



MILWAUKIE
Dogwood City of the West

Memorandum

To: Katie Mangle, Planning Director
From: Li Alligood, Assistant Planner
Date: September 1, 2010
Subject: Downtown Plan Refresh Background Memo #4:
Historic Downtown Development Patterns

The purpose of this memo is to provide an overview of the historic development patterns and architecture of downtown Milwaukie, and to provide a context for future development in the downtown area.

BACKGROUND

Milwaukie's physical development patterns have been incremental, small-scale, and eclectic. Early development patterns were low-density, and responded to physical constraints such as the surrounding forest to the north and east, the Willamette River to the west, and Kellogg Lake to the south. This resulted in a compact city center that expanded outward gradually.

Early downtown development was a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses, often within the space of a single block. Into the 1930s, dwellings and accessory buildings occupied lots within the commercial core. In many cases, buildings were separated by vacant lots and open space. Downtown blocks generally retain their original dimensions of 200 by 200 feet square, a dimension which resulted in compact, walkable area.

The extant architecture ranges from remnants of the early pioneer village of the 1850s; the small town of the 1900s to the 1930s; and the suburban community of the 1960s to today. Though Milwaukie is in many ways a traditional small town, its residents have historically been progressive and independent, and have shown a willingness to experiment with architecture as evidenced by unique structures like the Masonic Temple and the St. Johns Catholic Church.

HISTORY

The City of Milwaukie was founded in 1847 by Lot Whitcomb, who purchased a Donation Land Claim (DLC) of approximately 600 acres from an earlier settler on the site.¹ He chose the site on

¹ Donation Land Claim #38, recorded December 8, 1847. Courtesy of Oregon State Archives.

Milwaukie Bay and named the town after Milwaukee, Wisconsin;² he intended the town to become the shipping and transportation leader of the Willamette Valley. The early prosperity of the city was driven by lumber, flour, agriculture, and shipbuilding; however, the town remained a small, rugged trade center reachable only by difficult roads, isolated in the winter, and without a city government until the early 1900s.³ Significant public improvements, including sidewalks and streetlights, closely followed the town's incorporation in 1903.

Though Milwaukie has always had a strong civic spirit, early civic buildings were temporary in nature. City Hall had at least three rented locations before moving to its current site; the public library moved numerous times between its founding in 1889 and final move to the Ledding Library facility in 1965; and the first elementary school was established in about 1850, moved across the street to the City Hall site in 1859, and finally moved to today's Milwaukie Elementary upon its completion in 1916.⁴

EXPANSION

The city has experienced three periods of growth, each with a unique physical character:

- 1850-1860: The "golden period," fueled by the success of the shipbuilding, timber, and milling industries.
- 1893- 1930: Electric interurban rail began service between Portland and Oregon in 1893; this new accessibility brought growth to Milwaukie.
- 1950-Present: Through a combination of orderly annexations and Milwaukie's increasing popularity as a Portland suburb, the population has quadrupled since the 1950s.

Pioneer Village (1850-1860)

The city's first phase of growth was spurred by the interrelated advancements in transportation, agriculture, industry, and commerce. The early pioneers built lumber mills to provide lumber for San Francisco, which was growing quickly because of the California gold rush. According to early photographs, the town was surrounded by thick forests to the north, east, and south; the Willamette River, Johnson Creek, and Kellogg Creek provided power for the mills and the means to transport their products to other cities. Soon after the lumber mills were established, a grist mill was built to grind wheat from the outlying areas into flour, which was also in high demand in California.

In response to the growing population and the creation of the Oregon Territory in 1848, Lot Whitcomb platted the town the same year.⁵ The plat shows an ambitiously scaled city of 352 square blocks (or about 1 square mile); each block was bisected by a 10-foot alley running north to south. A public square was located near the center of town. Although the plat showed orderly blocks surrounding a public square, the reality of Milwaukie in 1848 was somewhat different.

² Some sources say that Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was Whitcomb's home town, but most agree that he emigrated from Vermont.

³ Clackamas County Cultural Resources Inventory, November, 1983; Charles Oluf Olsen, *The History of Milwaukie, Oregon*, 1965; Tom Humphrey, "As We Remember It," 1959.

⁴ Charles Oluf Olsen, 1965. *The History of Milwaukie, Oregon*.

⁵ The plat was not recorded with Clackamas County until 1865, 8 years after Lot Whitcomb's death in 1857.

According to local historian Charles Oluf Olsen, early Milwaukie was a generally unpleasant place:

“Houses and shacks were of raw lumber, unpainted and crude. Streets were narrow, muddy and full of stumps, with miry puddles in which hogs wallowed. Cattle roamed at large. But there was virile life in the primitive settlement, and its position as the future metropolis of the Oregon Country seemed assured.”⁴

By the fall of 1850 Milwaukie had 500 residents, two hotels, a post office, a sheet iron and copper plate works, a shoe store, several general stores, several saloons, four mills, a waterfront warehouse and wharf, and a school.⁴ A free public ferry and St. John’s Episcopal Church⁶ followed a year later. The city even had its own newspaper, the *Western Star*, for a brief time in 1850.

Lot Whitcomb built and launched the steamer “Lot Whitcomb” in 1850. His intention was to protect Milwaukie’s growth and damage Portland’s by providing shipping services to Milwaukie while ignoring Portland, which had become a rival. Due in large part to the success of the “Lot Whitcomb,” Milwaukie became a Port of Delivery by Congressional Appointment in April, 1851, and a shipbuilding industry sprang up.⁴

By 1851 Portland had edged ahead of Milwaukie in the shipping business, and the “Lot Whitcomb” was sold to buyers in California in 1854. Although Milwaukie was no longer dominant in shipping, it quickly became the center of fruit production in the region. The Llewelling brothers, Seth and Henderson, carried nursery stock from their homes in Iowa and planted their first nursery on the present site of the golf course at the Waverly Country Club.⁷

By 1860, Milwaukie had fully ceded shipping dominance to Portland. After about 1865, lumber and flour milling became the town’s primary industries. During this time, flour produced by the Standard Mill was shipped throughout the country and the regional transportation network continued to improve: a macadamized wagon road between Portland and Milwaukie was completed in 1863; the East Side Railroad reached Milwaukie in 1869 and provided a convenient way to ship goods to other parts of the state; and the free Milwaukie ferry continued to operate across the Willamette until the turn of the century.⁸

Small Town (1893-1930)

The second phase of Milwaukie’s growth occurred as a result of the electric streetcar line. Service between Oregon City and Portland began in 1893; the streetcar ran along the west side of McLoughlin Blvd (today’s Trolley Trail route) to a “car house” at the corner of McLoughlin and Jackson St, then turned left at Jackson St and continued across Johnson Creek to Portland. The new accessibility to Portland encouraged employees of the Eastside Electric Railroad Company to live in Milwaukie, and a number of subdivisions were platted during this time.

The population had declined to 100 people by 1901. The streets were muddy and blocked with stumps; livestock roamed free; and there were a number of “powder houses” within the city that

⁶ The church was moved by barge to Sellwood in 1961, where it was renamed the Oaks Pioneer Church and completely restored.

