



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649, Seattle WA 98124-4649

Street Address: 600 4th Avenue, 4th Floor

**LPB 280/24**

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Court 2132 Fifth Avenue**

##### Legal Description:

Fifth Avenue Court, a condominium, as described in Declaration of Condominiums recorded December 18, 2006 under Recording No. 20061218000467, and any amendments thereto, Condominium Plans and Map recorded December 18, 2006 in Volume 226 of Condominiums, Pages 33 through 36, inclusive, and any amendments thereto, records of King County Auditor.

At the public meeting held on June 5, 2024, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the U.S. Immigration Station and Assay Office at 815 Seattle Boulevard South as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standard for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- A. It is the location of, or is associated in a significant way with, an historic event with a significant effect upon the community, City, state, or nation.
- D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.
- E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.

The Features of the Landmark to be Preserved Include: The exterior of the building; and the interior entry vestibule.

### DESCRIPTION

#### **Site Description**

The Fifth Avenue Court sits on a 7,560 square foot lot on the southeast corner of 5th Avenue and Blanchard Street. The monorail track along 5th Avenue shades and partially obscures the building. Most of the surrounding buildings are considerably newer, with the

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exception of the 7-story Windham Apartments (1925, City of Seattle Landmark) across 5th Avenue. Looking north on 5th Avenue are several one-story buildings from the 1960s and 1970s and the more modern Ramada Inn; to the northeast is a newer high-rise office tower. Immediately to the south is Top Pot Doughnuts, a small glass-front 1950s Modernistic building. Across the street to the west is Lee Court (1991).

### **Building Structure and Exterior Features**

The Fifth Avenue Court has a U-shaped plan with the main entry on 5th Avenue (west elevation), with a 66-foot frontage, and 80 feet along Blanchard Street (north). A small light well on the south side is approximately twelve feet wide and twenty feet deep. A four-foot-wide pathway on the south side provides direct access to the interior court, so that the width on the rear is 70 feet. The building is of brick masonry construction faced with red brick. The brick is laid in a running bond pattern with a row of headers delineating the top of each row of windows. The three main stories sit above a daylight basement that also contains living units. The main façades have a three-part composition with terra cotta belt courses above the first and third stories. The flat parapet has a prominent cornice that appears to be of metal. Earlier photos show a white cornice but it is now painted black.

The principal west façade is symmetrical with a center entry flanked by two small windows on each side and a pair of larger windows at the corners. Most windows on all elevations have six-over-one wood sash. All windows on the west facade have terra cotta sills and the larger windows on the second story have terra cotta keystones. The basement windows, at grade level, have three-light sash with decorative metal grills for security. The relatively elaborate arched entry gives the building a Georgian Revival flavor that makes it stand out in the neighborhood. The entryway is flanked by a pair of fluted Ionic columns of mottled beige terra cotta sitting on granite plinths. The arch also has a decorative terra cotta keystone. The vestibule has granite stairs and wall cladding of gray and white marble with a black marble base. The floor is of white and gray marble with two inlaid diamonds of black marble. The double doors have leaded glass sidelights, with a large fanlight with leaded glass tracery. The entry is flanked by two signs saying "Fifth Avenue Court." Above the arched entryway is a group of three windows set in blind arches of terra cotta with a shell design; the arches also have keystones. The spandrels below the windows are a false balustrade of terra cotta. The three third-story windows in the entry bay are similar to others on that story, without extra ornament.

The north elevation facing Blanchard Street has six bays, each with two windows. Because of the distinct slope to the east, the basement windows are more apparent here and it has the appearance of a four-story building. The windows are the same configuration as on the main façade; all have terra cotta sills and those on the second story have keystones. The two belt courses continue around this façade as well.

The south elevation is separated from the neighboring Top Pot Doughnuts by a gated walkway approximately four feet wide. It is faced with red common brick with concrete on the basement level. Two-thirds of the way back is a twelve-foot wide light well. Windows on this façade have a six-over-one sash, with five bays on the west wing and a single bay on the

narrower east wing. The basement level windows have security exterior grills. There is a metal fire escape on the west wing.

