since that work was finished, spectators have been unable to watch the rate of progress, the work being all on the interior.

The 12-story Selling Building was rising a block away at Sixth and Alder. Quite an intense contest developed between the Selling and Yeon Buildings to reach completion first. Although the construction on the Yeon Building started in August, 1910, well before the Selling, and although construction on the Yeon was two months ahead of schedule in December, a strike of the brick masons in a jurisdictional dispute with the tile setters on the building delayed completion until April of 1911--at essentially the same time as the Selling.

The architects of the Yeon Building were Reid & Reid. The prominent San Francisco firm was not new to Portland. Twenty years before, they had designed the old Oregonian Tower at Sixth and Alder. In 1912, they also would complete the new tower for the Oregon Journal at Broadway and Yamhill Streets. Reid & Reid's design for the Yeon Building followed the current Portland fashion for white terra cotta buildings, begun by A.E. Doyle's Meier & Frank addition of 1907-1908. Doyle along with Whidden Lewis dominated the Portland office building scene in this period. The Yeon Building however also reflected the more flamboyant styling then prevalent in San Francisco. The Yeon Building was the first Portland office building to be entirely covered with glazed white terra cotta, and indeed, only the 1925 Bedell Building repeated this treatment.

The general contractor for the building was the prominent New York City contractor,

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Thompson-Starrett, and the steel frame was fabricated and erected by American Bridge & Iron Co.

At 15 stories, it was the tallest building in the city when it was constructed. It maintained that distinction for 16 years, until the Public Service Building was completed in 1927. The top three floors of the Yeon looked over every other Downtown building around it, affording incomparable views for many of its tenants.

### STRUCTURE

The design concept of the Yeon Building, with a base, shaft and capital, was within the main stream of office building design in the U.S. as defined by Louis Sullivan for the design of a tall building, echoing the base, shaft and capital of the Classical orders. The Yeon Building differs in degree, having a three-tiered base and a three-tiered capital.

In floor plan, the building follows the U-shaped plan usual for quarter-block sites on Portland's small 200 foot square blocks. The north wing of the U is narrower than the south wing, and these wings are tied together at alternate floors by steel struts, to stiffen the wings against wind load. Seismic loads were not being considered at that date in Portland. A similar scheme of wind bracing had been followed the year before in the Spalding Buildings also designed by an architect from another part of the country.

The steel frame was of I-beams supported on columns built-up of channels and plates, riveted together. The columns are supported on cast-iron bases, 4'-6" and 4'-10" square. Floors are concrete slabs supported on joists. Fireproofing of the steel frame, and exterior walls is of reinforced concrete.

### EXTERIOR

The exterior of the building at the street level was clad with bronze-plated cast metal, in-filled with plate glass. The main entrance, as well as an entrance on Alder Street intended for a basement space, were surrounded with decorative white terra cotta. The second floor was faced with rusticated white terra cotta. The facing and opening treatment

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of these two levels has been changed over the years in the course of remodeling.

From the third floor through the tenth floor the building is clad with smooth faced white terra cotta blocks, with slightly projecting frames around the widely separated windows. The windows are double-hung wood sash, except at the property lines, where windows are metal with wire glass. The windows at the third floor have heavily rusticated jambs and elaborate medallions at their heads. At the 11th and 12th floor levels are projecting belt courses, and windows in the 11th floor are treated with heavier projecting frames, separated by panels. Window heads here are decorated with medallions also.

The 12th, 13th and 14th floors are incorporated within a giant order of Ionic columns, a device later used in Portland on the 1914 Multnomah County Courthouse, the 1925 Bedell Building and the 1927 Public Service Building. In 1911 this giant order was unique for a Portland office building.

Above the cornice of the giant order, the 15th floor windows are set between panels, and surmounted by a dentil course, above which was originally a magnificent, widely projecting, and highly decorated cornice, executed in white terra cotta. The top edge of the cornice was ornamented with garlands, into which were set outlets for hundreds of electric light bulbs. This cornice, unfortunately, was removed in 1938, because of concern by city building department officials, after a terra cotta lion from cornice of the Lipman-Wolfe store across the street fell.

The exterior of the light court walls was all faced with white glazed tile. The material eased cleaning and increased light reflectance, since in 1911, electric lighting was not very adequate for work spaces. The concrete walls at the north and east property lines are painted.