⁷ Dimon, Elizabeth F., 1981. *’Twas Many Years Since: 100 Years in the Waverly Area 1847-1947.*

⁸ Metro, November 1997. “South/North Project – Historic Context Statement.”

posed a threat of explosion and fire.⁹ In response to the poor condition of the town site, the Town of Milwaukie was incorporated in 1903. The town's first fire department and water works (1904); sidewalks (1906); streetlights (1910s); and franchises for telephone, gas, and electric service followed closely behind.

According to a map of downtown Milwaukie drawn from the memory of early residents,¹⁰ development along the streetcar route remained sparse into the early 1900s. At that time, the center of commercial activity in the city was the Main St and Front St (today's McLoughlin Blvd) blocks between Jackson St and Washington St. The development pattern throughout this period remained low-density, and the buildings were separated in many cases by open, undeveloped lots. According to Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1928 and 1936, residences, sheds, and accessory buildings occupied properties in the downtown core into the mid 1930s and beyond. Several of the remaining downtown buildings were constructed between 1900 and 1926, and most replaced the older frame buildings.

By the 1920s, the automobile had become the dominant form of transportation in the city. McLoughlin Blvd (also known as 99E and the Superhighway) was completed in 1932, which resulted in faster travel times to Portland and other towns to the north and south. Several auto-oriented businesses, including service stations, restaurants, and car garages, were built along McLoughlin Blvd. Despite this development, many streets east of Main St remained unimproved into the 1940s.¹¹

During World War II, development in Milwaukie came to a halt. Ship yard workers came from all over the country to work in the ship yards of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. The Housing Authority of Clackamas County built the Kellogg Park housing development in the early 1940s to house shipyard workers. The site was sold to the City of Milwaukie between 1946 and 1950, leveled, and converted to the Milwaukie Industrial Park (now the Manufacturing Zone M north of downtown) and annexed to the City in 1956.¹²

Suburb (1950 to Present)

The third phase of Milwaukie's growth impacted both the physical and municipal development of the city. The city's northern boundary expanded in 1956 to include the Milwaukie Industrial park (the area between Scott St and the Portland city limits). As a result of the expanded city boundary, many of the buildings north of Harrison St and along McLoughlin Blvd were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. Much of the development that occurred during this period was suburban in style, comprised of boxy, low-rise buildings surrounded by surface parking.

Due to declining ridership and lack of interest on the part of the company's owners, the last electric interurban route through Milwaukie ended in 1958.¹³ Like many small towns, downtown Milwaukie entered a period of decline in the 1970s from which it is still recovering. However, due to the increasing appeal of Milwaukie as a bedroom community, and the gradual annexation of unincorporated properties, the population and city have continued to grow at a slow but steady rate. Between 1950 and 2010, the population grew from about 5,000 to about 20,000 people.

⁹ Ordinance 1, adopted July 6, 1903, addressed these dangers by prohibiting power houses within the City limits.

¹⁰ Tom Humphrey, "As We Remember It," 1959.

¹¹ City of Milwaukie. *Centennial Memories: 1903-2003*. 2003.

¹² Clackamas County Plat #729, recorded November 22, 1952; and Plat #803, recorded June 20, 1956.

¹³ Clackamas County Cultural Resource Inventory, November, 1983.

ARCHITECTURE

The architectural character of today's downtown is eclectic. The city's early architecture was primarily functional in appearance, and fashionable styles did not reach Milwaukie until several years after Portland. Many of the buildings from the early 1900s were influenced by the Gothic and Italianate styles. Remaining downtown Milwaukie buildings display a wide variety of styles corresponding to various periods of development, including Italianate, Northwest Regional, Craftsman, Mediterranean, Gothic Revival, Half Moderne, Georgian Revival, Art Deco, Mid-Century Modern, International, Brutalist, and vernacular.

The variety of architectural styles and building materials reflects the incremental development of the city, and its various periods of prosperity and decline. Due to the isolated nature of the town and the ready availability of lumber from the local mills, early residential and commercial buildings were simple, vernacular wood structures with limited ornamentation. In the 1870s, a brick kiln was founded in the city and masonry buildings became more common; however, wood was the building material of choice into the early 1900s. Today, most downtown buildings are constructed of stucco, masonry, and concrete; few wooden structures remain.

The Oregon Main Street Program conducted a Reconnaissance Level Survey (RLS) of 97 commercial and residential downtown buildings¹⁴ in April, 2009. Of those buildings:

- 25 percent were constructed between 1890 and 1930. This was a period of growth after the establishment of the Milwaukie to Portland streetcar in 1893.
- 46 percent were constructed between 1930 and 1960. This time frame corresponded with the Great Depression and government-funded WPA projects such as City Hall and the Portland Waldorf School, as well as the expansion of the city boundary in 1956 to include the Milwaukie Industrial Park.
- 22 percent were constructed between 1960 and the present. This period, particularly the period between 1960 and 1975, represents Milwaukie's growth from a small town to a suburb of Portland. This growth continues to the present.

Several homes from the first period of growth remain outside of the downtown area, including the William Schindler House (ca. 1865) at 3235 SE Harrison St; the only remaining residential building within the original town site of Milwaukie is the Reverend Abraham Hager House (1888) at 2105 SE Adams St.

A number of extant buildings were constructed during second period of growth, including the Schindler Building (1905); Kellogg-Wetzler Building (1910); Milwaukie Elementary School (1916); Grasle-Zanders Building (1923); Milwaukie High School (1925); the Dr. Joseph P. Murphy Building (1926); and the Masonic Temple (1926). WPA-funded projects during the Great Depression include the Milwaukie Jr. High School (1937) and City Hall (1938). The Schindler Building is the oldest remaining commercial building in Milwaukie.

Many of these historic buildings were themselves constructed on the site of earlier historic buildings, including the City's impressive second elementary school, on the City Hall block; the electric interurban line garage and other associated buildings; the train station, on Washington St (formerly Depot St); and numerous restaurants, dwellings, and commercial buildings.

¹⁴ Julie Osborne and Rosalind Keeney, Reconnaissance Level Survey (RLS), completed April 2009.

NEXT STEPS

Development in Milwaukie has historically been typified by incremental, small scale projects; combination and recalibration of existing lots and blocks; and eclectic and progressive architecture. However, development in Milwaukie has also tended to involve replacing the old with the new. As a result, the current residents are left with very few physical ties to the community's history.

A historic downtown core like Milwaukie's provides many advantages: it offers a physical environment that cannot be reproduced today; it is composed of areas of compact, fine-grained, human-scale buildings; it provides a view into what makes the city unique; and it reminds residents and visitors of the dynamic nature of the community.

In order to encourage compatible, incremental development while protecting the City's few historic structures, the following next steps are recommended:

1. Update the 1988 Milwaukie Historic Inventory

The City's most recent historic inventory was conducted in 1988, and is out of date. The methodology used to identify significant and contributing buildings is no longer recognized as valid by the State or the US Forest Service (which administers the National Register of Historic Places program). There are a number of buildings and structures constructed since 1945, in the downtown area and beyond, that would benefit from protection and should be included in the inventory.

