NPS Form 10-900
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received AUG 1 1984
date entered AUG 30 1984

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

1. Name

historic Cobb Building

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 1301-09 Fourth Avenue ___ not for publication

city, town Seattle ___ vicinity of

state Washington code 053 county King code 033

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Board of Regents, University of Washington

street & number University of Washington Campus

city, town Seattle ___ vicinity of state Washington 98195

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. King County Assessor's Office (File 2169-A)

street & number Third Avenue and James Street

city, town Seattle state Washington 98104

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Seattle Inventory of Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible? _x_ yes ___ no

date 1979 ___ federal ___ state ___ county _x_ local

depository for survey records City of Seattle Office of Urban Conservation

city, town 400 Yesler Building, Seattle state Washington 98504

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
_x_ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_x_ original site
___ good	___ ruins	_x_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Cobb Building is a large commercial structure located in downtown Seattle at the intersection of University Street and Fourth Avenue. This impressive structure combines elements of both Beaux-Arts and Commercial Style design. Eleven stories high with a penthouse, the building is constructed of reinforced concrete girders and floors supported by steel columns and is faced in brick and terra cotta. The surrounding area consists primarily of multi-story office buildings dating from the turn of the century through the present decade.

On the lower floors, the building is rectangular in plan and measures 107 by 120 feet. On the office floors, the rear facades recede to create an "L" shaped plan. The design of the Cobb Building is enlivened by a rounded corner at the intersection of the building's two primary facades. These facades are nearly identical in form and ornamentation while off-street facades are completely plain. The vertical organization of the street elevations is consistent with the Commercial Style: a distinct storefront base (consisting of the first and second floors detailed in terra cotta), a shaft (a large number of plain, repetitive office floors with paired double-hung one-over-one sash), and the capital (denoted by elaborate terra cotta and brick work which distinguishes it from the floors below).

With the exception of the Fourth Avenue entrance portal, the two street facades are identical, comprising six bays of paired windows that meet at the rounded corner in a triple window bay. Four of the bays, two on either side of the corner and one each adjacent to the extreme north and west bays, are delineated by slightly projecting wall surfaces and highlighted by more richly detailed ornament at their crowns.

The first and second floors are clad entirely in ivory terra cotta, simulating cut stone, with clusters of vegetable forms in sculptured relief atop the second floor piers. The main entrance portal, placed at the center of the Fourth Avenue facade, is expressed by two-story high fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals that frame an incised nameplate above the doorway and paired windows at the second story. These windows are framed by floral surrounds in low relief and feature a large central medallion of Hippocrates, symbolic of the Cobb Building's medical arts mission. Some of the storefronts have been altered with newer plate glass and signage. The storefronts of the final three bays on the northwest corner of the Fourth Avenue elevation appear to have been recessed at a later date to create an open vestibule before the bank that now occupies this site. The ground level on University Street slopes down to the west, creating a lighted basement office level.

Above the second story, six floors of offices are expressed very simply on the exterior by regularly spaced paired windows with terra cotta sills. The brick facing of the office levels is punctuated by dark-glazed headers which create a discreet textile pattern.

It is at the ninth and tenth floors that the designers have been most exuberant in the use of terra cotta. The ornament is derived from the Beaux Arts catalogue of classical forms and from a more unusual group of American Western images. The top floors are also distinguished from those below by the use of diamond-patterned tapestry brick in three colors. The slightly projecting bays of each street facade are capped at the ninth floor by pairs of large terra cotta Indian heads. Rather than depict a member of a Northwest coastal tribe, they more closely resemble the popular image of a Plains Indian chief. Though they are clearly American designs, the Indian heads still reflect the Beaux Arts

affection for symbolic, expressive ornament. Beneath the Indian heads are pine cone pendants. Terminating the remaining bays at this level are fluted pilasters with scrolled capitals. An intermediary cornice separates the ninth from the tenth floor which, from the street, appears to be the top floor of the building.

At the tenth floor, the slightly projecting bays are further emphasized by large console brackets framing supporting segmentally arched open pediments. Within these pediments are elaborate Baroque cartouches. All tenth floor window openings have rounded corners. A terra cotta open balustrade forms the parapet. For the pedestrian, this balustrade partially hides from view the eleventh floor, which is set back from the plane of the wall below. The windows at this level are simply detailed with transoms and sidelights. This floor is capped by a terra cotta coping featuring pediments over certain window bays. Above the eleventh floor, even further set back, is the mechanical penthouse, with large arched windows and corbelled cornice.

In 1930, the prominent architect Robert Reamer (who had designed the Metropolitan Tract's 1926 Skinner Building) refurbished the Cobb Building's lobby in the then popular Art Deco Style. Above rose-veined marble and green marble bases, light wood paneling covers the walls. The panels are separated by horizontal rows of inlaid wood decoration, including square, zig-zag, chevron, and diamond motifs. The four elevator doors feature vertical bronze panels with diamond patterns, fern fronds, and flowers, and central octagonal floral medallions of a type popularized by the French decorative movement. The octagon form also reappears as panels along the bronze staircase bannisters at either end of the lobby leading to the second floor. Also in the lobby is a medallion of Charles Henry Cobb, a stockholder of the Metropolitan Building Company for whom the building was named. The medallion dates from 1912 and was "placed here by his friends," according to its inscription.

