

Morris Whitehouse (1878-1944)

By William F. Willingham

Over the course of his career, Morris Whitehouse designed many important buildings in Portland, the Willamette Valley, and the Columbia Gorge. Born in Portland on March 21, 1878, Whitehouse studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, completing his studies in 1905. After a year's study at the American Academy in Rome, he returned to Portland and established a practice. His parents had moved to Portland in 1859, and his father worked first for the Portland Water Company and then for the Portland Gas and Coke Company.

Between 1908 and 1944, Whitehouse entered partnerships with such well-known architects as Edgar Lazarus, Jacques Fouilhoux, Genn Stanton, and Walter Church. He had a reputation for assembling and effectively managing strong design teams. While working with Fouilhoux, the firm designed Portland's Jefferson (1910) and Lincoln (1911) High Schools, Multnomah Athletic Club (1911), University Club (1913), Waverly (1913) and Eastmorland (1918) Country Clubs, the Platt Building (1913), and 705 Davis Street Apartments (1913). With Stanton and Church, Whitehouse designed the Columbia River Gorge Hotel (1921), such notable Portland buildings as the U.S. Courthouse (1932), and Sixth Church of Christ, Scientist (1932). They also did the construction drawings for Temple Beth Israel (1927).

Whitehouse designed the Lake Oswego Country Club in 1923 and collaborated with A.E. Doyle on the Multnomah Stadium (1926). His firm also designed the First Presbyterian Church in Salem (1929). During the Great Depression, Whitehouse and Church worked on the new State Capitol Building in collaboration with Trowbridge and Livingston (1936-1938); they also designed the Oregon State Library (1938-1939).

Whitehouse—trained in Beaux Arts historicism and influenced by an Italianate aesthetic from his study in Italy—expressed his stylistic preferences in his designs for the white stucco and red tile Columbia Gorge Hotel and his many clubhouse buildings. His design for the U.S. Courthouse can be seen as a refined or stripped version of Classical Renaissance Revival style.

Whitehouse also worked in more modern styles, such as Art Deco and Moderne. The lobby of the U.S. Courthouse is an impressive mix of classical and Art Deco elements. Cast bronze friezes and grilles in geometric and floral designs are set in marble and cherry and mahogany wood to great effect. The state capitol buildings reflect a similar blend of modern and stripped classical idioms.

The architectural firm Whitehouse established in 1907 continued under his successors for eighty years, making it the longest operating architectural office in Oregon. Whitehouse was active in the Portland Architectural Club and the Oregon chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He also served many years as a member of the Oregon State Board of Architectural Examiners. Whitehouse died in 1944.

Sources

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