

Tony Greiner and Rachel Bridgewater

# Portland

## An eclectic introduction

Whether Portland conjures images for you of outdoorsy people heading to the mountains for adventure; bookish people cozied in coffeeshops to escape the rain; gourmands enjoying a thriving local food, beer, and wine scene; or any of the too-close-to-home characters seen on *Portlandia*, your expectations will probably be fulfilled and, whichever of those Portland types you meet, they will be glad to welcome you to our beautiful city.

During the coming months, a series of articles will introduce you to what we love best about Portland, and what we think you will enjoy when you visit.

This first article will give you a taste of Portland history, geography, and character. We look forward to seeing you in March.

### Early history and geography

The land around Portland was shaped by the Bretz Floods in the year 10,000 BCE. These floods were created when the ice-dams holding back glacial Lake Missoula broke, releasing great cataclysms of water that swept through

Washington and Oregon, carving the Columbia River Gorge, which ends (or begins) a few miles east of Portland. These floods cut a canyon through the Cascade range, and created the waterfalls that give the mountain chain its name. At their deepest, these floods put 400 feet of water on top of what is now downtown Portland.



Native Americans spearing fish at Celilo Falls with fishwheel in background, c.1905, [www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historicviewer/CeliloFalls/celiloFalls1905.html](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historicviewer/CeliloFalls/celiloFalls1905.html).

After things dried out, Native American tribes arrived. Most made their lives by fishing, particularly for salmon and, for some tribes, lamprey eels. One of the best fishing spots was Celilo Falls (about 30 miles east of Portland), where the Columbia

River, which follows the path of the Bretz Flood, went through a lava flow creating narrow channels through which the fish could be caught in nets or speared. It was a major

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meeting and trading place for native peoples, who developed great skills as basketmakers. A trade language called the “Chinook jargon” was developed there. *Chinook* is also the name of one of the tribes, and the largest of several salmon species. (Although local fishermen call them “Kings.”)

Lewis and Clark passed through in 1804, and Clark poked his canoe a little way up the Willamette River. Before Portland, the first European settlement in the region was Fort Vancouver, a

private fort built by the Hudson’s Bay Company in Washington, near the mouth of the Willamette. At Fort Vancouver, John McLaughlin was the head of a group of French and English traders and trappers who

gathered beaver skins for the European trade and sea otters for the Chinese market. Some of these men later left the fur trade and set up farms in the Willamette Valley. Around 1840, the farmers started meeting in Champoeg (pronounced “shampoo-ee”) to discuss ways to solve problems, in particular wolves eating their livestock. A few years later, the question of whether the United States or England should be the governing force over the Oregon Country came up. The former traders met and voted to go with England, 52-50. Then, a pro-American in the group reminded two of the men who had voted to be under English rule that they had English arrest warrants out for them. The vote was retaken, and the United States carried the day. Champoeg was leveled by a flood in 1861 (save for two saloons), and the site, about 15 miles south of Portland, is now a lovely state park.



Cherry trees in bloom in Waterfront Park. Photo credit: Travis Estell, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/taestell/8622377099>

There remains a definite Native American presence in the state, both in the tribal members themselves, and place-names associated with them. They still hold their fishing rights from the treaties of the 1800s, sometimes after regaining them in court battles.

The Oregon Trail brought settlers to the region, and a town began to grow on the Willamette River’s banks. Originally it was referred to only by nicknames like “The Clearing” or “Stumptown.” When it came time for a

more permanent name, it was chosen in a coin toss between two founders Asa Lovejoy (from Boston, Massachusetts) and Francis Pettygrove (from Portland, Maine). Pettygrove won, and our town became “Portland.” If you visit the

Oregon Historical Society in Portland, you can see the actual penny used in the coin toss.

### A city grows up

The Library Association of Portland, founded in 1864, was one of Portland’s first cultural institutions. Originally a subscription library, a donation by John Wilson of his personal collection and the work of Director Mary Frances Isom began the transition from private organization to what is now the Multnomah County Library, one of the most-used library systems in the United States.

