LOOKING BACK TO GO FORWARD

A historic Portland neighborhood looks to its historic human-scaled development and orientation towards public transportation.

PHOTO: MADELINE BERRY

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FALL 2018 MAGAZINE • VOL. 43, NO. 3 • FREE
How can Landmarks be most effective?

What is THAT YOU LIKE about living in the greater Portland area? How is the area changing? How is historic preservation relevant to greater Portland? How can Landmarks be most effective in serving our community?

These are among the questions for which we are seeking community input in a strategic research initiative we are undertaking to help guide the organization into the future. For the project we are conducting a series of individual interviews and focus groups along with an online survey to gather information from as many sources as possible. If you haven’t participated in the survey already, I encourage you to do so at www.portlandlandmarks.org.

The timing for this project couldn’t be better. We are conducting a trusteed-led brand-study to focus our communication and messaging, and will use the findings from this study to focus our communication and planning student at Columbia University provided photographs; Rosa Fry and Lauren Patterson who are studying preservation at the University of Texas and the University of Georgia, respectively, interviewed Bruce Rouillard; and Sam Shape, doctoral student at Boston University wrote two major articles.

About the Magazine: Sincere thanks go to our summer interns who developed most of the content. Madeline Berry, a preservation and planning student at Columbia University provided photographs; Rosa Fry and Lauren Patterson who are studying preservation at the University of Texas and the University of Georgia, respectively, interviewed Bruce Rouillard; and Sam Shape, doctoral student at Boston University wrote two major articles.

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Portland is experiencing a building boom. While many new buildings are under construction, several more are in the planning stages. New construction is occurring off and on the peninsula, from the West End to Munjoy Hill, from Bayside to North Deering. The Island Street neighborhood and waterfront are the site of many new projects in Portland and the neighborhoods experiencing the most change. A new proposal for the Shipyard Brewery site on Newbury Street, the new India Street Historic District.

This magazine is published by Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc., and is mailed to the membership of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc. Additional copies are distributed free to the general public. Opinions expressed in this magazine and contents and derivative works are encouraged in the categories of historic preservation, architecture, urban planning, housing, economic development, neighborhood improvement and community development and which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a local landmark. The architect has created a number of images of the proposed building from various vantage points in the city. The new garage will be visible from the 1-295, St. John Street, and the Western Promenade. For more information on this project, visit the Landmarks’ website.

View of the proposed employee parking garage behind the landmark railroad building and existing dwellings on St. John Street.

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As the Portland Peninsula swells with new construction and a need for housing, both the city and residents are looking west to the Deering neighborhood. Slated for rezoning in the coming year, the largely residential community is facing a moment of change. However, the process of change is nothing new to Deering. Largely influenced by a robust network of accessible public transit and pedestrian-friendly design, the area transformed from pastoral farmland to subdivisions of single and multi-family housing at the turn of the century. Future zoning and development in Deering should consider how human-scale transit helped shape the neighborhood into an exemplary suburban commuter enclave.

Initially a sparsely populated farming community, Deering’s transformation began in earnest by the mid-1870s when the Maine Central and Portland & Rochester railroads bordered the neighborhood. At the same time, commuter-focused horse-drawn trolley lines began traversing major roads such as Ocean, Brighton, and Forest Avenues. They supplemented the passenger services of the heavy rails and spurred residential, industrial, and commercial development. By the early 1890s, electricity replaced horses and quicker trolley commutes encouraged the residential development of outlying agricultural neighborhoods, transforming Deering into a flourishing suburban community.

Concurrent with the expansion of its transportation infrastructure, owners of large swaths of land in Deering divided their holdings into individual housing plots. In some cases, whole streets developed seemingly overnight. In 1873, the immense Rackleff estate stretching between Deering and Stevens Avenues along Revere and Lincoln Streets was subdivided into house lots. More modest landowners such as Richard G. Smith developed plots on...
Deering’s population nearly doubled from 4,324 to roughly 7,500 people. Facing a loss of voters and a declining tax base, Portland forcibly annexed Deering in 1899. After annexation, Deering’s transportation landscape and infrastructure underwent significant changes. Electric trolleys continued to run during both World Wars, supplying residents with reliable transport to and from Portland’s downtown. In neighborhoods along the trolley routes, multi-family homes that emulated single-family homes, apartment buildings and triple decks sprouted up alongside single-family housing.

