



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

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

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 63/04

Name and Address of Property: **Mount Baker Presbyterian Church**

Legal Description: Mount Baker Park Addition, Block 41 Lots A and B

At the public meeting held on March 3, 2004, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Mt. Baker Park Presbyterian Church at 3201 Hunter Boulevard S. as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

- (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*
- (F) *Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, 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 city.*

### **DESCRIPTION**

#### **THE SITE**

The Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church is located on two adjacent lots at the northeast and northwest corner of the 41<sup>st</sup> Block of the Mount Baker Park Addition. Mount Rainier Drive ascends from the Mount Baker Community Club House (2811 Mount Rainier Drive South) upward until it becomes Hunter Boulevard at the intersection addressed by Mount Baker Park Presbyterian. The church appears on the sight line of Mount Rainier Drive going south. This road is a primary neighborhood route. Hunter Boulevard is located on one of the neighborhood's north-south ridges. Because of the site's elevation, the church's tower is visible from the I-90 bridge.

The church faces east, with its entrance on Hunter Boulevard, which is a wide, grassy, tree-lined center strip once occupied by streetcar tracks. The trees along the boulevard are mature, and provide substantial cover and shade to the houses along this sidewalk-lined thoroughfare.

## **ORIGINAL EXTERIOR FEATURES**

Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church's design is based on traditional church buildings of the early Middle Ages in central and northern Italy, and shares its basic composition and forms with its historic antecedents. The brick building, articulated in variegated Flemish bond, is composed of a few rectilinear volumes, the most prominent of which are its low-pitched sanctuary and tall bell tower. The building's L-shaped footprint connects the east-west oriented nave with the church's office, service, community, and educational spaces at a right angle. The foundation is poured concrete. With the exception of the stained glass windows, the northwest brick patio area, and a back (west side) entry area, all exterior fabric is original.

### **Sanctuary and Primary Entrance**

The nave, or sanctuary space is the church's primary volume, and its importance is accentuated by exterior and interior decorative treatments. The primary, symmetrical façade of the building faces Hunter Boulevard, and is divided into two levels on this east-facing entrance. A concrete and brick stair leads from the sidewalk to the triple round arched porch entry, located prominently in the center of the façade.

Two terra cotta-clad columns separate the porch bays. The column's quatrefoil diamond green pattern, and the vegetal elements within the capitals and arch soffits are reminiscent of decorative programs in early Christian churches. This foliate motif appears in tiny blue, green and yellow terra cotta brackets terminating both the saw tooth brick detailing along the primary gable, and the green and blue terracotta tooth molding along the porch roof. This decorative element continues around the side elevations over the windows along the nave exterior.

Three sets of large, paired oak doors with round-arched surrounds are centered within each of the porch's bays. Identical vegetal and cross designs are painted in the tympana above each of these exterior pairs of doors. A rose window appears centered within the front gable. The green and yellow terracotta wheel tracery separating its eight "petals" is articulated with details somewhat like those in early Christian churches.

The interior relationship between the nave and the side aisles is expressed on the exterior as a bi-level façade and side elevations. The roof of the side aisles projects approximately five feet from the central volume.

The south side of the sanctuary includes a few basement level entrances that provide entry to service and meeting spaces under the sanctuary. This side of the building stands immediately adjacent to a residence. Original building plans describe the south side entry much as it appears today. A concrete stair leads directly to the basement close to the southeast corner of the building. Another set of concrete stairs originally led to the basement on the southwest corner of the building.

## **Sanctuary Fenestration**

The primary windows along the side elevations of the nave are multi-paned and round-arched. On the exterior, these have green terra cotta sills. Original windows may have had round colored panes set within extant muntins, but this is unclear in original plans. Individual panes surrounding the stained glass images, installed in the 1950s, are round, forming a pattern inside rectilinear muntins. Round arched clerestory windows echo the modulation of the larger windows along the side aisles. The clerestory windows are stained glass, but relatively simple. The round panes within these windows are multiple colors, and each is slightly different, with a symbol in the upper middle center of the window design. The color and size of the panes within the clerestory windows appears identical to those framing the 1950 stained glass designs along the side aisles.

## **Tower**

Like the exterior brick treatment of the sanctuary, the tower's bricks are laid in Flemish bond. A single oak door, surmounted by a tympanum of the same design as those above the front entry doors, stands at the base of the tower. The door surround includes two blue and green terra cotta clad columns articulated in a twisted design. The capitals of these columns are Corinthian variants. Immediately above this door is a small double hung sash window. Small, narrow, rectilinear windows pierce the tower high above the ground, referring to similar openings in fortified religious complexes of the early Middle Ages.

