



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649  
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 10/08

Name and Address of Property: Norton Building  
801 Second Avenue

Legal Description: Lots 5, 6, 7 and 8, Block 8, Town of Seattle, as laid out on the claims of C.D. Boren and A.A. Denny (commonly known as Boren & Denny's addition to the City of Seattle), according to the Plat thereof recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, Page 27, records of King County, Washington;

Except the westerly 9 feet of said Lots 5 and 8 heretofore condemned in District Court Cause No. 7092 for widening of First Avenue, as provided by Ordinance No. 1129 of the City of Seattle;

And except the easterly 12 feet of said Lots 6 and 7, condemned in District Court Cause No. 7097 for widening of Second Avenue, as provided by Ordinance No. 1107 of the City of Seattle;

Together with the west half of vacated alley adjoining said Lots 5 and 8 vacated by Ordinance No. 56715 of said City;

Together with the east half of vacated alley adjoining said Lots 6 and 7, vacated by Ordinance No. 56715 of said City.

Situate in the County of King, State of Washington.

At the public meeting held on January 2, 2008, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Norton Building at 801 Second Avenue, as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- C. It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, City, state or nation; and*
- D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and*

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The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

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- E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder; and*
- F. Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of sitting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the City.*

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Norton Building is directly associated with a crucial period (1950-1966) during which downtown commercial redevelopment began to occur after nearly thirty years of stagnation. However, compared with massive post-war suburban real estate development, relatively few new buildings were constructed in downtown Seattle until the late 1950s. Major modern downtown construction included the Public Safety Building (1951, destroyed), Seattle Public Library (1956-59, destroyed) and the Municipal Building (1959-61, destroyed), as well as the expansions of two major department stores. During this era commercial construction occurred at scattered downtown sites as several highly notable projects reflecting modern zoning changes and international architectural trends were built, including: the Norton Building (1958); the Logan Building (1959); the Washington Building (1960) and the IBM Building (1961-64). The Seattle World's Fair - Century 21 Exposition was held in 1962 and triggered the remodeling of older buildings and the construction of the Monorail, and tourist-oriented restaurants and motels. However, throughout this era older downtown buildings were demolished to make way for surface parking lots and garages and for interstate freeway construction.

The Norton Building is a highly significant example of International Style architectural design. It is widely recognized as Seattle's first modern office tower. At the time of its construction, it was considered a highly innovative example of modern building technology due to its composite steel and concrete structural system and curtain-wall design. Furthermore, it is believed to have been the first building over six stories in height constructed in the United States to incorporate pre-stressed and post-tensioned concrete structural members. It was designed by a notable local architecture firm, Bindon and Wright, in collaboration with the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM), a nationally recognized innovator in the design of modern highrise buildings. Myron Goldsmith, SOM structural engineer and one of Mies van der Rohe most distinguished students, played an influential role in its design.

### **Modern Architecture Movement - Historic Context**

Modernism is a broad term that is given to a range of design approaches in architecture. Generally, Modern architecture in the Pacific Northwest is defined by buildings constructed from about 1930 to 1970. Most historians can agree that Modern architecture was conceived as a reaction to the perceived chaos and eclecticism of the earlier 19th Century revival of historical forms. The Modern Movement began in Europe in the 1920s as an optimistic belief that science and the new technologies of industrialization would produce genuine "modern age" architecture of universal principles. Much of this revolutionary philosophy emanated

from a core group of young designers and artists in Europe such as Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier.

The evolution of Modern architecture began with the “International Style,” a term coined in 1932 by an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The influential exhibition highlighted aspects of European architecture of the 1920s which represented a new direction and attitude towards architectural form. The first principle, “Architecture as Volume,” dealt with the creation of space by floors of a columnar structure, which allowed for flexibility in plan. The second principle, concerning regularity rather than axuality, stemmed from the structural ordering of the building. The third principle mandated the avoidance of applied decoration, which was seen as an attempt to eliminate superficiality.

Despite the exhibition and recognition by the architectural community in the United States, these new design principles were limited by lingering provincial tastes and the debilitating impacts of the Depression. However, in the years following World War II, Modern architecture in the United States became a widespread ideological approach. Unprecedented economic prosperity, combined with a renewed availability of materials, new construction methods, and technical innovations, sparked a building boom across America, and Modern design reigned supreme. True to the origins of the Modern Movement, many mid-century architectural achievements were often experimental in their goal, using design to change the environment of everyday life.

