

# Oregon marks rebirth of Capitol

At 50 years old, building instills pride, history

By Ron Cowan  
Of the Statesman-Journal

It was a summery October morning Saturday in Salem as a throng of men in double-breasted suits and women in veils and high heels gathered before a marble wall inscribed with the words of Plato.

The emcee — Wallace Carson, the associate justice of the Oregon Supreme Court — "couldn't resist starting out with a quip at the 50th anniversary rededication of the Capitol:

"This is a great day for Oregon, a great day for all of us.

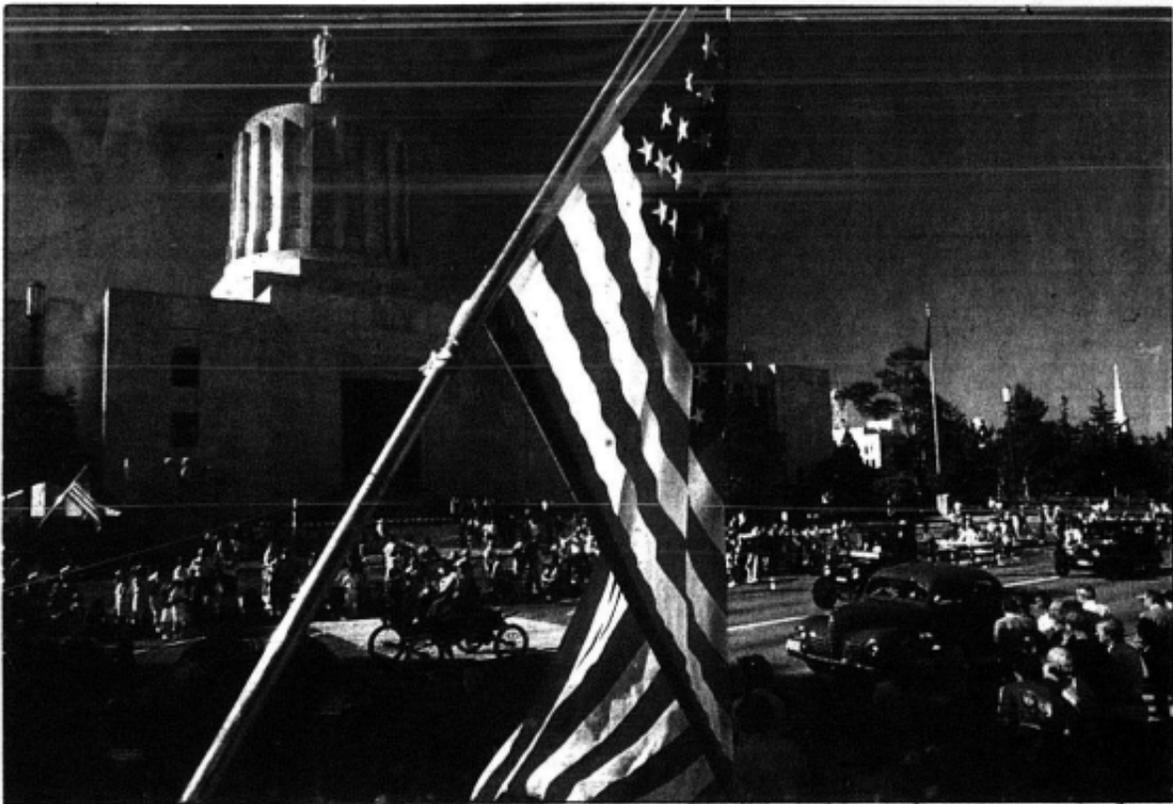
"It's a great day for me because I was able to fit into my father's suit. It may not mean a lot to you, but it means a lot to my mother and me."

He got a laugh, one of many that peppered a lighthearted ceremony observed by about 1,000 people on the Capitol's front steps.

The historical event had a populist twist as sentiment and oratory mixed with actors and models, bluegrass music, hot dogs Turn to **Capitol**, Page 2A.

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A 1930s-era parade on Saturday helps mark the Oregon Capitol's 50th birthday.

Statesman-Journal photo by Ron Cooper

# Capitol

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and elephant ears.

Salem historian David Duniway said, "People just love a party."

The party was for a building that has had its detractors. Built in a modernist style, it replaced a traditional classical building destroyed by a 1935 fire.

"First, I thought it was a Frigid-aire," Duniway said. "It just became more and more beautiful over the years."

Mel Whitback, '74, was one of many Salem residents who wandered through the rotunda after the speeches, admiring the terrazzo floor, stately murals and marble halls — his halls.

"I spent two years in here," he said. He painted the halls in 1936 and 1937.

"I've been on about 10 or 12 capitols, and this takes them all. It makes you honored to be in here."

Not all the builders are admired now.

Thomas Vaughan, the director of the Oregon Historical Society, drew a laugh at the ceremonies by suggesting recognition for the man who had the asbestos contract.

The Capitol — out of fear of future fires — was filled with fire-resistant asbestos insulation, which is now recognized as a health hazard.