The original building entrance, at the north side of the Fifth Street elevation was all plate glass, set in a bronze-plated cast metal frame. A revolving door at the center of the entrance was flanked by a pivoted door at each side. Above the revolving door, a large double-faced clock was set in the glass. Although this original entrance was replaced in 1931, the clock has been preserved and is now in the office of the Owner's general superintendent. A similar, but less elaborate entrance was constructed at the center of the Alder Street elevation, with a chain supported metal and glass marquee over the entrance.

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This entrance was intended to serve a large basement restaurant, which never materialized. The marquee was removed many years ago.

The first street level tenant was the Heitkemper Jewelry store, which opened in the space next to the building entrance in 1911, and remained in the space until 1923. In 1917 or 1918, F. W. Woolworth moved into the remainder of the ground floor space and the basement space originally intended for a restaurant. Woolworth remained there for more than 50 years, closing about 20 years ago, after which B. Dalton Bookstore leased the major part of the ground floor space on March 1, 1973.

### INTERIOR

The building entrance lobby as originally constructed was a grand space, with heavily veined marble veneer on the walls, and a mosaic tile floor. It featured four elevators. These were enclosed by a bronze plated ornamental metal grill behind which was wired glass. Mechanically operated floor indicator dials were located above each elevator. A lobby shop counter for tobacco and candy was located against the south wall of the lobby, and a Western Union Telegraph desk was located on the north wall, between the elevators and the entrance doors.

In 1931, the lobby and entrance were remodelled, in response to an appeal by then Governor Julius Meier to building owners in the state, asking them to perform maintenance and remodelling of their properties, to provide jobs for the large number of unemployed workers. Mrs. Yeon retained the New York architectural firm of DeYoung, Moscowitz and Rosenberg, then remodelling and enlarging the existing Meier & Frank Store. Louis Rosenberg of that firm was a native of Portland, and later participated in the design of the new Oregon State Capitol Building in Salem with New York architect Francis Keally. DeYoung, Moscowitz & Rosenberg designed the new lobby much as we see it today, except that the south lobby wall was also of marble, matching the north wall. The metal and glass entrance also was different, the doors having full frames of brass, and the glass panels above the doors being divided into smaller panes.

In 1983, a garbage collector's truck accidentally destroyed the entrance and much of the marble. The owners engaged Portland architects Zimmer/Gunsul/Frasca to design the

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repairs to the lobby and entrance, saving as much of the 1930s design and materials as possible. The south wall marble was replaced with wood panelling in order to piece out damaged areas of marble elsewhere. The present lobby retains much of the Art Deco detail from the 1930s remodel. Notable are the lighting fixtures and the elevator doors.

The office rental space throughout the building has received much renovation through the years, including the installation of suspended ceilings to accommodate new recessed lighting fixtures and air conditioning duct work. However, the original mahogany doors, frames and trim have been generally retained throughout the building, and most of the floors have all of their original corridor doors and frames, although the obscure glass door lights and relight transoms have been replaced with opaque panels. At one area on the 11th floor, the original ceiling is still exposed and the glass relights are still in place. Originally there were wall bracket gas lighting fixtures in every office, as insurance against electrical outages. These have all been removed. The original white marble wainscots and floors in the office floor corridors have mostly been left in place, although now covered over. The toilet rooms on the tenant floors have all been totally remodelled.

The four elevators were replaced with new Westinghouse gearless traction machines in the 1931 remodel. The hoisting machines and motor-generator sets in use today are the same equipment, although they have been recently re-built. When originally installed, these elevators were among the fastest in the city, equalled only by those in the 1927 Public Service Building. Designed to be controlled by operators, they were converted to use without operators in later years.

A small penthouse was built on the roof in the original construction to be used as living quarters for the building superintendent, so that someone would be in the building all night to attend to the building's mechanical equipment. In later years, this penthouse has been used as a conference room for the 15th floor tenants. A later addition on the roof included the air conditioning machinery and cooling towers, as well as a gas boiler which replaced the piped-in district steam, which, in turn, had replaced the original boilers in the basement as the heat source for the building.

Portland has a unique collection of office buildings dating from its pre-World War I period, mostly designed by its distinguished local architects Whidden & Lewis and A. E. Doyle. However, the few office buildings designed by architects from other parts of the country



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have added to the richness of the architectural mix of Downtown. These include the Wells Fargo (1907) by Benjamin Wistar Morris of New York City, the Spalding Building (1910) by Cass Gilbert, also of New York City, and those of Reid & Reid of San Francisco, who have given us three outstanding office buildings, two of which fortunately remain, the Yeon Building (1911) and the Oregon Journal Building (1912).