A shallow, tiled roof element projects over terra cotta tooth molding immediately below the belfry. A relatively small band of brick separates this intermediate roof from the belfry. The roof surmounting the tower is hipped, and clad in tile. A pair of round arched openings pierce the belfry. Small terra cotta foliate brackets terminate the ends of corbelled brick dentils that serve as a cornice for the tower's shallow hipped roof. These reflect the saw tooth pattern along the sanctuary's exterior.

The exterior of the tower appears to have received no alterations over time. A change in brick coloration above the building's cornice line does not appear to be related to a tower-rebuild.

## **Nave Interior**

The three pairs of doors facing Hunter Boulevard open into a vestibule that is the width of the porch. Stairs on both sides of the vestibule lead to a balcony area located directly over the entry space. Two round windows pierce the church's walls at the landings of these two symmetrical stairs. The vestibule opens into the nave space through three sets of doors that echo those on the front of the building.

The nave's interior is a simple basilican form with a square apse. The pews are arranged to the right and left of a central aisle of the same width as the two side aisles that run along the walls of the sanctuary. A six-bay arcade of round arches separates the side aisles from the rest of the nave. Columns supporting these arches have Corinthian-variant capitals, and an abacus designed in the manner of the capitals on the front porch.

Dark wooden timbers decorate the ceiling and provide roof support. Long timbers, positioned directly above the columns of the arcade below, extend the width of the sanctuary. These are decorated with light, linear stencil work. Heavy ornamental brackets support these beams at their point of connection with the north and south sanctuary walls. These are colorful, and painted in a number of pastel hues. The ceiling is made up of dark wooden timbers, laid side by side in the same direction as the support beams. Simple chandeliers hung from the cross beams provide primary lighting in the nave. These may be replacements, but if so, they are consistent with the character of the church. If they are not original, they are either reproductions of a 1920s design or were salvaged from a building of the period.

The terminus of the nave is a square platform and choir area that is roughly the same size and proportion of the entry vestibule. The woodwork of the platform and choir are not original, but are very similar in design to plans drawn up by the architect in 1924.

## **Secondary Spaces, Exterior and Interior**

### **Exterior**

The brick exterior of the service wing of the church, which is oriented north and south, is laid in the same variegated Flemish bond as the rest of the building. The windows of this two-story arm are wooden double hung sash style, with five narrow vertical panes in both upper and lower sashes. The exterior window sills are green terra cotta, and the saw tooth brickwork along the cornice is consistent with that running below the roofline of the sanctuary. Small terra cotta foliate brackets terminate each dentil in this pattern.

On the north side of this portion of the building, three windows are centered on both the first and second floor. On the west side of the building, windows are arranged asymmetrically along the stairwell, but are paired on the northwest corner (though not sharing a common mullion) and in a group of three on the west side immediately behind the sanctuary volume. On both the west and north sides of the building, over the center of the three-grouped windows, is a round arch design similar but not identical to those on the front porch and above the tower entry.

A brick chimney rises along the lower edge of the west side of the roof and roughly mimics the tower form when viewed from the west side of the building.

### **Interior**

Behind the choir and speaker's platform are a number of service rooms, including what were originally a pastor's study, a small bathroom, a choir room, storage area, and Sunday School rooms. In the original configuration, the north side of the building on the first floor was a large single room for young Sunday School students. On the west side of the building, on the opposite end of the primary rectangular volume, was another large open room, separated into seven small cubicles. This provided classroom space for older Sunday School students.

A door in the northwest corner of the sanctuary, and other at the base of the bell tower, leads into an entrance hall. A stair leading up to the second floor and down to the basement is on axis with this secondary entrance.

The wooden doors throughout the building are primarily two and three paneled. Much of the original hardware remains.

Under the sanctuary is a large activities space, which includes a raised platform stage area. The surfaces throughout this space have been altered, though the configuration is similar to the original condition. The southwest corner of the basement is a large kitchen which is currently a combination of old and newer elements. The rooms in the basement are oriented roughly around a hall leading north and south, as are the rooms on the first and second floor.

The second floor currently accommodates a day school. The rooms are open, similar to the original configuration on the first floor.

