

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Pioneer Building, Pergola and Totem Pole

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

First Avenue and Yesler Way

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Seattle

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Washington

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE

46

COUNTY

King

CODE

33

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

(See continuation sheet).

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

King County Auditor's Office

STREET & NUMBER

County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Seattle

STATE

Washington 98104

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

National Register of Historic Places

DATE

June 6, 1970

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

OAHP, National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D. C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

While Pioneer Square is not the birth place of Seattle, it does mark the heart of the city's early commercial development and the actual physical development of the city per se. It was from this location that the city expanded and grew into the queen city of the Pacific Northwest.

Pioneer Square Place itself marks the location of Henry Yesler's mill, which was built in 1853 and provided Seattle's economic beginnings. Logs cut on First Hill were skidded down to what is now Yesler Way (hence the term Skid Road) to the mill, where they were sawn for local use, and for export by ship down the coast to San Francisco. While the site was originally on the waterfront, filling gradually moved the shoreline westward. In the late 1880's, the City was engaged in realigning its streets which make a sharp bend at Yesler Way, and the former mill site was condemned to provide a public square, as well as the requisite bend in First Avenue. Following a court battle, A. C. Yesler sold the land to the City. In the 1890's the public square area was made into a park by the City, and trees were planted by ladies' organizations. From this point, Pioneer Square became the traditional point of focus for civic activities and celebrations, a role it enjoyed for many years. The area surrounding (now the Pioneer Square/Skid Road Historic District) became the retail, business and commercial center of the Northwest.

The site of the Pioneer Building was the location of Henry Yesler's (one of the City's founding fathers) home for thirty years. It was deeded to Yesler by Carson D. Boren, another of Seattle's founders, to induce Yesler to bring his mill to the city. The Pioneer Building was designed by Elmer Fisher, who was architect for many other Seattle buildings following the 1889 fire. Excavating for this building's foundation was begun prior to that fire, but the building was not completed until 1892. Now considered the city's most significant historic building, the Pioneer Building was the number one prestige office address during the 1890's and early 1900's.

The six-story building is of brick masonry and stone construction, (with internal early steel and cast iron structural members) in the Romanesque Revival style. The interior is finished with tooled millwork, iron grilles, natural oak paneling, and ceramic floor tiles. The interior atmosphere is open and light, due to twin light wells beneath large skylights. Every floor between the second and sixth has balconies opening onto the light wells. The building was equipped with Seattle's first electric elevators, now restored and still in use.

The Pioneer Building housed the Puget Sound National Bank, headed by Jacob Furth, leading financier of the period and the only "boss" the city has ever had. It also housed offices for no less than forty-eight (48) mining firms during the

(Continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1889

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Elmer H. Fisher

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Pioneer Square is the heart of the old city of Seattle and contains some of the handsomest Richardsonian-Romanesque facades in the Northwest. The best preserved structure is the Pioneer building by Elmer H. Fisher, architect. The pergola remnant in the center of this complex is a beautiful cast iron umbrella that was once a much larger shelter for transit passengers.

The quality of Pioneer Square is discussed in Space, Style, and Structure.

The style of the historic old business districts of Puget Sound cities is predominantly Richardsonian Romanesque with a few Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Renaissance Revival buildings. Water Street in Port Townsend, the Pioneer Square (Skid Road) Historic District in Seattle, and portions of Tacoma still contain a pleasing abundance of buildings of this type which are being preserved and finding good use.

Richardsonian Romanesque is, of course, a round arch style with much rock-faced masonry. Since good stone was less available locally than brick, buildings in the style here are usually of brick, sometimes specially molded with tile or terra cotta architectural details. Sandstone was obtained from Chuckanut, Wilkeson, Tenino and the San Juans. Well-detailed and maintained stone buildings have endured; however, there are buildings which have suffered considerable deterioration from the weather. In a few cases, stucco was applied over brick and formed to give the appearance of stone, which shows how far wrong an architect can go in trying to do the right thing. Richardsonian buildings have a considerable sense of massiveness and weight which appears a reasonable expression of stone. They gave an outward appearance of order and organization, and of understanding of their purpose, whether it be commercial, governmental, or religious.

In 1889, most of downtown Seattle burned to the ground to be rebuilt almost immediately in brick and stone, with Richardsonian Romanesque being the most popular of styles. The most prominent architect working in a variety of styles, particularly Richardsonian, was Elmer H. Fisher, who did many of the Pioneer Square Historic District buildings, as well as others along First Avenue. Although Fisher was the architect for a great many of Seattle's buildings of this busy period of growth, his life is lost in obscurity and little is known except that he was responsible for a few buildings later in Victoria, British Columbia. His work and other local buildings lacked the originality and refinement of similar structures in St. Paul, Chicago, and on the East Coast, however derivative they may be.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Space, Style, and Structure, Building in Northwest America, Thomas Vaughn, editor, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, 1974, pp. 356-358.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Morgan, Murray, Skid Road. New York: The Viking Press, 1960.

Speidel, William G., Sons of the Profits. Seattle: Nettle Creek Publishing Co., 1967.

Bagley, Clarence B., History of Seattle. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1916.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,0	55,018,0	5,27,21,2,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Site Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE

2/22/77

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW.

TELEPHONE

202/523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D. C.

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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OWNER OF PROPERTY

Pergola and Totem Pole: Mayor Wes Uhlman  
1200 Municipal Building  
Seattle, Washington 98104

Pioneer Building: Attn: Mr. Robert Baronsky  
Pioneer Building Investment Company  
2901 Seattle First National Bank Building  
Seattle, Washington 98154

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Alaskan Gold Rush. Many of the city's leading lawyers, doctors, investment firms, and insurance companies had offices in the building. During the prohibition period, the building housed one of Seattle's finest speakeasies.