2. Update the Historic Preservation Overlay

The current historic preservation (HP) ordinance was adopted in 1988. As noted above, the criteria outlined to establish significant and contributing resources is no longer recognized or utilized outside of the City. In addition, there are no protections in place for historic sites or structures that are not buildings (such as the Kellogg Lake trestle).

3. Implement a Storefront Improvement Program for downtown buildings

The Downtown Milwaukie Retail Strategy memo prepared by Commercial Realty Advisors NW, LLC,¹⁵ placed a high priority on the implementation and funding of a storefront improvement program to enhance the retail environment of downtown Milwaukie. This program should prioritize the refurbishment or restoration of the few remaining historic buildings, and encourage storefront improvements for more recent buildings.

4. Prepare a National Register of Historic Places Downtown Historic District nomination

The April, 2009, RLS recommended preparing a nomination for the buildings located on Main St and 21st Ave between Monroe and Adams Streets. This area captures the historic business blocks between Monroe and Jefferson Streets, as well as a few more recent buildings.

An historic district status would give the City more ability to encourage and require "compatible" new development; it would also provide additional funding sources for the

¹⁵ Prepared for the PMLRT Possibilities Project Team on June 1, 2010.

rehabilitation or restoration of buildings within the district. Lastly, historic districts are a draw for visitors.

5. Prepare individual National Register nominations for buildings identified by the RLS

The following buildings were determined eligible for National Register listing as part of the Portland to Milwaukie Light Rail Project:

- Masonic Lodge, 10636 SE Main St
- City Hall, 10722 SE Main St
- Milwaukie Jr. High School (Portland Waldorf School), 2300 SE Harrison St

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many of the following documents and resources can be found at the Milwaukie Museum or the Ledding Library:

- City of Milwaukie, *Centennial Memories: Milwaukie 1903-2003*, 2003.
- Clackamas County Policy and Project Development Division, *Clackamas County Cultural Resource Inventory: Recommendations for Inclusion in the Statewide Inventory of Historic Properties*, 1983.
- Elizabeth F. Dimon, *'Twas Many Years Since: 100 Years in the Waverly Area 1847-1947*, 1981.
- Tom Humphrey, Editor-at-Large, the *Oregon Journal*, "As We Remember It," booklet issued by the First State Bank of Milwaukie on the occasion of its Golden Anniversary, 1959.
- Koler/Morrison Consultants, *City of Milwaukie Cultural Resource Inventory*, 1988.
- Charles Oluf Olsen, *The History of Milwaukie, Oregon*, issued by the Milwaukie Historical Society, 1965.
- *The Review*, "Milwaukie Memories," February 23, 1977

The following documents are available for review by prior arrangement with City staff:

- Metro, "South/North Project – Historic Context Statement," 1997.
- Julie Osborne and Rosalind Keeney, "Oregon Main Street Program Reconnaissance Level Survey: Milwaukie, Oregon," 2009.

The following resources are available online:

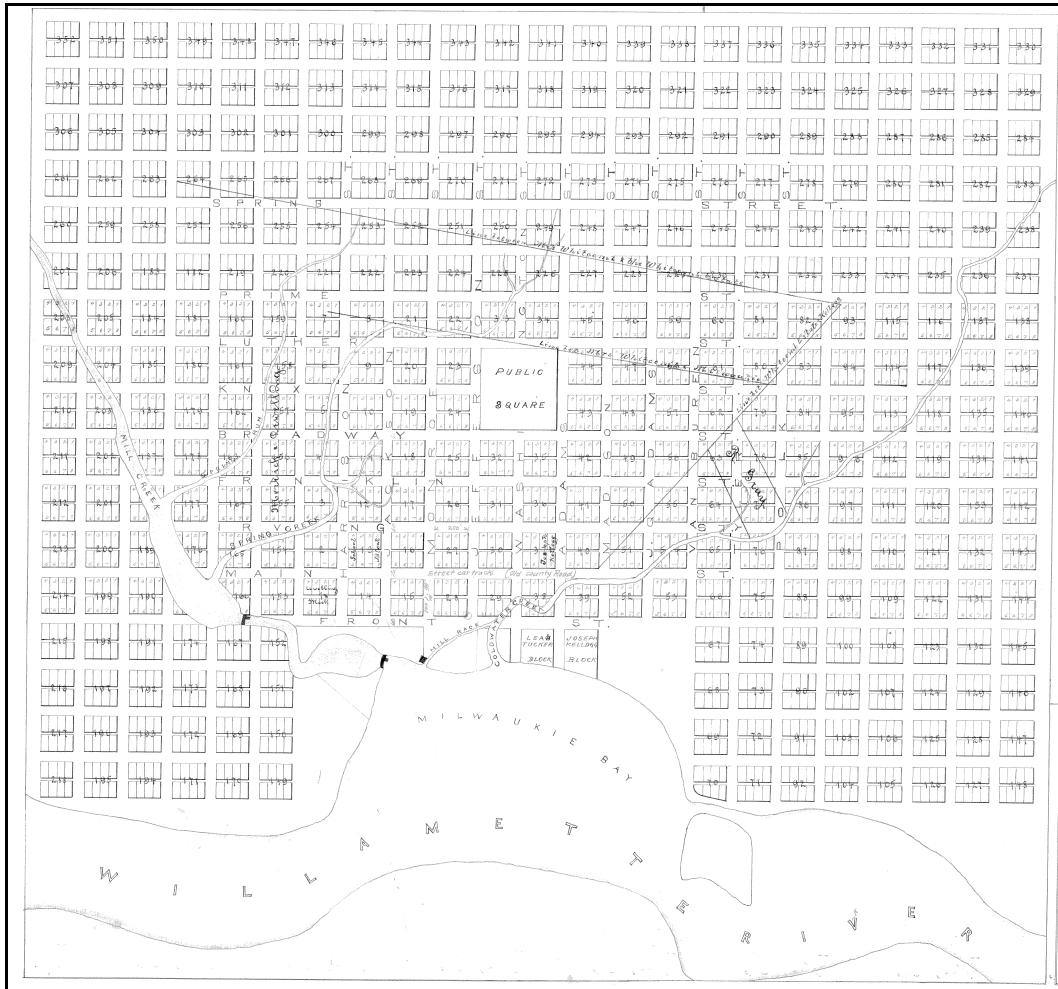
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Milwaukie, 1928 and 1936, available from <https://catalog.multcolib.org/validate?url=http%3A%2F%2F0->

sanborn.umi.com.catalog.multcolib.org%3A80%2F (requires Multnomah County Library card).