### **Additions/Alterations**

**Exterior:** In 1960, the church added a brick patio to the northeast portion of the building. The back (western) entrance dates from this time. The entrance is simple, and includes a low brick wall to the north side of the walk leading from the sidewalk to the door. This is covered by a cantilevered concrete awning. Some alterations to this side of the building, including service doors and some enclosure of the fire escape leading from the second floor of the office/school wing to the ground have occurred. The February 2001 earthquake caused some damage to the building, specifically the tall brick bell tower. A diagonal crack appears in the mortar on the north side of the tower at the cornice line. The tower has now been stabilized and retrofitted.

**Interior:** Interior spaces on all three floors within the service wing have been altered to accommodate church needs. Some alterations have occurred on the south side of the building near the fire escape. As mentioned above, the original windows were replaced in the 1950s with memorial designs depicting the life of Christ. The wooden podium and choir space were added, but very closely respond to Albertson's original designs. The north Sunday School room, once a large open space, is now divided into offices while the western classroom space serves as a meeting room, small kitchen area, and library space. A large ADA-compliant bathroom has been added to the first floor space, near the back ramp entry.

## **STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Significance Summary**

The history and design of Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church reflects a number of trends in local social, economic, cultural, architectural and political history. The story behind its siting, construction, and design and the church's relationship with the Mount Baker Park community, points to the strength of neighborhood-based churches in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Seattle. The importance of local Presbyterianism and architectural eclecticism, the work of prominent architects

Albertson, Wilson and Richardson, and the development of the Mount Baker Park neighborhood are well illustrated by this Seattle building.

## Social Context

In the early twentieth century, churches thrived in Seattle. The popularity of churches and their influence on local government tracked with a sharp population boom in the early 1900s. During this period in the city's development, Seattle's churches reflected the city's ethnically homogenous, mostly Protestant population.<sup>1</sup> Seattle's Protestant churches saw a sharp rise in number between 1900 and 1915.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary religious leaders and thinkers considered the emergence and success of churches and schools to be evidence of the city's natural evolution from an industrial hardscrabble frontier town to an urban, middle class metropolis.<sup>3</sup> This perceived maturation reflected wide-scale changes in American urban sensibilities at the time, and the city's increasingly sober identity in the 1910s and 20s.<sup>4</sup> This perception was aided by the physical transformation of Seattle between 1900 and 1920.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Seattle saw significant earthmoving, house and road building, and expansion through annexation. By the 1920s, the neighborhoods, parks, boulevards, and the physical character of the city was much more stable, solid, and in the words of historian Roger Sale, "young bourgeois."<sup>5</sup> This socioeconomic shift from 1910 to 1920 was highly significant as it directly parallels the rising political influence of Seattle neighborhoods. Though the Seattle area was still one of the "least-churched" parts of the country,<sup>6</sup> and prostitution, alcohol consumption, and other sin-based industries were still popular at this time, moral reformers within the city's growing middle class pushed for the wholesale adoption of Christian values. These ideas influenced local politics into the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

The miners, loggers, and sailors who helped shape successful businesses in what was known as the red light district, the "lava beds" or the "tenderloin" were quickly outnumbered by new arrivals. The acrimonious public debate between "pleasure seekers" and organizations supporting right and righteous living hit a fever pitch in 1919, with the ratification of the Constitutional amendment prohibiting the manufacture, purchase and sale of alcohol.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Calvin Schmid, *Social Trends in Seattle*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1944

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; see also David M. Buege and Junius Rochester. *Roots and Branches: The Religious Heritage of Washington State*. (Seattle: Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Reverend W. A. Major, "The Seattle Churches," *Argus*, December 12, 1925, pp. 34, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Norman H. Clark, *The Dry Years: Prohibition & Social Change in Washington*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press) 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present: An Interpretation of the History of the Foremost City in the Pacific Northwest*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.p.141.

<sup>6</sup> P. 43, Dale E. Soden, *The Reverend Mark Matthews: An Activist in the Progressive Era*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press) 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Soden, "Fundamentalism and Modernism," pp. 156-182.

<sup>8</sup> Washington state had prohibition between January 1, 1916 and this date, although not in the "bone dry" version ratified by the federal government. The purchase, sale and manufacture of alcohol was limited, but not prohibited.

