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CHAPTER ONE

The River City

River cities are usually working cities, and Portland is a city built around a working river. A lake port like Chicago can beautify its waterfront with beaches and boulevards and hide freighters and barges behind its back alleys. Salt water cities have often turned their backs to their harbor as their economies diversified. Portland's front door still opens on to the lower twenty miles of the Willamette River that gave it birth. Its open acknowledgment of the world of hard work and heavy loads separates Portland from other western cities just as surely as its misty climate and dark green hills. Its first cousins are not glamour cities such as San Francisco or Denver. They are other solid and sober river cities of middle America, from Pittsburgh to St. Louis.

On a typical Portland day, half a dozen ships finish loading at the docks and terminals that line the Willamette from the city center to its confluence downstream with the Columbia River. An auto carrier or container ship casts off from new terminals on the Columbia itself. Common cargoes are grain, wood chips, lumber and logs, scrap metal, and merchandise that have arrived on barge tows down the Columbia-Snake river system, on hundred-car freight trains, and on trucks from the farms, forests, and orchards of Oregon. The list of destinations covers the entire Pacific Rim—Japan, Taiwan, East Asia, British Columbia, California, Hawaii, South America, and the Panama Canal to the Atlantic. The return cargoes range from Japanese automobiles to Chinese souvenirs. The heaviest tonnages are petroleum, fertilizers, salt, palm oil, and Toyotas.¹

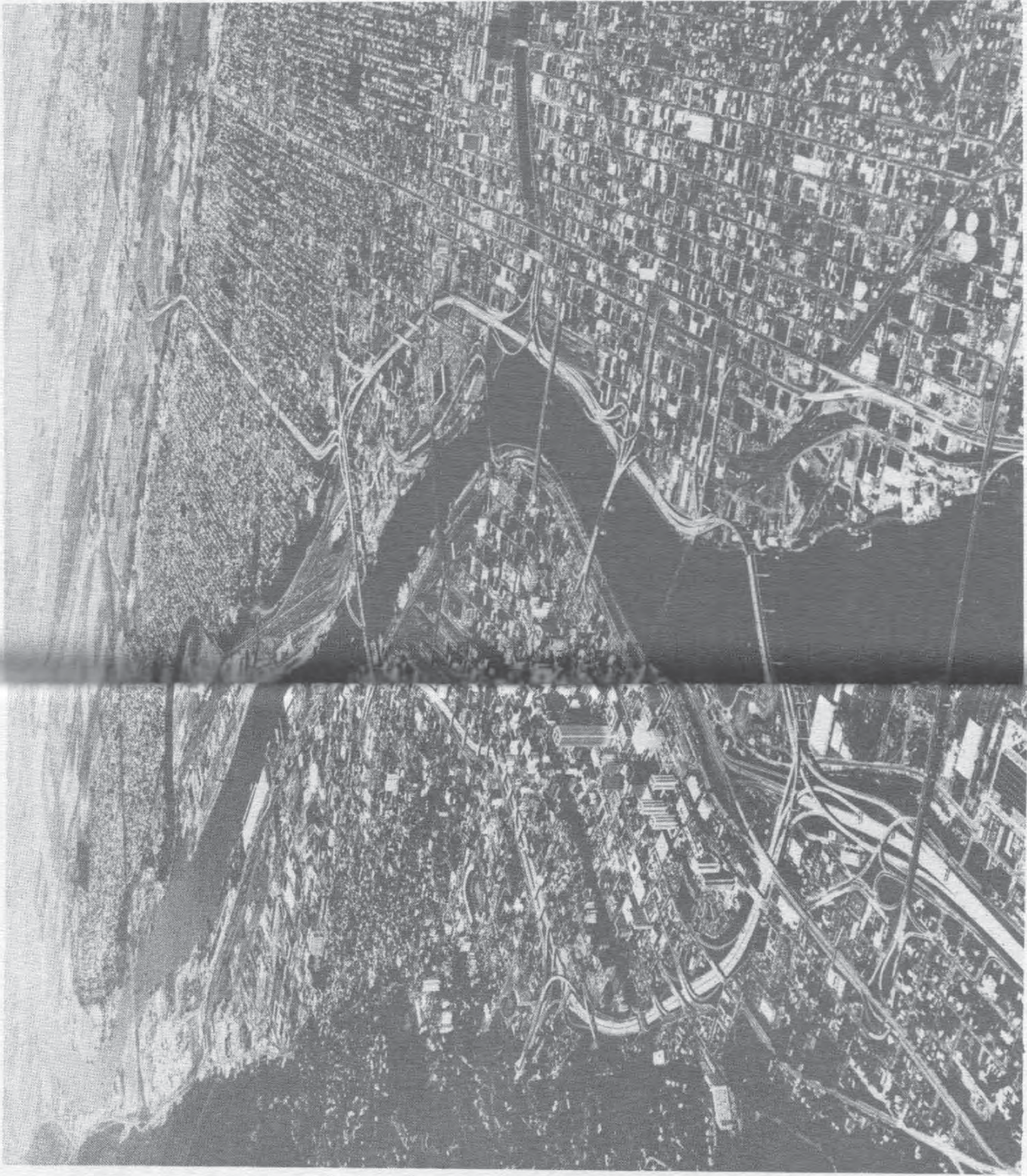
Ocean commerce was the reason for Portland's first settlement. Asa Lovejoy and Francis Pettygrove filed the first

