

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 30 1977
DATE ENTERED NOV 21 1978

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

Rhodes Medical Arts Building

AND/OR COMMON

The Medical Arts Building

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

740 St. Helens Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Tacoma

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

#6 - The Honorable Norman Dicks

STATE

Washington

VICINITY OF

CODE

53

COUNTY

Pierce

CODE

053

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Tacoma

STREET & NUMBER

930 Tacoma Avenue South

CITY, TOWN

Tacoma

VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County-City Building

STREET & NUMBER

930 Tacoma Avenue South

CITY, TOWN

Tacoma

STATE

Washington

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The site of the Medical Arts Building is irregular. It runs between two streets, with 175 feet of frontage on St. Helens on the east and 185 feet on Market on the west. The parking garage fronts on Market, the upper street. The average depth of the building, located in the middle of a flatiron block, is 122 feet. The main entrance is through a mini-proscenium from St. Helens. Because the site rises sharply to the north and also to the west going up the hill in the other direction, entrances from both streets became a logical necessity. Architecturally, the one from Market is not as important as that from St. Helens; however, it is practical for patients arriving by ambulance or for those using the interior entrance from the garage.

The Medical Arts Building is a seventeen-story building of reinforced concrete construction. The cladding is pre-cast stone tile, cast on site from colored gravel and sand and anchored to the concrete of the frame. The tiles are approximately 18 inches by 30 inches. The decorative tiles which accentuate various portions of the building were cast on the site, as were the prismatic geometric forms for the plaster ceilings in the two lobbies.

Viewed from Ninth Street and Broadway, the multiplicity of stepped forms build to what was originally thought of as a tower. This progression is logical and conforms to the elevation of the street and to that of the hillside. The cast stone cladding is a warm beige in tone. It gives a subtle texture to the building and contrasts with the rich undulating variations of Art Deco motifs. The decorative design of the exterior is coordinated with that of the lobbies. The exterior decoration, however, is made from the material of the building itself and gives a feeling of organic growth.

The motifs of exterior decoration are repeated or echoed again and again in the double lobby with its three-story, circular black granite staircase and the 35-foot bronze and glass light fixture. This fixture is hung on five bronze rods from a cast plaster sunburst whose traditional and innovative forms are covered with gold leaf in shades of copper, soft green and yellow-gold. The bronze ballusters create a feeling of movement through their undulating shapes, which are enhanced by forms similar to a contemporary acanthus design.

The folded forms of the sunburst are repeated in the ceilings of the two lobbies, decorated with the same three shades of gold leaf. The stair wall continues the warmth of the gold tones through use of a stippled technique. On the exterior, the fan fold can be seen above the proscenium and on either side of the area above the St. Helens entrance, as well as in the stepped back area towards the main doors where the rosettes from the interior are also repeated.

The Market Street entrance is a scaled down version of that from St. Helens. The base of the building is faced with black granite that leads into the lobbies, where the walls are a grayish marble tinged with a red which complements the tones of the gold leaf used in the ceilings and the stair wall. The doors on the bank of elevators are bronze, as is the mail box. Each has a flat incised design, or bas relief, that repeats triangular and geometric elements as well as some of the more traditional circular designs found on both the exterior tiles over the entrance and the interior bronze grillwork near the entrances.

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The architect, John Graham, was a master at the integration of architectural forms. The Medical Arts Building is an excellent example of such forms expressed in the mode of architectural design current at the end of the 1920's.

In 1920, the Medical Arts Building cost \$6.72 per square foot, a high cost building for the Depression. In 1977, its location, design and good construction made purchase of the building attractive to the City of Tacoma for adaptive use as the City Hall. In September, 1977, the architectural firm of Lea Pearson and Richards was awarded the contract for the open concept interior work. The exterior of the building needs to be cleaned and sealed. It suffered from sand blasting in 1968.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input 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 1930 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Graham, Architect
A. W. Quist, Contractor

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historic Significance

The story of Tacoma is one of growth and change. First, the city adjusted to the needs and demands of a boom company town essentially created by the Northern Pacific Railroad and its subsidiary, the Tacoma Land Company. After an interlude of growth, the Northern Pacific Railroad monopoly was broken and the city adapted itself to Twentieth Century technology in order to meet the needs of the citizens of a flourishing West Coast port city. From its modest beginnings, Tacoma has met its changes with a certain selectivity in planning. More often than not, concern was shown for the humanitarian quality of life and the need to provide well-designed buildings to enhance this quality.