In the first decades of the twentieth century in Seattle, organized religion had an effective and charismatic leader who advocated for the moral order of the middle class, and helped promote the idea of the church – a progressive, civic-minded church – within city government. Mark Matthews, pastor of the largest Presbyterian church in the country, was strongly identified as the most influential pastor in the city.<sup>9</sup> Reverend William Major, who led Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church during the 1920s, echoed some of the Progressive Matthews’ sentiments concerning the role of the church in civic affairs. In a 1925 article published in *Argus* magazine entitled “The Seattle Churches,” written as his new church was nearing completion, Major spoke to the inextricable link between religion and education, nationalism, and a vision of Seattle as an idealized civil society:

“Seattle will always be a good place in which to live. We have no slum life. There is no illiteracy. Her spirit is more American than in any city of her size. The church and the school have the contract to put religion and education at the front and make men live at their best. The rumblings we hear of sin and wrong are but the call for Seattle churches to do their best. President Coolidge said, ‘I can conceive of no adequate remedy for the evils that beset society, except through the influences of religion.’ The church is believing this courageously, and is taking a new hold in service, and when the account is rendered and the rewards are given, we believe that the Seattle churches will rejoice in hearing the “well done.””

This optimism, felt by secular and religious interests alike after Seattle’s meteoric population gains and economic successes of the 1910s, slowly gave way to concerns about the fate of the local economy. After World War I, which brought industrial Seattle great wealth, and buoyed the development of the rest of the city, the city’s population flat lined. After the war, Seattle saw very little growth relative to its earlier gains. Between 1920 and 1940, pockets of population near the central business district, such as in Belltown, First Hill, the Denny Regrade area, and parts of the International and Central Districts dropped while neighborhoods to the north and south, such as Green Lake and Mount Baker, saw increases of 50 to 100%.<sup>10</sup> While firebrand Mark Matthews continued influencing local public policy until his death in 1940, the number of local churches stopped growing in the mid-1920s.<sup>11</sup>

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Seattle churches were primarily a neighborhood rather than urban institution. The wide scale development of a variety of single-family houses along and near streetcar lines accommodated the expectations of Seattle’s middle class and upwardly mobile. These transportation lines stimulated the development of newly cleared and annexed parts of town.<sup>12</sup> Churches tended to follow these demographic trends.<sup>13</sup> Population and economic shifts, and

---

<sup>9</sup> Dale E. Soden, “In Quest of a City on a Hill: Seattle Minister Mark Matthews and the Moral Leadership of the Middle Class,” in *Religion and Society in the American West: Historical Essays*, ed. Carl Guarnari and David Alvarez, University Press of America, New York, 1987, pp. 355-373.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin F. Schmid, *Social Trends in Seattle*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1944, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Soden, p. 369; Polk Directories 1930-1950.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie Blanchard. *The Street Railway Era in Seattle: A Chronicle of Six Decades*. (Forty Fort, PA: Harold E. Cox, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> Based on a comparison of church listings within Polk City Directories from 1890 to 1940.

increasing land values downtown intensified the neighborhood identity of most area churches. At the onset of World War II, only three churches remained downtown.<sup>14</sup>

The role of neighborhood churches was often linked to the social and economic conditions in its immediate vicinity. In the case of stable and middle class to wealthy neighborhoods such as Mount Baker and Mount Baker Park, the community church was also relatively stable, and home to meetings and community group activities. Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church was, for much of its life, known as the Mount Baker Park *Community* Presbyterian Church. In addition to providing for the congregation's spiritual needs, the church opened its doors to a number of mostly secular, but compatible organizations. These included local troops of the Boy and Girl Scouts, the League of Women Voters, a children's hospital guild and a cooperative pre-school.

Even before the first cornerstone of the church building at 3201 Hunter Boulevard was laid on September 21, 1924, the story of the congregation and the neighborhood was inseparable.

### **Neighborhood Context**

Mount Baker, located on Lake Washington between the Leschi, Lakewood and Seward Park neighborhoods, grew slowly between Seattle's first days as a frontier town and its boom years in the early 1900s. Its shoreline was home to many saw and planing mills in the 1890s before the Rainier Avenue Electric Railroad was built between downtown and Rainier Beach. This line included stops near McClellan Street and in Mount Baker. By 1915, Mount Baker saw direct trolley service along Hunter Boulevard.<sup>15</sup>

The neighborhood, located along picturesque rises with terrific views, was designed to take advantage of its topography. It was one of Seattle's few planned communities of the period. J. C. Hunter, who formed the Hunter Tract Improvement Company in 1905, hired the Olmsted Brothers to shape his holdings into a park-like atmosphere. In the first years of the twentieth century, the Olmsteds conceived a comprehensive city park plan, much of which remains today. Mount Baker Park is no misnomer. The green spaces between its many substantial houses, and their relationship to the lake and distant mountains suggest a domestic idyll that is clearly separate from the city's urban core.

