

Saling Building (Smith Building)



A Brief History of the Saling Building

Do you recognize this building? It once had a very fine life. But about the mid-1930's until 2000, it languished behind a different façade and had been referred to around Weston, Oregon as the “flop house” (a place where cannery workers slept and showered between shifts) and more recent history “city storage.” It began its long life in the late 1870's and was owned by Isham and Malinda Saling and Isham Reese and Martha Reese. If those names sound familiar, then you are cognizant of the history of Weston and the importance of

not only the names but the importance of the building in Weston's history. And until 1935, it remained with the Saling family.

The Saling Building (on the corner of Franklin and Main Streets) was a part of the Weston Commercial Historic District.

The actual date of construction is not quite clear. Umatilla County records do not go back far enough to determine just when it was built. The first record of the building is in 1879 when Isham and Malinda sold half of it to Isham Reese.

Five years later, Isham and Martha sold half of it back to the Salings. After Isham's death in the early 1900's, family heirs ended up with the Saling Estate—which encompassed a great deal of land and buildings in the Weston area. The Saling Building was one of those buildings. (Another Saling building, the Saling House, is owned locally and is on the National Register of Historic Places.)

Frank Saling purchased the estate from Ida and F.H. Coffin in 1909 and a revised deed was filed in 1931 by Frank and Vashti Saling to include other Saling heirs in sharing of the estate. Those heirs included Ralph Saling, Cora Worthington, Emmaline Funk, and Martha J. Bullfinch. Sadly, in 1935 the Saling Building was taken by Umatilla County (along with other portions of the estate) for back taxes. This is the first time the City of Weston owned the building.

The city assumed ownership of the property in June 1936 and promptly sold the building the following month to Walla Walla Canning Company for \$150.00. Ten years later, the building came under the ownership of Eastern Oregon Canning Company. According to the Milton Eagle, “the ‘Saling Building’ at the corner of Main and North Franklin Streets...is a one-story brick structure...and had been used by the former owners for storing viners.” The new owner was in

the process of converting it into living quarters for use of single employees by the cannery. It was estimated that up to 100 men could be accommodated in the building. John T. Cox was in charge of the facility in making it ready for the employees.

It is interesting that even in 1936, it was still the “Saling Building.”

Reconstruction Finance Corporation ended up with the building three years later and sold it to F.G. Lamb and Company in 1950. Somewhere in the following years Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Baker-Boyer Bank became involved in the long list of ownership or else were financing the companies (this isn't quite clear).

In 1973, Lamb-Weston (as F.G. Lamb and Company became known) sold the building along with other property to Smith Canning & Freezing Company (now Smith Frozen Foods).

The City of Weston purchased the building from Smith Frozen Foods in 1990 and used the building for storage of city equipment.

An engineer's report indicated that the building should be demolished. Since the building is on the National Register of Historic Places, the city was required to negotiate the demolition with SHPO. Staff at SHPO determined that the engineer's report lacked sufficient information for them to determine whether the building should be removed or if it still had life. SHPO offered to the city the services of a qualified architect to resurvey the building and determine just how bad of a shape the building is in. This would have been at the expense of SHPO. The city turned down SHPO's offer and will hold a public hearing on whether the citizens wished to see the building demolished or restored.

While the city and many of the residents saw the old building as a liability and nothing but a storage building, there were those who saw the building as historic; in rough shape but well worth saving—but not as a storage building. There were some who wanted to see the building restored and given new life as a museum for the community. The museum would interpret local history and the county agriculture history—much of that agriculture history took place in the Weston area. The Saling Building, while once a mercantile store added to history as it played a part in the agriculture history as well in providing storage and housing for the canneries.

The building was used to sell cars and as a repair garage. The “ghost” of the SHELL sign could still be seen on the outside of the building. At some point the building was extended to the edge of the property to 106 feet. It shared a common wall with the building to the west of it, also a Saling-owned building. In all, there were currently four buildings still standing (as far as can be determined) that Saling and/or Reese constructed. The building to the west is currently owned by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Athena and is used for church functions. To the west, across Franklin Street, is the former Saling & Reese store, which is now home to the Longbranch Café and Saloon.

The City of Weston City Council voted to have the building demolished. It was demolished on January 25, 2000. The city did allow photo documentation of the interior and exterior of the building prior to its demolition as requested by SHPO. Local resident Bob Gilliland and (now former Weston resident) Trish Neal documented the building. They had also spearheaded the campaign to save the building.

Information based on research by Bob Gilliland and Trish Neal.