CARL ABBOTT



Portland

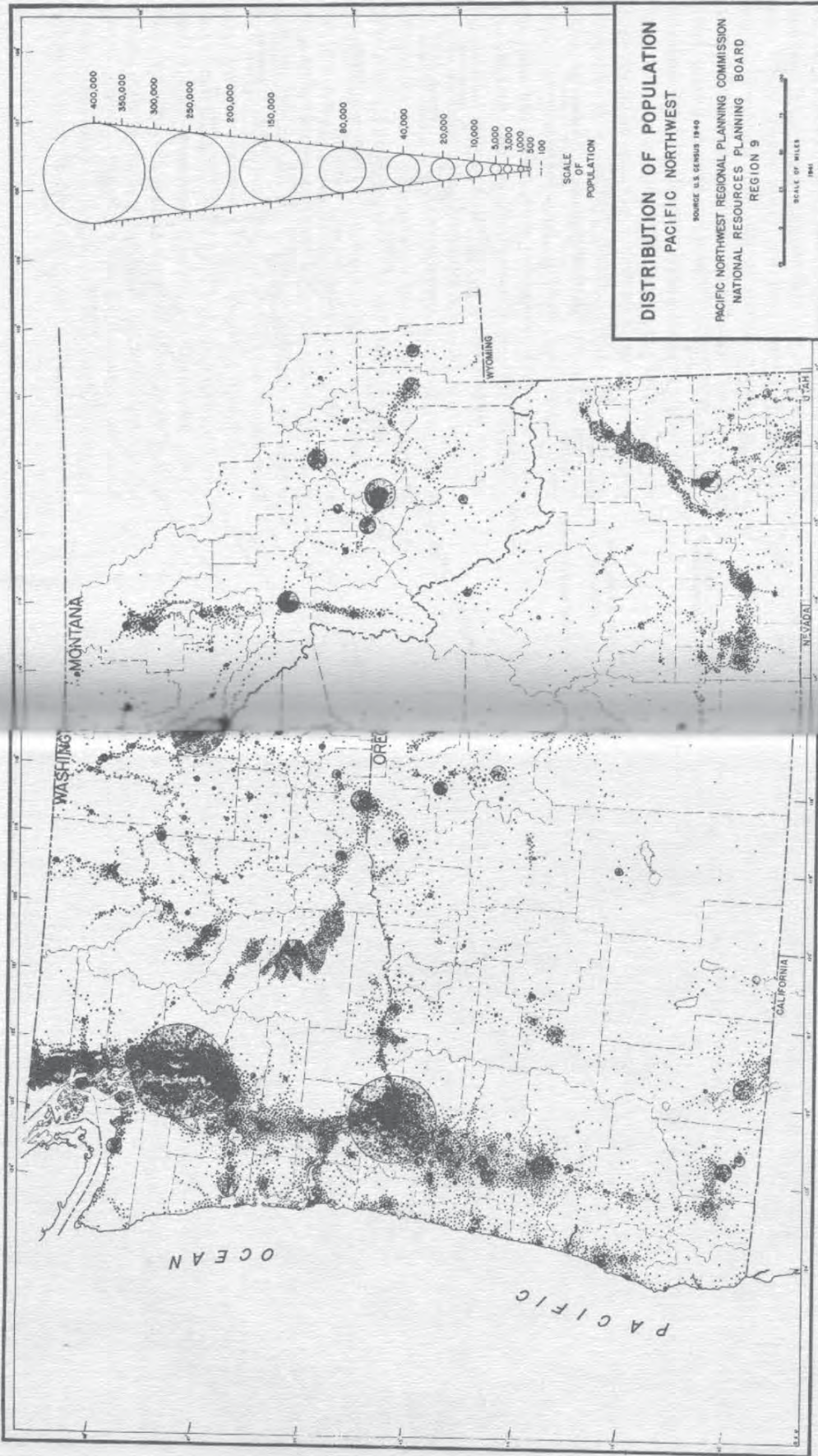
Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City



Downtown Portland is defined by the inner freeway loop. The heavily wooded West Hills rise on the left. Looking to the north, this aerial view shows the North Portland peninsula and the Columbia River in the background. Picture by Photo-Art Commercial Studios.



The Oregon Immigration Board issued this view of Portland, looking south down the Willamette Valley, in 1889. Development of the east side has just started with the completion of two bridges. Most Portlanders continued to live between the Willamette River and the West Hills until the early 1900s. Picture courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.



