



Visiting the Building

The capitol building is overseen by the Oregon State Legislature through the Legislative Administration Committee. It is not part of Oregon State Parks. The building hosts a number of permanent and visiting exhibits, artwork and historical information. Visitors can find self-guided tour options, escorted tour schedules, exhibit information and a gift store within the Capitol.

Visitor Kiosk: 503-986-1388

Capitol Gift Shop: 503- 986-1391

Mailing Address:
900 Court St. NE, Salem, Oregon 97301

Building Hours:
Monday through Friday, 8 AM – 5 PM

Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Pages/Visit-the-Capitol.aspx

Events at the Park

Individuals or groups interested in holding events on the capitol grounds need a permit from Oregon State Parks. For more info, go to www.oregonstateparks.org or email scsp.permits@state.or.us



This photo shows part of a painting of the early Territorial building in Salem, c. 1854.

The Seat of State Government

The most important historic feature in the park is, of course, the capitol itself. Today's capitol is the third building to seat the state government at or near this site. Two former capitol buildings were destroyed by fire: one in 1855 and the second in 1935. The current building was constructed from 1936-1938, and is considered to be an important example of Modernistic architecture. The base of the building is granite, and its exterior is clad with Danby Vermont marble. The building was expanded in 1977. It is listed (1988) in the National Register of Historic Places, and it houses the state legislature (both the House and Senate), and the offices of the governor, secretary of state, and treasurer.

Site History

A place for a capitol building was a part of the original vision for the city of Salem as early as 1846. The site was laid out in plat by William Willson, a lay member of the Methodist Mission and prominent Salem citizen. Many important mid-19th century institutions were located within this plat, including the Methodist Church, Oregon Institute (later Willamette University), county courthouse, post office and capitol.



Capitol number two, which burned down in 1935.

At the heart of the plat was a three-block-long open space labeled Willson Avenue, with a plot clearly marked for the capitol building at one end and a plot for the county courthouse at the other. Willson Avenue included three city blocks measuring approximately 300 feet by 1100 feet and was bounded by Court, Church, State and Capitol Streets.

Chloe and William Willson donated Block 84 on the plat for what became the 1853 Territorial Statehouse, and conveyed the rest of Willson Avenue to the city of Salem in 1853, as a city park. At some point, Willson Avenue was renamed Willson Park.

The Breyman Fountain is the only historic object remaining in Willson Park today.

The fountain, originally used as a horse watering trough, was a gift to the city of Salem in 1904 from the Breyman family. The statue atop the fountain fell off at some point in the late 1930s, was stored, and somehow disappeared. It's possible it fell victim to a scrap drive, which were common during the World War II years.



The Breyman Fountain

These columns come from the portico of the second capitol, which burned in 1935.



State Capitol State Park

Walking Tour

Welcome to State Capitol State Park. The grounds surrounding Oregon's capitol building are owned by the people of Oregon, and since 2008 have been managed by Oregon State Parks. The 21-acre T-shaped property is known as the Capitol Mall, and is home to two smaller parks: Willson Park, west of the capitol, and Capitol Park, to the east.

The grounds themselves tell a story of Oregon's history, through architecture, botany and art. Statues, fountains, trees, marble intaglios, special plantings and commemorative markers create a sense of history and place. In spring, dozens of cherry trees come into bloom, creating a soft pink carpet as the days lengthen. Several varieties of cherry trees are planted throughout the park.

Stone plaques set in the mall sidewalks list the county seat and establishment date for each of Oregon's 36 counties. On the Willson Park side of the street, flags from every state in the union sit in a circle near the Moon Tree, a state heritage tree. The young Douglas-fir, just north of the flags along Court Street, was grown from a seed carried to the moon in 1971.

Some 75 species of trees flourish here. The sturdy native conifers, dozens of non-native trees of varying ages and sizes and unusual ornamentals give the park an arboretum-like feel. Not all are "specimen" trees, but many are, and all were planted deliberately if informally.



www.oregonstateparks.org

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