

The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

919 Arctic Building Seattle, Washington, 98104 • (206) 625-4501

LPB-130.1/77

REPORT ON DESIGNATION/REPEALER/120 DAY PROPERTIES

NAME OF PROPERTY: Seattle Tower (formerly Northern Life Tower)
1212 3rd Avenue

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Replat A.A. Denny's 2nd Addition, Block 4
Lots 1, 2.

OWNERS: Tower Associates
Seattle Tower
3rd & University
Seattle, Washington 98101

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNATION:

On December 18, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Board conducted a Public Hearing to consider the nomination of the Seattle Tower as a Seattle Landmark. After reviewing the nomination and hearing testimony (see also Seattle Historic Data Sheet, copy attached) the Board voted to recommend designation to the Seattle City Council based on satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 102229.

- Section 6(4) - portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- Section 6(5) - embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type or engineering specimen;
- Section 6(6) - is the work of a designer whose individual work has significantly influenced the development of Seattle;

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNATION (cont.):

Section 6(9) - owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or city.

PROTECTIONS:

In recommending designation on the basis of the above enumerated criteria, the following specific elements were recognized for protections:

1. The exterior of the structure -
2. The 3rd Avenue Lobby -

Review of any changes or improvements to the above elements of the structure other than in-kind maintenance and repair require review by the Board and either issuance of endorsements or Certificates of Approval prior to the granting of applicable permits by the City.


Earl J. Layman
City Historic Preservation Officer

/hg

Landmarks Preservation Board

Seattle Historic Building Data Sheet

1. Name (common or present and/or historic) Seattle Tower (formerly the Northern Life Tower)
2. Street and Number 1212 - 3rd Ave. Block 4 Lot 1-2 Year Built 1928
3. Present Owner Tower Associates (Peter Eising) Present Use Commercial Office Bldg.
4. Interim Owner(s) -- Interim Use(s) --
5. Original Owner Northern Life Insurance Co. Original Use Commercial Office Bldg.
6. Architect A. H. Albertson; Jos. Wilson and Paul D. Richardson, Associates. Builder Henry Lohse; Sound Construction; Hall and Stevenson; Josiah C. Moore
7. Assessed Value: Building \$1,096,690 Land \$279,720 Assessors File No. 197520 - 0005

8. Classification:

- Building
 Site
 Structure
 Object
 Other

- Public
 Private
 Both

- Occupied
 Unoccupied
 Preservation work in progress
 Threatened by demolition
 Unknown

Open to Public:

- Yes
 No
 Hours _____

9. Neighborhood Information:

A. Compatibility With Neighborhood

Structure Yes X No _____

Use Yes X No _____

B. Importance to Neighborhood

Great _____ X

Moderate _____

Minor _____

C. Architecturally Strong Neighborhood

Comments The stylistic contrast

emphasizes its integrity and its impact
in 1928.

10. Special Research Sources (Be Specific, list name or item and where found)

In Seattle Public Library --

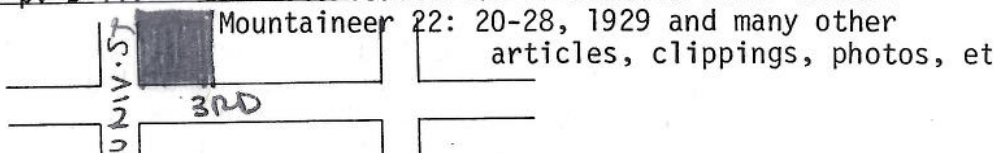
Seattle Times: Aug. 10, 1928; November 25, 1928, p. 18-19; June 30, 1967, E9;

April 12, 1970, mag. sec. p.8, June 25, 1972, p.89.

P - I: November 7, 1965, NW Today p. 13; Jan. 15, 1971, p. 20;

November 21, 1971, p. D 11. In Historical Files of Seattle Tower Assoc:

11. Cross Street Reference



12. Photos Attached & Photographer _____

13. Physical Description

A. Style of Architecture

B. Construction Material

REINFORCED CONCRETE,
BRICK

C. No. of Stories

27

D. Condition

Excellent X
Good _____
Fair _____
Poor _____

E. Exterior Deterioration of Original Design

None or little ✓
Moderate amount _____
Considerable _____

F. Architectural worth at Example of Its Style

Exceptional X
Excellent _____
Good _____
Fair _____
Poor _____

G. Notable Features: (Be specific, i.e., detailing, craftsmanship, proportions, materials, colors, interior, etc. Refer to Guidelines of Landmarks Preservation Board).

Perhaps the most notable feature of the Seattle Tower is the total integration of all design elements and details within a single system, that's creating a building of potential lasting strength and stature - resulting from its architectural excellence and design unity. Its style is not unlike that of some of the original buildings of Rockefeller Center in New York and is associated with the "modernistic" styles of the late Twenties and early Thirties.