Concrete cobble-style pavers pave the courtyard, which also contains a small locust tree at the northern end, and a narrow palter with a Japanese maple.

The rear (east) elevation faces an alley and a small parking area, since the building does not extend to the eastern property line. Cladding on the upper stories is red common brick but concrete extends above the first story [up to the second story floor level]; there are also three concrete buttresses. North of the center of the building is a simple rear entry, reached by concrete stairs with a metal railing, and an external chimney that probably served an incinerator. At the building's southeast corner is a second set of concrete stairs, which accesses the loading dock of the adjacent building. Windows on this elevation have six-over-one or three-over-one wood sash, except for a pair of twelve-light windows above the stairs. In the center of the lower floor is the building's electrical meter, covered with plywood.

The height of an original retaining wall is marked by the height of the concrete foundation on the south elevation. The original retaining wall held back soil that was removed in the 1928-29 regrade.

### **Interior Layout and Finishes**

The Fifth Avenue Court has 31 units, with a basement storage room and laundry room having been converted to dwelling units. Each of the three main floors has nine units, with four units in the daylight basement level. Approximately three-quarters of the units are two-room efficiencies, most ranging from 360 to 450 square feet. The remaining units include one-bedroom units (some with dining rooms) and two-bedroom units as large as 750 square feet. The apartments are arranged along a central corridor reached from the center staircase and a secondary rear staircase.

The 1937 Tax Assessor's data indicates that this was an elegant and well-appointed building. It originally had oak floors, with fir floors in the kitchens and baths. The fir was evidently covered with linoleum at a later date, and replaced with tile flooring in 2006. The data sheet also noted the presence of six sprinklers as well as a fire hose and a fire escape. Apartments were renovated in 1989 and again in 2006 when the apartments were converted to condominiums. However, no exterior changes (other than repointing and newly-painted windows) are apparent. The entry vestibule and lobby appear to be highly intact with extensive marble and a painted staircase.

### **Documented Building Alterations**

The building appears to be highly intact with few alterations. The alterations that have been identified, primarily on the interior, are:

- At an unknown date the original trellises flanking the main entry were removed.
- In 1989, apartment units were renovated, with dry wall added (permit #646653).
- Further interior alterations occurred in 1991, to units 03, 103, 104, 203, 204, 303 and 304 (permit #654698).
- 1991 basement storage room was converted to a dwelling unit (permit #656739).
- In 2007 the laundry room was converted to a dwelling unit (permit 6124227).
- The metal cornice has been painted.

Date; Description; Permit No.

1922; Construction permit: to build apts as per plans filed; 211316

1957; Repair fire damage, orig. construction; 452139

1957; Install 4 auto. sprinkler heads & 2 doors in storage areas; 456242

1973; Repair bldg. to comply with dept letter H.C. 72-1062; 549577

1991; Interior alterations to units 03, 103, 104, 203, 204, 303, 304; 654698

1991; Convert existing accessory storage room to dwelling unit (unit 04) in apartment building per plans; 656739

1989; Interior renovation of apt units, dry wall (no new walls); 646653

2007; Interior alterations to convert existing laundry room into additional unit in existing apartment building per plan; 6124227

2012; Construct alterations to existing apartment building for unit #304, per plan; 6318338

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Historic Neighborhood Context: Belltown**

Prior to colonization by white settlers, the land that makes up present-day Seattle was inhabited by the Coast Salish Duwamish people. The Duwamish spoke Southern Lushootseed of the Coast Salish language group.

A village site called babáqWab was located near the waterfront of what is now known as Belltown, at the approximate location of present-day Bell Street. babáqWab—whose approximate meaning is "Little Prairies"—was the location of two Duwamish longhouses. Middens have been found along the Elliott Bay waterfront, documenting the shellfish processing that occurred in this area. A prairie, rich with fruit-bearing salal, stretched east and north of these structures, up to the south end of what is now known as Lake Union.