All of the office buildings designed in this period by A. E. Doyle and by Whidden & Lewis utilized white or cream colored brick facing for the shaft portion of their towers, between the white or cream colored terra cotta of the base and the attic story differing notably from the all white terra cotta facing of Reid & Reid's Yeon Building.

The Yeon is a building, whose design, height and location have distinguished it throughout its life. It is excellently maintained by its present owners who have always been sensitive to its historic qualities.

**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**

1910-1911

**Significant Dates**

1911

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

John Baptiste Yeon (1865-1928)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Reid & Reid, San Francisco, architects

Thompson-Starrett, New York, contractor

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Portland Bureau of Planning

Yeon Building  
Name of Property

Multnomah, Oregon  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.22 acres

Portland, Oregon-Washington 1:24000

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	10	525340	5040510
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4			

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 George Sheldon and Richard E. Ritz, FAIA

organization SERA Architects for Heritage Investment Corporation date June, 1992

street & number 123 Northwest Second Avenue telephone (503) 228-6404

city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97209

#### 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 Melvin Mark Properties

street & number 111 SW Columbia Street Suite 1380 telephone (503) 223-4777

city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97201-5845

**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.

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**SHPO SUMMARY**

The Yeon Building, a 15-story, U-shaped Commercial style office tower of steel-framed reinforced concrete with white glazed terra cotta cladding, occupies a 100-foot square site, or full quarter block, at the corner of SW Fifth Avenue and Alder in the central business district of Portland, Oregon. The skyscraper as constructed in the years 1910-1911 for the investor John B. Yeon, a wealthy and public-spirited capitalist who established his fortune in the lumber industry. Plans and drawings were provided by the San Francisco architectural firm of Reid and Ried, whose early and important project in the city was the nine-story Richardsonian Oregonian Tower of 1892 at SW Sixth and Alder which no longer stands. The Yeon Building was included in the Portland Historic Resource Inventory as a Rank II potential city landmark.

The nominated building is described in the following documentation in the context of an office building boom which followed promotions of the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition of 1905 and extended through the First World War. During that 12-year period, as many as 20 major office towers and four large retail blocks--many of them clad or embellished with terra cotta, were constructed west of the traditional business district oriented to the Willamette River waterfront. Together, these developments shifted the weight of commercial activity in Oregon's metropolitan center. The Yeon Building also represents a high point in the use of architectural terra cotta locally. Located nearby are several contemporary projects designed by Doyle and Patterson, leading local exponents of the new building technology for tall buildings. Terra cotta, most of it produced by Gladding, McBean and Company manufactory at Lincoln on the northern California coast, was fire-resistant, lightweight and comparatively economical. The Meier and Frank Department Store Annex, the Lipman and Wolfe Building, the Olds Wortman and King Department Store, and the Selling Building were standing by 1910. Each has been listed in the National Register. Evaluated in the context of this broader pattern of downtown development, the Yeon Building meets National Register Criterion A. It also meets Criterion C as a significant and rare work in Oregon by Reid and Reid and meets Criterion B for its association with the historic developer. No remaining residence associated with John B. Yeon during the high point of his career has been identified.

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Street facades of the Yeon Building are organized in the rational base-shaft-capital scheme that characterized commercial buildings inspired by the Chicago School. The building's vertical emphasis--the stacking of office compartments to heights made possible by mechanical elevators--clearly expresses the underlying function.

Originally, the retail base consisted of plate glass shop fronts framed with bronze-plated cast iron. The elaborate main entrance on Fifth Avenue incorporated a revolving door, and the Alder Street entrance was marked by a metal and glass marquee. The main lobby was finished with full marble paneling, mosaic tile floor and bronzed cast metal elevator grilles. The entrance was replaced in remodeling of the elevator lobby by the New York firm of DeYoung, Moscowitz and Rosenberg in 1931. Following damage to the remodeled entrance in 1983, the local firm of Zimmer, Gunsul, Frasca Partnership repaired the lobby and entrance along the Art Moderne lines.

The historic base is essentially intact at the rusticated second story with its strong belt cornice and at the third story, embellished with Mannerist rusticated window surrounds having cartouches and cornice lintels. The fourth through 11th stories comprising the shaft are differentiated by modestly-framed openings for double-hung wood window sash and crowning belt courses. The 12th through 14th stories are composed as a colossal three-story Ionic colonnade, and the 15th story, the attic, was originally capped by the boldly-projecting, full classical entablature with scalloped cresting that was crucial to balancing the composition. The terra cotta cornice, which was fitted with sockets for decorative electrical lighting, was removed in 1938 in response to official concerns for public safety.

