

Great renaming changes city streets

Second of two parts

When it came to naming streets, Portland founders Francis Pettygrove and Asa Lovejoy took the easy way out — they copied Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is also strung out along a riverfront, the Delaware.

Paralleling Philly's waterfront are Delaware Avenue, and Water and Front streets, with numbered streets beyond. Thus for Portland, the street next to the Willamette River became Front (now Naito Parkway), with First and Second streets to the west. East-west streets were Washington, Alder, Morrison, Yamhill, Taylor, Salmon, Main, Madison and Jefferson.

"Of those names, six were among the standard names in a Philadelphia-style grid: presidents, trees and 'Main,'" says Eugene Snyder in "Portland Names and Neighborhoods." "Only three had specific local significance: Morrison, named for an early pioneer who built a house at the foot of that street, Yamhill and Salmon."

Those were all needed because infant Portland was but 16 square blocks. As the town grew it added Third, Fourth and Fifth streets.

Capt. John Couch arrived in 1839, and pronounced Portland the "head of navigation" on the Willamette. He took out a 640-acre land grant, built himself a house on Couch Lake, about



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where Union Station now sits. In 1865 he laid out his first subdivision, extending Portland's numbered streets to his land. His east-west streets were designated simply by letters — A, B, C and so forth. In 1869 he added L, M, N and O.

Couch died in 1870. His widow, Caroline, added P, Q and R in 1872. Other plats progressed likewise until W Street. The letters endured until what Snyder terms "The Great Renaming of 1891."

That year East Portland and Albina, previously incorporated as separate cities, voted to become part of Portland. One upshot was confusion when it came to streets.

"Street names like 'Washington' were found in each of the three previously separate areas," Snyder says. "Some names were repeated many times. There were 12 'A' streets, 12 'B' streets, 12 'First' streets and so on."

The great renaming saw the letters attached to Couch's alphabet district changed to names, starting with Ankeny, ending with Wilson. In some

cases the names came from among several suggestions. Alternatives for Burnside were Benton and Burton; for Vaughn, Van Buren, Vance, VanSycle and Vulcan.

Nor did the changes occur without debate. "The subject of renaming the streets has caused a great deal of interest lately," commented the Evening Telegram newspaper. In all, 150 street names were changed.

Although eliminating the duplications, the city was left with arcane addresses — 93 East First Street North, for instance — which cried out for modification. Efforts toward that end began in 1909 but didn't get settled until 1933, when the present system was adopted.

During World War I, anti-German fervor sweeping the nation also was also in vogue in Portland.

"Residents of the southern part of the East Side are out to eliminate the German names attached to many of their streets," observed The Oregon-

ian in 1917. "A petition has been filed with the city asking that the German names be changed."

The City Council agreed and changed Frederick Street, after Frederick the Great of Prussia, to Pershing; Frankfurt, obviously after the city, to Lafayette, and Karl to Haig.

Linnton shipyard workers wanted Germantown Road changed to Libertytown Road (never happened). Residents on Southeast Liebe Street also asked for change.

Carl Liebe, an aged pioneer and upstanding citizen born in Germany, was still alive, making "the proposal rather unfeeling — particularly poignant when one realizes that 'liebe' is the German word for 'love' or 'charity,'" says Snyder.

The City Council rejected the idea.

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