

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0674605

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RECEIVED	MAY 10 1979
DATE ENTERED	JUN 15 1979

**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

The Olympic Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

The Olympic

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

1200-1220 4th Avenue or 400-12 Seneca

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Seattle

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th-Mike Lowry

STATE

Washington

CODE

53

COUNTY

King

CODE

033

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Board of Regents AF-50  
University of Washington

Western International Hotels Lessee

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Seattle

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

King County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

4th & James

CITY, TOWN

Seattle

STATE

Washington

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Begun July 21, 1923 and completed October 31, 1924, the Olympic Hotel was commissioned by the Community Hotel Corporation. A.S. Kerry was president of the company whose 4,500 stockholders were local citizens. The hotel was designed in the modified Italian Renaissance style architecture by the New York firm of George B. Post & Sons, a leader in the development of hotel architecture in the United States. Harry J. Cadwallader and G.W. (W.S.)<sup>1</sup> Wagner were the New York firm's liaison with the Seattle office of Bebb and Gould who acted as supervising architects for the project. George Teufel was the construction superintendent for the nationally-recognized contracting firm of Grant Smith & Company. Louis Rorimer of the Rorimer-Brooks Studios in Cleveland, Ohio designed and supervised the interiors and furnishings. In 1929, the 300-room addition to the northeast wing part of the original plan was completed. Sometime after 1941, Western International Hotels took over the hotel's operation, after which the auto lobby entrance and the two pedestrian skybridges on Seneca Street and Fourth Avenue were added. With the exception of those major additions, the character of the Olympic remains intact.

The Olympic Hotel (commonly called "The Olympic") is located in the S.E. quarter of Section 31, Township 25, Range 4 of the Willamette meridian. It occupies the major portion of the block bounded by University Street on the north, Fourth Avenue on the West, Seneca Street on the south and Fifth Avenue on the east. The Metropolitan Theater (1911-1954) originally occupied the portion of the Olympic block now given over to the auto lobby entrance. The 1924 building permit describes the site as unplatted land known as "The Old University Tract." It is on lot 247-240, a portion of the University Tract included in A.A. Denny's donation claim #4.

The building is sited at 1200-20 Fourth Avenue in the heart of downtown Seattle on gently rising ground sloping upward from Fourth & University Street toward Seneca Street to the south and Fifth Avenue to the east. The topography plays an important role in the varying heights and sequences of the interior spaces. The site measures 224 x 247 feet with the building's mass occupying the full site. The building's major (south) facade fronts the 1964 parking garage linked by a pedestrian skybridge over Seneca Street. Directly across Fifth Avenue to the east is the Yamasaki I.B.M. Building and diagonally across the intersection of Fifth and University is the Skinner Building (National Register, 1978) which houses the Fifth Avenue Theater designed by R.C. Reamer. Across from the University Street (north) elevation which includes the 1950's auto lobby is the new Rainier Tower also designed by Yamasaki. The west elevation faces Fourth Avenue and is linked to the Financial Center with the second of the two overhead pedestrian walkways.

The Olympic Hotel is a steel and reinforced concrete structure consisting of a basement and 12 stories topped with a penthouse floor and elevator housing. Rising from a base line of granite, the exterior is faced with rusticated ashlar-coursed terra cotta and buff-colored brick. The materials are identical on all four elevations with the exception of the auto-entrance addition. All of the interior public spaces are below the second floor ceiling level, using the corner of Fifth and Seneca as the reference point from which the floors are numbered. At ground level the building is U-shaped in plan, formerly accommodating on the University Street elevation the Metropolitan Theater. Until completion of the 300-room northeast wing in 1929, the plan of the third through the twelfth floors was an elongated "L". With the wing addition, the modified H-plan was complete.

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With its classically derivative details and three horizontal divisions, the Olympic is an example of the modified Italian Renaissance style characteristic of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The positioning of these divisions expresses the Renaissance architectural vocabulary of base, shaft and capital. These horizontal divisions occur consistently on all four elevations and are treated more elaborately on the principal Seneca Street facade. Moving up the building vertically the three unequal parts are marked by terra cotta string courses. The first one occurs above the second story, delineating the base and shaft. The belt course is interspersed at varying intervals with a flat balustrade motif. The next division occurs between the 10th and 11th floors and is characterized by a projecting balustraded balcony motif. The top two floors represent the capital and are topped with a slightly projecting roof supported by brackets.