Emblematic of this character, the Mount Baker Community Club, organized in 1909, is said to be this county's oldest continuously operating organization of its kind. It also acted as a semiautonomous city hall and was the venue for social events. Discussions within the club ranged from community lighting and beautification to police protection. While many of Mount Baker's residents were wealthy, Franklin High School, which also served diverse Beacon Hill, provided a multicultural learning environment for its children whose classmates were Italian and Japanese. The Mount Baker community was, however, relatively racially, ethnically, and economically homogenous until the 1960s and 70s. The neighborhood's image as a "city beautiful" in miniature and a bastion of wealth was challenged by overarching and powerful social change.

---

<sup>14</sup> Schmid, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Junius Rochester, "Mount Baker - Thumbnail History," 2001, <http://www.historylink.org>.

Physical reminders of Mount Baker Park's early development as a planned community remain in its thoroughfares, its housing stock, and the architecturally exceptional, but modestly proportioned Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church, located on picturesque Hunter Boulevard.

### **Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church**

The history of Mount Baker Park Presbyterian is an integral aspect of the congregation's identity. It has been compiled and reprinted in church newsletters, and the church maintains a brief, one page history of itself within its staple of take-away literature. A drawing of the church has decorated its stationary since its earliest days.<sup>16</sup>

The congregation that built the church identifies its beginnings a few decades before the 1924-25 structure was built. According to one account, the question of forming a church in Mount Baker was first discussed during a Ladies Aid Society meeting at the home of Mrs. Lucretia Goodale in March of 1902. The ladies invited Reverend David Blyth of Calvary Presbyterian Church (Seattle) to the meeting, where the group discussed the composition of the Mount Baker community and its religious predilections. The neighborhood was soon surveyed, presumably by the Ladies Aid Society, which concluded that the majority of their neighbors were Methodists. A few community members gifted land at the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and Horton Street to the Methodist Episcopal Church of York, Washington. It was here that the first church occupied by what would be the Mount Baker Park Presbyterian congregation was built. This wood frame cross gable church was similar to many being constructed around town.

The community's population was more stable in 1906 when the community church building was completed than it was in 1902 when construction began. Hunter started his improvement company during the church's construction. This development activity apparently attracted a number of Presbyterians. There was also, according to one account, a decided denominational shift from Methodism to Presbyterianism in the area.<sup>17</sup> This change follows citywide trends.

In 1900, Seattle was home to 12 Presbyterian churches, while only a decade later, this number doubled to 24.<sup>18</sup> The number of Presbyterian churches in Seattle was relatively stable after 1910. This may have been related to Mark Matthews' extreme popularity in the first decades of the 1900s (see Social Context above), Presbyterianism's connection with progressive attitudes popular during Seattle boom period between 1900 and 1910, or to the national and regional popularity of evangelical religion at that time.<sup>19</sup>

The steep growth of Presbyterian residents in Mount Baker caught the attention of church leaders, including many of the same ones who formed York Methodist. For a brief time, Presbyterians and Methodists shared the building. A number of community members, church leaders and elders petitioned the Presbytery of Puget Sound to establish a Presbyterian church in the neighborhood.

---

<sup>16</sup> Based on Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Historical Archives, maintained within the church. The church appears in the masthead of its newsletter and its stationary.

<sup>17</sup> Butler.

<sup>18</sup> Comparison of Polk Directories in 1890, 1900, 1905 and 1910.

<sup>19</sup> Soden.

Their wish was granted, and York Methodist was officially changed to York Presbyterian later in 1906.<sup>20</sup>

The location of York Presbyterian, at the corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and Horton Street, posed an inconvenience for the many new Mount Baker Park residents living on the west side of the ridge. The church officially considered these concerns and, in 1915, decided to start planning for a new church, located in the near center of the neighborhood. The church officially changed its name to Mount Baker Park Presbyterian five years earlier, in 1910, which served to connect the congregation with the neighborhood even before the physical move to its center.

The plan for the new church began with concerted fundraising within the Mount Baker Park community. A committee of women canvassed the neighborhood, requesting pledges of \$10 per household toward the construction of the new church. Ledgers recording their efforts and individual donations remain in the church's archives. The ladies raised \$1000.75 in their first week of work. The fund raising effort continued, though the idea of an official move, with a brand new building, was still being actively debated within the church's governance. After a few years of considering the costs of a new site and new building, the church seriously considered expanding and repairing the old building as another possible interim measure.

