



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 271/12

Name and Address of Property: Seattle National Bank Building  
720 Second Avenue

Legal Description: Lots 1 and 4, Block 6, Boren and Denny's Addition to the City of Seattle, according to the plat thereof, recorded in Volume 001 of plats, page 027, in King County, Washington.

At the public meeting held on June 6, 2012, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Seattle Bank Building located at 720 Second Avenue as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

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

### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

#### *Site, Setting and Urban Context*

The United Way Building, formerly known as Seattle National Bank, is located on a sloping site at the southeast corner of the intersection of Second Avenue and Columbia Street. The building occupies the entire northwest quarter of the block and is particularly visible from easterly views at viewpoints along Columbia Street and southerly views along Second Avenue. The principal formal façade is oriented west toward Second Avenue; however a secondary entry to the second floor level is oriented toward Columbia Street. A dead-end, north-south oriented private alley runs behind the east side of the subject building.

The modern 17-story Norton Building (Bindon & Wright with SOM, 1958) is located at the opposite NW corner of the intersection. The highly distinctive former Chamber of Commerce Building (Harlan Thomas with Schack, Young and Myers, 1924) is located uphill on Columbia Street at the opposite side of the private alley. Several other historic bank buildings are also located nearby, including: the former Seattle Trust & Savings Bank (former Seattle National Bank, 1906) located on the opposite side of Columbia Street; the former Seattle-First National Bank (Dexter Horton Building,

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The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

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1924) immediately adjacent to the subject building, and the former Union Savings and Trust Co. (Hoge Building, 1911), which is across the street from the Dexter Horton Building. The former Bank of California (Key Bank, 1923-24) is located one block north on the opposite side of Second Avenue. The 20-story Millennium Tower (Zimmer/Gunsul/ Frasca, 2000) is located on the opposite west side of Second Avenue.

This highly distinctive two-story bank building was designed and constructed in 1921-1922 and subsequently served as a bank for several decades; it is now used for private office purposes. It exhibits an enframed block façade composition and incorporates classically derived architectural details and features executed in a refined Roman-inspired design mode. Due to its relatively modest scale in comparison to the nearby multi-story modern office and bank buildings and its unique architectural character, the United Way Building contrasts with its surroundings and is a highly distinctive component of the streetscape and the nearby urban environment.

### ***Current Exterior Appearance***

The reinforced concrete structure is three stories in height with a full basement level and measures 120 feet by 108 ft. It is clad with a plain smooth marble that is a cold grey-white color. The enframed block façade is divided into seven structural bays; it is distinguished by a main two-story central section that is bracketed by narrow end bays and surmounted by a third floor level cap, which form a nearly continuous wall plane. The plane is punctuated by tall, narrow window and window/door bays at the base and square window openings at the cap that reinforce classical design elements. These crisply cut openings and the simplified and finely detailed architectural elements create a refined modern yet somewhat severe appearance. This severity in combination with refined classical motifs serves to convey strength and stability and reinforces the public image desired for a banking institution.

The base is accentuated by three central entry bays; each composed of a slightly recessed entrance vestibule surmounted by a large rectangular mezzanine level window. Original sets of decorated, bronze-framed and glazed entry doors remain in place with original granite sills/steps. The doors are trimmed by ornamental cast iron decorated with geometric patterns and meander bands. Finely detailed, bead-and-reel mouldings surround the entrance door openings, which are capped by egg-and-dart and acanthus leaf header caps. The entrance bays are flanked to each side by tall two-story windows and surmounted by an intermediate cornice decorated with carved lions' heads. The window and door bays are accentuated by simple Roman-inspired pilasters that correspond with the intermediate cornice forming the principal façade design element. Originally the bank name "The Seattle National Bank" was carved into the cornice frieze; however, the frieze is now only a simply decorated flat band.

This principal façade element is enframed by tall two-story windows and a third floor level band of windows. Narrow horizontal marble moulding accentuates the third floor level and defines the terminal parapet, which is decorated with subtle fluted patterns and accentuated at each corner with acroteria. The parapet is slightly stepped at the center of the façade.

The large rectangular window openings hold original multi-pane divided steel sash enframed by cast-iron surrounds that rest on cast iron sills. The cast iron surrounds are highly ornate with fluted jambs and headers that are decorated with Roman crosses.

