



The City of Seattle LPB-88/83

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206)625-4501

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PROPERTY: United States Assay Office/German House
613 - 9th Avenue

Legal Description: Lot 2, except the northwesterly 49.7 feet; and all of
lot 3, block 69, Terry's First Addition.

At a public hearing held on July 6, 1983, the City of Seattle's Landmark Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the United States Assay Office/German House as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance #106348.

- Section 3.01 (1) It is the location of, or is associated in a significant way with, an historic event with a significant effect upon the community, city state or nation; or
- (2) It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the city, state or nation; or
- (3) 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; or
- (4) It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.

In the decade that followed the arrival of the steamer "Portland" on July 17, 1897 with gold on board from the Klondike, about 200,000,000 worth of gold came back through Seattle.

When the miners assembled their nest eggs, there was always someone willing to relieve them of their heavy burden. While the Royal Canadian Mounted Police protected them in the Northwest territory and the express companies protected them while their gold was in transit, they felt they could get cheated at the counting house. Nobody knew exactly how much gold existed in any given supply of gold dust or nuggets and how much silver or copper or other metal until it had been melted down into bars.

The Chamber of Commerce, aware of the miners' predicament, hit on the idea that to get the miners coming, as well as going, a Federal Government Assay Office in Seattle must be established. This came at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Chamber of Commerce, then chaired by J. B. Metcalfe and which was attended by I. A. Nadeau, general manager of the Northern Pacific in Seattle, Thomas Prosch, and J. J. McGilvra. This historic meeting was on April 21, 1897 at 3:30 in the afternoon. These prominent citizens in a memorial to Congress pointed out that Seattle must have an assay office since it is the principal and natural distribution point for Alaska and, also, for the reason that the then nearest assay office in San Francisco was too far away.

The "Establishment" (as the four prominent citizens were known during that period) tried working for an assay office in the winter and again the summer of 1897. They sent Ernest Ling, Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce to Congress to voice their cause.

Finally, they enlisted the help of Erastus Brainerd, editor of the P.I., whom they knew was a man who knew his way around in the intricacies of newspaper and politics. In the spring of 1898, they provided him with an unlimited expense account to get the assay office for Seattle. Brainerd found a strong and precious ally in the person of Congressman Charles W. Stone of Pennsylvania who was not only a senior member of the committee on coins, weights or measure in the House, but also had a brother who was in business in Seattle and who was willing to apply any and all of the necessary family pressure to provide his Congressman brother with an enlightened attitude about the importance of Seattle.

Brainerd and Stone worked hard to persuade Congress to give Seattle its assay office. In Congressman Stone's speech to Congress, he declared that it had been the policy of the government to provide convenient assay offices for miners because theirs was an unusual product and they had no guarantee they would be given their fair value of their gold any place except an assay office. On May 16, 1898, Brainerd had the pleasure of sitting in the House Gallery and, after a 45 minute debate, seeing the House approve his bill by a vote of 128 to 17. The Senate had earlier passed the bill without a debate and shortly after it became a law.

The Establishment cast to the water \$10,000 worth of Brainerd's time, but he came back with a Government Assay Office worth \$15,000 - at the expense of other cities who also wanted an assay office. When Seattle got its Assay Office in May, 1898, the Federal government rented Prosch's building and opened it as an assay office on July 15, 1898. It also contained a melting department.

Miners were paid by government checks or their gold bars were stamped and were shipped to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia at government's expense. During the early years of the gold strike at Klondike, annual deposits in the office reached \$20 million to \$22 million. But, by 1928, it had dropped to \$6 million. In the decade following its appearance in Seattle, the Assay Office handled \$200,000 worth of gold, about \$100,000 of that stayed in Seattle.

The first owner of the structure was Thomas Prosch, who had it erected in 1886 as an office building and entertainment hall. Prosch, a civic leader and one time Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce was one of the founders when the Intelligencer and Post merged. He was former sole owner of the Post Intelligencer from 1884 to 1886 when he sold the paper.

Deutsches Haus purchased the building in 1935 as a social center. It was renovated and remained in use until the 2nd World War when it was used by the Navy as an entertainment center. After the war it has been solely used by the German Club.

This building's current exterior represents an excellent example of a 19th century commercial cast-iron and masonry structure, typified with larger, open street level bays and narrow vertical window openings on other facades and on the upper street-front level. Of special note are the series of five round arched second story windows, flanked on both sides by narrow, rectangular windows and the wooden cornices with original detailing.

Features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The entire exterior of the structure and the site,
and upon the interior, the assay office safe.

Issued: July 12, 1983

Roberta Deering, Acting City Historic Preservation Officer

By:



John S. Chaney, Landmarks Preservation Coordinator

JSC:dn

cc: H. Otto Giese