



Looking east from 5th Avenue and Capitol Way.

OLYMPIA SPRANG UP IN THE 1850S

on the shores of shallow Budd Inlet, where a northern spur of the Oregon Trail reached the south end of Puget Sound. When Washington Territory was created from the upper regions of Oregon in 1853, the small town of Olympia was named as its capital. In spite of occasional challenges from other hopeful cities—especially at the time of statehood in 1889—it has served as the capital city of Washington ever since.

The Olympia Downtown Historic District, designated to the National Register in 2004, covers an area of approximately 12 square blocks. Though the city has grown tremendously since the end of World War II, Olympia’s old-fashioned downtown core remains the heart of the town. The shops and the businesses may have changed significantly



Looking north from Legion and Capitol Way.

over the years, but the storefronts and buildings look much the same now as they did in the early decades of the 20th century.

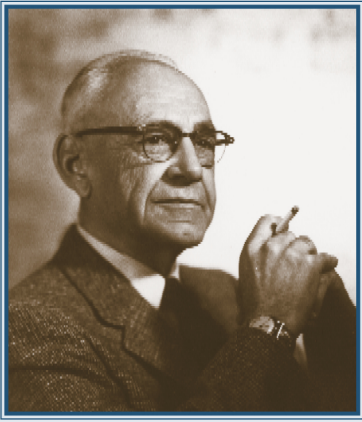
As you explore downtown Olympia, watch for the round historical markers that briefly tell the stories of individual buildings. Sites marked with these bronze medallions are listed on the Olympia Heritage Register (OHR). A number of downtown properties are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR) and the Washington Heritage Register (WR).

Looking west on 4th Avenue near Washington Street.



OLYMPIA’S ARCHITECT

California architect Joseph Wohleb was just 23 years old when he arrived in Olympia in 1911. Over the next half century, until his death in 1958, Wohleb designed more than 100 buildings—houses, shops, factories, schools and state offices—in Washington’s capital city.



Architect Joseph Wohleb. Photographer, Vibert Jeffers. © The Susan Parish Collection.

Wohleb was clearly familiar with both the old Spanish missions of California and the new Mission Revival architecture that had gained popularity there. His first Olympia commission, a studio for photographer Joseph Jeffers (#5), featured stucco walls and red clay tiles—elements that the architect would use again and again. These same California details appear on Wohleb buildings throughout downtown, from the former Olympia Knitting Mills (520 Jefferson Street SE) to the former Olympia Junk Company (525 Columbia Street SE).

A particularly good selection of Wohleb’s work can be seen at the intersection of Fourth Avenue and Washington Street, where three of the four corners are anchored by his designs.

1 SYLVESTER PARK, 1850 Legion and Capitol Way

Olympia founder Edmund Sylvester, a settler who came from Maine, set aside this town square on his original plat of the city. Livestock grazed here in the early days. In 1893 the square was renamed Sylvester Park and formally landscaped, probably to complement the new courthouse across the street. (NR, WR, OHR)

2 OLD COUNTY COURTHOUSE/ OLD STATE CAPITOL, 1892 (East Wing added 1904) 600 SE Washington Street

Built as the fourth Thurston County Courthouse, this Romanesque sandstone structure served as a temporary state capitol from 1905–1928. It originally boasted a large central clock tower (destroyed by fire in 1928) and several additional turrets that were toppled by a major earthquake in 1949. (NR, WR, OHR)



The Old Capitol and Sylvester Park, before the loss of the clock tower and the bell-roofed park bandstand. Jeffers Studio photo from the Washington State Capital Museum, Washington State Historical Society.

NR: National Register of Historic Places OHR: Olympia Heritage Register
WR: Washington Heritage Register JW: Joseph Wohleb Design



FIRSTS IN OLYMPIA

1850 First Post Office in Washington at Olympia.

1850 First American-owned vessel on Puget Sound owned by Edmund Sylvester “The Orbit.”

1851 First Port of Entry on Puget Sound.

1852 First newspaper in Washington Territory “The Columbian.”

1852 First public school in Washington at Olympia.

1852 First Masonic Lodge in Washington, Olympia No. 1 F. & A.M.

1852 First and only Thurston County Seat.

1853 First Territorial Capital.

1854 First Legislative Assembly in Washington Territory at the Parker and Colter Store.

1854 First Presbyterian Church in Washington at 5th and Columbia in Olympia.

1855 First Oddfellow Lodge in Washington at Olympia.

1859 First Washington Fire Department, “Alert Hook and Ladder Company.”



For more information contact the City of Olympia. Copyright — City of Olympia and Olympia Heritage Commission 2006

Unless otherwise noted, images are postcards from a private collection. Cover: Looking east from 4th Avenue near Franklin.

3 OLD HOTEL OLYMPIAN, 1919 116 SE Legion Way

Many political deals were done in the elegant lobby and dining rooms of the old Hotel Olympian in the years when the legislature convened in the building across the square. The hotel was renovated in 1975 and converted to housing for seniors.