The north (Columbia Street) elevation exhibits five enframed window bays. The tall narrow base level window configuration continues at this elevation and is surmounted by a band of square third floor level windows. One original window bay at the east end of this (north) elevation was converted to a recessed entry vestibule after 1968 and further modernized in 1989. The east (alley) elevation is

entirely utilitarian in character with plain poured concrete walls and industrial sash. A modern skybridge connects the third floor level of the east elevation with the former Chamber of Commerce Building at the eastern side of the alley. The south wall abuts the Dexter Horton Building. A rooftop penthouse at the center of the building is not visible from the adjacent streetscapes.

### ***Interior Features and/or Finishes***

The interior of the banking hall originally included highly distinctive travertine and other marble finishes and various ornate interior features and fixtures including iron grille work and Roman-inspired plaster details. The banking hall included a foyer/atrium with a coffered central dome that was three stories in height. An open mezzanine level and a third floor level occupied the peripheral spaces around the atrium. These interior spaces were significantly altered in 1969 when the building was converted to a brokerage house and have been subsequently altered for changing office and government agency purposes. A small portion of marble flooring and travertine trim are currently visible within the remodeled Second Avenue entry vestibule area. While it is possible that there may be other architecturally significant interior building features or finishes that remain in place, they are no longer accessible or visible to the general public.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The United Way Building (Seattle National Bank) is directly associated with the early twentieth century developmental era between 1920 and 1930 when a significant number of commercial buildings were constructed and the modern downtown commercial district was fully established. In 1923 Seattle adopted its first ordinance that regulated specific geographic areas for specified uses; it allowed the most densely concentrated commercial development to occur in the downtown core. The economic prosperity of the 1920s stimulated the development of numerous major highrise commercial buildings, as well as smaller-scale bank and commercial buildings, major hotels and apartment hotels, club buildings and entertainment facilities that were typically designed by leading Seattle architects. During this era, the original residential district was entirely absorbed by commercial and other real estate development. By 1930, virtually all of the settlement era residential properties, as well as many of the immediate post-fire era commercial buildings outside of Pioneer Square, had been demolished or removed.

The United Way Building (Seattle National Bank) is a well-preserved and intact example of a very important downtown property type from this era. It is a noteworthy example of bank design executed in a highly distinctive and refined Roman-inspired design mode and is an outstanding work of the highly regarded regional architectural partnership of Doyle & Merriam (A.E. Doyle).

### ***Historic Land Use Patterns & Downtown Commercial Development***

The downtown commercial core of Seattle has evolved for over one-hundred and fifty years. This unique geographic area has been developed and redeveloped multiple times, as most building sites have been repeatedly changed due to a complex set of geographic, economic and historic circumstances. The historic commercial development and the current urban environment of downtown Seattle were shaped in obvious tangible and subtle intangible ways by broad national and international events and further influenced by city-wide and regional land use and development patterns.

### **Community Establishment**

The settlement-era community of Seattle was essentially carved out of dense forest along a relatively steep hillside above Elliott Bay where the protected deep water harbor could function as an ocean-going port. As the community became established and was incorporated as a town in 1869, it

gradually accommodated industrial, commercial, social and residential functions within a concentrated area near Front and Commercial Streets (now First Avenue and First Avenue S.) and Yesler Way. Due to its remoteness, the town grew slowly and evolved in a laissez-faire manner with land use and planning decisions based on public health and transportation necessities.

The surviving downtown grid street system is a legacy of the three original plats delineated by the city's major founders: Carson Boren; William Bell; and Arthur Denny. They chose to layout their individual land claims and correlated streets to follow the adjacent shoreline, rather than according to a uniform compass point, creating distinctive angular street intersections within the overall grid. As established, this street grid pattern influenced the future form of the downtown area, its network of streets and blocks, and dictated the future special relationships between downtown commercial buildings.

The earliest settlement community was composed of wood-frame, plank and clapboard buildings that were typically one to two stories in height with gabled shingle roofs – constructed using locally abundant materials. Commercial buildings were clustered along Front and Commercial Streets; they exhibited utilitarian false front designs and building forms typical of newly established communities throughout the American West. One particularly notable exception to this pattern was the Territorial University building (1861) that exhibited a formal Classical Revival façade with ionic columns. It was situated at a high point some eight blocks to the north of Yesler Way on Denny's Knoll, and became known as the University Grounds.

