



## COMBINING STRUCTURE & BEAUTY

La Grande's turn-of-the-century buildings reflect the practical, down to business attitude of the area's hardy settlers. Business people here built for practical use, for durability and general quality. And that's why the brick work becomes interesting.

By simply turning and rearranging the structural bricks, masons created distinctive patterns and detail. While many buildings are similar in size and shape, they differ delightfully when you pay close attention to the ins and outs, ups and downs, and stacks and bonds with which masons laid their bricks or combined them with stone, concrete and even cast metal.

The brick work is still there for your enjoyment; in most cases, simply "look up" over contemporary store fronts to the second and third stories.

This self-guiding tour will introduce you to La Grande's historic turns-of-the-brick and give you a taste of what those bricks have seen since the century last rolled over.

The tour is about 13 blocks long and takes approximately one hour. Go at your own pace—lots of benches and refreshments enroute!



## LA GRANDE'S BEGINNINGS

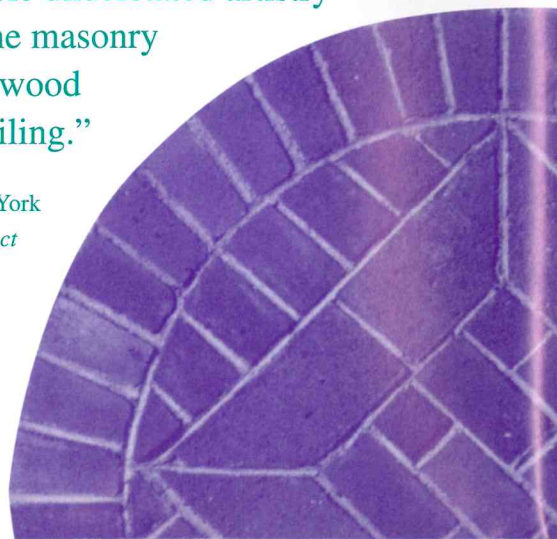
Oregon Trail Travelers of the 1840's and 50's passed through the edge of La Grande, usually staying overnight at what is now Birnie Park. They admired the Grande Ronde Valley and praised the farming and ranching potential but thought it too isolated to settle. By the 60's things were different. As the far western Oregon valleys filled, settlers filtered back. Mining strikes soon brought more people.

By 1861 the city had permanent residents and was being called Brown's Town and Brownsville after Ben Brown, one of the first settlers.

By 1863, the town had been officially named La Grande and had opened a post office on what is now C Avenue. The railroad arrived in the 80's bringing more settlers and opening markets for the valley's timber and agricultural products. On the cultural side, residents established Blue Mountain University, to begin the tradition of higher education culminating in today's Eastern Oregon State College.

**"La Grande has a solid collection of historic architecture depicting the rugged, hardworking nature of its founders. This can be seen in the simple understated artistry of the masonry and wood detailing."**

David York  
*Architect*



## EVENTS

### MAY

Rediscover Downtown Day  
Ag/Timber Day Parade

### JUNE

Show Shine 'n Cruise Car Show

### JULY

Crazy Daze Sidewalk Sale  
Union County Fair Parade

### AUGUST

Oregon Trail Days Festivities

### OCTOBER

Halloween Costume Contest

### NOVEMBER

Veterans Day Parade  
Community Tree Lighting & Song Fest

### DECEMBER

Holiday Celebrations

For more details, contact the  
La Grande Downtown Development Association  
105 Fir, Suite 321, La Grande, OR 97850  
503-963-0364



The La Grande Downtown Development Association works to maintain and improve the vitality and economic well being of downtown La Grande for the benefit of the entire community.

The Association follows a balanced four-step approach to downtown revitalization. These steps include design, economic development, organization and promotion.

This project made possible in part by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Other funds and in-kind contributions have been provided by La Grande/Union County Chamber of Commerce Visitors & Conventions, City of La Grande Council Economic Development/Visitors Promotion Fund and David York, AIA, Director of Design Services, Oregon Downtown Development Association, a Division of Livable Oregon, Inc.

