



The City of Seattle LPB-24/84

Landmarks Preservation Board

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

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and address of property: Decatur Building
1521 Sixth Avenue

Legal Description: Block 18, Lots 3, 6 & 7, A.A. Denny's 3rd

At the Public Hearing held on March 7, 1984, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Decatur Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance #106348.

Section 3.01(2) It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the City, State or Nation.

The Decatur Building was owned and built by Louisa Denny Frye, daughter of Arthur Denny and herself one of the City's first settlers in 1851. In 1860, she married George Fredrick Frye, a successful businessman whose entrepreneurship included the building of the Frye Grand Opera House and the Frye Hotel (1908-11). The opera house was the principal cultural center until it burned in the 1889 fire. The 340-room Frye Hotel at Third and Yesler Way was planned in 1898 but not constructed until 1908-11 from designs from the well-known firm of Bebb and Mendel. With its ornate terra cotta cornice, it was one of the city's then finest hotels located adjacent to government offices, courts and the principal financial center along Second Avenue. After Frye's death in 1912, Louisa Denny Frye controlled his property in addition to property of her own that included the site of the Decatur Building, a part of her father's plat. Louisa Frye consulted with Henry Bittman in 1921 on plans for the retail and office building. The Decatur Building represents one of the finest, most detailed glazed terra cotta facades in Seattle. Its warm golden color of terra cotta, the delicacy of its designs that are repeated in the major vertical piers and along its cornices, and parapet, and the gracious way in which its retail shops provide a continuous and harmonious street front, make this one of Seattle's most successful buildings from the standpoint of architectural and urban design values.

Section 3.01(5) is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.

Henry Bittman's firm was responsible for a great many downtown buildings utilizing locally produced terra cotta. Born in 1882 in New York City, Bittman graduated from Pratt Institute and received further training in Chicago, probably at the Armour Institute of Technology. Arriving in Seattle area in 1805, he began a practice as a structural engineer. In 1906, he formed a brief partnership with the architect William Kingsley. After that, he dissolved the partnership and practiced alone as a structural engineer. As his business expanded, he employed additional staff and operated as an architectural and engineering firm. One of his most talented associates was the architect Harold Adams, who was the designer for many of Bittman's finest buildings. Along with the Decatur Building, Bittman's firm produced a remarkable number of highly detailed, well-proportioned, and structurally innovative commercial and public buildings for the downtown. These include the Eagles Auditorium Building, the Shopping Tower (now Olympic Tower) Terminal Sales Building, King County Courthouse addition, Equitable Savings, Hubbell Building and the Embassy Theatre.


Features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The Sixth Avenue facade of the building.

Issued March 9, 1984

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

By:


John S. Chaney
Board Coordinator

KG:JSC:tg

cc: David C. Pinkerton, agent for
LCF Associates, Ltd.



City of Seattle
Department of Community Development/Office of Urban Conservation

Landmark Nomination Form

Name DECATUR BUILDING Year Built 1921-2
(Common, present or historic)

Street and Number 1521 Sixth Avenue

Assessor's File No. Account No. 197570-0125-04

Legal Description Plat Name A. A. Denny's
3rd Block 18 Lot 3, 6 & 7

Present Owner LCF Associates, a Washington limited partnership Present Use Office and retail sales

Address 9714 Kopachuck Dr. N.W., Gig Harbor, Washington 98335

Original Owner Louisa Frye Original Use Furniture Manufacturing and Sales

Architect Henry Bittman Builder Unknown

DESCRIPTION:

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On May 13, 1921, Pacific Builder and Engineer noted plans for the construction of a steel and concrete, four-story and basement commercial structure, 180' by 120', trimmed with terra cotta tile to be built on the west side of Sixth Avenue between Pine Street and Pike Street. Louisa Frye, owner and operator of the Frye Hotel, had contracted with Henry Bittman to design the building at a cost ranging from \$330,000 to \$360,000. By September 9, 1921, with the work well under way - Pacific Builder listed a revised cost of \$250,000 and also noted the various local suppliers of materials, including Novelty Iron and Wire Works (1421 South Dearborn) for the ornamental ironwork, Art Marble Company (2011 Second Avenue) for marble, and Tregoning Manufacturing Co. (West 65th Street) for millwork.