In 1974, the Metropolitan branch of the Seattle First National Bank moved from the White Building across the street to its present location in the Cobb Building. Its original interior, executed by Robert Reamer in the 1920's, featured a large rectangular colored stained glass skylight and stained glass windows, some of which have been relocated to the Cobb Building, along with period lighting fixtures. Otherwise, this new bank has been decorated in a neo-Georgian Style with elaborate plaster ceilings. The vestibule entrance to the bank, with terra cotta Corinthian pilasters and decorative friezes, utilizes materials from the demolished building or reconstructions of its ornament. Decorative features of the upper floor offices of the building have been substantially altered with new wall coverings, doors, and acoustical tile ceilings.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1908–1910 **Builder/Architect** Howells & Stokes, Architects
Metropolitan Building Company
Robert Reamer: 1926 interior alterations

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Cobb Building is the only surviving structure of the 1907 Howells and Stokes Metropolitan Tract plan, an innovative urban design scheme considered to be the largest development of a downtown site undertaken to that time in the United States. The structure is also commercially significant as the first office building ever erected in Seattle for one particular type of tenant. The building itself is finely detailed and exhibits a masterful design that combines Beaux Arts and Commercial Style ideals.

The ten acres of the Metropolitan Tract had been deeded by Arthur Denny to the University of Washington, and this downtown parcel was the original site of its campus. When the university was moved to its present location, the tract became available for another use. The Regents of the University decided to lease the tract rather than sell it, in order to gain the greatest long-term benefit. The Metropolitan Building Company was formed and assumed the lease in 1907. The company, principally led by J.F. Douglas, immediately engaged the respected New York firm of Howells and Stokes to assemble a master plan for the development of the entire tract in orderly and integrated stages. This plan was modified several times as the need to generate a return on investment caused hurried and speculative building. Five of the ten buildings originally proposed were actually built between 1908 and 1912. The original plan for the Metropolitan Tract consisted of a complex of contiguous office buildings, apartment houses, and a department store, all designed to be harmonious in style, proportion, and materials. In concept, it was meant to become the commercial center of Seattle.

The center of the development was to be "University Place," a small plaza on University Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. The buildings on either side of the plaza were to be set back to allow for the widened street. A hotel was planned on the north side of University Place; to the south, a department store was planned. The remainder of these two blocks was to be filled with office buildings. Additional office blocks were to line the western edge of Fourth Avenue, and apartment houses were to be placed on the eastern side of Fifth Avenue. Most of the ground floor areas of the various buildings would have been occupied by retail businesses.

A most important aspect of this scheme was the similarity of building elevations that would have resulted. All of the structures proposed were drawn in great detail, and the design included a consistent eleven-story height with bands of terra cotta ornamentation along the upper few stories and at the street level with intermediate stories clad in brick. Construction was to be steel frame, with the entire developed tract using the same modules and the same grid. The corners of many of the buildings were shown rounded and articulated, serving as entry ways at street level. In fact, the completed White, Henry and Stuart Buildings, which were erected on Fourth Avenue and University Street closely resembled the Cobb Building. The White, Henry and Stuart Buildings were built adjacent to one another so that they appeared to be one structure. They utilized the same brick facing, facade arrangement, and terra cotta detailing (including the Indian heads) as the Cobb Building. The influence of the Ecole des Beaux Arts method is evident throughout the master plan, in particulars of ornamentation and axial symmetry, and in

9. Major Bibliographical References

American Architect, June 21, 1916, p. 404
Architectural Record, July 1912, February 1916, p. 154.
American Magazine, November 1924, p. 16-17
Bagley, Clarence, History of Seattle, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, 1916.
University of Washington Library. (cont.)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Seattle South **Quadrangle scale** 1:24,000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	550050	5273800
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification The Cobb Building, on a parcel of land in the University Tract, City of Seattle, generally described as: beginning at the most easterly corner of the alley adjoining Block 3, as platted in A.A. Denny's Second Addition, as per plat recorded in Volume 1 of plats, page 30 of records of King County as vacated by

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 Miriam Sutermeister, Shirley Courtois, & Mark Brack

organization Allied Arts of Seattle **date** December 1983

street & number 4710 University Way N.E., #608 **telephone** (206) 525-2374

city or town Seattle **state** Washington 98105

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national X 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 Jacob E. Thorn

title State Historic Preservation Officer **date** July 24, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register **date** 8/30/84

Attest: **date**

Chief of Registration

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the consistent configuration of buildings. These elements were strengthened by the ideals of the American City Beautiful Movement that concentrated on unified urban design schemes.