Here in the Pacific Northwest, Oregon’s Pietro Belluschi and Paul Thiry in Seattle (known as the “father of modernism” in Washington), had already gained national recognition for designing significant Modern buildings before World War II. With the war over, the post-war economy and the population boomed in Washington State (jumping from 1.7 million in 1940 to 2.3 million in 1950, to 3.1 million by 1970). Capitalizing on the large demand for architectural designs during this time were a plethora of newly arrived young and eager architects who brought with them the latest architectural fashions and modes of thinking. In Washington, the group included architects such as Paul Hayden Kirk, Paul Thiry, Roland Terry, Robert B. Price, Alan Liddle, and Omer Mithun.

### **Norton Building History**

Completed in 1959, the 21-story Norton Building is recognized as the city’s first modern office tower. It was the first major highrise structure to be constructed in the city for nearly three decades after 1930 and was among Seattle’s earliest aluminum and glass curtain-walled office buildings. It is widely recognized as the city’s finest example of the International Style, due to the successful use of modern building technology and construction materials to express an ideal modern highrise building form. At the time of its construction, it was considered a highly innovative example of the use of technology due to its composite structural system and curtain-wall design, which was assembled from prefabricated and pre-glazed wall units. Reportedly, it was also the first building over six stories in height constructed in the United States to incorporate pre-stressed or pre-tensioned concrete structural members.

The Norton Building was initially conceived as a highrise office tower addition to the neighboring Exchange Building; early drawings and planning studies referred to the project as the “United Exchange Building.” The original developers and owners of the project were variously identified in press clippings as the United Exchange Building Corporation, the Metropolitan Building Corporation and as the Northwest Building Corporation. However, the project was ultimately undertaken as an independent construction project by the Northwest Building Corporation and the marketing and management of the new office building was handled by the Metropolitan Building Corporation.

The Norton Building was designed by Seattle architects Bindon & Wright in consultation with the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM). Leonard Bindon and John LeBaron Wright formed the architectural firm of Bindon & Wright in 1956 and quickly began to receive many large commissions. They were proponents of the Modern style and in 1956-57 had designed the early glass curtain-wall Seattle City Light Building (demolished). SOM was the nation’s preeminent practitioner of highrise design during this era. Elliott F. Brown served as SOM partner-in-charge, Alan S. Robinson, as SOM project manager and Myron Goldsmith, as the SOM project structural engineer. Myron Goldsmith is believed to have played an influential role in the design of the Norton Building. Goldsmith studied with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's and became one Mies’s most distinguished students. It is not clearly understood how the architectural team was selected.

From the outset, the concept for the building was for use entirely as flexible rented office space that could be marketed for its natural light and views of Puget Sound. The design program called for a tower held away from the Exchange Building but interconnected to it at the lobby level. Thus, rental spaces at all four sides of the tower had access to natural light and views and the exterior elevations could be uniform in design, materials and construction method.

Thus, the highrise office tower was separated from the 23-story Exchange Building by a 47-foot wide channel of open space and interconnected at the Second Avenue level by a one-story entrance lobby with landscaped plazas to east and west sides of the lobby pavilion. The concept for the design of the Norton Building required very few changes or alterations to the Exchange Building and did not significantly impact light, ventilation or views at its south elevation. Furthermore, upon close observation the window modules and other proportions of the Norton Building – especially evident along the First Avenue elevation - appear to have been predicated on the bay spacing and window proportions of the adjacent Exchange Building.

In order to maximize flexible office rental space, the structural design was developed so that there would be no internal structural columns. The basic solution involved a steel column-girder system and high strength concrete beams spanning 70’ wide bays. An initial design concept proposed an external diagonal steel bracing system due to anticipated earthquake and wind loads; it called for a series of triangular and diamond pattern external trusses. A preliminary model was built; however, after additional studies it was determined that under lateral forces this rigid structure could tear apart. Thus, the structural design was refined to include the steel and concrete shear walls at the service core and the crisp rectangular form of

the office tower that ascends elegantly on tall slender lobby level columns above the monumental base.

The innovative curtainwall construction utilized some 1,792 pre-glazed spandrel and window panel units. All of the panels were locally prefabricated and shop glazed and assembled off-site by Fentron Industries. The design and pre-fabrication methods allowed for the curtain wall units to be installed without scaffolding. Each floor level of the tower from the second through the sixteenth floor is devoted to office space designed in a U-shaped configuration around the service core, equaling some 200,000 square feet of rentable office space. The tower was designed to maximize open and flexible office space for rental purposes; due to its innovative structural system, it is essentially column free on all three sides of the service core. The design also provided for movable office partitions and flexible ducting systems between floors; thus, tenants had the ability to arrange their offices to suit their specific special needs and requirements. This included flexible locations within five-foot modules for telephone outlets; supply and exhaust of heat and air conditioning; in-ceiling light fixtures and electrical service. The module system was also designed to accommodate ten-foot minimum partitioned office cubicles; the movable partition system designed for the building continued to be marketed and widely used for other highrise office buildings.

