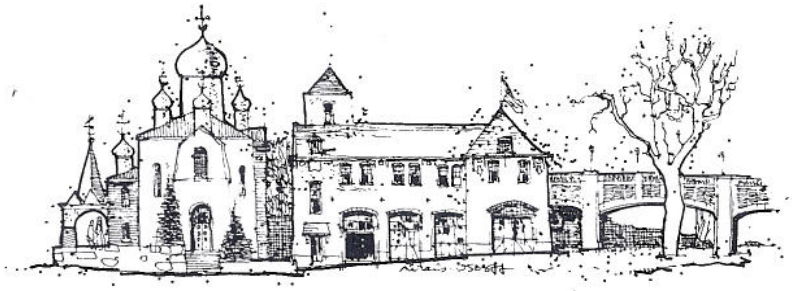

The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

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

LPB 51/87

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: Black Manufacturing Building
1130 Rainier Avenue South

Legal Description: Block 4, Rainier Boulevard Addition,
Lots 17 through 28, inclusive

At the public hearing held on March 4, 1987, the City of Seattle's Landmark Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Black Manufacturing Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 106348:

Section 3.01(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;

Section 3.01(4): It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction;

DESCRIPTION:

The Black Manufacturing Building was designed in 1914 by architect Andrew Willatsen. It is located at 1130 Rainier Avenue South, between South Charles Place and Bush Place South in the Rainier Valley area of Seattle. It is easily visible from the major Dearborn intersection to the north and I-90 overpass to the west and south. With the recent construction on I-90, a major interchange is now located just half a block south on Rainier Avenue South. The building is unique to the area in style, size, and age.

Built for the purpose of garment manufacturing, the building contains a gross floor area of 62,220 square feet on two floors plus a daylight basement, made of reinforced concrete. It is a

U-shaped building with two identical wings extending west toward Rainier Avenue South. The bays of the structure are delineated by unadorned projecting brick piers, between which are large metal sash, multi-paned industrial windows with concrete sills. The sidewalls are faced with red brick that was manufactured by the Denny-Renton Clay and Coal Company. Windows along the rear facade, where brick has not been used to cover the concrete, are accented by brick sills. Diamond shpaed plaques decorate the spandrels between the windows of the first and second floors.

A molded sheet metal cornice caps the building and is detailed by painted brackets at the points at which the piers meet the cornice. Double brackets decorate the corner piers. The brick courses curve up and forward from the facade to meet this cornice. With the exception of these simple ornamental treatments, the only significant architectural details to the exterior occur in the pilasters at either side of the central entrance on Rainier Avenue South. Here, bricks have been laid in vertical and horizontal groupings to form tapered capitals that recall the design of lighting fixtures and wood and stucco interior embellishments present in Willatsen's residential architecture and derived from Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style aesthetic.

The interior of the building was designed to support heavy machinery (loads of 160 pounds per square foot were accounted for in the structural design) and to be fire-resistant. Its slow combustion, mill-type of construction consists of floors composed of laminated type rough cut 2"x6" lumber finished with 2"x6" tongue and groove flooring. Floors are supported by 8"x8" posts and 14" or 16" x 24" beams. An overhead sprinkler system was also installed originally, which was a very early use of such a system. An article in Pacific Builder and Engineer notes: "In fact the character of construction and the system of fire prevention adopted removed every reasonable possibility of fire hazard. So safe is the building that it enjoys the lowest rate of any in the state of Washington."

The main architectural change during the renovation occurred with the removal of the metal portico and storefront. These features were replaced with brick which matched the original, and large multi-paned industrial windows to match the upper windows and the south bay. The original red paver brick required a cursory cleaning and tuckpointing in a few areas.

Prior to renovation, the majority of windows had been broken and boarded up. The sash had deteriorated beyond repair in almost all areas where any original glass remained. Unfortunately, the existing sash was incompatible with the installation of new glass. Green-tinted, double-glazed glass and metal frame sash with a mullion/muntin pattern that duplicated the original windows, were used for the rehabilitation. The glass block windows on the east

and south facades, which were not original to the building, were replaced with metal frame, double pane windows as well. Materials and colors used for window and sash replacement are consistent with original materials.