On May 5, 1946, Yesler Estates, Inc., sold the building to Manson Bacchus II, for \$315,000. Bacchus in turn sold it in 1951 to Robert Shapiro, Louis Shapiro and Sam Buttnick for \$75,000. The property was purchased by the present owner, Theta Company for \$500,000. The upper floors had been empty since the early 1950's.

The building was restored in 1974 over a nine-month period, (Ralph D. Anderson and Partners, Architects) and officially opened on November 1, 1974. Cost of the restoration was \$1,750,000. Despite the age of the building, it was found to be structurally sound and did not require major design changes. Exterior restoration consisted mainly of sandblasting the brick and stone to regain the original appearance. Nearly all original interior fittings were cleaned and retained. Improvements in the form of air conditioning, heating, carpeting, and a sprinkling system were added. With many professional offices and restaurants housed in the building, the Pioneer Building is once again becoming a number one prestige address in Seattle.

The Pioneer Square Pergola was built in 1909 as a waiting shelter for patrons of the Yesler and James Street cable cars. The design of the cast iron and glass structure, with wrought iron ornamentation, was the result of an architectural competition. It represented further development of this important public space. The ornamental iron columns, capped with ball-type luminaires, provided ventilation for the large underground restroom. The pergola was restored in 1972 through a gift of \$150,000 from United Parcel Service, which had its beginnings in the Pioneer Square area. The restoration included the totem pole, grass area, iron fences and benches of the park.

The underground restroom was constructed circa 1910 and was, reputedly at the time of its construction, the most lavish of its kind west of the Mississippi. Although sealed up at the present, the restroom and its fixtures are still extant. They await only the necessary funds to accomplish restoration.

The totem pole in Pioneer Square has a long and checkered career. The original pole was stolen from Tlingit Indians on Tongass Island, Alaska, by leading Seattle citizens on a Chamber of Commerce excursion. It was donated by them to the City and was unveiled at this location on October 10, 1899, as a memento of the Alaska Gold Rush. However, the Indians from who it was stolen filed charges and the

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U.S. Marshal arrested the guilty members of the excursion party. Though the Indians asked \$20,000 damages, the case was quashed in court. The guilty parties were fined \$500, and the City retained the pole. In 1938, the original pole was burned in a fire set by vandals. At that time the remains were shipped to Alaska and a reproduction was carved by Indian craftsmen. With official tribal blessings, the new pole was dedicated at a Potlatch Celebration.

The Chief Seattle Fountain in Pioneer Square was designed as a drinking fountain and watering rough. It has three levels and was intended for people, horses, and dogs, each at his own level. The fountain is surmounted by a bronze bust of Chief Sealth (Seattle), for whom the city is named. The bust was sculpted in 1909 by James Wehn.

This information supplied by Earl Layman, City Preservation Officer, Seattle, Washington.

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The National Register form details the history of Seattle's growth.

"In the spring of 1853, Henry L. Yesler was encouraged to begin operating his steam sawmill at the location of the northwest corner of First Avenue and Yesler Way (Pioneer Square). This was Seattle's first and major industry. As lumber was selling for \$60/thousand board feet in California, the new community prospered.

Yesler's donation claim included a narrow corridor encompassing what is now Yesler Way--the street from which the term Skid Road was derived. When the skid road was used to skid logs down to the mill, it was a 49% grade. When improved, it was eased to a 15% grade, to accommodate wagons and the Yesler-Leschi cable car which started from Pioneer Square. Most of the early settlers, and many of the Indians, worked in Yesler's mill.

The area that is known as the Skid Road and Pioneer Square was the heart of the community for more than the first half century of the town's existence. During this period, Seattle became the major city in the northwest quarter of the nation.

June 6, 1889, Seattle suffered a major disaster when all of the docks and most of the business district were burned down. But immediate reconstruction and widespread publicity after the fire brought hordes of new people and much additional business. Statehood on November 11, 1889 made it possible for the town to spend money in public work, and the citizens declared their intentions to rebuild the Skid Road area into the most beautiful city center in the world.

Because of the massive rebuilding within a short period after the fire, and partly because of the influence of one architect, Elmer H. Fisher, there is great homogeneity of style and construction in the Skid Road - Pioneer Square architecture. Although he is virtually unknown today, Fisher appears to have been responsible for the design of at least sixty buildings in Seattle, many of which were located in the Skid Road area.

Seattle and this historic area prospered during the last decade of the 19th century, always due to lumber, but also from other factors. James Hill's initiation of the operation of a combination of rail and shipping put Memphis cotton into Shanghai 197 days faster than any other means of transportation. The gold rush of the Klondike and Nome brought not only miners, but business, and shipping to Seattle as the nearest large port. Seattle built ships for Alaska trade, and also became the center of the Mosquito Fleet of small steamers in Puget Sound.

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Following World War I, business moved northward out of the Skid Road, and the area gradually fell into lower uses. By the Depression of the 1930's the area became an almost forgotten district."<sup>2</sup>

Today a vital restoration is once again bringing life to the old district in Seattle.

<sup>2</sup>National Register form, Margaret A. Corley

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Photographs and Their Descriptions

Pioneer Building, Pergola and Totem Pole, Seattle, Washington

Photo credit: Charles Snell, NPS. John W. Snyder. Seattle  
Office of Urban Conservation. Seattle Engineering Department.

- Photo descriptions:
1. Pioneer Building facade.
  2. Facade and Chief Seattle Fountain.
  3. Pergola.
  4. Pioneer Building interior court.
  5. Pioneer Building stairwell.
  6. Pioneer Building, Pergola and Totem Pole.
  7. Totem Pole.
  8. Pergola from Southwest.
  9. Pergola (old photo).

PROPOSED PIONEER SQUARE  
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK SITE