The typical office floor plan followed the conventional double-loaded corridor circulation pattern wrapping around three sides of a light court, the interior walls of which were faced with white glazed ceramic tile to intensify ambient light. While individual office spaces have been renovated over the years, mahogany doors and trim have been retained in many places, and original corridor doors and frames are in place on most floors, but without relights and transoms.

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The distinction of the Yeon Building under Criterion C lies in its height of 15 stories, unmatched in Portland at the time of construction, and in the detailing of street facades in which the effect of verticality was heightened by adhering to a single, light-reflecting tone throughout. The proportions of an extra tall building were knowingly corrected by incorporating as many as three and four stories in the base and cap.

John B. Yeon (1865-1928), a native of Ontario, Canada who had emigrated to the United States to work in the woods, amassed a fortune in the logging industry on the lower Columbia River and by shrewd investments in downtown Portland real estate. The property at Fifth and Alder which he developed at the age of 45 with the aid of the prominent San Francisco architects is considered a statement of achievement. The building which bore Yeon's name remained the tallest in the central business district until completion of the Public Service Building in 1927.

Yeon is remembered in the annals of Oregon history as the Multnomah County Roadmaster who served for token compensation to oversee development of an exemplary county road system. He also promoted and supported from his personal fortune, along with Simon Benson and others, construction of the Columbia River Highway which connected Portland to market road systems of eastern Oregon and gave motorists access to an area of scenic grandeur.

Progressive era works in Portland by noted non-local architects:

Oregonian Tower, Reid and Reid, San Francisco firm  
(no longer standing), 1891-1892.

Wells Fargo Building, Benjamin Wistar Morris, New York, 1907.

Yeon Building, Reid and Reid, San Francisco firm, 1910-1911.

Spalding Building, Cass Gilbert, New York, 1910-1911.

Oregon Journal Building, Reid and Reid, San Francisco, 1912.

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### HISTORY OF TERRA COTTA IN PORTLAND BUILDINGS

There are different types and uses of glazed terra cotta. Portland office buildings generally used architectural terra cotta. This type is a design of hollow blocks of baked clay hand-pressed into molds and used to decorate the exteriors of buildings. Most of the terra cotta buildings are found in the downtown core of the city, but there are also residential and institutional examples outside the city center. These buildings were constructed in Portland from 1905 to 1930 and the Yeon Building is an exquisite example.

Although dating back centuries, architectural terra cotta became popular as an overall facing in the 1890's, with the first example in Chicago. Use of terra cotta in Portland commercial buildings started around the same time. The period between 1907 and 1920 was the main period of buildings glazed of the large commercial type in downtown Portland. It's popularity resulted from the popularity of steel framed skyscrapers; these large commercial structures needed a protective, yet lightweight and economical facing. Terra cotta answered these needs. Molded and glazed, it also gave the architect an economical, creative source for decorative exterior treatments.

Architectural terra cotta is of hard-baked, fine-grained clay. It is similar to brick, but made of a finer grade of clay and fired at a higher temperature. Generally, it is manufactured in hollow blocks, 4 inches deep with faces typically 12x18 inches.

Given the decorative nature of the facing, terra cotta ornamentation begins with a set of shop drawings translated from the architect's drawings. These drawings outline each individual piece of terra cotta, with details including how it is to be secured. From the drawings, sculptors employed by the terra cotta firms make plaster and clay models; the plaster for the main body and the clay for the detail. In interpreting the relatively simple shop drawings, the model makers also had to supply their own sense of proportion, scale and texture to any ornamentation. In addition to the detailing required, terra cotta firms must also plan for shrinkage when the clay is baked; shrinkage would vary according to the clay used but could be as much as 10%. From the models, the manufacturers created plaster molds. From there, grog (ground-up, previously burnt clay) is added to the clay to control plasticity and firing behavior. The mixture is wetted, blended, aged up to 24 hours and then hand-pressed into the molds. Carefully pressed, the clay is left in the mold for several hours. After which, the presser removed the clay and cleans off any imperfections. The

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terra cotta is then placed on a drying rack for about 24 hours. The piece is then glazed accordingly and fired. To allow the piece to warm and cool gradually, firing generally stretches from days to a week. Subsequently, the pieces are checked for size in the fitting room and shipped.