While the trolleys nourished this expansion, so too did the private automobile. As with the rest of the country, car culture exploded in Deering, so much so that Portland had to modernize its packed-dirt roads with fresh pavement. By the 1930s, a city-wide paving effort was underway. In 1930-31, Deering Avenue, from Park to Forest Avenues, transformed from a dusty thoroughfare with cracked and aging sidewalks into a modern streetscape of smooth, car-friendly pavement and neat granite curbs enclosing freshly laid sidewalks. Closer to the city, on the edge of Deering Oaks Park, new pavement surrounded a central thoroughfare of cobblestones and trolley tracks. This transformative work, captured in historic photographs retained by Portland’s Public Works Department, depicts a modern commuter suburb with a blend of private and public transportation.

As the publically accessible trolley gave way to motorized travel, such corners provided light commercial centers along Deering’s completion, they published a pamphlet detailing Deering’s pleasant suburban qualities that dominate Deering’s neighborhoods today.

Deering’s growth was bolstered by local civic groups. In 1897, the International Order of Odd Fellows opened their building topped by a grand clock tower that firmly anchored the city’s center at Woodford’s Corner. In conjunction with their building’s completion, they published a pamphlet detailing Deering’s suburban neighborhood’s growth.

The popularity of the auto required new building forms for its sale, storage, maintenance, and fueling. Gas stations, garages, and car dealerships multiplied along transportation corridors. Many 20th-century owners converted their 19th-century carriage barns into car-friendly structures. New residences often incorporated a new building type, the garage. Dozens of one- and two-bay garages from the 1910s and 20s can still be found throughout Deering (see sidebar).

The evolution of car culture resulted in car-centric streets and neighborhoods hindered by intersections like Morrill’s Corner. In the trolley era, such corners provided light commercial centers easily approachable by foot from neighboring residences. Now, nearly two decades into the 21st century, the neighborhood is on the verge of yet another transformational nexus of transportation and residential development. Currently, Portland’s population hovers around 67,000 people, less than its historic peak in 1950 of 77,634. A 2010 census analysis completed by the city reveals that while the highest areas of density remain on the peninsula, the neighborhoods of Deering along the old trolley lines of Brighton, Forest, Stevens, and Washington Avenues come in at a close second.

Announced in the Portland Plan 2030 document released last year, the city is planning for a population potentially as high as 80,000 people by 2030. As in the past, Portland understands the Deering neighborhood’s pleasant suburban qualities will attract

what are now Rackleff, Belknap, and Prospect Streets. These early developers created the neat grid-like layout of streets that are partly defined by their attached garage. Today the garage is viewed as more than just a place to park a car. We use garages for storage, additional bedrooms, and even creative space for things like woodworking or garage band practice.
many of these new residents. In preparation, Portland has scheduled a city-wide rezoning effort to encourage denser commercial and residential development along Deering’s historic streetcar corridors. Any new rezoning of the neighborhood transportation corridors should be historically informed and enhance the remaining historic development patterns.

Although trolleys will likely never return to Deering and cars and buses will remain the primary modes of commuting, Portland’s Plan 2030 tightly emphasizes the importance of developing safe and walkable neighborhoods connected to public transit and a bicycle infrastructure in Deering. Neighborhoods such as Deering Center are cited in the new plan as examples to emulate because of their access to schools, shops, and open space, as well as diversity in housing types. Any future plans for Deering must recognize its residential and commercial desirability stemming from its historic human-scaled development and orientation towards public transportation. To maintain Deering’s attractive character, new zoning, building, and design must encourage the neighborhood’s historic emphasis on public transit, residential development, modest commercial businesses, and mixed single- and multi-family residences.