The interior of the building was largely open industrial space, with exposed structural members, sprinkler system, and electrical wiring. Interior rehabilitation consisted of cleaning and repair work, except where alterations to the northwest corner affected the interior. Interior finishes include a suspended ceiling, HVAC system, and recessed florescent lighting, as well as wall partitions and other finishes to accommodate modern office use.

Referred to as the "daylight factory", the building's above ground floors expose over 15,000 square feet of window area, originally composed of 7,200 panes, each measuring 14" x 20". A shed roofed skylight extending the entire length of the second floor provides overhead lighting.

The building was continuously occupied by the Black family garment business from 1914 until 1981. It had been vacant since 1981 until the current owners purchased it in 1984. Although the building was in good shape structurally and had been fairly well maintained throughout the years, vandalism had caused many of the windows to be broken and/or boarded up (the entire lowest portion of east, or rear, facade was boarded up), the window sash had deteriorated beyond repair in many places, and alterations to the building detracted from its historic character. These alterations included the metal sash windows replaced by glass block along the rear (east) facade and lower the south facade, and the two window bays replaced with metal roll-up garage doors along the south side. Plywood doors replaced the original main entrance doors. The most prominent alteration occurred on the first floor of the north wing, where stucco was applied to the brick veneer, and aluminum frame windows were installed. A small metal portico was attached to the northwest corner that was out of character with the building's original design.

The rehabilitation of the Black Manufacturing Building was dedicated to recapturing the original design of the building while adapting it to useful modern office and manufacturing space, according to the building's owners. The architectural firm of Ralph Anderson, Koch, and Duaarte guided the rehabilitation in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. To provide adequate parking, a two story concrete parking facility was constructed off the north side of the building. The original main entrance to the building, centered along Rainier Avenue South, no longer functions as the principal entry. A steel-framed, canopy-covered entryway now extends from the north side of the building, connecting it to the parking garage.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The harmonious and simple use of broad expanses of windows and skylights to provide maximum natural light, the fire resistant construction and the early use of an overhead sprinkler system, and the efficient organization plan, make the Black Manufacturing Building exemplary of Seattle's early twentieth century industrial mill architecture. The building is also significant as the work of one of Seattle's more important architects, Andrew Willatsen, and its relationship with George G. Black, owner of the Black Manufacturing Company. This business has continued to exist in Seattle since 1902, manufacturing outdoor clothing under the "Black Bear" label. The "daylight home" of the Black Manufacturing Company - with its well-proportioned, warm brick facades and simple detail - has a strong identity as an anomoly along the Rainier Avenue commercial strip.

Andrew Willatsen was already established as an exceptionally talented residential architect, after a number of years generating outstanding residential projects both in partnership with Barry Byrne and on his own. The Black Manufacturing Building marks one of Willatsen's earliest recorded efforts to apply his design and structural knowledge to an industrial building. An article in Pacific Builder and Engineer (1915) expansively described the building:

> Today the Black Manufacturing Company possesses at Rainier and Norman Streets, Seattle, the finest and largest exclusive working men's garment factory building in the United States. It is operating at its full capacity of more than 50,000 dozen pairs of overalls per year, and has an ultimate capacity of 100,000 dozen perannum. The company has over 265 people on its payroll. This statement may seem to some as being a little boastful, but it is founded upon fact and the observations of one who had visited every factory of similar nature in this country. it is, therefore, a factory of which the Greater Northwest may be justly proud.

The "daylight factory" was built in 1914 for George G. Black's expanding Black Bear wearing apparel industry. Although the building's features are replicated in other Seattle commercial industrial buildings, in its time the Black Manufacturing Building represented the best of efficient and modern technology. Its 15,000 square feet of window area, fire-resistant mill construction, overhead sprinkler system, high speed sewing machines with ceiling mounted motors, machine shop, cafeteria, and roof garden made it "absolutely up-to-date, with all that is essential and low cost of production and to the welfare of those contributing their efforts to the success of the business."