This map of population distribution in 1940 shows the extent of Portland's hinterland and its relationship to Seattle. Portland trades with the heavily populated Willamette Valley to the south, with the farm lands of eastern Oregon and Washington, and to a lesser extent with the Snake River Valley of southern Idaho. From a map courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.

claims and built the first cabins in 1844 because Portland's site offered deep-water moorage for sailing ships after their hundred-mile journey upriver from the treacherous bar at the mouth of the Columbia. Portland grew as the entrepôt for the rich farmlands of the Willamette Valley, which had no other town of over 50,000 until the 1950s. It tapped their produce and supplied their manufactured goods by river steamers, and by railroad after 1869. The great basin of the Columbia River came into its own with the completion of the Union Pacific, Northern Pacific, and Great Northern rail lines and their feeders. From the early nineteenth century, when the

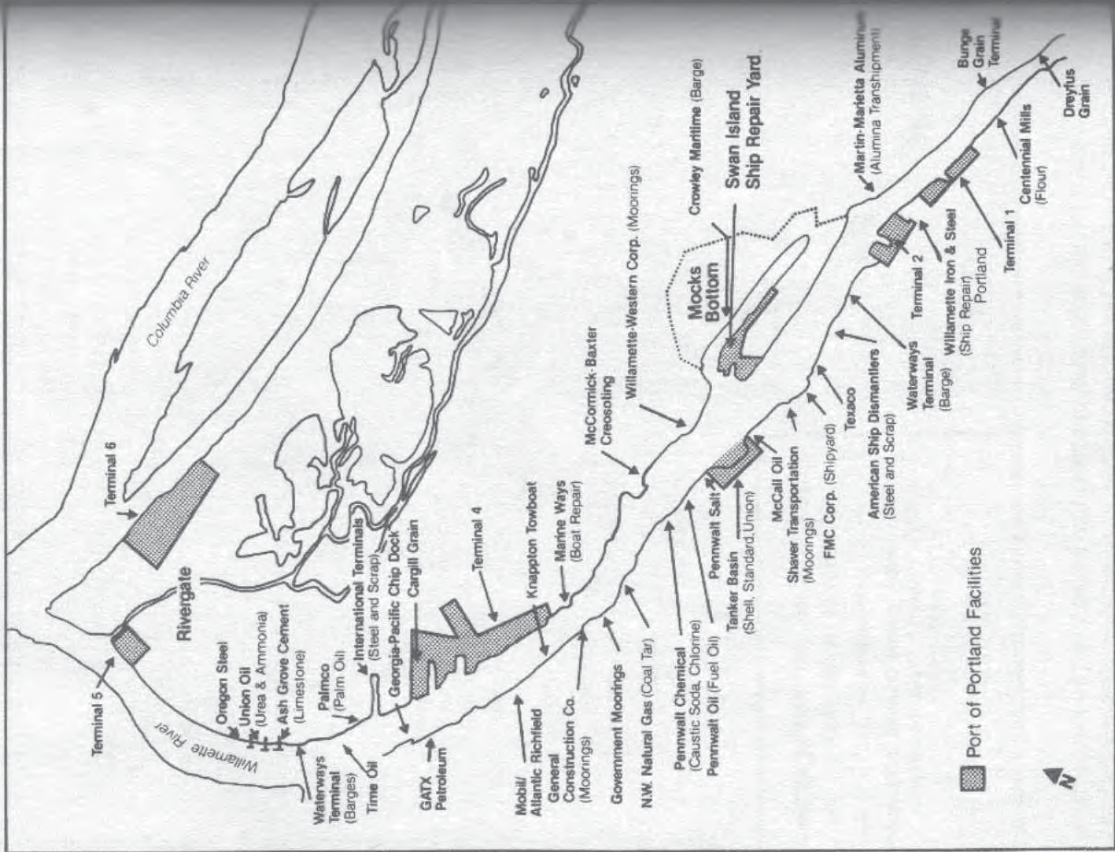
Columbia dominated the imagination of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Hart Benton, the great river of the Pacific Slope had been the path of adventure. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the settlement of the Inland Empire has given scale and excitement to Portland's economy. Steamers, barges, railroads, the Columbia River Highway of 1915, and its later high-speed replacements have brought the taste of dry air and dust from a hinterland that includes all of Oregon and much of eastern Washington.

International trade is the base for a superstructure of related activities. Huge 200,000-ton oil tankers from the Alaska