On March 16, 1919, the church installed a new pastor, Reverend William Major as leader of their congregation. Major was passionately in favor of a new church building that would accommodate the growing need for Sunday School space and would attract new membership. Soon after, the Mount Baker Park community was mapped out into visiting districts to raise more funds for the new church. By 1921, the church moved ahead with its plans and purchased a lot at the corner of Hunter Boulevard "at the end of the car line."<sup>21,</sup>

On September 21, 1924, at what was called a "very remarkable service," the cornerstone for the new church was laid. A number of speakers, and residents outside of the Mount Baker Park community attended the ceremony that was focused, primarily, on the history of the church. Professor Edmund S. Meany, head of the University of Washington's History Department, spoke.

The following March, the church held a dedication service. The new building was packed with members and guests who filled the pews and the balcony. The impact of the new church, its physical presence and its popularity was great. Many in attendance at the dedication gave money toward the debts incurred by the church for its construction. The building, designed by noted local architecture firm Albertson Architects (later Albertson, Wilson and Richardson) cost \$123,000 once completed.

In March of 1941, the church installed the William A. Major Chimes in its tower. The reverend, who died in 1944, was and still is strongly associated with the church. According to the church's archives, the reverend was keenly interested in the height of the tower. He wanted the church "high on the hill." When Albertson presented the first set of drawings, Major reportedly sent them back with the criticism that the tower looked too short. The architect made the change so that "it (the

---

<sup>20</sup> Butler, the Presbyterian church paid the Methodists \$600 to clear their debt.

<sup>21</sup> This phrase appears in quotes, suggesting emphasis in an undated, anonymous typescript history of the church. Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Archives.

tower) could be seen by all – from across Lake Washington, from over on Beacon Hill, and from all over our Mount Baker Community.<sup>22</sup>” When the church began its newsletter in 1947, it chose the name “The Tower.”

In 1950, additional congregational attachment to the building came in the form of memorial stained glass windows. These windows, which replaced clear panes within the classical round arched windows, depict the life of Christ. The narrative begins in the northwest corner. The great majority of individuals who are commemorated by the windows were Mount Baker Park residents.

The most recent threat to the building proved that the relationship between the church and the Mount Baker Park community is still strong. The February 2001 earthquake significantly damaged the church’s bell tower. The church internally debated whether the costs of repair were worthwhile relative to other needs. The church, in the manner of its early fundraising efforts in the neighborhood, raised a banner on its tower reading “Save Our Tower.” One hundred Mount Baker Park residents, many of them non-church members, came forward with donations.

## Architect

The architecture firm of Albertson, Wilson and Richardson was best known for the Northern Life Tower in downtown Seattle.<sup>23</sup> During the mid-1920s, when Mount Baker Park Presbyterian was constructed, the firm was known as Albertson Architects, though Wilson and Richardson were associates at the time. The firm was well versed in the use of multiple historical styles. Albertson spoke to the reasons behind this in an article published in the *Town Crier*, a Seattle newspaper, in December of 1933:

“in modern times, with all the means of communication, ideas are exchanged and architecture firms and materials are freely carried from one part of the world to another, and after a generation of adaptation, what was originally foreign becomes domesticated, if not indigenous. This very freedom of interchange tends, of course, to dilute and to retard the development of strictly local forms of architecture ... the American Spanish and American Italian (are) very successfully domesticated in California, but not as yet so happy here.”<sup>24</sup>

The designs for Mount Baker Park, which fuse rectilinear Italianate church forms with colorful Romanesque detailing arguably “domesticate” foreign forms. The building was one of the firm’s earliest church designs. Saint Joseph Catholic Church, located at 732 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Seattle’s, Capitol Hill neighborhood, is the firm’s best-known ecclesiastical building. Other extant churches designed by Albertson’s firm include Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church at 6512 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW in Seattle, and First Presbyterian Church in Yakima, Washington.

---

<sup>22</sup> In unpaginated typescript, prepared for dedication of chimes in 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Veith, “Albertson, Wilson & Richardson,” *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994. pp. 162-167.

<sup>24</sup> *Town Crier*, December 16, 1933, unpaginated excerpt in Architects Files within the University of Washington’s Special Collections Library.

Mount Baker Park Presbyterian's ornate, twisting terra cotta columns at the base of the tower closely resembles details at the Cornish College of the Arts, which the firm designed a few years earlier. In Saint Joseph Cathedral, built between 1929 and 1930, the firm made great use of financial restrictions, and produced what has been praised as a "proto-modern" work of expressive concrete. Its form, which looks to traditional gothic churches, strips away the conventional exterior tracery, finials and other medieval ornamentation, and respects the straightforward volumetric strength of the raw materials. The tower, which is suitably inspiring, monumental and moderne, is a common form in both religious and secular designs produced by the firm in the 1920s. In Saint Joseph's, the tower is linked to the primary form but is somewhat autonomous, like a sacred skyscraper rising above the expansive Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Mount Baker Park Presbyterian's tower is an integral part of the church's program and consistent with the historic relationship between sanctuary and tower in central Italian religious vernacular architecture. The design is scaled to the community, and is on the primary line of sight as cars enter Hunter Boulevard.