The principal south facade facing on Seneca Street is composed of three main elements based upon a nine-arched window center section flanked by the ends of the wings. The corner treatment of the wings comprises a flat pavilion-like motif, a variation of which is repeated at the main entrance and on the other three elevations. The hotel's principal entrance is centered in the facade using the pavilion motif of an arched-window topped with an identifying stone inscribed with the name "The Olympic" and surmounted with urn finials. An ornamented bronze marquee is attached to the wall by metal rods ornamentally supported by a pair of gargoyle-like griffins holding flagstuffs. The later pedestrian skybridge addition penetrates the second floor immediately to the east of the Seneca Street entrance. Above the second floor the hotel is faced with light tan brick of common running bond and the wall surface is pierced with unadorned double hung windows.

The Olympic is Seattle's only example of the subtly elegant grandeur of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. The architect's adeptness at exploiting the sloping site to its fullest potential resulted in an exciting sequence of spaces. The elegant interior spaces draw eclectically from several Renaissance styles. The architecture, elegantly simple, contrasts with the ornate furnishings. The lobby with its gilt vaulted ceiling and carved wood trim is in the English Renaissance style as is the assembly lounge reached from the main lobby by a large elliptical staircase, and whose entrance is flanked on either side by oak Corinthian columns and capitals. The walls are oak-paneled from floor to ceiling. From this space one enters the ballroom of Spanish Renaissance spirit developed in the Plateresque style sporting an authentic Spanish chandelier and characteristic recessed balcony. The mezzanine corridor above the lobby is framed by arches with carved-wood trim. Located in the east wing off the main lobby is the main dining hall known as the Georgian Room, especially noted for its grand English Renaissance crystal chandelier. Along the mezzanine were originally located specialty shops. In planning the Olympic, careful thought was given to small details. An example is the Olympic crest. It was featured on the hotel stationery, woven into the linens, etc. Its design capitalized on Seattle's significance as a seaport, portraying a full-rigged ship under full sail surrounded by a wreath of entwined ropes. For over fifty years the Olympic Hotel has had the reputation of being Seattle's largest and finest. With its unique interior spatial qualities and subtle grandeur, it is Seattle's only extant example of fine hotel architecture executed in the mode of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

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Footnotes

1. Mr. Wagner's initials appeared as G.W. and W.S. in the various references.

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" 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 Begun July 21, 1923  
Completed October 31, 1924

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Owner/Builder - Community Co. of Seattle

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: George B. Post & Sons,  
NYC  
Bebb & Gould, Seattle  
Supervising Architects

The Olympic Hotel, completed in 1924, has a number of claims to outstanding significance. It is located on an historic site. It was designed by an internationally famous firm whose founder was one of only forty architects in history to receive the A.I.A. Gold Medal. It is the only work by that firm known to exist in the Pacific Northwest. Its design is of intrinsically distinguished quality, an excellent example of the tradition of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. It is a symbol of the unprecedented civic energy and spirit of the time, marking an epochal event in the civic and social development of the city. And it serves today in an urban design sense as an outstanding example of a traditional architecture complemented by other and later developments which surround it.

The opening of the Olympic Hotel was a milestone in the history of the Pacific Northwest. New accounts of the day ranked its historical importance with the discovery of gold in the Klondike and with the establishment of regular steamship lines to the Orient. It marked the largest cooperative community effort undertaken to that date. Designed in the modified Italian Renaissance style by the prominent firm of George B. Post & Sons of New York City, it is an outstanding example of the type. Grant Smith & Company, locally owned but nationally recognized, was the contractor for the project. Located at 1200-1220 Fourth Avenue in downtown Seattle, it is on the original site of the University of Washington and is part of the ten-acre Metropolitan Tract which is owned by the University and the state.

As the years pass, the Olympic's value as an important urban design component becomes clearer. Strategically located between the business and retail cores, the scale and location have acted as a magnet for pedestrian traffic, making it a common reference point. Upon its completion in 1924, the Olympic Hotel stood as Seattle's status symbol reflecting the city's aesthetic values. It announced to the rest of the country that Seattle had come of age, it was no longer the last frontier. The design of the building was a statement that a quality urban environment was equally as important as an industrially and commercially significant city. Today the juxtaposition of the old and new structures enhances the Olympic's architectural qualities. The layering of eras with their varying qualities is essential to a rich urban environment. Around the intersection of Fifth Avenue and University Street, the urban design composition is delicately balanced with the old and new diametrically opposed. The Olympic is vital to the maintenance of that equilibrium. The Olympic offers an alternative to the late 20th century; the contrast is necessary for a mature and sensitive urban environment.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See attached sheet.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.2

QUADRANGLE NAME Seattle South

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1: 24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 10 550130 5272780  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The University Tract of A.A. Denny's DLC #4, Lots 240-247; a site 224 feet x 247 feet.