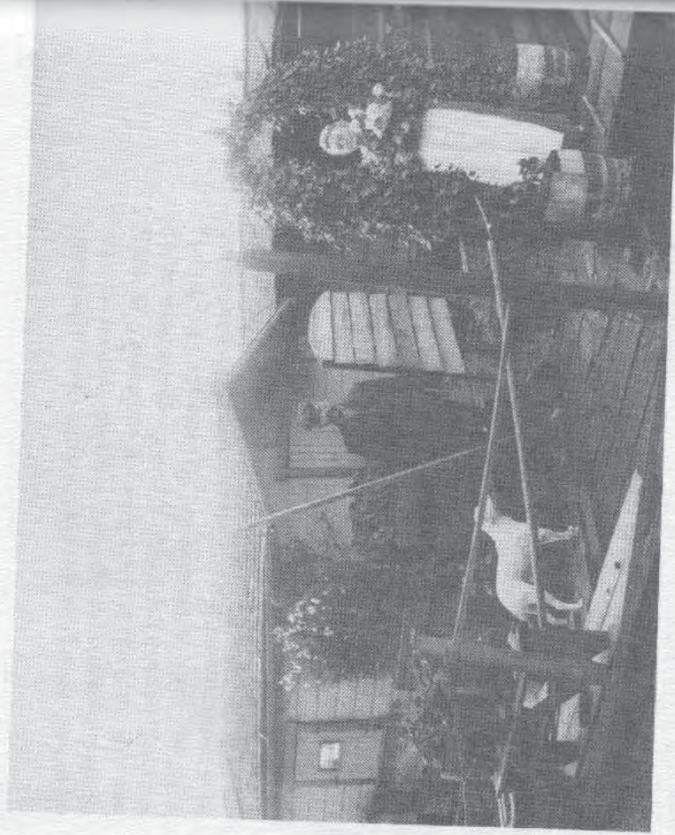
trade nudge slowly into the Swan Island dry dock. Towboats, with their control rooms perched high on stilts, push loads of gravel and limestone for new construction jobs. Railroad tracks and freight yards occupy hundreds of acres of the low ground on both sides of the Willamette. From the city's bridges and bluffs, Portlanders can see the waterfront lined with grain elevators and flour mills, chemical tank farms, cement plants, shipyards, factories, and warehouses. The sales agents, shipping clerks, and insurance brokers who handle the paperwork overlook the river from downtown offices. With more than its share of workers in wholesaling, finance, trade, and transportation, Portland is a regional commercial metropolis.² Although some of the connections to the river trade are tenuous, 70 percent of the jobs in the city of Portland and 50 percent in the entire metropolitan area are located within a mile of the Willamette or Columbia.³

The focus of the industrial and commercial city has moved steadily downstream. The filled lands on both banks of the Willamette as it nears the Columbia have provided space for newer and larger facilities to serve bigger ships and expanded trade. The greater river width below the central business district was also necessary as turning space for larger ships. At the start of the twentieth century, there was almost as much industrial land adjacent to downtown Portland and upriver as there was to the north. Between 1910 and 1920, however, the Portland Docks Commission constructed new terminals in Northwest Portland to replace outmoded downtown wharves, while Linnton and St. Johns emerged as industrial centers. Harbor dredge spoil helped to fill the marshes of Guild's Lake and Swan Island, which were claimed for industry during and after World War II. The same decades brought industrial use of the floodplain on the Oregon and Washington sides of the Columbia by aluminum mills, airports, and more ship terminals. Terminal Four in North Portland became the center for shipping in the 1960s, and the 3,000 acres of industrial land and marine terminals now under development by the Port of Portland in Rivergate, at the tip of the North Portland peninsula, are the most recent steps in the process.⁴

As the upper reaches of the Willamette have slowly been freed of docks and factories, Portlanders have begun to reuse their riverfront. The Willamette Greenway is a twelve-year-old state program for the maintenance of natural and recreational resources and public access along the entire



The lower reach of the Willamette River is lined with marine terminals operated by private corporations. From a map by the Port of Portland.



Since the nineteenth century, hundreds of Portlanders have lived on houseboats moored out of the shipping lanes in the Willamette River. Picture courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.

two hundred miles from Cottage Grove to Portland. Within the city limits, Portlanders have gained four riverfront parks during the last ten years. Even so, many residents are eager for further public use. An overwhelming 94 percent of the membership of the elite City Club, for one example, agreed in 1980 that "more should be done with the Willamette River to make it an integral part of city life."⁵ Thousands of units of new housing have also been built or planned along the river in Sellwood, Terwilliger, and both ends of the downtown.

The Willamette also creates the visual ambience of Portland. Rising in the Cascade and Calapooya mountains, the river flows high and brown in the winter and spring, carrying a runoff twice as great as that of the entire Colorado River Basin.⁶ By the end of summer, when the snow has faded from all but the highest peaks, it quiets and slows enough for fishing boats and canoes. High or low, it cuts an open space through the center of Portland that sets off views in both directions. From the east bank or the I-5 freeway, the river and Waterfront Park make it possible to take in the entire center of Portland at a single glance. From the hills west of downtown, the river shows itself as the seam that ties together the halves of the city.

Portlanders cross their river on eleven automobile and railroad bridges inside the city limits and four more upstream in suburban Clackamas County. The bridges carried a total of 100,000 cars per day in 1925 and 500,000 per day in 1980.⁷ Offering views of the river and hills, harbor, downtown, secondary business districts, and older neighborhoods, the bridges encapsulate the evolution of the city. The first four were built to connect the downtown to the newer settlements directly across the river. The Broadway Bridge opened to serve the burgeoning streetcar neighborhoods of Northeast Portland in 1912, and the Ross Island Bridge to serve the growing southeast in 1926. The Sellwood and St. Johns bridges, that also date from the 1920s, help to preserve the identity of communities that still remember their origins as satellite towns. Farther south, freeway bridges at Wilsonville and Oregon City serve new suburbs. None of the Willamette crossings is a structural milestone like the Brooklyn Bridge or a soaring giant like the spans at the Golden Gate or the Straits of Mackinac, but the erector set towers of the Steel Bridge and the looping ribbons of the Marquam Bridge are tributes to different generations of engineers. The high arch of the Fremont Bridge and the cathedral spires of St. Johns are self-consciously lyrical. The rickety Hawthorne and Sellwood bridges are reminders of the days when automobiles were fewer and flimsier.

