

Heritage Oregon

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Holman Building served as home of state government

By Andy Zimmerman
Special to the Statesman Journal

State Capitols are known for being grand homes for government, the current building and the 1870s building being examples.

However, the Holman Building in downtown Salem served as the home of state government from 1857-76. The nondescript building didn't stand out from its surroundings. It didn't have anything along the lines of a dome or a pioneer. The building stood on the northwest corner of Ferry and Commercial streets SE and bridged the gap between the first state Capitol, which was burned shortly after it opened, and the third building, which served from 1876-1935.

When Oregon became a state on Feb. 14, 1859, the Holman Building, named after Joseph Holman, a Salem businessman and an original Willamette University trustee, was the center of state government.

The state Legislature met on the second and third floors.

After state government opened its new home in the 1870s, the Holman Building was home to many businesses, including the Commercial Hotel.

However, history got in the way of progress. Downtown Salem parking was even more limited than it is today, with no major parking garages. By the 1950s, the property became a solution.

According to SalemHistory.net, State Archivist David Duniway led an effort to persuade the owners to convert the building into an audi-



The Holman Building was on the northwest corner of Commercial and Ferry streets SE. WILLAMETTE HERITAGE CENTER AT THE MILL 2013.013.0023

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torium and museum. Despite its past as a home to the

state and territorial legislature, it wasn't enough to save it from demolition in 1951. It did, however, galvanize the public to form a historical society with the hope of saving Salem's other at-risk treasures. The Willamette Heritage Center at the Mill has architectural pieces from the Holman Building.

The building was replaced by a parking structure for the nearby Marion Hotel. The parking structure remains, outlasting the hotel and many of the businesses that once surrounded it.

sjtimecapsule@gmail.com,
[Twitter.com/zimmermanSJ](https://twitter.com/zimmermanSJ)



The Holman Building served as the home of state and territorial government from 1857-76. It was torn down to make way for a parking structure. WILLAMETTE HERITAGE CENTER AT THE MILL 2007.001.1755

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Oregon and Mexico have a long connection

By Kylie Pine

Willamette Heritage Center at the Mill



This week, many will celebrate Cinco de Mayo, commemorating the Battle of Puebla and the defeat of French forces on May 5, 1862. For many, the Cinco de Mayo holiday has become a symbol for Mexican culture in the United States, but there is a much more complex and rich interweaving of history between Mexico and Oregon.

Like Mexico, the land that is now Oregon was claimed by Spain as part of the colonial holdings in the New World. Maritime explorers flying under the Spanish flag discovered the Pacific Ocean (Vasco Núñez de Balboa, 1513) and the Columbia River (Bruno de Hezeta y Dudaogitia, 1775), acts that according to legal thought of the time gave the exploring nations a claim on adjoining lands. The 1819 Adams-Onís treaty set a firm line between Oregon and Spanish holdings to the south. Oregon and the emerging country of Mexico continued to share a border until the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded the Mexican territory of Alta California to the United States.

Most histories of Oregon tend to skip ahead to World War II and the Braceros program, which brought many Mexican workers to Oregon to help with farm work during labor shortages caused by military needs.

One of the few photographs in the Willamette Heritage Center's collections documenting Mexican-American history dates to this period, although its back story is a little murky. The photo, taken on Sept 4, 1944, has long been used to document the Braceros program in Salem. However, California voters records show Salem-based photographer Kathryn Gunnell was not living in Oregon at the time this photo was taken. While we can't say for sure if



Taken by Salem-based photographer Kathryn Gunnell, this photo has been used to document the Braceros program in the Salem area, though it may actually have been taken in California. WILLAMETTE HERITAGE CENTER, 1998.15.14

the photo was taken in Oregon, we can't say for sure it wasn't either. We do know that there was a camp for Mexican workers set up at the Oregon State Fairgrounds during World War II. Workers living there provided much needed assistance to the Willamette Valley Cherry Growers in harvesting and packing the cherry crop in and around Salem.

Not a lot has been written about Mexican-American history in Oregon and, more specifically, in Salem and the Mid-Willamette Valley, during the intervening periods.

A brief look at the historical record suggests there are many stories that might be told. Stories like that of James J. Davis. He appears in the 1900 Federal Census living on State Street between Front and Commercial and working as an upholsterer. Davis had been born in Mexico in 1852. He immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 9, at the beginning of the American Civil War. By 1880, he was living in New Orleans, and ship manifest records show he made a trip back to Mexico in 1881. Fifteen years later, he shows up in census records in Salem. While these facts place him here, they leave a lot of unanswered questions about his motivations.

While I was struggling to find records documenting early Mexican set-

tlers, I came across a record for Anato L. Jiminez in the 1930 Census. A section worker for the railroad, Jiminez came to the U.S. in 1925. His address is listed as 1313 Mill St., in one of those quick twists of fate, the same address the museum uses today. A quick look at a 1927 map of the area shows a cluster of small buildings that are called Southern Pacific Railroad Co.'s "Section Housing" on the north side of Mill Street in what is the museum's parking lot.

While scholarship has been lacking in the past,

there are some bright spots in the preservation of these stories. The Salinas-Saldaña family has been doing a remarkable job of documenting the history of migrant workers in Marion County. Go to their website, Windows of Migrant Life, texmexorusa.org, to read more about their work.

For this month's First Wednesday celebration, the Salem Creative Downtown Network will be delving into some of these stories and more as they celebrate the area's Latino history. More information is available at salem downtown.net.

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