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# URNS OF THE BRICK



**A  
WALKING  
TOUR  
OF DOWNTOWN  
LAGRANDE'S  
TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY  
COMMERCIAL  
BUILDINGS &  
GHOST SIGNS**

**THE TOUR begins and ends at La Grande City Hall on the corner of Adams Avenue and Fourth Street. Two-hour street parking is available in the immediate area. For the best view of the upper stories, observe the buildings from across the street, then, get up close to enjoy the finer detail. Frequently used architectural terms are illustrated on the flap below.**

**1 City Hall, 1912**

*National Register of Historic Places*

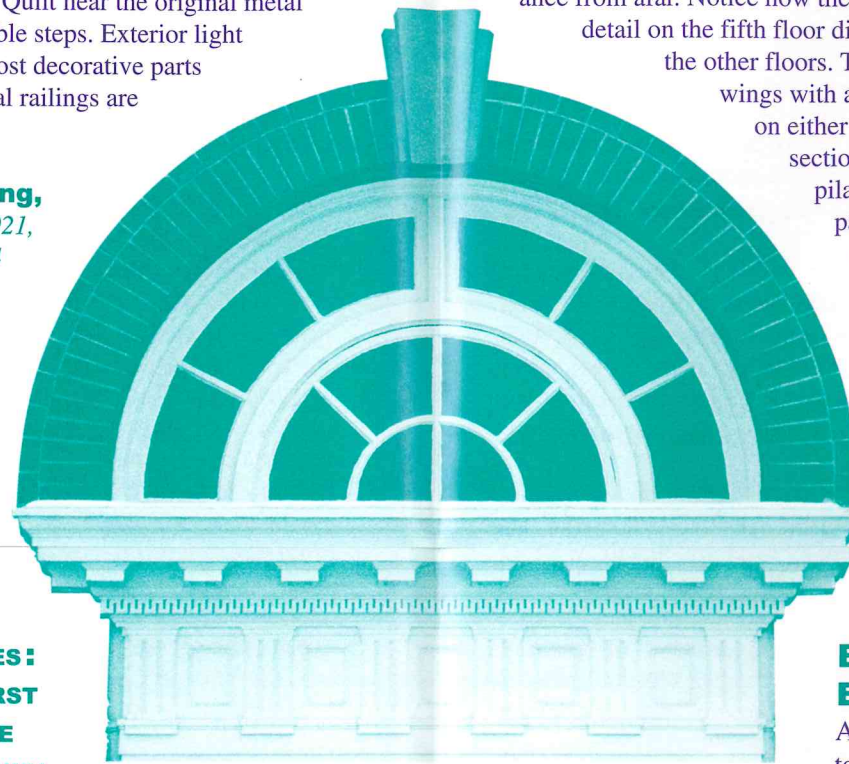
This Federal or American Renaissance style has been widely used in America for public buildings because it gives a feeling of stability and prominence. It has details typical of the Federal order such as the tympanum or rounded-top windows with matching arches above the doors, fluted inlay around doors and windows, the quoins on the corners (where the bricks are set out in blocks), and detailed dentils of the

cornice. Notice the brick rosettes between the windows. Step to the curb or cross the street to view the beautifully worked balustrade atop the building. The structure was built in 1912 as a Post Office, later used by the extension service and water master and was restored in the early 80's for city offices. Inside, note the wide doors and wood work, look for the Centennial Quilt near the original metal stairway with marble steps. Exterior light fixtures and the most decorative parts of the outside metal railings are also original