The Willamette River with its ships and bridges has been the unifying factor in the development of Portland. The river is a key for understanding the city's history, economic functions, and geographic distribution of activities. In the words of Portland novelist Ursula LeGuin, the Willamette is "a useful element of the environment, like a large, docile draft animal harnessed with straps, chains, shafts, saddles, bits, girths, hobbles . . . without it Portland would not have been a port."⁸ It is the scaffolding on which Portlanders have hung different uses of land, and it gives the city its characteristic appearance.

If one thing obviously sets Portland apart from other American cities of the same size, it is the visually striking downtown that wedges a growing skyline between the brown river and the green shoulders of the West Hills. It is a vital downtown that has not only survived but prospered in the second half of the twentieth century. From the 1880s through the 1950s, the central business district was a compact square oriented to

the Burnside, Morrison, and Madison street bridges. Shoppers, office workers, and real estate developers all climbed the gentle slope from the Willamette up Stark, Washington, Alder, Yamhill, and other east-west streets.⁹ The Broadway Bridge and Barbur Boulevard, before 1940, began to stretch the downtown north and south, but real change came with the decision to build an inner freeway loop before a suburban bypass.¹⁰ Half of the loop across the Marquam Bridge was finished in 1966 and the other half across the Fremont Bridge was finished in 1973. The inner freeways increased the convenience of the central business district in competition with outlying towns. It marked off an elongated core area with a north-south axis. Land at the north and south ends that was neglected in 1950 is now incorporated in the downtown as the Old Town Historic District, the Portland State University campus, and the Portland Center renewal project.

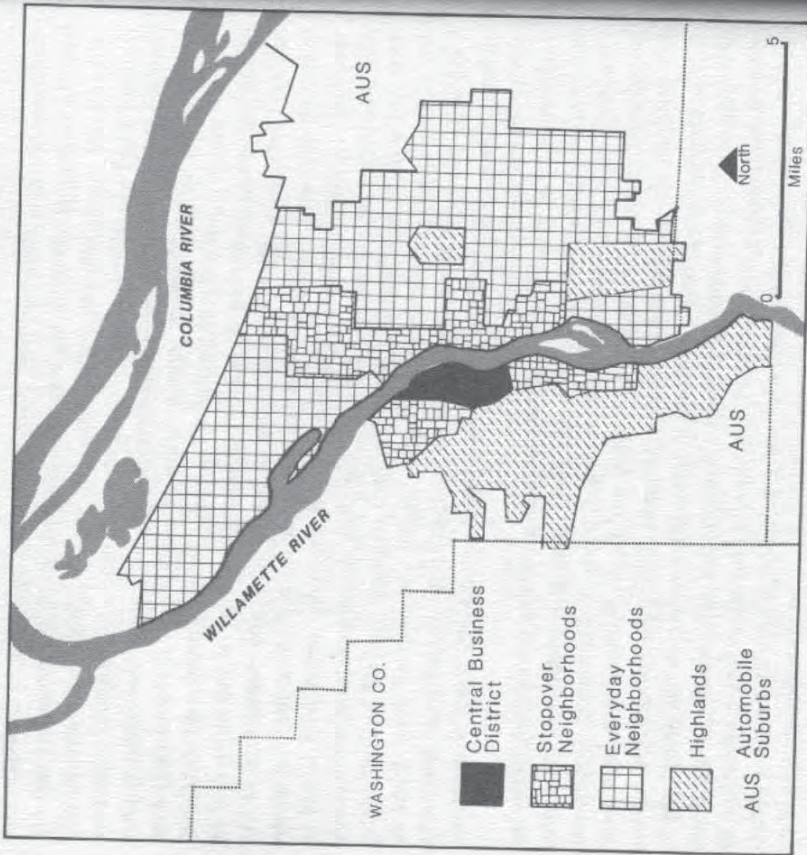
Despite the remarkable construction boom that has remade every corner of downtown in the last twenty years, Portlanders still have a blind spot when they talk about the central business district. It seems to be an article of faith that downtown Portland dies at 6:00 P.M. Planners, Development Commission executives, and downtown businessmen all describe the urban core as a daytime employment center that goes dark at night. The reality, however, does not match the image. Any outsider who discovers the scarcity of downtown parking spaces after the rush hour knows that things are not as bad as the natives claim. Core areas are in deep trouble in some metropolitan areas, but not here. The problem may be that Portlanders unfairly measure themselves against international decision-centers like New York or Chicago. They forget that the proper measures for comparison are the two dozen or so regional centers in the second rank of the urban hierarchy. By this realistic standard, Portland looks very lively indeed. It has a far wider choice of downtown recreation than tourist and convention cities like Atlanta and San Antonio. It has more people on its streets in the evening than Sunbelt boom towns like Dallas, Houston, or Tulsa. Civic leaders and chambers of commerce in most middle-sized cities would be delighted to have Portland's downtown concerts, first-run movie houses, live theater, bars, and restaurants.

