



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue · 4th floor · Seattle, Washington 98104 · (206) 684-0228

LPB 172/95

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: Seattle Times Building
1120 John Street

Legal Description: Lots 7 through 12 in Block 110, D. T. Denny's Fifth Addition to North Seattle, as per plat recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, Page 202, records of King County; and together with those portions of the Donation Claim of D.T. Denny and Louisa Denny, his wife, and Government Lot 7 in the southeast quarter of Section 30, Township 25 North, Range 4 East, W.M., lying westerly of Fairview Avenue North, as condemned in King Country Superior Court Cause No. 204496, as provided by Ordinance No. 51975, and described as that portion lying southerly of Thomas Street as conveyed by deed recorded under Recording No. 2103211, northerly of John Street, and easterly of the alley in said Block 110; and together with the vacated alley in Block 110 of said Plat of D.T. Denny's Fifth Addition, vacated under Seattle Ordinance No. 89750; situate in the City of Seattle, County of King, State of Washington.

At the public hearing held on August 2, 1995, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Seattle Times Building 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*

- D. *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction*

- E. *It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder*

Description

The 1930-31 Seattle Times plant consisted of three units: an office building, printing plant and garage, all of which were designed by architect Robert C. Reamer. The original two-story, 135' X 68' office building portion of this complex was constructed between June 1930 and March 1931. It was constructed in conjunction with the adjacent extant printing plant building, and a garage structure that was demolished ca.1949. The original office and industrial complex was situated at the northwest corner of Fairview Avenue and John Street and extended northward on the half-block to Thomas Street. The office building was oriented southward, toward the business district and the printing plant and garage were oriented toward Fairview Avenue. Since 1947, the original complex has been repeatedly altered, expanded and modernized.

The original office building is constructed of reinforced concrete and clad with cream-colored Indiana limestone above a granite base. The original south elevation or main facade consists of the central entrance vestibule and the three window bays symmetrically placed to each side. Facade ornament is limited to decorative cast aluminum panels at the window spandrels, wide piers with shallow flutes and simple cresting at the parapet edge. The words "Seattle Times" are cut into the stone and centered above the original main entrance. The entrance features particularly handsome aluminum grillwork decorated with octagons, florals, spirals and wave motifs. This entrance grillwork is considered to be one of the finest examples of decorative metalwork in the city. On each side of the entrance vestibule, limestone panels are carved in bas relief with distinctive ornamental floral patterns. The original ornate pendant-type lantern fixture remains in place within the entrance vestibule. Windows are grouped in a series of four per bay on the south elevation and five per bay on the east elevation. The original window sash has been replaced with compatible newer materials. The original lobby walls and floors are identified as a light-tan Bottichino marble and remain in place. It is assumed that no other character-defining original historic building fabric remains in the lobby area.

The design of the Seattle Times office building is distinguished by features derived from Art Deco and Moderne styles. The design emphasized symmetrical massing and proportions drawn from Beaux Arts classicism, however executed with minimal ornamentation. This mode of "starved classicism" was promoted by Paul Phillippe Cret, an influential classicist and educator at the University of Pennsylvania during the 1920s and 30s. The design of the Seattle Times Building demonstrates architect Robert C. Reamer's mastery of these design modes.

The original 1930-31 office building portion of the Seattle Times complex remains predominantly intact with the exception of a 1947 addition; the south elevation of the office building was extended two window bays to the west by the addition in 1947. This addition was designed by W.Henry Fey and is compatible in character and detail to the original facade design. A new "The Seattle Times" electric neon sign was also installed above the main entrance. In 1967, a major addition designed to house a new pressroom and the classified advertising department was made to the west of the expanded office building. This addition

was further modernized in 1979. A back-lit plastic sign with a digital readout and clock has also been attached to the southeast corner of the building.

The original six-bay portion of the original 135' x 172' printing plant building is adjacent and interconnected to the office building. The plant building is a three-story concrete structure, but due to the northward-sloping street grade, it shares a common roof line with the office building. The printing plant was designed to harmonize with the office building although it was executed in a simpler and more utilitarian manner. The window pattern and bay spacing are similar, however the architectural details and construction materials are modest and utilitarian in character. Original window sash has been replaced along the east elevation of the building. A new plant addition including a new pressroom wing was added to the northern end of the original printing plant building in 1949. This addition extended the east elevation northward by three window bays. This addition was designed by architect David H. Fey and is compatible in character with the original six-bay design. A new paper receiving platform was also constructed as part of this expansion and the original 1931 garage building was demolished. The remainder of the complex is generally utilitarian in character. The other major modern additions, while basically compatible with the original design, are not considered to be architecturally or historically significant. New press equipment was also installed in the facility in 1954, 1956 and 1964. In 1963-64, further building additions were again made to the northern and western portions of the old printing plant structure.