The design of the Norton Building also included other highly modern amenities including the longest escalators outside of New York City that served to connect the First and Second Avenue entrance lobbies. The building was also the first Seattle highrise building designed to include internal underground parking facilities – for 300 cars - within the building and a major off-street pedestrian plaza.

In June 1957, permits were issued for the demolition of two buildings at the corner of Second Avenue and Columbia Street, including the Haller Building (1890, Elmer H. Fisher). However, actual construction work on the new “office building” – which remained unnamed until early 1958 - did not begin for another year.

Dated June 2, 1958, an extensive and detailed set of architectural drawings - 42 sheets – for “The Norton Building” was submitted to the City of Seattle for building permit purposes. All of the sheets include the signatures of both John Wright and Leonard Bindon in the title block; however, all of the drawings bear only the signed architect stamp of John Wright. The permit application also included 16 sheets of electrical drawings, 24 sheets of mechanical drawings and 32 sheets of structural drawings. All of the structural drawings were signed and stamped by Myron Goldsmith, the principal consulting architect/engineer for SOM.

The Norton Building was constructed between June 1958 and October 1959 by the Howard S. Wright Construction Company for the Northwest Building Corporation at a cost of \$12 million. During this period, two highrise office towers in San Francisco that were also designed by SOM were under construction, the Crown-Zellerbach Building and the John Hancock Building. It was named in honor of Matthew G. Norton, a pioneer lumberman and the grandfather of Norton Clapp - the building owner (Northwest Building Corporation) and chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Building Corporation, the building manager.

A cornerstone laying ceremony event took place on September 30, 1959 at which time the inscribed granite plaque that states “Norton Building 1959” was laid. It was attended by Alan Robinson, the SOM project manager; Leonard Bindon; Mrs. Norton Clapp; Howard S Wright; and, Norton Clapp. A sealed metal time capsule was also positioned in the niche and cemented in place. It is said to include photographs of construction process and views of the harbor from atop the building; a copy of Norton Clapp’s dedication address; a photograph of Mathew G. Norton; a memorial scroll in recognition of the contributions of SOM partner Elliot F. Brown and others involved with the project; original proofs of newspaper articles about the project; and, an illustrated promotional brochure for the Norton Building.

The Norton Building was formally opened to the public in a dedication ceremony held on October 30, 1959 and received local publicity. The event included “Prevue 21” a scientific and space exhibition that show cased models of the Century 21 Exposition site, a videophone for “face-to-face telephoning,” a model space capsule which “may carry a man to the orbit the earth” and a model of a nuclear-powered merchant vessel built for the U.S. government. The Canadian Bank of Commerce was the initial ground floor tenant and the Harbor Club was established on the top floor.

The original design of the Norton Building also incorporated public art. The building owners commissioned two artists from Washington State to create major pieces to illustrate the themes of progress and the future. A tall bronze sculpture was created by artist/craftsman Harold Balaza; it used machine and manmade forms in order to convey the region’s burgeoning economy. It appears to have been originally placed in the plaza area at the west side of the lobby; however, the current location is not known. A second public art piece is the cast stone sculpture created by Philip McCracken entitled “Restless Bird.” It was created to symbolize the restless awakening of the Pacific Northwest with all of its natural resources. McCracken (b.1928) earned a B.A. from the University of Washington in 1953 and then served as an apprentice in England to famed sculptor Henry Moore, with whom he formed a lasting friendship. McCracken returned to Seattle in 1955 and settled on Guemes Island; he is widely recognized as one of the region’s leading Northwest School sculptors, well-known especially for natural subject bronze sculptures including a variety of birds and owls, and has been widely exhibited. “Restless Bird” was originally displayed in the main pedestrian plaza, where it remains in place. The inclusion of contemporary sculpture as public art and as part of a commercial building design was considered a modern innovation; it was promoted as a unique and desirable feature of the building.

The University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections retains an exquisite original copy of an illustrated brochure for the Norton Building, presumably the same publication that was added to the time capsule niche. It is a large (9” x 14”) format promotional piece with a color-lithographed rendering of the building on the cover. It includes artistic, hand illustrated drawings of the plaza areas, parking access/egress and furnished office spaces, as well as a building section and standard floor plans. Inspiring text describes the building as “Seattle’s handsomest and most efficient office tower” and its many amenities. A companion small folded mailer appears to have been published as part of the brochure; it includes a typical office floor level plan, color renderings of the building and a map showing the “ideally located (Norton Building) in the center of Seattle’s Downtown Financial District.”