In the late 1870's and the 1880's, the heart of New Tacoma was at the intersection at Ninth, Broadway (then C Street) and St. Helens. The business of the city revolved around this area. The wooden Second Empire courthouse was south of Ninth on Broadway. South of it stood the Tacoma Daily Ledger Building, where in 1890 George Francis Train departed on his 67 day trip around the world. North of the courthouse at Ninth and Broadway stood the first home of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Across Broadway stood the Chamber of Commerce Building. In 1924, it was razed to make way for the Winthrop Hotel, which was designed by the New York architect W. L. Stoddard. South across Ninth Street from the Chamber was the Gross Brothers Department Store which boasted twelve separate retail departments and a child care service for shoppers. It was also from here that President Benjamin Harrison was welcomed to the city in 1891. This building was razed in 1916 to allow for the construction of the Pantages Theater/Jones Building, designed by B. Marcus Priteca, (National Register - 1976).

North of Ninth Street on St. Helens was the Hoska Mortuary, *the finest in the Northwest*, and the old Masonic Temple. In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone for the latter. When the Hoska Mortuary and the Masonic Temple were razed to make room for the Medical Arts Building, the Masonic Temple cornerstone was moved to the Old Tacoma Cemetery.

In 1929, the concept of a full-service building in the central business district which would have the facilities to serve all health needs was implemented by a group of farsighted businessmen from Seattle and Tacoma, along with investors from the Northwest and the East, through the financial house of Drumheller, Erlichman and White. They saw the need for an aesthetically innovative architect, an architect who understood advanced engineering as well as one attuned to their concept of . . . *a man-made monument of mercy, dedicated to the proposition that all men deserve good health.*

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Anonymous, Who's Who in the State of Washington, 1939-1940, edited by Gordon Barteau, Seattle, 1939
- Robinson, Cervin and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style Art Deco, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975
- Stewart, Edgar I., Washington Northwest Frontier, III, New York, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1957

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 0	5 4 2 3 4 0	5 2 3 3 5 6 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 6 to 12, inclusive, in Block 807, Map of New Tacoma, Washington Territory

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Patricia A. Sias, Historic Preservation Officer

ORGANIZATION

Community Development Department, City of Tacoma

DATE

September, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

909 Broadway Plaza

TELEPHONE

(206) 593-4960

CITY OR TOWN

Tacoma

STATE

Washington

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

James M. Welch

TITLE

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

December 15, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Wm J. Murtaugh

DATE

11/21/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NUMBER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Lawrence T. Cole

DATE

4-12-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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They chose the English trained architect John Graham, whose work had already been recognized throughout the United States, Canada, and the Far East. For several years, Graham had been the official architect for the Ford Motor Company, designing over thirty plants, including the major plant at Highland Park, Michigan. He had also designed several hospitals, including the Virginia Mason in Seattle. Graham's influence spread to the Far East when he designed Ciro's Night Club in Shanghai. He had an office in Shanghai with his partner, W. L. Painter, an engineer, until the Japanese invasion in 1937 forced closure.

The inspiration for a medical tower, as it was called, came from the officers of the United Rhodes Realty Corporation, a subsidiary of the United Pacific Corporation (later United Pacific/Reliance, and now Reliance Insurance Company). The men involved were Henry A. Rhodes, Chairman of the Board; Ben B. Erlichman, President; Wilmer C. Hewitt, Vice President; and A. M. Fraser, Secretary-Treasurer.

The site chosen for the Medical Arts Building was centrally located and vital to the central business district. Tacoma had good hospitals, but as yet no single building to house 150 doctors' offices. The building was designed to take advantage of the latest construction technology and included two electric systems, an innovative safety feature for the period. A fresh air circulation system changed the air six times an hour throughout the building. A small hospital with two operating rooms, an auditorium, laboratories, covered parking for 175 cars, a pharmacy, library and facilities for opticians completed the services provided within the building.

The Medical Arts Building was built in the depths of the Depression, and is sometimes referred to as the "Spirit of 1931." In the years 1930-1931, this construction project gave jobs to 750 men and cost close to two million dollars. This allowed Tacoma to claim a high rate of new construction during this time as compared to other West Coast cities with populations of 100,000 or more.

In August, 1929, a dinner was held for city doctors at Winthrop Hotel to announce the successful financing for the Medical Arts Building. During the course of several speeches, Henry A. Rhodes was reported to have said:

It is proposed to build a better medical building there than is now in the Northwest. The financing is all arranged. The building is going to be built. We are ready to build it as big, high and broad as the occasion warrants. It will be a big advertisement for Tacoma, whether you are interested in it directly or not; I think it is a big thing for Tacoma, especially when we can build it with outside money, without asking for any local financial assistance. (Tacoma Ledger, August 1, 1929).

It was an interesting statement to make. In 1925, when the Winthrop Hotel itself was built on the northeast corner of Ninth and Broadway by the Rhodes Investment Company's Citizen's Hotel Corporation, it was praised for being totally financed by Tacomans.