By the early 1880s, the bustling commercial center had evolved to include elaborate architect-designed wood-frame buildings and modest brick and stone masonry structures, two to three stories in height. By then, a scattered collection of fashionable residences and small dwellings dominated the hillside above the bay stretching from Cherry Street to Pike Street. Further north and above the bay, a small community had been established near First Avenue and Bell Street, known as Belltown. By the mid-1880s large mansions began to be constructed on First Hill and Queen Anne Hill, a distance from growing commercial, industrial and port activity. Indicative of an established population and the degree of residential development, two substantial schools - Central School (located at Seventh Avenue and Marion Street) and Denny School (at Sixth Avenue and Wall Street) - were built in 1883 and 1884. While residential concentrations grew to the north and east of the commercial center, industrial growth and port activity became more concentrated along the mouth of the Duwamish River and southern tidelands portions of Elliott Bay.

#### Post-Fire Reconstruction

The destruction of 64 blocks of commercial buildings and waterfront industrial and shipping facilities in the fire of 1889 brought a dramatic end to these established districts, which had evolved over the prior three and a half decades. City leaders and local entrepreneurs immediately began to plan to rebuild commercial buildings and industrial facilities in anticipation of a future population for 100,000 people, several times the actual size of the community. The reconstruction effort adhered to new building code provisions that mandated safer and more fire resistant building construction and brought about a new urban scale and design character within the commercial core. Streets were regraded, modern water and sewer utilities were installed, and First Avenue and Yesler Way were widened to relieve growing traffic congestion.

Massive load-bearing stone, brick and heavy timber structures were constructed that utilized decorative terra cotta, cast iron, and modern elevator technology. The urban scale of the city was significantly changed as substantial five-story buildings began to characterize the reconstructed commercial district. Facades uniformly met the street edge and individual land parcels were typically

developed to utilize the full frontage and lot area. Continuous blockfronts of commercial offices, hotels, banks and wholesale houses began to dominate the new streetscapes.

The well-established residential district survived the fire; however, by 1889 new residential districts were being established well beyond the original downtown residential district. While specific geographic sub-areas that had been dominated by industrial, commercial and residential uses began to be more clearly defined, the reconstructed commercial district remained very diverse. Residential hotels, flats and lodging houses were typically located above retail storefronts and various commercial, warehouse, entertainment and manufacturing uses were intermixed on the same city block. Furthermore, individuals from a wide range of economic levels lived and worked in relatively close proximity to one another.

While the new commercial district remained fixed within five blocks of Yesler Way and First Avenue, substantial commercial construction gravitated further north along First and Second Avenues and toward the well-established residential district. First Avenue to the north of Yesler Way became a major shopping street. As modern business blocks and the growing retail trade expanded uphill, Second Avenue to the north of Marion Street remained largely residential. Gradually the southern portion of Second Avenue between Yesler Way and Marion Street became a second major north-south business thoroughfare. Steep grades limited foot and horse-drawn carriage traffic further uphill to Third Avenue, which remained dominated by residences and churches. Scattered within the commercial core and to a smaller degree within the residential district were smaller enterprises like cabinetmakers, machine shops, livery stables, and milliners.

The discovery of gold in the Yukon in 1896 prompted a major influx of people traveling to Seattle, which emerged as a primary embarkation point for those traveling to northern British Columbia and Alaska. After what had been a brief period of economic stagnation, the Klondike Gold Rush triggered unprecedented economic growth and dramatic subsequent population increases. Spurred by new economic prosperity, the City began to undertake projects that would drastically reshape the city's topography. Beginning in the late 1890s, hills were removed, tunnels and canals constructed, streets regraded, and valleys and tidelands were filled in order to facilitate the movement of goods and people and the expansion of commercial and industrial development. These major engineering efforts, which continued for nearly three decades, addressed various transportation and civil engineering challenges and shaped the future of the burgeoning downtown commercial district in significant ways.

