



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 129/08

Name and Address of Property: Washington Athletic Club
1325 Sixth Avenue

Legal Description: Lots 1 and 2, Block 16 of A.A. Denny's Third Addition to the City of Seattle, according to the plat thereof, recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, Page 33, in King County, Washington;

Except that portion of said Lot 1, condemned in King County Superior Court Cause No. 62589 for street purposes, as provided by Ordinance No. 18188 of the City of Seattle.

At the public meeting held on March 5, 2008, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Washington Athletic Club at 1325 Sixth Avenue, as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- 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; and*
- D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and*
- E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder; and*
- 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.*

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Washington Athletic Club is directly associated with the early twentieth century era between 1920 and 1930 when the modern downtown commercial district was fully established. During this era numerous large commercial buildings were constructed and

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virtually all of the old residential properties - as well as many of the immediate post-fire era commercial buildings outside of Pioneer Square – were demolished or removed. The economic prosperity of the 1920s stimulated the development of major highrise commercial buildings, as well as the construction of smaller-scale bank and specialty retail stores, major hotels including apartment hotels, club buildings and entertainment facilities. By 1930, the original late-nineteenth century residential district that extended eastward from Second Avenue and northward from Yesler Way had been entirely absorbed by commercial and other real estate development. While the original residential district was primarily composed of single-family homes, it included numerous churches and buildings used for meeting and fraternal hall purposes. Despite ever-increasing commercial real estate development throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, this land use pattern continued as major new churches, fraternal halls and club buildings - typically designed by skilled local architects – continued to be constructed in the evolving and expanding downtown commercial district.

The Washington Athletic Club is highly unique as the only example of a highrise clubhouse building in downtown Seattle. It is also unique for its specific design and construction as a large private athletic club facility, purposes for which it has been continuously used. It is notable for its architectural character – as a 21-story Art Deco style highrise building and for its associations with the career of Sherwood Ford, an important Seattle architect. Despite significant interior alterations and modernization projects, the exterior of this clubhouse building is well-preserved and is a distinctive and prominent visual feature within the downtown commercial core.

History of Physical Culture and Athletic Club Movement

Physical culture or physical fitness has been part of society since the earliest of civilizations. Its real beginning as sustained endeavor dates from the Greeks and the advent of the Olympic Games. The Greeks also cultivated the ideal that gymnasiums and physical activity could be used not only for exercise purposes, but also as a place for socializing and the discussion of philosophy and politics. The athletic club of the modern era was born out of the most basic ideals of physical culture as they evolved throughout history.

Cultural emphasis on physical exercise and the pursuit of health and fitness was greatly diminished after the fall of the Roman Empire; it was not until the Italian Renaissance that strong interests were revived in Western Civilization, primarily due to the study and admiration of the human form expressed in the works of Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci. In Northern Europe by the eighteenth century this renewed physical awareness was transformed into an interest in genuine exercise and fitness activities. A gymnasium was established in Germany in 1774 that emphasized physical activities such as wrestling, running, riding, fencing, vaulting and dancing. Other modern exercise movements emerged across the European continent throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that focused on gymnastics, calisthenics, strength training, as well as hammer throwing, shot put, and other activities know as modern-day track and field events. Europeans began to develop a focus on physical culture that was strongly rooted in their ethnic or national

identities; much of the focus on physical fitness was intended to foster a sense of national character or to build up a strong and physically fit army.

By the early nineteenth century European physical culture traditions began to take root in America, particularly among German-American immigrants. Components of physical culture had developed in the United States since the colonial era; however, throughout the nineteenth century, the movement gradually attained institutional status. The first American gymnasium was founded in North Hampton, Massachusetts in 1823; this was followed by the establishment of the first American-based gymnastics club in Cincinnati in 1848.

Participation in sports activities also became more popular in America due to the various social benefits rather than the purely physical and fitness benefits obtained from the activity. Thus, individuals began to focus on fitness and participation in sport more for personal fulfillment and physical exercise became increasingly viewed as a form of personal amusement. The prior nationalistic focus on health and well-being as the purpose for the pursuit of fitness was replaced with the ideal that health, fitness and engaging in sport could be viewed as a personal reward and as a worthy social endeavor. Ultimately, America's first "athletic club" was founded in 1868 in New York City.

The earliest American athletic clubs were typically large institutions, which were exclusive and founded to essentially foster business and social networks. Most clubs did not allow women as members. The Chicago Athletic Club, one of the most prominent early clubs in the nation, did not officially allow women as members until 1972. Elegant private athletic clubs were typically run by governing bodies, included business enterprises – like cigar shops, barber shops and guest accommodations - and provided an opportunity to participate in a diverse range of sporting activities, games and events. Common components of many early clubs include swimming pools, archery and shooting ranges, a billiards room, a bowling alley, boxing rings and other facilities that focused more on the social aspects of sport rather than physical demands. In some cases, athletic clubs also offered lectures or discussions on nutrition, literature, theater, or current affairs.

Another prominent American club was the Los Angeles Athletic Club, which was founded in 1880 when Los Angeles was just a small town of 11,000. As the city grew, the modest club grew and expanded; it boasted among its membership prominent political and financial figures and film stars from the golden age of Hollywood. In 1912, a new purpose-built clubhouse building was constructed, reflecting the success and popularity of the club. The elegant 12-story Beaux-Arts style clubhouse was designed by John Parkinson and included hotel accommodations. It was the first building in Southern California to have a swimming pool located on an upper floor level, for which it gained much notoriety. This clubhouse with its sixth floor level swimming pool, was reportedly the model on which the Washington Athletic Club was founded.

