



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 684-0228

LPB77/88

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: 1411 Fourth Avenue Building
1411 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, Washington

Legal Description: Denny's 3rd Addition, Block 21, Lots 10-11

At the public hearing held on March 2, 1988, the City of Seattle's Landmark Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criterion of Ordinance 106348:

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

DESCRIPTION AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Constructed at a cost of \$1.1 million, the 15-story 1411 Fourth Avenue Building was designed in an "L" shape that provided for a maximum of office space with window exposure. The building is boxlike and designed in a type of modernistic style, with recessed window spandrels, unadorned vertical piers that taper to form gently setback pillars at the parapet and a vocabulary of Art Deco and Celtic ornamentation at both the base and the crown of the building.

In November, 1928, Washington State Architect featured a rendering of the building and the following description:

"The lovely soft light gray cut stone exterior of 1411 Fourth Avenue lends impressive dignity to the architectural lines and weaves soft shadows which seem to deepen the vertical lines and give a picture effect, restful and pleasing."

This building was the tallest in the city to be surfaced in stone; other high-rise structures were faced in brick with terra cotta trim or completely glazed terra cotta. The stone surfacing complemented two other R.C. Reamer designed buildings in the immediate vicinity, the limestone sheathed Great Northern Building (1928) and the Wilkeson sandstone sheathed Skinner Building (1926).

Although five floors higher, the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building's box-like form recalls the more traditionally styled Liggett Building (1926) at Fourth and Pike and the Republic Building (1927) at Third and Pike. In all three buildings, the corner window bays are distinguished from the interior window bays by various manipulations of the surfaces, the piers, or the window fenestration. Recessing or fenestration around interior window spandrels accentuate the vertical. However, the "modernistic" building makes its vertical piers more emphatic by deep recessing of interior spandrels and by fluting and narrowing of pillar-like piers at the top two floors. Connecting these "pillars" are two Art Deco motif ornamental bands. The band at the parapet is decorated with button friezes and surmounted, in the recesses between piers, by curving urn-like sculptures placed in front of diamond and sunburst motif panels. A second band of cream colored glazed terra cotta friezes with interlocking patterns decorate spandrels between the fourteenth and fifteenth floor windows; they contrast sharply to the deeper stone surface in both color and reflective qualities. Mock balconies appear below 14th floor windows.

The two base floors of the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building reveal a remarkable combination of decorative patterns borrowing from the Art Deco and the Celtic traditions. Between the windows along the second floor are Celtic interlacing panels with different animals from the Bestiary. Above the entrance portal, at the north east corner of the building, is another intricate interlacing design, as well as the "1411 Fourth Avenue" name incised in stone. All display windows along the ground floor originally were highlighted by beautiful cast bronze ornamental panels with spiraling vines and flowers, some of which have been retained despite the remodelling of storefronts into smaller display windows for Brooks Brothers. The main entrance portal, with its gold chevron and floral edged vestibule ceiling, includes a small angular glassed-in retail establishment. Possibly, this was a tobacconist shop. The bronze frame for this stone, as well as the bronze details around entrance doors, have acorn and sprouting leaf, as well as chevron patterns.

Although changes have been made to the main lobby, certain original architectural features remain. These include polished brass elevator doors and surrounds, and diamond patterned carved wood elevator indicator panels, mahogany spiral columned moldings, vine and flower carved wood friezes edging the ceiling, flower and spiral decorated balusters and newell posts, and green marble wainscoting and flooring. The combination of dark woods, polished metals and colored marble form a richly textured environment.

When constructed in 1929, the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building was touted by its owner as the tallest edifice in the city to be built entirely of stone facing. Owned by the Stimson Realty Company and opened by the Metropolitan Building Company, the building followed the examples of the Skinner Building (1926) and the Great Northern Building (1928), designed by the same architectural firm and all surfaced in stone. These buildings represented a move away from the original concept of tan brick and terra cotta buildings of similar height and Beaux Arts classical ornamentation conceived by the New York firm of Howells and Stokes for the Metropolitan Trust and represented by the Cobb, White Henry Stuart, and Stimson Buildings that became a part of Metropolitan Center. By 1928, the modernistic, Art Deco style popularized in New York and Chicago had reached Seattle; its sophisticated application under the watchful eye and creative hand of Robert C. Reamer, the architect, made the corner of Fourth and Union Street adjacent to the tract one of Seattle's most up-to-date.

Reamer had been brought to Seattle after completing Old Faithful Inn and all the other major buildings in Yellowstone Park to become the chief architect for the Metropolitan Building Company. Reamer's firm was equally at home with classical Exotic and modernistic detailing regardless of styling, his concern for detail, proportion, texture, and simplicity carries through all of the firm's buildings in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Works include the Skinner Building and Fifth Avenue Theater (1926), Great Northern Building (1928), Seattle Times Building (1931-32), and Edmond Meany Hotel (1931-32).

The 1411 Fourth Avenue Building is rich in textural relief details deriving from Celtic interlacing and bestiary motifs as well as from the more familiar chevron and floral motifs associated with the French Decorative Arts Movement known as "Art Deco". Like its companion of the period, the Northern Life Tower, this building's design, with recessed windows and unadorned piers, strongly suggests verticality; both buildings are decorated with exquisite relief ornament in the spandrels and house mock balconies at upper floors. Unlike the Northern Life Tower, the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building is essentially a box whose piers taper slightly at the top two floors; it lacks the setback towerlike form and is more grounded to traditional downtown Seattle architecture. It is akin to the colorful Textile Tower at 7th and Olive Way in its form and ornamental banding.

Page four

Of interest in terms of Seattle's development, the 1411 Fourth Avenue Building's entire street level was occupied originally by railroad and steamship lines; located directly across the street from the Great Northern Railroad main ticket office, this made the corner of Fourth Avenue and Union Street the city's transportation headquarters.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

the exterior of the building, including the roof; the entrance vestibule including the associated tobacco shop/storefront; and the first floor elevator lobby of the interior of the building.

Issued: March 4, 1988

Karen Gordon

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:dlv

cc: Robert Weaver, Chair, Landmarks Preservation Board
Alan Oiye, DCLU
Ken Mar, DCLU
Carol Wilson, Harbor Properties, Inc.

F&ED
68.11