

REPORT ON LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Name of Property: Seattle Street Clock Thematic Group

Legal Descriptions:

Benton's Jewelers Clock, 4333 University Way N. E.

immediately E. of lot 4, block 2, Brooklyn Addition in public R.O.W.

Ben Bridge Clock, 409 Pike Street.

immediately N. of lot 1, block 20, A.A. Denny's 3rd Addition in public R.O.W.

Carroll's Jewelers Clock, 1427 Fourth Avenue.

immediately E. of lot 2, block 21, A.A. Denny's 3rd Addition in public R.O.W.

Century Square Clock, 1529 Fourth Avenue.

immediately E. of lot 3, block 22, A.A. Denny's 3rd Addition in public R.O.W.

Great American Food and Beverage Corp. Clock, 3119 Eastlake Avenue.

immediately E. of lot 14, block 36, Denny-Fuhrman Addition in public R.O.W.

Greenwood Jewelers Clock, 129 N. 85th Street.

immediately N. of lot 8, block 10, Greenwood Park Addition in public R.O.W.

Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank Clock, 705 - 3rd Avenue.

immediately E. of lot 7, block 6, Boren & Denny's Addition in public R.O.W.

Meyers Music Clock, 1206 - 1st Avenue.

immediately W. of lot 5, block G, A.A. Denny's 2nd Addition in public R.O.W.

West Earth Co. Clock, 400 Dexter Avenue N.

immediately W. of lot 7, block 82, D. T. Denny's Home Addition in public R.O.W.

Features/Characteristics to be Preserved: Each clock in its entirety (external appearance and original mechanisms where extant) and current location of each.

Criteria applicable: and reasons/discussions why applicable.

Criterion 3.01 (4) Each clock embodies the distinctive characteristics of style, and period.

Criterion 3.01 (6) Prominence and contrasts of age and scale contributes to streetscape.

Approved by the Landmarks Preservation Board at a Public Hearing held 1.7.81.

Issued: 1.21.81


Earl D. Layman, C.H.P.O.



City of Seattle
 Department of Community Development/Office of Urban Conservation

Landmark Nomination Form

Name Seattle Street Clock Thematic Nomination **Year Built** c. 1900-1930
 (Common, present or historic)

(Refer to individual data sheets for detailed information.)

Street and Number _____

Assessor's File No. _____

Legal Description **Plat Name** _____ **Block** _____ **Lot** _____

Benton's Jewelers	433 Univ. Wy. N.E.	Greenwood Jewelers	129 N. 85th St.
Ben Bridge Jewelers	409 Pike St.	Hongkong & Shanghai Bank	705 3rd Ave.
Carroll's Jewelers	1427 Fourth Ave.	Myers Music	1206 First Avenue
Century Square	1529 Fourth Ave.	Harry Taintor's Clock	4610 34th W.
Great American Food	3119 Eastlake Ave. E.	E.J. Towle Co.	406 Dexter N.

Present Owner _____ **Present Use** timekeeping & advertising

Address _____

Original Owner _____ **Original Use** timekeeping & advertising

Architect none **Builder** Mayer Co., Seattle
Howard Co., Boston

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Street clocks, also referred to as post clocks, have been a part of the American urban scene since the mid-nineteenth century, and trace their mechanical ancestry to the great medieval tower clocks of Europe. The design and commercial use of timepieces within free-standing cast iron cases appears, however, to be a primarily American horological development.

The first important manufacturer of these clocks in the United States was the E. Howard Co. of Boston, established in 1842; company catalogues of the 1860's and 70's illustrate some of their early models. Other important manufacturers have included the Seth Thomas Co. of Thomaston, Connecticut and the Mayer Co. of Seattle (1897) which grew to become a major West Coast supplier.

As an advertising medium in the West, street clocks appear to have reached the peak of their popularity during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is uncertain when street clocks were first introduced to Seattle, but the gold rush prosperity of the late 1890's seems to have been a major impetus. In 1897, Marcus and Joseph Mayer founded a jewelry establishment in Seattle and began to assemble street clocks with Howard Co. movements and locally-cast cases. Eventually the manufacturing division of their establishment began to produce clock works independently under the name of Joseph Mayer and Bros. In 1920, the company was divided into a wholesaling company operated by Al and Marcus Mayer (Mayer Bros.), and a manufacturing company operated by Joseph Mayer. It is believed that most of the street clocks manufactured by the Mayers were produced prior to this split. Both descendants of the original company continue in business to date; the wholesale concern under its original name, and the manufacturing concern under its successor's name, the E.J. Towle Co.

