

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAY 14 1984

date entered JUN 27 1984

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

1. Name

historic Commodore Hotel

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number 1609 ^{Sw.} Southwest Morrison St. N/A not for publication

city, town Portland N/A vicinity of

state Oregon code 41 county Multnomah code 057

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Howard Stenger

street & number 725 NW Westover Terrace

city, town Portland N/A vicinity of state Oregon 97210

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Multnomah County Courthouse

street & number 319 Southwest Fourth

city, town Portland state Oregon 97205

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Resources Inventory
City of Portland has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980-1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records Bureau of Planning, City of Portland

city, town Portland state Oregon

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Commodore Hotel is a four-story, Art Deco style, reinforced concrete building. It is located on a sloping corner lot and occupies a quarter of the block. The front facade and lobby face the south. A restaurant and small retail spaces are located in the base along the south and east sides, and hotel rooms are located in the top three floors. The Commodore was constructed in 1927, and was designed by noted Portland architect Herman Brookman. Although the base has been altered, the remaining elevations and interior spaces retain a high degree of integrity.

Setting

The Commodore Hotel, located on southwest Morrison Street, a major east/west arterial, is 100' x 100' and occupies Lots 3 and 4 of block 323 of the Portland Addition. In the immediate neighborhood are several same-scale apartment buildings and the distinctive Mallory Hotel and Woodmen of the World buildings. Historically the area was the location of numerous car dealerships - a product of the city's fascination with the automobile. Several of these buildings are still operational. A parking lot occupies the quarter block to the west.

Description

The south (main) facade is divided into seven equal bays. The hotel lobby is located in the center bays of the base and surrounded by retail spaces. The retail space in the two bays on the left is entered through a separate, recessed doorway. The large single-light windows, awning and door located here are recent additions. The original three-light transoms with wood and copper trim remain.

The hotel lobby has a new plate glass window in the third bay. The entry doors in the center bay are paired and made of wood, single full-height lights and brass fixtures. Framing these doors are fluted wood pilasters, each capped with a cast stone acanthus leaf. Just inside the hotel is a small wood paneled vestibule. The lobby floor, plastered walls and fireplace are inlaid with polychromed tile. Eight-sided wood columns with molded abacus capitals support the vaulted lobby ceiling. These, and other wooden lobby details, are of black walnut and gumwood.

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Projecting above the entry is a canopy constructed of enameled metal and neon lights. The canopy is not original and obscures cast stone pieces above the entry. The center three bays have arches that have been in-filled. Two decorative metal lamps are located on the pilasters to the left, but are missing on the right.

A restaurant is located to the right of the lobby. Recent alterations here include the three-pane window in the middle of the restaurant, the plate glass window next to it, and the small green tiles covering two bays at the right corner. Recessed in the corner bay are modern aluminum frame glass doors. A lighted sign above advertises Manion's Restaurant.

The upper floors are divided from the base by a rounded belt course. Pendant-like cast stone decorations are located between each bay below this belt. Just above the belt are sculpted birds which are about four feet tall. They are set in front of large pilasters which further define the bay rhythm. The original windows on this facade have been replaced with hinged aluminum ones. Each bay has one of these, except the center bay which has paired windows. In the center bay a single, narrow pilaster passes between the two windows paired together, while in the other bays narrow pilasters bracket the single window.

Just above the fourth floor windows is a frieze of cast stone with a diamond-shaped pattern of flowers. The narrow pilasters extend through this band and are capped by sculpted birds which resemble those below but are shorter, narrower, and don't have shields in front. The large pilasters extending above the parapet wall are buttressed by volutes and then capped with balls. At the corner the pilasters and decorations from the front and side facades rise next to each other. A small sculpted bird set between them faces out diagonally to the corner.

East Facade

The east facade has seven bays which at the base are occupied by the corner restaurant, a lounge in the center and a small grocery store in the end two bays. The three bays on the left have blank windows with no detailing. In the center bay the lounge entry has a neon sign and small tiles like those added on the front, but these have been painted. The sixth bay has an original store window with a larger center light and transom. Both commercial spaces have a formal entry and an adjacent service entry. All but the door to the lounge are the original ones made of wood with brass fixtures.

The street level drops as it wraps around from the front, providing room for a mezzanine in the lower half of the building. Recessed panels decorate the spandrels between levels. Single-light wood sash windows remain in all the upper windows of the east facade. Those in the mezzanine are guarded with twisted iron bars.

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Above the base the pattern of pilasters, belt course decorations, frieze tiles and bird sculptures is identical to that of the south facade. An iron fire escape is located on the second bay from the right.

North Facade

The base of the north facade abuts a neighboring building. Above this is the open side of the U-shaped hotel room layout. On this back side there are metal frame, multi-light casement windows with fixed transoms.

West Facade

The west facade is broken up by four floors of the multi-light casement windows. As the ground level drops from the front, the basement is exposed. Square metal frame windows are recessed into the wall here.