### **Terra Cotta**

At the turn of the twentieth century, architectural terra cotta gained popularity in Seattle. Cheaper than carved stone, the material was often used on skyscrapers and tall office buildings downtown.<sup>25</sup> The building material, capable of capturing the most fanciful of architectural details, helped shape the identity of Seattle's commercial district between 1900 and 1930.

Area building material manufacturers aided and advanced the extensive use of terra cotta. Local producers included the Denny Clay Company (first downtown, then in Renton) and the Northern Clay Company. The latter produced the terra cotta work used at Mount Baker Park Presbyterian. Originally located in Auburn, Washington, the Northern Clay Company was purchased by the California firm of Gladding, McBean who merged with the Denny-Renton Clay & Coal Company in 1925, when the church was in its final stages of completion. While it was an independent firm, clay used in terra cotta produced by the Northern Clay Company came from a fifty-acre property along the Green River.<sup>26</sup>

While terra cotta was cheaper than stonework, relative to other building materials, it was still expensive. The costs of production and streamlined, ornament-free architectural trends led to the demise of the terra cotta industry in the 1930s.

Terra cotta use in Seattle churches tends to be restricted to details rather than cladding. Examples of the building material's use in neighborhood churches include the Gothic tracery of Seattle First Christian (on Broadway) and Seattle First Baptist Church's (First Hill) window casings and buttress details. The use of terra cotta on Mount Baker Park Presbyterian follows this trend. Colorful decorative work, historically rendered in stone on its Italian antecedents, is articulated in terra cotta on this neighborhood church.

---

<sup>25</sup> Earl Layman and Matthew Lampe, "Terra Cotta Clad and Ornamented Buildings in Seattle," *Impressions in Imagination: Terra Cotta Seattle*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Smith, "The History of American Terra Cotta and its Manufacture," *Impressions in Imagination: Terra Cotta Seattle*, pp. 3-4.

## The Italianate and Romanesque Style

In 1933, Architect Abraham Albertson noted that Italian and Spanish American architectural styles were “not so happy” in Seattle.<sup>27</sup> The use of these styles in Seattle architecture is relatively uncommon.<sup>28</sup> Much of Seattle’s architectural vernacular of the early twentieth century reflects ethnic trends in Seattle’s early demographic makeup, with most of its resident descended or recently arrived from England, Germany and other Northern European countries at this time.<sup>29</sup>

Eclectic architecture, that is, architectural designs that fuse more than one set of stylistic elements, was popular during what is known as “America’s Renaissance (1876-1917). This treatment of historical styles did not completely die out in the 1920s, especially in Seattle. The trend is best reflected in the city’s many apartment buildings designed during this period.<sup>30</sup> Romanesque Revival details, such as those used by Albertson, et al in the design of Mount Baker Park Presbyterian, are sprinkled in a few apartment buildings, and in another of the firm’s buildings of the period, Cornish School of the Arts.

Ecclesiastical architecture, seen in Seattle’s earliest churches until the dissolution of historicist styles in the mid-twentieth century, references traditional programs and styles with European origins. Seattle’s strong Nordic roots were (and thankfully still are, at least in Ballard) evidenced in stave style, wooden frame churches. English Gothic, with its typical long nave, integral towers, often surmounted by spires is illustrated in local neighborhood churches such as Seattle’s First Baptist Church and the small masonry Trinity Episcopal Parish Church on First Hill. In the early 1900s, a number of churches and synagogues employed classical or Byzantine inspired designs popular in civic architecture of the period. Examples of this trend include the First United Methodist Church in downtown Seattle and what was the Fourth Church of Christ Scientist on First Hill (now Town Hall). The use of the traditional basilican plan with simple bell tower rendered in a manner consistent with northern Italian churches of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance was relatively uncommon in religious architecture in Seattle, even during its hay day of architectural eclecticism.<sup>31</sup>

Typical exterior elements found in northern Italian medieval churches that are also employed in Mount Baker Park Presbyterian include the simple composition of volumes (low, rectangular sanctuary with tall, narrow, rectilinear bell tower or *campanile*) connected in such a way that the square footprint of the tower is distinct within the footprint of the entire building. The front gable roof form is low-pitched and clad with red terra cotta tiles. Scalloped decorative moldings below the

---

<sup>27</sup> *Town Crier*, December 16, 1933, unpaginated excerpt in Architects Files within the University of Washington’s Special Collections Library.