All of the completed Metropolitan Tract structures by Howells and Stokes presented coherent, confident images where ornamentation, arrangement and form were fully integrated. As previously described, the fine design of the Cobb Building reflects the academic Beaux Arts training of the architects and the methods of the ascendant Commercial Style. The Americanized ornament near the cornice of the Cobb Building is quite charming and perhaps reflects a romanticism regarding the "Old West" on the part of the architects. The building remains one of the city's finest commercial buildings from an era that saw the expansive growth and increasing sophistication of Seattle.

Significant portions of the Howells and Stokes plan were constructed. The Cobb Building, the White, Henry and Stuart Buildings, and the Annex Building (which was attached to the northeast side of the White and Henry Buildings) were completed according to the original plan. The Metropolitan Theatre (1911) does not appear to have been part of the original plan, but was added by Howells and Stokes and conformed to the overall scheme in style, materials, and details. Other structures noted in the plan such as the later Olympic Hotel and Stimson and Skinner Buildings were designed by other architects using different stylistic modes. The small plaza materialized also, as a tiny landscaped island along with a remarkable mid-street Shell Oil station, which occupied the center of University Street for many years. If the rest of the project had been built as originally planned, Seattle might have acquired a sort of unified core in the middle of its commercial district that Rockefeller Center later developed for New York City. The tract was meant to be a 'city within a city,' containing a variety of building uses: a department store, offices, a hotel, garden court housing, and a plaza. The plans for the tract were exhibited in New York after their completion (to the Architect's League of America) and were favorably received. They were also reported in Architectural Record and Pacific Builder and Engineer, where they were described as the largest and probably the only development of its kind anywhere in the United States. They were hailed as showing sensitivity to such an important site in the center of town, certainly a challenging undertaking. Considering these innovative qualities of scale and design, the Metropolitan Tract plan and the Cobb Building are of historical significance to the entire state of Washington.

The Cobb Building is the only surviving Howells and Stokes building remaining in the Metropolitan Tract. The White, Henry and Stuart and Annex Buildings were demolished in the 1970's to make way for Minoru Yamasaki's Rainier Bank. The Metropolitan Theatre was destroyed in 1954.

As symbolized by the plaque of Hippocrates at the Cobb Building's main entrance, the structure was designed especially for medical and dental offices. The Cobb Bulding was identified in contemporary journals as the first building in Seattle, and perhaps in the West, built and leased for a single professional use. At the time, it was considered to be one of the largest and most highly developed medical buildings in the country, and received a great deal of publicity in both medical and architectural journals for its innovative one-tenant concept and for the effort and research used in procuring the latest equipment for its various medical and dental offices.

Howells and Stokes

The firm of Howells and Stokes was ten years old when it was selected to design the plans for the Metropolitan Tract. John Mead Howells (1868-1959) and Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes (1867-1944) were classmates at both Harvard University and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Howells was the nephew of Charles McKim and he worked for a period of time with McKim, Mead and White. In 1899, the fledgling firm of Howells and Stokes won second place in the prestigious Hearst International Competition to design the campus plan for the University of California at Berkeley. Their later designs would include the Royal Insurance Company Buildings in Baltimore and San Francisco, the New York Institute for the Blind, Woodbridge Hall at Yale University, and St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University.

The firm was eventually dissolved and Howells went on to collaborate with Raymond Hood on three buildings. Together they won the international competition for the Chicago Tribune Tower and also received the commission for the New York Daily News Building. Both of these structures received an enormous amount of publicity. Alone, Howells designed the landmark Panhellenic (now Beekman Tower) Hotel in New York. Paul Goldberger refers to Howells and Hood as "perhaps the most gifted molders of skyscraper form." Howells was also considered an authority on early American architecture, on which he published many articles.

Stokes later became well known for his work on low-income housing. He introduced housing reform legislation in New York, and spent a great deal of effort in designing and studying economical housing. He also wrote several books and many articles, including the widely praised Iconography of Manhattan Island.

Goldberger, Paul, The Skyscraper, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1981.

Grey, Henry L., Metropolitan Tract Story, August 1964. (Northwest Collection, University of Washington Library).

Hines, Neal O., Denny's Knoll: A History of the Metropolitan Tract of the University of Washington, University of Washington Press, 1980 (University of Washington Library).

Meier, Dennis, Two unpublished papers on the Metropolitan Tract. In possession of author, 416 East Roy, Seattle, Washington 98102.

Metropolitan Bulletin, newsletter of the Metropolitan Tract, July 31, 1909, to June 17, 1911.

Pacific Builder and Engineer, August 8, 1908, July 13, 1912. (University of Washington Library).

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, March 8, 1908, Sec. 11, p. 8. (University of Washington Library).

Westerner, June 1911. (University of Washington Library).

ordinance 93906; thence Northeasterly along the northwest margin of University Street 107 feet, more or less, to the southwestern margin of Fourth Avenue; thence northwest along said southwest margin 120 feet, more or less, to the northern most corner of the Cobb Building; thence southerwesterly parallel to University Street 107 feet, more or less, to the northeast margin of the above mentioned alley; thence southwesterly along said northeast margin to the point of beginning.