Interior Spaces

Originally, two storefronts appeared on either side of the central lobby space and extended three bays in depth on the east and west elevations. The fine lobby space, extending the full height of the base, consisted of a gothic vaulted ceiling supported by octagonal columns. This space was diminished by 1/3 when, in 1957, the firm of Dougan and Heims created a restaurant in the southeast corner which obliterated the storefronts and added a north/south wall in the lobby to provide extra space for the restaurant. A ramp and large opening led to this new space from the old. The vault in the new space was destroyed and all historic fabric removed. No alterations occurred to the lobby space, and the ceramic tile floors, detailing and original woodwork are intact. Entrances to the rooms from this space are from stairs located off the lobby.

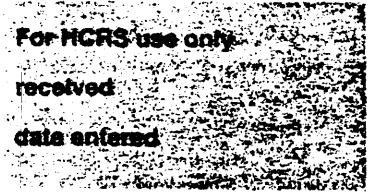
The upper-level rooms, in basically a U-shaped plan, are small spaces with minimal or no plumbing and are sheathed in lath and plaster. Paneled doors with transoms (now sealed-off due to city codes) lead to the rooms from the hallway. All rooms have windows and there are a few "suites" located at the corners.

Rehabilitation

Future plans are to rehabilitate the hotel into low income efficiency apartments. This will entail changing the interior configuration of the rooms, but not their relationship to the halls, which will remain. The number of rooms will be reduced by less than 10 percent from the original. The lobby space will be restored, although no alterations to the restaurant are anticipated.

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On the exterior, the historic storefront configuration on the south facade will be restored, the non-historic alterations will be removed and a similar treatment applied to those bays. The central entrance bays will be changed by removing the non-historic material covering the arches and the historic appearance duplicated as much as possible if physical evidence exists. The doors will be removed and replaced by a single large door for handicap access, and the entrance canopy will be restored.

Similarly, the east facade treatment will attempt to recreate the historic transom/pane configurations. Windows on the south facade will be replaced with duplicates of the original. Surfaces will be repaired and cleaned and the building will be painted.

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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates 1927 **Builder/Architect** Herman Brookman

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Commodore Hotel, erected in 1927, is significant as a rare building type in Portland. It is also significant for its associations with prominent Portland architect Herman Brookman, and with Mrs. Sigmund (Fannie) Frank. We feel that it is eligible under criteria "b" and "c."

History

The 1920s was definitely an automobile decade in the city. As opposed to the national average of one in five households owning a car by the beginning of the Depression, one in four of Portland's households purchased automobiles during the same period. In a 1927 report, it was noted that Oregonians annually consumed more gallons of gasoline per vehicle than any other northern or western state and fully 30 percent of the city's land was related to automobile uses by the end of the decade.

"The city is in haste" was a literal and figurative statement when published in the Oregon Journal on November 16, 1926. It characterized both the continuing growth of the commercial core area and the city's attempts to deal with the more staggering problems attendant with suburbanization and the literal effects the automobile had on the city. Narrow streets, scarce parking, and few traffic lights contributed to traffic congestion of staggering proportions. To escape this, it is not surprising that hotel structures like the Commodore were proposed and/or constructed away from the city center.

In 1927, the Portland Chamber of Commerce touted the city's prominence as a tourist city and stated in the City Directory that the "development of the automobile travel has resulted in hundreds of thousands of motorists visiting Portland every year." They added that "many new hotels have been built during the past year to take care of this immense tourist business, also of the commercial and business travel to Portland that is ever on the increase."

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Portland, Oregon

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 1 0 | 5 2 4 4 4 0 | 5 0 4 0 7 7 0
Zone Easting Northing

B | |
Zone Easting Northing

C | |

D | |

E | |

F | |

G | |

H | |

Verbal boundary description and justification The Commodore Hotel occupies Lots 3 and 4, Block 323, of the Portland Addition to the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, an area approximately 100 feet square.

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

state None code county code

state None code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title N/A

organization Heritage Investment Corporation date December, 1983

street & number 813 SW Alder, Suite 800 telephone (503) 228-0272

city or town Portland state Oregon 97205

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date April 17, 1984

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



date 6/27/1984

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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This statement contradicts the fact that construction activity had tapered off from a high in 1925 and was on the decline. E. Kimbark MacColl in The Growth of a City, noted a study on the desirability of new hotel growth in Portland:

"The need for new downtown hotels came under study by the chamber of commerce. California investors showed some interest and the Spokane-based owners of the Portland Hotel even considered tearing down the 32 year old crown jewel of Portland's hostelries to make way for an updated, modern facility that would provide space for retail stores at street level. At one point, the chamber advocated purchasing the Pioneer Post Office block from the federal government in order to erect a new superhotel of which the whole Northwest could be proud. The concerned proprietors of the existing major hotels, including the Portland, did a quick study and found that their establishments had been running at only a 50-60 percent occupancy rate during the first half of 1925. The message was clear: Beware of overbuilding just to accommodate seasonal conventions. Portland already had 45 hotels with 50 or more rooms. The Multnomah was the giant with 534, almost twice the size of the Portland. The city had a reservoir of over 6000 hotel rooms, a total that seemed to be adequate for all but the largest conventions.