The expanded Wilson Collection, with items from D. H. Lawrence, the *Nuremburg Chronicle*, and a complete *Birds of America* by Audubon, can be viewed at the Central Library. If you call the library in advance, you can make arrangements to see the Audubon volumes.



Portland microbrew. Photo credit: Torsten Kjellstrand & Travel Portland

About the same time, Republican governor Oswald West realized that the pattern of wealthy individuals buying up oceanside property in the east was soon to come to Oregon. He approached the legislature with a plan to declare all beaches “public highways.” The idea of a free road system appealed to them, and the plan was approved; all beaches in

Oregon remain open to all to this day. (You can still drive on some of them, too.)

The 1930s to 1950s brought about a lot of dam building in the Columbia Basin. This led to cheap electricity, but also had some negative unintended consequences, including greatly reduced salmon runs and sturgeon populations. Gone are the days when fishermen would line the downtown bridges shoulder to shoulder to catch some of the millions of fish that made their way home. But the cheap power spurred the increase of ship-building at the start of World War II, which drew more Af-



Portland Coffee. Photo credit: Rob Finch & Travel Portland

rican Americans to Portland for the good jobs. A temporary city named Vanport was built to house the workers and grew to a population of 40,000 before it was washed away in 1948 when a railway berm that was being used as a dike gave way. An empty field near the “Expo Center” has a sign to mark the spot; the former Vanport College moved downtown to become Portland State University.

Portland remained a railroad and lumber town for many years. These industries caused environmental issues for Portland, especially water pollution from the paper mills. Governor Tom McCall (elected in 1966) is largely considered a hero in Oregon for ushering in legislation to clean up the Willamette River, keeping Oregon’s beaches free and open to the public, and passing the nation’s first “bottle bill” to encourage recycling. And he won the hearts of all Oregonians when he told folks that Oregon

was beautiful, and to come visit, “but for heaven’s sake, don’t move here to live.” Portland’s beautiful Tom McCall Waterfront Park (which replaced a freeway that was removed in the 1970s) was named after him.

It’s possible that during ACRL 2015, the cherry blossoms in the park will be blooming for conference attendees to enjoy.

**The lay of the land**

The Willamette River runs through the center of Portland, dividing the city into east and west. The city is further divided by Burnside Street, which runs east-west and divides the city into north and south. This Burnside/Willamette intersection divides the city into four quadrants—southwest, northwest, southeast, and northeast. Given Portland’s reputation for

quirkiness, maybe it won't surprise you to hear that we actually have a "fifth quadrant," North Portland. Each of the quadrants is home to wonderful, distinct neighborhoods, so look for a future article that will explore these intriguing neighborhoods.

This might be a good time to talk about pronunciation. Willamette is not pronounced "will-uh-MET"; it's pronounced "will-LAM-et" as in "Willamette, damn it!" The proper pronunciation of the state

name is "ore-uh-gun;" if you want people to point fingers and serve you watered-down beer, pronounce it "ore-uh-GONE." Some of the street names add to the confusion . . . for instance, Couch (named after a ship captain) is pronounced "cooch" and Glisan (a frontier doctor) is "glee-san."

### Keep Portland weird: Beer, zines, and a great big statue

Among Portland's many nicknames is "Beer-vana." We definitely earn that one. We have a lot of beer and brewpubs; at the time of this writing, there are 53 breweries in Portland, more than any other city in the world. To recover from the beer, we drink coffee. The coffee keeps us



Portland Bridge Pedal. Photo credit: Travel Portland.

warm when it rains. The beer makes us forget it is raining. Rain provides the water for both, so it works out just fine.