#### Early Twentieth Century Growth

Modern urban architectural scale and design character began with the construction of the earliest steel-frame highrise buildings in the commercial district - the extant 14-story Alaska Building built in 1903-04 at Second Avenue and Cherry Street and the 12-story American Savings Bank/Empire Building (1904-06, destroyed) at Second Avenue and Madison Street. In 1906, the extant seven-story Eitel Building at Second Avenue and Pike Street was the earliest substantial commercial building to be built as far north as Pike Street. Major commercial buildings were subsequently built along Pike Street, including: People's Bank Building (1906, destroyed) at the NE corner of Second Avenue; and the Northern Bank and Trust Company Building (Seaboard Building, 1906-09) at the NE corner of Fourth Avenue. By 1905, a distinct concentration of banking enterprises and specialty/department stores had been established along Second Avenue near Marion Street.

During this era numerous residential properties, including large mansions that were only 20 years old, were removed and/or relocated in order to accommodate large commercial and civic building projects. The increased pressure for commercial development brought about the first broad scale local planning efforts - influenced by the City Beautiful movement - intended to guide future

downtown development. Various civic center plans were proposed between 1905 and 1911; however, none were ever fully adopted or implemented. The legacy of these efforts is reflected to some degree in several extant buildings within the commercial core, including: the Central Building (1906-08); and the Securities Building (1912-13). Unfortunately, two of the most architecturally distinctive public buildings to be constructed during this era and influenced by such grand schemes were lost during the 1960s; the Carnegie Public Library (1902) and the Government Post Office Building (1903).

The Rialto Building (1894, destroyed) at Second Avenue and Madison, housed the Frederick and Nelson Department Store, which was one of several major retail enterprises that gradually made Second Avenue a fashionable shopping district. Other important department stores included: the Bon Marche Store (1896, 1902, 1911 destroyed) at the SW corner of Second Avenue and Pike Street and the extant Stone, Fisher & Lane Store (Galland Building, 1906). Three more major retail enterprises: the J.A. Baillargeon & Co. (1907), MacDougall and Southwick Store (1907, Chapin Building, destroyed) and the original Rhodes Department Store (1907, destroyed) were also located along Second Avenue.

By 1905, numerous brick hotels were already clustered near First Avenue and Pike Street and further up Pike Street at Third Avenue. A particularly significant boom in downtown hotel development occurred between 1906 and 1910 in conjunction with improved economic prospects, population growth and in anticipation of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific (AYP) Exposition of 1909.

In 1907, the University of Washington regents successfully negotiated a long-term lease of the former University Grounds that encompassed several contiguous blocks between Seneca and Union along both sides of Fourth and Fifth Avenues. While the University had relocated to its current north end campus in 1894, it was not until early 1908 that a comprehensive master plan for the redevelopment of the University/Metropolitan Tract was finalized and made public. The ambitious scheme called for a concentration of ten-story business blocks unified by a Beaux Arts design and a formalized spatial relationship. The successful lease and this visionary plan signaled that the commercial district would certainly shift northward and that Fourth and Fifth Avenues would become major commercial thoroughfares.

While commercial development and retail activity had been concentrated along First Avenue and nearer to the waterfront ever since the earliest street regrading efforts had occurred in the late 1870s, Pike Street also functioned as a main transit route between Lake Union and the central waterfront. By the early 1900s the area around First Avenue and Pike Street was a center of small-scale commercial activity and residential hotels. Early in the decade, the regrading of Denny Hill and the establishment of the Pike Place Public Market at the foot of Pike Street triggered increased hotel and commercial development in the general vicinity.

Second Avenue continued to serve as the major downtown commercial thoroughfare for several decades – in addition to three of the five major department stores as well as the Smith Tower, the city's tallest skyscraper until 1968, the street included the largest office buildings, leading furniture stores, a distinct concentration of the biggest commercial and oldest pioneer banks and several of the leading hotels, including the Savoy Hotel (1906, destroyed). The street was preeminent due to the fact that it provided an easy and direct route for the movement of traffic and goods between railroad and wholesale terminals to the south and the thriving retail, business and residential areas to the north and east. Well into the 1930s, Second Avenue remained the principal arterial roadway through the downtown commercial core for those traveling by electric streetcar, private or commercial motor vehicle and for passengers making connections to water-based transportation on Elliott Bay.

