



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 195/09

Name and Address of Property: **William Tell Hotel**
2327 Second Avenue

Legal Description: Lot 8 of supplemental plat of Block 27 to Bell & Denny's first addition to the City of Seattle, according to the plat thereof recorded in Volume 2 of Plats, Page 83, in King County, Washington; except the northeasterly 12 feet thereof condemned for widening 2nd Avenue.

At the public meeting held on April 1, 2009, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the William Tell Hotel at 2327 Second Avenue as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- C. 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; and*
- D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and*
- E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.*

DESCRIPTION

Setting

The William Tell is located on a 6,480 square foot lot in the middle of the block on the west side of 2nd Avenue, between Bell and Battery streets. This section of Belltown retains much of its pre-World War II character and scale. The western half of this block is the heart of the original Belltown, the 1889 Austin Bell Building (with a large new addition) and the Barnes Building on First Avenue. Lining this block of Second Avenue are one-to-two story buildings from the Film Row of the 1920s-30s. Adjacent to the north is the Art Deco

Administered by The Historic Preservation Program
The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

"Printed on Recycled Paper"

MGM/Loew's film exchange (1936).

Across the street is the B. F. Shearer Building (now the Rendezvous), which has a highly-altered exterior but retains its original scale. The same is true of the Suyama-Peterson-Deguchi Studio, an altered garage. Other one-story 1920s buildings complete the block. To the north is the full-block six-story Belltown Court condominium built in 1992, with other newer development farther north and to the east.

Exterior description

This three-story Spanish colonial-style building T-shaped in plan, measuring 60 feet along 2nd Avenue and 108 feet deep, with 17,040 gross square feet of area. The rear (west) elevation is 40 feet wide, with a 10-foot wide light well on each side. It is of hollow tile construction faced with yellow stucco on the principal east façade. This façade has a mansard roof clad with red metal tile; behind this U-shaped roof structure is a flat roof.

The main façade is symmetrical, with a recessed center entry with a small vestibule with a wood and glass door. Above the doorway is a large ornamented terra cotta arch flanked by rope molding and pilasters with very ornate capitals that seem to have a griffin motif. Beside the entry are two pairs of tall six-over-fifteen windows the same height as the doorway. Above each pair of windows is a round terra cotta medallion with an urn motif. Below each individual window is a similar medallion with a floral motif. This composition is flanked by two small six-light windows and, near the corners, a pair of six-over-nine windows. These also have terra cotta shield medallions below them, each flanked by twisted molding. A belt course of terra cotta is at sill level of the first floor windows, defining the building's base, which is painted light gray.

The second floor has similar six-over-nine windows, in pairs. The third floor has four pairs of six-over-nine arched windows, with two smaller casement windows between them. Above the second story windows a prominent terra cotta belt course projects. Above this is a balustrade supported by ornate corbels extending cross the center third of the façade. A corbel table runs above the windows, below the mansard roof.

The upper portions of the north and south façades, visible above the shorter adjacent buildings, are clad with stucco but have no windows. The mansard roof does continue along this elevation. However, on the lower portions, visible from the alley, the clay tile is visible. The windows on the side and rear elevations are newer one-over-one metal sash in pairs. The rear elevation is also of clay tile, with concrete at the basement level. In the center is a recessed concrete stairway enclosed with a metal grill.

Interior Description

The public spaces of the interior appear to be largely unchanged. The small lobby has a terrazzo floor and arched openings to the hallways. There are 51 units, most arranged along a single double-loaded corridor in each floor. The wider eastern section has six units on each

floor except the first, where the lobby and office areas are. The units have been refurbished to some extent with some new fixtures and appliances but not significantly altered.

Building Alterations:

- In 1971 (permit #540443), fire safety improvements were made to relocate fire doors in the existing enclosed stairway.
- In 1973 a fire occurred on the second floor and repairs (costing \$750) were made to units 206-11, 214 and 218.
- In 1988-89 (permit #635236) the building underwent a renovation designed by Kovalenko Architects. The work included tuckpointing and other exterior repairs on the exterior and one-over-one dark aluminum windows on the minor elevations.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Neighborhood Context

The William Tell Hotel, originally known as the Hotel Lorraine, served both transients and residents in an area with few hotels in the immediate vicinity. A few years after the hotel's construction, this block became Seattle's Film Row, where theater managers from throughout the Pacific Northwest and Alaska came to meet studio representatives and brokers to select films for their theaters. Reportedly, many of the managers, the studio representatives, and the movie stars on publicity tours, stayed at the Lorraine. No printed evidence of this connection has been located, but this was the only transient hotel near Film Row, and hundreds of people came to film exchanges every month, as described below.