The dominant firm manufacturing handmade architectural terra cotta for the Portland market was Gladding, McBean and Co. of San Francisco. In the 1880's, Charles Gladding, visiting from Chicago, convinced his midwestern partners to establish a plant in Lincoln, California after sending them samples of the clay. Initially, Gladding, McBean and Co. manufactured sewer pipe, but almost immediately began producing architectural terra cotta for buildings in Portland and elsewhere on the west coast. Gladding, McBean & Co. provided the terra cotta for the Yeon Building. Other terra cotta firms active in Portland during the period were N. Clark & Son and Washington Brick, Lime & Sewer Pipe Company.

Masons installed the terra cotta from scaffolding while working from drawings. They attached the terra cotta to the building's skeleton using metal anchors. Generally, anchors were made of wrought iron before 1930. Preservation of such terra cotta often difficult as water seeps in and eventually rusts the anchors; the weathering eventually explodes the terra cotta. Once in place, the masons would saturate the terra cotta with water, rake out the 1/4 inch joints about 1/2 inch and point.

The standard exterior structure of terra cotta buildings was a composition of four sections: the base, the attic, the shaft, and the cap. The exterior plan was common to most of Portland's terra cotta buildings and is reflected in the Yeon Building.

The glazed terra cotta used in the Yeon Building consists of white colored glazed terra cotta facing on the lower three floors, glazed terra cotta on the columns and facings at the attic floor level, around the Florentine windows of the two highest stories and on the roof cornice. The original glazed terra cotta remains except for the white-colored facing used on the ground floor.

The Yeon Building is an important extant example of the terra cotta skyscrapers that comprised so much of Portland's downtown building boom in the two decades following the Lewis & Clark Exposition. It followed what had become a fair standard formula of design,



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as found in the Selling and Wilcox Buildings--but expressed a somewhat more flamboyant flair likely due to Reid & Reid's San Francisco home. First, it was the largest of the genre at 15 stories, dominating the skyline. Second, Reid & Reid by elongating the base and capital to three tiers accentuated the building's size. Finally, by using an all-white facing, Reid & Reid created a dramatic architectural statement--one not to be repeated in Portland until 1925 with the Bedell Building; most buildings in downtown Portland used a cream or mixture of cream and white. In location, design and material, the Yeon Building was in many ways the dominant Portland skyscraper of the period.

**JOHN BAPTISTE YEON**

(born, April 24, 1865; died, October 15, 1928)

On April 24, 1865, John Baptist Yeon was born on a farm four miles from the town of Plantagenet, Ontario along the Ottawa River just south of Quebec Province. One of eight children on an isolated farm, his youth revolved around the chores. In between, he received intermittent schooling. By 13, John assumed responsibility for plowing the fields. By 1882, at the age of 17 and tired of the enduring farm life of northern Ontario, John struck out with hometown friend, Mose Leroux, to the "States".

Following in the footsteps of another favorite Plantagenet son, Jim Muckle, the duo headed southwest to the woods around Defiance, Ohio. There they worked with an oxen team hauling oak logs to the Maumee and Wabash canals. Yeon worked from 4:00 am to 9:00 pm. He was paid \$25 a month plus room and board. In camp, they had heard that Muckle had moved west and prospering in Oregon logging industry. This success story prompted Yeon to follow Horace Greeley's advice of "go west, young man".

Yeon and Leroux arrived in Portland in the early spring of 1885 just as the logging season ended. They decided to continue west to Astoria where they heard work was still available. Broke, they worked their way to the coast on a steamboat by loading wood at fuel stations and keeping the boiler stoked. Once in Astoria, they worked clearing a logging road near Warrenton at the Lewis and Clark River, earning \$40 a month plus room and board. Given his farm experience, Yeon soon became an ox driver--the second highest paying job in the camp at \$100 a month plus room and board.

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After three years, Yeon moved east 25 miles to Cathlamet, Washington and ran a logging camp for the Simpson Logging Company. Within two years, the frugal Yeon had saved over \$900 and started his own logging business nearby. He bought stumpage along the Elochaman River. Stumpage gave him the right to cut and haul logs. He did not have to pay the stumpage fee until his logs reached the mill. By making small payments on logging equipment and oxen, he leveraged his \$900 investment into a first year net profit of \$3000.

A working owner, the industrious Yeon reinvested his money in available timberland and continued to expand his enterprise. After three years, he sold his interest and organized the logging firm of Yeon and Pelton in Ranier where he continued to prosper using rail rather than oxen to move his logs. By 1906, he had become a millionaire. Yeon described the secret to his success:

"during dull seasons I did not close down my camp like most loggers did, but kept at work, keeping my equipment in shape and assembling my logs so that when good times came again, I was ready to put my logs on the market and get top price."