After the 1851 landing of the Denny Party at Alki Point, the area saw a rapid influx of settlers. A year after the landing at Alki, William and Sarah Bell established a claim north of the early settlement. The Bells' cabin was burned by Indigenous raiders in the "Battle of Seattle," but the family returned and re-settled on their land claim in 1870. In 1889 the Bells' son hired architect Elmer Fisher to design a large residential building in the same block. Soon afterwards, Fisher designed an Odd Fellows Hall next door and a retail/hotel/office building (the Hull Building, 2401 First Avenue, City of Seattle Landmark) across First Avenue. These substantial brick buildings, some distance from Pioneer Square,

combined with the area's isolation, gave Belltown a distinctive identity separate from that of downtown Seattle.

Also in 1889, the first streetcar service arrived in Belltown, extending from James Street to Denny Way along Second Avenue. The Front Street Cable Railway erected its elaborate powerhouse and car barn near Denny Way and Second Avenue in 1893. Within a few years, lines would run along Western and Elliott avenues to Ballard and on First, Second, and Fifth Avenues to Lower Queen Anne, with connections at Pike Street to Eastlake, Westlake and points north and east.

Significant development of the Bell land was slowed by its isolating topography. A steep bluff rose from Elliott Bay to Second Avenue, and Denny Hill, which was too steep for horses to climb, extended between Second and Fifth Avenues north of Pine Street. With the economic growth following the 1897 discovery of gold in the Klondike, the business district expanded to the north, and many saw Denny Hill as a significant barrier to progress. In 1898, the first of three regrades in area began, lowering First Avenue between Pike Street and Denny Way by seventeen feet, using hydraulic jets to sluice the earth into Elliott Bay. The area west of First Avenue was not regraded, and its steep slope kept it largely industrial.

By 1910, Belltown was a thriving community of wood-frame residences and small commercial buildings, with brick hotels for workers along First Avenue. The waterfront and the western slope bustled with wharves, the railroad, fish canneries, small manufacturers, and livery stables. Small commercial buildings, brick workers' hotels and houses lined First and Second Avenues. In June 1910, a fire destroyed eight blocks on the western slope, from the waterfront to Second Avenue and Vine Street. The burned area was largely industrial, but included many small wooden cottages and workers' lodgings. Only one person died but hundreds lost their homes. The area was soon rebuilt with larger industries and new residences and apartments.

The subject site is located at the edge of two significant regrade projects. As the city's population continued to grow—nearly tripling to 237,194 by 1910—the pressure for land increased, and the city regraded the remainder of Denny Hill. The second phase occurred between 1908 and 1911, when twenty-seven blocks between Second and Fifth Avenues, from Pine to Cedar streets, were sluiced away. The greatest excavation was along Blanchard Street, which was lowered by 107 feet at Fourth 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, 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 created along Fifth Avenue remained for more than twenty years, until the third regrading phase.

Belltown, like the rest of the city, evolved significantly during the 1920s. Its location close to downtown made it an ideal location for apartment buildings to house downtown and waterfront workers, with an accompanying array of cafes, taverns, and small grocery stores. Belltown also became the center of the film industry in the Pacific Northwest. The

numerous film exchanges and related suppliers made the area around Second Avenue and Battery Street a mecca for theater owners and managers from Montana to Alaska. The automobile had become a significant feature of the city, and Belltown's close-in, low-density location encouraged auto-oriented businesses such as service garages. It also attracted light industrial uses such as printers and small-scale suppliers and assemblers servicing downtown businesses.

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. The project was completed just as the country was entering the Great Depression, and the expected development in the newly regraded area stalled. For decades the area east of Fifth Avenue contained primarily car dealerships, parking lots, motels, and other low-density uses. Development again increased in the late 20th Century.

During World War II, Belltown's apartments, workers' hotels and taverns boomed. The district's proximity to downtown and waterfront industry also made it a center for union activity, with the Seattle Labor Temple relocating to First Avenue in 1942. This trend continued through the 1950s, with numerous other union halls being constructed here.