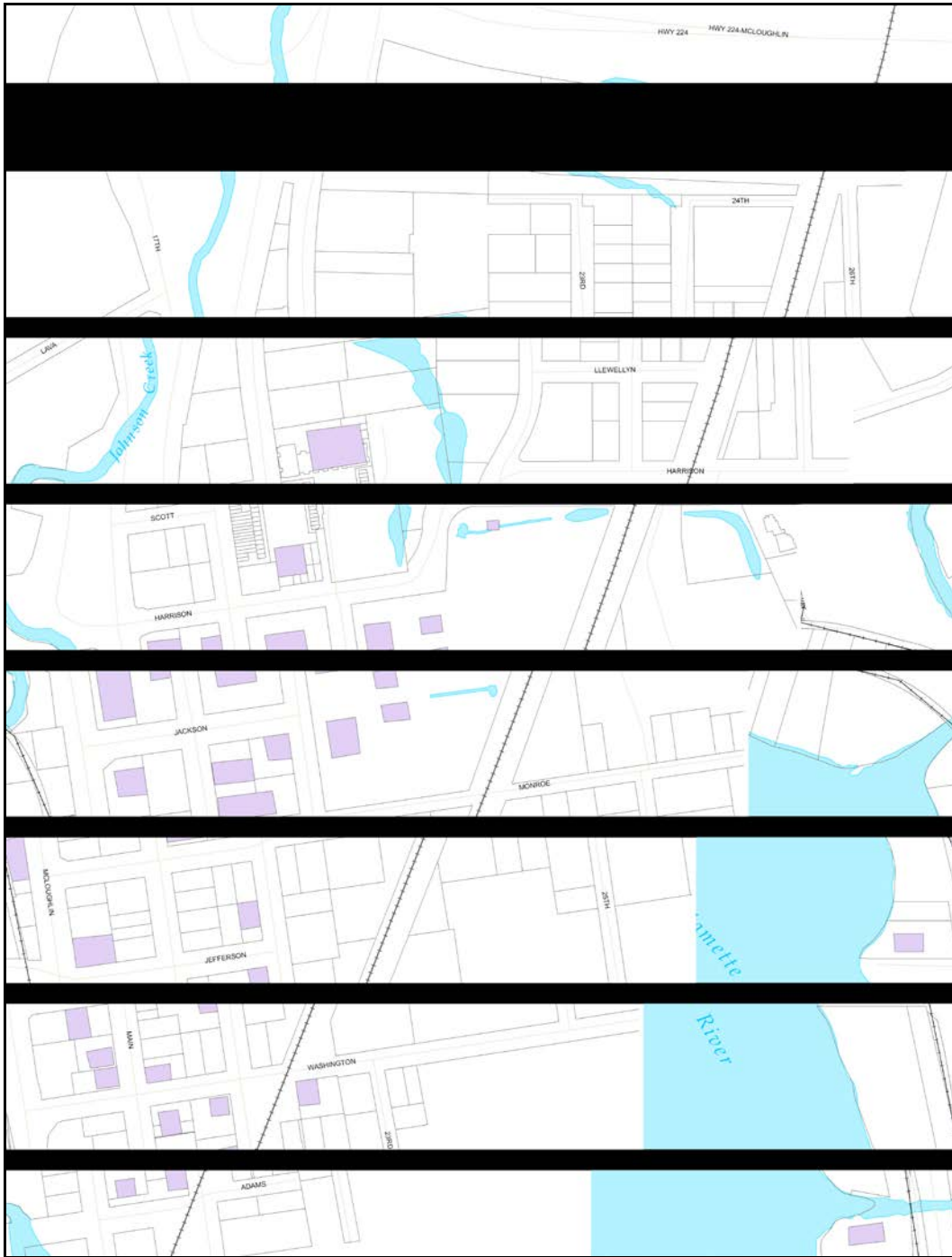
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ATTACHMENT 1 Downtown Plans and Maps

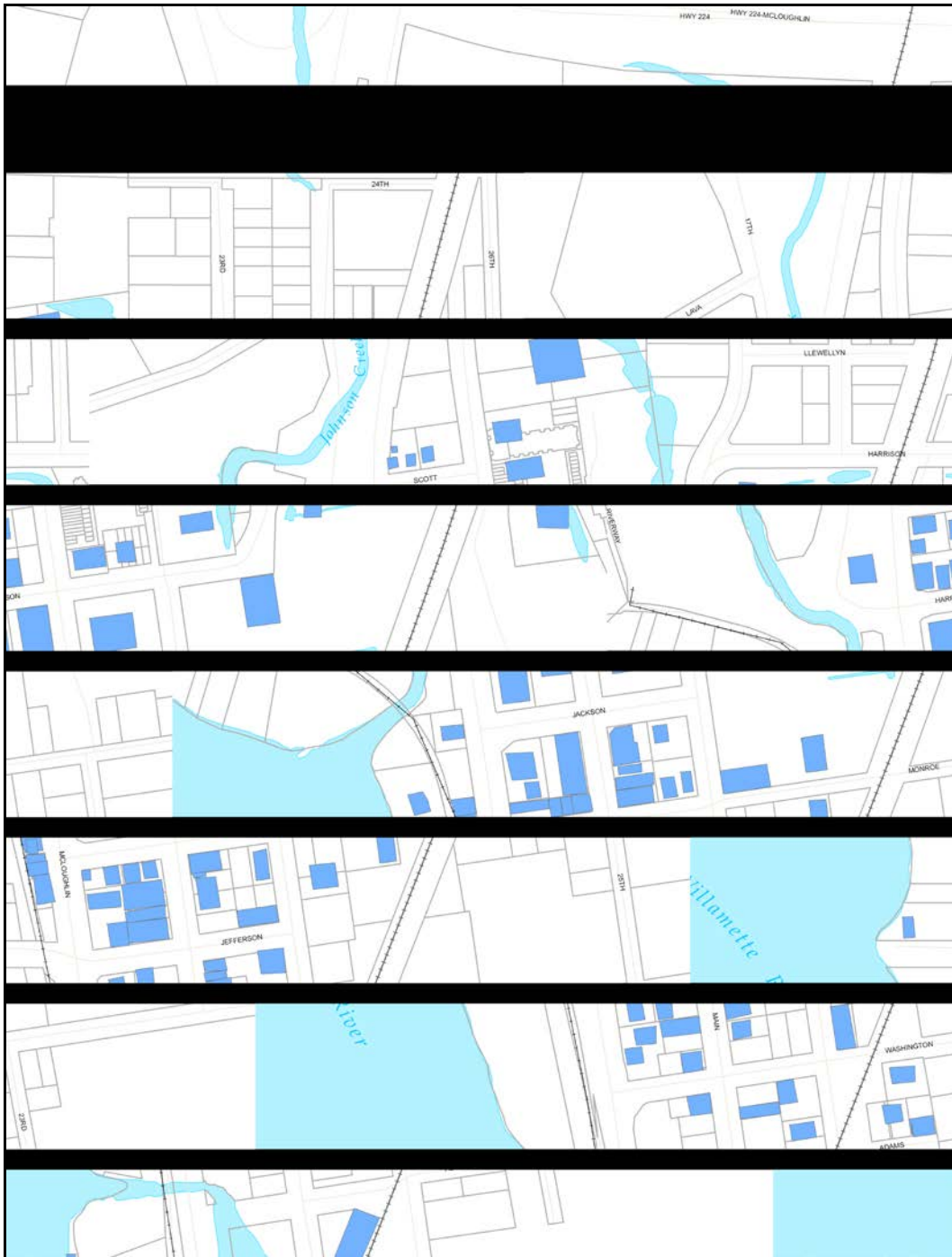
Lot Whitcomb's Plat of the Town of Milwaukee, 1865



