

History exhibit recalls black business district

By [Susan Green, The Oregonian](#)

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[Central City Concern](#) will host an unveiling reception Oct. 22 for a new exhibit that tells the story of its historic Golden West Building at [707 N.W. Everett St.](#) and the vibrant African American business district that surrounded it in the early 1900s.



Oregon Historical SocietyA new display pays tribute to the heyday of the Golden West Hotel, part of a thriving district of African American-owned businesses in the early 1900s. The reception will be from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at [Carleton Hart Architecture](#) at [322 N.W. Eighth Ave.](#) It will feature refreshments, music from Sweet Baby James and remarks at 5:30 p.m. by City Commissioner Randy Leonard and members of the project advisory committee.

In the early 1900s, the area around the Golden West Hotel and Union Station was home to most of the city's 1,000 or so African Americans.

When steamships and the railroads flourished and brought opportunities for better-paying jobs for African Americans as Pullman porters, barbers and hotel cooks and waiters, an African American middle class arose, and along with it a thriving district of black-owned businesses.

There were pool halls, haberdasheries and the Golden West Hotel, which became the social centerpiece of the community with its restaurant, Turkish baths, barbershop, gambling room, gymnasium and ice cream parlor.

A decades-old existing window box display on the outside of the hotel's south side hinted at some of that history.

Last year, Central City Concern got a grant from the city's Vision Into Action Coalition to expand and upgrade the display. This spring Oregon Humanities provided additional money.

Besides updating the design and content of the south-side display, two new window box displays have been installed on the building's east side. A visitor-activated audio component incorporates music from the time and interviews with people associated with the area's history.

"So much of the neighborhood's rich history is unknown to Portland residents," says historian Jackie Peterson Loomis of the Old Town History Project, who curated the display. "This street-level installation is a first step -- and a long-term goal of the Old Town History Project -- in bringing the neighborhood's multiethnic history to life."

--[Susan Green](#)