In 1906, at the age of 41, Yeon sold his logging and timber interests to the Portland Lumber Company and bought his first major downtown Portland property for \$125,000. The site purchased was the quarter block on the southeast corner of Broadway and Stark, the future site of the Imperial Hotel. Within a year, he invested another \$275,000 for the sites of the future Benson Hotel, to be built by friend and fellow former logger, Simon Benson, and his own Yeon Building.

It was with this last plot of land that John Yeon planned to use to make a statement that he had arrived. The plot was located in the midst of a downtown core, across the street from the soon to be built Selling Building and a block from the Wilcox. These were all dominant downtown structures built with the then technologically advanced steel/terra cotta skyscraper design and named for their developers. Yeon's architects were not local, but the prominent San Francisco firm of Reid and Reid. The building not only bear his name, it would be the largest building in Portland--and would remain so until 1927. The Yeon Building remains the structure most importantly associated with this important Oregonian.

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According to E. Kimbark MacColl in Merchants, Money & Power, many of Yeon's friends thought him foolish. The Imperial Hotel site had sold for only \$14,000 eight years prior. But Yeon shrewdly envisioned downtown's enormous growth. Within 20 years, his downtown holdings were worth over \$1.5 million.

Truly a rags to riches story, Yeon devoted his energies and money in later life to public interest. He is quoted to have said, "What I am and what I possess, I owe to the state of Oregon." From 1913 to 1917, he served as Multnomah County roadmaster at a salary of \$1.00 per year and created one of the best county road systems in the West in a county that had approximately 8,000 automobiles. He also worked successfully with his friend Benson to gain public approval of a bond issue to fund the Columbia River Highway and then as Multnomah County Roadmaster supervised its construction--saving the state an estimate \$25,000 in construction costs. Yeon Mountain, a prominent point on the south bank of the Columbia River just east of St. Peters Dome and visible from the highway was named for him. When Simon Benson resigned from the State Highway Commission in 1920, the Governor appointed Yeon to serve as its chairman. Yeon served until his death on October 15, 1928 at the age of 63.

He was survived by his father, John B. Yeon, his wife, Elizabeth Mock Yeon, and four children: Mary Pauline, John B., Jr., Allen Eugene, and Norman Leroy.

### THE REID BROTHERS

James William Reid with his brother, Merritt J. Reid, were San Francisco architects whose firm, Reid & Reid, designed the old Oregonian Building (1892), the Yeon Building (1911) and the Oregon Journal Building (1912) all in Portland.

James Reid and his brother Merritt were both born in St. Johns, New Brunswick, Canada; James on November 25, 1851. James attended McGill University in Montreal and received his architectural education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He first worked as a draftsman with the Evansville & Terre Haute Railroad in Evansville, Indiana. In 1886, the Reids went to San Diego, California to design the Coronado Hotel, and in 1888, the Reids opened their office in San Francisco, which continued until Merritt's death and James Reid's retirement in 1932. Another brother,

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Watson E. Reid, was also in the practice with James and Merritt for a time. Watson Reid died in Vancouver, B.C. in 1943.

James Reid died in San Francisco on September 22, 1943 at the age of 91. He was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Reid & Reid had a very successful practice. Among their works in San Francisco were the old Fairmount Hotel (1906), the Call office building, Hale Brothers department store (1902 & 1907), the Cliff House (1908), Matson Building, Fitzhugh Building, and the Western States Insurance Building, all in San Francisco. In Los Angeles, they designed the Fitzhugh Building and the Merritt Office Building. In San Rafael, they designed the Carnegie Library and in Contra Costa County, the Byron Springs Resort Hotel.