Sam Shupe was born and raised in Portland, Maine. Now, in the final stages of completing his Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University, Sam researches and writes about how Maine bicyclists transformed 19th-century Portland and Maine into the “Vacationland” we know today.

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Deering’s multi-family residences like this double house at 27-29 Glenwood Avenue were designed to blend in with their single-family neighbors.
Visible from both Interstate 295 and Casco Bay, the Portland Observatory tower is a defining feature of Munjoy Hill’s skyline. However, many might not realize it was once part of a larger complex of buildings during the 19th century. Captain Lemuel Moody, who built the Observatory in 1807, also constructed several buildings adjacent to the tower including his own family home, a bowling alley, dance hall, and stable.

While none of those original structures survive, one slightly later link to the Observatory’s larger familial landscape does: the Ellen Moody York House at 140 Congress Street. Born in Portland in 1837, Ellen Moody was the granddaughter of Lemuel. She married John W. York and had several children, the oldest of whom, Edward Howard York, gave the Observatory to the city of Portland in the late 1920s.

Built around 1858 and located directly west to the Observatory, the Ellen Moody York House is a modest one-and-a-half-story home. Largely vernacular in style, it boasts hints of Gothic and Greek revival influences with features such as tripartite windows, slightly curving trim, and rounded molding. Seen from the Observatory’s seventh-story viewing deck, the house has a rear ell with gabled windows facing down Munjoy Hill towards Casco Bay.

The significance of the home extends beyond its relation to Ellen Moody York. Its building site is the exact plot of land where Lemuel Moody’s original home sat. In Charles Codman’s 1830 painting of Boston and Portland rifle clubs gathering on Munjoy Hill, the tower and original home rise above the horizon line, enclosed by a picturesque white fence. In photographs from the late 19th century, Ellen’s house replaces her grandfather’s, standing almost exactly on the original footprint.

To see it today, the bird’s eye vantage point of the tower might be the best perspective. Set forty feet back from Congress Street, the house’s front yard is now occupied by the small one-and-a-half-story chapel of the Portland Free Methodist Church. The group purchased the property in 1947 and moved their church building to the front yard shortly thereafter. Viewed from the sidewalk, only the top point of the home’s front facing gabled roof is visible from the small alley created by the Observatory and the church.

Despite its sheltered placement behind the church, the Ellen Moody York House remains an integral part of Munjoy Hill’s inherited 19th-century landscape. It is more than just a landmark of the Moody and York families that built and ran the Observatory. Rather, it is also a physical window into the larger family of buildings who once comprised the site’s multifaceted architectural complex of commerce and domesticity. It signals the long history of intimately mixed living and working that still appears along Congress Street on Munjoy Hill today.

OBSERVATORY AT A GLANCE

View of Portland looking down Congress Street from the top of the Observatory.

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These guides were created with support from the Leonard C. and Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation, the Roses Thompson Fund of the Maine Community Foundation, and Unum.

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**LANDMARKS PEOPLE AND PLACES**

Landmarks 2018 Gala took place on a beautiful June evening at historic Greenwood Gardens on Peaks Island, a recently listed Place in Peril.

Gala chair Candice Thomson Lee and Careen Lutes following his keynote lecture in May.

Gala guests Lauren Webster and Jeremy Sherman.

Director of Advocacy Julie Larry (second from left) joined summer interns Madeline Berry, Rosa Fry, Lauren Patterson, and Sam Shupe for a tour of Peaks Island summer cottages.

Historic Preservation is good business. Greater Portland Landmarks is honored to recognize our Business Partners and Sponsors.