<sup>28</sup> Comparison of neighborhood surveys led by Victor Steinbrueck and Folke Nyberg, 1975-1979, a project of Historic Seattle.

<sup>29</sup> See Schmid.

<sup>30</sup> Arguably the best, and most concentrated example of whimsical eclecticism rendered in terra cotta outside of Seattle’s downtown is located on the 1100<sup>th</sup> block of 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Central Area. Steinbrueck, Nyberg survey, “Central Area: An Inventory of Buildings and Urban Design Resources,” commenced 1975.

<sup>31</sup> A preliminary survey of churches from 1910-1930 based on listings within the Polk Directory suggests that this traditional format was unusual. Further study may prove that Mount Baker Park Presbyterian is the only example of this style of religious architecture within the city limits. Historic Seattle volunteers are currently surveying Seattle’s historic religious buildings as a part of planning activity associated with its Sacred Sites initiative.

roofline, rendered in green terra cotta on the Mount Baker church, are commonly articulated in brick in medieval examples. One prototypical example of Italian Romanesque is S. Ambrogio in Milan, built between 1088 and 1128.

Interior features common to this historic form include a simple basilican floor plan with two flanking side aisles. Interior space is oriented toward a central point opposite the primary entrance. An interior arcade of round arches supported by clearly distinct columns separate these side aisles from the primary interior space. Mount Baker Park Presbyterian's ceiling mimics those of early Christian Italian churches. These were often rustic, and articulated with heavy timber supports. The many historicist details within the church, and the simplicity of the church's interior volume, create a sacred space reminiscent of the monastic environments of its stylistic forebears.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allied Arts, ed., *Impressions of Imagination: Terra Cotta in Seattle*, Seattle: Allied Arts, 1986.

Bagley, Clarence B. *History of Seattle*. Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1916.

Blanchard, Leslie. *The Street Railway Era in Seattle: A Chronicle of Six Decades*. (Forty Fort, PA: Harold E. Cox, 1968.

Berner, Richard. *Seattle 1921-1940: From Boom to Bust*, Seattle: Charles Press, 1992.

Buege, David M. and Junius Rochester. *Roots and Branches: The Religious Heritage of Washington State*. (Seattle: Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1988.

Clark, Norman C., *The Dry Years: Prohibition and Social Change in Washington*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press) 1965. 1988, rev.

Fletcher, (Sir) Bannister, *The History of Architecture: On the Comparative Method*, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1896, reprint, 1963.

Gowans, Alan, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Function and Cultural Expression*, New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

Guarnari, Carl and David Alvarez. *Religion and Society in the American West: Historical Essays*, ed., University Press of America, New York, 1987.

Harris, Cyril, *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, New York: Norton and Company, 1998.

Major, Reverend W. A. "The Seattle Churches," *Argus*, volume 32, number 47, December 12, 1925, pp. 34-36.

Ochsner, Jeffrey Carl, ed. *Shaping Seattle Architecture*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Pierson, William H. Volume 3: American Buildings and their Architects (unpublished typescript on Italianate architecture), 1994.

Polk Directories for the City of Seattle, 1890-1960.

Rochester, Junius "Mount Baker – Thumbnail History," 2001, <http://www.historylink.org>.

Sale, Roger. *Seattle: Past to Present: An Interpretation of the History of the Foremost City in the Pacific Northwest*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.

Schmid, Calvin F. *Social Trends in Seattle*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1944

Soden, Dale E. *The Reverend Mark Matthews: An Activist in the Progressive Era*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 2001.

Szasz, Ferenc. *The Divided Mind in Protestant America 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1982

#### **Archives**

University of Washington Special Collections

Puget Sound Regional Archives, Washington State Archives

Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church Archives

Seattle Public Library

Historic Seattle Organizational Files: Steinbrueck/Nyberg Surveys, commenced 1975.

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

The exterior of the building, the interior of the vestibule and main sanctuary excluding existing pews and casework, the interior of the tower, and the site excluding the brick patio built in 1960.

Issued: March 17, 2004

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Rev. Leland Seese  
Heather MacIntosh  
Virginia Wilcox, Chair, LPB  
Diane Sugimura, DPD  
Cheryl Mosteller, DPD  
Ken Mar, DPD