**2 Foley Building, 1911, expanded 1921, renovated 1983-84**

*National Register of Historic Places*

This buff and ochre structure



was built by bridge engineer J.E. Foley to compliment his Foley Hotel that sat where the GTE building is today. The five-story section on the corner was completed in 1911 and rapidly filled with offices of the Union Pacific Railroad. The building's symmetrical pilasters, with quoins as well as the band and cornice of ochre brick, give it an imposing appearance from afar. Notice how the windows and brick detail on the fifth floor differ from those of the other floors. Three and four story wings with apartments were built on either side of the corner section in 1921. Their pilaster and window patterns along with the corbeled detail at the cornice blend with the original corner building. Many of the store fronts on

the first floor retain their original features and the retractable awnings resemble the originals. The interior space has been used for offices, for a clinic and hospital in the 30's and 40's, and for apartments since the early 50's. A ghost sign\* on the northwest corner of the Foley is visible from the Safeway Parking lot.

**3 Earth 'n' Books, 1905**

This buildings and those next to it, built between 1905-1910, show a variety of interesting brick work. The light colored brick building, housing 1010 and 1008, was originally the popular Liberty Theater. Below the sheet metal upper cornice, notice the argyle pattern created with ochre brick. Three rows of bricks around the triple windows and other brick patterns around other windows give more detail. (The tiny window was the projection booth.) The pilasters have vertical panels with corbeled capitals on top. Original lantern pieces and the hook bolts, from which the permanent canopy hung, are still visible.

**BASIC TURNS OF THE BRICK**



Soldier Course



Corbel Pattern (side view)



Sailor Course



Row Lock Course



Header Course



Parquet Pattern



Stacked Header

**STREET NOTES: WHY A & FIRST AREN'T AT THE CENTER OF TOWN**

With the arrival of the railroad in 1884, business folk quickly moved shops and offices from "old town," on the Oregon Trail Route, to "new town" along the railroad route. The new commercial center paralleled the northwest-southeast tracks, while the rest of the town remained on a traditional north-south, east-west layout. The combination created the angled intersections and five-street corners you'll encounter near the downtown area.

Originally north-south streets were numbered and east-west streets were named with letters of the alphabet. The shift from old town to new made soup of that order, mixing in names of presidents, trees and others things.

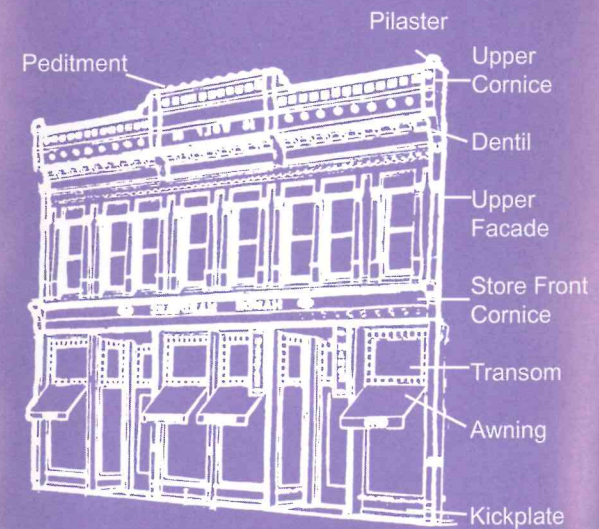
**BUILDING EVOLUTION**

As in most frontier towns, early La Grande businesses

put up simple wooden buildings, replacing them later with more substantial, more fire-resistant brick structures. Much of downtown was built with bricks made in the local brick yard which operated west of La Grande from the 1860's into the 1940's.

Brick bordellos, car dealerships, hotels, grand theaters, office buildings, banks and restaurants came to line the streets in fits and starts, a building here, one there, another to fill in-between.

Stand back and look at entire blocks of buildings to see where they join and overlap. Notice how brick work patterns reappear in slightly different combinations. Look for "ghost signs" painted onto the sides of buildings by early merchants.



**PARTS OF A COMMERCIAL BUILDING**

Peditment  
Pilaster  
Upper Cornice  
Dentil  
Upper Facade  
Store Front  
Cornice  
Transom  
Awning  
Kickplate

#### 4 1102/1104 Adams, circa 1905

An entirely different style is on the upper story of 1102 and 1104 Adams. Although now painted, the rich brick detail can still be enjoyed. Above each arched window is a panel with its own corbeled detail. The upper facade has a capital cornice with similar detail. The pediment is still in place.