Growth was generally slow in the 1950s and 1960s, as the economy took some time to recover after the war. In 1953 the Battery Street Tunnel was completed from Aurora Avenue North to the foot of Battery Street, connecting the SR 99 highway through downtown. This new infrastructure, and the 1962 World's Fair just north of Belltown, led to the construction of several modern motels in the eastern part of Belltown. Otherwise, construction was primarily one- and two-story buildings at the eastern and northern edges.

In 1974, the City of Seattle created the Denny Regrade Development Plan to preserve existing buildings and encourage new housing development. Local and federal funding supplemented the construction of both new buildings and the rehabilitation of older apartment buildings.

## **Building History**

As early as 1899, a duplex rooming house existed on the subject site, addressed as 2134 and 2136 Fifth Avenue. Before 1919, the owner of the site was lawyer Edward M. Comyns (1873-1928).

Construction of the subject building was announced in the Seattle Times in May 1921. The building was described as a "three-story and basement brick and concrete apartment house to contain 30 modern apartments," at an estimated cost of \$65,000. The developer, and owner at the time, was William Carroll. By March 1922, construction bids were open. In June of that year, William D. Perkins & Co. was offering 7% mortgage bonds in the building, which was then called the William Carroll Apartments.

The building was completed in 1922. In 1923, Sibbella Davis became the owner of the property. An early rental advertisement for the building touted "Roman baths, ivory

woodwork, 2 and 4 rooms available." The building was known as Sibbella (variously spelled Sibella) Court from 1923 until around 1927.

Unlike many large apartment buildings built in downtown Seattle in the 20th century, the subject building did not operate as a single-residence occupancy (SRO), often known as a worker hotel. Residents tended to be middle-class, and included many single individuals, young married couples, and retirees.

In 1940, the building was described in a Seattle Post-Intelligencer column called "Apartment Hunting" thus:

Just three blocks north of the main downtown apartment stores, the FIFTH AVE. COURT is located at 2132 5th Ave. Here is a desirable two-room is available at really a low rental price. One check covers light, gas. Telephone, refrigeration and free laundry. Hardwood floors, new range, good overstuffed furniture, full length mirror are a few of the features. Special arrangements for weekly or daily rates. This corner view suite now \$39.50 per month. Adults only are preferred. We urge you to visit the FIFTH AVE. COURT today!

In 1952, William and Louise Kongsli owned the property. By 1985, the building was called Kongsli's Fifth Avenue Court Apartments.

The building was converted to use as a condominium in 2006.

By 2019, many units in the building were being used as short-term rentals.

### **Original Owner: William Carroll**

The original owner and developer was William Carroll. Next to no biographical information was available on Mr. Carroll.

### **Original Building Designer: Lawton & Moldenhour**

The Fifth Avenue Court is an outstanding example of the apartment work of George W. Lawton and Herman Moldenhour, notable for its finely detailed entry and terra cotta ornamentation. The building plans filed with the Seattle Building Department list Moldenhour as associate architect, so the project was probably done shortly before they formed their partnership in 1922. In 1918, Lawton had worked with Moldenhour on two other apartment buildings in Belltown, the Castle and the Franklin. Their later apartment work is considerably different than these buildings. Olive Crest is a simple mixed use building on Capitol Hill, with very ornate terra cotta ornamentation along the cornice line. Hawthorne Square, just south of Woodland Park Zoo, is a unique full-block townhouse development with understated ornamentation.