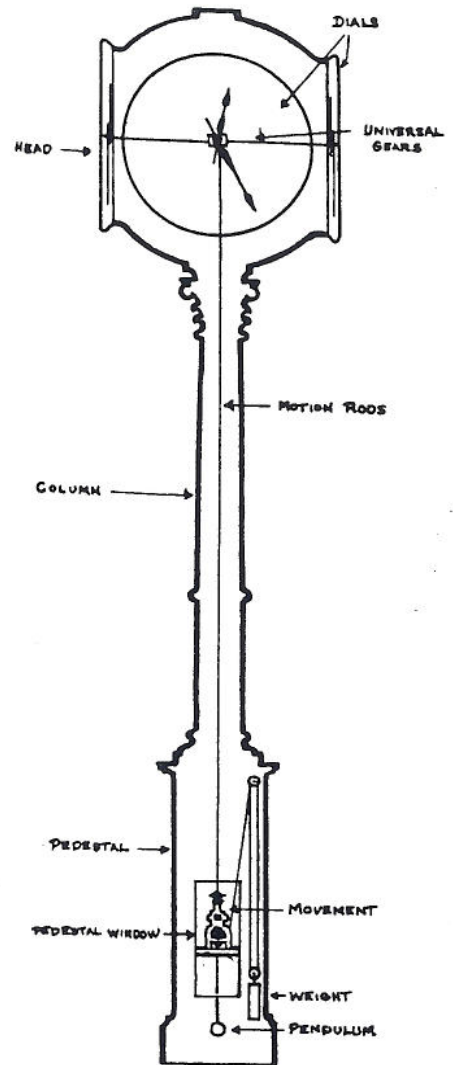
By the 1920's, street clocks had become prominent features along many of Seattle's streetscapes, and their numbers led some observers to refer to Seattle as the "City of Clocks". A heavy concentration of jewelry store clocks congregated on Pike St. near the intersection of Fourth Avenue and individual examples stood at numerous downtown locations and in the outlying commercial districts such as the Alaska Junction, Ballard, Greenwood, and the University District. By 1950, twenty-four clocks were reported standing on Seattle sidewalks.

The popularity of free standing cast iron street clocks waned after the 1930's as city streets became increasingly vehicularized, and newer forms of advertising, particularly neon lighting, became more effective and fashionable. By the 1950's, street clocks came to be regarded pejoratively as old-fashioned and obsolete, and efforts to remove them from city streets were instigated by many municipalities in the name of "improved pedestrian circulation". During this period in 1953, Seattle's Board of Public Works considered banning clocks altogether because of their "obsolescence and homeliness", and because they allegedly impeded pedestrian circulation. Clock owners and aficionados opposed the effort, which finally resulted in a modified ordinance requiring clocks to indicate the time accurately or be removed. A number of clocks were hauled away as a result of this ordinance and a number of others were converted from their original weight-driven drive trains to electrical drive trains in order to reduce maintenance costs and ensure accuracy. Other clocks have disappeared due to business relocations, acquisition by collectors and, in one instance, the competitive motives of a rival clock owner. Today in Seattle, nine clocks remain standing along city streets. A tenth clock, salvaged by a collector, stands alongside his private residence, and an eleventh lies dismembered in the owner's backyard.

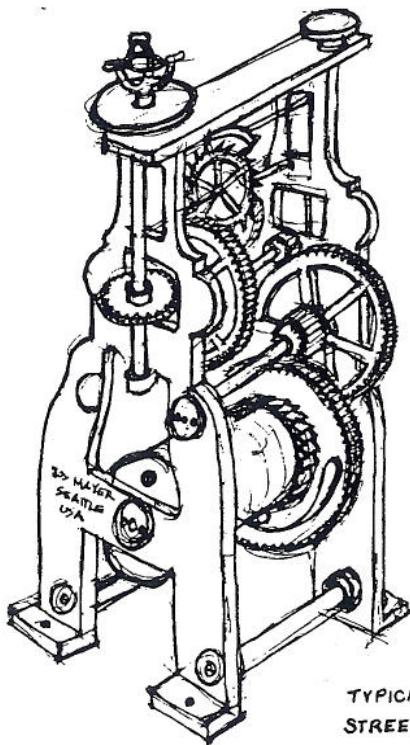
DESCRIPTION

The typical Seattle street clock stands approximately fifteen feet in height and incorporates a pedestal base, a column, and a two or four-sided upper casing housing the dials and the hands. Weight driven movements of a fairly standard design, are encased within the pedestal base of the clocks. Typically the movements stand about fourteen inches in height and consist of two parallel iron plates which secure simple, brass-gear drive trains. A long pendulum is suspended from one side of each movement, and motion gears and a universal joint are located at the opposite side. The works are frequently mounted on a marble plate and exposed to view through windows in the pedestal. A cable is attached to a pulley-suspended weight, which transmits power to the clock via a 6" diameter drum near the bottom of the movement. The column rising above the pedestal houses connecting or motion rods which transmit the motion of the clock movement to the hands via a second universal joint in the upper portion of the clock.

Case designs are more varied depending on the manufacturer, the model, and/or client specifications. Basic styles were advertised in company catalogues, but changed little from year to year. Occasionally, more



TYPICAL STREET CLOCK



TYPICAL MAYER CO.
STREET CLOCK MOVEMENT.

affluent clients would order custom designed time-pieces and, elsewhere, in at least one instance, an architect was commissioned to design a case. The simplest case designs include square-based pedestals with recessed panels and a single door, fluted columns with capitals, and round heads with back-to-back clock faces. Variations on this basic design often include ornate crests, and, occasionally, two to four lamps with milk glass shades. More elaborate designs often include ornate classical columns, four-dial tops and in some instances, coach lamps.

SIGNIFICANCE

Despite the losses of the past three decades, Seattle is still considered to have one of the largest and perhaps most significant collections of cast iron street clocks in the United States. An interesting perspective on their relative scarcity is provided by the case of New York City, where only eight clocks could be identified for landmarks consideration. In the Northwest, Portland and Tacoma are believed to have only one intact example each in their respective downtowns. Seattle's collection has long been familiar to clock historians in the East who have expressed concern for the preservation of these timepieces.

Seattle's street clocks also make a significant contribution to the pedestrian character and the unique personality of the streets and sidewalks in which they stand. When associated with commercial establishments such as banks, and particularly jewelry stores, street clocks become symbolic elements which serve to identify the establishments and set them apart from otherwise routine and conforming facades.

Mark L. Peckham

Submitted by: Staff, Office of Urban Conservation

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Date _____

Reviewed  Date 10 15 80

Historic Preservation Officer