By the early 1960's, the science of exercise physiology was well-recognized, and as a result, physical exercise began to become more focused on aerobic activities such as jogging and organized aerobic exercise classes. Vigorous exercise replaced more stationary and social sports activities that had been a staple of traditional athletic clubs and many older athletic clubs adapted their facilities in order to accommodate the demand for more rhythmic, cardio-

based, or group fitness activities. The classic American athletic club began to be transformed into a health and fitness center of chrome equipment and mirrors complete with free weights, aerobics classes, computerized exercise machines, saunas, nutritionists, and personal trainers.

By the end of the twentieth century, private non-exclusive health clubs, exercise facilities and gymnasiums gained in popularity and were established in significant numbers. The term “athletic club” began to take on a different meaning as a reference to a place where specific exercise facilities were offered. Typically, these clubs and gyms serve the sole purpose of providing exercise facilities. However, many private athletic clubs – like the Washington Athletic Club – continue to function in major metropolitan areas offering expensive and exclusive memberships, fostering social networking and providing an opportunity to participate in a wide range of sports and exercise activities, as well as dining and social activities.

Historic Context - Social and Athletic Clubs in Seattle

Social clubs and fraternal organizations were an essential aspect of burgeoning communities throughout the American West that were becoming established during the late nineteenth century. They offered places and opportunities for community members with shared interests or common backgrounds to meet and develop local contacts and social networks. Membership in fraternal organizations provided social, religious, ethnic and labor-related networks. Membership in businessmen’s clubs provided social, business marketing and recreation opportunities, and in particular cases residential accommodations. Women’s clubs typically provided opportunities to pursue educational, philanthropic, civic or cultural activities outside of home, family and church life.

Social clubs in Seattle and the nation as a whole were typically limited to one gender and most often had other restrictions based on age, education, race and religion. Among the earliest men’s clubs in Seattle were the Rainier Club founded in 1888 and the University Club founded in 1900, as well as several athletic-oriented groups established around various sporting activities including golf, tennis, riding and polo. Among the earliest women’s clubs in Seattle was the Women’s Century Club founded in 1891 by a group of early feminists in order to provide intellectual stimulation and cultural enrichment. A booklet described as “Seattle Society Addresses and Women’s Club Roster” was published in 1904 and listed 23 individual women’s clubs including the YWCA, which prompted exercise activities.

The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) movement was introduced in Seattle by the late 1870s and became an important civic institution that promoted civic and moral values through various programs including an emphasis on physical culture and exercise. In 1907-08, the YMCA Building constructed a large, six-story building at Fourth Avenue and Madison Street – now demolished – that included a swimming pool and fairly elaborate sports and athletic facilities. In 1925, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce published a directory that listed over 700 clubs based within the city. Fraternal and religious organizations were not included in the directory; however, it did list a wide range of professional and industrial organizations, athletic clubs, community groups and social clubs. Numerous alumni organizations representing major colleges and universities across the

nation were listed as were several education-based social clubs. The education-based social clubs that operated out of their own downtown clubhouse buildings were the male-only College Club and the Women's University Club. In 1913-14, the YWCA constructed an eight-story building at Fifth Avenue and Seneca Street that included a swimming pool and a large gymnasium facility and by 1929 the YMCA was preparing to greatly expand its downtown building.

Founding of the Washington Athletic Club

In early 1928 Noel B. Clarke, a young Californian who had settled in Seattle, began to promote the establishment of a major new downtown athletic club. He had become annoyed by the fact that he could only play handball at the YMCA, had to go to First Avenue to find a Turkish bath and still elsewhere for a good meal and a good barber. Clarke was familiar with the Los Angeles Athletic Club that provided all of these services and facilities; it was owned by individuals and operated as a business for the benefit of its members. Clarke came up with a development plan and began to sell memberships with the goal of attracting 2,000 members in order to establish and build a downtown club building. In March of 1928, the design commission for a 12-story athletic club building - to be constructed at Sixth Avenue and University Street - was announced. The anticipated construction cost was \$1,000,000 and a little-known architectural firm of Baker, Vogel and Roush was selected to design the facility. This initial project did not proceed due to insufficient financial backing in conjunction with other questionable real estate activities undertaken by Mr. Clarke. Clarke lost his real estate license and was forced to abandon the effort after spending approximately \$7,500 on newspaper ads and office expenses. However, he had successfully sold some 1,000 memberships in the club.

The concept for a downtown athletic club then began to be seriously promoted by Edward B. Waite and Jules L. Charbneau. After some effort, they were able to involve Mr. William D. Comer; he was the president of Puget Sound Savings and Loan Association and the financier for various other local real estate developments including the Mayflower (Music Hall) Theater, the Textile Tower, the Marlborough House apartments and the Olive Tower apartments. Mr. Comer assumed Clarke's expenses and purchased control of the club records and accounts for \$500. He agreed to finance the construction of a suitable club building provided that there were at least 2,000 businessmen and professional men willing to purchase memberships. Waite and Charbneau established an office in the White-Henry - Stuart Building and set up a crew of salesmen working on a commission basis; within 90 days they had signed up 2,600 members. The Washington Athletic Club Holding Company was established and planning for the construction project moved forward.

William D. Comer had previously purchased a prime piece of real estate at the southwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Union Street where he had initially intended to develop an apartment building. As the market for new apartment houses had become glutted, he deemed the site appropriate for the construction of the athletic club building. A board of trustees was selected by Mr. Comer; it included Darwin Meisnest, Charles Clise, S.W. Thurston, and Raymond G Wright.

The firm of Sherwood D. Ford and Don M. Clippinger - with Ford serving as principal architect - was hired to design a much larger athletic club building than Clarke had anticipated. The selection of the firm must have been related to the fact that Sherwood Ford had previously designed the Mayflower Theater (1927-1828, destroyed) for Mr. Comer. By September 1928, Sherwood Ford published his initial design concepts for the proposed new building. Reportedly, he traveled to the East Coast and California to study athletic club buildings in Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia and become familiar with the latest designs and interior arrangements for this building type. By January 1929, the final plans were being prepared for the construction of a highrise tower some twenty stories in height with an anticipated construction cost of \$2,000,000.