Portland in fact offers three distinct centers in which nighttime businesses support each other by drawing traffic and exchanging customers. The traditional multipurpose

entertainment district stretches from Oak to Jefferson between Broadway and Tenth, where Portland has retained the old and added new. The thirty square blocks include old movie theaters and the new renovated Galleria shopping complex, the historic Benson Hotel and a new Hilton, the Art Museum, and a range of restaurants. A Performing Arts Center to be built in the early 1980s will provide an additional anchor. In a second nighttime center at the north end of downtown, a score of trendy bars and restaurants in the Skidmore-Old Town Historic District blend into the established Chinatown. A third entertainment district is still in formation between the Civic Auditorium and the Yamhill Historic District. The light rail loop that will be built along Morrison and Yamhill streets will help all three areas by linking Broadway to the riverfront and Old Town and make Portland more aware that it can already boast an eighteen-hour downtown.

When Portland residents subdivide the residential city beyond the office core and industrial corridor, they think most readily about the five sectors of Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, and North Portland that have been defined for street addresses. Slicing the Portland pie into five pieces, however, ignores differences in social geography by lumping affluent Eastmoreland with working-class Buckman, Portland Heights with Corbett. In fact, competition for space, attitude, and prestige in twentieth-century Portland created four irregular rings around the business core of the city. The stopover neighborhoods, the everyday city, the highlands, and the automobile suburbs have each had different social standing and filled different social functions.

The stopover neighborhoods in the early years of the century were Portland's nearest equivalent to the large ethnic communities of New York or Chicago. The crescent of flatlands around the central business district below the hills and the inner tier of east-side neighborhoods from Albina to Brooklyn were largely settled by the early years of the century. With minor exceptions, they offered cheap housing for transient workers, European immigrants and their children, orientals, and a scattering of blacks. At the start of the Great Depression, these areas housed the overwhelming majority of Portland's foreign-born and its racial minorities. No single European ethnic group provided the majority of residents in any one neighborhood between 1910 and 1930. However,



Portland neighborhood types. From a map by Merziah Kiern.

Jews and Italians set the tone for South Portland, Germans for Goose Hollow, Slavs and Scandinavians for Northwest Portland, Scandinavians, Central Europeans, and Germans for the Albina-Union Avenue district, and Italians for Brooklyn near the Southern Pacific yards.¹¹

Successful immigrants or their children did not settle permanently in the stopover neighborhoods. Newcomers could use their cheap housing for a year or a decade to learn the rules of their new home and to land a decent job before finding a better house in a better neighborhood. Since the curtailment of European immigration in the 1920s, there have been few replacements for the Italians or Poles who moved on. The neighborhoods had Portland's highest density and almost all of its apartment buildings in 1930, but had

already begun to lose population. One prominent real estate firm described the area as the city's "break-up zone" in which new land uses were destroying old residential patterns.¹² Since 1950, large tracts of land in the old stopover neighborhoods have also been taken for I-5 and the Stadium Freeway, for urban renewal, and for institutional, industrial, and commercial use. The partial exception to the pattern of changing function has been in northeast Portland, where the increase of black population in the metropolitan area from 2,000 in 1940 to 33,000 in 1980 has allowed the survival and growth of ethnic neighborhoods.

Stopover neighborhoods have assumed the disproportionate burden of Portland's poverty because of their special use by newcomers to the city. In 1944, Harlan P. Douglass used seven measures of social status and real estate value to define social quality. South Portland and Albina ranked at the bottom of his list, with Northwest Portland and the inner southeast also below average. Independent analyses of 1960 census data by the city's Planning Bureau and by the Columbia Region Association of Governments showed a continued match between deteriorated housing and poverty in the same neighborhoods. The most recent study of Portland's social geography describes a smaller area including lower Albina, Buckman, and downtown residential areas as the city's postwar slum zone, which fell further and further behind the rest of the city on standard social indicators.¹³

A countertrend that dates largely to the 1970s is the reuse of these same areas by the professional middle class. The inner neighborhoods obviously contain the city's surviving stock of Victorian houses and most of the middle-aged apartment buildings suitable for conversion to condominiums. A slight upturn during the 1960s in the percentage of close-in residents with managerial or professional jobs and a college education previewed more substantial changes in the 1970s.¹⁴ The reversal has been most marked on the west side, where institutional and industrial expansion and federally funded bulldozers nearly destroyed the old stopover neighborhoods and opened the way for a new set of colonists who range from aging hippies to artists to young professional couples. With its complex mixture of older apartments and restored houses, students, neighborhood activists, and the elderly, Northwest Portland has become a lively center for innovative community institutions. The start

of the same change could be discerned by the late 1970s in the larger expanse of the inner east side.¹⁵

Portland's black community has benefited from a slow erosion of residential segregation. The 1980 census confirms that most of the city's black population is concentrated in the inner Northeast. There is no ghetto that approaches the nearly total racial isolation of South Side Chicago or Bedford-Stuyvesant, but 10,000 black Portlanders live in a compact corridor along Union and Williams avenues from Russell to Killingsworth, where more than 60 percent of their neighbors are also black. The degree of racial concentration in this core community has not changed since 1970. However, the housing market has also opened to blacks in neighborhoods beyond the Albina community. Black families are now dispersed in appreciable numbers through most of the east-side and the west-side flats, although the West Hills, the far Southwest, and Eastmoreland remain highly segregated. The suburban housing market is at least partially open to black families. During the 1970s, black population rose from 400 to 800 in Clackamas County, and from 200 to 1,100 in Washington County, mostly in Beaverton. Another 1,800 black residents are scattered among the middle-class neighborhoods between Eighty-second Street and Gresham. For the metropolitan area as a whole, the number of census tracts in which blacks constituted 1 to 5 percent of the total population increased from twenty-three in 1970 to fifty-nine in 1980.