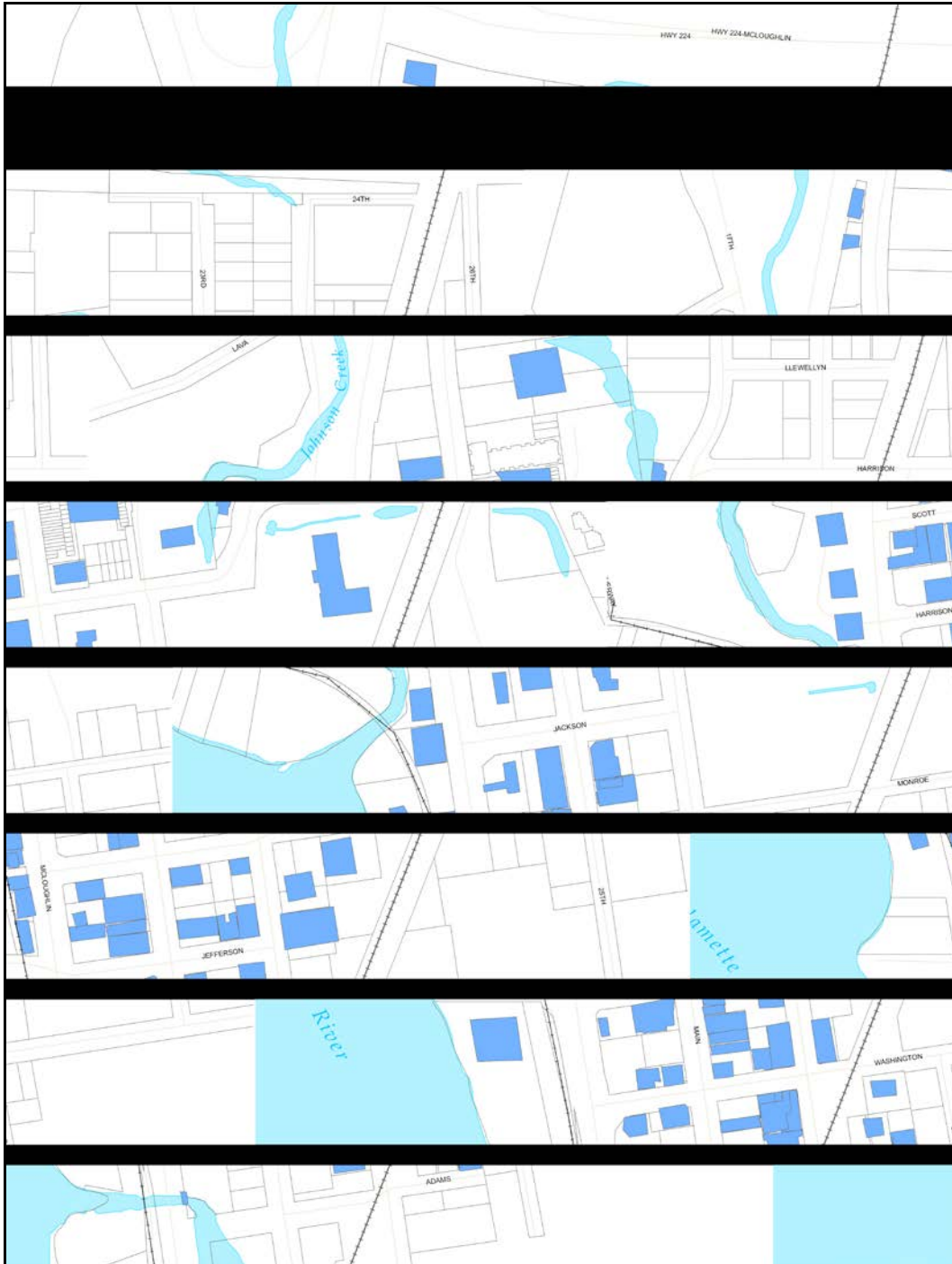
Milwaukie in 1895



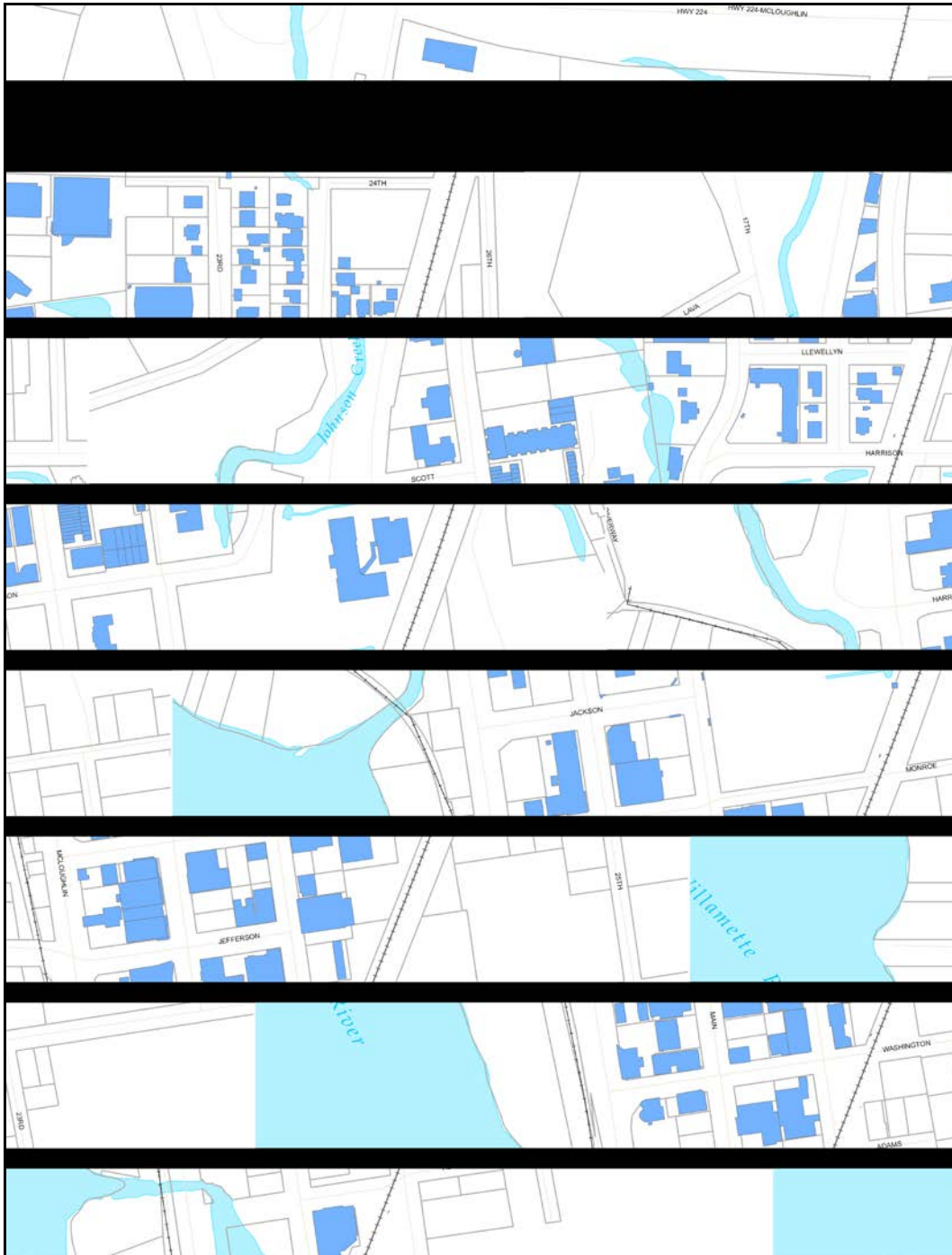
Milwaukie in 1930



Milwaukie in 1960



Milwaukie in 2006



ATTACHMENT 2 Downtown Buildings

1850s commercial building, location unknown.