Once these facts became public knowledge, it proved increasingly difficult to interest local investors in any new hotel project."

Demand for office and department store space also decreased and little new building commenced to the end of the decade. This would account for the relatively small number of Art Deco and Moderne-era commercial structures within the downtown core area. The Commodore Hotel is, in fact, the only Art Deco-styled hotel building in the downtown area and perhaps in the entire city.

Association with Fannie Frank

The Commodore was built for and owned by Mrs. Sigmund (Fannie) Frank, eldest daughter of Aaron and Jeannette Meier.

Aaron Meier, Sr. came to Portland in 1857 and started the mercantile business that eventually became the largest department store chain in the state. He was married to Jeannette Hirsch, a strong willed woman who was the force to be reckoned with in the retailing operation. She imported large numbers of her relatives from Germany to help run the burgeoning business. She also arranged or approved all of the family marriages, and when Aaron Meier met Sigmund Frank in San Francisco in 1872, he persuaded Frank to return to Portland and enter into the family business. The former music teacher took to retailing in a natural way and Mrs. Meier, sensing an alliance, set up a marriage between Mr. Frank and her oldest daughter Fannie. Frank became a junior partner and after Aaron's death in 1889, became president of the firm. Before he died in 1910, he continued the firm's aggressive growth pattern and was responsible for purchasing the block on which the landmark flagship store currently stands.

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Sister of Julius Meier, Governor of Oregon from 1931-35, Fannie Meier died on March 11, 1930, just five days after her brother Abraham's death. She had been living at the Benson Hotel at the time of her death. In numerous articles in the Oregonian and Oregon Journal, her contributions to the Meier and Frank Company and to the city were extolled. She was characterized as "one of the city's outstanding women in social, civic, philanthropic, and artistic circles." Especially noted for her attention to the family business interests, the papers commented that she "brought to business associations a more than perfunctory attendance upon duty," and, like her mother, "exercised a large influence in the business." When her \$3,220,000 estate was probated, 14 shares in the Frank Investment Corporation were listed, with a value of almost \$99,000. This is the Company that built the Commodore Hotel. The investment company, specializing in real estate investment, was not affiliated with the department store.

The Frank house most importantly associated with her was designed by Whidden & Lewis in 1896 in the "Colonial Revival" style. Mrs. Meier Sr., lived there with Fannie until the former's death in 1925. The house was subsequently purchased by Harsh Investment Corporation and demolished in the sixties.

Architecture

Herman Brookman was born in 1891, the son of European immigrants to New York. He received the typical Beaux-Arts training as an apprentice to the New York firm of Allbro and Lindeburg, who specialized in designing estates and mansions for wealthy Long Islanders. Brookman worked for the partnership from 1909 to 1915 and then for Harry Lindeburg until 1923, when Lloyd Frank, eldest son of Fannie and Sigmund Frank went to New York in search of a firm to design his house in Portland.

Brookman and Frank shared a dedication to quality construction and appreciation of detail that resulted in the superb city Landmark and National Register property, Fir Acres, now owned by Lewis & Clark College. Primarily working alone, Brookman's work is residential for the most part. His eclectic design approach included borrowing from French, English, German, Moorish and Byzantine traditions. He insisted on the best craftsmanship and controlled other aspects of projects such as landscaping. Particularly fine examples of his houses are the Julius Meier Estate (Menucha), Martin Zell House, Lee S. Elliot House and the Harry Green House.

The Commodore Hotel is the only commercial building attributed to the architect which appears in the City of Portland inventory. The "semi-Spanish" design had 124 guest rooms originally, 75 of which had "private tile bathrooms." Painted in a "buff hue," the building was constructed by the McHolland Brothers for

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\$175,000. The interior wood used in the lobby is made of black walnut and gumwood, and all furnishings and other decor was supplied by Meier & Frank. The Oregonian equated the erection of this building with that of the Terminal Sales Building and stated that its construction "marks another step in the progress of the city's retail district towards the western hills." One of Brookman's design predilections, that of including animal details in his projects, is evident in the exterior stylized pelicans which appear at the base of the pilasters.

Brookman was president of the Portland AIA in 1950, the same year he was elected as AIA Fellow. He retired to California in 1968 and died in 1974.

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Oregon Journal, January 30, 1927, Sec. 2, p.2.

Oregonian, March 11, 1930, p. 1.
March 12, 1930, p. 12 and 16.
July 15, 1930, p. 11.
November 11, 1930, p. 1.
September 3, 1936, p. 12.
March 2, 1958, Sec. 2, p. 8, c. 2.
May 17, 1966, p. 23.

Commodore Hotel
1609 SW Morrison Street
Portland, Multnomah Co., Oregon