Within the city, the center of Portland's black community has moved more than a mile north from Union and Broadway in 1940 to Union and Skidmore in 1980.¹⁶ The process started with the land clearance for the Coliseum in the 1950s and continued with the construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s and the Emanuel Hospital redevelopment project in the 1970s. Black population fell from 5,000 to 3,400 during the 1970s in the historic heart of Albina south of Fremont and west of Eighteenth Street. Housing rehabilitation programs in Irvington reversed an eastward movement of blacks south of Fremont, and whites in recent years have discovered the Eliot neighborhood as a target for recolonization. In contrast, the Vernon-Concordia-Cully area north of Fremont and east of Fifteenth Street saw black population grow from 2,000 to 5,500 during the 1970s. At the same time, movement of black residents into Woodlawn, Piedmont, Kenton, Portsmouth,

and other neighborhoods that lie north of Killingsworth and west of Fifteenth Street has raised the black total from 3,800 to 6,500.

Portland's everyday east side neighborhoods have evolved gradually from its streetcar suburbs. Between 1890 and 1920, land developers platted thousands of acres on the east side of the Willamette in the zone between 1.5 and 6 miles from the central business district: St. Johns, University Park, Overlook, Piedmont, Concordia, Alameda, Irvington, Rose City Park, Montavilla, Mount Tabor, Richmond, Ladd's Addition, Woodstock, Sellwood, and Westmoreland were within a half hour trolley ride of downtown in 1930 and a half hour bus ride in 1980. Builders filled these neighborhoods with block after block of bungalows in two great building booms of 1905-13 and 1922-28. Even Ladd's Addition—now a historic conservation district—was built largely in the 1910s and 1920s. Most of the remaining lots were used for new one-story houses to meet the needs of war workers and returning veterans in the 1940s.¹⁷

The golden age of American cities is still alive in many of these everyday neighborhoods that retain something of the community life of the 1920s and 1930s. The housing shortage of the 1940s, the construction of the inner freeway loop in the 1960s, and the inflation of new housing costs in the 1970s all helped to preserve them from deterioration. As Fairlanes and Impalas stretched the suburban fabric twenty-five miles to Wilsonville and Forest Grove, the east side continued to offer stability, convenience, and comfort. Everyday neighborhoods in the early 1980s are distinguished by the survival of several major shopping districts, by retail strips along the old east-west streetcar routes, and by local retail clusters. Neighborhood movie theaters, restaurants, taverns, and professional offices continue to provide the focus for a neighborhood life that is largely unknown to speeding suburbanites on the Banfield Freeway and westsiders on their foggy fastness.

Two examples illustrate the variety within and among these everyday neighborhoods. The intersection of East Burnside and Twenty-eighth Street offers a drugstore, hardware store, movie house, and two Chinese restaurants. Within a block are a Hispanic grocery, the offices of the Roman Catholic diocese, and an old trolley barn being converted to new offices. The surrounding blocks in the Kerns

and Buckman neighborhoods are filled with small, well-kept single-family houses dating from 1900 to 1930, and intermixed with old walkup apartment buildings. Housing in the newer Beaumont area around Northeast Fremont and Forty-second Street dates from the 1920s through the 1950s, and many of the houses are entering their second rather than their third generation of ownership. Beaumont's street-corner commercial district has the same mix of activities with neighborhood and citywide markets. Gas stations and groceries serve the neighborhood; professional offices, hairdressers, hardware store, and middle school serve the larger northeast; a bagel bakery and a fine restaurant use the low-rent store fronts to serve the entire city.

The highlands also date from the twenties, thirties, and forties, although their pioneers built in the 1910s. The high-status communities that provide homes for most of Portland's upper middle class and its upper crust are draped over the crest of the West Hills from Willamette Heights and Arlington Heights on the north, through Portland Heights, Council Crest, and Burlingame, and south beyond the city limits in Dunthorpe and Lake Oswego. The areas are a natural expansion of the Nob Hill and King's Hill neighborhoods that housed Portland's upper class at the turn of the century.¹⁸ East of the river, the same groups occupied the slightly higher land of Alameda, Eastmoreland, and Laurelhurst. Overall site planning with curving streets, large middle-aged houses, mature trees, and the banishment of dry cleaners and groceries make them residential enclaves that shelter residents from the outside world. From the start, the majority of West Hills householders expected to commute to work by automobile rather than trolley, although Eastmoreland and Laurelhurst did have streetcar connections. The clubby tone of the highlands is similar to that of Ansley Park in Atlanta, Alamo Heights in San Antonio, the east-shore suburbs of Detroit, and the Country Club district of Kansas City—all twentieth-century neighborhoods whose social status has been protected by geography and tradition since the start of the automobile era.

