

= Frank Dekum =

Frank Dekum ( November 5 , 1829 ? October 19 , 1894 ) was a prominent 19th century fruit merchant , banker , and real @-@ estate investor in Portland , Oregon . Born in Germany , Dekum emigrated to the north @-@ central U.S. with his family and as a young man went west in search of gold before starting a successful fresh @-@ fruit business in Portland . Prospering as a merchant , Dekum invested in real @-@ estate , banking , and an early railroad , was a president or board member of many of the city 's companies , and was one of 15 men named to Portland 's first municipal water committee .

Dekum involved himself in many building projects in downtown Portland . One of his structures , the Dekum Building , which served as headquarters for the city 's government in the 1890s , was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 . The Portland and Vancouver Railway , financed partly by Dekum , ran along the east side of the Willamette River from East Portland to the Columbia River . Dekum Street in northeast Portland is named after him .

Married to Fanny Reinig , Dekum fathered eight children . He was the president of the German Song Bird Society , which imported to Oregon many German songbirds . After suffering great financial loss during the Panic of 1893 , he died in 1894 .

= = Early life = =

Dekum was born in Deiderfeld , Rheinfalz , Germany , on November 5 , 1829 . He and his brother and four sisters emigrated to the United States to settle on a farm near Belleville , Illinois . The family later moved to St. Louis , Missouri , where both parents died . After serving as an apprentice confectioner in St. Louis , Dekum and a friend , Frederick Bickel , went gold prospecting in California and Idaho before settling in Portland .

= = From fruit to real estate = =

In 1853 , the two men established a fruit and confectionery store , Dekum & Bickel , which prospered for the next quarter @-@ century in downtown Portland . Amassing wealth from the " largest wholesale fresh @-@ fruit business in the Northwest " , Dekum joined " the frenzied real @-@ estate speculations of the early 1860s " , and his large holdings included several buildings that bore his name . In 1875 , he and Simeon Reed financed the city 's most expensive building of the time ; it was known as the Dekum and Reed Block .

Portland historian Joseph Gaston wrote , " It is an interesting and noteworthy fact that he was connected with the construction of every building in whole or in part between First and Third on Washington street ... " . These projects included the first large brick building on Front Street , the Gadsby and Commercial blocks , the Waldo Building , and in 1892 the Dekum Building .

The latter , at the southwest corner of Southwest Third Avenue and Washington Street , is eight stories high , was built entirely of Oregon materials , and cost \$ 300 @, @ 000 in 1892 dollars . The first three stories of the Romanesque structure are of rough @-@ cut sandstone ; the top five floors are of red brick and unglazed terracotta with floral designs . Decorative machicolations ( openings of the sort used in earlier eras for pouring pitch and dropping rocks on attackers ) appear in the parapet at the top of the building . For eight years starting in 1893 Portland 's government was headquartered in this structure , temporarily dubbed the Council Building . The exterior was renovated in 1987 , and the interior opened to the nearby Hamilton Building in the 1990s . The Dekum Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and is part of the Skidmore / Old Town Historic District .

= = Banks , companies = =

In 1880 Dekum helped establish the Portland Savings Bank , of which he was named president in 1886 , succeeding David P. Thompson . He helped organize the Commercial National Bank of

Portland and served as its president . ( The two banks occupied the same building and had overlapping directors , including John McCracken , George H. Williams , and Cyrus A. Dolph , as well as Dekum and Thompson . ) He was at various times president of Columbia Investment Company , Oregon Land and Investment Company , Columbia Fire and Marine Insurance Company , Portland and Vancouver Railway Company , Trinidad Asphalt & Paving Company , and the Portland Exposition Company . In 1885 , Dekum was one of 15 men named to the Portland Water Committee , empowered by the Oregon Legislative Assembly to acquire and operate a municipal water system for the city .

= = Portland and Vancouver Railway = =

In 1888 Dekum , Richard L. Durham , and John B. David built a narrow gauge railway , the Portland and Vancouver Railway , that began in what was then the separate city of East Portland and went north through the then @-@ separate city of Albina on the way to the Columbia River . The south end of the steam railway was at the east end of the Stark Street ferry between Portland and East Portland on the Willamette River . The north end of the line was at a landing on the Columbia that served ferries traveling between Oregon and Vancouver , Washington .

Dekum and Durham , through their Oregon Land and Development Company , invested in developing the Woodlawn District , which was near the railroad in Albina . Most of the railway route ran initially through " virgin timber and scattered clearings " , especially north of Albina , where " the country was quite primitive until the broad bottomlands of the Columbia were reached . " Because the land near the river was subject to annual flooding , the northernmost 8 @,@ 000 feet ( 2 @,@ 400 m ) of the line was elevated on trestles . In 1892 the line was sold to the Portland Consolidated Street Railway Company , which switched to a bigger gauge to match its other tracks and began to electrify the railway for trolleys .

= = Family , other interests = =

Dekum was married in 1859 to Fanny Reinig of St. Louis , with whom he had eight children . In Portland , they lived in a three @-@ story house , built in about 1864 , on a tract later defined by Northwest 13th and 14th avenues and Morrison and Yamhill streets , that was at the time well outside the city . The house featured staggered quoins at its corners , a three @-@ bay entrance porch , segmental arched windows , and a conservatory ( sun room ) on the south . Fanny died in 1877 .

President of the German Song Bird Society , Dekum contributed money to import German song birds , including thrushes , starlings , and nightingales , to Oregon . According to one report , the society brought a total of about 500 German birds to Oregon at various times and released many of them into the wild , mainly in Portland parks . Although birds from these early importations survived for years by some accounts , they all eventually disappeared . Dekum was also president of the German Aid Society of Portland .

= = Death and legacy = =

During the Panic of 1893 , when many banks failed , Dekum 's Portland Savings Bank barely survived . Portland historian E. Kimbark MacColl writes that among Portland bankers the banker who suffered the heaviest loss was Frank Dekum , who died in 1894 , partially from the strain of the depression . With David P. Thompson 's help , he had managed to salvage enough out of the wreckage of the Portland Savings Bank to leave an estate of over \$ 1 million , largely in downtown real estate ; his railway holdings had collapsed . Thompson , who had been president of the savings bank from 1880 to 1886 , had sold all his bank stocks before his appointment in 1891 as American Minister to Turkey . Upon his return in 1893 , he was appointed receiver for the bank .

Wells Fargo bought Dekum 's other bank , Commercial National Bank of Portland , in January 1894 . Dekum died on October 19 that year and was buried in Lone Fir Cemetery in southeast Portland .

Northeast Dekum Street in Portland 's Woodlawn neighborhood is named after him .