However, by 1910 the commercial core had shifted northward and significant commercial real estate development was occurring within the former residential district. By then, regulations had been adopted that limited building heights to 200 feet - or sixteen stories high. In 1912 the City government enacted an innovative ordinance that governed building heights in greater detail according to lot coverage and set particular construction requirements. Following a nationwide trend, several major highrise buildings were constructed – primarily located along Second and Third Avenues. Distinctive multi-story civic, commercial and hotel buildings were also being built as the urban scale and extent of the commercial district changed dramatically prior to World War I. With the opening of the elegant five-story Frederick and Nelson Department Store at Fifth Avenue and Pine Street in 1919, the fashionable retail center began to make a rather dramatic northward shift.

A local Zoning Commission was created in 1920 and in 1923 Seattle adopted its first ordinance that identified specific areas for specified uses. The zoning code allowed the most densely concentrated - although regulated – commercial development to occur in the downtown core. Over the following seven years the downtown core was transformed by the addition of highly distinctive office towers, major hotels and movie theaters designed by skilled local architects.

The economic prosperity of the 1920s stimulated the development of numerous major highrise and commercial block office buildings, as well as smaller-scale bank and specialty retail stores, major hotels including apartment hotels, club buildings and entertainment facilities. The northward expansion of commercial development ultimately led to the destruction of Seattle's original residential district. Distinctive and highly ornate mansions on large lots, modest family homes, row houses and flats, and vernacular cottages and dwellings were gradually removed or demolished. By 1930, virtually all residential properties had been eliminated - as well as several immediate post-fire commercial buildings - due to regrading and commercial real estate development.

### ***Seattle Banking History***

Seattle's earliest official bank was Phillips, Horton & Company, which began operations in 1870 in a building located at First Avenue South near Washington Street. Prior to the fire of 1889, there were at least thirteen different bank enterprises located in the historic commercial center near Yesler Way (Mill Street). Most of these banks were small enterprises located at the storefront level, often at the corner, of a building housing other commercial uses. After the fire, banking establishments were reestablished in modern fire-proof buildings still concentrated near the original commercial center; however, the national economic downturn of 1893 slowed the growth of local business as well as banking establishments. By the late 1890's business activity and banking boomed due to the Yukon gold rush as Seattle became a major provision point for fortune seekers.

By the early 1900s fortunes had been made by local entrepreneurs, industrialists and shipping companies; the economic impact was directly reflected in the northward expansion of commercial development. Banking institutions played a crucial role in this development. Major steel-frame and concrete highrise office buildings – that typically housed banking enterprises - were constructed along Second Avenue to the north of Yesler Way. At the same time banks began to merge in order to benefit from their combined financial resources. As the banking institutions grew they required a greater amount of office space at their downtown headquarters locations, typically housed in lower floor levels of large multi-story commercial office buildings. A distinct financial district gradually developed along Second Avenue between Cherry Street and Madison Avenue.

In 1922, despite multiple bank mergers there were almost as many banking institutions in Seattle as there had been 25 years earlier. However, instead of approximately \$3,000,000 in deposits in 1897 these banks represented \$140,000,000 in deposits. The remarkably rapid development of the Pacific

Northwest during this era is directly reflected in the growth and expansion of the banking industry and the construction of modern bank headquarter facilities and branch bank buildings.

By the mid-1920s, the financial district was well-established along Second Avenue as banks and other financial institutions continued to construct or occupy portions of large commercial office buildings as well as smaller scale buildings devoted entirely to banking operations. The *Seattle Times* reported on July 26, 1924:

“This financial foundation, numbering up to this year twenty-five principal banks, has been a tower of strength not only to Seattle but the entire Pacific Northwest. Among the outstanding banks are the National Bank of Commerce, First National, Seattle National and Washington Mutual Savings. All these fine banks are housed on Second Avenue and all of them are in homes completed within the last few years, models of banking facilities and public convenience.”

Extant Second Avenue buildings that housed historic banking operations include the Scandinavian American Bank (Alaska Building, 1904); Seattle Trust and Savings Bank Building (1906, 1922); Seattle National Bank (1921); National Bank of Commerce (Baillargeon Building, remodeled 1919 & 1957); Union Savings and Trust Co. (Hoge Building, 1911); the Dexter Horton Building (Seattle-First National Bank, 1924); and the Bank of California (1923-24).