During and immediately after the completion of construction, the Norton Building was recognized for its architectural character by numerous local and major national publications. Architectural Record described the innovative design and compared it favorably to three contemporary highrise office tower designs in an April 1959 article, “Four Office Buildings: Four Different Schemes.” Its unique structural system was highlighted in the Architectural Record issue of March 1960 in an article entitled “Punctured Prestressed Beams Frame West Coast Skyscraper.” Western Architect and Engineer published a fully illustrated and in-depth article “Seattle’s Sophisticated Tower” about the Norton Building in May 1960 as did Architectural Record in July 1960.

In 1962, Victor Steinbrueck – a consummate observer and recorder of Seattle changing cityscape – wrote in Seattle Cityscape that:

“The elegant new Norton Building is a sharp and definite addition to the city’s skyline with its orderly aluminum and black glass skin. It compares well with recent high buildings built anywhere and seems to approach the ultimate in curtain wall design. From street level, reflections of nearby older buildings lend enjoyable contrasts. The luxurious off-street entrance court with its art work lends a welcome quality to the vicinity, suggesting the need for open spaces in the central (business district) area.”

The Norton Building appears to have remained essentially unchanged until the early 1980s when a project was undertaken (designed by WGHT Architects, the successor firm to Bindon & Wright) to expand the banking lobby for the Canadian Imperial Bank, the long-time ground floor tenant. This project created rental space to the west side of the main lobby; the west plaza and the reflecting pool were eliminated. Due to this extension the distinctive transparent character of the glass-box main lobby was lost. A major \$3.5 million renovation project was subsequently undertaken in 1983; it was the first major renovation of a modern era building in downtown Seattle. The project was designed by architects Loschky, Marquart & Nesholm with landscape architect Thomas Berger and built by Robert E. Bayley Construction Co. The work was intended to enhance, rather than detract from the original building design. It included major upgrades to the life-safety systems and the parking garage and alterations/modernization of the First and Second Avenue lobbies and the pedestrian plaza at Second Avenue. The Philip McCracken bird sculpture was also refurbished and reset in the building entry. However, the main entrance lobby was enlarged toward Second Avenue and the distinctive form of the original lobby pavilion and its appearance from Second Avenue were significantly altered.

### **Norton Clapp (1906-1995)**

Norton Clapp was a prominent Seattle businessman who was instrumental in the development of the Norton Building and the building was named in honor of his grandfather, Matthew G. Norton, for whom Norton Clapp was also named. Mr. Clapp’s involvement in Northwest business ventures, civic groups, and philanthropic work is well-known; his role in Seattle real estate development is equally significant. Aside from the development of the

Norton Building in 1959, Clapp is also well-known for having been one of the five original investors in the Space Needle.

Matthew Norton Clapp was born on April 15, 1906 in Pasadena, California. The Clapp family was already one of great wealth and financial success. His grandfather, Matthew G. Norton, was a pioneer lumberman from Winona, Minnesota, who, along with his brother James and their cousin William Laird, founded the Laird - Norton Company in 1855. The business proved to be very lucrative and the firm subsequently helped finance Frederick Weyerhaeuser's initial purchase of 900,000 acres of Washington timberlands in 1900. The Laird - Norton Company was one of the original investors in what became the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company. Other family enterprises included Potlatch Forests, Boise Payette Lumber Company (Boise Cascade), and Northwest Paper Company.

Norton Clapp attended Occidental College in Pasadena, graduating in 1927 and then received a law degree from the University of Chicago in 1929. While attending the University of Chicago, he began his investment career buying stock in the Milwaukee Railroad in 1927. After graduating law school, he decided to sell the stock in order to avoid carrying the valuable certificates back home to Pasadena with him. Fortunately, Clapp was able to make a decent profit from the sale shortly before the stock market crash and was left with a sizeable fund from which he began his own career.

Clapp attempted to establish a law career in Tacoma, however due to the onset of the Great Depression he did not have much success. He then began to take part in several different business ventures including gold mining and the marketing of a new electric iron before finally joining the family business, the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, as corporate secretary. In 1938, he began his career in real-estate development by developing the Lakewood Center in Tacoma, touted as one of the first shopping centers west of the Mississippi River.

After a brief stint working in the Navy's Convoy and Routing Office in Seattle during World War II, Clapp returned to Weyerhaeuser. In 1947, he replaced his late father as director of the Company, and in 1960 became its president. Clapp was extremely influential in initiating the expansion of Weyerhaeuser from a primarily Northwest company into the South and the Midwest and later throughout the world. In the six years that Clapp served as president, the number of employees increased by 10,000, the net income of the company more than doubled, and Weyerhaeuser acquired plants and operations in 17 different countries.