George W. Lawton was born in Wisconsin in 1863 and moved to Seattle in 1889, about the time of the city's Great Fire. He worked as a draftsman for the prominent firm of Saunders & Houghton before entering into partnership with Charles Saunders in 1898. The firm of Saunders & Lawton designed a wide range of projects. One of their specialties was apartments and hotels, including the Lincoln Apartment Hotel (burned), the San Marco (1905), and the Summit (1910). Another of the firm's specialties was warehouse structures,

and they found a fertile market as the area around the train stations developed into a trade/distribution center. Some of their buildings in Pioneer Square are the Norton (1904), Mottman (1906), Goldsmith (1907) and Provident (1910) buildings. The firm also designed two of the city's oldest remaining schools, Horace Mann (1902, now Nova Alternative High School, City of Seattle Landmark) and Beacon Hill (now El Centro de la Raza) elementary schools. They adeptly used a wide range of revival styles, including Romanesque, Classical, Tudor and Colonial. One of their most noted works was the Forestry Building (1908-09) at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, a classical design executed in raw logs. Another well-known building is the Masonic Temple (1912-16, now the SIFF Cinema Egyptian Theater), completed by Lawton after the partnership dissolved in 1915. As an independent practitioner, Lawton worked with A. W. Gould on the Arctic Building (1913-17, City of Seattle Landmark), famed for its terra cotta walrus heads.

In 1922 Lawton formed a partnership with Moldenhour (1880-1976), who had been an office boy for the Saunders & Lawton. One of their earliest joint projects was the Ravenna United Methodist Church. The firm specialized in large office and apartment buildings, including the Fourth & Pike Building (1927, also known as the Liggett Building, City of Seattle Landmark) and the Melbourne Tower (1927-28). The partnership ended with Lawton's death in 1928. Moldenhour continued with an independent practice, and was the supervising architect for the Port of Seattle's Sea-Tac Airport Administration Building in 1948. He died in 1976 at the age of 96.

#### **Building Contractor: J. B. Warrack Construction Co.**

Warrack Construction Co. was the original contractor for the subject building. the company incorporated in 1917, J. B. Warrack and O. L. Willett, \$10,000. J.B. Warrack Company was organized in Washington State in 1913. The construction company worked in reinforced concrete, brick and stone masonry, heavy timber construction, earth and rock work, sewage disposal, industrial plants, refrigeration, and warehouses. The company incorporated in 1917, helmed by J. B. Warrack and O. L. Willett, with \$10,000.

Between 1913 and 1918, J.B. Warrack constructed buildings on Seattle's auto row including those for the Detroit Electric Co., Winton Automobile Co., Kelley-Springfield Motor Truck Co. (City of Seattle Landmark), and the Overland Automobile Co. By 1918 the firm was operating from the Arcade Building in Seattle.

The company constructed several buildings for the State of Washington. These included a kitchen and cold storage facility for the State Board of Control, and ward buildings, an assembly hall and laundry for the Northern Hospital for the Insane at Sedro-Woolley, along with the sewer system of that town.

In the 1920s, Warrack constructed the Sunset Electric Company Building no. 3 (1925-1926, demolished), located at 1111 E Pine Street on Capitol Hill, and Sacred Heart School and Chapel (1928) in Lower Queen Anne, designed by architect William L. Smith. By 1928 the firm had offices in the McDowell Building, downtown at Third Avenue and Union Street.



In 1940, J. B. Warrack was the contractor for the Woolworth Building at Third Avenue and Pike Street (now the Ross building).

Warrack was contractor for at least four Seattle Public Schools projects: 1930 addition at Lincoln High School (City of Seattle Landmark), construction of T. T. Minor Elementary (1940-41), addition/remodel at Magnolia School (City of Seattle Landmark), and construction of Edmund S. Meany Junior High School (1940).

J. B. Warrack Company was working in Alaska as early as 1923, when they contracted to build a new federal building in Cordova, Alaska, "the first reinforced concrete federal building in the territory." In 1934, the firm helped with the Public Works construction of the bridge to Douglas Island. In 1935, they constructed the Decker Building (National Register) at 231 S Franklin Street in Juneau. Warrack was also the contractor for the Ketchikan Federal Building (National Register) completed in 1938, designed by the Cleveland architectural firm of Garfield, Stanley-Brown, Harris & Robinson. In 1950, the firm constructed the Petersburg High School in Juneau, and the Chugiak High School in Anchorage in 1963. In 1972, the J. B. Warrack Company incorporated in the State of Alaska, and is still considered active there.

