



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

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

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 233/96

Name and Address of Property: Frederick & Nelson Building  
500-524 Pine Street

Legal Description: Heirs of Sarah A. Bell's Addition, Block 2, Lots 1-4, and lots 9-12, and south 20' of Lots 5 & 8.

At the public hearing held on October 16, 1996, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Frederick & Nelson Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

- B. *It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the city, state, or nation;*
- 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;*
- 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 the city;*

### **Description**

The Frederick & Nelson Department Store building is situated in the retail core of Seattle's downtown central business district. It occupies an entire blockfront on the northern side of Pine Street between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue and abuts the south side of the adjacent Medical Dental Building. The building footprint measures approximately 253 feet by 256 feet. As initially constructed in 1916-1918, the store was five full stories with a sixth floor penthouse and basement and subbasement levels. The original total floor area was greater than ten acres, measuring approximately 437,500 square feet.

The original store building was designed in a "Neo-Renaissance" style and constructed with

fireproof materials and a reinforced concrete structural system. The exterior was clad in a full glaze, cream colored terra cotta and distinguished by ornate exterior features. It exhibited a two-part vertical block façade composition. Each of the three major exterior elevations was divided by ornamented piers into ten slightly recessed window bays.

The ground floor and building base originally included large plate glass display and mezzanine windows, an ornate intermediate cornice and prominent iron and glass marquees located at six separate public entrances. The building shaft was composed of window bays divided into groups of double-hung windows with transoms. The windows were separated by ornamented terra cotta mullions and spandrels. The lowermost, second floor level windows in each bay included elaborate surrounds and the uppermost, fifth floor level windows terminated the fenestration pattern with a segmental arched head. The original building form was further distinguished by classical ornament at the cap of each pier and a prominent, classically inspired cornice and roof parapet.

The original interior spaces were distinguished by the use of marble; 30,000 square feet of Victorian-pink Tennessee marble covered the first floor and 25,000 square feet of pink and silver-gray marble was used elsewhere in the store building for wainscoting and stair work. Finished mahogany of a soft, brown tone was utilized throughout the building for store fixtures and interior trim. The store was designed to include innovative labor- and time-saving equipment and services in order to assure convenience and comfort for the customers, as well as the 1,230 staff members.

The store included eight passenger elevators, a system of automated chutes for the efficient movement, shipment and pick-up of merchandise and freight elevators that could transport delivery trucks from street level to all floor levels in the building. Modern ventilation and vacuuming systems, pneumatic tube communication and a private branch telephone exchange with 100 stations also increased efficiency and comfort. The sixth floor penthouse was devoted to staff needs and included an education department for staff training, a medical department with a staff physician and dentist, rest and reading rooms for both men and women staff members, a large cafeteria and open air sun porches. The store offered many amenities to shoppers as well: A soda shop, a nursery, a post office, a beauty salon, an elegant tea room with seating capacity of 400 situated on the fifth floor, and a grill for exclusive use by men. Comfortable reading and writing rooms with elaborate restroom and lavatory facilities, an-auditorium equipped with a “moving-picture projecting machine,” and three private banquet or dining rooms were also available for public use.

In 1950–1952, a major expansion and modernization of the store building was undertaken. An additional five floor levels, each approximately 56,000 square feet in space, were added to the original structure. Rising ten stories above ground level, the form and appearance of the building were dramatically modernized. Each of the end window bays on the three exterior elevations were filled in with clay tile and surfaced with glazed terra cotta matching the original cladding

though not equaling the level of detail in the original second through fourth floors. The classically detailed cornice was removed, the central window bays extended to the ninth floor of the building that was terminated by a plain non-ornamented parapet, behind which the tenth floor was located.

Within the window field of the added floors, the typical pattern was broken in two areas. For five bays of the sixth floor on the east elevation, the typical triplet of double hung windows and transoms with intervening mullions were replaced by glass block. This area of the building was believed to have been used at one time as the bakery. In two bays on the south elevation and six on the west of the eighth floor, the typical windows and intervening mullions were replaced with aluminum frame windows with disproportionally large glass areas. It was behind these windows that the tea room was located. The majority of the typical windows were treated with a pattern finish on the interior face reminiscent of venetian blinds to prevent visibility in or out of the perimeter rooms, most of which were used for stock or had solid partitions directly behind them. Numerous transom windows throughout the building were infilled with louvers to provide air intake and exhaust for updated mechanical systems or were boarded over behind the patterned glass.