The American bank building-type dating to the mid-nineteenth century was typically designed to represent tradition and solidity. Prosperity and a sense of permanence were conveyed through the use of Classical design forms. The typical bank building of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – even those located in smaller rural towns – often represented a temple and included a fairly grand banking hall. Internal functions were clearly separated with formal spaces created to reinforce a sense of hierarchy and control.

Smaller individual bank buildings and the entryways and lobbies to banking offices housed in larger office buildings were most often executed in a grand, neoclassical design style with a rich mixture of interior marble, plaster and tile finishes and ornate fixtures and features.

### ***Seattle National Bank –Bank History***

Seattle National Bank was founded in 1889 and was originally located in the corner of the Pacific Building (Interurban Building, 1890-1892) at Occidental Avenue and Yesler Way. In 1903, Seattle National Bank merged with Boston National Bank. The combined deposits exceeded \$3 million making it the third largest bank in town, after the Dexter Horton Bank and the Puget Sound National Bank. The Boston National Bank was founded in 1889 and was originally located in the Boston Block (1887-88, W.E. Boone, destroyed). The Boston Block was located at the SE corner of Second Avenue and Columbia Street, the site of the subject building.

A few years after the merger Seattle National Bank relocated to a newly constructed two-story headquarters building at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Columbia Street (804 Second Avenue). The building was designed by Boone & Corner architects and financed in part by Herman Chapin of the Boston Company and the former president of Boston National Bank. The building was initially known as Seattle National Bank; it subsequently became known as First National Bank and then for several decades as Seattle Trust & Savings Bank. It now functions as a mixed use commercial building with a fitness club at the ground floor and offices above.

In late 1907, *Pacific Builder and Engineer* reported that numerous banks had been recently constructed or remodeled with substantial improvements to their interiors. The article identified the interior of Seattle National Bank for praise:



“No bank in Seattle is more perfect in its luxurious fittings than the Seattle National. Everywhere genteel taste has been displayed, and money has not been spared to make it one of the magnificent banks of the coast.”

The article noted counters of Italian Pavanaso marble with deep verde antique (marble) base trim and bronze grillwork incorporating brass electric lighting. Walls were painted an ivory white and accentuated by mahogany woodwork and furnishings. In 1910 Seattle National Bank merged with Puget Sound National Bank, which had been founded/ organized in 1882. Thus, Seattle National Bank eclipsed Dexter Horton Bank in size and would remain the largest commercial bank in Seattle until 1924 when Dexter Horton Bank merged with the Union National Bank of Seattle. After the 1910 merger the original banking hall was remodeled and expanded by combining a former storefront space (to the north of the banking hall) with the main banking hall. At this time, one of the original retail storefronts was infilled and the granite bulkhead extended. The expanded hall was described as having “an abundance of natural light” more so than any banking hall in the city. The upper floor level, which had separate entrance off of both side streets, appears to have been used primarily for office purposes unrelated to the bank.

In mid-1918, the firm of Bebb & Gould began to study design schemes for the remodel and expansion of the building to better accommodate the growing banking institution. Preliminary sketches and scale plans for this project are included in the University of Washington Architectural Drawing Collection. Carl Gould, who had previously designed a new bank vault for Seattle National Bank at their prior Boston Block location, appears to have prepared several innovative schemes that involved an elaborate interior remodel of the banking hall or public lobby. The designs involved the further expansion of banking operations to utilize most of the first floor and upper floor levels and included the proposal for an ornate Roman-inspired entrance vestibule. However, none of the concepts appear to have gone beyond the design development phase.

By 1920, Seattle National Bank had clearly outgrown its two-story office building at 804 Second Avenue. Thus, the bank acquired the adjacent southeast corner of Second Avenue and Columbia Street, the site of the Boston Building, with the intention of constructing a new, modern bank building. Seattle National Bank purchased the property for \$350,000 in early April 1920. The four-story Boston Block was the oldest brick commercial building in the city having been constructed in 1887-88 and having survived the great fire. At the time of the purchase, Daniel Kelleher, chairman of the bank board of directors noted:

“The site for our new building is now, and I believe will for many years continue to be, in the center of Seattle’s banking and financial district. I feel, moreover, that property in Seattle’s banking district is most reasonable in price and that right now is the time for a bank to buy its permanent site and build its own home.”

“While it is certain that with the growth of the city our shopping center will in the future, as it has in the past, continue to move northward, I believe it is just as certain that the financial and banking center will stay permanently just where it now is.”

