

The Front Porch Although the flooring had to be completely replaced, the porch looks just as it did when the Bensons moved in. The curved pieces are reproductions but many of the posts and much of the trim are original. **The bronze bubbler in front of the house is one of the original 20 drinking fountains Simon Benson donated to the City of Portland in 1912.**

Foyer/Stairway The main stairway is the highlight of the house and is all original oak. Note the detail on the newels and the posts supporting the railing, as well as the benches on either side. The alcove to the right was used as a place where family and guests could hang their coats. Also note the beautiful cut glass windows at the stairway landing, all original.

The light fixture in the foyer is a replica of a combination gas and electric lamp that was in the house in 1900. The front door, the cut glass window above it, and the large curved window are reproductions, but the flooring, wainscoting and moldings are original oak. The plaster trim on the upper walls was re-discovered when old wallpaper was removed during renovation.

Please limit your tour to the main floor. *The second floor now houses the offices of the PSU Alumni Association and the Retirement Association of PSU. These offices are in the former bedroom area of the house. The rooms have been restored to look much as they did in 1900.*

Visitors Parlor Located just to the right of the foyer, this room was the formal parlor where the Benson family would have received guests. It now serves as the reception area for visitors.

The wood in this room is all original oak, including the ¾" thick white oak floors, the pocket doors with their elegant old hardware, and the dentil-style picture-frame molding. Note the handsome stained glass transom window, also original. The fireplace and mantle are replications, with the exception of the modern gas burner inset.

Here, as in the rest of the house, the lathe and plaster walls have been replaced with plaster over sheetrock. The coved ceilings have been retained only in the four main historic rooms of the house.

Furnishings The furniture of the four front rooms (foyer, visitors parlor, the Simon Benson Room, and the small dining room) are reproductions of hand-crafted Gustav Stickley designs. Stickley, a craftsman recognized in the early 1900s for the sturdy quality and elegant simplicity of his designs, is called the Frank Lloyd Wright of American furniture.

The Simon Benson Room Adjoining the front parlor, this was once the Benson dining room but it will soon

house an historic display about Simon Benson. The wainscoting, trim and even the panels of the pocket doors facing into this room are all made of cherry, most of it original. The flooring is the original Russian white oak; however, some was so badly damaged it had to be replaced.

Small Dining Room To the left of the Simon Benson Room, this room was once the family parlor. Both the floor and the wood trim are the original fir and the cut glass transom window is also original. It is now used for small meetings and as a dining room.

The light fixture in the ceiling is a replication, based on a photograph of this room taken in Benson's time. Similar fixtures are used in both the front parlor and the Simon Benson Room, although there is no record of the original fixtures that were used in these rooms.

The Back of the House The back of the house, which included the kitchen, originally ended just beyond the small back door and the current stairway. The side porch (facing the Park Blocks) was undoubtedly extended when the back of the home was enlarged (date unknown) to make way for a larger kitchen and pantry area.

The back of the house and the back stairs were reconfigured during the restoration to meet city code and to make the house more useful for public meetings and events. It includes a modern galley kitchen with full-sized refrigerator and warming oven. A second bathroom was added and both were designed to look like bathrooms at the turn of the century. Note the "subway" tiles on the walls and the woven design of the floor tiles.

Conference Room This room, which was part of the addition to the house, originally served as a kitchen and pantry. The fireplace was rebuilt and some of the windows and woodwork are new, but they continue in the style of the historical rooms. The light fixtures are typical of the early 1900s. This room is available to both the university and community groups for meetings and other events (rental fee apply).

The large conference table, sideboard and chairs were custom-made for this room by The Joinery, a local manufacturer of fine furniture.

Donations to Friends of Simon Benson House are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

THE SIMON BENSON HOUSE

Self-Guided Tour

Who was Simon Benson?

Simon was the third son of Berger Iversen and Karen Stenersdatter, born in Gausdal, Norway, September 9, 1851. He had little formal education, going to work on a neighboring farm at the age of nine. When he was 16, the family emigrated to the United States, moving to Black River Falls, Wisconsin, where they joined an older son and daughter who had come several years earlier. The Berger Iversens took out naturalization papers and changed their name to Benson.

Simon worked on farms and in logging camps and sawmills until 1876 when he opened a general store in Lynxville, Wisconsin. The store did well until destroyed by fire three years later. Then married and with a small son to support, Simon decided to move to the Northwest where he felt there would be considerable opportunity in the timber industry.

Benson arrived at the right time. The lumber industry was flourishing in the Pacific Northwest. After first working in the woods, he went into business for himself in 1881. He was an innovator, introducing donkey engines and steam locomotives to the Northwest woods. He also bought up timber holdings whenever he could.

But his interests went beyond the lumber industry. He built the Benson Hotel in Portland and the Columbia Gorge Hotel in Hood River. And he became active in civic affairs. In 1915, he represented Oregon at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco as the state's "First Citizen."

One of Oregon's earliest philanthropists, Benson's many contributions include:

- Promotion of the Columbia River Gorge Highway, devoting both time and money to the project.
- Donation of 1,000 acres of land for parks, including Multnomah and Wahkeena Falls and the present Benson State Park.
- Donation of \$100,000 to the Portland School District for Benson Polytechnic High School to advance vocational education.
- The gift of \$10,000 to the city of Portland to install 20 bronze drinking fountains, which are still in use. One of the original "Benson Bubblers" now stands in front of the restored Simon Benson House.

A bit of history...

Simon Benson built this Queen Anne-style home for his family about 1900. It was originally located at SW 11th and Clay-across from Portland's "Old Church." The family lived in the house until 1912 when Benson moved his family to the Benson Hotel and took over its management. The house's history is not clear from that point, though it served as a boarding house in the Depression Era of the 1930s and was later divided into apartments. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, but fell into disrepair and was finally condemned by the City of Portland in 1991.

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to save the house, but finally, in 1998, then City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury gathered together a group of citizens-known as Friends of Simon Benson House - who were determined to preserve this piece of Portland's history. Because the owners wanted to develop the property on which the house stood, their first task was to find a new site and then to raise the money to move and restore the historic home. They succeeded on both counts, raising close to \$1.4 million between May 1998 and November 2001.

On January 16, 2000, the house was moved to a quarter block donated by Portland State University at the corner of SW Park and Montgomery. A new foundation was poured, the house lowered onto it, and the renovation begun. By December 2000, the restoration was complete. Returned to its former elegance, the Benson House is now a focal point of the Portland State campus, a reminder of the lovely old homes that once graced Portland's South Park Blocks.

The Exterior of the Simon Benson House

The exterior wood is clear cedar siding and the house paint matches the original colors. The stonework at the base of the house is also original, having been cleaned and reinstalled after the move. The roof shingles are cedar, laid three shingles deep. The flashing, gutters and downspouts are copper, as is the roof of the rounded dormer on the east side of the house. The roof ornaments are reproductions of those that originally decorated the house. The chimneys had to be rebuilt, but the style and pattern of the bricks replicate the originals.

The Patio Garden is new and designed for outdoor events and general public use. Inscribed bricks, purchased by donors to the house restoration, make up a portion of the plaza. Plantings in the plaza and all around the house are appropriate to the house's 1900 time period.