



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 612/08

Name and Address of Property:

**Seattle Labor Temple
2800 First Avenue**

Legal Description: Lots 1-4, Block 16, Bell & Denny's 1st Addition, as per plat recorded in Volume C of Deeds, Page 52, records of King County; Situate in the City of Seattle, County of King, State of Washington.

At the public meeting held on November 5, 2008, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Seattle Labor Temple at 2800 First Avenue, as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standard 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.*

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Seattle Labor Temple is a very important element of Seattle's notable labor history, as the headquarters of the M. L. King County Labor Council and the long-time focal point for union organizing and activities in the county. It is the last large functioning labor hall in Belltown, a neighborhood that was once the center of union activity. The building is also an excellent example of the effective use of terra cotta on a Modernistic building, adding color and contrast to the building's clean lines.

Neighborhood Context: The Development of Belltown

Belltown may have seen more dramatic changes than any other Seattle neighborhood, as most of its first incarnation was washed away in the early 20th century. The area now known as Belltown lies on the donation claim of William and Sarah Bell, who arrived with the Denny party at Alki Beach on November 13, 1851. The following year they established a claim north of the early settlement (Pioneer Square), on land largely covered with dense cedar and fir forests. A steep cliff rose from the beach, where a Duwamish winter village was located at the foot of the future Bell Street. The Bell claim extended from Elliott Bay east to today's Yale Avenue North, from Pine Street north to Denny Way.

**Administered by The Historic Preservation Program
The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

"Printed on Recycled Paper"

The Bells returned to California in 1856, after their cabin burned in the Battle of Seattle, a skirmish between the settlers and Native Americans. Bell returned in the 1860s to plat the property, but it was not until 1870 that he and his son Austin returned permanently. They then began to actively encourage commerce to spread northward, although the topography and poor roads made it a difficult task. Before his death in 1887, the elder Bell built a home and a hotel (both now gone) on 1st Avenue near Battery Street. In 1889 his son hired the architect, Elmer Fisher, to design a large residential building in the same block. Soon afterwards, Fisher designed an Odd Fellows Hall next door and a retail/hotel/office building (the Hull Building) across 1st Avenue. These substantial brick buildings, some distance from Pioneer Square, combined with the area's isolation to give Belltown a distinctive identity separate from that of downtown Seattle.

Also in 1889, the first streetcar service arrived in Belltown, extending from James Street to Denny Way along 2nd Avenue. The Front Street Cable Railway erected its elaborate powerhouse and car barn near Denny Way and 2nd Avenue in 1893. Within a few years, lines would run along Western and Elliott avenues to Ballard and on 1st, 2nd and 5th avenues to lower Queen Anne, with connections at Pike Street to Eastlake, Westlake and points north and east.

But significant development on the Bell property was slowed by its isolating topography. A steep bluff rose from Elliott Bay to 2nd Avenue, then Denny Hill, too steep for horses to climb, extended between 2nd and 5th avenues north of Pine Street. With the economic growth following the 1897 discovery of gold in the Klondike, the business district expanded to the north, and many saw Denny Hill as a significant barrier to progress. City Engineer Reginald H. Thomson envisioned leveling the hill, using hydraulic jets to sluice the earth into Elliott Bay. In 1898, the first of three regrades in the vicinity occurred, lowering 1st Avenue between Pike Street and Denny Way by 17 feet. The area west of 1st Avenue was not regraded, and its steep slope kept it largely industrial.¹

By 1910, Belltown was a thriving community of wood frame residences and small commercial buildings, with brick hotels for workers along 1st Avenue. The waterfront and the western slope bustled with wharves, the railroad, fish canneries, small manufacturers and livery stables. Small commercial buildings, brick workers' hotel and houses lined 1st and 2nd avenues. However, on June 10, 1910 a fire destroyed eight blocks on the western slope, from the waterfront to 2nd Avenue and Vine Street. The burned area was largely industrial, but with many small wooden cottages and workers' lodgings. Only one person died but hundreds lost their homes. The area was soon rebuilt with larger industries and new residences and apartments.²

The city's population continued to grow at a remarkable rate, nearly tripling to 237,194 by 1910. As the pressure for land increased, the city proceeded with regrading the remainder of Denny Hill. The second phase occurred between 1908 and 1911, when 27 blocks between 2nd and 5th avenues, from Pine to Cedar streets, were sluiced away. The greatest excavation was along Blanchard Street, which was lowered by 107 feet at 4th Avenue. This was the largest such operation in the world up to that time, moving six million cubic yards of dirt. The regrade opened up access to Belltown, Queen Anne and Lake Union, greatly enhancing property values. The city regraded only the streets, with owners of individual lots required to hire contractors to level their property; many pinnacles of land remained even into the 1920s. The embankment created along 5th Avenue remained for more than twenty years, until the third regrading phase.³

¹ Myra L. Phelps, *Public Works in Seattle: A Narrative History*, The Engineering Department 1875-1975, Seattle Engineering Department, 1975

² Clarence B. Bagley, *The History of Seattle from its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1916, pp. 514-515

³ Phelps, pp. 18-20

Everyone waited expectantly for the city to expand into the newly-cleared Regrade, but it remained filled with small commercial buildings and apartments. Perhaps the best known development in Belltown during this period was one that did not occur. In 1910 the Municipal Plans Commission hired Virgil Bogue to develop a comprehensive plan for the city. His plan, released in 1911, proposed a new civic center plaza and building complex at 4th Avenue and Blanchard Street, with broad boulevards radiating outwards. Voters rejected the ambitious plan, consolidating the city center downtown and forestalling any significant movement into Belltown for the next sixty years.