4 REED BLOCK, 1891 208 SE Legion Way

At various times this building housed the city post office, a motor stage depot and the offices of *The Morning Olympian*. Some architectural details were lost in the 1949 earthquake, but the original Victorian pilasters and arched upstairs windows survive. (OHR)

5 JEFFERS STUDIO, 1913 500 SE Washington Street

Designed in the Mission Revival style by architect Joseph Wohleb for Joseph Jeffers, Olympia’s most prominent photographer. Note the skylights on Fifth Avenue side that allowed soft natural light into the portrait studio. (JW, NR, WR, OHR)

6 CAPITOL THEATER, 1924 204 – 206 SE 5th Avenue

This cinema, still in use, was built as a combination movie palace and vaudeville hall. The large marquee, added in 1940, hides round art-glass windows depicting the Classical muses. (JW, WR)

7 SECURITY BUILDING, 1926 203 E 4th Avenue

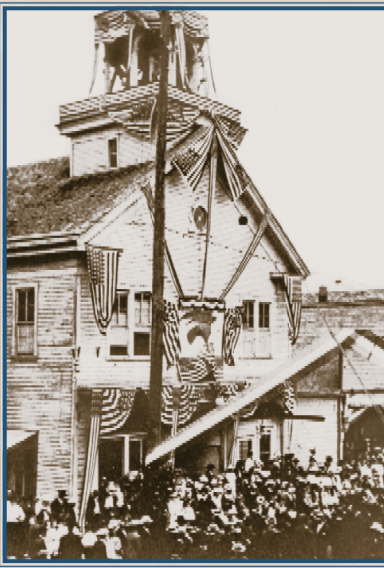
At five stories tall, this was Olympia’s first “skyscraper” and exemplifies the Chicago or Sullivan-esque Style. Look for pineapples, rosettes and griffins on the glazed terra-cotta exterior, and for molded plaster, marble and mahogany details inside.

OLYMPIA DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT WALKING TOUR



8 COLUMBIA BUILDING, 1914 210 E 4th Avenue

The name of this small commercial building honors Columbia Hall, which stood on this site from 1869 until 1914. The original wooden hall, which housed both city government and the local fire department, was named after Olympia’s beloved Columbia fire engine.



Olympia’s first City Hall, completed in 1869, stood on Fourth Avenue between Washington and Franklin Streets. Known officially as Columbia Hall, it housed city offices, council chambers and the fire department on its ground floor. The second floor was variously used as a ballroom, theater and opera house. Columbia Hall burned to the ground in 1914. *Washington State Capital Museum, Washington State Historical Society.*

9 STATE THEATER, 1949 204 E 4th Avenue

This modern International-Style theater, originally built as a movie house, stands on the site of the fifth Thurston County Courthouse. (JW)

10 ROCKWAY-LELAND BUILDING, 1941 119 NE Washington Street

Sleek, smooth lines characterized the Art Moderne style of the 1930s and early 40s. Joseph Wohleb designed this building for Olympia Oil and Wood Products, a local fuel supplier. (JW)

11 BARETICH BUILDING, 1935
116 SE 4th Avenue

Hard, gleaming surfaces were also typical of Art Moderne styling. Both this commercial storefront and the café next door are faced with shiny Carrera glass tiles. (JW, OHR)

12 THE SPAR CAFÉ, 1935
114 E 4th Avenue

An Olympia institution, The Spar still looks much the same today as it did when it opened its doors. Interior features include original neon, hanging light fixtures and an old-fashioned J-shaped counter with swiveling seats. (JW, OHR)



Mid-1940s street scene looking west on Fourth Avenue past the Art Moderne-style Spar Café and Baretich Buildings. Electric traffic signals have arrived, but Fourth Avenue still carries two-way traffic. *Postcard from a private collection.*

13 CHAMBERS BLOCK, 1887
108 NE 4th Avenue

Built by mayor A.H. Chambers, this is one of Olympia's oldest surviving business blocks. Though many of its elaborate features were lost in the 1949 earthquake, some cast-iron details remain at street level. In pioneer days this corner was the site of the town's first water pump—a popular meeting place where settlers talked and swapped news. (JW-REMODEL, OHR)



The 1887 Chambers Block, designed by architect John G. Proctor of Tacoma. The stones of its foundation, hauled from nearby Mud Bay, were laid by local masons Patnude and Bleuvelt. *Washington State Capital Museum, Washington State Historical Society.*

14 OLYMPIA HARDWARE BUILDING, 1884
109 N Capitol Way

This mirror-image storefront is notable for its exuberant cast-iron decoration—a mass-produced, cheaper alternative to hand-carved wood or stone. (OHR)

15 OLD OLYMPIAN NEWSPAPER BUILDING, 1930
116 N Capitol Way

Built for Olympia's daily newspaper, which published at this location for more than 30 years. Architect Joseph Wohleb used plenty of Spanish motifs here: stucco, arches, glazed tile inserts and a clay tile roof. (JW, WR)

16 FIRST TERRITORIAL LEGISLATURE,
(SITE) 222 N Capitol Way

A bronze tablet in the sidewalk marks the site of the two-story Parker and Colter Store where the Washington Territorial legislature met for the first time in 1854, just after Olympia was named capital of the new territory.