The Denny Regrade

Second Avenue is within the second phase of the Denny regrade, an event that defined the future of the neighborhood. Denny Hill steeply north of Pine Street between 2nd and 5th avenues, with a steep bluff from 2nd Avenue to Elliott Bay. With the economic growth following the discovery of gold in the Klondike in 1897, the business district expanded to the north, and many saw Denny Hill as a significant barrier to further progress. City Engineer Reginald H. Thomson envisioned leveling the hill, using hydraulic jets to sluice the earth into Elliott Bay.

The first regrade in the area was in 1898, lowering 1st Avenue between Pike Street and Denny Way by 17 feet. The second phase, which affected this area, occurred between 1908 and 1911, when 27 blocks between 2nd and 5th avenues, from Pine to Cedar streets, were sluiced away. The largest excavation was along Blanchard Street, which was lowered by 107 feet at 4th Avenue. This was the largest such operation in the world up to that time, moving six million cubic yards of dirt. The regrade opened up access to Belltown, Queen Anne and Lake Union, greatly enhancing property values. The city regraded only the streets, with owners of individual lots required to hire their own contractors to level their property. Thus many pinnacles of land remained even into the 1920s. The embankment along 5th Avenue remained for more than twenty years.

The third and final regrading phase began in 1928 and was completed in December 1930. This phase extended from Fifth Avenue to Westlake Avenue, between Virginia and Harrison streets. In volume it was about two-thirds the size of the second phase, removing 4,233,000 cubic yards of dirt on a conveyor belt to barges on Elliott Bay (Phelps, historylink.org). Because the third regrade was completed as the country was entering a major depression, the expected development did not occur. For decades the area east of 5th Avenue contained primarily car dealerships, parking lots, motels and other low-density uses and even now, 75 years later, it has seen less development than surrounding areas.

Seattle's Film Row

From the 1920s until the 1960s, this block was the center of the film industry in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle was a major film center, more than fifty theaters in the 1920-40s, and more than 400 in the state. All the major studios and many smaller ones had distribution centers, called film exchanges, in Belltown. Films were shipped by rail from Los Angeles, and were shipped from here to local theaters in Washington, Alaska, Idaho and Montana by truck, ship, rail or auto. Each distributor had salesmen who would preview the films and go on the road to describe the new releases to theater owners. Many theater owners came here themselves to view the films and select the ones they wanted to feature

“Film Row” had originated a few blocks to the south at 3rd Avenue and Lenora Street, but in 1928 two large film exchange buildings were constructed north of the William Tell, across Battery Street (the site now occupied by the Belltown Court condominium). B. F. Shearer, an important supplier of theater equipment, moved across the street in 1928; this building (now the Rendezvous) still has an original screening room, known as the Jewel Box Theater. The same year the RKO building (now Roq la Rue Gallery) was built across the street and, in 1936, MGM/Loew's expanded to a new building adjacent to the William Tell on the north. Other surrounding buildings had poster companies and other supporting businesses.

Multifamily Residential Development in Belltown

The William Tell has also played a role in the residential development of Belltown. Since its initial settlement, Belltown has provided affordable housing for workers. In the late-19th-early 20th century it was cottages, rooming houses and hotels for industrial and maritime

workers and their families. By the 1920s the neighborhood was one of the city's major centers for apartment development, providing modest but comfortable accommodations that were affordable for the sales clerks, clerical staff and other workers in downtown businesses.

The extremely rapid growth of the first quarter of the 20th century brought an acute need for housing of all types. From the beginning of the Klondike gold rush in 1897 to 1910, Seattle's population increased 400%, from 55,000 to 237,000, and then to 315,312 in 1920. It was at this time that apartment blocks as we know them, with a single primary entrance and individual units with kitchens and bathrooms, began appearing in Seattle and Belltown.

A review of Baist maps and survey data shows that between the completion of the second Denny Regrade in 1911 and the Depression in 1930 at least 20 apartment buildings were constructed in the Belltown/Denny Regrade area. The most intensive apartment development occurred on 2nd, 3rd and 4th avenues. Belltown's future as an apartment district was confirmed in 1923, when Seattle adopted a comprehensive zoning ordinance. Those areas that already had apartment development were zoned for future apartments, while new apartments were prohibited in single family zones. The booming economy encouraged investment in new apartments. Social conditions also encouraged apartment development, particularly the increasing role of women in the work force. Single women working in shops, offices and factories needed respectable and affordable housing, something that could not be obtained at the workers' hotels.