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**4 WALKS THROUGH PORTLAND**

The Portland Observatory: 138 Congress Street, Portland

Get yours at one of these locations:
The Portland Observatory: 138 Congress Street, Portland
The Safford House: 93 High Street, Portland
Online: www.portlandlandmarks.org/tours

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2018 PRESERVATION AWARDS CELEBRATION AND ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, September 27, guided tours at 4:30 pm and program begins at 5:30 pm. Reception to follow. 605 Stevens Avenue, Portland

Join us for a celebration of the 2018 Preservation Award winners. Explore the history of the historic St. Joseph’s Convent Motherhouse while reveling in successful historic preservation projects and people. This program will include the Greater Portland Landmarks Annual Meeting. Advanced registration preferred. Suggested donation $20.

3 OLD HOUSE AND HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE WORKSHOPS

Seats fill up fast – Sign up early! These 3 workshops held at Landmarks’ headquarters are kept small so that attendees have lots of opportunity to ask questions and engage with the presenter and subject.

ATTENTION REALTORS: They all qualify for 3 MREC approved CEUs.

Help Your Building Get to the Next Century:
Energy Performance, Sustainability, and Durability
Wednesday, October 17, 9 am – 12 pm
With Peter Taggart of Taggart Construction
Peter will provide guiding principles and specific techniques and efforts that can be taken to save energy, improve occupant health, and promote durability and sustainability of older buildings. There will be time to discuss strategies for specific situations.

What Does It Mean to Own Property in a Local Historic District?
Wednesday, October 24, 9 am – 12 pm
With Hilary Bassett, Executive Director
Portland has eleven local historic districts. This program will cover guidelines that govern ownership and care of properties within these districts, and increase understanding of the designation process. It will conclude with a walking tour of the historic Western Promenade in Portland.

Residential Architecture:
Uncovering the Story of Your Historic Building
Wednesday, October 31, 9 am – 12 pm
With Julie Larry, Director of Advocacy
Learn how to research the history of an historic home and share its story. The program will conclude with a walking tour of the State Street neighborhood to practice identifying building styles in Portland.

Advanced Registration Required. $35/$30 Members
Safford House, 93 High Street, Portland

LANDMARKS TOURS

There is still time for seasonal tours! All tours are $10/$5 for members. Advance tickets required. www.portlandlandmarks.org/tours.

The Portland Observatory
Open everyday, 10 am – 5 pm, through Monday, October 8

Homes of Portland’s Golden Age
Tuesdays and Fridays through September 14, 10 am

Portland’s India Street:
The Grand Trunk to the Abyssinian
Mondays through September 24, 10 am

U.S. Custom House
Wednesdays and Thursdays, through October 25, 10 am & 11 am

WE WILL BE IN A NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR YOU SOON!

4 Neighborhood History Nights
This summer our graduate-level interns surveyed the historical resources in 4 off-peninsula neighborhoods. Julie Larry will be presenting the new research with photographs and maps. All events are free and open to the public. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Space is limited.

Deering Highlands, Part 2
Tuesday, August 28, 6 pm – 7:30 pm
Woodfords Club, 179 Woodford St, Portland

Peaks Island
Thursday, October 11, 6 pm – 7:30 pm
5th Maine Regiment, 45 Seashore Ave, Peaks Island

East Deering
Thursday, October 18, 6 pm – 7:30 pm
St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, 678 Washington Avenue, Portland

Nason’s Corner
Thursday, October 25, 6 pm – 7:30 pm
St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, 515 Woodford Street, Portland

TRICK OR TREAT AT THE OBSERVATORY

Wednesday, October 31, 5 pm – 8 pm, The Portland Observatory, 138 Congress Street, Portland

For the 3rd year in a row, the Observatory is excited to welcome trick-or-treaters and their families on Halloween. Some ghosts of the Tower’s past will be on hand to welcome visitors and hand out candy. First floor ONLY will be open.

LANTERN TOURS AT THE OBSERVATORY

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, December 13, 14, 15, 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm,
The Portland Observatory, 138 Congress Street, Portland

Special and seasonal docent-led tours will leave every half hour beginning at 5:30 pm (last tour at 7:30 pm). Tours limited to 12 people per tour on a first come, first served basis. The Observatory has no heat so dress warmly. $10