Another thing you might notice a lot of in Portland is strip clubs. While this isn't normal-

ly something we'd bring up, it's worth mentioning to an audience of librarians that it is Oregon's very strong free speech laws that makes this possible. These laws also make possible our famous (infamous?) naked

bike ride, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in June 2014 with more than 9,000 riders. Portland is famous for our love of cycling and our vibrant bike culture. Portlanders who prefer to keep their clothes on might participate in the Bridge Pedal, a yearly event held in August where cyclists get to ride across all ten of Portland's bridges.

While in Portland, you can try to find all the streets that characters on the Simpsons are named after. You can check out the

world's smallest park (the two-foot Mills End Park); eat some Voodoo donuts; try to catch a glimpse of the Darth Vader mask-wearing, bagpipe-playing unicyclist; and look at the Portlandia Statue in front of the Portland Building.

The award-



Portlandia statue. Photo credit: Holly Hayes, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacred\\_destinations/8615083085](https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacred_destinations/8615083085)

winning Portland Building itself is something to behold; designed by Michael Graves in 1982, it is an icon of postmodern architecture.

It is also widely reviled, making *Travel + Leisure's* list of ugliest buildings in the world in 2009. Regardless of your take on the building, the statue is cool, and looked cooler when it was floated down the Willamette on a barge to take up its place in front of those city offices.

Libraries and bookstores are just the beginning for literary Portland. This is a city that loves books in all forms. The city is home to novelists such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Whitney Otto, Chuck Palahniuk, Peter Rock, and a host of others. Children's author Beverly Cleary set her children's novels in her neighborhood in northeast Portland. Visit the Hollywood branch of Multnomah County Library

to see a map of Ramona Quimby and Harry Huggins' local haunts. Those who identify more closely with Riot Grrls than Ramona might like to check out the Independent Publishing Resource Center, a nexus of Portland's thriving zine scene.

Portland is second only to New York City in the number of comic book and graphic novel authors and publishers. Bridge City

Comics is a wonderful place to connect with fellow enthusiasts, or visit the Portland State University library, which has the definitive

collection of Dark Horse Comics. Book arts thrive here, too: Oregon College of Arts and Crafts, Marylhurst University, and Reed College, as well as galleries and book arts centers are devoted to showcasing book artists and nurturing crafts such as bookbinding, paper making, letterpress, and calligraphy.

### So much more than weird

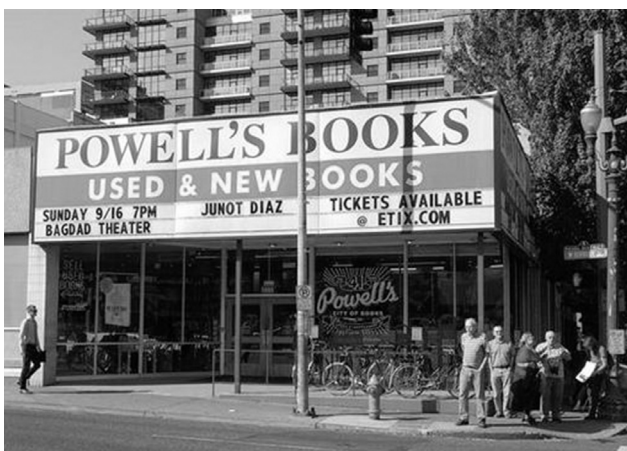
Though Portland has a well-deserved reputation for quirkiness, much of what we love about our town isn't so much weirdness as distinctiveness. Portland is friendly, clean, green, and bursting with energy. We know you'll love visiting, and we look forward to telling you about

our neighborhoods, shopping, culture, dining, and outdoor activities over the coming months. Portland is a literary city eager to welcome librarians. The city has lots of independent bookstores, including the world famous

Powell's Books. Portland also has a wonderful zoo, museums galore, and much, much more. See you in 2015! ♪♪



The Ramona Quimby statue in Portland's Grant Park. Photo Credit: Kara Newhouse, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rogueanthro/6842760055>



Powell's City of Books. Photo credit: Scott Beale, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/laughingsquid/8320080842>