



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

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

LPB 173/95

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: Troy Laundry Building  
311-329 Fairview Avenue North

Legal Description: Lots 3 through 5 and 7 through 10 in Block 109, D.T. Denny's Fifth Addition to North Seattle, as per plat recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, Page 202, records of King County; and together with those portions of the Donation Claim of D.T. Denny and Louisa Denny, his wife, and Government Lot 7 in the Southeast quarter of Section 30, Township 25 North, Range 4 East, W.M., lying westerly of Fairview Avenue North, as condemned in King County Superior Court Cause No. 204496, as provided by Ordinance No. 51975, and described as that portion lying easterly of the alley in said Block 109 and southerly of Lot 4 in said Block 109 and northerly of Thomas Street as conveyed by deed recorded under Recording No. 2103211; and together with the vacated alley in Block 109 of said Plat of D.T. Denny's Fifth Addition, vacated under Seattle Ordinance No. 92708; situate in the City of Seattle, County of King, State of Washington.

At the public hearing held on August 2, 1995, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Troy Laundry Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standard for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

Standard D: *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction;*

### **Description**

The original two-story, 150' x 120' portion of this building, located at the NW corner of Fairview Avenue and Thomas Street, was constructed in 1927 for the Troy Laundry Company. The exterior of the original 1927 portion of the building remains predominantly

intact. The building is a steel reinforced concrete structure that features extensive terra cotta and brick veneer patterned details. It is the most ornate of the extant laundry buildings in the South Lake Union/Cascade district. The entrance is distinguished by a terra cotta surround with cable molding around a semi-circular arched opening. Facade pilasters include ornate capitals with terra cotta floral motifs. The copper "Troy Laundry" sign band remains in place over the entrance, which is further distinguished by a festooned cartouche surmounted with a woman's head, though to portray Helen of Troy. Elaborate brickwork, accentuated by raked mortar joints, is used within the pilasters and window spandrels. Terra cotta belt courses and a prominent parapet cap add to the decorative quality of the building. The minor (north and remaining original west) elevations do not include ornate brickwork or terra cotta detailing; the windows are typically multi-pane industrial steel sash and remain in place although in a deteriorated and damaged condition. The interior spaces within the building were specifically designed to accommodate specialized washing, drying, spreading, pressing and ironing equipment and for employees to efficiently receive, launder and ship thousands of articles and garments a day. It is assumed that no significant interior features remain in place.

The building and the site successfully housed the Troy Laundry Company for many years. A substantial addition was made to the western side of the building in 1944-45. Another addition was made to the northern side of the building in 1946. The design of these additions closely matched the original building design. While the original symmetry of the Fairview Avenue facade was altered, the brickwork and terra cotta ornament were closely matched. The architect for each of these additions was Henry Bittman (1881-1953), a highly respected and prolific Seattle architect/engineer.

In 1965, a major concrete-block structure (designed by Charles E. Kitchin) was constructed on the adjacent western quarter block at Thomas Street and Boren Avenue and inner-connected to the western elevation of the older building. A smaller, concrete-block addition and the "Troy" roof sign were also added to the northern end of the older structure sometime after 1966. The post-1946 additions are generally unsympathetic to the original design and are of no architectural or historical significance. In recent years the building and site were purchased by the Seattle Times and the laundry business discontinued operation in the original structure.

### **Statement of Significance**

The Troy Laundry Company appears to have been initially established ca. 1905 by Rollin V. Ankeny and Bradford D. Baucus. It was initially located at the NE corner of Republican Street and Nob Hill (500 Nob Hill) and for a period appears to have operated a branch office near Third and Union. The business continued to operate at the Nob Hill location until the construction of the 1927 plant. The ownership and management of the laundry appear to have changed several times until J.C. Hagen acquired a controlling interest in the business in 1920. John C. Hagen was a native of Boseman, Montana and migrated to Seattle in 1908. He initially established the Broadway Laundry on First Avenue and then relocated it to