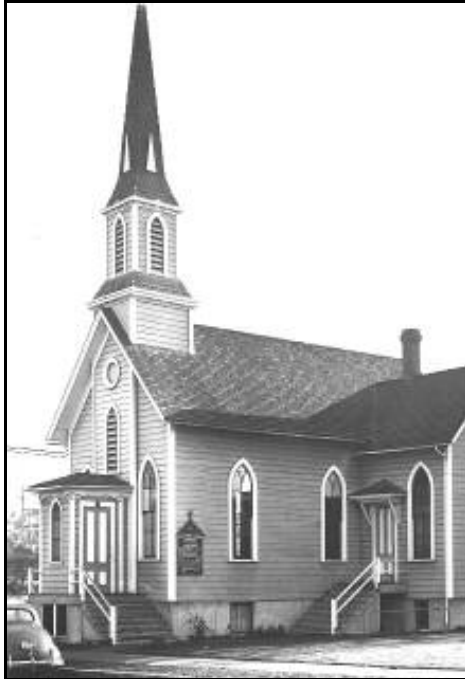
Source: Milwaukie Museum

Seth Luelling House at Jackson St and McLoughlin Blvd (1849-1940). The house was built by Israel Mitchell, an early pioneer. In 1851, he and his family moved and it was leased for use as a tavern. When Seth Luelling arrived later in 1852, he bought the house.



Source: Oregon State Library

St. Johns Episcopal, built 1851 at on land donated by Lot Whitcomb; the original location was near Milwaukie High School. It was moved from that location to the northeast corner of Jefferson and 21st, before its final move to Sellwood by barge in 1961. Once it arrived in Portland, it was renamed the Oaks Pioneer Church and restored by volunteers.



Source: Milwaukie Museum

Spencer Hall Boarding School was founded in 1861 at the corner of Jefferson St and McLoughlin Blvd, and held classes until 1866. At that time the school moved to Portland and the building became the Veranda Hotel. It later became Jacob Miller's hotel and was demolished sometime between 1900 and 1928.



Source: Oregon Historical Society

The Harlow House, at the foot of Jefferson St, during the 1907 flood.



Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie's third elementary school (1893-1936) was located on the City Hall block.



Source: Oregon Historical Society

The First State Bank building, at the northwest corner of Main St and Monroe St, was constructed in 1909. The building has been substantially altered but was recently rehabilitated.



Source: Milwaukie Museum



Source: Osborne and Keeney

The Ledding House (now Ledding Library), built 1910.



Source: Oregon Historical Society

A car garage in 1914, likely located on McLoughlin Blvd at the foot of Jackson St.



Source: Oregon Historical Society

The Grill Café, located at the west side of McLoughlin at Monroe in what is now Riverfront Park. The building was constructed ca 1920s as a station for the electric interurban line, and was converted to a restaurant when the service was discontinued. It was demolished in 1995.



Source: Unknown

Victory/Wonderland Theater (1945) at 11011 SE Main St.



Source: Osborne and Keeney

Perry's Pharmacy/Collector's Mall Building (1949) at 10909 SE Main St.



Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie Cleaners (ca.1949) at 10345 SE Main St



Source: Osborne and Keeney

Commercial building (1950) at 1925 SE Washington St.



Source: Osborne and Keeney

Reliable Credit Building (ca. 1959) at 10633 SE Main St.



Source: Osborne and Keeney

Kellogg Bowl Building (1963) at 10306 SE Main St.



Source: Osborne and Keeney

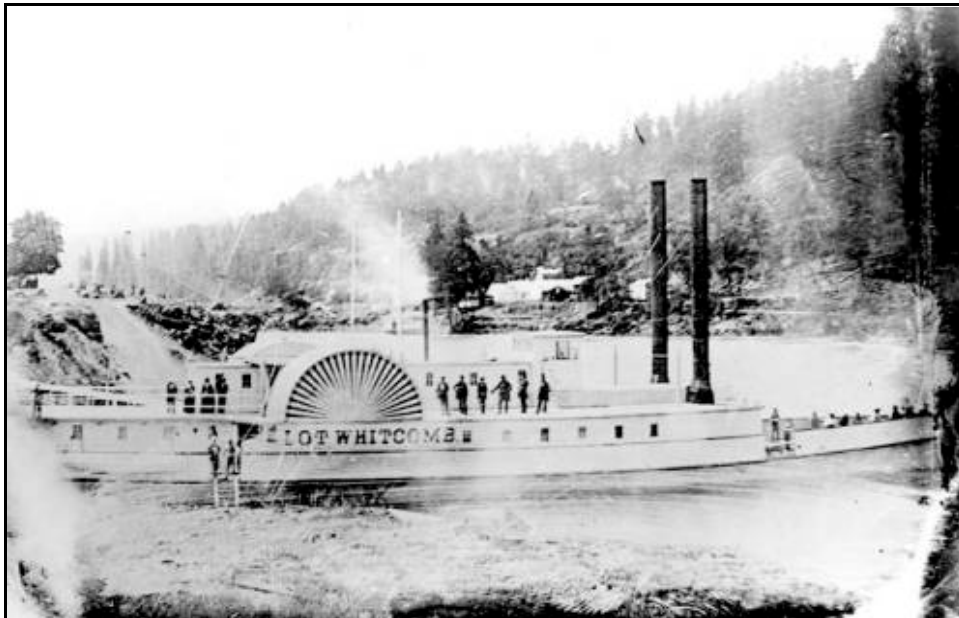
Ledding Library (1965) at 2105 SE Harrison St.



Source: Osborne and Keeney

ATTACHMENT 3 Historical Downtown Images

Sternwheeler "Lot Whitcomb" in Milwaukie Bay, ca. 1850.



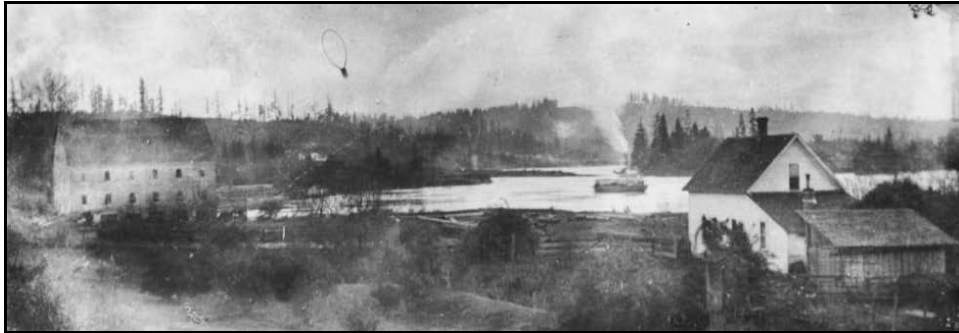
Source: *City of Milwaukie*

Downtown Milwaukie Residences, 1850s.



