

**VICTORIA'S NEPHEW
WILDE OSCARS**

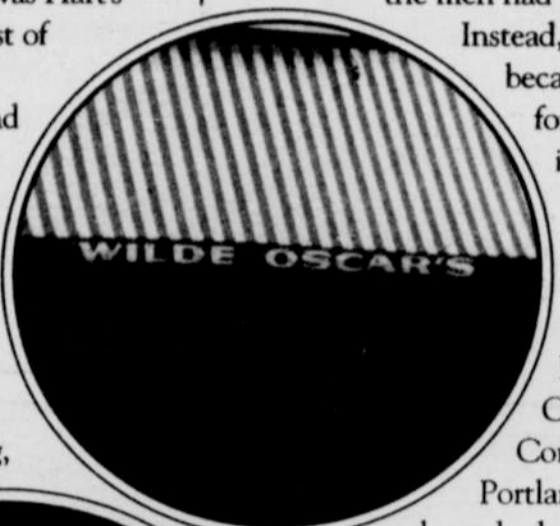
Begin your tour at Southwest Stark and Second. Now called Mother's Bistro, this space was once an eatery named Victoria's Nephew, popular with both gays and straights for noon-time dining.

Walk up Stark to Third Avenue and detour north to 330 S.W. Third Ave. Now it's Temptations, but in the '90s, this was Hart's X Movie Arcade, the northernmost of the Sin City-type video shops on Third. More significant for Portland gay history is the restaurant at 318 S.W. Third Ave., now the Red Sea, but for six years this was **Wilde Oscar's**.

When it opened in 1976, Earl Wright ran a European-style cabaret with musical shows, food and drink. When he began renting, the place was called the Filling Station, and for years before that it was called the Crystal Pistol. Wright redecorated in an 1890s style, with a large portrait of famous English author Oscar Wilde near the front. The sandwiches were notoriously delicious, and the place was popular with men and women, straight and otherwise, and not really a cruising bar.



There was some controversy early on in that the women wanted it to be a lesbian bar and the men had the opposite opinion.



Instead, the establishment became a meeting place for several groups including Gay Men Together, Oregon Fair Share, a William Temple House counseling group and the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. Metropolitan Community Church of Portland members often

brunched there, and on Easter Sunday in 1977 they held an Easter breakfast there after having a sunrise service around Skidmore Fountain.

Oscar's was wildly popular, to the point that the landlord decided to double the rent in 1983. There had been some difficulty with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission concerning the



liquor license, and Wright decided to close one of gay Portland's classier spots. It is much missed by those who were frequent patrons.



**THE WATER CLOSET
UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE
POLYESTERS
MAHON'S/OLYMPIC BATHS
CIRCLE THEATER
LOUVRE CAFE**

Backtrack to Stark and continue west to Southwest Fourth Avenue. Rounding the corner brings you to a building that was constructed in 1890 as the New Mayer Hotel. At 424 S.W. Fourth Ave. now stands The City—a sports bar and restaurant. For several years in the 1970s, this was called **The Water Closet** or just **WC's**. A narrow stairway took patrons upstairs to a large open space, excellent and popular for dancing. A bar served the libations, and several tables and seats were

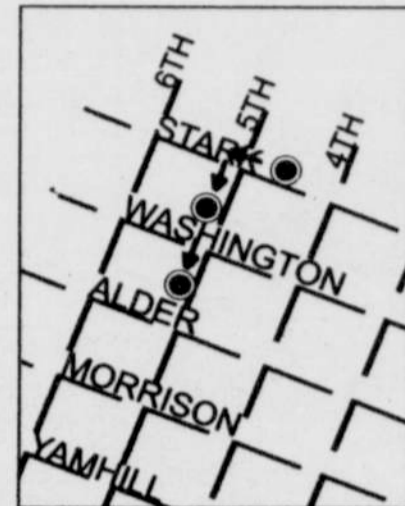
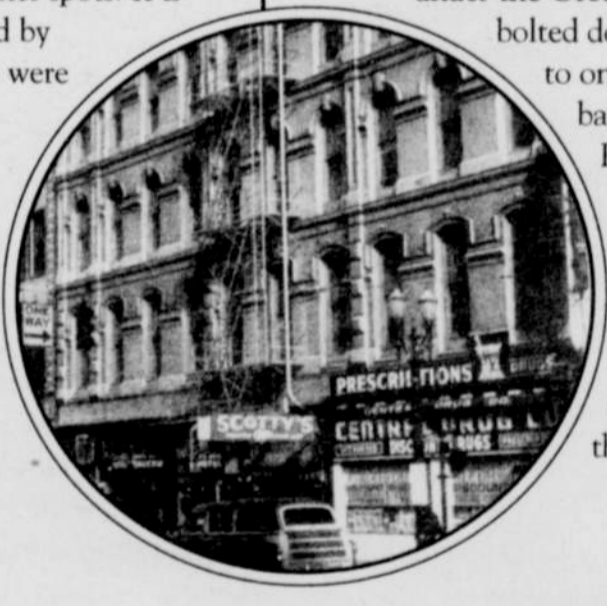
arranged on a stepped riser in the back.

