Site History

A place for a capitol building was a part of the original vision for the city of Salem as early as 1846. The site was laid out in plat by William Willson, a lay member of the Methodist Mission and prominent Salem citizen. Many important mid-19th century institutions were located within this plat, including the Methodist Church, Oregon Institute (later Willamette University), county courthouse, post office and capitol.

Chloe and William Willson donated Block 84 on the plat for what became the 1853 Territorial Statehouse, and conveyed the rest of Willson Avenue, with a plot clearly marked for the capitol building at one end and a plot for the county courthouse at the other. Willson Avenue included three city blocks measuring approximately 300 feet by 1100 feet and was bounded by Court, Church, State and Capitol Streets.

Modernistic architecture. The base of the building is granite, and its exterior is clad with Danby Vermont marble. The building was expanded in 1977. It is considered to be an important example of Modernistic architecture. The site was laid out in plat by William Willson, a lay member of the Methodist Mission and prominent Salem citizen. Many important mid-19th century institutions were located within this plat, including the Methodist Church, Oregon Institute (later Willamette University), county courthouse, post office and capitol.

At the heart of the plat was a three-block-long open space labeled Willson Avenue, with a plot clearly marked for the capitol building at one end and a plot for the county courthouse at the other. Willson Avenue included three city blocks measuring approximately 300 feet by 1100 feet and was bounded by Court, Church, State and Capitol Streets.

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The most important historic feature in the park is, of course, the capitol itself. Today’s capitol is the third building to seat the state government at or near this site. Two former capitol buildings were destroyed by fire: one in 1855 and the second in 1935. The current building was constructed from 1936-1938, the building number two, which burned down in 1935.

The Breyman Fountain is the only historic object remaining in Willson Park today. The fountain, originally used as a horse watering trough, was a gift to the city of Salem in 1904 from the Breyman family. The statue atop the fountain fell off at some point in the late 1930s, was stored, and somehow disappeared. It’s possible it fell victim to a scrap drive, which were common during the World War II years.

Welcome to State Capitol State Park. The grounds surrounding Oregon’s capitol building are owned by the people of Oregon, and since 2008 have been managed by Oregon State Parks. The 21-acre T-shaped property is known as the Capitol Mall, and is home to two smaller parks: Willson Park, west of the capitol, and Capitol Park, to the east.

The grounds themselves tell a story of Oregon’s history, through architecture, botany and art. Statues, fountains, trees, marble intaglios, special plantings and commemorative markers create a sense of history and place. In spring, dozens of cherry trees come into bloom, creating a soft pink carpet as the days lengthen. Several varieties of cherry trees are planted throughout the park.
Trees/Shrubs
- Coast Redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)
- Tom McCall Tree – Japanese Maple (Acer palmatum)
- Dawn Redwood (Metasequoia glyptostroboides)
- Shag Bark Hickory (Carya ovata)
- Giant Sequoia (Sequoiadendron giganteum)
- California Nutmeg (Tereya californica)
- Tulip Tree (Liriodendron tulipifera)
- Sweet Gum (Liquidambar styraciflua)
- Redtwig Dogwood (Cornus stolonifera)
- Japanese Maple (Acer palmatum)
- Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)
- Camperdown Elm (Ulmus glabra ‘Camperdownii’)
- Birch Bark Cherry (Prunus serrula)
- Southern Magnolia (Magnolia grandiflora)
- Saucer Magnolia (Magnolia soulangiana)
- Deodar Cedar (Cedrus deodara)
- Douglas-fir “Moon Tree” (Pseudotsuga mensuricata)
- Horse Horse-chestnut (Aesculus hippocastanum)
- Rhododendron (Rhododendron pacificum)
- Bradford Pear (Pyrus calleryana ‘Bradford’)
- London Planetree (Platanus x acerifolia)
- Blue Atlas Cedar (Cedrus atlantica ‘Glauca’)
- Persian Parrotia (Parrotia persica)
- Norway Maple (Acer platanoides)
- Dove Tree (Davidia involucrata)
- Northern Red Oak (Quercus rubra)
- Alkobono Flowering Cherry (Prunus yedoensis ‘Akebono’)
- Ginkgo or Maidenhair Tree (Ginkgo biloba)
- Witch Hazel (Hamamelis species)
- Red Maple (Acer rubrum)
- Red Oak (Quercus rubra)
- Silver Maple (Acer saccharinum)
- Staghorn Sumac (Rhus tydonica)

Monuments/Statues
1. Circuit Rider – Dedicated to Robert Booth by his son in 1924, this statue honors preachers who rode circuits carrying the gospel to remote communities.
2. Dr. John McLoughlin – Physician and Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. McLoughlin was the first person to unofficially govern the Oregon Territory. He is known as the "Father of Oregon Country."
3. Column Fragments – These columns made from bricks fabricated at the State Penitentiary supported the front of the Capitol Building that was destroyed by fire in 1935.
6. Rock Monument – This hefty boulder once marked a trail to Oregon and was given by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1932 to honor Oregon settlers.
7. Liberty Bell Replica – Presented to the State on July 4, 1950 by the Hon. John Snyder, U.S. Secretary of Treasury, to promote savings bonds.
8. Tribal Walk of Flags – Completed 2009. A tribute to the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon.
12. Breyman Fountain – Donated by the Breyman family to the city of Salem in 1944.
13. World War II Memorial – This imposing, 33-foot, 5-sided granite obelisk honors those who worked and served at home and abroad during WWII. Donated in 2014 by the Oregon WWII Memorial Foundation.
14. Fallen Worker Memorial – Dedicated April, 2009

Flowers
1. Rose Garden – This garden has a variety of beautiful, fragrant roses.
2. Fuchsia bed – Propagated, planted and cared for by the Salem Fuchsia Society, this display of 350 plants showcases more than 90 varieties.

Fountains
- Waite Fountain – This is a replacement of the one donated in memory of businessman E.M. Waite by his wife in 1907. The original was severely damaged by the 1962 Columbus Day Storm.
- Wall of Water – Constructed in 1990. Uses recycled water to shoot up a sparkling wall 12 feet high. Engraved slabs around its plaza relate Oregon history and folklore.
- Sprague Fountain – Donated by Governor Charles Sprague in honor of water. Dedicated in 1980, the bronze fountain also uses recirculated water.

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Legend
- Trees/Shrubs
- Fountains
- Monuments/Statues
- Flowers
- Willson Park
- Capitol Park
- ADA Restroom