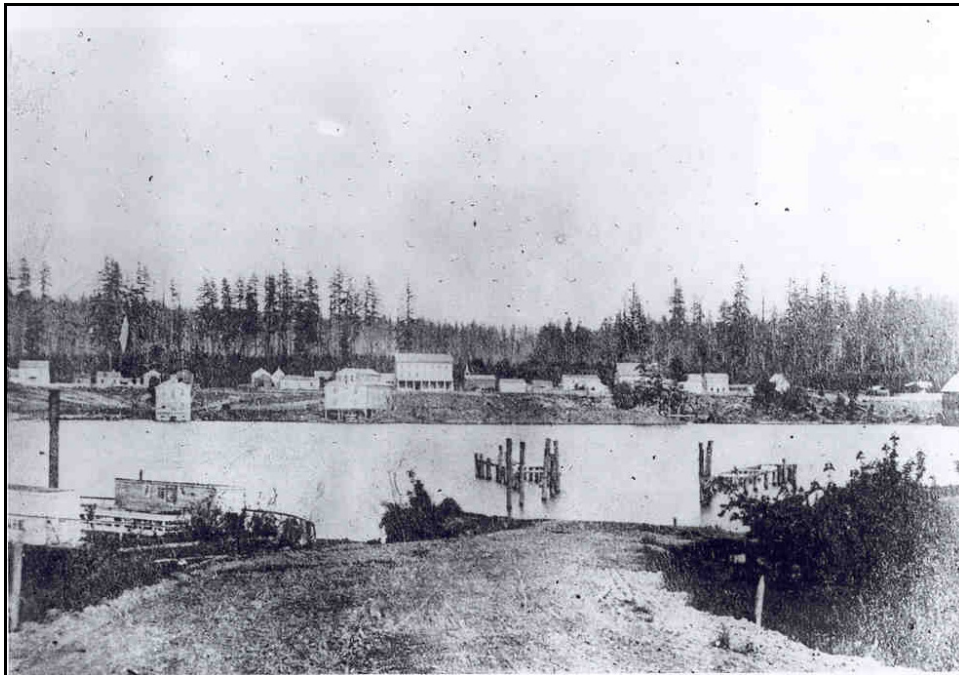
Source: *Oregon Historical Society*

Milwaukie Bay in late 1860s, with the Harlow House in the foreground and the Standard Mill on the left, at the mouth of Johnson Creek.



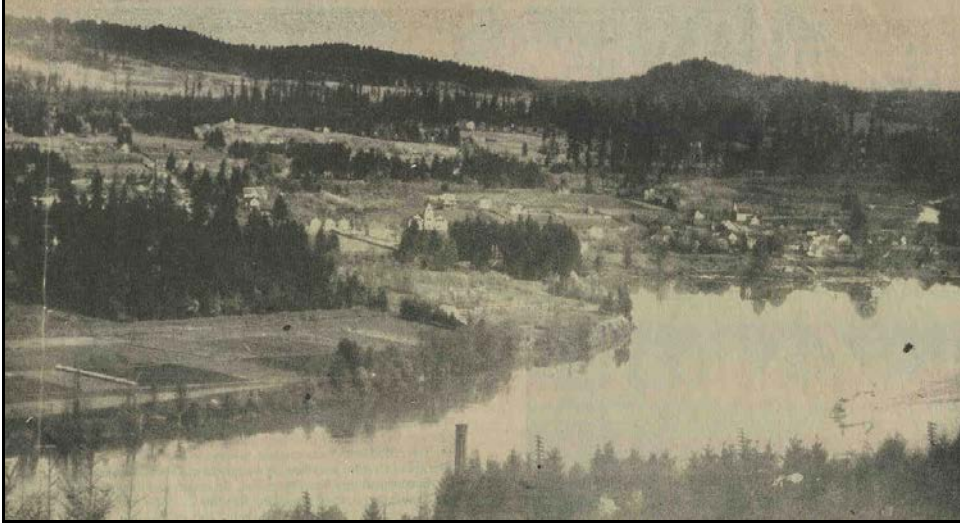
Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie in the 1870s. Note the mills on the waterfront.



Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie in 1900. The elementary school/City Hall site is visible near the center of the photo.



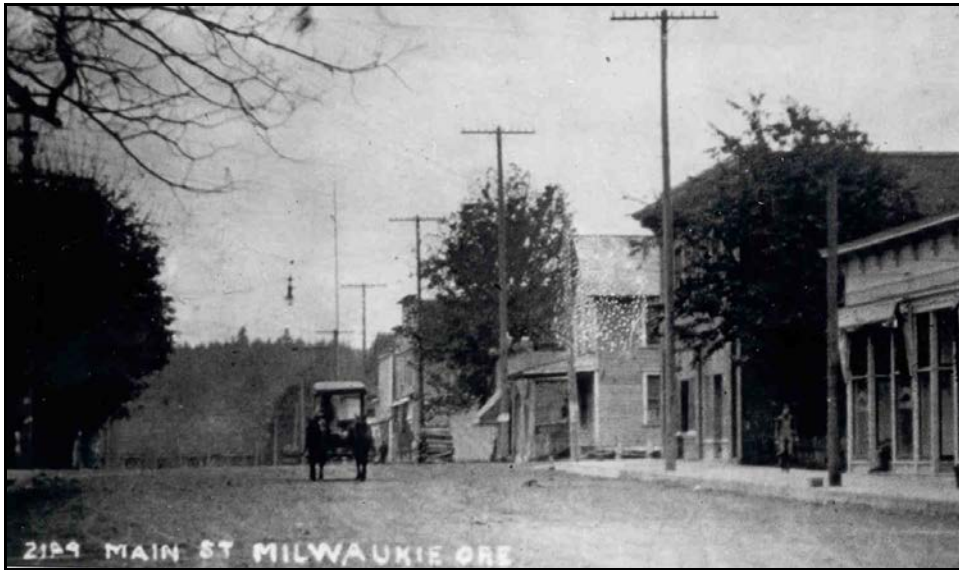
Source: *The Review*, 1959.

Downtown Milwaukie sometime after 1906. The first home of the First State Bank was the white building at the near left (current location of the Kellogg-Wetzler Building at Washington St and Main St). The first City Hall was on the second story of the building at the far left (current location of the Wonderland Theater at Jefferson St and Main St), which was built in 1902 as the Woodsmen Hall. Both buildings were destroyed in 1910; the First State Bank Building by demolition, the Woodsmen Hall by fire.



Source: *City of Milwaukie*

Downtown Milwaukie sometime after 1906. The brick building on the right is the First State Bank Building at Main St and Monroe St.