The construction budget and the building height both appear to have been adjusted and revised over the following four months. By August 1929, the plans called for a 21-story building with a \$2,300,000 construction budget. Five retail storefronts were included at the street level oriented toward Union Street with the remainder of the building devoted entirely to club facilities for the Washington Athletic Club (WAC). A ground breaking event took place on December 16, 1929. Sound Construction and Engineering Company – headed by Henry Lohse and C.C. Hastie - served as the general contractors.

Art Deco Style Architecture

The final exterior design for the new athletic club was executed in an elaborate Art Deco style with a dramatic stepped-back highrise tower form and a profusion of ornate bas-relief and sculpted terra cotta ornament. Art Deco was a popular international design movement from 1920 until the late 1930s that found expression in the decorative arts including architecture, interior design and industrial design as well as the visual and graphic arts and clothing and jewelry fashion. The design mode grew out of several earlier twentieth century design styles and movements including Constructivism, Cubism, Bauhaus, Art Nouveau and Futurism. The mode gained wide popularity in the United States after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes that was held in Paris 1925, which served to showcase futuristic works designed to express modernity and artistic idioms meant to complement the machine age. The movement was initially called Style Moderne but it subsequently became popularly known as Art Deco.

Art Deco ornamentation is typified by bas-relief geometric designs and architectural ornament that is most often executed in the form of parallel straight lines, zigzags, ziggurats, chevrons, and stylized floral and fern motifs. The style is typified by a conscious rejection of historical styles; in North America, design motifs were often inspired by Native American art. Art Deco style architecture is typified by the stylized and innovative use of modern construction materials, bold stepped forms and sweeping curves as well as opulent and often lavish exterior and interior ornamentation. The most notable examples of the Art Deco style were produced due to harmonious collaborations between architects and artists, sculptors and designers.

The stepped-back vertical form of Eliel Saarinen's un-built, second-prize winning design for the Chicago Tribune Tower competition, which was held in 1922, became a prototype for tall

urban buildings. Subsequently, the great Art Deco skyscrapers of New York City had an overpowering influence on the popularization of the style, which came to symbolize the possibilities of twentieth century technology and the future. During the late 1920s, the style was popularly used for the design of commercial buildings, apartment houses, theaters and hospitals; however, it found its fullest expression in the stepped-back office tower form with which the style is most frequently associated. With the advent of tall buildings, zoning codes were adopted that required the building facades above a certain height to be setback from the street edge in order to provide sufficient openings for the passage of sunlight between buildings. Thus, modernistic skyscrapers were executed in the Moderne or Art Deco style with a consistent set of ornamental design motifs, structural piers and massing that served to reinforce the verticality of the form. Corporate and commercial skyscraper designs were executed to include an opulent and often intricate selection of exotic materials, motifs and interior treatments. Bas-relief ornament that could be executed in terra cotta, incised stone and bronze was particularly well-suited to decorate the multiple flat surfaces of highrise buildings; the ornament often incorporated symbolic images of the activities within the building. Bold bands of ornament near the building caps were scaled to be perceived from the street level; the building base and the cap were typically much more ornamented than the shaft, which was designed to emphasize the overall height and draw visual attention to top of the building.

Seattle's Early Twentieth Century Skyscrapers

After the turn of the century, local and regional economic prosperity generated the earliest construction of tall, steel-frame and ferroconcrete office buildings at the northern edge of the Pioneer Square commercial district along Second Avenue. The 14-story Alaska Building (1903-04), the 12-story American Savings Bank/Empire Building (1904-06, destroyed), and the not fully realized 12-story Melhorn Building (1906-07) were constructed exhibiting elegant face brick with terra cotta cladding and ornament in a design mode heavily influenced by eastern precedents, especially the Chicago School. Distinctive skyscrapers of similar scale, construction technology and design character would be constructed elsewhere in the expanding commercial core over the subsequent ten years, including: the Eitel Building (1906); Northern Bank and Trust Company Building (1906-09); the White Building (1908, destroyed), the Henry Building (1909, destroyed), Cobb Building (1909); and the eighteen-story Hoge Building (1911). During this era commercial business blocks and highrise buildings inspired by Beaux-Arts design principles - often entirely terra cotta-clad - were constructed throughout the expanded commercial district, including; the Central Building (1907); Securities Building (1912-13) Joshua Green Building (1913); Arctic Building (1913-17); the Times Square Building (1916) and most notably the 42-story Smith Tower (1914).

In 1923, the City of Seattle enacted a zoning code and ordinance that included setback requirements for tall buildings. The construction of office buildings accelerated during the downtown construction boom of the 1920s as major highrise buildings replaced older business blocks and transformed what was left of the old residential district. By 1930, the downtown commercial core included numerous major highrise office and hotel buildings including: the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building (1921, 1926); Dexter Horton

Building (1922); Spring Apartment Hotel (Vintage Park Hotel, 1922); Terminal Sales Building (1923); Shafer Building (1923); Olympic Hotel (1924); Bergonian Hotel (Mayflower Park Hotel, 1926); 1411 Fourth Avenue Building (1929); Exchange Building (John Graham, Sr., 1929); Northern Life Building (1929); United Shopping Tower (Olympic Tower, Henry Bittman, 1929); Roosevelt Hotel (John Graham, Sr., 1929); Textile Tower (Earle W. Morrison, 1930); and the Joseph Vance Building (V.W. Voorhees, 1930). Several of these highrise buildings were designed in the Art Deco style - particularly those designed and constructed after 1928, when the Northern Life Tower (A.H. Albertson, Joseph Wilson and Paul D. Richardson) project was undertaken. This project was Seattle's first and its finest example of Art Deco skyscraper design. Due to the economic downturn after 1930, major downtown commercial construction was halted and Art Deco designs for a new Arctic Club and Seattle City Light Building were never realized.

