Back in the early 1900s when our neighborhoods were just taking shape, there were fewer than 200 cars in the entire state of Oregon. Think about that: in just over 100 years how much has changed. You can probably walk around a few blocks in your neighborhood and count 200 cars in just a few minutes.

In those days, Portland was filled with livery stables, which took care of the working horses that delivered everything from groceries to big blocks of ice in the days before refrigerators.

You can find clues to the horse and wagon days in our neighborhoods. And some neighbors and artists are bringing horses back to our streets. Toy horses, that is, tied up to the same tethering rings where carriages pulled by real live horses used to stand 100 years ago.

It’s time to go find some horses right in your own neighborhood while learning more about how horses helped make life work.
Food for Thought
Every commodity and supply that came to your house in the early days was delivered by horse and wagon: firewood, coal, ice, groceries, dry goods, laundry, building materials, parcel post packages. A page of classified ads in The Oregonian from 1900-1910 looks like the land of opportunity for horse-wagon delivery teams and people with strong backs. If you had a horse and wagon, you had a job.

In 1907 Portland City Council passed an ordinance requiring that new curbs in front of houses have “ring bolts” installed every 25 feet so delivery vehicles could be securely tied down to protect pedestrians and other wagons using the street. These rings weren’t some quaint design feature. They were designed with safety in mind, and they were the law. Today, you can still find these horse tethering rings on curbs in most of our older neighborhoods.

Over the years, some of the rings were taken out by the city, but neighbors protested saying the rings reminded them of our history. And then a few years back, some neighbors came up with an idea to celebrate the old horses by tying up tiny toy horses to the old tethering rings. Today, there’s quite a herd of tiny horses out there tethered to our old curbs

Activity Suggestions & Curiosities
1. Have a read through an article about why the tethering rings were required in the first place and how people have felt about them over the years. Be sure to read the actual city ordinance requiring the rings: [https://alamedahistory.org/2018/06/12/portlands-horse-tethering-rings/](https://alamedahistory.org/2018/06/12/portlands-horse-tethering-rings/)

2. Do you have horse tethering rings on your block? Are they 25 feet apart like the ordinance requires? Are they placed right in front of your house? At the bottom of the steps? Why might that be?

3. Draw a map of your block and show where the tethering rings are. If they aren’t in front of every house, why might that be?

4. Time to go for a walk. Bring a notepad or a camera and see how many tethered toy horses you can find. Take pictures (send us your favorites if you like and we’ll share them!).

5. Do you have a toy horse you could add to a tethering ring on your block?

Check out these other links:
Old film of mail delivery from the Library of Congress
It’s not northeast Portland, but it does give you an idea of what our landscape looked like around here, and the horses that delivered the things we needed:
[https://youtu.be/1LfQpG_31EM](https://youtu.be/1LfQpG_31EM)

Ice delivery wagon and kids
Again, not Portland but this :22 second clip helps us imagine a neighborhood ice delivery.

A fun video about the Portland Horse Project
[https://vimeo.com/34871153](https://vimeo.com/34871153)

Home History School is a collection of activities for kids of all ages to experience and connect with neighborhood history in Northeast Portland, Oregon. This is one of a dozen “lesson plans” on a variety of local topics. The collection—which we’re adding to each Monday this spring—can be found at [www.alamedahistory.org](http://www.alamedahistory.org). For more information or other ideas, contact Doug Decker, [doug@alamedahistory.org](mailto:doug@alamedahistory.org) / 503-901-5510.