But Vaughan returned to a sentimental theme and said, "This Capitol building is our place in history."

Humor waxed and waned throughout the event, as Gov. Neil Goldschmidt joked that he looked like a shlemiel, or bungling person, in his double-breasted suit, and Secretary of State Barbara Roberts reminded listeners of the danger of losing our past.

"We are finally accepting responsibility as the stewards of our state history," she said.

"Time slips away, but our history can and must be preserved."

## Today's schedule of Capitol events

The 50th anniversary celebration of the Oregon Capitol building continues today in Salem.

Here's a list of today's events:

■ **Volksmarch:** 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., walk throughout downtown Salem.

■ **Exhibits:** Noon to 4 p.m. "Temples of Government: The Oregon Capitol Buildings in Salem" and the "Oregon Arts Commission Invitational Exhibit: Bicentennial Ratification Celebration," both in Capitol Galleria — first-floor lobby.

■ **100 years of Oregon railroad history:** 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., railroad museum cars off 14th Street SE, south of the Amtrak station.

■ **"Up in Oregon":** 2 p.m., Elsinore Theater, 170 High St. NE. Admission \$7.50 to \$12.50. Tickets at theater.

The Capitol building will be open from noon to 4 p.m. No tours are available.

The only charge is for the musical vaudeville at the Elsinore.

Frankie Bell, the Visitors Services manager for the Capitol, inspired Saturday's event with a remark that the state should have a party for the Capitol's birthday.

It was decided early on that humor should be part of the event.

"I liked that," she said. "I thought that was pretty important."

"The ceremony in 1938 was pretty dry."

Newsman Greg Parker, who revised the original 1938 official comments for use Saturday, said the old speeches were long, dry and boring oratory: "There did not appear to be any humor in the original dedication."

Even with the cake in the Capitol Galleria and the picnics in Willson Park, Saturday was sentimental and moving for some.

Francis Burch, 75, of Salem recalled the 1935 Capitol fire: "I was astounded. I was hanging out of the window of the YWCA."

Celia Anderson, a Beaverton resident, said she was 17 at the 1938 dedication.

"It was very exciting," she said. "Of course, I was from a farm in Idaho."

To some of those attending, there were no memories, just a new acquaintance.

Inside the Capitol, Virginia Ramsby looked up in awe at the rotunda, then struggled to keep her son, Scott, 6, and daughter, Dianne, 3, from trampling on the state seal in the floor.

"We just moved to Salem in April," she said, "and the kids have been interested in the Capitol building."

"I thought it would be a special time to bring them down."

"It's important to them to learn about Oregon history and how we came to be."

The kids just wanted the cake, she said, but they could have that, too, Saturday.

Bell said a lot of people came for cake, consuming 16 sheet cakes — feeding 100 people each — and one cake in the shape of the Capitol: good for 700 servings.

# Few turn out to watch Capitol's birthday parade

By Cathy Beckham  
Of the Statesman-Journal

Crisp marching bands, shiny antique cars and brightly decorated floats on Saturday serpentine through downtown Salem, but almost no one was there to watch.

Shirley Morgan, the wife of former legislator Ross Morgan, said the Oregon Capitol's 50th birthday party parade was "splendid, but it was like someone threw a great party but forgot to invite the guests."

Frankie Bell, the director of visitor's

services at the Capitol, said: "We don't know what happened. Maybe the Greek festival in Portland, the beginning of hunting season or afternoon football games had something to do with it."

About 1,000 people watched the morning parade, according to Lt. Dave Hunter of the Salem Police Department.

The parade started at Willamette University and wound northwest to Chemekeeta Street NE and up Court Street, dispersing just after passing the Capitol.

But many of those who watched the parade said they were glad they came,

and they especially enjoyed the antique cars.

"I love it," Dave Suderman of Salem said. "I love the old cars. And I've seen two good bands. You never see a good band in a Salem parade."

Another parade-goer, Duane Frazier of Salem, said: "I'm delighted with this parade. There is a lot of nice variety."

His wife, Norma, said, "Going to this parade is the American thing to do."

Gov. Neil Goldschmidt and his wife rode in one of the vintage cars. They were followed by former Gov. Bob Straub, As-

sociate Justice Wallace Carson Jr., state Sens. Cub Houck and Jim Hill, state Rep. Rocky Barilla, and Bob Chandler, the owner of the *Bend Bulletin*.

Chandler gave a speech at re-dedication ceremonies later in the morning.

Verne Duncan, the superintendent of public instruction, waved to sidewalk viewers from an old orange and black school bus.

Parade officials chose Superman as the grand marshal of the parade because he is 50 years old this year.

Behind him was Scott Larsen, who

portrayed President Franklin Roosevelt.

Roosevelt was not invited to the 1938 dedication of the Capitol, but he probably would not have attended had he been asked, parade officials said.

Frances Hulse Boly, the 1938 Rose Festival queen, was in another car followed by a couple who honeymooned at the Dorchester House at Lincoln City 50 years ago.

A re-dedication ceremony on the Capitol steps followed the parade.