



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Salem, Ore – The State Library of Oregon is pleased to announce its recent listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is the first entry accepted under the *Oregon New Deal Resources from the Public Works Administration (PWA) or Works Progress Administration (WPA), 1933-1943, Multiple Property Document*. It is also the first property on the Capitol Mall listed in the National Register besides the Capitol building itself.

The building has a rich history dating back to 1938. The land had formerly been used for houses, one of which was the Cooke-Patton House, built by Edwin N. Cooke, Oregon's first State Treasurer. The house was demolished, and construction began in 1938. Once building construction was completed in 1939, it was dedicated as a PWA project and became the first building to be built on what is now the Capitol Mall, after the Capitol itself. The final cost totaled \$825,000, including \$450,000 from the WPA. Before this, the library had shared quarters with the Supreme Court.

Harriet C. Long was the State Librarian at the time of construction and played a significant role in the project. She had spent 25 years searching and advocating for funding for a separate State Library building, all while expanding library services to rural communities, connecting local writers, and developing a consciousness in "Northwest Literature." She was one among many female State Librarians, a testament to the role played by women in providing library materials to communities throughout the state.

The building was considered one of the most important architectural designs done by Whitehouse & Church in the New Deal era and is considered a prime example of Modernist architecture in Oregon. Carvings done by talented sculptor Gabriel Lavare on the interior and exterior enhanced the building and reflected the mission and values of the library itself. One example is the series of beautiful carvings over the mall side exterior doors that allude to the library's commitment to furthering education. These panels include the owl of wisdom, the tree



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of knowledge, and the lamp of learning. Nearly all the original carvings remain and can still be viewed throughout and around the building.

Properties listed in the National Register are recognized as significant to the nation, state, or community. In this regard, the State Library was significant during the WPA era for being the only library that served all Oregonians and contributed greatly to education in the state. The library distributed WPA funds to employ somewhere between 120-135 workers to drive bookmobiles, clean and repair books, staff service desks, and do outreach to community organizations. The project lasted through the end of the WPA funding in 1943.

Thank you to everyone who contributed in some way to this nomination and official listing, whether it was through public comment or other forms of support. We celebrate the historic significance and look forward to the ways the library will continue to develop and grow.

For more a more detailed history of the library, you can read our full application for this nomination [here](#).

Further Reading:

- Full State Library application for the National Register of Historic Places:
https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/oh/documents/or_marioncounty_statelibraryoforegon.pdf
- History of the State Library:
<https://www.oregon.gov/library/operations/Pages/History.aspx>
- Previous *Connections* article on the nomination:
<https://www.oregon.gov/library/Documents/Volume%2031,%20Issue%2010,%20October%202021.pdf>
- Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Press Release:
<https://www.oregon.gov/newsroom/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?newsid=65186>

The State Library of Oregon cultivates, preserves, and delivers library and information services to foster lifelong learning and community engagement.