### ***United Way Building (Seattle National Bank) – Construction History***

In early July 1920, the firm of Bebb & Gould developed design schemes for the construction of an entirely new two-story bank building specifically designed to accommodate Seattle National Bank. Multiple preliminary sketches and scale floor plans for this project are included in the University of Washington Architectural Drawing Collection. Carl Gould had previously designed a new bank vault for Seattle National Bank (at its prior Boston Block location) and proposed several design schemes to

remodel the bank at 804 Second Avenue. He appears to have prepared several preliminary schemes for the new building; the designs involved a central entry vestibule opening onto a large open symmetrical banking hall surrounded by an open mezzanine level with cashiers and other offices located below, as well as a second floor level and basement. A preliminary perspective drawing shows an interior design with tall Corinthian columns extending up through the mezzanine level, coffered ceilings and ornate mezzanine handrails.

On July 18, 1920 the *Daily Journal of Commerce* published a lengthy article describing planning for the new building. The distinguished Portland-based architectural firm of Doyle & Merriam was described as the architects for the new building and Bebb & Gould was listed as the associate architects. At the time, the planned project was the largest *exclusive* banking house to be solely “devoted to the transaction of banking business” built in Seattle. The planned design – presumably that developed by Gould – would include a basement level occupied by extensive vaults and committee and director’s rooms, a main banking floor at the Second Avenue level and workforce offices on the open mezzanine level and in third floor offices located directly above it. The preliminary design called for a three-story open marble foyer (or atrium) in the banking hall that would be 73-feet wide and 35-feet high. The article noted several recently-built bank buildings in Yakama, Ellensburg and Wenatchee that were designed by Doyle & Merriam. The article did note the Union National Bank in Seattle credited to Bebb & Gould although the firm had undertaken several other noteworthy bank design projects since 1914. Subsequent press coverage identified only Doyle & Merriam as the architects without any further reference to Bebb & Gould. Thus, for unknown reasons it appears that Carl Gould and his firm had relatively limited involvement with the final design of the building.

The bank could not begin demolition or construction work until March of 1921 when all of the Boston Block tenant leases had expired. The construction cost was identified as \$500,000 with significant expenses associated with the acquisition of marble products. The new building was completed and formally opened to the public in early August 1922. Press coverage emphasized the simplicity and “air of quiet dignity” of the design:

“The exterior is simple, its lines being of classical architecture, graceful in their expression of strength and solidarity. The walls are of warm pink-toned Tennessee marble and the principal entrances are portals of striking design.”

“Entering the main doors on Second Avenue, one passes through small vestibules into the main banking room and is at once struck with the feeling of space and quiet dignity which it conveys. From the floor to the great dome in the center, the eye follows pleasing lines of massive pillars and walls of soft-hued Travertine marble. The ornamentation is not obtrusive, but is in keeping with the simplicity and symmetry of the entire structure.”

A circular counter was located at the center of the banking room. The teller’s cages had limited grillwork; instead they were distinguished by polished black marble countertops and plate glass fronts. The bank was equipped with modern steel and concrete vaults as well as thirty call boxes directly linked to the police headquarters. Seattle National Bank president J.W. Sprangler stated at the formal opening ceremonies:

“Every effort has been made to insure the comfort and convenience both of our own work force and of our customers and at the same time to produce a building of pleasing proportions and dignity of appearance and we feel we have achieved a worthy home which will be useful to us and an ornament to the city for many years.”

An incomplete set of copies of the original 1921 Doyle & Merriam drawings was found to be in the records of the current owners of the building; these consist of all the floor plans, and structural drawings specifying beam and column sizes. These drawings for unknown reasons are not on file at the Department of Planning and Development Microfilm Library. Notes on these drawings, especially the structural sheets (also by Doyle & Merriam), indicate an unknown number of floors to be accommodated in the future. However, no elevations or sections could be found which would indicate what the design of the additional floors would be, nor is there any suggestion in the 1921 architectural set that such a design existed yet.

A news article from the July 24, 1921 edition of The Seattle Times entitled "New Bank to be Built at Once," states that "the foundations provide for a fourth story to be added when required."