Design and History of the Washington Athletic Club Building

The final exterior design for the new WAC highrise clubhouse was executed in an elaborate Art Deco style with a dramatic 21-story stepped-back highrise tower form and a profusion of ornate bas-relief and sculpted terra cotta ornament. The building design was formally oriented to the north and toward Union Street with the club entry located off of Sixth Avenue. The formal and heavily ornamented central bay of the façade at Union Street extends 21-stories; at the eleventh floor level the base shaft is stepped-back to the south, east and west. At the nineteenth floor level the tower is setback at all four corners. The two-story setback cap between the nineteenth and the twenty-first floor levels is crowned by a setback pavilion at the 22nd floor and a two-story elevator machine room. Wide major piers and narrower interstitial piers emphasize the verticality of the stepped-back building form. Bas-relief and sculpted terra cotta ornament decorate the top of the building base, the central bay of the façade shaft, the two-story cap at the top of the base shaft and setback, and the two-story setback at the tower cap. The bas-relief ornament includes traditional acanthus, shield, cable and denticulated motifs and cresting in addition to distinctive moderne floral, fern and chevron motifs and vertical fluting. The WAC winged symbol, sculpted eagles and eagle medallions are distinctive artistic expressions; especially the eagles that emphasize the multiple outside corners of the twenty-first floor level and cap the central tower bay. Other distinctive sculptural ornament includes muscular human figures at the base piers of the Union Street façade and mythical human and animal masks that decorate pier caps and stylized ziggurat parapets.

The clubhouse building was designed to include a highly ornate main lobby with a formal entryway from Sixth Avenue. The two-story space featured a vaulted ceiling with open balconies to the second floor level. Several formal rooms including a men's library and lounge were located off of the lobby as well as a coat check, cigar shop and barber shop. A large formal main dining room and seven private dining rooms including the Pompeian Room were located on the Third floor level. Formal areas were typically finished and decorated with terrazzo flooring, ornamental cast plaster, marble cladding and stairs and southern red gum wood cabinetry and trim.

The architectural plans for the highrise WAC clubhouse included a separate ladies entrance at the south side of the Sixth Avenue entry vestibule. A women's elevator provided direct access to a separate second floor level ladies lounge, bridge room and Third floor level dining room. The majority of the seventh floor was taken up with a large locker room facility for women and children; the girls shared this locker room with their mothers while a separate boy's locker room was located nearby on the same floor level. A promotional brochure noted;

“The Club offers exceptional advantages to its women members and wives of members. A special women's elevator gives exclusive entrance and exit to the women's departments. The entire seventh floor is taken over by facilities for women – the beauty salon, the conditioning department, the ladies' sport shop and locker rooms. On the second floor is the ladies bridge room, lounge, cloak room and powder room. The ladies' dining room and private dining rooms are on the third floor. Ladies are permitted to use the gymnasium and the swimming pool at specific hours during the week, as well as the bowling alleys.”

Men's locker room areas were located on the Sixth and the Eighth floor level. The men's Sixth floor locker room opened onto a large two-story space at the north side of the building that housed a large swimming pool with a balcony overlooking it at the seventh floor level. An informal men's grill/dining room as well as billiard, game and card rooms were located at the Fourth floor level. Housed elsewhere between the Fourth floor and the Eighth floor levels were a bowling alley, a large two-story gymnasium, numerous handball and squash courts, a golf practice room, boxing and wrestling facilities, exercise rooms with rowing machines and other workout equipment, and a physical conditioning department with massage tables, steam baths and a “sun ray” room. The kitchen and other food preparation and serving facilities were primarily located in the subbasement and on the Third and Fourth floor levels. The basement was primarily devoted to mechanical equipment and machinery, laundry operations, linen storage and separate locker rooms for male and female employees.

Approximately 113 guest rooms were originally located between the 9th and the 20th floor levels. Because there is no 13th floor level – the 20th floor is actually the 19th floor level - causing some confusion regarding the overall building height. A portion of the 9th floor as well as all of the 10th through 12th and 14th through 18th (actually 13th through 17th) included standard guest rooms with private baths. The 19th & 20th (actually 18th & 19th) floor levels included larger guest rooms with fireplaces. The 21st floor was used for meeting rooms and offices and the 22nd floor level served as a print room. The 23rd (actually 22nd) floor housed the elevator machine room penthouse.

The inclusion of over 100 guest rooms for use by non-resident club members made it feasible to promote a special category of club membership and generate additional revenue. The initial club membership fee was \$100, but due to the revised and much expanded building design the basic membership fee was gradually raised to \$150. During the promotion, design and construction process all club members were kept informed about the progress of construction and club activities by way of regularly published bulletins. In January 1930, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce devoted an entire meeting to the promotion of the new club.

In February 1930, the club became involved in promotional efforts related to the Olympic Summer Games planned for Los Angeles in 1932. During this period, Ray Daughters the discoverer and trainer of Helene Madison, Seattle's world champion swimmer was hired as the club's swimming master. Thus, the club was assured of having Miss Madison swim under the WAC colors. The club's first track team also began to gather various laurels and went on to National AAU championships. Thus, it became certain that the planned trophy displays would immediately include a selection of trophies. As a Washington Athletic Club member, Helene Madison went on to become one of Seattle's most famous Olympic athletes after winning three gold medals at the 1932 Olympic Games.

On November 14, 1930 the By-laws and House Rules of the Washington Athletic Club were formal adopted and stated:

“The purpose of the Club shall be to foster amateur athletics, promote physical culture, athletics, sports, good fellowship, recreation and social entertainment...”