The loo was downstairs, where another bar called **Eli's** functioned in the 1980s. Eli's later became **Up the Down Staircase**.

After closure, the space became **Polyesters**.

Head south on Fourth, and under the Greek Cuisina at 509 is a bolted doorway that once led to one of the oldest

baths in Portland called **Mahon's**. Business began in 1903 and operated through the



1960s, when it became the downtown **Olympic Baths** after the original Olympic on Morrison was closed.

Across the street, you will see a parking structure. This was once the site of the **Circle Theater** at 516 S.W.

Fourth Ave. Famous as a place for anonymous encounters, there were two balconies where such meetings took place.

De facto, the right side balcony was a men-only spot, whereas the other balcony was "reserved" for straight activity.

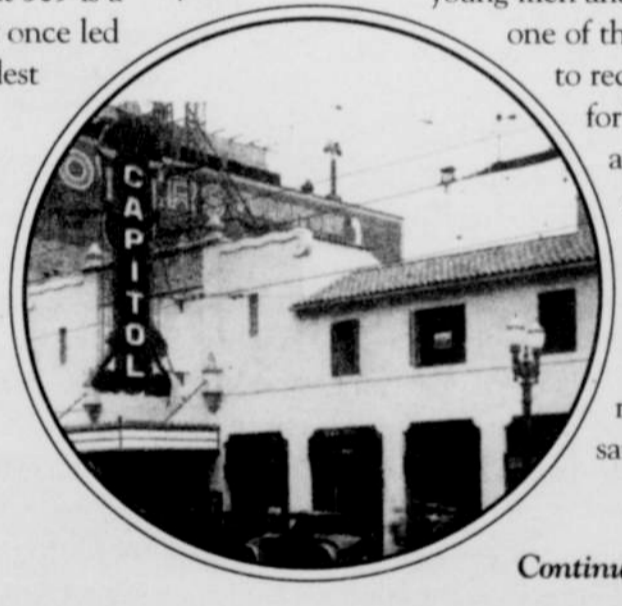
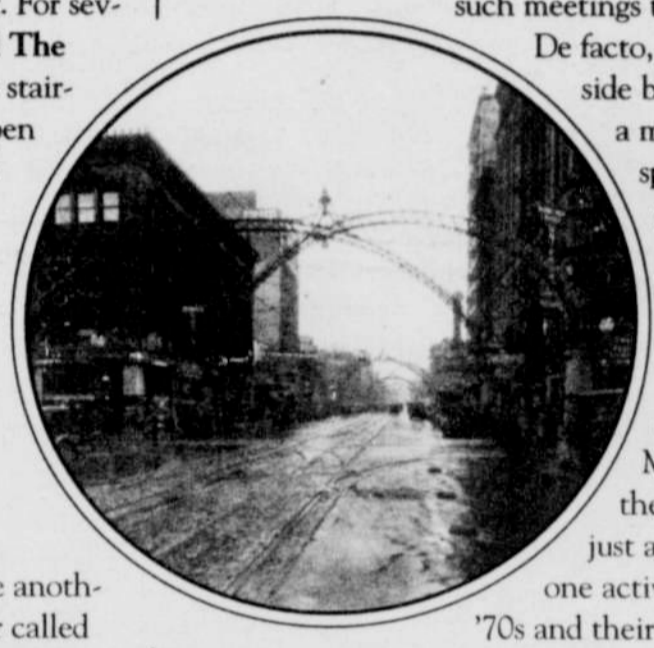
Mention the **Circle** to just about anyone active in the

'70s and their eyes often glaze over with memories. Behind the theater on Third was the popular **Pink Cat Bookstore and Arcade** at 523 S.W. Third Ave.

Looking across Fourth, you see the site of the once-famous **Louvre Cafe** on the northwest corner at Alder. In 1912, several men involved in the famous **YMCA same-sex scandal** were known to meet there. The owner, **Fritz Stroebel**, reportedly kept company with several

young men and often took one of them to Seattle

to recruit performers for his "bohemian" place. He closed it in 1913, but it appeared for years in the newspapers in reference to same-sex activity.



Continued on Page 24

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