Minor Avenue. He gradually acquired several small neighborhood laundry operations including the Empire, Snowflake, Nelson's and the Troy Laundry. They were eventually merged under the Troy Laundry Company name. The construction of the 1927 building coincided with the establishment of this multiple laundry operation. The well-established Cascade Laundry and American Linen Supply businesses were also eventually acquired and appear to have merged with the Troy Laundry Co. sometime prior to 1944. Hagen eventually owned laundry, linen supply and dry cleaning companies in Wenatchee, Spokane and Yakima, as well. In 1927, when the new plant was constructed, the sales manager for the Troy Laundry Company was Carl H. Robinson. Mr. Robinson was a native of Dallas, Oregon who migrated to Seattle in 1912 and entered into the laundry business then. He served as Troy Laundry sales manager until his retirement in 1951. John C. Hagen remained the chairman of the board of the Troy Laundry Co., until his death in 1968.

The Troy Laundry, like the adjacent Seattle Times Building and Plant constructed three years later in 1930, was sited on a main thoroughfare a relatively short distance north of the established business district. This working-class residential district, near the southern industrialized shore of Lake Union, gradually evolved into a semi-industrial district due to its desirable distance from the congestion of downtown Seattle. Delivery and service vehicles, as well as employees, could come and go with relative ease and efficiency. The Troy Laundry appears to have been one of several industrial laundry operations established in the area after W.W.I. Eventually numerous laundry-related businesses were located in the general vicinity.

By 1948, the Troy Laundry Plant was the largest laundry operation in the Pacific Northwest. It operated the region's largest automatic, self-loading washer, capable of handling 900 pounds of laundry in one washing. A fleet of 50 trucks provided pick-up and delivery service for laundry and dry-cleaning. This fleet operated throughout Seattle and many outlying communities including Kirkland, Bellevue, Burien, Bothell, Richmond Beach, Lake Forest Park and Renton. The company also operated a Linen Supply Department providing linens to hotels, restaurants barber shops, beauty parlors, doctor's offices and other consistent linen users.

The original Troy Laundry Building was designed by Victor W. Voorhees and constructed by Henrikson & Alstrom, Construction Co. Victor W. Voorhees is listed as the "architect" on the January 27, 1927, Application and Building Permit "to erect a laundry building" at 307 Fairview Avenue North. Victor W. Voorhees is an intriguing although little known figure among Seattle's historic architects. Extensive biographical information has not been uncovered regarding his personal background, architectural training or the full scope of his long career. He is listed in the recently published volume on noteworthy Seattle architects, *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, which includes a brief description of his known career. He appears to have practiced architecture in Seattle from ca. 1904 until at least 1957. A particularly noteworthy aspect of his career and his influence on Seattle architecture was his publication of *Western Home Builder* between 1907 and 1911. *Western Home Builder* was a very popular "plan book" or catalog of house, cottage and bungalow plans. These plans

were promoted and sold to home builders, contractors and developers and heavily used during a period of dramatic population growth and physical expansion. He is also individually credited with the design of hundreds of cottages, residences, apartment houses, commercial, industrial and fraternal buildings constructed through the 1920s. These projects included the Vance Hotel (1927) and the Vance Building (1929). He is also known to have designed other laundry buildings in Ballard and the South Lake Union area, as well as numerous commercial and industrial properties in the nearby Denny Regrade during the 1920s.

The exterior design of the original 1927 portion of the building includes complicated brick masonry veneer patterns and fairly elaborate terra cotta detailing that are features indicative of then-current architectural trends. This degree of ornamental brickwork and terra cotta detailing distinguishes the Troy Laundry Building from other industrial buildings constructed in the Cascade/South Lake Union area. The building remains a prominent part of the contemporary streetscape and is one of the most architecturally ornate commercial/industrial buildings in the Cascade district.

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

**The entire exterior of the original 1927 building, and the exteriors of the 1945 and 1946 additions designed by Henry Bittman.**

Issued: August 15, 1995



Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:cjh

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