External elements worth noting are the use of set-backs and vertical piers, monochromatic color, strong vertical lines and the restrained horizontal lines, free standing tower form finished on all four sides. The set-backs progress upward uninterrupted by horizontal lines; the depth of reveals lends strength to this upward movement. Even the colors of the brick and mortar were carefully mixed and graded so that they become progressively lighter as the building rose upward.* The purpose of all this was to attract ones eyes upward - and emphasize the vertical nature of the skyscraper triumphant. The effect of monochromatic color strengthens the quality of the architectural composition by contributing to the upward movement and not detracting from it; where various or several materials are introduced this restraint (monochromatic color) attracts attention to texture and use. For example, the "art-deco" panels attract attention partly because of the contrast in textures and partly because of the scale and details of the design; both combine to reinforce the horizontal, and thus the apparent solidity, of the base.

* (This required the daily delivery of that day's brick.) This technique as well as the use of setbacks was new at that time. In fact, Seattle's setback ordinance, the first in the nation, was designed and promoted largely by A. H. Albertson, architect of the tower.

G. Notable Features: (continued)

Interior features of note are the lobby, the executive offices, the elevator, the unique and elaborate bronze work, the extensive use of marble throughout, the monogrammed hardware, and the design motifs. The lobby has a gilded, vaulted ceiling; its reveals and elevator openings are trimmed with incised bronze; on the far wall is a bronze clock and map of the world; the design motifs on the bronze and the grill work are similar to those on the exterior, but reduced in scale. The original light fixtures are still in the lobby, but the glass has been replaced. Minor remodeling has occurred but without destroying the original flavor. The executive offices are reached by separate elevator which is elaborately decorated with bronze.

The upper floors have seven to nine foot wide marble corridors which are inlaid with marble. The restrooms are likewise surfaced in marble. Unfortunately, all the original light fixtures in the corridors were replaced years ago. Also many tenants have replaced the original wood and glass doors with more contemporary ones, changing the overall character of many floors.

All hardware was specifically designed for this tower: the escutheons bear the NLT monogram and the elevator indicator plates - "art nouveau" outline of the Tower. The bronze work throughout was also specifically designed for this building. Great attention was given to the continuation and development of design - the continuity and development of design motifs throughout the building.

The exterior appears generally in mint condition. Only a pedestrian overpass to the new Financial Building has been added and that with a minimum of change.

This building was long one of the dominant elements in the cityscape. For many years it and the Smith Tower at opposite ends of the Central Business District were the most important symbols and significant elements in the skyline of our city. They are still important elements even though they are overshadowed, but not surpassed by, larger and more bulky structures.

14. Significance

A. Major Significance :

- Historical
- Architectural
- Engineering
- Cultural
- Geographical
- Archaeological

B. Level of Significance

- National
- State
- Community

C. Statement of Significance (Be specific, history, personages, events, etc.)

When the Northern Life Tower was designed and built, it presented a fresh architectural approach to skyscrapers, as most such buildings in the late Twenties, following the decline of the Chicago School and its rational influences, were conceived in a variety of eclectic styles. Buildings such as this and the Exchange Building and the Meany Hotel in the University District were efforts to break away from the stifling influence of eclecticism. This change was brought about to some extent by a major architectural competition of the late Twenties: that for the Chicago Tribune Tower. Although the winning design was neo-Gothic (and brought fame and subsequently gave impetus to really sound work by its designer, Raymond Hood), the world really noticed the second prize winner designed by the late Eliel Saarinen. His design in terms of set-backs and form was similar to that which we find in the Northern Life Tower, and touched off a major controversy. This design influenced many subsequent skyscrapers throughout the Country.

President D. B. Morgan of the Northern Life Insurance Company, builder of the tower, instructed the architects with the "thought that the building should convey the impression of lofty aspirations, strength, durability and solidity." This building was to be more than just the usual office building. During construction no other skyscraper on the Pacific Coast aroused greater interest from the architectural profession. Many articles appeared in national architectural and engineering magazines detailing the construction and inspiration of the tower. Locally, it was referred to in many newspaper articles as the city's "sentinel of the great Northwest." 400 Seattle citizens attended the cornerstone laying. After the completion of the tower it was the most sought-after business location.

In 1962 the Seattle Chapter of the A.I.A. gave it a special citation "in recognition of an older building's professional excellence and enduring quality." The A.I.A. committee commented as follows:

"Careful attention to detail and sensitive selection of materials allowed the natural weathering process to produce a structure as pleasing to look upon today as it was 30 years ago: gracefully elegant, it is a source of inspiration to the architects of this generation. Its designers also are to be commended for considering

Surveyor Signature

Date

6-1-74

and
 WERN TORRE
 MURRAY PAULSON

Reviewed:

Historic Preservation Officer

Date

6-17-74

C. Statement of Significance (continued)

the building as a whole, not just from the street fronts, as was customary then and too often true today."

In 1972 the Northern Life Tower name was changed to the Seattle Tower when the Northern Life Insurance Company moved to new headquarters, as was specified under the terms of the sale of the building in 1962.