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It is significant to note, nevertheless, that when the Medical Arts Building opened its doors in January, 1931, with a permanent staff of 40 employees (exclusive of the medical and accessory staffs) under the management of Frederick Murmann, this structure was the second (the Winthrop Hotel being the first) which was designed to specifically revitalize the central business district. Both projects were early "urban renewal" attempts accomplished through private financing. (The Winthrop Hotel is now part of the Old City Hall Historic District, and has been nominated to the National Register).

The Medical Arts Building is an important architectural structure in the Northwest and a major building in the city of Tacoma. It was the only medical center in the city when, in 1930, the American flag first flew from its "tower." The building is still partially occupied by doctors, most of whom have plans to move to one of the newer centers when the Medical Arts Building is adapted for use as Tacoma's City Hall. This action by the City contributes to the revitalization of the central business district and means that once again local government will operate from the heart of the city, as it did in 1880 when the Tacoma Land Company donated the land for Tacoma's first courthouse south of Ninth and Broadway.

Architectural Significance

The scientific and technological discoveries which fostered mass production, mass communication and mass transportation are elements that set the Twentieth Century in a different time frame. In the field of the visual arts, the interconnection of form and function resulted in the triumph of innovative architecture over that of the traditional approach of the Beaux Arts.

American architecture of the 1920's combined strong verticals with a decorative addenda inherited from Paris. The result was essentially a commercial style which can be seen in the Chrysler Building in New York or the Medical Arts Building in Tacoma. The Medical Arts Building represents the only significant example of the Art Deco style applied to a major commercial structure in the city of Tacoma.

In 1927, Edwin Avery Park wrote . . . *architecture is competing in the great modern struggle to survive through fitness.* This quotation is particularly apt in the case of the Medical Arts Building, where the design complements the function, that of a full-service medical center. This was the first planned health center to be designed and erected in Tacoma.

The architect for the project was John Graham, Sr, of Seattle, who also had offices in Detroit and Shanghai. He was born in Liverpool, England and received his college education on the Isle of Man. He then received his architectural training through the British and European apprenticeship system. He came to the United States and, in 1900, established an office in Seattle. This was essentially his home office, even

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though he and his family lived in Detroit when he was chief architect for the Ford Motor Company. During the 1920's, Graham became increasingly interested in engineering and formed a partnership with W. L. Painter, an engineer. It was the ownership of the firm of Graham and Painter that John Graham, Jr. assumed in 1946. The original plans for the Medical Arts Building read John Graham, Architect and Engineer, and are dated 1930. At this time, John Graham, Jr. was at Yale College. By the time he graduated, he had won several awards from the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York; among them were two second medals, one first medal and a silver medal. He worked on the plans for the Medical Arts Building as an apprentice architect in his father's office.

From Tacoma, the consulting architects were the nationally known firm of Heath, Gove, and Bell. Around 1900, Frederick Heath had seen the possibilities of the adaptive use of the Tacoma Land Company Hotel. Through his foresight and guidance, that building became Stadium High School. In 1909, he designed Stadium Bowl, designed around the concept of a Greek amphitheatre. In 1909, the firm of Heath, Gove and Bell designed the Puget Sound National Bank Building, then the tallest building west of the Mississippi. The firm was represented by buildings in 47 states, including Alaska. These two firms, John Graham and Heath, Gove and Bell, formed a fortuitous combination of talent and technical expertise which included understanding the conditions of construction in a high earthquake potential area.

John Graham, Jr. has said that he feels the style of the Medical Arts Building is that which was prevalent at the time of its construction. It is obvious that both he and his father were au courant with architecture on a world basis. Mr. Graham feels that the forms of the building were dictated by the irregular shape of the site. He suggests that the Medical Arts Building is reminiscent of the Western Union Building in New York, designed by Voorhees, Gmelin and Walker between 1928-1930. Mr. Graham feels that it is the refinement of designs for buildings like these that influenced some of his own work after 1950; for instance, the Wells Fargo Building in San Francisco and the Bank of California Center in Seattle.

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Seattle Times, August 4, 1929

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Tacoma News Tribune, April 13, 1932; January 30, 1941; December 1, 1941; March 28, 1953;
April 5, 1953; May 2, 1954; August 2, 1955; July 14, 1957; March 31, 1968;
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Tacoma Times, August 2, 1929; September 9, 1929; January 3, 1931; January 29, 1941.

Unpublished Documents: (Acquired from John Graham and Company, 1110 Third Avenue,
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Reguso, Connie, "John Graham Company Employee's Manual," 1976.

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Personal Interviews:

John Graham, Jr. A.I.A. September 16, 1977

Frederick Maurmann September 14, 1977

William Iyall (Civil Engineer) August 9, 1977

Charles Pearson A.I.A. September 16, 1977