After stepping down in 1966, Clapp continued to pursue various business interests—remaining chairman of the board of Weyerhaeuser until 1970 and serving as a director of Safeco Insurance Company, Metropolitan Building Company and Seattle First National Bank. He also pursued a variety of real-estate endeavors in the Puget Sound region, the most notable of which being the Space Needle. After the King County Council refused to finance the construction of the structure for the 1962 Century 21 - Seattle World's Fair, Clapp was among the five private investors who financed the project.

Clapp was generous with his time and money in support of several charitable causes. Particularly among them was the Medina Foundation, an organization founded in 1949 that provided more than \$48 million to a variety of education and social service agencies in the Puget Sound Region. Chief among Clapp's other primary causes was the Boy Scouts of America; he held several administrative positions at the state and regional level and served as national president in 1971. Among his other most notable philanthropies, Clapp also served on the board of trustees of the University of Puget Sound for 62 years, serving as chairman from 1967 to 1986. In 1973, he received an award for his humanitarian work from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, an honor Clapp himself was most proud of. Clapp died at his Medina estate in 1995 at age 89. He left behind an estate estimated to be valued at about \$450 million, making him one of the wealthiest people in America at that time.

### **Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM) and Myron Goldsmith**

The Norton Building was designed by Seattle architects Bindon & Wright in consultation with the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM). SOM was the nation's preeminent practitioners of highrise design during this era. Elliott F. Brown served as SOM partner-in-charge, Alan S. Robinson, as SOM project manager and Myron Goldsmith, the SOM project structural engineer.

Myron Goldsmith (1918-1996) is believed to have played an influential role in the design of the Norton Building. Goldsmith was born in Chicago and in 1939 received his bachelor's degree in architecture from Chicago's Armour Institute of Technology (subsequently Illinois Institute of Technology, IIT), where he studied with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and became one of Mies's most distinguished students. Goldsmith worked for various architecture firms in Chicago until 1944, when he joined the Army Corps of Engineers. Upon his discharge in 1946, he returned to Chicago and began to work in Mies's office, while he also finished his Master's thesis ["The Tall Building: The Effects of Scale"] at IIT under Mies, who also served as his thesis advisor. While working with Mies for seven years, Goldsmith was involved in the design of the Farnsworth House and projects on the IIT campus. Inspired by the work of Pier Luigi Nervi, Goldsmith was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in 1953 and subsequently studied with Nervi at the University of Rome. Nervi was the finest structural engineer of the era having innovated the use of pre-stressed concrete to design long-span buildings – an elegant expression of structural form that was also applicable to steel frame highrise building design.

After returning to the United States in 1955, Goldsmith joined the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. Founded in Chicago in 1936, by the 1950s SOM had become the nation's preeminent practitioners of highrise design. Goldsmith remained active through the San Francisco office until 1958 when he returned to Chicago. He became a General Partner in the firm in 1967. Goldsmith retired in 1983 having distinguished himself as a master of both architecture and engineering. His stated purpose was to express the structure of the architecture concept; thus, to fully express rather than hide the structural elements and the underlying design of the building.

Among his most prized designs are the United Airline Hanger and Flight Kitchen (1958) at the San Francisco International Airport, the McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope (1962) at the

Kitt Peak Observatory in Arizona, the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum in Oakland, California and the unbuilt Ruck-a-Chucky Bridge proposed near Auburn, California (1978); all of which are characterized by sculptural expressions of form and function. Goldsmith maintained an active graduate-level teaching and lecturing position at IIT – exploring further possibilities for high rise design - throughout his career and was honored with numerous pretentious awards and exhibitions. He was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 1972.

The Norton Building follows in style and precedent New York City's dramatic Lever Building, one of SOM's better known and ground breaking architectural works. Constructed in 1952, the Lever House along with its contemporary, the United Nations Secretariat Building, was the first curtain wall designed building in New York City and is widely considered an icon of modernism and the International Style. The distinct rectilinear form of the Norton Building set on a horizontal plaza atop a plinth - reflects the direct influence of Miesian esthetics and Goldsmith's pivotal role in its design.

### **Bindon & Wright**

The Seattle architectural firm of Bindon & Wright served as local associate architects on the design and construction of the Norton Building. Leonard William Bindon (1899-1980) was born in London on June 27, 1899. He earned a Bachelors degree in Architecture from the University of Washington in 1924. He worked for Seattle architect Robert C. Reamer from 1925 to 1926 before moving to New York City to obtain a Masters in Architecture from Columbia University in 1927. Bindon worked in New York for the next several years and returned to the West Coast in 1933, where he practiced for one year with Seattle architect Paul Thiry. In 1935, Bindon established his own architecture practice in Bellingham and quickly became very well-known in that city. His work during this period included the Bellingham City Hall (1939), the Music Building at Western Washington College (now known as Western Washington University), and several large Art Deco/Streamline Modern style homes in the Edgemoor neighborhood.