Belltown, like the rest of the city, evolved significantly during the 1920s. Its location close to downtown made it an ideal location for apartment buildings to house downtown and waterfront workers, with an accompanying array of cafes, taverns and small grocery stores. Belltown also became the center of the film industry in the Pacific Northwest. The numerous film exchanges and related suppliers made the vicinity of 2nd Avenue and Battery Street a Mecca for theater owners and managers from Montana to Alaska. The automobile had become a significant feature of the city, and Belltown's close-in, low-density location encouraged auto-oriented businesses such as service garages. It also attracted light-industrial uses such as printers and small-scale suppliers and assemblers servicing downtown businesses.

The third and final regrading phase began in 1928 and was completed in December 1930. This phase extended from Fifth Avenue to Westlake Avenue, between Virginia and Harrison streets. In volume it was about two-thirds the size of the second phase, removing 4,233,000 cubic yards of dirt on a conveyor belt to barges on Elliott Bay.⁴ However, the project was completed just as the country was entering a major depression. Population growth virtually came to a standstill and manufacturing stalled. The expected development in the newly-regraded area did not occur. For decades the area east of 5th Avenue contained primarily car dealerships, parking lots, motels and other low-density uses. Only recently has development come to this area.

Seattle was transformed perhaps more than any other large city by World War II. Its North Pacific location made it a strategic military location for the war against Japan. Its airplane factories, shipyards and steel mills made it a crucial part of the war effort. Boeing alone increased employment from 4,000 to 50,000 between 1939 and 1945. Belltown's apartments, workers' hotels and taverns boomed.

The district's inexpensive land and proximity to downtown and waterfront industry also made it a center for union activity. Four of the largest halls were once located here, with the Labor Temple being the only major one that remains in its original use. Directly south, across Clay Street, is the former International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers hall, now the City Church. Three blocks west is the former Sailors Union of the Pacific hall, now the El Gaucho restaurant. The Teamsters building on Denny Way was recently demolished. Numerous smaller union offices were in the vicinity; nearly all of these have been demolished or converted to new uses.

However, growth was generally slow in the 1950s-60s, as the economy took some time to recover after the war. In 1953 the Battery Street Tunnel was completed from Aurora Avenue North to the foot of Battery Street, connecting the SR 99 highway through downtown. This new infrastructure, and the 1962 World's Fair just north of Belltown, led to the construction of several modern motels in the eastern part of Belltown. Otherwise, construction was primarily one- and two-story buildings at the eastern and northern edges.

⁴ Phelps, pp. 32-33.

Labor Context: Seattle's Notable Labor History, 1900-1950

Seattle has a long and important history as a center of labor activism, and the King County Labor Council and the Labor Temple have been its focal point since the early 20th century. This building, the second labor temple, has fulfilled this role for the past sixty years.

The Early Years

In the late 19th century labor unions were established primarily among skilled and artisan workers of the lower middle class, who organized for better working conditions.⁵ The strength of the labor movement was directly proportional to the demand for labor, and its success waxed and waned with the economy. Organizing was strong in the 1890s, declined after the Panic of 1893, and resumed more strongly with the economic boom that followed the 1897 Klondike Gold Rush.⁶ Union membership surged, partially due to politically-aware immigrant workers from Northern Europe. On March 3, 1900, the *Seattle Union Record* reported that forty labor unions met regularly in the city. They represented not only the major trades such as bakers, brewers, machinists, clerks, lumbermen and sailors, but also newsboys, cigar makers and upholsterers. By 1903 the city had 75 labor organizations with 6,000 to 7,000 members.⁷

Over the following two decades, the strengthened labor movement's struggle with business interests for better pay and working conditions was often joined by agricultural granges and middle-class organizations in fighting for Progressive era reforms such as women's suffrage and initiative and referendum rights. Washington also achieved national leadership in pro-labor legislation, partly because of the high accident rate in two of its major industries, timber and mining; reform groups joined labor for groundbreaking legislation such as child labor laws.⁸ Business leaders often gave their support as well, so long as workers eschewed strikes and focused on seeking fair pay; this would, after all, allow them to buy a house and support the economy.⁹