#### 5 Birnie's Jewelry, circa 1905.

Paint nicely sets off brickwork here. Different colors show off the corbeled pattern along the cornice and the row lock course along the pediment. The facade has raised panels; the pilaster on each end of the building are topped by a corbeled capital with projecting panel. Marble has been used to reface the kickplate under store front windows.

#### 6 Red Cross United Drug Block, 1891, remodelled 1916

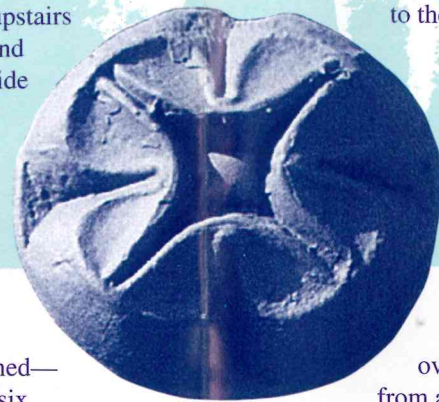
Here's an example of builders combining brick with both stone and concrete. From the curb or across the street, look up to see how formed concrete is used above and below the second story windows to add detail to a generally flat facade. The store front pilasters are blocks of grey tuft, a local volcanic stone that can be easily carved. You'll see tuft in other buildings around town. Get up close to see and feel marks from the carving tools. Notice the inscription on the pilaster at the corner of Depot and Adams.

#### 7 Benchwarmers Pub and Grill, 1910

Here tuft is again used for pilasters. Notice how twists and turns give detail to brick work on the upper story. The main floor of this building has been a bar since it was completed. The eight upstairs rooms were used by ladies of the night and the basement was an ice house. Peek inside to see the "second oldest bar in the Northwest," now beautifully restored. The bar was brought from China to San Francisco in the 1860's and placed here in 1910.

#### 8 Union Pacific Railroad Depot, 1930

The City's first two Railway Depots burned—one of them in a fire that also destroyed six downtown blocks. The third depot building was razed in 1930 to make way for this Spanish Style brick building. It's typical of many built by the UP in the west and a unique style for La Grande. Notice the relief work around the main entrance, the engraved lettering above doors, the relief-work on stone border beneath the eaves and under the windows, and the original iron light fixtures on the exterior. Return to Adams Ave.



#### 14 Stoplight Building, 1896

This building was originally a three story department/hardware/furniture store named after owner W.H. Bohnenkamp. Fire destroyed the second and third floors in about 1913. Bohnenkamp rebuilt those floors and added a fourth, changing the building's design in the process. Note the staggered corbel detailing of the light colored bricks and the segmented pilasters, similar to the quoins in the City Hall. The original canopy still hangs from large hooks placed below the second story windows. Turn-of-the-century features continue inside; the store has the original pressed metal ceiling, a mezzanine and one of the few water-run freight elevators still operating Oregon. Step to the corner of Jefferson and Elm to see the ghost sign\* on the rear of the building.

#### 15 Masonic Lodge & JC Penney Co, circa 1900

These sister buildings are unique in the city. The Masonic Lodge was completed in 1900, followed a few years later by the larger orange building. The overall effect is best appreciated from across the street. The upper story details, with striking v-shaped or sharply angled corbels, are of the Italianate style. The pilasters go all the way through the cornice itself to create an unusual profile. Notice the stepped out band and the recessed panels above the second story windows. Also notice the small, narrow shape of the bricks and the narrow mortar lines—these features allow the tight and profuse brick detail. Get a closer look at the small bricks, and how they can be corbeled to create an arch at the first floor entrance to the Masonic Lodge.