Born in 1876, Andrew Willatsen came to America with his family in 1902 and settled in Illinois. As an admirer of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, he came to Chicago that year to work in Wright's Oak Park Studio, where he was given increasing responsibility for projects. Between 1902 and 1905, he executed designs for several Prairie styled houses, a fence for the Larkin Building in Buffalo, New York, and designs for the lobby of the Rookery. In 1907, he migrated west and worked for the prestigious Northwest firm of Cutter and Malgren in Spokane. As draftsman and later supervising architect for the Rainier Club and Seattle Golf and Country Club, Willatsen became acquainted with Seattle and decided to settle there. He formed a partnership with another Frank Lloyd Wright student, Barry Byrne. Their exceptional residential work for A. S. Kerry and C. H. Clarke in the Highlands (1909) promoted the distinctive Prairie style in residential architecture and led to the establishment of the Prairie School in Puget Sound.

The partnership was dissolved and Byrne left for California in 1913. Willatsen continued an active practice in Seattle until the 1960s, though he claimed that his best work had been accomplished during the years 1909-1928.

In May, 1914, Willatsen was commissioned to design a home on West Highland Drive for J. C. Black, cousin of George G. Black, founder of Black Manufacturing. Not long after, in September, 1914, his roster of projects listed "Black Manufacturing." The Black Manufacturing Building was one of his earliest departures from the residential style into industrial, warehouse, and commercial buildings, which led to many commissions well into the 1960's. Prior to this time, Willatsen's only output in a similar genre appears to have been a warehouse for financier Horace Chapin Henry, at Connecticut Street near Railroad Avenue (later Alaskan Way South) in 1909.

On the basis of his 1909 and 1914 work, he was hired to prepare plans for a number of Pike Place Market buildings, bakeries, neighborhood shops and, in 1918, the Skinner and Eddy warehouse at 1559 Railroad Avenue South.

George G. Black, the founder of Black Manufacturing Company, may be viewed in the same historic context as the Nordoffs, founders of the Bon Marche Department Store, the Schwabacher family, founders of the hardware company, and Joshua Green, banker and financier. These men represent a breed of late nineteenth and early twentieth century entrepreneurs whose small first efforts, conceived broadly and with vision, generated highly successful local and later regional enterprises that had substantial economic impacts and benefits to the Puget Sound area. For its time, "Black Bear" wearing apparel was a remarkably large and prominent industry.

A native of Kentucky, Black was employed in wholesale and dry goods and in the manufacturing of working clothes in Chicago. Later, in Oklahoma, he learned about the retail clothing business and, when he arrived in Seattle in 1900, associated with McDougall and Southwick, a major retail apparel store.

In 1902, Black organized and began operation of his working clothes industry at the corner of First Avenue and Jackson Street, with five sewing machines in 1200 square feet of floor space. During his administration as president of the company, Black's business grew to 325 machines, 200,000 square feet of office, warehouse, and production space. As a manufacturer of "Black Bear" brand mackinaws, shirts, overalls, pants, overcoats, and waterproof garments, by 1929 his company distributed thier products throughout the western states as far east as the Dakotas, south to Mexico, north into Alaska, with some exporting to China and Russia. By 1915 the company had over 265 people on payroll, and maintained 200-300 workers throughout much of its productive period.

In 1927, when Black died, his cousin J. C. Black took over as president. The Black Manufacturing Company is distinguished by its existence under the same family ownership for nearly 80 years, unitl its closing in late 1981. Black's fledgling business grew to influence and benefit the economy of the Pacific Northwest as the Nordhoffs, Schwabachers, Greens and other first families of business enriched the city and the region through their industry and vision. Black was quite proud of being able to make the claim that his building was "the most up-to-date factory building in America, built entirely of Washington-made materials and by Washington men."

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include: the exterior of the building including the roof, and the site.

Issued: March 5, 1987

Karen Gordon

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:dlv

cc: Holly Miller, DCLU (3)
Robert Weaver, Chair,
Landmarks Preservation Board
Molly MacPhee, Bush Street Associates

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