The mezzanine level windows were infilled with clay tile and smooth terra cotta with numerous louvers for ventilation. The entrance marquees and the street level storefronts were replaced with new construction, also in a very modernized style. A new marquee was installed around the entire perimeter of the building beneath which the new work was finished with black granite base and white veined marble pilasters flanking enlarged show windows and entry doors framed in bronze. The Pine Street entries were relocated one bay further toward the center of the building.

The interior spaces within the store were also extensively rearranged, remodeled and redecorated. While every office and selling department was altered to some degree and some departments were moved as many as fourteen times, the store remained open and in full operation throughout the twenty-nine months of remodeling. The construction work included the introduction of escalators, a kindergarten area, a mothers' room and family lounge, a tenth floor candy factory and the expansion and relocation of the tea room to the eighth floor. The remodeling also improved efficiencies in the receiving and handling of merchandise, and the operation of the elevators and new fire protection and ventilation systems. The telephone switchboard was expanded to 500 phones as the number of staff members increased to 3,000.

The expansion and modernization of the exterior and interior features of the store significantly altered the original architectural character and the appearance of the building. However, these changes are indicative of important broad societal changes and reflect the evolving role of the store as both a commercial and a social institution.

During the last four decades only minor alterations were made to the building exterior, while interior spaces continued to be adapted to changing fashion and marketing trends. The most

notable alterations occurred in the 1980s. In 1981, the bargain basement level was extensively remodeled into a food and kitchenware hall called "The Arcade." This remodeling included extensive changes to the soda fountain area that had become known as the Paul Bunyan Room. In the late 1980s, with the construction of the METRO Westlake Station, the Pine Street entrances and storefront elevation were altered in order to provide entrances for the underground bus station that now interconnects all the major retail businesses located on Pine Street. To assure recognition of the station entries, METRO imposed their own distinctive finishes on portions of the Pine Street and Fifth Avenue storefronts. Prominent awnings accentuate the entrances to the store building that has stood unused and vacant since mid-1992.

As the building was being prepared for transition to new ownership, the heirs of D.E. Frederick removed many notable items. These include a plaque honoring Frederick & Nelson employees who gave their lives in World War II, which was given to the Seattle Chapter of the VFW, and a large, four-sided clock which hung from the first floor ceiling, which was donated to the Seattle Public Library. Most interior fittings and finishes, such as cast iron railings, chandeliers, marble and wood paneling, were auctioned by the heirs and were removed from the building.

The Tennessee marble floor has sustained significant damage over the years as store layouts have moved, resulting in numerous core drillings for utilities. The stone does not extend to parts of the current floor.

### **Statement of Significance**

On June 21, 1914, the front-page of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* announced that D.E. Frederick, the highly successful Seattle retailer, had purchased eleven lots with frontage on Fifth and Sixth Avenues and Pine Street. The newspaper further reported Mr. Frederick's intention to erect a large, multi-story, department store on this isolated "uptown" site. The proposed store site was in a semi-residential district located a half dozen blocks away from the established center of retail activity, along Second Avenue between Madison and Pine Streets. Thus, fellow retailers, businessmen and financiers labeled the project "Frederick's Folly." The decision to move "uptown" was based on Frederick's understanding of Seattle's topography, urban growth and traffic patterns and retail needs. This decision signaled, as well as triggered, the eventual shift of the retail core northward.

Frederick & Nelson began as a second-hand household furnishings business in a storefront on Front Street (now First Avenue) near Pike Street in early 1890. The business was established by D.E. Frederick and James Mecham, who had become acquainted while involved with mining activity in Colorado. They were joined shortly thereafter by Nels B. Nelson, whom they had met in Colorado. Mecham remained in the business for a short period and then sold out his interest on friendly terms. The subsequent success and expansion of the store over the next many years mirrored the changes in Seattle's population and the health, as well as the weaknesses, of its economic environment.