#### 16 Slater Building, 1891 National Registry of Historic Places

Fear of fire may have been one of the reasons Attorney James H. Slater ordered a metal front for his building. The ornate front of the building faces Jefferson and you can best appreciate the size, overall design and upper floor features from across the street. This building displays a rare, intact, prefabricated front of cast iron and galvanized sheet metal with raised decorations. The cornice is embellished with a row of Eastlake medallions or rosettes. Below that are molded string courses and a band of square metal tiles and scrolled embossing. Notice the detail on the columns between the windows. Beneath the metal the building is made of brick, which you can see on the Fir Street side. This ornate metal front was mail ordered from the

#### 18 Melville Building, 1916.

Many turns of the brick here. Look closely at the top of the facade to see a brick panel, a parquet pattern and courses of soldiers, sailors and row lock. These bricks were "raked" before curing to give the rough texture you see.

#### 19 Baker Distributing, 1915

This "dressed up functional building" has many elements common to the turn-of-the-century primary commercial/manufacturing buildings built near the railroad tracks. The gabled roof has masonry projections giving the appearance of a pediment. The front gable is corbeled with a little dentile pattern going right across the top and up and down the gable. The store front is very different from those on Adams Ave.; the heavy plank porch is at a height convenient for unloading wagons and trucks. In the foundation stones along Greenwood, look for a metal ring to which horses could be tied. That wall also has a ghost sign\* touting beer. The building across Greenwood (1433 Jefferson) is of the same period and has many similar features.

#### 20 Miller's Cabinet & Hardware, 1910, remodeled 1979

This simple one story building is a perfect example of practical solid building lightly dressed with brick detail. Even though the second story is only four or five feet tall it was set in so the cornice could project four brick courses, giving detail to the building's top. A tasteful remodel has modernized display windows while retaining the feel of the original era. Kick plates have been replaced with brick to match the building.

#### 21 Dolven's Building, circa 1920

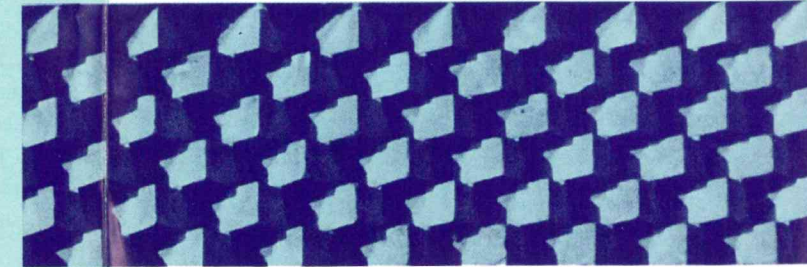
This building uses a lighter yellow brick to add detail on the pilasters and upper facade, to create a panel and to spell out the name "Mackey" in the masonry joints. Some of these colored bricks are also pulled out for even more emphasis. Notice how the lines on the top of the building add interest. If you step to the corner of the building, next to the car lot, you'll see a finer quality brick has been used to face the building—the side is made of red structural brick.

#### 22 Goss Motors Garage, circa 1920

This simple brick building still uses the original sliding and folding doors; note their workmanship. Observe too the difference in the brick of this structure and those next to it. The seam between this building and the Dolven's store shows how buildings fit together—see how the Dolven's building covered part of the front pilaster of the

#### 25 Fire Station Bell Tower

A poured concrete bell tower was added after the fire station was in use. The tower, and buildings of stop #26, are best seen from the Post Office parking lot. The tower's band of small decorative arches resemble the brick corbel detailing on the original firehouse. Wet fire hoses are still hung to dry in the tower.



#### 26 Helm Building, 1891

From the fire station garage to the corner of Depot and Washington, there appear to be three buildings, different in color and exterior. Notice how projections and indentations of the building with exposed brick are also apparent on the two with stucco exteriors. All three are part of the Old Sommer Hotel which wrapped around the corner. It offered 30 rooms and a dining room with black-suited waiters. The building exterior was covered with stucco in the mid 1920's. That stucco was later mechanically removed from the Helm office portion. Proceed with the tour. When you reach the corner of Washington and Depot, look back at this building to appreciate its size, the total effect of its brick and stone detail, and the way colors of the building sections and window trim all tie together.