Statement Of Significance

The original complex was constructed for the Blethen Corporation, by Teufel & Carlson Builders according to plans prepared by architect R. C. Reamer. Extensive news articles regarding the construction of the new facilities at Fairview Avenue and the relocation of The Seattle Times operation from Times Square were included in *The Seattle Times*, March 1, 1931, and March 15, 1931. *The Architect and Engineer*, (Vol. 105, No.3) included a fully illustrated feature article regarding the design of the office building and plant in June 1931. Seattle Department of Construction and Land Use (DCLU) microfilm records include fairly poor quality copies of the original architectural drawings prepared by R. C. Reamer. DCLU microfilm records include complete copies of the original *City of Seattle - Department of Buildings, Application and Building Permit* records and extensive permit records and design/structural drawings related to subsequent building additions, plant expansions and interior alteration projects.

The present *The Seattle Times* newspaper was founded by Colonel Alden J. Blethen on August 10, 1896, after having acquired an Associated Press membership for an evening daily newspaper. Upon the death of the founder in 1915, his son, Colonel C. B. Blethen, became Editor and Publisher of the newspaper. By 1925, the Seattle Times Company published the *Seattle Daily Times*, an evening newspaper and the *Seattle Sunday Times*, a Sunday morning publication that included the Rotogravure Section. By 1930, the circulation of the paper averaged over 100,000 copies sold per day and ranked among the highest densities of circulation in the United States.

The relocation of The Seattle Times headquarters and plant to the Fairview Avenue location was the third time in three and one-half decades that the newspaper operation moved. From August 10, 1896, to November 15, 1901, the newspaper operation occupied rooms in the old Boston Block at Second Avenue and Columbia Street. The plant was then relocated further north to Second Avenue and Union Street. In 1916, Col. Alden J. Blethen and C.D. Blethen oversaw the design and construction of the third (and further northward) location, the Times Square Building at Fourth and Fifth Avenues between Olive and Stewart Street. As with the prior two moves, cramped conditions at the Times Square Building precipitated the last northward move to the Fairview Avenue site in 1931.

The Seattle Times Building and Plant were sited along a main north-south thoroughfare. The site was considered a "remote" distance north of the established business district and, rather symbolically, the main facade of the office building was oriented to the south and back toward the business district. This working-class residential district, near the southern industrialized shore of Lake Union, gradually evolved into a semi-industrial district due to its desirable distance from the congestion of downtown Seattle. Delivery and service vehicles, as well as employees, could come and go with relative ease and efficiency. The Seattle Times was one of several industrial operations established in the area after W.W.I. Eventually numerous light-industrial commercial enterprises were located in this general vicinity.

The three units of the 1930-31 Seattle Times plant - the office building, the printing plant and the garage - were all designed by architect Robert C. Reamer. R.C. Reamer (1873-1938) is a highly regarded architect who practiced in the Pacific Northwest after 1916. He is nationally known for his work within Yellowstone National Park, most notably the Old Faithful Inn (1902-3). He is known locally for the design of several Seattle area buildings that exhibit distinctive architectural style and contribute significantly to the character of the city. The Seattle Times Building is among a group of Reamer's most noteworthy Seattle commissions including; the Skinner Building (1925), the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building (1928), Great Northern Building (1927-29), and the Meany Hotel (1930-31).

The design of the original 1930-31 office building portion of the current Seattle Times complex is distinguished by architectural features derived from Art Deco and Moderne design modes. Important character defining features of the original building design remain intact and in place including; the cream-colored Indiana limestone cladding and granite base, decorative cast aluminum panels at the window spandrels, wide piers with shallow flutes, simple cresting at the parapet edge, the cut limestone "Seattle Times" sign, particularly distinctive aluminum grillwork, carved limestone entrance panels, and the ornate pendant-type lantern light fixture. The architectural character and the quality of these features distinguish The Seattle Times Building from all other commercial or industrial buildings in the Cascade/South Lake Union district, as well as the remainder of the city. The building is representative of a design mode of which there are few comparable local examples, with the exception of the Seattle Art Museum at Volunteer Park (designed by Bebb & Gould, 1931-33). Furthermore, the design of the Seattle Times Building is representative of the work of Robert C. Reamer, an important Seattle-based architect, and demonstrates his mastery of this design mode.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

The entire exterior of the original 1930-31 office building, including the roof.

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Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:cjh

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