Between 1890 and 1897 the store relocated four times to increasingly larger spaces and expanded into a wider variety of new, as well as used, merchandise. By 1897, D.E. Frederick and Nels Nelson were in partnership with Silas Munro and the store occupied two storefronts with upper floors in the Rialto Building at Second Avenue and Madison Street. By 1906, Munro had been bought out and the Frederick & Nelson store occupied the entire Rialto Building, as well as adjacent retail spaces on First Avenue. The store included newly established departments for the sale of ready-to-wear women's apparel, men's wear, children's clothing, millinery, yardage, lingerie, luggage, notions, cosmetics and sportswear as well as a variety of customer and employee services. The store's popular tea room served French pastries and featured Haviland china, Irish linen and the impeccable service of 40 waitresses. Beginning in the early 1900s, the store employed a fleet of 28 delivery wagons and offered telephone and mail order shopping services.

The design for the new Fifth Avenue and Pine Street store was developed by John Graham, Sr., a particularly noteworthy early Seattle architect. The architect traveled to the eastern United States in order to study the latest department store design modes and develop an innovative and efficient design for the store. After two years of planning and design, Black Masonry & Construction Co. began construction work in early September 1916. D.E. Frederick- stated as the construction began, "It has been our aim in planning the new building and arranging for its construction to make for architectural beauty as well as convenience for our patrons and employees, and we believe that when the new building is finished it will be a structure of which the city may well be proud."

The building design incorporated numerous modern conveniences and included innovative freight elevators that could transport delivery trucks, extensive pneumatic tube and telephone communication systems and merchandise handling systems, as well as special services and accommodations for employees and patrons. The fifth floor level included an elegant tea room, a men's-only grill room, restroom accommodations, a nursery area, reading and writing rooms and a public auditorium. The sixth floor level, entirely devoted to the needs of staff members, was the location of an education department for staff training purposes, a medical department with a staff physician and dentist, separate rest and reading rooms for both men and women staff members, a large cafeteria and open-air sun porches for exclusive use by the 1,230 staff members.

Construction work- moved slowly, due to W.W.I, and the building was not completed until August 1918. When the store opened to the public on September 3, 1918, over 25,000 first-day patrons were reportedly welcomed. Behind the scenes, the store housed huge storerooms and workshops where staff members tailored clothing, repaired and finished furniture and created draperies, lamp shades and mattresses. The store's staff members were never called "employees" and followed a business creed that emphasized courtesy, loyalty and the need to "sell goodwill as well as good merchandise." Gradually, Seattle's major retail establishments were clustered along

Pine Street and Fifth Avenue, in close proximity to the Frederick & Nelson Department Store and over the subsequent seven decades the store evolved as a social as well as a commercial institution.

In 1929, D.E. Frederick retired and sold the business to Marshall Field & Company of Chicago. This decision was based on his admiration of the company policies and the high quality of its merchandise and its sales staff. The department store retained its name and local identity and continued to offer high quality merchandise and distinctive customer and personnel services. However, when William Street assumed management of the store in January 1938, it was suffering from difficulties brought on by years of poor depression-era earnings. It was necessary to fire rather than hire staff members and someone suggested firing the doorman. Street's response was indicative of the era and the store's continuing business philosophy, "I'm the next to last to go; the doorman is the last."

Despite the economic depression, the store was a center of civic life during the 1930s. The *Seattle Times* (January 30, 1938) reported that during 1937 over 300,000 people attended public meetings and events held in the Frederick & Nelson auditorium.

"These programs ranged from forest conservation to home decorating, from health to fashions and made the auditorium a gathering place for cultural, philanthropic and character-building groups. The President's Forum held their fine arts exhibit there, a health conference, parliamentary classes, science teachers of Seattle schools, Association of Child Education, Capitol Hill Music and Art group and the Junior League presented programs."

The article noted the use of the auditorium by the Federation of Women's Clubs, the Washington State Federation of Garden Clubs, Boy Scouts and the Washington Automobile Association, as well as exhibits sponsored by the American Institute of Architects, Federal Arts Project, Puget Sound Painters and Children's Orthopedic Hospital.

During W.W. II, Frederick & Nelson staff members formed a War Policy Committee to coordinate activity with other civilian protection organizations and organized a defense group for the protection of the store, its personnel and customers. In 1943, Frederick & Nelson opened a small white cottage on landscaped property near Boeing Airplane Company's Plant No. 2. This satellite store was conveniently located in order to lessen absenteeism, and help conserve the rubber (tires) of delivery trucks, as well as rationed gasoline and oil. The store offered a full line of men's and women's work clothing and a selection of other clothing, candy and toiletry items. A "Victory Post" headquarters was established on the main floor of the downtown store, where war bonds and stamps were sold in great volume. The store received numerous commendations for its highly successful war bonds sales and for a period the store building was draped by huge war bonds banners and American flags.