During World War I the tremendous demand for workers, particularly in the shipbuilding and timber industries, strengthened labor's power. Increased production brought jobs and prosperity to Seattle's middle class as well as the ownership interests. In 1915, the Central Labor Council craft unions had 9,000 members, primarily skilled white males such as the building trades, cooks, musicians, printers. On the eve of the war, less skilled workers such as retail clerks, longshoremen, seamen and metal trades joined the council.¹⁰

In the period immediately after World War I, economic and political tensions in the Pacific Northwest resulted in a tendency to leftist politics, which had originated in the East in reaction to slum conditions and bossism. Although Seattle did not have these problems to such an extent, a strong strain of idealism led to increasing radicalization of the middle class.¹¹ By 1919 labor was a power to be reckoned with, with organizing activities not only in union halls, but in mass meetings in the streets and organizations of working- and middle-class people. Labor issues became polarized, as the Populists and other progressive organizations joined with the more radical Knights of Labor and the Socialist International Workers of the World (IWW) for more substantive reforms such as more equal

5 Roger Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976, p. 114.

6 Richard C. Berner, *Seattle 1900 - 1920: From Boomtown to Restoration*. Seattle: Charles Press, 1991, p. 49.

7 Berner 1991, p. 49.

8 Berner 1991, p. 53.

9 Berner 1991, p. 49.

10 Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

11 Sale, pp. 114-115.

distribution of wealth and public ownership of utilities. The creation of Seattle City Light (1905) and the Port of Seattle (1911) were among the successes of this loose coalition. However, their efforts were adamantly opposed by the conservative establishment, including the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and other business leaders.¹²

The best-known radical group was the International Workers of the World (IWW), which strived to unite all workers in one class-based union to demand worker ownership of factories, rather than just better pay and working conditions. It was particularly influential among migrant laborers and logging camp workers and was involved in violent clashes in Spokane (1909), Everett (1916) and Centralia (1919)—primarily for demonstrating for workers' rights. It also organized a statewide lumber strike for better living conditions and an 8-hour day in 1917. Although the IWW played a less direct role in Seattle itself, its influence was strongly felt and they were supported by members of other unions.¹³

The event that put Seattle on the national labor map was the General Strike of 1919, the first city-wide labor action in America to be proclaimed a "general strike." The Armistice in November 1918 brought economic and labor unrest, with massive strikes across the country. The first of these was in Seattle. The strike began in the shipyards, where 35,000 workers had been employed in war production. Wages were controlled by the federal government and workers expected pay increases when the war ended. When regulators refused raises and many were laid off, the metal trades unions declared a strike, closing the shipyards. The powerful Central Labor Council and most of the 110 unions in the city joined in a sympathy walkout. On February 6, 1919, 60,000 workers in Seattle, a city of 315,000 people, were on strike. Stores closed and streetcars stopped. By the third day, some workers began to return, and the council ended the strike on February 11.¹⁴ Although labor demonstrated its broad support, they gained little and became alienated from business and the middle-class coalition of progressives. Business interests subsequently began efforts to require "open shops," where union membership would not be required.¹⁵

The year 1919 also saw the beginning of a series of significant maritime strikes. The longshoremen succeeded in getting a contract with the Northwest Waterfront Employers Union with a wage increase and preferential union hiring. However, the post-war depression slowed shipping dramatically and a disastrous strike in 1921 brought back some of the pre-war working conditions. No major maritime union activity was seen again until 1933.¹⁶

The Conservative Years

Historians say that the World War I boom and the General Strike were the end of Seattle's pioneer days, the end of its period of hope and growth. Although the 1920s are remembered as a time of prosperity, the decade began with a significant depression, with 10 percent unemployment in Seattle.¹⁷ Population growth, manufacturing and employment all slowed significantly.¹⁸ The country became more conservative, drastically limiting immigration and raising tariffs. A Superior Court hostile to labor reversed many of the gains of the war years, such as the 8-hour day. In Seattle, the

12 Padraic Burke, *A History of the Port of Seattle*. Port of Seattle, 1976, p. 60.

13 Ross Rieder, "Industrial Workers of the World—a Snapshot History," http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=2016, June 25, 2005.

14 <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/index.shtml>

15 Richard C. Berner, *Seattle 1921-1940: From Boom to Bust*. Seattle: Charles Press, 1992, p. 11.

16 Burke, p. 86.

17 Frank, p. 140.

18 Sale, p. 136-38

radicals of 1919 either left or lost interest in the fight.¹⁹ The more radical industrial unions had lost, leading to the rise of more conservative craft unionism.²⁰ The Labor Council itself became more conservative, ejecting Communists, Socialists and progressives such as the Farmer-Labor Party.²¹

The conservatism was solidified in the late 1920s with the dominance of Dave Beck and the Teamsters. Beck, a local laundry-truck driver, had risen to become the chief of Teamsters west of the Rockies. He had an interest in working cooperatively with business leaders for better wages and working conditions, but without the concern for social justice and political reform that had influenced many earlier labor leaders. He used the strategic position of truck drivers in the economy to rebuild organized labor in King County and was willing to exert his power, sometimes ruthlessly, over the teamsters to control related unions.²²

Depression and Violence

The Great Depression brought massive workforce and wage cuts, reducing the power of unions just as their members needed more protection. However, New Deal legislation, such as the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act recognized the right of unions to organize and bargain collectively. The latter years of the Depression (1934-39) were marked by a string of bitter and often violent strikes, both locally and throughout the nation. The bitterest were the maritime strikes of 1934, 1936 and 1937, lead primarily by longshoremen, those who did the critical but dirty and dangerous work of loading and unloading cargo.