With the onset of World War II, Bindon left his private practice to serve in the Army from 1940-45. While in the military, he designed several buildings for the US Army including several warehouse buildings constructed at the Auburn Army Depot. After his service, Bindon returned to Seattle where he joined the architectural firm of Charles H. Bebb & John Paul Jones; however Bebb had died in 1942. Bindon became a partner with Jones forming Jones & Bindon sometime after 1945. Upon Jones' retirement in 1956, Bindon and John LeBaron Wright formed the architectural firm of Bindon & Wright. The partnership began to receive many large commissions that were executed in the Modern style. Among their first commissions was the glass curtain wall Seattle City Light Building (1957, demolished). Their skill in using this new technology led them to partner with the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill to design the Norton Building. Several large projects followed including the downtown branch of the Seattle Public Library (1960, demolished), an addition to the Suzzallo Library on the University of Washington Campus (1963), the library at Pacific Lutheran University (1966), and Seattle Fire Station No. 40 (1965), as well as numerous schools for the Seattle, Bellevue, and Ferndale districts. However, the Norton Building remains their most notable work.

John LeBaron Wright (1916-?) was born in North Dakota and received his architectural degree from the University of Illinois in 1941. During World War II, Wright was employed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in South America, and subsequently served in the Marine Corps. After working briefly with the Chicago architectural firm of Freedman, Altshuler & Sincere, Wright joined the firm of Bindon & Jones in Seattle in 1947. Upon Jones' retirement in 1956, Wright became a partner in Bindon & Wright.

Throughout the 1960s, several of Bindon & Wright's projects received awards and recognition. These included the Bethlehem Pacific Coast Steel Corporation Office Building (1960)—a Seattle Chapter AIA Honor Award winner, and the Parke-Davis Company Seattle Sales Office Building (1965) for which they received an award of merit from the Seattle Chapter of the AIA. Other notable projects include three buildings for NW Bell Telephone Management System that garnered awards from the Bell System Architectural Review in 1968. Architect Elton C. Gildow joined the firm of Bindon & Wright as a new partner in 1968, which then became Bindon Wright & Partners. Other partners soon joined the firm, including George Hartman and Clark Teegarden. The firm became known as Wright, Gildow, Hartman, Teegarden Architects and Planners (WGHT) in 1980.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **Site, Setting and Urban Context**

The Norton Building is a particularly prominent 21-story modern office building located on a steeply sloping 119' x 235' site along the entire southern half of the city block between First and Second Avenue at Columbia Street. The Norton Building is considered to be Seattle's finest example of the International Style and reflects the direct design influences of Mies van der Rohe. The building design was developed to accommodate the steeply sloping site; thus, the 17-story office tower and one-story main entrance lobby are oriented toward Second Avenue; the tower and lobby rest on a monumental building base that encompasses the four-story change in height between First Avenue and Second Avenue.

The Norton Building shares the remainder of the city block with two other highly distinctive commercial buildings: the 23-story Exchange Building (1929, John Graham, Sr.), one of Seattle's most distinctive Art Deco highrise buildings; and the two-story, Classical Revival style Bank of California (1923, John Graham, Sr.). The Norton Building is functionally interconnected to the Exchange Building.

Directly across Second Avenue to the east and southeast are two other distinctive and low-scale historic bank buildings: the Seattle national bank (United Way Building, 1921) and the Seattle Trust & Savings bank (now used as a private fitness club, 1906/1922). Within a one block distance to the east on Columbia Street and south along Second Avenue are three highly significant historic properties: the Chamber of Commerce Building (1924, Harlan Thomas with Schack, Young and Myers); the Dexter-Horton Bank Building (1922, John Graham, Sr.) and the Hoge Building (1909-1911, Bebb & Mendel). A newly-constructed highrise office tower and a 1960s-era parking garage are located to the south side of

Columbia Street. Another significant historic property - the six-story Colman Building (1889, 1904, and 1930) is located directly across First Avenue to the west.

The Norton Building is highly visible from various view points and is visually prominent due to its contrasting scale and distinct design character in relationship to nearby and adjacent properties; it is an easily identifiable visual feature of the immediate neighborhood and contributes to the distinctive urban quality and identity of the downtown commercial core.

