



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

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

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: L.C. Smith Building (Smith Tower)
502-508 Second Avenue

Legal Description: Boren and Denny's Add., Block 3, Lots 5 and 8

At the Public Hearing held on June 6, 1984, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the interior of the L.C. Smith Building (Smith Tower) 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;

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

Section 3.01(6): Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.

The L.C. Smith Building was conceived by Lyman Cornelius Smith as an office building of special qualities in Seattle. The building was completed by his son, Burns Lyman Smith, as a tribute to his father. Smith had made his fortune in arms manufacturing, most notable the Smith and Wesson revolver which helped settle the West. L.C. Smith and son prospered even farther with the production of the soon to be indispensable Smith typewriters. The interior is lavished with the initials of the elder Smith "LCS".

The stature of the building as the fourth tallest building in the world and the tallest outside of New York in the entire world are standards to judge the prominence of the tribute to the elder Smith.

In announcing the building, L.C. Smith had stated that "no money, artistic or architectural skill will be spared in making the edifice a monumental advertisement for Seattle and the Northwest". The quality of interior appointment was realized along with the monumental scale of the exterior.

The Smith Building contained the latest convenience for the 600 offices including shops, a restaurant, lavatories on every floor, telegraph, telephone, wireless and cable offices in addition to the "telegraph" chute, reported as the "latest convenience" and the only one of its kind. The building was advertised as "absolutely fireproof" with windows, sash and frames of steel and bronze. The extensive mahogany trim, doors and windows are actually grained metal of superior quality. Lobbys and halls are finished in ceramic tile with consistent border treatment throughout the building and floor numbers at each elevator landing.

The building was "trademark" quality with the best materials installed by the most experienced subcontractors and craftsmen in Seattle. The high speed Otis elevators had the finest machinery and controls of the day. The machinery of elevator #2 is visible and displayed on the 35th floor. The consistent quality throughout the building is still evident today. Many features bear the initials LCS including the solid brass door knobs, elevator grill work, and telegraph chute.

On March 10, 1914, a Post Intelligencer article spoke eloquently of the new building: "The whole is a magnificent monument to the faith of those who believe in the future of this city...near this spot Yesler built his mill 50 years ago. That mill was the center of Seattle then, and it is believed that the L.C. Smith Building will be the center of Seattle today and of tomorrow and of all the tomorrows which are to come".

Later observers note that the Smith Tower is the highest, finest and most complete office building in the world outside of New York City. Others note that the finish and completeness is not surpassed anywhere. The quality of the interior remains evident today throughout the building in the original finishes, rich details and quality mechanical equipment. The interior is the most intact major historical office building interior in Seattle.

The areas proposed for designation on floors 1 through 32 are shown on the attached floor plans with hatched areas.

Features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The first and second floor lobbies and public corridors including wainscoating, onyx wall covering, brass grill work, tile floors, elevator grill work, hall lanterns, call buttons, mail chutes, doors and trim; plaster ceiling decoration, and carved plaster Indian heads;

The elevator lobby on floors 3 through 21 including the elevator grill work, hall lanterns, call buttons, mail and telegraph chutes, doors, trim, wainscoating and the tile floors;

The interiors of the elevators to include grill work, ceiling panels, light fixtures and operating equipment;

The original intact corridor plan on floors 10 and 32 to include doors, trim, wall coverings and fixtures in the corridor and to include the public lavatories on those floors; and,

On the 35th floor, the Chinese Temple Room ceiling and the elevator machine room and machinery.

Issued: June 12, 1984

By:



Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Office

cc: H. Martin Smith, Jr.

F&ED 61.10