By the early 1920s, apartments were well established as an acceptable housing option for the middle class, typically for single people or for those saving to buy a single-family home. Apartments appeared in most Seattle neighborhoods, but the largest numbers were in Belltown, First Hill, Capitol Hill and the University District. The buildings were designed to meet the needs of various residents, such as the larger more luxurious units found on First Hill and Capitol Hill. Belltown apartment buildings catered specifically to single people or couples of modest means. The convenient location meant that those working downtown could walk to work, saving on carfare. The small units meant that rents (\$30-40 a month) were affordable.

The typical efficiency apartment was between 450 and 550 square feet in size and consisted of a living room, a full bath and a kitchen with appliances and cabinets. Often a large closet or dressing room opened off the living room. Wall beds and built-in cabinets and dinettes enhanced the usefulness of the small space. In many cases, leaded glass, oak floors and tile bathrooms added elegance. The buildings themselves usually had small lobbies (sometimes clad with marble) and shared facilities such as laundry rooms. The units were usually arranged along double-loaded corridors with windows opening onto either the street or an inner courtyard or light well.

By the 1960s many of these buildings had deteriorated and were in danger of demolition. The City of Seattle's Denny Regrade Development Plan of 1974 directly addressed the problem of providing new housing and preserving existing buildings. Zoning and building codes were changed to encourage housing development and the entire area, from Lenora to Denny and from western to 5th avenue, was established as a residential district. City and

federal funding was used to preserve many of the older apartment buildings, such as the William Tell.

Building History

The Hotel Lorraine was designed in 1924 by J. Lister Holmes for Colin O. Radford (permit #238993). Contractor A. S. Hainsworth built it, at an estimated cost of \$70,000. The permit was issued in October 1924, with construction beginning soon afterwards, but the building was not officially completed until March 1926 due to a delay in installing fire doors. *Hotel News of the West* announced the building on April 18, 1925, calling it “an important addition to the many structures which have been built in the regrade district of Seattle during the past year.” It described it as “very impressive with a red tile roof and an exceedingly attractive design.” It was to operate as a transient and residential hotel.

Colin O. Radford, the project developer, was a prominent real estate figure who established a four-generation dynasty. He came to Seattle from Montreal in 1898, with his 13 brothers and sisters, many of whom were very accomplished. His sister, Anne E. Radford, was superintendent of nurses at Harborview County Hospital and later served as state superintendent of nursing education. His sister Ethel taught chemistry at UW. His brother, Frank M. Radford, was chairman of the board of The Bon Marche.

Radford developed two notable First Hill apartment buildings, the Marlborough and the Gainsborough, as well as numerous commercial buildings. In 1947 was a partner in the property ownership firm of Radford and Radford with his son Fenton Radford. In 1950s they developed Park Row shopping center in Bellevue. It became the firm of Radford & Company Realtors, with Fenton, his two sons Colin W. and Foster, and his brother John. Radford & Company still exists, specializing in retail property management and consulting. Radford died in 1957 at the age of 72.

The building had several owners during the 1940s-50s. B. F. Shields purchased it in 1932, probably from Radford. Shields sold it in 1943 to John O. Garver, who had been managing the building. In 1958 Angelo and Joseph Carpinito bought the building, selling it in 1963 to Robin Lee, Inc. for \$95,000. During this period it was occupied as “housekeeping rooms,” and deteriorated. It was later sold to William T. Kobayashi. It appears that he name was changed to the William Tell Hotel about 1940.

In 1986 the William Tell was purchased for \$450,000 by the non-profit Plymouth Housing Group, an arm of Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Seattle. Three years later Plymouth completed a \$226,000 restoration, adding a new roof, electrical and fire safety systems, repairing mortar and installing aluminum windows on the minor elevations. Funds for the purchase and renovation were by federal, foundation and corporate grants as well as a bank loan. Minimal interior alterations were made, as the building remained open during renovation.

The Architect: J. Lister Holmes

J. Lister Holmes (1891-1986) is noted both for his early eclectic work and his later Modernist designs. A Seattle native, he first studied civil engineering at the University of Washington, but transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his degree in architecture in 1913. After working for short periods in Philadelphia, New York and Montana, he returned to Seattle. He worked for several noted architects, including E. F. Champney, Carl Gould, B. Marcus Priteca, Schack, Young and Myers and Daniel Huntington. He established his own practice in 1922.