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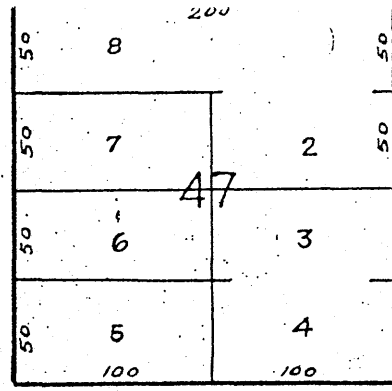
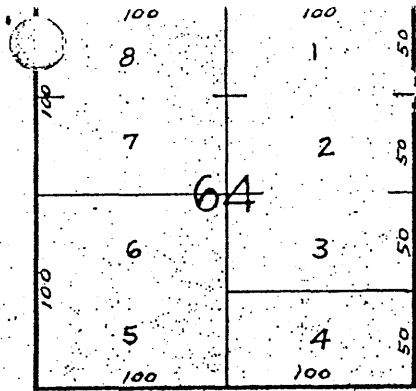
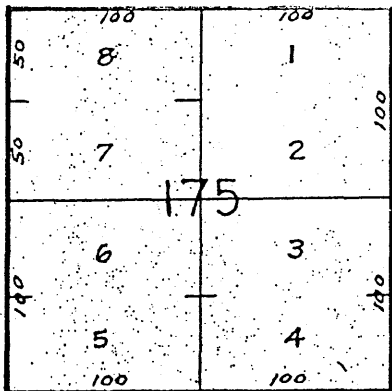
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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

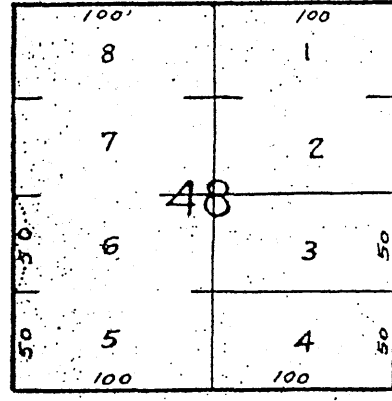
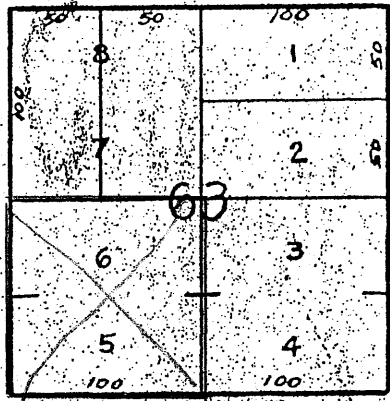
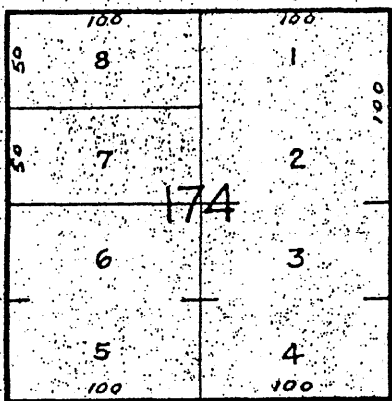
The Yeon Building is located on Tax Lots 5 & 6, Block 63, Portland Addition to the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

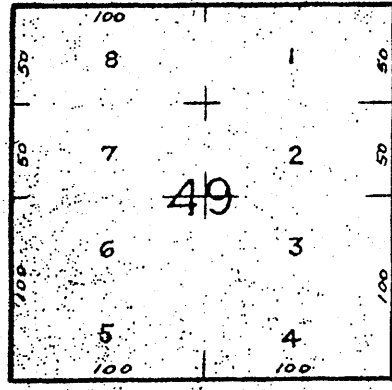
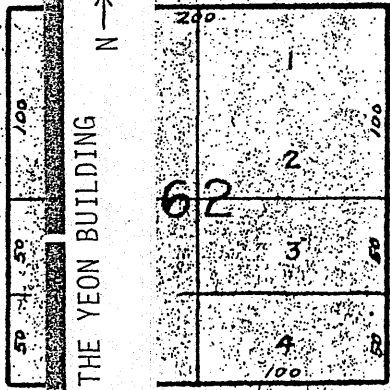
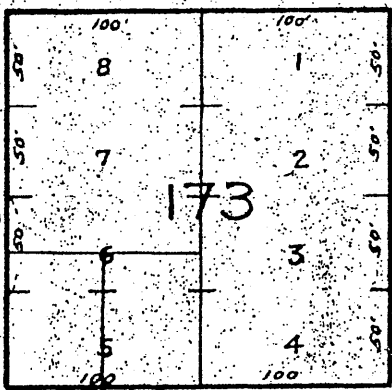
The boundary includes the two 50' X 100' lots in downtown Portland. The nominated area encompasses the entire urban tax lot occupied by the historic building.