Locally, the major labor event of the period was the West Coast-wide maritime strike in 1934, which closed ports for nearly three months. The strike, involving all maritime unions, resulted in violence in every major port and was so bitter that it affects labor relations to this day. The economic losses were extreme, as lumber mills closed, the silk trade left, and countless tons of fish and produce were left to rot.²³

In Seattle the 1934 strike culminated in the Battle of Smith Cove. Virtually the entire police force, armed with baseball bats and tear gas, joined by employers' guards with shotguns, gathered in Smith Cove to open the docks, opposed by 2,000 workers blocking rail and truck traffic. The mayor took over operations himself, arming his men with machine guns and tear gas. Hundreds of strikers were injured and clouds of tear gas drove Queen Anne residents from their homes. Within a few days, both sides agreed to federal arbitration.²⁴ The workers won their major demands—a coast-wide contract with a wage increase, a shorter work day and work week, and a joint management-union hiring hall with a union dispatcher. However, the bitterness was so great that labor actions occurred in West Coast ports an average of once a week until the beginning of World War II. The result was increased shipping by truck and a decline in the maritime industry.²⁵

The War Years and After

World War II brought many of the same conditions as World War I, but on a much larger scale. Thousands of people flocked to the Northwest seeking jobs at Boeing, the shipyards and other industries. Seattle was one of the top three cities in the country, on a per capita basis, in the value of

¹⁹ Burke, p. 66.

²⁰ Frank, p. 170.

²¹ Frank, p. 189.

²² Sale, pp. 144-49.

²³ Burke, pp. 87-88.

²⁴ Burke, pp. 90-93.

²⁵ Burke, pp. 93.

its war contracts. Jobs were plentiful and labor was at a premium, but wages, prices and some working conditions were federally controlled. The general focus of both business and labor was on producing and moving defense goods quickly. The drastic growth in the number of local workers, however, increased union membership significantly.

Many firms were more willing to deal with the conservative Beck than with the more radical Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) or independent unions. By the end of World War II Seattle unions were largely affiliated with the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) and most firms ran closed shops that required union membership of their employees.²⁶

The end of the war brought great economic uncertainty and unrest as the nation attempted to adjust to a peacetime economy. National leaders sought to control inflation through price controls, while labor leaders wanted to make up for the stringent wage controls of the war years. In the months after the war, national strikes took place in the coal, railroad, steel, auto, meatpacking and electrical industries, among others. While most of these impacted Seattle, the most significant local actions were the 1945 lumber industry strike and a two month strike against all three newspapers. Another coast-wide maritime strike began in October 1946; after seven weeks, workers achieved a modest wage increase. The end result of this turmoil was, not surprisingly, federal legislation to control labor's power. The Taft-Hartley Act, passed over President Harry Truman's veto in 1947, made union organizing and striking significantly more difficult.²⁷

One of the first tests of the new legislation became another crucial event in Seattle labor history, the five-month long Boeing strike of 1948. Over a protracted series of legal battles, the company used the new laws in an effort to oust the Aeromechanics Union in favor of Dave Beck's Teamsters, who were considered more amenable to management. Although the Aeromechanics Union retained the right to continue to represent the workers, they lost much ground that had been gained and essentially had to build the union up again.²⁸

The Waterfront Employers Association also attempted to use the Taft-Hartley provisions to break the power of the longshoremen (ILWU). However, after an economically punishing 95-day strike/lockout, they gave up and continued to negotiate with the union.²⁹ "Red-baiting" and requirements for union officials to sign loyalty oaths were a key element in this strike.

Accusations of Communist influences in labor organizations (some of which were true) had been a negotiating and propaganda tactic since the Russian Revolution during World War I. During the early 1950s, however, the "Red Scare" became the primary focus of the national political scene. The issues were particularly prominent here in Washington in the late 1940s with the Canwell hearings, which investigated supposed Communists at the University of Washington. By this time, Seattle, under the influence of Beck's business unionism, was the most unionized city in the country, with relatively conservative, middle class union members focused on securing a good job, a house and other amenities, rather than on revolution.³⁰ The progressives and radicals that had built the foundation of Washington's labor organizations, and its progressive social policies, had been too successful, in some senses, and no longer had a role to play—for the time being.

26 University of Washington, Special Collections <http://www.lib.washington.edu/findaids/docs/papersrecords/AFLCIOKingCoLaborCouncil>, accessed 1/18/2008.