His early practice focused on residential and small commercial buildings. His Beaux-Arts training emphasized adaptation of past architectural styles and the use of applied ornament. His skillful use of these enabled him to design eclectic and revival style homes for a considerable number of prominent citizens. Holmes executed designs in a range of architectural idioms, including English Tudor, Spanish Colonial, Norman Provincial and 18th century French. Among his residential designs are the Harry Lawton house (1926-27), the O. W. Fisher house in Broadmoor (1926), Collinswood on Bainbridge Island (1930-32) and the Phillip Baillargeon house (1936-37), as well as several fraternity houses. His commercial work during this period included the Sovereign Apartments and the York Lunch Building (1924, 1500 First Avenue).

Like many architects, his designed during the Depression shifted toward the newly-developed International Style. The Arnold Dessau house in The Highlands (1937-39) and the Katherine Coulon house (1939-40) blend the International Style with regional vernacular elements, which he termed a “cross between the Modern and Japanese.” The recognition from these designs led to his involvement in designing the Washington state Pavilion for the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Soon afterwards, he served as chief architect for the Seattle Housing Authority’s first public housing project, Yesler Terrace (1940-43). He also designed, with William J. Bain, Sr., the Rainier Vista Elementary School (1942-43) at the Rainier Vista housing project and two temporary housing projects, Gatewood Heights (1941-43) and Seward Parke (1941-43).

After the war he continued his work in the International Style, designing clinics, banks, and schools as well as houses. Among his notable works was the Industrial Branch of Seattle First National Bank (1945-47), which served as a prototype for branches throughout the city. Others from this period were the Seattle Pubic Schools Administration Building (1946-48, demolished) and Catherine Blaine Junior High School in Seattle (1949-52).

Holmes was also involved in civic and planning issues and served on the Seattle Planning Commission (1947-55) and on the national board of the American Society of Planning Officials, the predecessor to the American Planning Association (1948-51). This interest involved to involvement in master planning, including the Fort Lewis Peacetime development Master Plan (1950-52). In the mid-1960s he turned to industrial work, doing distribution centers for the United Parcel Service in Seattle and throughout California. Holmes was elevated a Fellow of the American Institute of architects in 1955. He died in Seattle in 1986.

Terra Cotta

The William Tell is one of a number of Belltown/Denny Regrade buildings noted in Seattle's terra cotta survey conducted in the 1980s. Terra cotta is molded clay block that can be used either as cladding or as ornament. The plasticity of the clay and the manufacturing method allow it to be formed into extravagant shapes, which add variety and richness to the streetscape. Terra cotta ornament became very popular in the late 19th-early 20th centuries as the cost of cut stone grew prohibitive. This popularity coincided with Seattle's early commercial development, and the city has a particularly rich collection of terra cotta-clad buildings. The Seattle area had several prominent terra cotta manufacturers, including the Northern Clay Company and the Denny-Renton Clay & Coal Company. Both were acquired in 1925 by a California firm, the Gladding-McBean Company, making it one of the largest producers of terra cotta in the country (Aldredge).

Seattle's best known examples of terra cotta are its early structural steel skyscrapers, beginning with the 1904 Alaska Building. Terra cotta lent itself to this use because it was much lighter in weight than stone or brick. However, the material was more widely used to clad or ornament smaller commercial buildings and apartment houses. In Seattle, terra cotta was typically glazed in cream or tan, sometimes with a mottled finish. However, any color was possible and some buildings featured colorful accents or terra cotta colored to look like granite (Granitex). Early 20th century terra cotta ornament typically used Classical, Gothic, Tudor or Mediterranean elements and motifs, but by the late 1920s Art Deco and Art Moderne terra cotta elements were more common. After World War II terra cotta use almost ceased, both because it was more costly than newer materials and because the modern architectural styles moved away from ornamentation of any kind. However, brightly colored terra cotta veneer was used on several Modernistic buildings, including the Seattle Labor Temple and the Sailors Union of the Pacific hall in Belltown.

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_____ “Capretto & Clark List Sales, Trades,” March 10, 1963.

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_____ “Hotel Saved for Low-Income Housing,” April 3, 1989, p. B3.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved include: the exterior of the building.

Issued: April 3, 2009

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Gordon', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Gerry Pigotti, Gibraltar Investment Property Solutions
 Kurt A. Fisher, Gibraltar Investment Property Solutions
 Stephen Lee, LPB
 Stella Chao, DON
 Diane Sugimura, DPD
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