The formal opening of the massive new clubhouse building was held on December 16, 1930; the Washington Athletic Club was the last major highrise building to be completed in downtown Seattle as the Great Depression began to sink in. Shortly after construction completion a fully illustrated promotional brochure was printed and distributed. It included dozens of photographs of the formal rooms and athletic facilities as well as advertisement from dozens and dozens of local companies that were involved in the construction, furnishing or provision of services or supplies for the club, including: Rautman Plumbing & Heating Company; Seattle Cornice Works; Wallace Bridge & Structural Steel Company; J.H. Pomeroy & Company, Inc, steel erectors; Pioneer Sand and Gravel Company; Anderson Brass & Fixture Works; Gladding, McBean & Company , supplier of ornamental terra cotta and face brick; Western Granite Company, Inc.; H.L. Nelson Company, ornamental cast plaster; Joe Di Luck, terrazzo contractor; Builders Hardware & Supply Company ; Western Fibre Furniture Company; Schorn Paint Manufacturing Company; Cascade Fixture Company – designed and manufactured lighting fixtures; Bakers, providers of oriental art; Franklin Hall, decorative furniture and carpets and Western Painting and Decorating Company, Inc.

As part of the dedication activities, a sculpted bronze tablet was installed near the northeast corner of the building on Sixth Avenue. The relief sculpted medallion image was created by well-known Seattle sculptor James P. Wehn. It was placed on the building in honor of a territorial pioneer Mrs. John (Hannah) Newman and includes the inscription: “Mrs. Hannah Newman with courage and faith in the development of our city, owned this ground from pioneer days to the erection of the present building, 1930.” Hannah Newman was the wife of a famous local packer and “sourdough” John “Jack” Newman (1863-1931) who had lead pack trains over the White Pass for the Brooks Packing Company during the height of the Klondike gold rush. Hannah Newman arrived in Seattle as a child in 1866 when there were only nine European-American children residing here. Reportedly, she purchased the property in 1882 when it was still considered an isolated wooded block east of the University Grounds. She sold the property to “citizens promoting the construction of a new home for the Washington Athletic Club” – presumably Mr. W.D. Comer – and her husband had the plaque commissioned and erected to honor her. Mr. Newman had previously commissioned Wehn to

create two other sculptures commemorating gold rush era events. Mr. and Mrs. Newman participated in the public ceremony that was held when the tablet was placed on the building.

From 1928 until 1935 the WAC was owned and operated by a group of private individuals with Darwin Meisnest holding the controlling stock; during this era the Board of Governors was primarily concerned with social events rather than club operations. Only a few months after the club opened it was threatened with closure due to failing local economic and business conditions and a significant and rapid drop in membership. Darwin Meisnest - by then a cement company executive – and attorney Raymond G. Wright played a pivotal role in keeping the doors open. The 33-year old Meisnest and his brother Ken essentially took over the management and operation of the club. On April 11, 1931, a new membership drive was mounted – memberships could be purchased for \$25 plus \$7 monthly fee with the funds held in trust until it was certain that the club would be able to continue to operate. Some 800 new members were recruited. However, by 1935 the membership numbers had again dropped to a new low of 1,426. Civic leaders and community members stepped forward to insure sufficient membership numbers and income, and the club was able to continue its operations.

The club was able to weather the depression because it had a program for every member of the family. For men there was bowling, swimming, volleyball, handball squash, badminton and monthly “smokers” and speaker’s dinners. The women’s program included a Friday morning lecture series, a course in interior decorating, fashion shows, dramatics, swimming, tap-dancing, calisthenics, as well as bridge luncheons and lessons. For children there were swimming lessons, boxing, calisthenics, holiday parties and summer programs.

In 1934 due to the Steele Act, the WAC could no longer serve liquor unless it became a non-profit corporation. Thus, the club was reorganized so that the Board of Governors actually ran the club while the property was leased to the Washington Athletic Club Holding Company. Darwin Meisnest was hired to serve as Executive Vice President and manager of the club. In 1942, Ken Meisnest took over management of the club; he was a strong advocate of a member-owned and member-operated club.

In the 1940s, the WAC reciprocated for prior support from the community by mobilizing a significant number of members to work on behalf of World War II relief efforts. In their “Victory Center” – which took up the entire seventh floor level - women members sewed, knit, weaved and made surgical dressings for local soldiers, pilots and sailors.

In 1945 the initial steps were taken toward the actual purchase of the club building by WAC members from the Washington Athletic Club Holding Company. By 1950, all of the original bonds and preferred stock had been purchased at market value and entirely paid off. Policy making, management responsibilities and operational decisions began to be completely handled by members serving on multiple organizational committees. By 1950, the WAC was considered to be one of the most progressive and well-equipped athletic clubs in the nation, employing some 300 people and serving between 1,200 and 1,500 meals a day.

In 1953, the club acquired a long-term lease on the vacant 60-foot wide lot adjoining the clubhouse to the south on Sixth Avenue. In 1954, the original clubhouse was modernized,

remodeled and expanded by general contractor Howard S. Wright and Company at a cost of approximately \$2,000,000. A four-story addition was constructed. It was designed by Bain and Overturf to eventually accommodate a total of twelve stories and included a 400-seat auditorium, a new dining room, and a below-grade parking garage. The modern curtail wall façade included a glass entry vestibule and contrasted sharply with the original clubhouse building with its distinctive Art Deco style exterior treatments. The original entry vestibule was abandoned and enclosed and the main lobby was expanded and modernized. The original open second floor level balcony that overlooked the main lobby was infilled and enclosed. As envisioned in 1954, an additional eight stories were added to the new wing in 1970. At that time the curtain wall façade was removed and a new entrance and Sixth Avenue exterior elevation was executed in a Brutalistic style according to a plans prepared by John Graham and Company. Between 1970 and 2007 virtually all of the interior spaces within the clubhouse were repeatedly modernized and updated in order to accommodate evolving modern athletic facilities and programs and decorating trends.