27 Richard C. Berner, *Seattle Transformed: World War II to Cold War*. Seattle: Charles Press, 1999, pp. 191-193.

28 Berner 1999, p. 214-215.

29 Berner 1999, pp. 223-224.

30 Sale, p. 149.

Labor Context: The M. L. King County Labor Council

The Martin L. King County Labor Council, AFL-CIO, is the communal decision-making body for the union locals of King County, and is the primary tenant of the Seattle Labor Temple. The council has more than 150 affiliated local unions and chapters of constituency groups, representing more than 75,000 workers throughout the county. Each of these organizations elects delegates to the council, which has more than 450 members. The council elects a 22-member executive board, which hires the executive secretary and conducts the general business of the council. The purpose of the council is to assist workers and unions in seeking social and economic justice, to support them in getting fair contracts, to aid participation in the political process and to support community services and laws that assist working people.³¹ Membership is diverse, with major organizations in health care, government and other white collar employees as well as the more traditional blue-collar manufacturing unions.

The council began in 1888 as the Western Central Labor Union, which reorganized in 1905 as the Seattle Central Labor Council.³² In these early years the council often affiliated with progressive causes, but was not politically powerful. A second, more active, phase of its history began about 1914, when Seattle's industrial growth and the accompanying labor shortage led to greater union membership. The council grew increasingly radical and became the dominant force in Seattle's powerful progressive political coalition during World War I. It was during this time that the council published its own newspaper, the *Union Record*. The paper was first published in 1900 as a private venture, and was purchased by the council in 1903. It became a daily in 1918, at the height of the local union movement. Stock in the paper was owned by more than fifty locals, as well as the council and individuals. Although its circulation reached 100,000, it never made a profit.³³

The massive layoffs of shipyard workers after the war led the council to call the Seattle General Strike of 1919. The strike failed and employers launched a successful effort to allow open shops that did not require union membership.³⁴ After the strike, the council was plagued by internal power struggles and became increasingly conservative. Members voted in 1919 to expel the Industrial Workers of the World and, in 1925, Communist Party members. The conservatism was solidified in the late 1920s with the dominance of Dave Beck, a local laundry-truck driver who was chief of the Teamsters west of the Rockies. He used the strategic position of truck drivers in the economy to start rebuilding organized labor in King County. A firm that the council declared "unfair to labor" could find that truckers would not deliver its goods. This period was characterized by Beck's business unionism, in which the council worked with businesses to assure them a profit while providing fair wages and working conditions. Many firms were more willing to deal with the conservative Beck than with the more radical Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) or independent unions. The council backed Beck and Seattle unions came to largely affiliated with the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) and most firms ran closed shops that required union membership of their employees. The council, however, was involved little in local politics, endorsing pro-labor Democrats rather than the leftist coalitions it had supported earlier in the century.³⁵

In 1955 the national AFL and CIO organizations merged, expanding the membership of the King County Labor Council. World War II had been another period of strong demand for labor and increased labor organizing, but it was followed once again by economic uncertainty and conservatism

31 <http://www.kclc.org/>

32 Berner 1991, p. 52.

33 Frank, p. 70

34 UW Special Collections, King County Labor Council

35 UW Special Collections, King County Labor Council

as the country returned to a peacetime economy. In 1956 and again in 1958 state initiatives were on the ballot to make a Washington a right-to-work state, prohibiting the union membership requirement that had long been a hallmark of the state's labor relations. The council played a leading role in defeating these measures and began a pro-labor public relations campaign in 1959. In 1964 the council launched a voter registration drive and voter education campaign to explain labor issues. The growth of public sector unions and the addition of the more progressive CIO unions led the Council to endorse expanded social services, public housing and civil rights.³⁶

Labor Context: Union Halls

At the height of the union movement, following World War I, Seattle unions took the opportunity to expand their halls and build new ones. The seven-story Carpenters' Hall was one of the largest, housing the Ritz Hotel, stores, a dining hall, offices, a comfortable reading room, lockers and a meeting room. The waitresses' union also had its own hall. Organized in 1900, it was the primary female union, and one of the most effective. It established its own downtown hall in 1902 and loaned space to the labor council and other unions as they awaited construction of the Labor Temple; the council promptly granted the women membership.³⁷ The Labor Temple, a mansard-roofed structure at the northeast corner of 6th Avenue and University Street, was perhaps the largest of the buildings, housing meeting halls and the offices of dozens of union locals.³⁸

The growth in industrial activity and union membership during World War II strengthened the local labor movement, so that by the late 1940s the city had more than 300 labor organizations. Many were located in downtown offices or near their place of work (such as the Ballard shingle mills) but they increasingly concentrated in Belltown or near the Teamsters' headquarters on Denny Way near Fifth Avenue. In 1942 the Seattle Labor Temple relocated to First Avenue and Broad Street. The spacious new building had offices for dozens of individual unions as well as for the labor council, an auditorium for large events and a restaurant for socializing.

