



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

LPB419/85

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

Name and Address of Property: Shafer Building/Sixth and Pine Building, 515 Pine Street

Legal Description: Denny's Third Addition, Block 18, Lot 2

At the public hearing held on December 18, 1985, the City of Seattle's Landmark Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Shafer Building/Sixth and Pine Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria 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:

The Shafer Building is located at the S.W. corner of Sixth Avenue and Pine Street in downtown Seattle. Designed by Joseph E. Blackwell, it was constructed in 1923-24. The Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce of January 30, 1923 noted the plan to build an 11-story store and office building of steel and concrete, faced with terra cotta, on the 120' by 63' lot by the Shafer Brothers (Land Company). The notice indicated that the building would be the highest in the north shopping/commercial district with the exception of the Joshua Green Building on Fourth Avenue and Pike Street. In a later issue (March 31, 1924), the Journal of Commerce presented a photograph with the following description of the almost completed building:

"The building design is Gothic and different from any other in Seattle due to the fact that it has a great expanse of glass and thin tapering columns with an elaborate Gothic cornice and capped by terra cotta finials."

The Shafer Building derives from the skyscraper commercial style of architecture developed in Chicago at the turn-of-the-century. The perfection of the steel frame led buildings away from the limitations of load bearing brick walls or heavy timber

construction. Steel piers and beams allowed for large window spans and minimal structure. The development of the elevator also allowed for taller multi-storied buildings. These engineering developments allowed architects new freedom in their designs. One of the earliest buildings to take advantage of these technical advancements was the Reliance Building (1890-94) designed by the Chicago firm of Daniel Burnham and J. W. Root. It consisted of large expanses of window, extending bays, and a terra cotta treatment that sheathed but honestly defined the major structural steel frame. Seattle's Shafer Building, while built considerably later, shares these characteristics of expressing the building's lighter structure, allowing the design to reflect this lighter structure through large expanses of windows, and a surface treatment of ornamental terra cotta.

The Shafer Building is composed of seven bays of paired windows facing onto Pine Street and three bays of paired windows on the Sixth Avenue facade. These windows, like those in Seattle's Colman Building (1904), are of the pivoting type popularized in Chicago commercial architecture. A large plate glass window turns on a central pivot to open or close; above each movable window is a static transom window. Separating each of the paired windows is a thin terra cotta mullion. The pairs of windows are in turn separated by wider terra cotta fluted piers that express the primary steel structural system of the building. The spandrel sections are sheathed with a lancet arch frieze consisting of five repeated arches under each window. Below the top floor windows, these arches are extended outward slightly to form shallow corbels. Instead of the traditional overhanging cornice, the building is topped with a band of diamond decorated Gothic arches broken by medallions at the termination of the vertical piers. The verticality of the building is further accentuated by Gothic inspired turrets above the arched frieze. These finials, looking somewhat like chess pieces, are formed by double crosses placed at 45 degree angles to rectangular bases.

Ground floor and retail second floor spaces are defined by large single plate glass windows. Windows at the second floor, with four part transoms, take the place of the painted windows on the floors above. A marquee wraps around the building to shelter pedestrians along both Sixth Avenue and Pine Street.

SIGNIFICANCE:
SHAHER BUILDING

The Shafer Building is an excellent example of the Chicago-style of commercial skyscraper architecture as it developed in the late 1880s. In particular, this building derives from such outstanding and innovative prototypes as the Reliance Building (1890-94) by Barnham and Root. Although it is a late addition to Seattle's Chicago-style commercial buildings (The Colman, 1904, and Central, 1906, were Seattle's earliest derivative examples), the Shafer Building's extraordinarily minimal structure and large window expanse, its honest expression of structure and function, and its

adept application of the English Gothic style to the terra cotta surfaces provided Seattle's downtown with one of its best high-rise structures. Furthermore, in its stylistic approach, the building broke with tradition. Most buildings designed in Seattle during the 1910-1920 period, such as the Joshua Green Building, the Dexter Horton Building, and the Decatur Building, were pure expressions of Beaux Arts neo-classicism, replete with dentils, garlands, acanthus leaves, and fluted Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian columns. Most such buildings had large overhanging cornices supported by corbels. The Shafer Building broke away from these patterns. Its Gothic facade reflected the lightweight, open feeling achieved by the structural steel frame and emphasized the verticality of the building. Its stylistic approach may have influenced the design of the Liggett Building (1928) by Lawton and Muldenhauer at Fourth and Pike Street, and the Medical Dental Building (1926) by John Creutzer at Sixth and Olive Way, among other late 1920s buildings downtown.

It would also appear that the Shafer Building expressed the strength of the local business community in the north end of the central business district. As the tallest building north of Pike and Fourth, the Shafer Building demonstrates the shift in major retailing and commercial space northward, probably encouraged since the establishment of the Frederick and Nelson Department Store at 5th and Pine in 1918.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

the entire exterior of the building

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Karen Gordon

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:alp

cc: Beatrice Ryan, DCLU (3)
Susan Boyle, Chair, Landmarks Preservation Board
Frank Medina

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