In 1953, the Associated General Contractors of America named Warrack the nation's safest contractor.

### **Architectural Context: Beaux-Arts/American Renaissance Style**

The building was documented on the Seattle Historic Resources survey as having been designed in a Beaux-Arts/Neoclassical style. The elements of the style exhibited in the building include the bilaterally symmetrical façade with a defined base shaft and capital composition, with a terra cotta belt line marking the base and cornice of the building; the arched entry flanked by columns, the three central windows with terra cotta spandrels and shell-decorated blind arches at the window head; and exaggerated terra cotta keystones above selected openings. The composition and ornamentation recalls classical column and arches, with incorporated Baroque shells in the blind arches. Other elements of the design relate the building to the style and typology of apartment buildings in the early portion of the 20th century. These include the central entry, the sheet metal cornice, the use of mixed brick and terra cotta, and a fenestration pattern typical of early 20th century apartment buildings.

#### **Beaux-Arts Style/American Renaissance**

Beaux-Arts is a late, eclectic subset of Neoclassical architecture. The style derives its name from the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) in Paris. This school emphasized the study of Greek and Roman art and architecture and encouraged artists and architects to design "in the manner of" classical styles. American Architects including Richard Morris Hunt, H. H. Richardson, Bernard Maybeck, and Julia Morgan trained at the Paris school and brought the style and teaching curriculum back to the United States. The popularity among American architects of Parisian academic architecture and its emphasis on neoclassical forms led the style to be dubbed "American Renaissance."

Characteristics of the style include elaborate detailing and ornamentation, massive plans, attention to symmetry, and the classical forms of column, arch, vault, and dome. The style tends to incorporate features of Renaissance and Baroque design. Due to the large scale and heavy use of ornamentation, the style was generally reserved for large public buildings.

Major international exhibitions of manufactured goods, or world's fairs, became popular after the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. The architects of American exhibitions in Philadelphia (1876), Chicago (1893), St. Louis (1904), and Seattle (1909) designed their campuses and temporary buildings in the Beaux-Arts Style. The most significant "debut" of the style was the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The director of works, Daniel H. Burnham, decided the focus of the exposition would be architecture and sculpture, in contrast to the emphasis on engineering at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. The Chicago exhibition featured a clutch of all-white highly ornamented buildings, known as the "Great White Way." Major buildings in the United States designed in the Beaux-Arts style include the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. (1889-97, Smithmeyer & Pelz), and Grand Central Terminal in New York City (1903-13, Reed & Stem with Warren & Wetmore).

Seattle's best-known Beaux-Arts/American Renaissance buildings are the Alaska Building at 618 Second Avenue (1904, Eames & Young with Saunders & Lawton), the old City Hall/Public Safety Building at 400 Yesler Way (1909, Clayton Wilson) and the Pioneer Square Pergola (1910, Julian Everett). Many apartment buildings in Seattle also have Beaux-Arts features. The St. George Hotel (1910) at 105 Fourteenth Avenue in the Central District demonstrates the style with its cornice, pilasters, window and door head entablatures, and Corinthian corbels. The Calhoun at 2000 Second Avenue (1910, William P. White) also demonstrates the Beaux-Arts tradition of tall building composition with base, shaft, and capital, along with ornament such as a large elaborate cornice, cartouches, swags, entablatures at selected windows, and a terra cotta-clad base with pilasters and Corinthian corbels. The Oxford (1909, Frank P. Allen and John Graham Sr.) at 1920 First Avenue also demonstrates the base, shaft, and capital composition with an oversized cornice, and remarkable oversized cartouches at the upper level.