This move apparently encouraged other unions to build facilities in the area. Other large halls in the vicinity were the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 46) at 2700 First Avenue (1948); Carpenters Center (1957, demolished); and the Sailors Union of the Pacific (1954, 2505 First Avenue). Smaller buildings were the Marine Firemen's Union (1948, 2333 Western Avenue), the Seattle Musicians' Association (1959, 2620 Third Avenue), the Masters, Mates & Pilots (2333 Third Avenue) and the Cooks & Assistants Union (2407 First Avenue).

The larger of these buildings are a distinct building type, with a hiring hall, offices, meeting rooms and often additional facilities such as coffee shops or locker rooms. The most complete was the Sailors Union (now El Gaucho); because it served people away from home, it had a large hiring hall, sleeping rooms, a gymnasium and a barber shop for members. Most are Modernistic or Moderne in style, reflecting the period of construction, with clean lines and modern materials such as metal window sash, Roman brick and ceramic or terra cotta tile cladding.

Building History

Labor temples have historically been a common feature of cities with active labor movements. They have three functions. One is to be a home for the union movement in the city and center for activities that combine the efforts of various unions or that are too large to be accommodated in an individual union's hall. Another is to provide office space for organizations such as the labor council or smaller

36 UW Special Collections, King County Labor Council

37 Mildred Tanner Andrews, *Woman's Place: A Guide to Seattle and King County History*, Seattle: Gemil Press, 1994, pp. 178-180.

38 Frank, p. 70-71

unions that do not have their own facilities. Finally, it can provide space for political and other activities and recreational or other activities for union members, their families and the general public.

The city's first permanent labor temple at 6th Avenue and University Street was the center for local labor organizing and labor council office activities from about 1903 until 1942. Notably, it served as labor headquarters for the General Strike of 1919.

This new Labor Temple was built in 1942 and has carried on Seattle's labor tradition for more than sixty years. It contains the headquarters of the M. L. King County Labor Council and offices for nearly 30 union locals. Its large auditorium and meeting rooms are the primary place for union meetings and many other political or other activities. It also serves as the local center for union organizing and related political activities, including serving as the headquarters for labor participation in the World Trade Organization demonstrations in December 1999.

Other businesses that were either labor affiliated or to serve members as well as the public have also been located in the building at various times, including the *Labor News*, the *Labor Press Publishing Company* and a barbershop. The building has apparently always contained a restaurant and/or tavern, under various managements. The 1950 directory lists a restaurant in the basement, and in 1960 there was both a coffee shop and a tavern. The current restaurant/bar space at the south end of the basement was expanded in 1981.

The first section of this building, the U-shaped southern section, was designed by McClelland and Jones (permit #35039) in 1942 as a two-story building. In 1946, the firm designed a two-story auditorium addition on the north side, very compatible with the original building. An almost undistinguishable third story, designed by Harmon, Pray, and Detrich, was added to the original structure in 1955. There have been relatively few changes since that time, and the uses of the building have remained the same, although the restaurant at the south end of the first floor has had several incarnations and has been expanded. .

Architectural Context: The Architects

Two firms have been involved in the design of the Labor Temple: McClelland and Jones and Harmon, Pray & Detrich.

McClelland and Jones and Associates, Architects and Engineers was founded in 1933 and dissolved in 1946. Historic resource surveys have identified small commercial buildings designed by the firm, often with Modernistic or streamline Moderne elements. The Labor Temple appears to be their major known work, although no comprehensive study of their designs has been undertaken. Robert McClelland, who served three terms (1934-36) as president of the local chapter of the American Association of Architects, later joined with architect Hugo Osterman to form McClelland and Osterman. Following dissolution of his partnership with McClelland, Victor Noble Jones founded Victor N. Jones & Associates, which lasted from 1946 to 1955. The firm designed the Administration Building (now Gerberding Hall, 1947-1949) and the first building at the University of Washington Medical school (1952), on which he collaborated with NBBJ. Subsequently, Jones was a partner in Jones Lovegren Helms & Jones (1956-65) and was the designer of the Washington State Ferry Terminal in Seattle (1964-67). A native of Exeter, Ontario, he received a M. Arch. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1926.³⁹

Harmon, Pray & Detrich, who designed the third floor addition, was founded in 1948 by architects Roland D. Pray and Craig Harmon and engineer Robert Detrich. Pray (1908-1996) had come to

³⁹ Seattle Historic Resources Survey, 234 9th Avenue N.

Seattle in 1943 after receiving his degree in Architectural Engineering from Iowa State College and working in Denver and Forth Worth. During the war he worked for Boeing and received his architectural license in 1946. He then worked briefly for NBBJ before forming the new firm.

The firm was particularly well known for its work for large corporations and governmental entities. In the Seattle area they designed the King County Administration Building (1971), Sieg Hall (1960) at the University of Washington, the Seattle City Light Power Control Center, and the headquarters for Puget Sound Power and Light Company (1957) in Bellevue. They also completed a number of buildings in Olympia, including the master plan for the expansion of the East Capitol Campus and designs for the Employment Security Building (1962), the Highway & Licenses Building (1962), and the State Archives Building (1963).⁴⁰

Architectural Context: Terra Cotta

The Labor Temple is one of several Belltown/Denny Regrade buildings noted in Seattle's terra cotta survey conducted in the 1980s, but it is one of only two examples of the use of the material after 1940.⁴¹ It is one of the city's most notable examples of the modern use of the material that was so popular on earlier highly-ornamented buildings.