Sherwood D. Ford and Don M. Clippinger

The Washington Athletic Club was designed by Sherwood D. Ford (1872-1948) and associate architect Don M. Clippinger. Sherwood Ford is best known for his theater, apartment and hotel design projects. Ford was born in England in 1872 and immigrated to the United States in the 1890s. He first worked as an architect in Montreal before moving to Boston where he worked for twelve years with the Boston architecture firm of Hartwell, Richardson, and Driver. During a portion of that time, he is said to have been in charge of that office.

The Hartwell and Richardson firm was formed in 1881 when Henry Walker Hartwell (1833-1919), a successful practicing Boston architect, partnered with William Cummings Richardson (1854-1935), a Boston-trained architect more than twenty years his junior. The pair practiced together for more than forty years, gaining particular success in the 1880s and 1890s during the period of H.H. Richardson's greatest influence. They were most popular for their work in designing suburban homes for newly successful businessmen and merchants. Their work provides an excellent example of the popular architectural taste in Boston and the influence of H.H. Richardson on his contemporaries. One of their most notable works is the Church of St. John the Divine (1889-90) in New York City.

Upon moving to Seattle in 1907, Sherwood Ford joined the firm of Graham and Myers, focusing on residential design. After the dissolution of that firm, Ford continued to work with Graham. When John Graham relocated to Detroit to work as the supervising architect for the Ford Motor Company in 1914, Ford formed a partnership with James E. Webster and they took over Graham's northwest projects until 1916. In 1917, Ford began practicing independently; his most notable commissions include the Cambridge Apartments (1923), the Marcus Whitman Hotel (1927) in Walla Walla, and the Mayflower Theater (1927-28, Music Hall Theater, destroyed). The Mayflower Theater, which was designed in a flamboyant Spanish Baroque style, was designed for W.D. Comer, the financier of the Washington Athletic Club project.

Upon receiving the commission to design the Washington Athletic Club in 1928, Ford reportedly set out on an extensive trip to conduct design research. An article from *Washington State Architect* in September of 1928 reported that Ford was leaving Seattle to study prominent athletic clubs across the country in order to examine interior arrangements that would aid in the design of the Washington Athletic Club. His itinerary included visits to athletic clubs in Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Boston, and California. It is believed that the overall design concept for the WAC – including the Sixth floor swimming pool - was largely based on the lavish Los Angeles Athletic Club. In 1929, Ford was elected president of the Washington State Chapter of the AIA.

Bain & Overturf

The 1954 addition to the Washington Athletic Club was designed by Bain & Overturf. William James Bain, Sr. (1896-1985) began his architectural education in 1915 as an apprentice for W.R.B. Wilcox, Arthur Lovelace and other Seattle architects. After serving in France during World War I, he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania where he earned an architecture degree. After returning to Seattle, he practiced independently and in several partnerships with others – including Lionel Pries – primarily designing residences, apartment and sorority houses. From 1941 to 1943, he worked with J. Lister Holmes and others on Yesler Terrace, a highly innovative low-income housing project. In 1943, in order to handle several large World War II era government projects he joined with architects Floyd Naramore, Clifton Brady and Perry Johanson to form Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johanson. Now known as NBBJ, the partnership went on to design a wide variety of commercial, industrial and institutional buildings for which the firm has earned considerable local, national, and international prominence and recognition. In 1947, Bain formed a partnership with Harrison Overturf that continued until 1970; this partnership enabled him to work on smaller residential and commercial projects.

Helene Madison

Helene Madison (1914-1970) was Seattle's first world famous teenage Olympic swimming champion. She learned to swim at age two in classes at Green Lake and learned competitive techniques training in pools at the Moore Hotel and later as a member of the Washington Athletic Club, where she swam under the WAC colors. She made her debut in international competitions at age 15 and went on to break 117 United States and World records. She won three gold medals for the United States at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Madison turned professional following her success at the Olympics, giving performances at the amusement park at Bitter Lake after her return to Seattle. She ventured to Hollywood and starred in the Mack Sennett comedy flop *The Human Fish* in 1932, and attempted a failed career as a nightclub entertainer in Seattle. By 1936, her minor and largely unsuccessful gigs as a paid swimmer left her ineligible to compete at the Olympic Games in Berlin. Her later years were filled with tragedy, indebtedness, and illness. The public swimming pool near Ingraham High School and the pool at the Washington Athletic Club are both named in her honor.

James A. Wehn

James A. Wehn (1882-1973) moved to Seattle with his family in 1889 shortly after the Great Fire. He subsequently studied art locally and in on the East Coast. He eventually turned to sculpture and ornamental modeling for buildings and worked at his father's local foundry. He is believed to have established Seattle's first professional sculpture studio in back of the When family home near the Mt. Baker neighborhood. In the early 1900s, he became involved with the creation of a bronze statue of Chief Sealth; during this period he became closely associated with local historians Clarence B. Bagley and Edmond Meany. Probably due to those connections, he founded the sculpture department at UW in 1919 and taught there for five years. He is best known for the large standing sculpture of Chief Sealth at Tillicum Place (1907-1912) and the small bust of Chief Sealth (c.1909) with a bubbler for horses and dogs located in Pioneer Place Park. In 1936, he also created the official City of Seattle seal – an image of Chief Sealth.