The most elaborate example of a Beaux-Arts apartment building in Seattle may be the Frye Apartments (1908, Bebb & Mendel) at 223 Yesler Way in Pioneer Square. The Frye is also symmetrically designed with a base shaft and capital, and has modulated corners outlined with an exaggerated pairs of quoins. The base is clad in terra cotta with elaborate cartouches and corbels, and an egg-and-dart motif under the geometric relief of the belt course. The oversized cornice is decorated with more cartouches and corbels.

### **Architectural Context: Apartment Development In Seattle**

The Fifth Avenue Court apartments are typical of apartment building typology in Seattle during the 1910s through the 1930s. The subject building, constructed in 1922, falls within the later stage of the single-entry brick apartment development in Seattle. It has no elevator, and the small individual units were marketed towards single working middle-class professionals. The central entry and interior access provide a level of security, and the central light well accords light and air to every unit along the double-loaded corridors. The

masonry exterior, central entry, double-loaded corridors, and light wells are all elements typical of Seattle apartment building and single-occupant residency buildings in Seattle from the late 1800s through the 1930s.

Between 1880 and 1900, multi-family dwellings in Seattle were mainly boarding houses, tenements, or single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, catering primarily to single men. These small-scale buildings were usually built either of brick masonry or frame construction and were limited to three or four stories with one or two stairways and double-loaded corridors. Bathrooms were shared, and common areas such as lobbies were minimal. Some single-room hotels incorporated interior enclosed light courts, allowing rooms without exterior windows. As building codes changed, light wells and courts began to provide required light and ventilation.

Starting in the late 1890s, the apartment building and apartment hotel became a new type of housing in Seattle, providing suitable housing for the growing numbers of middle-class families arriving in Seattle as the economy prospered. At the time that the subject building was constructed, Belltown contained cottages, rooming houses, and hotels that served industrial and maritime workers and their families. Early apartment hotels provided meals in a central dining room, but would also include a kitchen in the private units. Apartments provided secure convenient housing for single people or couples, often with shared amenities such as lobbies, elevators, laundry rooms, and rooftop gardens. Apartment buildings with a single entry, and kitchens and baths private to the units started being built around 1900 in Seattle.

One of Seattle's earliest known apartment building is the St. Paul (1206 Summit Avenue), constructed 1901. Many upscale apartment buildings were originally located on First Hill, Capitol Hill, and the southern slope of Queen Anne Hill. Extant early examples of apartments are the Chelsea Hotel Apartments (1906-07, Harlan Thomas, City of Seattle Landmark) on Queen Anne and the Old Colony Hotel (1910) on First Hill.

Before 1910, elevators were not common in residential structures. The usage of elevators and more sophisticated structural engineering allowed taller building and higher density. Fold-up beds, often known as Murphy beds, also became common during this period. These led to the development of efficiency units, now known as studios, which had private bathrooms, a small kitchen, and a single room that served as both a living room and bedroom. These small apartments were aimed at and marketed towards working-class individuals.

In all building types, efficiency apartments typically measured between 400 and 550 square feet with a living room, full bath, kitchen with appliances and cabinets, and sometimes a large closet or dressing room (which could contain the bed) that opened off the living room. One-bedroom apartments would have a separate bedroom in place of the dressing room. Some apartments featured wall beds, built-in cabinets, and dinettes, with materials such as leaded glass windows, oak floors, and tile bathrooms. The basement of the building would contain shared facilities such as laundry rooms and storage areas.

Apartment hotels catering to more affluent tenants were also built with servants' quarters, dining rooms, housekeeping and laundry service, as well as parking. Most of these luxury apartment hotels, like those developed by Frederick Anhalt, were clustered on First Hill and Capitol Hill. Buildings of this type included the Sorrento (City of Seattle Landmark) and Perry Hotels on First Hill, and the Moore Hotel (City of Seattle Landmark) in the Denny Regrade. The apartment buildings in Belltown were generally either single-purpose apartments with elegant front entries and a lobby, or a mixed-use building with retail space below and apartments above.