Terra cotta is molded clay block that can be used either as cladding or as ornament. The plasticity of the clay and the manufacturing method allow it to be formed into extravagant shapes, which add variety and richness to the streetscape. Terra cotta ornament became very popular in the late 19th-early 20th centuries as the cost of cut stone grew prohibitive. This popularity coincided with Seattle's first period of major commercial development, and the city has a particularly rich collection of terra cotta-clad buildings.

The Seattle area had several prominent terra cotta manufacturers, including the Northern Clay Company and the Denny-Renton Clay & Coal Company. Both were acquired in 1925 by a California firm, the Gladding-McBean Company, making it one of the largest producers of terra cotta in the country. The company closed its local plants in the 1930s, but it still operates a plant in Lincoln, California, one of the country's two remaining manufacturers of architectural terra cotta.

Seattle's best known examples of terra cotta are its early structural steel skyscrapers, beginning with the 1904 Alaska Building. Terra cotta lent itself to use on skyscrapers because it is much lighter in weight than stone or brick. However, the material was also widely used on smaller commercial buildings and apartment houses. In Seattle, terra cotta is typically glazed in cream or tan, sometimes with a mottled finish. However, any color was possible and some buildings featured colorful accents or terra cotta colored to look like granite (Granitex). Early 20th century terra cotta ornament typically used Classical, Gothic, Tudor or Mediterranean elements and motifs, but by the late 1920s Art Deco and Art Moderne terra cotta elements were more common.

The use of terra cotta declined after 1930 because of rising production costs, the effects of the Depression on construction and changing tastes in ornament and style. The emphasis was on economical, easily-available mass-produced materials with the clean lines of glass or metal. The Streamline Moderne/Art Deco Woolworth store (1940) was the last major downtown terra cotta-clad structure of the period.⁴²

40 www.docomomo-wewa.org: Roland D. Pray

41 Lydia Aldredge (ed.), *Impressions of Imagination: Terra Cotta Seattle*, Seattle: Allied Arts of Seattle, Inc., 1986, pp. 58-71.

42 Aldredge, p. 5.

In order to compete, terra cotta manufacturers began producing simplified, extruded forms with large flat surfaces and very shallow backs. In this process the clay is forced through a die and cut by wire into individual elements before being glazed and fired. The clay is usually dryer than hand-formed terra cotta, so less shrinkage occurs.⁴³ A similar product was developed as an earthquake-resistant cladding in the 1930s. It is made from high-quality clay like terra cotta and is machine pressed into flat forms no more than 1.5 inches thick in standard sizes up to four feet square; it can be used in panels for curtain walls.⁴⁴ It is variously called terra cotta, terra cotta veneer, or ceramic veneer.

These units could be used to achieve the sleek look of Modern architecture, with the added advantage of brilliant colors. National examples from the late 1920s include the Eastern and Columbia Building in Los Angeles and New York's McGraw-Hill Building. Their smooth terra cotta ashlar blocks were decorative only in their bright colors, but were smooth enough for the modern aesthetic. A number of early International Style federal buildings also used the material as cladding. In redevelopment efforts of the 1950s, some commercial property owners turned to this terra cotta cladding to modernize the appearance of their older buildings.⁴⁵ Most products had flat surfaces, but they could also be produced with ribs, grills or more fanciful low-relief textures popular in the 1950s-60s.⁴⁶

In Seattle, terra cotta appears to have been used very little after the mid-1930s. The major exceptions are the Woolworth store (1940), the Seattle Labor Temple (1942) and the Sailors Union of the Pacific (1952-54).

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Setting

The Seattle Labor Temple is located on a 26,640 square foot site occupying the entire half block on the east side of First Avenue between Clay and Broad streets. It is at the north end of Belltown, surrounded primarily by newer buildings. Directly south is the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Hall (now City Church), a somewhat altered building of similar age, use and style. Across First Avenue is the 1920s Bremer Apartments and several newer high-rise residential structures; a high-rise condominium, Bay Vista Tower, is immediately behind the Labor Temple. Several small-scale commercial buildings from the 1950s-60s remain nearby.

Exterior description

This building has three stories plus a basement for a total of 40,320 gross square feet. It is a Modernistic design of brick masonry construction with face brick in varied shades of buff. The site slopes slightly down to the north, exposing the concrete foundation. The most notable features are the aqua-colored terra cotta spandrels that define each window bay.