S.W. WASHINGTON



AVE



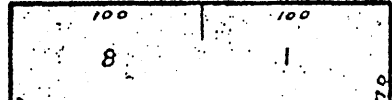
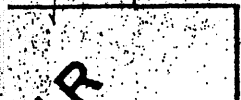
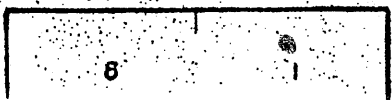
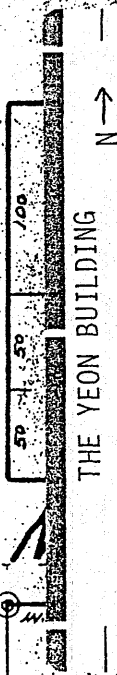
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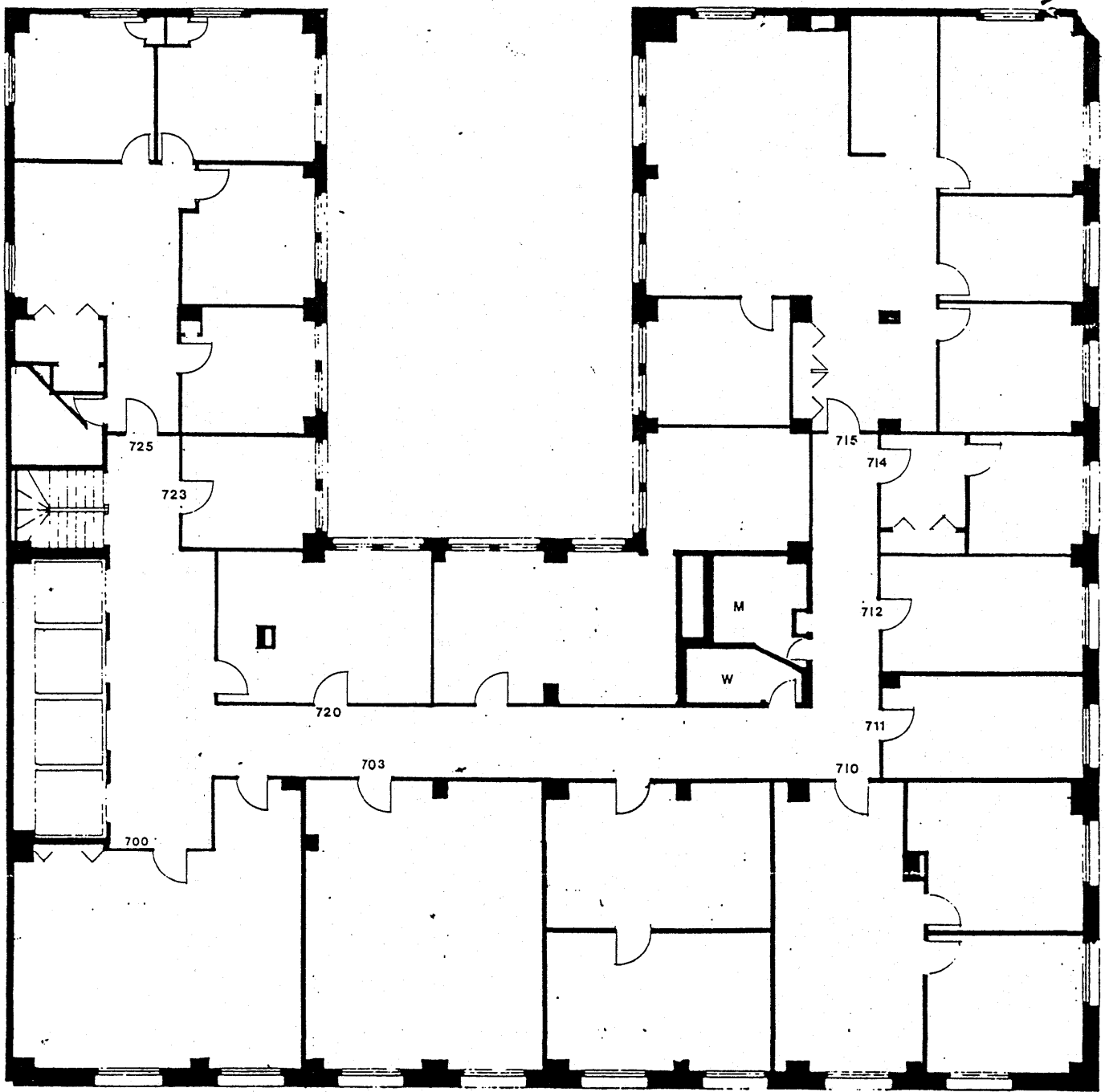
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FIVE.





7<sup>th</sup> FLOOR PLAN - YEON BUILDING

1/8

MELVIN MARK PROPERTIES