Mr. John “Jack” Newman appears to have commissioned Wehn to create the distinctive sculpted bronze tablet honoring his wife, Hannah Newman that is mounted on the east elevation of the WAC. Jack Newman had previously commissioned Wehn to sculpt two other works. One was a similar sculpted monument plaque created to honor the pack teams that died hauling supplies up White Pass for Mr. Newman; it was placed along the line of the White Pass Yukon Railway in August 1929. The other was a bronze bust of Mollie Walsh - the “wonder girl of the Yukon Trail” who ran a supply and grub tent at the summit of White Pass and was murdered in Seattle in 1902; it is located in Mollie Walsh Park in Skagway, Alaska.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Site, Setting and Urban Context

The Washington Athletic Club (WAC) is a visually prominent and distinctive highrise building located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Union Street in downtown Seattle. This 21-story building was designed and constructed to serve as a large private athletic club with guest accommodations, purposes for which it continues to be used. The original design included a formal club entry oriented toward Sixth Avenue and five retail stores oriented toward Union Street; the five retail storefronts also remain in use. The clubhouse building occupies the northeast quarter of a city block; the site slopes slightly downhill to the north along Sixth Avenue and to the west along Union Street. A north-south alley bisects the entire block and runs along the west or rear elevation of the clubhouse.

Major modern highrise hotels and office buildings are located to the northeast and east of the clubhouse building including the Seattle Sheraton Hotel and the Two Union Square and the One Union Square building complexes. The Washington State Convention Center complex is located directly east on Union Street; it includes the ACT Theater (Eagles Temple/Auditorium, Henry Bittman, 1924); from the open terraces at the convention center and Two Union Square there are striking views toward the west of the Washington Athletic Club. The lower portion of a modern highrise mixed-use office tower (U.S. Bank/City Centre) occupies

the site located directly across Union Street to the north of the WAC and the Logan Building (1958); a distinctive ten-story, mid-century modern highrise office building is located on the southwest corner of that same block. The six-story Skinner Building/Fifth Avenue Theater (Robert C. Reamer, 1925-26) is situated immediately to the west and across the alley from the WAC; it occupies the entire half block.

The original Washington Athletic Club building was completed in December 1930 and measures 120' x 115' at its base and approximately 68' x 74' at the tower; it is functionally interconnected to a modern non-historic 12-story addition. The original building exhibits a highly distinctive two-part vertical block façade composition, stepped-back Art Deco design character and distinctive bas-relief and sculpted terra cotta ornament. The modern wing (initially constructed in 1954 and remodeled/expanded in 1970) measures 60' x 120' and is interconnected to the original clubhouse at its south elevation. The 1970 addition is oriented to Sixth Avenue and functions as the main entry to the entire clubhouse facility. The addition is relatively non-intrusive and exhibits a minimalist brutalistic design character with somewhat complementary masonry cladding. The addition is non-historic and does not contribute to the historic or architectural character of the original clubhouse building.

Current Exterior Appearance

The reinforced concrete and steel structure includes a concrete foundation and basement and is primarily clad with buff-color face brick. The brick clad exterior walls at the multiple prominent faces of the building base, the base shaft and tower are accentuated throughout by a profusion of buff-color and salmon-color terra cotta and pressed/cast stone ornament and trim. The principal building façade is oriented toward Union Street although the formal club entry has always been located at the Sixth Avenue elevation. The complex stepped-back building form is composed of a three-story building base with a seven-story base shaft above, which is surmounted by a stepped-back tower that measures 68' x 74' and extends from 11th through the 18th floor. The next two floors (19th and 20th) are further stepped back and measure approximately 63' x 63 feet. These floors are capped by a setback pavilion on the 21st floor level. A smaller two-story elevator/mechanical penthouse surmounts this pavilion. The shaft of the tower is flush with the building base at the Union Street elevation. Because there is no 13th floor level (it is known as the 14th floor) – the actual 21st floor is known as the 22nd floor level -causing some confusion regarding the overall building height.

The building base extends three floors and is accentuated by a wide intermediate cornice. At the Union Street façade the base is divided horizontally between the retail storefront level and second and third floor club rooms and interior uses. The storefront level is clad with copper-brown (w/ white highlights) terra cotta panels. The majority of the five original display/storefront openings retain fluted terra cotta surrounds and gray-black granite bulkheads. The original storefront openings included large fixed-glass display windows with bronze sash (and ornate cresting) and terrazzo-paved vestibules. Portions of several of the original storefronts remain in place and at least one (at northeast corner) appears to remain highly intact and virtually unaltered, including the terrazzo paving. The installation of modern rigid awnings has altered the Union Street storefront level to some degree. None of the ornate cresting appears to remain in place.

The fenestration and bay spacing at the upper floors of the Union Street building base reflect internal club uses. Four round-arched, two-story window openings with ornate surrounds and keystones are located at the wide central bay; they were designed to illuminate the men's lounge. [Construction drawings indicate that they may have been designed to include stained and leaded glass windows that do not appear to have ever been installed.] The bay to each side of the window arcade includes sets of tall, narrow, two-story recessed window openings with ornate terra cotta spandrels decorated with fluted potted flower/fern images; these openings correspond with the base shaft and façade composition above. Other ornament at this level of the façade includes fern-decorated keystones, medallions decorated with baskets of fruit and muscular human figures at the base piers. A terra cotta intermediate cornice decorated with foliated ornament band wraps the top of the base; it is inscribed with a "Washington Athletic Club" sign at the center of the Union Street elevation that is flanked by Art Deco style "WAC" winged symbols.

At the Sixth Avenue elevation the building base includes two storefront display windows and terra cotta cladding. A sculpted brass tablet that commemorates Mrs. Hannah Newman, the original land owner, is located at the north end of the base of the east elevation. The original formal club entry vestibule was located at the south end of this elevation; its location can still be distinguished by the presence of a terra cotta inscribed "Washington Athletic Club" plaque within the broad intermediate cornice. When the initial modern addition and entry lobby were constructed to the south in 1954 the original arched entry opening and recessed vestibule were entirely infilled and replaced by a flush face brick and faux terra cotta panel wall designed to closely match the original cladding materials. The remainder of the building base at this elevation includes two-story recessed window openings with recessed decorated spandrels that correspond with the base shaft and façade composition above.