Between 1900 and 1920 women increasingly entered the work force as Seattle urbanized. SRO hotels had been largely tenanted by men. Early popular housing types like SRO hotels and boarding houses featured shared bathing facilities, often a single bathroom per floor or multiple floors. Because the apartment typology offered secure single entry and private bathing facilities, apartments were perceived as a safer housing type for women than boarding houses, SRO hotels, or cottages with their entries on the street. Women, both married and single, generally occupied apartment buildings at a higher rate than men. The new apartment buildings, such as those in Belltown and the Denny Regrade, provided economical and "respectable" housing for women.

The first single-purpose apartment in Belltown was the Cedar Court Apartments at 320 Cedar Street (1908, Swope & Waterman, now known as the Watermark), a sixty-unit Classical Revival apartment building that was constructed during, but left untouched by, the 1903-1911 regrade. Other early apartment houses were the Hermosa at 2700 Fourth Avenue (1909, Theobald Buchinger) and the two-story multi-entry Vine Court at 2600 Third Avenue (1911).

In 1923, one year after the subject building was constructed, a new zoning ordinance designated Belltown an apartment district. Second Avenue was the location of several significant and substantial buildings, including the New Washington Hotel/Josephinum (1908, City of Seattle Landmark) and the Moore Hotel and Theater (1907, City of Seattle Landmark), but the Denny Regrade area north of Virginia Street was still lightly populated with apartments in the 1920s. The six-block area surrounding the Fifth Avenue Court included the Sheridan Apartments (1914, David Dow, City of Seattle Landmark), one of the neighborhood's earliest apartment buildings, followed by the Stratford/Nesika Apartments (1916), the Virginian (1917), the Claremont Hotel (1925), and the Benjamin Franklin Hotel (1928-1929, demolished). In addition to these larger masonry apartment buildings there were also smaller wooden buildings like the two-story Denny Hotel at 2015 Fifth Avenue, and larger wooden apartment buildings like the three-story building at 2018 Fourth Avenue.

By the mid-1920s, the demand for apartment units in Seattle exceeded available supply, mainly due to reduced construction during World War I. As the post-war economy thrived, dozens of large apartment buildings were built near streetcar lines in the older in-city neighborhoods and in newer suburban areas, including the University District, Greenwood, and West Seattle. Many of these buildings had spacious, house-like flats, with tenant services and handsome exteriors. Examples of this type include the Exeter and Gainsborough Apartments on First Hill.

Apartment buildings of three stories or fewer usually did not have elevators, so a central staircase would access a lobby, often clad with marble or other luxurious materials. Double-loaded corridors meant that apartments had windows opening onto either the street or an inner courtyard or light well. Examples of these buildings include subject building Fifth Avenue Court, the Franklin Apartments (1918, Lawton & Moldenhour, City of Seattle Landmark), the Charlesgate Apartments (2230 Second Avenue, 1922), the Stone Cliff Apartments (2602 Fourth Avenue, 1923), the Cornelius Apartments (306 Blanchard Street, 1925), the Davenport Apartments (420 Vine Street, 1925), and the Devonshire Apartments (420 Wall Street, 1925).

Multi-story apartment buildings with elevators included larger lobbies and often had public dining areas. Examples of larger apartment hotels include the Camlin at 1619 Ninth Avenue (1926, City of Seattle Landmark) the eleven-story Vintage Park/Spring Apartment at 1100 Fifth Avenue (1922), the twelve-story Lowell and Emerson Apartments at 1102 and 1110 Eighth Avenue, and the ten-story Exeter at 720 Seneca Street (1928, Stuart & Wheatley).

By 1930 at least twenty apartment buildings had been constructed in the Belltown/Denny Regrade area, with most of the construction still focused along Second, Third, and Fourth avenues. The Great Depression signaled an end to new construction as financing for new apartment buildings dried up. The Grosvenor House (800 Wall Street, 1949) may have been the only apartment building constructed in Belltown after the onset of the Depression. In the six-block area around the Fifth Avenue Court, the New Washington/Westin Hotel had been added by 1969, the Royal Crest Condominium in 1973, and the Warwick Hotel in 1980.

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