### **Current Exterior Appearance**

The 17-story office tower measures approximately 70' x 210' and the four-story monumental base covers the entire site, measuring approximately 119' x 235 feet. The monumental base is clad with variegated polished black granite with pink and white highlights. The tower essentially occupies the southern half of the site. The formal building entry is via a pedestrian plaza and main entrance lobby that is set back from Second Avenue at the northern side of the tower. The face of the curtain-wall tower aligns with the Columbia Street property line but it is set back approximately ten feet from First Avenue and Second Avenue. The crisp rectangular form of the office tower rises elegantly on slender lobby-level columns that are metal-clad. At the base of the tower a glass box "banking hall" rental space is set back under the tower shaft. This space is surrounded on three sides by a narrow open plaza level. The finish-floor to finish-floor height at the tower base is 24' - 8" while the standard floor height between all of the upper floor levels is 13' - 2".

Due to the sloping site three levels of parking and a mechanical equipment level were designed to be housed within the building base. Garage access/egress driveways and a pedestrian lobby (with escalator access to the Second Avenue level lobby) are located at First Avenue. Building service/delivery bay openings are also located at Columbia Street. The base is entirely clad with polished black granite with pink/white accents that is only penetrated by service openings and air intake openings (tall narrow vertical slots some 20 feet above street level at First Avenue) and is monumental in character.

*Structural System:* The building has a composite structural steel and concrete construction system using innovative pre-stressed concrete and long span modular concrete members. Four transverse structural steel column-girder frames are repeated at each of the upper sixteen floor levels with the structure divided into three 70-foot longitudinal (east-west) bays and two 35-foot transverse (north-south) bays per floor level. Pre-cast and pre-stressed concrete beams span 70 feet – the full width of the building - at each floor level and support a 6" thick, poured in-place concrete slab floor system. The structural system was designed to use 4' - 2" deep punctured and pre-stressed beams and pre-cast concrete technology in order to achieve 9' high interior ceiling heights. Modified concrete I-beams were pre-cast with about fifteen openings (of various sizes and shapes) incorporated into the beam webs so that mechanical ducts and other building utilities could pass through the beams rather than under the structural frame.

The design of the beams was also dictated largely by the desire to create floor plates without interior columns and exposed framing members. Beams are placed at 10' - 0" on center and span 70' between transverse girders at each bay of the upper sixteen floor levels supported

entirely by the steel perimeter frame. It was possible to reduce the beam size and depth to a minimum by using innovative pre-stressed and post-tensioned concrete members and lightweight “haydite” concrete for the floor slabs.

The walls of the service core at the north side of the central longitudinal bay function to absorb earthquake forces. The longitudinal core wall is a steel truss bent combined with a reinforced concrete shear wall to absorb lateral forces and the end core walls are reinforced concrete and rigid steel shear frame construction that absorb transverse lateral forces. The floors act as horizontal diaphragms.

At the lobby level of the office tower the structural columns are exposed; however, they are clad with aluminum plates treated with a special anodizing process.

*Curtain Wall:* The office tower is unique due to its innovative curtainwall construction utilizing some 1,792 pre-glazed spandrel and window panel units. The typical curtainwall panels are (1) dark blue-gray spandrels of opaque tempered glass backed by an insulated metal pan within anodized aluminum frames and (2) window panels of grey heat-absorbing glass within anodized aluminum frames. All of the panels were locally prefabricated and shop glazed and assembled off-site by Fentron Industries in Ballard; thus, they were installed as units and no scaffolding was required. Window and wall components are bolted rather than welded together. Frame jambs using ¼-inch aluminum sections were sealed and bolted to permanently form mullions, which act as continuous accordion-like pleats in the exterior walls creating repetitious strong vertical grid that corresponds to the 5-foot interior module grid. Incorporated into the mullions are guide slots for window washing equipment.

*Service Core and Office Spaces:* The service core is located within the building tower at the north side of the central longitudinal and interconnects all floor levels within the base and the tower. At the three parking levels, the service core is located at the center of each of the floor plates since they are twice the size of the tower floor plates. The service core houses eight elevators, two exit stairwells, two large mechanical/utility shafts, restroom facilities, storage and service closets; all of which are placed symmetrically around a central elevator lobby.