Source: City of Milwaukie

Downtown Milwaukie sometime after 1906.



Source: City of Milwaukie

Elk Rock Island with the Rock Island Clubhouse building, reachable only by ferry. The Clubhouse was constructed in 1906 and burned down in 1917.



Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie in 1916.



Source: City of Milwaukie

NW corner of Main and Monroe Streets, ca. 1935



Source: Oregon Historical Society

NW corner of Main and Jefferson Streets, ca. 1935



Source: Oregon Historical Society

McLoughlin Blvd/Super Highway facing south, ca. 1937.



Source: City of Milwaukie

Silas Peake Parade on Main St, 1947 (Mayor Peake and wife pictured).



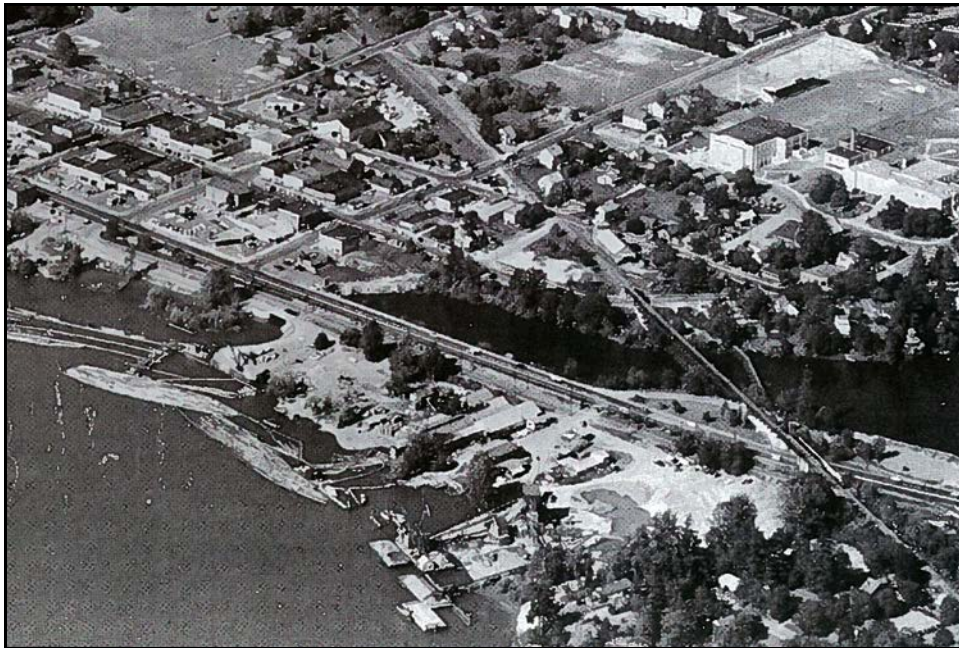
Source: Milwaukie Museum

Milwaukie SeaBees Parade on Main St, 1948.



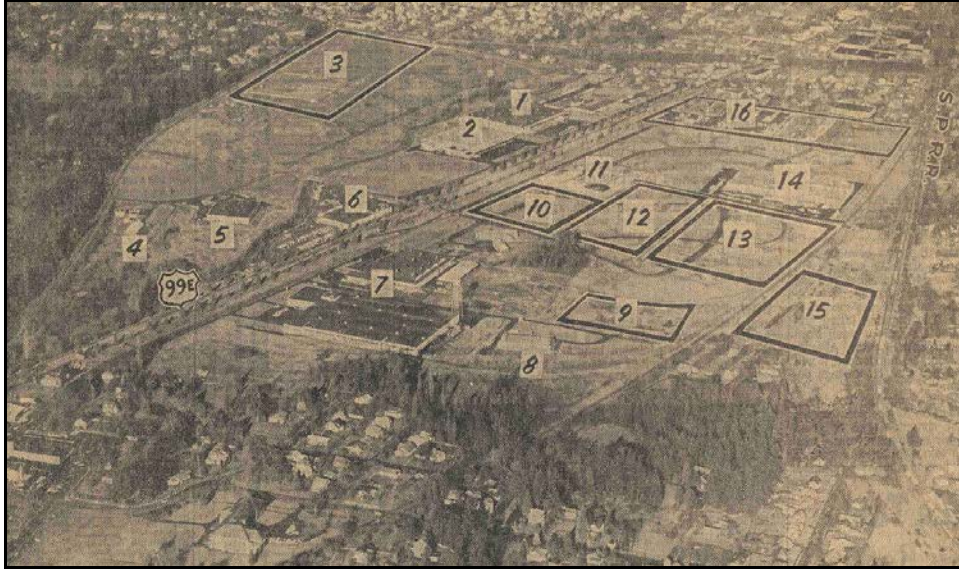
Source: Milwaukie Museum

Downtown Milwaukie and waterfront in the 1950s, including log floats.



Source: Oregon Historical Society

Milwaukie Industrial Park, located on the former site of Kellogg Park worker housing, 1958



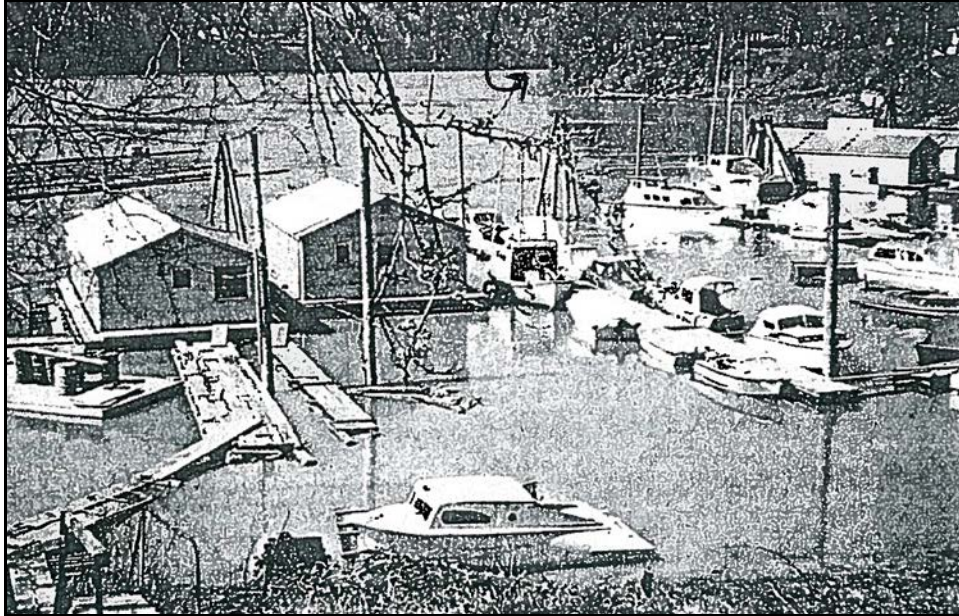
Source: *The Oregonian*

Jefferson St at McLoughlin Blvd, ca. 1980s. Krogh Building (formerly Vic's Tavern) and the former interurban rail station are shown.



Source: *City of Milwaukie*

Milwaukie Marina in the 1980s.



Source: City of Milwaukie