#### 27 DW Hall's Business Machines, 1891

During a recent renovation, this store front was stripped of a "modern" facade and restored to its appearance during the Sommer Hotel's heydays. Notice the old style kickplates, store front and transom windows. Inside, high ceilings were restored and structural beams and brick walls were exposed to continue the feel of the period.

#### 28 Mamacita's, 1900

This building's distinctive upper story brick work deserves a careful look. Below each window is a panel of recessed brick. The two tall, narrow center windows feature a full arch; the four larger windows have half arches with tympanum windows. Now look at the bricks. Above each of the four large windows is a diagonal parquet inlay. In contrast, bricks above the center windows are zig zagged to create a cheese grater pattern. The two pilasters in the middle of the second story go up to break the building's cornice into two different styles. Notice the difference in the cornice above the center windows and above the

**9 I.J. Gems, 1933**

This structure is very different from other commercial buildings in the area. It was remodeled in the 1950's by the well-known architect Pietro Belluschi, who did work throughout the Northwest. The building is now faced with stone and cast concrete panels; the interior's high ceiling and balcony give it the International Style Belluschi often used. The adjacent store burned in 1994.

**10 McGlasson's Stationery, 1890**

In this block, you can see many different kinds of upper facade brickwork. White bricks have been pulled out to create panels and horizontal lines. Bricks are corbeled around the recessed panels along the top of the building and under the cornice. This building was renovated in the 1980's to resemble the original store front; step inside to see the beautiful pressed metal ceiling.

**11 Edward D Jones Building, 1895**

The upper facade of this red brick building is different than any other in the city. Here pulled-out bricks create gracefully curving lines above the upper story windows. Exposed brick ends have been angled to create distinctive zig zag panels. A line of corbeled dentils tops the upper facade.

**12 Bohnenkamp Interiors, 1900**

Here second story bricks are placed to create a panel with a checkerboard pattern. Store fronts have been subtly remodeled since their construction; transom windows are still exposed and storefront windows are near original.

**13 1216 Adams Ave, circa 1900**

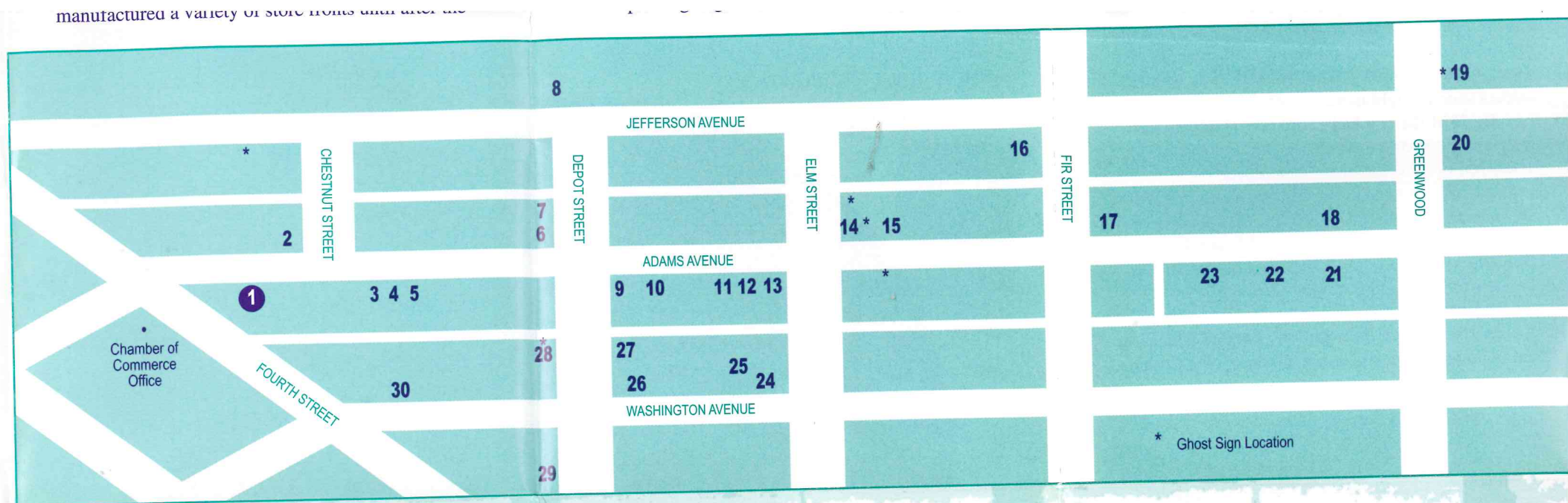
Bricks create an entirely different effect here; they're corbeled in horizontal rows to create recessing panels. This building too has been tastefully remodeled to allow for a large recessed covered entrance and add a scooped sheet metal cornice and metal balls. The latter are Victorian elements. Notice how bricks have been used to define the windows on the side street entrance too.