Each floor level of the tower from the second through the sixteenth floor is devoted to office space designed in a U-shaped configuration around the service core. The tower was designed to maximize open and flexible office space for rental purposes; thus due to the innovative structural system it is essentially column free on all three sides of the service core. Because the building was designed to maximize rental space and adaptability to various office tenants the floor plate was specifically designed and organized into five foot square modules; thus, being able to comfortably accommodate the typical office set-up with a five foot wide desk. Each module was laid out such that all utilities (supply and exhaust of heat and air conditioning; in- ceiling light fixtures and electrical outlets) could be efficiently supplied. The module system was also designed to accommodate ten foot minimum partitioned office cubicles that could be assembled using movable partitions; the partitions were specifically designed and manufactured for the building

A glass box rental space at the base of the tower is slightly set back and under the tower shaft. This two-story rental space has a mezzanine level and is surrounded on three sides by a narrow open plaza level; since construction it has continuously housed a banking institution. Original tile paving remains in place in the plaza areas to the east, south and west under the tower shaft. The top floor level was planned and built to serve as a downtown businessmen's club, purposes for which it continues to be used. Two elevator and cooling tower penthouses that measure approximately 71' x 36' are located above the 17th floor level.

*Entrance Lobby and Pedestrian Plaza:* The original main entrance lobby wing and the original off-street pedestrian plaza to the east and west sides of the main lobby have been remodeled and altered to some degree, as described below. An original cast stone sculpture entitled "Restless Bird" that was created by Philip McCracken and specifically commissioned for the Norton Building is located in the pedestrian plaza off Second Avenue. A simple inscribed granite plaque that states "Norton Building 1959" is located at the east face of the SE corner of the monumental base on Second Avenue.

### **Non-Historic Exterior Alterations**

The original main lobby was a one-story glass box that measured approximately 40' x 45'; it was roughly centered with the service core at the north side of the tower. The lobby interior included escalators interconnected to the small First Avenue level entrance lobby and double doors that directly interconnected the lobby with the adjacent Exchange Building. Access to the rental space (banking lobby) at the base of the tower was via a set of double doors at the south end of the elevator lobby. A distinctive original feature of the lobby was its transparency; both the east and west walls of the lobby were glazed and the original west plaza area with a reflecting pool and sculptural feature was visible through the main lobby and from pedestrian plaza.

During the early 1980s the west wall of the glass box was removed and the interior was expanded westward to create additional office space for the bank tenant. The west plaza with the reflecting pool and tile-clad planters were eliminated; the footprint of the main lobby/banking lobby wing was expanded westward and it now aligns with the original west wall at the base of the tower. Due to this extension the distinctive transparent character of the glass-box lobby wing was significantly altered.

In 1983, the entrance plaza and main lobby were further altered with the addition of landscaping features and various interior alterations intended to reduce the transparency and openness of the original plaza area and the adjacent banking lobby. Alterations included the removal of original tile paving, planters and flooring and the installation of non-skid granite paving and flooring within the pedestrian plaza and main lobby area. The east wall was reconstructed approximately ten feet to the east in order to enlarge the lobby and modern stainless steel and glass revolving doors were installed to replace the original recessed glass vestibule. This work also included the installation of matching polished rose-colored granite cladding at the north wall of the plaza area and extending it along the north wall of the lobby interior. The original glass-box lobby pavilion was one-story in height with a flat roof and had a distinctive low flat form that clearly differentiated it from the Norton Building office tower and the Exchange building. The eastward extension involved the addition of high

mezzanine level window, nearly doubling the height of the east wall and aligning it with the bottom of the tower shaft. The original “Norton Building” appears to have been reinstalled above the new entry doors; however, the form of the original lobby pavilion and its appearance from Second Avenue were significantly altered.

The plaza was updated with the construction of two steel trellises with ivy plantings located at each side of the plaza. The trellis at the south side of the plaza functions to limit public access to the plaza areas at the base of the tower. New rose-color granite benches and planter boxes were also installed. “Restless Bird” remains at its original location in the pedestrian plaza. Two new granite and stainless steel building identification pylons were placed near the Second Avenue pedestrian entryway.

In 1982, major mechanical and electrical upgrades were also made in order to bring the building up to current life-safety regulations and the garage areas were renovated. Reportedly in the early 1990s, glazing members in the curtain wall units were replaced with more energy efficient members that closely matched the originals. This work did not alter the exterior appearance of the office tower.

### **Interior Features and/or Finishes**

Despite extensive modernization and remodeling work affecting the main entrance lobby, small portions of original and intact interior finishes and features appear to remain in place. The main lobby retains escalators at the original locations and a direct entryway to the Exchange Building. The most distinctive feature is polished Alaskan white marble cladding at the south wall and within the elevator vestibule. An original wall clock and an elevator operation panel also remain in use. There are likely to be other intact original interior features and finishes at upper floor levels; however, these areas are used for private office purposes and are not generally accessible to the public.

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***The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:***

The exterior of the building and the site.

Issued: January 10, 2008

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City Historic Preservation Officer

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