There are several examples of buildings built in phases, with additional stories added later, in downtown Seattle. Because the downtown core grew explosively at several periods after the Great Fire through the 1920s, this was a not-uncommon way for new office space to be accommodated, or losses to be minimized, as economic circumstances changed. Examples of such buildings include the Empire Building aka American Savings Bank & Trust Company (1891, addition 1908; demolished); People's Bank on Second Avenue (1899, addition 1902; demolished); JM Frink Building aka Washington Shoe Company (1891, addition 1912); Cyrus Walker Building on Second Avenue (1899, addition 1902). Another example, civic rather than commercial in use, was the City-County Building (today's County Courthouse), the first five floors of which were built in 1916, the upper six floors in 1929-31.

Seattle National Bank remained the largest commercial bank in Seattle until 1924 when Dexter Horton Bank merged with the Union National Bank of Seattle. Seattle National Bank and First National Bank subsequently merged with Dexter Horton Bank in 1929 to form First Seattle Dexter Horton Bank, the entity later known as Seattle-First National Bank. After the great merger of 1929, the subject building remained unaltered and continued to be used by Seattle-First National Bank in conjunction with the adjacent Dexter Horton Building (John Graham, Sr., 1924), which served as the bank headquarters until the completion in 1969 of the modern International style, 50-story Seattle First National Bank Tower (1001 Fourth Avenue, NBBJ).

In 1969, the Transamerica Title Company acquired the building and began to adapt it for office purposes. In 1976, the interior was extensively remodeled in order to create a full three floor levels of office space for the brokerage firm of Foster and Marshall. Interior columns were added to the banking hall to support floor slabs at the new second and third floor levels and the dramatic open domed foyer space was eliminated. Alterations were also made to create a modern formal entry at the east end of the Columbia Street elevation. The City of Seattle acquired the building in the early 1990s and subsequently adapted it for government office purposes, making additional alterations to the interior. Since 2003, the building has been owned by United Way of King County and has been in use for office purposes.

### ***Doyle & Merriam, architects***

Albert Ernest Doyle (A.E. Doyle) [1877-1928] is considered to have been Portland's most distinguished and prolific early twentieth century architect. He apprenticed with the Portland firm of Whidden & Lewis and also received training at Columbia University and the office of Henry Bacon, the designer of the Lincoln Memorial. In 1907, Doyle opened his own office in Portland and quickly gained notoriety for the purity of his classically-inspired design work. His design for the U.S. National Bank in Portland (1916) was widely acclaimed, after which he gained numerous bank design commissions throughout the Pacific Northwest. Among his most important works are:

Multnomah Falls Lodge - Bridal Veil, Oregon  
Butler Bank - Hood River, Oregon  
Bank of California Building – Portland, Oregon  
Benson Hotel – Portland, Oregon  
Lipman-Wolfe & Company Department Store – Portland, Oregon  
Meir & Frank Department Store – Portland, Oregon  
Multnomah County Central Library – Portland, Oregon  
Northwestern National bank Building – Portland, Oregon  
Oregon National Bank – Portland, Oregon  
Pacific Building – Portland, Oregon  
Pittock Block – Portland, Oregon  
Reed College Campus – Portland, Oregon  
Terminal Sales Building – Portland, Oregon

In addition to the work on the 1921 design of the subject building then known as Seattle National Bank, the firm of Doyle & Merriam is known to have undertaken several other commercial and bank projects in downtown Seattle during this period, including: the J.S. Graham Store (Doyle Building, 1919-20); Baillargeon Building/National Bank of Commerce (1919-1920); and the remodel of First National Bank (804 Second Avenue, 1922). Information regarding Doyle's partnership with C.A. Merriam or biographical information on Charles A. Merriam has not been obtained or discovered. Charles Merriam was individually responsible for the design of the 1929 basement remodel of First National Bank (804 Second Avenue) and the fifth floor addition to the Baillargeon Building that was undertaken in 1941.

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***The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:***

The exterior of the building

Issued: June 19, 2012

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

Cc: Mike Pete, United Way of King County  
Jack McCullough, McCullough Hill PS  
Mark Hannum, Chair, LPB  
Diane Sugimura, DPD  
Alan Oiye, DPD  
Ken Mar, DPD

## Photos



Seattle National Bank Building, 720 Second Avenue, 2012



Seattle National Bank Building, 720 Second Avenue, c. 1922