The Union Street façade is dominated by a central stepped-back tower that rises to 21 stories and is flanked to the east and west by a lower seven-story tall base shaft above the building base. The Union Street façade is divided by two major vertical piers located one bay in from each corner of the tower; these piers extend from the top of the building base to 21st floor level. The central tower bay is further divided by four bays of windows divided by stepped interstitial piers and window mullions that extend to 21st floor level. The piers are all capped by varied terra cotta panels and bas-relief ornament including sculpted eagles at the major piers and floral cresting, chevrons and human and animal mask images at the interstitial piers.

To each side of the face of the tower is a single outermost bay with recessed windows and spandrels that extends from the 11th floor through the 18th floor level – creating an additional setback at each corner of the tower at the 19th floor level. The vertical thrust and rhythm of the tower piers is accentuated by recessed windows with decorated spandrels, tall ornate arched window openings at the 6-7th floors and segmental arched windows at the 18th floor. Stylized ziggurat spandrels and parapet caps distinguish the 19th floor level. Ornate sculpted eagles emphasize the multiple outside corners at the 21st floor level, which is further decorated with ornate terra cotta cresting, animal and human masks and a stylized

ziggurat parapet. The setback 22nd floor pavilion is distinguished by ornate terra cotta cresting and a large carved eagle finial incised with the “WAC” insignia.

The east and west bays of the base shaft at the Union Street façade are each divided into four bays of recessed windows divided by stepped interstitial piers and window mullions that extend to the 10th floor level in the same pattern as the tower bays. The vertical thrust and rhythm of the base shaft is accentuated by recessed windows with decorated spandrels and ornate segmental arched window openings and highly decorated spandrels at the 8th through 10th floor levels. The vertical piers at the base shaft are all capped by varied terra cotta panels, ornament and coping elements including mythical human and animal masks that decorate pier caps and stylized ziggurat parapets.

The east, south and west elevations of the tower rise above the roofline of the base shaft and exhibit the same major pier configuration, fenestration and ornamentation patterns as the Union Street façade. At the 19th floor level the tower steps back at each corner to align with the major structural piers at each elevation creating a notch at each corner of the tower. The corner piers and parapet at the 19th floor level are also slightly set back to further accentuate the cap. Terra cotta cresting, coping members and ornament decorate the pier caps and stylized ziggurat parapets at the 19th floor level. At each elevation the 21st floor level is distinguished by ornate sculpted eagles that emphasize the multiple outside corners at that floor level. The south elevation of the tower varies in that it extends an additional two stories to accommodate the elevator equipment and overrun. It is capped by a stylized ziggurat parapet and includes window openings at the top floors. However, the lower portion of this elevation does not include windows due to internal utilitarian building uses.

The east elevation of the base shaft exhibits the same major and interstitial pier configuration, fenestration and ornamentation patterns as the side bays at the Union Street facade with a few exceptions. Fenestration varies at the north end of the 6-7th floor level [which is the swimming pool location]; a two-story arched window is flanked by two-story high blind window openings. The stylized ziggurat parapet continues at this elevation; however, it is stepped and accentuated with additional terra cotta ornament at the southern end of this elevation. This feature corresponds with the location of the original entry vestibule that was formerly located directly below at street level.

The west elevation at the alley side of the 10-story base shaft is utilitarian in character. Portions of the plain painted concrete wall are visible above the Skinner Building from some view points to the west along Union Street. A portion of storefront level terra cotta cladding extends one display window length into the alley. Face brick and terra cotta ornament terminate at the corner of the building; the elevation does not include any of the distinctive fenestration or ornamentation patterns of the other elevations. It is utilitarian in character; original unframed window openings remain in place, as does a fire escape.

Non-Historic Exterior Alterations

In addition to the entry vestibule and storefront level alterations described above, there have been some major changes made to the design of some of the original window units. Most of

the current 1/1 double-hung windows appear to be original or closely match the original window design and profile. However, the large arched windows at the Sixth-Seventh floor level of the Union Street façade and the east elevation have been altered and changed from what was originally constructed. These windows appear to have originally included a traditional multi-pane muntin/mullion configuration with simple fanlight panels at the arched heads. These large arched openings now include fixed sash members with multiple horizontal panels and meeting rails and no vertical mullions. Large windows at the Second-Third floor level and at the Fourth floor level have also been modernized; however the multi-pane configuration is somewhat similar to the original design. The fenestration at the 21st floor level of the tower cap has been rather drastically altered; what appear to be wide modern fixed window panels have replaced pairs of small narrow multi-pane sash. A tall screen enclosure that may be partially glazed also appears to have been installed above the 21st rooftop level at the north side of the elevator machine room penthouse.

Significant Interior Features and/or Finishes

The vast majority of the original formal dining and athletic activity spaces have been altered and modernized. Virtually all of the interior spaces within the clubhouse have been repeatedly modernized and updated in order to accommodate evolving modern athletic facilities and programs and decorating trends. The original lobby space was greatly altered in 1954 when the formal entrance was relocated; however, it continues to exhibit some distinctive marble finishes and what may be original elevator doors. Portions of original wood cabinetry, doors and hardware remain in the main lounge. The original library room appears to be well-preserved with intact wood paneling, shelves and ornate plaster ceiling. The original swimming pool and balcony also appear to remain mostly intact. However, these areas are all used exclusively for private club purposes and are not generally accessible to the public. There do not appear to be any significant interior finishes or features within public spaces worthy of consideration for historic preservation purposes.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The exterior of the building, excluding the 1954/1970 addition.

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Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: James Johnson, Washington Athletic Club
Jack McCullough, McCullough Hill, PS
Marc Benveniste
Michael Benveniste
Anne Benveniste
Tania Benveniste
Lynn Milner, Milner Ventures LLC
Stephen Lee, LPB
Stella Chao, DON
Diane Sugimura, DPD
Cheryl Mosteller, DPD
Ken Mar, DPD