

SPOKANE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Nomination Form

OPR 95-1110

City/County Historic Landmarks Commission
Sixth Floor - City Hall
Spokane, Washington 99201-3337

Type all entries--complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Symons Building
and or common Symons Building

2. Location

street & number 525 W. Sprague AV & 9-15 S. Howard St.
city/town Spokane vicinity of _____
state Washington county Spokane

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			<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object			<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes unrestricted		
		<input type="checkbox"/> no		

4. Owner of Property

name Joseph M. & Mary Z. Dinnison
street & number 6205 South Ferrall
city, town Spokane vicinity of _____ state WA
99223

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds etc. Spokane County Courthouse
street & number 1116 West Broadway
city, town Spokane state WA 99201

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6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Landmarks Survey, City of Spokane
date 1979 federal state county local
depository for survey records Spokane City/County Hist. Pres. Office
city, town Spokane state WA (Spo. City Hall, W. 808 Spo. Falls Blvd.)

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<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 Symons Block, Neoclassical in style, is a four-story structure that fills the length of Howard Street between Sprague and First Avenues. Located in the southeast portion of the central business district, it comprises the west end of the block occupied by Spokane's Ridpath Hotel. Reflecting 1917 construction techniques, the Symons is a steel-framed and reinforced-concrete building. Its exterior is faced with white terra cotta above street level to third floor windows. Red brick is the facing on the third and fourth floors. A plain entablature of white terra cotta crowns the facade. The central entry on Howard Street is also terra cotta, and features an archway between large square pillars. Adapting to the downward slope of Howard Street, a mezzanine, faced with terra cotta, sits between first and second levels on the building's north half. The Howard Street mezzanine space originally consisted of tall transom windows. Also altered at street level, the north half is faced with panels of smooth, polished stone. The south half store fronts retain their large display windows but bulkheads are a red brick of recent vintage and transoms have been filled with rough-textured panels of stucco. Occupied continuously since its construction, the Symons building is in excellent condition.

Ell-shaped in plan, the Symons building is 155 feet in length along Howard Street, with 50 feet of frontage on Sprague Avenue, and approximately 75 feet of frontage on First Avenue. Constructed on the site of an earlier Symons Block, the building rests on a full concrete basement that extends slightly under an adjacent building on Sprague. On the south half of the Howard Street face at street level are entries and display windows to accommodate four separate businesses. The Howard Street-First Avenue corner is anchored by a large terra cotta pillar that matches entry piers. First Avenue display windows are separated by a small, off-center entry. The stone panels that cover street-level frontage on the north half are composed of squares and rectangles consisting of pebbles of Italian Verde marble and white marble embedded in cement and polished. A base course below the panels is of Minnesota black granite. These non-structural alterations appear to date from the late 1960's or early 1970's.

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The semi-circular arch over the Howard Street entrance is framed by square pillars with Norman capitals and granite bases. Above the pillars and the arch's keystone is a large entablature, plain except for dentils below its cornice, and the building's title incised in the fascia between shallow circles. Recessed behind the arch, a horizontal wood panel above the double-wide entry supports archway glazing. Between the pillars and recessed double doors, panels of light gray and dark gray Alaskan Marble cover the walls.

On the north half of the Symons Block, the mezzanine facing consists of off-white stone rectangles that attempt to mimic the terra cotta. They replaced, some time before 1955, transom windows that consisted of a row of tall panes topped with a smaller pane.

Second level windows are classic Chicago windows, with a large, fixed glass at the center flanked by smaller, once-operable pivot sashes, and transoms above. The wood framing is prominent enough to add a strong line. The windows are regularly-spaced and identical except for narrower corner openings consisting of paired sashes with a single transom. Terra cotta sills are created by a belt course. A similar belt course separates the second and third stories, with the terra cotta facing rising high enough on the third floor to define fenestration. At third and fourth floor levels the finish is red brick, laid in common bond. Windows are double-hung and evenly spaced except for a slight pairing.

Above fourth floor windows, an entablature of terra cotta repeats the plain design of the entry entablature, with its shallow circles and dentils. The alternating of white terra cotta and red brick continues through the parapet, emphasizing the horizontal lines of the exterior. The red brick parapet with white terra cotta coping conceals a flat roof. At the center of the rooftop, a red brick elevator tower is slightly visible from street level.

Beyond double doors at the main entry, an interior foyer leading to two elevators repeats the light and dark gray marble surfaces of the entryway. To the right, a stairwell contains stairs finished with identical marble surfaces coupled with wrought iron railings. Second, third, and fourth floor interiors are similar, with a central hallway running north-south and a series of offices opening into the hallway. A current renovation replaced false ceilings and 1970's formica doorway surfaces with oak veneer. Walls are plain and painted and floors are carpeted.

Building Department records indicate that numerous non-structural interior changes have occurred over time, particularly at street level. The changes have consisted of partition additions and removals, installation of false ceilings, and remodeling of surfaces.

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8. Significance

Period

- prehistoric
- 1400-1499
- 1500-1599
- 1600-1699
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-

Areas of Significance-Check and justify below

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> archaeology-prehistoric <input type="checkbox"/> archaeology-historic <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture <input type="checkbox"/> art <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications <input type="checkbox"/> community planning <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> economics <input type="checkbox"/> education <input type="checkbox"/> engineering <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement <input type="checkbox"/> industry <input type="checkbox"/> invention <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture <input type="checkbox"/> law <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> music <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government <input type="checkbox"/> religion <input type="checkbox"/> science <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture <input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian <input type="checkbox"/> theater <input type="checkbox"/> transportation <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
|---|--|--|

Specific Dates 1917-18

Builder/Architect Ricca & Vantyne

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Symons Block is architecturally important because it reflects the attention to style, and the investment in quality materials and construction, that were still attributes of Spokane's commercial architecture following the City's greatest era of expansion and development. It was designed by the highly-regarded architectural team of Archibald Rigg and Roland Vantyne, known for several Spokane landmarks. It is also important for its association with pioneer Spokane business investor Colonel Thomas W. Symons, and his son who helped to bring broadcast radio to the northwest. For many years the home of Spokane's first radio station, the Symons Building is significant for its association with development of this area's local and national broadcasting media. An integral part of Spokane's business community, the Symons Building also has street-level spaces that have been occupied by some of Spokane's best-known small business enterprises.

The Building and its Context:

Sharing one of Spokane's consistently successful business blocks with the Ridpath Hotel, the Symons Building of today, constructed in 1917, is the successor to two earlier Symons Buildings, one erected before Spokane's disastrous fire of 1889, and a second constructed shortly afterwards. A part of one of the city's earliest plats, the Railroad Addition, the land was purchased by Colonel Thomas W. Symons in 1881 from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. The original Symons Building contained lodging houses above commercial spaces and occupied the center of the block. Constructed of brick, it was flanked by frame business structures. After the Fire, Colonel Symons rebuilt a single business building of brick on his property. While only two stories high, it was nonetheless impressive for that era, covering the 100 western feet of the block between Sprague and First Avenues. Largely replaced in 1917 by the current Symons building, a portion of it remains today. Its street faces comprise the northern 50 feet of Sprague Avenue and the southern 26 feet of First Avenue just east of the Symons. Its brick finish included rounded corners, an arched corner entry with title stone on a curved parapet, and corbelled brick at the cornice. A remnant of its interior, a large tin ceiling, can still be seen in Jimmy'Z Newsstand.

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Construction plans for the present Symons building were first announced in January, 1917, by Thomas W. Symons, Jr., son of the late Col. Symons. It was originally intended to be a \$100,000 two-story building, designed by early Spokane architect Arthur Cowley. By the beginning of construction in mid-summer, both architect and plans had changed, and footings were being poured to accommodate steel framework for a four-story structure. The 15-ton steel beams, machined in Minneapolis, required 12 railroad cars for shipping to Spokane.

The use of terra cotta to provide an elegant surface for the Symons building was in keeping with the standards that Spokane's downtown property owners had set for themselves. A bold commitment to build the finest they could afford was still in evidence as Spokane's thirty-year "Age of Elegance" came to a close. One year earlier, Kirtland Cutter's Gothic Sherwood building was added to Spokane's skyline. In 1917, along with the Symons, plans were being made for a major Crescent department store addition, a six-story Chronicle building with a pressroom enclosed in plate glass so all of Spokane could watch the presses roll, and a new Elks Temple. Along with its structural integrity, the Symons, with its alternating courses of red brick and terra cotta, and its Chicago windows, exhibits integrity of design.

The Architects:

The partnership of Rigg and Vantyne was a leading architectural firm in Spokane during the early twentieth century. Organized in 1913, during its first twenty-five years the partnership was responsible for such well-known buildings as the Masonic Temple's 1925 remodel and addition, the early Saint Luke's hospital, the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children on Summit Boulevard, Edgecliff Sanatorium on Park Road - today's Park Place Retirement Community, Riverside Mausoleum, the Harriet Cheney Cowles Memorial Library at Whitworth College, and Washington State University's Science Hall.

Archibald G. Rigg, a native of Ontario and a graduate of Trinity College in Toronto, worked as head draftsman for the firm of Cutter and Malmgren for two years. He held a similar position with the eminent architect, Albert Held. After working in the east designing public buildings, he returned to Spokane, eventually forming the partnership with Roland Vantyne, and later, Vantyne's son, Carl. A resident of Spokane for 58 years, he died in 1959 at the age of eighty.

A resident of Spokane for five years before joining in partnership with Archibald Rigg, Roland Vantyne was trained in business at Buffalo Polytechnic institute. He worked in Buffalo under prominent architects before moving to Duluth, Minnesota, and then Spokane. Vantyne, active in Civic affairs, served on the Civil Service Commission and was an unsuccessful candidate for

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state representative in 1932. His home was in Lincoln Heights, at that time the Fourth district. He died suddenly in 1938 at the age of fifty-one. With the succession of Roland's son Carl, the firm continued to operate as Rigg and Vantyne until the late 1950's.

The Symons family:

The Symons block is associated with Colonel Thomas W. Symons whose distinguished military career included Army Corps of Engineer projects associated with development of east and west coast and Mississippi River shipping resources, and, at the end of his career, close association with the White House. His son, T. W. Symons, Jr., was for many years a resident of Spokane, a World War I officer, and a pioneer in the radio industry and in the promotion of aviation.

Colonel Thomas W. Symons first came to the Inland Northwest in the early 1880's as a young Lieutenant, serving in the capacity of chief engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers' survey of the upper Columbia River. The report he subsequently filed with the Secretary of War and the United States Senate provides for future generations an insightful account of the geography and history of the Spokane area. An 1874 graduate of West Point who finished first in his class, officer Symons continued his distinguished career with assignments that covered Midwest and southwest engineering projects, a superintendent position in Washington, D.C. for development of the City's utility and transportation systems, where he married Letitia Robinson of Philadelphia, and then in 1889, another placement in the Northwest that encompassed study of potential river and harbor improvements in Seattle. In 1896, he returned to the east to help modernize harbors and ports including the Erie Canal. After transfer to Washington, D. C., where he was put in charge of buildings and grounds, and promoted to the rank of colonel, his acquaintance with President Theodore Roosevelt grew, and he became an important figure at White House functions.

When young Lieutenant Symons wrote his report on the Columbia, Spokane was still a part of the Washington Territory and consisted of a village of 200 people situated by the falls. He was so enamored with the beauty of the area and its potential for water power and agriculture that he purchased four lots in downtown Spokane: the southwest corner of Sprague and Wall, and the Sprague and First Avenue corners of the east side of Howard Street where he placed the Symons building.

Thomas W. Symons, Jr. was born in Washington, D. C. in 1889. A graduate of Yale and Oxford Universities, he studied law and passed the bar but never formally practiced law, preferring to

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enter business instead. He was responsible for the 1917 construction of the current Symons building on the site of his father's real estate, and used that location for office and broadcast facilities when he began Spokane's first radio station in 1922. Involved with the development of broadcasting throughout the northwest, he was a part of local radio's transition to national network affiliation, and also held interests in broadcast facilities in Portland and Butte, Montana. Serving as a flight commander in the Air Corps in World War I, he continued to fly planes after the War in the National Guard. Well-known as an aviator in the Spokane area, he headed the Symons-Russell Aviation company and pioneered commercial aviation operations between Spokane and Walla Walla. Married to Frances Rutter of Spokane, also from a prominent family, he ran for state office in 1930. He died at his country home near Portland in 1941, at the age of 52.

Association with Radio Broadcasting business, other early business enterprises:

The Symons building was home to Spokane's first radio station, today's KXLY. Its transmitter atop the roof was a visible part of Spokane's downtown skyline through the 1950's. Dissatisfied with early radio broadcasts that were transmitted from Seattle, Thomas Symons, Jr. joined with Ed Craney to establish the station and begin radio broadcasting from offices and studios in the Symons building on October 22, 1922. In this era of crystal sets, the station operated with 10 watts of power, with call letters of KFDC, and later, KFPY. By 1926, power had increased to 500 watts and in 1927, the first mobile transmitter was put into use. The age of nationwide network affiliation began soon afterward, and in 1929, KFPY, operating under the Symons Broadcasting Company, became a member of the Columbia Broadcasting System. The station adopted KXLY as its call letters in the 1940's to conform with calls of eight other stations in the Northwest it was associated with. A recipient of numerous broadcasting awards, the station offered a range of local programming from news and sports, farm and women's features, and entertainment, to community service programs. Among the many celebrities that entered its studios were home town entertainment stars Bing and Bob Crosby and Patrice Munsel, who debuted on local radio broadcasts before they became famous.

Other well-known businesses that began in the Symons Block have included the Sengfelder Bakery, in the original Symons; Greenoughs, one of Spokane's largest and best-known grocery businesses; Bill Hatch Sporting Goods, and Kirishian's, Spokane's oldest oriental rug dealer.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Hyslop, Robert. Spokane Building Blocks. Spokane, 1983
McKelvey, Greg E. Cornerstones of Spokane. Spokane, 1981
Spokesman-Review, 1905-1941 (various articles)
Spokane Daily Chronicle (various articles)
Northwest Room, Spokane Public Library, vertical files

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre
Railroad Addition; lots 1 & 2 of block 9

Verbal boundary description and justification

list all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state _____ county _____
state _____ county _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sally R. Reynolds
organization Consultant date 8-30-95
street & number 7015 E. 44th AV telephone 448-0311 (509)
city/town Spokane state WA

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12. Signature of Owner(s)

John

For Official Use Only:

Date Received: 11-1-95
Date Heard: 11-15-95
Commission Decision: Approved
Council/Board Action: Approved
Date: 1-2-96

Attest: Marilyn J. Montgomery
City Clerk

Approved as to Form:
Pat Dalt
Asst. City Attorney

We hereby certify that this property has been listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.

Jack Covert
MAYOR, City of Spokane

or

CHAIR, Spokane County Commissioner

Cheryl Gaden
CHAIR, Spokane City/County Historic Landmarks Commission

Musa L. Brun
City/County Historic Preservation Officer

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SYMONS BUILDING
9-15 SOUTH HOWARD ST & 525 WEST SPRAGUE AV
SPOKANE, WA

COLOR SLIDES

September, October 1995

1. west (Howard St/primary) and south (First Av) facades, looking ne
2. west (Howard St/primary) facade, looking se
3. north (Sprague Av) facade, looking s
4. west (Howard St/primary) facade, lookingne
5. streetscape, Howard St, looking n
6. streetscape, Howard St, looking s
7. streetscape, Sprague Av, looking w
8. streetscape, Sprague Av, looking e
9. streetscape, First Av, looking w
10. streetscape, First Av, looking e
11. Howard St (main) entrance, looking e
12. lobby & elevators, looking e
13. lobby, looking nw
14. lobby & stairs, looking sw
13. lobby & stairs, looking s
14. second floor corridor, looking s