The building has two compatible but slightly different sections. The northern one, containing the large auditorium, was constructed approximately four years after the main office section. The recessed main entry to the office section is in the center of the southern part of the First Avenue façade. It is flanked by five bays of windows on each side, with each one having a single one-over-one window on each story. The first and second story windows have aqua-colored terra cotta surrounds and spandrels with a three-dimensional geometric pattern. On the third story a course of darker brick runs at the mid-level of the

43 Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997, pp. 115.

44 Deborah Slaton and Harry J. Hunderman "Terra Cotta," in Thomas Jester (ed.). *Twentieth-Century Building Materials*, New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995, p. 158.

45 Tunick, pp. 108-11.

46 Tunick, p. 119.

windows and steps up to outline each window. Below alternate third-story windows is a square terra cotta medallion matching the three-dimensional motif of the spandrels. Some windows have newer metal sash replacing the original metal sash. At the southwest corner is a blade sign saying "Labor Temple."

The main entry bay is clad with aqua-colored terra cotta tile above polished red granite. The entry strongly reflects its original period of construction (1942), with a suspended metal canopy with the words "Labor Temple" in neon. The words are repeated above in blue letters, below a large 21-light metal window. Above the entry recess is the seal of the American Federation of Labor, with which the King County Labor Council was affiliated at the time of the building's construction. A pair of glass and metal doors with plain glass sidelights is below the canopy.

The auditorium to the north of the main building is approximately eight feet lower in height. The face brick is similar to that on the older building, but is more colorful with shades of buff and salmon with a ruffled texture. The entry bay has three recessed double height entries, each with a pair of metal doors below a large glass transom window. At the second floor level above the doors are original large multipaned aluminum windows. Below are large spandrels of terra cotta with original light fixtures. At the south end of the auditorium section of the building (near the junction of the two sections) is a secondary entry to the basement level, with a pair of glazed steel doors. The entry recess is clad with terra cotta and red granite, with flooring of small multicolored ceramic tile.

The south façade, on Clay Street, has the same window treatment as the main façade, with eleven bays of windows. Near the center is the entrance to a restaurant, with its own blade sign above. The recessed entry has a pair of older metal doors with glazed upper panels. Most of the windows on the façade have newer dark metal sash.

The north elevation, facing Broad Street, has, at the northwest corner, three bays of windows similar to those on the front, with terra cotta surrounds and spandrels. The lower ones have newer sash, with original 9-light metal sash above. The northeast section of the auditorium is lower in height than the front and has no windows.

The east elevation on the alley has a below-grade courtyard in the original section of the building. It is four stories in height with mostly original multipaned metal windows on the first three stories and newer metal sash on the top story (these windows may be original as that story was added later). The basement level is of concrete, with buff-colored brick veneer on upper stories. At the rear of the courtyard, next to the building is an enclosed incinerator structure. The space is set up as a patio dining area, with plants, tables and chairs. Stairs descend from the alley into the courtyard; a metal grill above the rear wall provides security. To the north of the courtyard, the rear of the auditorium section is featureless except for two exit doors.

Interior Description

The building interior appears to be virtually intact. The floorplan is complex, because of the connections between the two building sections and the various levels and uses. The main entry to the older (south) building has steps ascending to the main lobby and offices. The entry area has glazed tile and terrazzo flooring, dark wood paneling and wood handrails. This section of the building is primarily offices arranged along double-loaded corridors in a U-shape around the rear courtyard. Doors are original dark-stained fir with large panels of obscure glass; the transoms also have obscure glass. Most corridors have newer carpeting. The secondary entry at the south end enters onto a small lobby space and a staircase providing access to the restaurant in the basement and offices on the upper floors; the stairs have linoleum flooring.

The northern building has a more complex floorplan, with a large auditorium on the main floor and offices and meeting rooms on the lower level. The three exterior doors open into a large lobby space leading to the main auditorium, which has imposing doors of dark stained fir. Doors throughout this section are similar dark wood, with many of the larger offices and meeting rooms having double doors. Flooring in the corridors and stairways is terrazzo in varying shades of gray, tan and dark red. Walls are generally painted plaster with a wood chair rail. A secondary entry at the south end of the new section (near the junction of the two buildings) provides access to the central staircase leading down to the restaurants and meeting rooms in the basement and up to the main auditorium level. At the rear (east end) of one corridor are double loading doors leading to the alley.

Building Alterations

Based on the permit record and observation, few alterations appear to have been made to the building since the 1955 addition.

- In 1946 an auditorium was added on the north side of the original building, designed in a compatible style by the same architects, McClelland and Jones and Associates.
- In 1955 (permit #428804) a third story was added to the original building (Harmon, Pray & Detrich, architects).
- In 1980 (permit #592222) underpinning was installed under the building, for the construction of Bay Vista Towers to the east of this building.
- In 1980-81 (permit #591532) the tavern on the south end of the basement was expanded.
- Most windows have newer one-over-one metal sash replacing the original metal sash.
- The blade sign at the southwest corner was added sometime after 1955.
- Signs for the restaurant above the secondary entries on the south and west facades have been changed numerous times as tenants have changed.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The exterior of the building, the two interior lobby spaces, and the site.

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