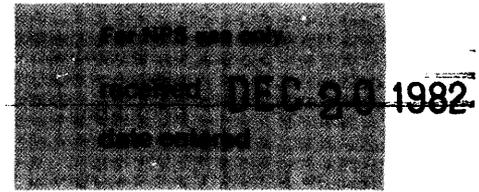


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Flatiron Building

and/or common Bellingham Bay Furniture Building

## 2. Location

street & number 1311-1319 Bay Street \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Bellingham \_\_\_ vicinity of ~~Congressional District~~

state Washington code 053 county Whatcom code 073

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Morris Piha Co.

street & number 1201 Cornwall

city, town Bellingham \_\_\_ vicinity of state Washington 98225

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Whatcom County Courthouse

street & number 311 Grand Avenue

city, town Bellingham state Washington 98225

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Whatcom County Preservation Planning Survey has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes  no

date 1979 \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state  county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Whatcom County Parks, 2600 Sunset Drive

city, town Bellingham state Washington 98225

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Flatiron Building is a seven story detached commercial building, triangular in plan, with a full basement. The foundation and walls beneath street level are of Chuckanut sandstone masonry. The structure is reinforced concrete in all piers, columns, and girders, making it one of the Pacific Northwest's first buildings in the reinforced concrete mode throughout. The building was also Bellingham's first multi-storied structure constructed in the flatiron style.

The building has exposed concrete on the exterior walls, with very little ornamentation. Large fixed pane wooden sash and casement windows ring the building in a regular repeated pattern on each story, providing ample natural lighting inside. The roof structure is flat consisting of joisted wood frame beams supported by reinforced concrete columns. The roof covering is of composition covered by tar. Atop the roof is a 46 foot cylindrical water tower, with a 15,000 gallon tank above 25 foot derrick type legs. A low conical roof covers the tank.

The main entrance to the Flatiron Building is at the Bay and Prospect Street angle facing south. Floors in the structure are two by four and two by six inch laminated (on edge) fir which clear span approximately sixteen feet beam to beam. The structure was designed for manufacturing and warehouse uses which exceed floor loading conditions for commercial and office needs.

During construction of the building the entire triangular lot of 5585.3 square feet was excavated and finished as basement and foundation; but, above street level, the floor space is much smaller on each level due to the surrounding sidewalks. The basement floor is a four inch thick concrete slab with floor structures from there up supported by four foot by three foot-six inch columns on the first level and 24 inch square columns on all others. Reinforcement rods are one inch and three quarter inch within all columns, piers, and beams. Two by twelve inch wood floor joists at sixteen inch O.C. between the supports are covered with a one inch fir subflooring.

Two elevators connect the upper floors and basement in the building. The interior partitions are constructed of ten inch reinforced concrete for the vault and two by four inch studs at sixteen inch O.C. in the walls with finishes of painted plaster over lath, painted drywall, vinyl wallcovering, wood paneling, pegboard, and some tilework. Central heating is provided by a gas fired hot water boiler with radiant heat throughout. Additional features include built-in cabinets on the mezzanine level, ton capacity Odese passenger and freight elevators, sprinkler system fed by the rooftop water tower, a vault and fire escape network. Frontage is 131.45 feet on the Bay Street side, 107.49 feet on the Prospect Street side, and 101.9 feet along the remaining Champion Street elevation.

In the years between 1924 and 1927, following a serious fire, the second floor mezzanine was redone as a full second floor and thereafter the building was referred to as a seven story structure. This accounts for the six foot ceiling on the second floor while all the rest are 12 foot. The central customer elevator was moved to the Champion Street wall next to the freight elevator. An automatic sprinkler system was added after the fire, the first of its kind in the city. The roof tank was needed due to low water pressure in the city system. A pipe runs from the basement boiler to the tower and back to prevent freezing. The original architectural plans are presently held by the owners.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1907 **Builder/Architect** Frank C. Burns/Booker & Cambell (concrete work)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Flatiron Building is one of the first commercial buildings in the Pacific Northwest to be constructed entirely of reinforced concrete. As an engineering anomaly in 1907, it was a practical solution for its builder, a furniture retailer, to the ever present danger of fire in his business. Ironically, the Bellingham Bay Furniture Building was swept by a major fire on April 28, 1924; but, devastating as it was, the structure's integrity survived and the building was rebuilt around the basic concrete structure. Known as Bellingham's first skyscraper, the Flatiron Building served, from its completion until 1926, as the city's tallest building. Its distinctive water tower has made it a familiar landmark on the skyline.