The automobile suburbs built after 1945 occupy by far the largest portion of the metropolitan area. On the east side of the Willamette, they run roughly east from Ninety-second Street, which marked the approximate limit of streetcar and bus service before 1940, and south from the Multnomah-Clackamas county line.¹⁹ With minor exceptions, these areas

lie outside the city of Portland. West of the river, the new housing after the war spilled down the far slope of the West Hills onto the rolling farmland of Washington County. Annexations by the city of Portland in the Jackson and Vermont areas since 1950 have added typical suburban problems of substandard roads and overtaxed sewers to the worries of city officials. Across the political boundary, residents of Washington County have spent much of the last two decades complaining about the same growing pains while refusing to spend the money to deal with them.

The suburban impulse has followed corridors of settlement that were defined by electric interurban railroads early in the century. Southern Pacific and Oregon Electric lines reached west to Beaverton and Tualatin, while the Portland Electric Company ran trains to Oregon City and Gresham. Use of automobiles in the 1930s accelerated the dispersal that reached massive proportions after World War II.²⁰ The vast quantities of land that new cars and new highways made available for urban development in the postwar decades have allowed Portlanders to sort themselves out by economic class and to discover a new use for the Willamette River as a social barrier. The new communities that blossomed on the far slope of the West Hills took on something of the social tone of the highlands in the 1950s and 1960s. Washington County in 1940 ranked below Clackamas County, Portland, and the remainder of Multnomah County on the standard socioeconomic indicators of education, income, and occupational mix. The county drew even with the rest of the metropolitan area by 1950, surged ahead in 1960, and widened its lead by 1970. The difference between the eastern and western halves of the metropolitan area is even more dramatic if the West Hills census tracts in western Portland and Multnomah County and the Clackamas County tracts west of the Willamette River are grouped as separate subareas. In both 1960 and 1970, the median values for the tracts in each of these west-side areas far exceeded the values for the entire county of which they are a part. The east side of the SMSA can claim several prestige neighborhoods that are known to eastsiders, but an address almost anywhere from Portland Heights west to Hillsboro and south to Wilsonville carries the cachet of respectability.

The division of metropolitan Portland into four growth zones is both a way to describe the social geography of the metropolis and a tool for understanding the roots and results

of public decisions.²¹ Every city and metropolitan planning proposal has had different effects on neighborhoods and sections. The most persistent bias has been to force the costs of growth onto the stopover neighborhoods while maintaining the attractiveness of the downtown and outer residential areas. The location of parks and parkways, street construction, and zoning have all been used to concentrate urban problems. The dry prose of planning reports has also concealed a conflict between the automobile suburbs and the older rings, with local suburban planners trying to avoid the costs of sprawl and metropolitan agencies trying to distribute them more evenly. Most recently, the city of Portland has begun to protect inner neighborhoods and ask its newer areas to share the problems of urban change through mixed uses and higher densities.

A final question is the attitude that Portlanders share about their city. With a few exceptions, river cities are stodgy communities, conservative in social values if not in politics. From a thousand miles, it hardly seems to matter if we confuse Cedar Falls and Cedar Rapids, Racine and Kenosha, Tuskegee and Tuscaloosa. At closer view, urbanites often define the identity of their own city by contrast to another. In the Pacific Northwest, it is important for both cities that Seattle is the "fast" town and Portland its stay-at-home sister. Seattle has had high times and low times since it ran off with the Klondike miners. It is the city that worries about trends and styles. Portland has a relaxed confidence and a smugness about the superiority of life in Oregon to high-speed Los Angeles or New York. It is a city with the social stability to allow the easy coexistence of a stolid middle class with sandaled artisans and down-and-outers on Skid Road.

The same confidence translates into strong affection for the city. Portland residents were pleased but scarcely surprised to be told that they live in the country's most livable city. For the past decade, roughly three-quarters of the residents in the city and metropolitan area have considered their communities to be good or excellent places to live. The federal report on quality of life found that Portland was especially outstanding for social factors such as education, family stability, housing integration, cultural events, and readership of newspapers and library books. Indeed, Portlanders tell polltakers that they value distinct neighborhood identities and a community spirit that helps to maintain a

middle-class way of life. City neighborhoods that actively seek to maintain their identity and status inspire the most positive opinions.²²

Portlanders also place a high value on the natural setting and physical design of their city. In contrast to old industrial cities like Boston and Pittsburgh, more residents are satisfied with their metropolis as a whole than with their local communities.²³ They are eager to preserve both physical and visual access to the natural environment, whether the wild scenery of the Pacific coast, Cascades, and Columbia Gorge or the city's own trees and parks. They adamantly refuse to forgive ill-conceived skyscrapers that damage the view to and from the West Hills. They plunge into issues of urban design and planning with commitment and enthusiasm matched in few other cities.

The rediscovery of the Willamette riverfront after 1965 sums up something of the Portland spirit. It is the one natural feature that dominates Portland's visual image just as it controls the economy. Recovery of the river for public use has been an issue broad enough to unite Portlanders as different as conservative mayor Frank Ivancie and cosmopolitan architect Pietro Belluschi. The focus of attention has been the downtown waterfront, but improved access has also been a neighborhood issue from Sellwood to St. Johns. The Willamette first brought settlers to Portland in the 1840s. It helps to bring their descendants and successors together in the 1980s.