17 OLD CITY HALL/FIRE STATION, 1912
108 NW State Avenue

City offices occupied part of this building until 1966, when a new City Hall was built on Plum Street. The front portion served as headquarters of the Olympia Fire Department until 1992. (WR, OHR)

18 HISTORIC SHORELINE MARKER
(SITE) 204 W 4th Avenue

One of a series of round bronze markers, stamped with an image of waterfowl, that indicate the original edge of the natural Budd Inlet shoreline—a line that changed dramatically as repeated dredging and filling changed the shape of the waterfront.

19 WRIGHT BUILDING, 1908
218 W 4th Avenue

One of the earliest poured-concrete structures in Olympia. By 1909, poured concrete sidewalks had replaced wooden boardwalks throughout downtown.

20 BARNES BUILDING, 1911
209 W 4th Avenue

The Barnes family originally ran a grocery and mercantile operation on the ground floor of this handsome building. The second floor, with its stately arched windows, was originally the meeting hall of a fraternal club known as the Knights of Pythias. In 1938 the Knights disbanded and sold their upstairs hall to the local Oddfellows Lodge—the oldest in Washington—which still meets here today. (WR, OHR)

21 MOTTMAN BUILDING, 1888
101 N Capitol Way

This mercantile building originally stood only two stories high. It was extensively remodeled in 1911, when it acquired a third floor and one of the first elevators in town. Mottman's remained open until 1967, one of the last old-fashioned mercantile emporiums in the country. (NR, WR, OHR)



The Mottman Building as it appeared in horse-and-buggy days, before a third story was added in 1911. *Washington State Capital Museum, Washington State Historical Society.*

22 CAPITAL NATIONAL BANK, 1922
402 S Capitol Way

Architect Joseph Wohleb designed this dignified bank of sandstone and granite for prominent banker (and one-time mayor) C. J. Lord. The mansion that Wohleb designed for Lord a year later, near the capitol grounds, is now the State Capital Museum. (JW, WR)

23 TALCOTT BUILDING, 1882
420 S Capitol Way

Brothers Charles and Grant Talcott opened Washington's first jewelry store on this site in 1872. When the original wooden building burned ten years later, they rebuilt in brick. The present façade was added after the old brick storefront was damaged by the earthquake of 1949. (JW-REMODEL, OHR)

24 OLYMPIA NATIONAL BANK, 1915
110 SE 5th Avenue

In the early 20th century, Victorian fussiness gave way to a new architecture inspired by buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. This corner bank, lavishly decorated with neo-Classical columns and cornices, was heavily damaged in the 2001 Nisqually Earthquake. (NR, WR)

25 OLYMPIA FEDERAL SAVINGS AND LOAN, 1967, 1978
421 S Capitol Way

This local bank, founded in 1906, was one of the few local savings and loan institutions to survive the Great Depression. Its current building features the floor-to-ceiling glass walls of the New Formalism style. Note the striking carved doors.

26 HARRIS DRY GOODS, 1896
510 S Capitol Way

Early settler Isaac Harris started his dry goods business by trading calico and beads with local Indians. The store he erected in 1896, extensively altered over the years and badly damaged in the 2001 earthquake, has recently been rebuilt with a nod to its original design. (OHR)



Looking south from Capitol Way near 4th Avenue.

27 ELKS BUILDING, 1919
521 S Capitol Way

Olympia Lodge #186 hired lodge member Joseph Wohleb to design this red brick clubhouse, where local Elks continued to meet until 1958. The distinctive art glass canopy was restored in 1989. (JW, NR, WR, OHR)

28 NORTH COAST LINES DEPOT, 1937
107 SE 7th Avenue

Built for a local Olympia-Tacoma bus service and later owned by Greyhound Lines, this little depot features the geometric accents and curved chrome awning typical of the Art Deco/Moderne style.

29 PACIFIC TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH EXCHANGE, 1937
119 NE 7th Avenue

Designed by Seattle architect Carl Gould (who designed similar phone company buildings in several other Washington cities), this Art Moderne brick building once housed long-distance operators, business offices and switching facilities. It was converted into apartments in 1997. (OHR)



Bus depot and first section of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph building.

30 OLYMPIA CARNEGIE LIBRARY, 1914
620 SE Franklin Street

One of nearly 1,700 library buildings across the U.S. that were funded by grants from steel baron Andrew Carnegie. Olympia's public library was housed here until 1978. (JW COLLABORATION, NR, WR, OHR)



Carnegie Library.