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*National Register of Historic Places*  
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section in 1921. Their pilaster and window patterns along with the corbeled detail at the cornice blend with the original corner building. Many of the store fronts on



turn of the century. The store front cost less than \$750, including installation. Look for the Mesker Brothers Company name about knee-high on the first floor columns. This building escaped fire damage and survived the flood which swept through downtown in 1894.

**17 Claudson's Sew Chic, 1927**

At the corner here, notice how ornaments of molded concrete have been set into the brick for decoration. Also notice how bricks meet at the corners above the glass canopy. As you walk along this block to the next stop you'll see many of the store fronts with original ceramic tile on the kickplates and original bronze mullions between the windows' glass panes. Newer windows have steel or aluminum mullions. As you walk, also notice the rhythm of the buildings, one after another. Notice the name plates for "Lottes" and "Grace." Observe how buildings join—you can tell by the zigs, zags and settling which was built first.

**23 Pat's Alley, 1916**

More brick patterns are visible on the upper facade. Beneath the molded metal cornice, notice how the dentils are created. Beneath that runs an attractive border created with five rows of stack bond; only the ends of the bricks show. The large store front cornice above the first floor windows is part of a remodel; up close you can tell most of the actual store front windows are original. On your way to the next stop watch for ghost signs\* for a Dentist and Bohnenkamp Hardware store.

**24 Fire Station Building, 1898.**

In response to numerous fires, the city organized a Rescue Hose Company in 1887, and later allocated \$3,000 to build a brick fire station here. Originally called the "City Building," it was transformed over time and eventually covered with stucco; some brick patterns are recognizable through the stucco. Part of the original building is still used by the La Grande Fire Department.

see the old JC Penney ghost sign\* high up on the side of Mamacita's Restaurant.

**29 Ten Depot, 1900, restored 1988**

The corbel detail on this building resembles that of other buildings in the city. Recent renovation and sandblasting have restored the exterior to near-original style. Inside the restaurant see another beautifully restored bar.

**30 Mother Earth Mural, 1993**

This was a "common wall" shared by two buildings. When the taller building was torn down, the wall had to stay. Locals began calling it the "ugly wall." Eastern Oregon State College Art students recently covered the "ugly" with Mother Nature and some of her Oregon creations—winning a State Downtown Special Projects Award. From here, it's just around the corner to the starting point. You'll find information about other local attractions and happenings at the Chamber of Commerce Office, across Fourth Street from City Hall.

restored brick building, housing 1010 and 1008, was originally the popular Liberty Theater. Below the sheet metal upper cornice, notice the argyle pattern created with ochre brick. Three rows of bricks around the triple windows and other brick patterns around other windows give more detail. (The tiny window was the projection booth.) The pilasters have vertical panels with corbeled capitals on top. Original lantern pieces and the hook bolts, from which the permanent canopy hung, are still visible.