The post-W.W.II era of Frederick & Nelson's evolution as a commercial and social institution reflects important broad societal changes and the dramatic impacts of suburbanization and the use of the automobile. Following a national trend, Frederick & Nelson began its suburban expansion in 1946 with the completion of its first chain store. Located in the newly constructed Bellevue Shopping Square area, this store was originally planned to be only 20,000 square feet, actually constructed to be 60,000 square feet and within ten years replaced by a 116,000 square foot building. The planning for the 1950–52 modernization of the downtown Frederick & Nelson Department Store occurred in conjunction with several other significant retail developments, most importantly the construction of Northgate Shopping Center (1946–50) and the expansion of the downtown Bon Marche Department Store (1950–52).

The local press heralded the decision by the Marshall Field & Co. board of directors as evidence of faith in the future of Seattle and the store's continuing contribution to urban living. The expansion and modernization of the store cost more than \$10 million and was one of the most costly and aggressive construction projects ever undertaken in the Pacific Northwest. While every office and selling department was altered to some degree, and some departments were moved as many as fourteen times, the store remained open and in full operation throughout the twenty-nine months of remodeling. The 1950–52 alterations to the store served to make Frederick & Nelson "one of the largest and finest department stores in America." These changes provided the space for additional merchandise and offices and the modern decor and conveniences that were necessary in an increasingly competitive retail market.

The architectural design for the 1950–52 expansion and modernization was prepared by John Graham & Company then headed by John Graham, Jr., the son of the architect of the original store building. John Graham, Sr. was one of Seattle's most prolific designers of large scale commercial and office buildings and an innovator in the design of this commercial property type, including the Bon Marche Department Store (Seattle, 1928–29). John Graham, Jr. joined his father's firm in 1937, after having spent several years as trainee in statistical merchandising for Allied Stores. In 1946, upon his father's retirement, he took over the direction of the firm. As the designer of the Northgate Shopping Center (1946–50), the initial model for shopping mall development, John Graham, Jr. went on to gain national and international recognition for the design of large scale regional shopping centers throughout the United States, Canada, Australia and parts of Europe.

Over the following forty years, the store continued to be a supporter and exhibition place of Seattle arts organizations and arts events, and a meeting place for thousands of Seattleites for civic, arts and educational purposes. The store encouraged local artists by sponsoring the annual Scholastic Art Competition for junior and senior high school students and operating the Little Gallery that featured the work of Washington State artists. The store became nationally renown for its window and floor displays, especially during the Christmas holiday season. Strolling minstrels and the Santa Claus window, at Sixth and Pine, became local traditions after having been initially introduced in the early 1940s. The store also continued to operate an in-store

bakery, an ice cream plant and a candy factory that began to produce their trademark Frango mint confections in 1927.

The Frederick & Nelson department store chain expanded further into suburban markets throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s with the acquisition of several other Northwest department stores and the construction of new stores at shopping centers in Washington and Oregon. In 1982, Marshall Field & Company merged with BATUS, Inc., as U.S. subsidiary of a British holding company. In September 1986, the Frederick & Nelson chain was sold to a Bellevue-based development partnership that sold it, in turn, to David Sabey in February 1989.

In the late 1980s, with the construction of the METRO Westlake Station, the store was interconnected by an underground bus station to the other major retail businesses located on Pine Street, including the newly constructed Westlake Center and the highly successful Nordstrom flagship store. In early 1992, after earnestly attempting to revive what had gradually become a failed retail chain, Sabey was forced to liquidate the entire Frederick & Nelson operation and its holdings. Since mid-1992, the doorman has been gone.

As the family of D.E. Padelford had always retained title to the building, leasing it to the succession of operators, upon the liquidation of Frederick & Nelson, the building reverted to the family and a search for a new owner began. In mid-1995, a project was assembled that would result in Nordstrom relocating their downtown Seattle store to the Frederick & Nelson building. The components of the project were assembled by May 1996, at which point the title was transferred from the heirs of D.E. Frederick to Nordstrom.

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

**The east, west and south exterior elevations of the building, and the roof.**

Issued: October 28, 1996



Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:cjh

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