The Flatiron Building was constructed as the third home for Bellingham's oldest continuous home furnishing retailer, the Bellingham Bay Furniture Company. The company was founded in 1889 by T.S. Hamilton and operated out of the Bellingham Hotel and a store at 217–219 Holly Street until 1907. As the furniture company grew, Hamilton implemented plans for the construction of his own building by first purchasing a prominent triangular downtown lot in 1907, and then enlisting the professional services of Bellingham architect Frank C. Burns. Together, Hamilton and Burns began the specialized task of designing a modern, imposing, and above all, fire safe addition to Bellingham's downtown. When work began in 1907, the plans called for a six story flatiron type "skyscraper" to be constructed by the concrete company of Booker and Cambell. Though not dramatically apparent at first, the building was pioneering a new construction technique when it was "welded and poured together" into one of the Northwest's first reinforced concrete buildings. As an innovative answer to the problem of a fire prone tenant, the Flatiron Building survives as a unique engineering artifact.

After its grand opening in 1908, the Flatiron Building housed showrooms for furniture, carpets, draperies, appliances, and a wide variety of household goods. At an initial construction cost of more than \$100,000, the Bellingham Bay Furniture Building became the area's largest retail sales outlet for home furnishings. Then, in the spring of 1924, the fire which Hamilton and Burns had taken such precautions against struck. It swept up through the customer's elevator shaft, and, in only a few minutes, destroyed the inventory and wooden sections of the building, mostly floors. Photographs from soon after the fire show that the reinforced concrete sections of the building make up far more than a shell. Though charred, the building lost only its floors and window frames, and, because there were very few partitions, the fire died quickly once it burned out through the roof.

The rebuilding process went quite slowly since Hamilton lost his inventory as well as his building's use. He unsinkably set up shop nearby, partially under a circus tent, and went about the business of cleaning out and then reconstructing the insides of the Flatiron Building. It took him three years, but when he was done several changes had been made and the consideration of fire safety was even more evident. The almost twenty foot high ceiling in the mezzanine was divided by a complete second floor addition with only a six foot high ceiling. The central passenger elevator, which had served as a flue for the fire, was relocated next to the freight elevator against an outside wall where it could be contained. And, most notable of all, was the addition of an elaborate sprinkler system fed by a massive water tank atop, what was then, the city's tallest building. Bellingham Bay Furniture Company reopened and operated out of the Flatiron Building until 1979.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Edson, Lelah, The Fourth Corner, 1951, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, WA  
Roth, Lottie, History of Whatcom County, 1926, Pioneer Publishing Company, Seattle, WA  
Bellingham Herald, "Flatiron Building Nears Completion," 12/12/07  
Bellingham Inventory of Historic Buildings, Municipal Arts Commission/Turbeville

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Bellingham North

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

1	0	5	3	8	2	5	0	5	3	9	9	8	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The portion of fractional lots 11, 12, 1nd 13, Block 7, map of the Town of New Whatcom, 1883, now part of consolidated City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Washington.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code

state	n/a	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jackie Kales, Diane Molberg, and Michael Sullivan

organization Owners/Chronicles & Design date July 12, 1982

street & number 2300 James St./2600 Sunset Dr. telephone (206) 676-0149

city or town Bellingham state Washington 98225

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Jacob E. Thon

date Dec. 10, 1982

for NPS use only  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date 1-27-83

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration