



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

LPB 99/85

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 625-4501

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: Arctic Building, 306 Cherry Street

Legal Description: Boren's Addition, Block 27, Lots 4-7

At the public hearing held on April 3, 1985, the City of Seattle's Landmark Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Arctic Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 106348:

Section 3.01(3): It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation;

Section 3.01(4): It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction;

Section 3.01(5): It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder;

The terra cotta clad Arctic Building, occupying a site at the corner of Third Avenue and Cherry Street, rises eight stories above a ground level of retail space to an ornate terra cotta cornice. The penthouse office is not original. When the building opened, this was the location of a roof garden used by members of the Arctic Club.

Before the design for this office building was formalized, the developer, Mr. James Moses of New York City, entered into a lease with the Arctic Club, then quartered in the Morrison Hotel. He agreed to provide suitable quarters for the organization. His facade design reflected the name of the club, and consisted of walrus heads adorning the piers at the third story level, and a polar bear which was placed over the Third Avenue entrance.

The Arctic Building reflects early twentieth century trends in architectural design; an adherence to the traditional Classical patterns as promoted by the teachings of the Ecole de Beaux Arts

was replaced by newer ideas about progressive, less highly ornamented commercial structures as promoted by Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Chicago School. The Arctic Building represents a merging of these two schools of architectural thought. While it is clearly a product of early twentieth century Chicago architecture, with its large window areas, simple and clearly understood structure, and an easily distinguished base, shaft, and crown sections defined by Sullivan for such commercial architecture, the building does incorporate a number of typical classical decorative devices including fluted columns and large, heavily detailed cornicing. The building's strength is in not relying simply upon these devices, but in utilizing several new elements of decoration which relate specifically to the major tenant of the building.

An article in the February, 1917 issue of Pacific Builder and Engineer explains the reasoning behind the plan and architectural treatment of the building facades.

The governing thought was that of solving the problem of a well planned building for utilitarian purposes, having amply lighted rooms, and an office unit allowing of the maximum flexibility in arranging space to suit tenants, yet, creating a design by the adoption of such ornament in its decorative portions as would produce an artistic effect.

The use of large windows in the upper stories, so nearly square, presented a problem not easy of solution, and in order to bring the proportions to a pleasing effect, and procure a depth of reveal to relieve the usual flat thin wall appearance, and produce vertical lines indicating piers, the conventional treatment was reversed, and the architraves were placed in relief and a motif chosen for the spandrel between the windows which would combine with the vertical treatment and produce a well proportioned entity. The top story and main cornice are richly adorned.

The materials used for exterior facing consist of cut grey granite base and matt glaze terra cotta. A carefully considered color scheme was adopted, using submarine blue and orange brown in the decorative portions, while the major portion is cream white. The two lower stories are of the body color only, while the polychrome treatment is used in the remaining height.

The ornament is particularly rich above the second floor and at the top.

Salmon tone shields encircled by swags and topped by walruses separate each third floor window. Under each corbelled window sill is a tan glazed panel which, along the fourth floor, is further accented by light blue discs that are repeated in the pattern between each top floor window. The cornice features repeating dentils and a cresting parapet.



The second floor of the building housed nearly all major meeting rooms, dining rooms and reception areas for the Arctic Club. The exterior is delineated by taller, narrow windows - twice the number of windows as on the other floors, grouped in fours for every two square windows on the upper office floors. The Arctic Club had its entrance on the sloping Cherry Street side; the office entrance was from Third Avenue. The Arctic Club entry area walls and ceiling are richly ornamented in the cream colored terra cotta, featuring a shell-like niche and handsome fluted, metal lamp standards at either side of the stairs leading to the entry.

The major interior spaces were treated with quality materials. Corridors in the office portion were finished in selected Alaska marble. The club lobby was finished in imitation Caen stone, and decorative plaster work adorns the columns throughout the main floor. As befits a men's club, the plasterwork motifs include crossed pool cues and balls. Hardwood finishes on these columns, as well as panelling and wainscoting in the former library and lounge, created a harmonious effect on the main floor of the club. The fireplace in the lounge has a mantle faced in "faience tile" depicting Lake Washington and Mount Rainier.

Above the main floor level was the club's main dining room, the focal point of the club. The room is about 60 feet square entirely surmounted by an ornate tinted glass dome. The room is, in fact, now referred to as "The Dome Room." The walls and ceiling were highly ornamented with stucco which had been frescoed. The plaster cornices, appropriately enough, depict fruits and vegetables. Crystal chandeliers were especially designed and concealed lighting combined with them to provide pleasing lighting effects in the evening.

The Arctic Club also originally boasted a ladies' tea room, private dining rooms, billiard and card rooms, bowling alley, barber shop, and roof garden - all turned into office space in recent years.

The building has been remodeled several times. It was purchased from the estate of James Moses in 1963 by the Arctic Building Group. They spent between \$240-300,000 in 1964-6 to remodel 15,000 square feet of office space, including the former sleeping rooms used by Arctic Club members. In a Times article of January 23, 1986, it was noted that the remodel "includes a new lobby finished in plastic coated pecan wood and gold foil." At that time, indirect lighting and dropped acoustical tile ceilings were added, as well as aluminum sash windows.

A more sensitive approach to remodeling occurred in 1981-82 when Carma Developers, Stickney-Murphy, Architects, renovated the building. Work included installation of new entrance doors, a marquee and retail store fronts on Third Avenue. The exterior of the building was cleaned and its masonry and terra cotta cleaned and repaired. The task included replacement of the tusks on all



the ornamental walruses; the tusks had been removed in the early 1950's for fear that earthquakes might loosen them and endanger pedestrians. The original terra cotta tusks were replaced by specially cast epoxy ones. Interior renovation included installation of air conditioning, ventilating and plumbing systems, the rehabilitation of passenger elevators, and improvements to the dome room. The building now provides 79,448 square feet of leasable space (retail and office) at a cost of \$7.5 million.

The Arctic Building, like the Smith Tower (1914), Frederick and Nelson (1918), and the Dexter Horton Building (1922), pioneered the use of light glazed terra cotta panels over reinforced concrete or structural steel frame. Terra cotta facades became extremely popular and widely used in downtown Seattle for many years because of their bright reflective qualities and their ease of maintenance. However, the designer of the Arctic Building went a step further than the designers of these other buildings; he added a significant amount of color to the facade. It provides an excellent example of multi-colored matte glaze terra cotta work in the Northwest.

The Arctic Building is also noteworthy because it did not adhere to one particular style, such as Italian Renaissance, Greek, Roman, or Gothic. Instead, its combined decoration includes a number of original motifs created exclusively for the Arctic Club.

In addition to its outstanding architectural merit, the Arctic Building represents a colorful economic and social period in the Northwest; its site has hosted a variety of vital public uses and its architect was one of the foremost designers in the region.

The Arctic Club, originally located in the Morrison Hotel, provided an exclusive social community for those Seattleites who had returned from the Alaska Gold Rush with money in their pockets and a repertoire of stories to tell about their adventures in the Yukon. Its dining room and lounges were locations where many of Seattle's wealthy and socially prominent citizens planned strategies and dreamed projects which turned the city into a major west coast metropolis. In recent years, a number of city departments, including the Department of Community Development, have had offices in the Arctic Building.

A. Warren Gould, architect, was responsible for many of the finest commercial buildings in downtown Seattle. Among them are the County-City Building, the American Savings Bank and adjacent Empire Building (demolished for First Interstate Bank headquarters, 1982), YWCA, and Standard Furniture Co. (Second and Pine). In addition, he was responsible for many private residences and for commercial buildings in Vancouver, B.C., Aberdeen, and Tacoma.

He was born in Nova Scotia in 1872 and studied architecture at M.I.T. before practicing architecture in Boston until 1904, when he journeyed to Seattle. In addition to his architectural work, Gould originated the municipal plans amendment to the City Charter and was responsible for the creation of the Municipal Plans Commission. He stimulated interest in a major civic plan for downtown during the City Beautiful period. In 1917, he was elected president of the Washington State Society of Architects and was appointed a member of the State's Architects Examining Board in 1919.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include: the exterior, the dome room, the second floor entry on Cherry Street.

Issued: April 4, 1985



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cc: William Justen, DCLU (3)  
Susan Boyle, Chairperson, Landmarks Preservation Board  
CARMA Developers

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