Because the Decatur Building is sited mid-block, it has only one principal facade which faces Sixth Avenue. Designed in the classical style popular in the early 1920's, the building consists of eight bays of windows, each bay separated by ornamental capped pilasters. At the street level, eight display windows or store entrances are defined by these bays: segmental arched three-sectioned transoms are placed above the retail store shop windows and doors. A curved bronze-tone awning functions at the southmost bay, the entrance to the offices above the ground floor retail. These transoms are recessed and surrounded by rusticated stone-like terra cotta tile capped with acanthus-leaved keystones. Bands and a row of dentils separate the ground floor retail from the three floors above. The only major alteration to the facades has been the addition of a metal and glass canopy of modern design - the sections of which conform to the bays of retail space.

The three office floors are treated identically. All windows are three-sectioned, with a large plate glass window bordered by narrow wide windows separated by thin terra cotta-clad mullions. The spandrels consist of floral relief cast terra cotta panels. The vertical pilasters are given added dimension by layering and by a slight angular treatment which makes the surfaces "curve outward" at their centers. Windows are deeply recessed between these pilasters, making them appear even more like fluted columns. The capitals of these pilasters are in the form of acanthus leaves. They appear to support a terra cotta entablature consisting of bands of spirals, ovals, and

DESCRIPTION:
Decatur Building, pg. 2

flowers with rosettes placed above each pilaster. The words "Decatur Building" are incised above the two central window bays along this rosette-decorated frieze. The parapet cornice cantilevers outward from this entablature. It is delineated by a row of rosettes on its underside and by repeated decorative bands. The cornice is capped by a cresting border of acanthus leaves interrupted by acroterian motifs vertically aligned with the pilasters and rosettes below them. The Sixth and Pike Street office tower now under construction utilizes air rights over the Decatur Building without destroying any of the architecturally rich facade.

The Decatur Building represents one of the finest, most beautifully detailed glazed terra cotta facades in Seattle. In richness and texture, it is comparable to the Italian Renaissance-inspired Coliseum Theatre at Fifth Avenue and Pike Street. However, the Decatur Building's style is expressive of a less flamboyant, more dignified Beaux Arts Classicism. Its warm golden color of terra cotta and the delicacy of its designs, repeated in the major vertical piers and along its cornices and parapet, and particularly the gracious way in which its retail shops provide a continuous and harmonious street front, make this one of Seattle's most successful buildings from the standpoint of architectural and successful buildings from the standpoint of architectural and urban design values.

Louisa Frye, owner of the site and the builder of the Decatur Building, was born Louisa Catherine Denny in 1844. She was one of the City's small band of first settlers, arriving at Alki in 1851 with her father, Arthur Denny. In 1860, she met and married George Frederick Frye, a successful businessman whose entrepreneurship included the building of the Frye Grand Opera House and the Frye Hotel (1908-11). The opera house was the principal cultural center until it burned in the 1889 fire. The 340-room Frye Hotel at Third and Yesler Way (planned in 1898 but not constructed until 1908-11 from designs from the well-known firm of Bebb and Mendell, with its ornate terra cotta cornice, was one of the City's then finest hotels located adjacent to government offices, courts, and the principal financial center along Second Avenue.

George Frye died in 1912, leaving his wife in control of the hotel. But Louisa Frye owned property in her own right, particularly the site in her father's plat on which the Decatur Building stands. In 1921, she consulted with Henry Bittman on plans for this retail and office building.

Henry Bittman's firm was responsible for a great many downtown buildings, utilizing locally produced terra cotta. Born in 1882 in New York City, Bittman graduated from Pratt Institute and received further training in Chicago, probably at the Armour Institute of Technology. Arriving in Seattle area in 1905, he began a practice with the architect William Kingsley. After that, he dissolved the partnership and practiced alone as a structural engineer. As his business expanded, he employed additional staff and operated as an architectural and engineering firm. One of his most talented associates was the architect Harold Adams, who was the designer for many of Bittman's finest buildings. Along with the Decatur Building, Bittman's firm produced a remarkable number of highly detailed, well-proportioned, and structurally innovative commercial and public buildings for the downtown. These include the Eagles Auditorium Building, the Shopping Tower (now Olympic Tower), Terminal Sales Building, King County Courthouse Addition, Equitable Savings, Hubbell Building, and the Embassy Theatre.

Bibliography:

- Pacific Builder & Engineer, May 13, 1921; September 9, 1921.
Seattle Times, Obituary, Mrs. Louisa Catherine Denny Frye.
Seattle P.-I., Obituary, George Frye, March 23, 1924; March 24, 1919
Seattle Times, Obituary, Henry Bittman, November 18, 1953.