



# A BOON'S COMPANION PIECE

Def.: (mid-16th century)

*boon* from Old French *bon*, from Latin *bonus* meaning “good.”

The early literal sense was “good fellow,” originally denoting a drinking companion.

Constructed in 1860, just a year after Oregon became a state, Boon's Treasury has weathered the region's booms and busts, floods and fires, highway expansions, shopping malls and urban renewal. No longer as fresh-faced as it was during Abe Lincoln's presidency and one of the oldest continuously operating commercial buildings in the state of Oregon, Boon's wrinkles, spots and scars are a testament to more than 15 decades of life.

The worn-in, welcoming comfort of this modest brick building has always been part of its charm. No doubt, its unassuming nature originated with its builder, John D. Boon, who was a direct descendant of wilderness pioneer Daniel Boone (1734–1820), one of America's most stalwart explorers.

John D. Boon was plain spoken and lacking a formal education, having left Ohio in 1845 to help spread the tenets of Methodism by working for the mission established in present-day Salem. As a preacher, he was



remembered for his “strong religious emotion” as well as for wearing a red flannel shirt. In 1851, his forthright, honest character got him elected as Oregon's Territorial treasurer, an office he kept into the 1860s. During this time, Boon also started his own general store, only the second in Salem. (Coincidentally, the carpenter who lived next door and who may have helped in the construction of Boon's building was the same person who a few years later

settled the spot on which our Crystal Hotel now stands in downtown Portland.) Boon conducted both state and public business from his brick building on Liberty Street – in fact, it's said that he kept two sacks: one for government monies, the other for store operations.

Even when new in the mid-1860s, Boon's brick store/treasury office possessed an innate quaintness. An 1864 newspaper article described it as a “favorite trading place of many an old dame who could never be induced to leave [Boon's] unpretentious shop for that of any of his more spruce and modern neighbors.”

After J.D. Boon's demise, a prosperous adventurer named William Lincoln Wade infused his good fortune into the Liberty Street store – the same good fortune that had led to his discovery of a 15-pound gold nugget during the California Gold Rush. Wade maintained the sterling reputation of Boon's business and opened the building up to serve the community in another role. Wade's Hall on the second floor was available for public gatherings – political orations, social galas, club meetings and the like.

During this time, Wade's young son Murray befriended a kid named Bert Hoover, who had moved to Salem with his adoptive family. The boys liked to play in and around the store, and in one escapade, Murray thought it would be a hoot to strand poor Bert on the roof of the building! Despite the prank, the boys remained lifelong friends – even after Bert became better known as U.S. President Herbert Hoover (1929–33). In fact, if you know whom to ask and where to look, you might even discover the “HH” that a certain someone carved into the side of the building many years ago. Murray Wade went on to become a notable cartoonist, perhaps best known for his drawings of Oregon legislators. He also drew portraits of popular celebrities, many of whom used Wade's sketches for promotional pieces in *Variety*, the theatrical trade magazine. It was said that Wade probably had more of his work in *Variety* than any other artist of that day.



After its first 75 years, the old Liberty Street building took on yet another mantle. Soon after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, a former hop grower and bowling academy director named Fred Karr transformed the old state treasury into a beer parlor. The long run of Karr's Tavern came to end in the early 1970s, when new owners renovated and reopened the landmark as Boon's Treasury, still a neighborhood pub but invoking its original history in its name. The new blood that took over introduced live music into the old joint, and featured a series of marvelous jazz artists. Perhaps the most renowned was Earl “Fatha” Hines, called the first modern jazz pianist. He was remembered by trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie as “blazing the path for the next generation to come,” while Count Basie deemed Hines simply “the greatest piano player in the world.” Not only did Earl Hines play at Boon's Treasury, but he played at Duke Ellington's funeral, twice in the White House, once for the president of France and once for the Pope. Just imagine what it would have been like to hear this jazz phenom blow the ceiling off this joint. As they say, if only the walls could talk...

Other cultural icons were drawn to the place in the winter of 1975. Salem resident and local historian Professor John Ritter recalls that he and actor Jack Nicholson as well as others who were filming an adaptation of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at the Oregon State Hospital convened many times at Boon's Treasury after days of shooting. The barkeep would simply hand the keys over to the Hollywood folks and tell them, “Lock up when you're done.” The film itself went on to win all five major Academy Awards (Best Picture, Actor in Lead Role, Actress in Lead Role, Director and Screenplay).

McMenamins took stewardship of Boon's Treasury in 1998. We've made a few changes over the years – the bar, for example, was remodeled in the summer of 2013. Originally intended as a standing counter with a foot rail, it was lowered six inches to accommodate today's more relaxed, seated guests. We've also added artwork, both original and vintage. Manager Emily Heberlein says the giant ENLIST poster near the musicians' area is a draw for guests with their cameras and iPhones. The poster, most likely a WWI propaganda piece, depicts Lady Liberty in flowing gown lofting the American flag overhead.

Today, the well-aged Boon's Treasury continues to be a place for warm conversation, good food and drink, interesting music and a historic atmosphere that's been honed to a well-worn patina over the course of a century and a half (and counting...).