

Building History & Renaming Process

MARTHA WASHINGTON BUILDING HISTORY

In 1911, the Portland Women's Union (now the Women's Foundation of Oregon), a group of volunteers who created one of the first organizations in Oregon to provide safe housing for young women, acquired the quarter block at the corner of SW 10th Avenue and Montgomery Street for the Martha Washington Hotel for Self-Supporting Women. The building opened in 1917, home to 90 women.

The residence hotel had classrooms where residents could learn skills such as bookkeeping, common areas for social events and a gymnasium. The women who lived there were teachers, nurses, seamstresses, clerical employees and students, 18 to 26 years old, from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and even as far away as England, Illinois, Kansas, California, Nebraska and Ohio. Occupancy dwindled over time as result of World War II and the Great Depression. During World War II, the hotel was home to war workers, and women over 30 were asked to leave.

In 1969, the Portland Development Commission bought the Martha Washington for Portland State University to use for student housing. They renamed the building Montgomery Court. The Portland Women's Union purchased the Campbell Court Hotel at 1115 SW 11th, which had been used by Multnomah College as a dormitory since 1961, and renamed this building the Martha Washington. During the 1970s, the new Martha Washington lost money, as women wanted more freedom than the hotel's rules (such as a curfew and no overnight male guests) allowed.

In January 1983, the Union accepted an offer from the Rajneesh Investment Corporation for \$1.4 million, with three Rolls Royce's as collateral. In 1986, the Rajneesh Investment Corporation sold the building to Multnomah County, which used it as a work-release center for county offenders until 2003. On June 16, 2010, the Martha Washington reopened as low-income housing run by Home Forward and operated by Central City Concern.



RENAMING RESEARCH PROCESS

Central City Concern formed a team of staff to lead the process of developing the Martha Washington Building renaming proposal to Home Forward. This team included:

- Sean Hubert, Chief Housing and Strategy Officer
- Freda Ceaser, Chief Equity Officer
- Mercedes Elizalde, Director of Public Policy
- Dana Brandon, Director of Supportive Housing
- Laura Recko, Associate Director of Communications and Donor Relations
- E.V. Armitage, Executive Coordinator

After receiving input from the CCC Equity Committee and group of Martha Washington staff and residents and conducting initial research, the team agreed the building renaming proposal should honor a BIPOC woman who was a leader in the Portland community. The team felt these parameters would preserve the central role of women in the building's history and create an opportunity to recognize a lesser-known BIPOC Portland civic leader who worked to improve their community.

The team reached out to Emily Evans, Executive Director of the Women's Foundation of Oregon (which the Portland Women's Union later became) because of the central role of the Portland Women's Union in the building's history. Emily Evans supported the concept of renaming the building after a BIPOC woman.

The team solicited input from Dana Plautz, former second vice president of the Portland Women's Foundation and filmmaker who made a [documentary](#) about the history of the building and the Portland Women's Union.

The team conducted outreach to the following historians of Portland's Black and/or women's history and all were supportive of the idea of naming the Martha Washington Building after Katherine Gray.

- Kimberly Moreland, Moreland Resource Consulting, historian of Black Portland.
- Zachary Stocks, Executive Director, Oregon Black Pioneers.
- Tanya March, tour guide with Slabtown Tours, who compiled research on Katherine Gray on her blog.
- Janice Dilg, researcher and creator of the existing historical display at the Martha Washington, owner of HistoryBuilt.
- Kimberly Jensen, Chair, Department of History, Professor of History and Gender Studies, Western Oregon University.
- Jean Ward, Professor Emerita, Lewis & Clark College.
- Eliza Canty-Jones, Director of Community Engagement, Oregon Historical Society.
- Thomas Dublin, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, State University of New York at Binghamton.