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

Miriam Sutermeister - Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Washington Trust for Historic Preservation

DATE

January 21, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

6548 51st Avenue N.E.

TELEPHONE

(206) 522-4075

CITY OR TOWN

Seattle

STATE

Washington

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Jeanne M. Welch 5/2/79

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

W. Ray Luce  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 6-15-79

ATTEST: W. Ray Luce  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 6/19/79

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The hotel site encompassed the entire block, with the exception of the land occupied by the Metropolitan Theater bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues and University and Seneca Streets. The land was deeded to the state in 1861 by Arthur A. Denny and was used for University purposes until 1895 when the campus was moved to its present location. (A bronze plaque designating the original university site and commemorating these dates can be found just inside the Seneca Street vestibule on the east side at the top of the first flight of stairs.) In 1922 plans for financing the hotel project were formulated. The Community Hotel Corporation was formed and 400 of Seattle's prominent citizens were given the task of selling bonds to the public. Within a month \$2,854,000 had been pledged by local citizens, businessmen and civic leaders. The Seattle Times held a contest to name the new hotel. From 3906 entries, the name Olympic was chosen. Negotiations began for leasing the hotel to an operating company which resulted in the formation of the Olympic Hotel Corporation, an affiliate of the United Hotel Company of America. The momentum and immensity of the project was reflected in the selection of George B. Post & Company, architects specializing in hotel design. The Seattle firm of Bebb & Gould was chosen as the on-site supervising architect. The bids exceeded the estimates; the plans had to be revised, leaving the completion of the 300-room northeast wing to a later time. Grant Smith & Company of Seattle was the low bidder. The original building permit was for twice the dollar amount ever issued in Seattle -- an indication of the magnitude of the project. On July 21, 1923 ground was broken. The structural steel work began in January, 1924 and by October 31, just ten months later, the completed structure was turned over to the operating company, setting a new record for speed of construction. The final cost was \$5,500,000 plus \$800,000 for furnishings. All this was achieved through local support.

The Olympic Hotel, a monument to a cooperative community effort, opened on December 6, 1924 with one of the most notable affairs in the history of the city. It marked a new direction for community growth. The Olympic linked Seattle both socially and commercially to the rest of the nation. To the social world, the opening of the Olympic introduced new standards for lavish social affairs. It marked the arrival on the Seattle scene of social extravaganzas that were typical in the large eastern cities. For the first time in the city's history, a gathering of over 2,000 people in formal attire could be accommodated under one roof. The hotel project symbolizes the growth of the Seattle community. In the short span of a single generation, Seattle had grown to the point where such a facility was not only wanted and needed, but could be financed with local resources. The investment incentive for the project took a back seat to the moral issue of civic duty.

By 1929, business warranted the addition of the 300-room northeast wing. R.C. Reamer, architect for the Skinner Building in Seattle, designed the addition. The depression years of the 1930's took its toll on the Olympic. In 1931, the Community Hotel Corporation and the Olympic Hotel Company entered into bankruptcy proceedings. About 1943, William Edris, father of Jeanette Rockefeller, acquired all of the common shares of the Olympic. In 1955, Western International Hotels assumed the lease and in 1956 construction of the ballroom and automobile lobby was begun.

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The architectural significance of the Olympic Hotel today applies to the structure as originally constructed including the 1929 300-wing addition. Its significance excludes the 1956 addition that occupies the site of the former Metropolitan Theater, specifically the auto lobby and the grand ballroom. Also excluded are the pedestrian skybridges on the building's Seneca Street and Fourth Avenue facades.

With the completion of the Olympic Hotel in 1924, a sophisticated, highly polished style of architecture was introduced to Seattle. With its 617 hotel rooms it was by no means the largest, but it reflected the latest in hotel architecture and furnishings. Its grandeur and elegance was comparable to other hotels in large cities throughout the country. It is a fine example of "grand hotel" architecture characteristic of the early part of the 20th century. Except for several theaters, its elegance and spatial qualities are unique in Seattle. At the time of its opening, it was heralded as truly "metropolitan": a bit of New York transplanted to the Pacific Northwest. In 1928, it received an architectural award from the Seattle Chapter of the A.I.A. An article appearing in the P-I on January 13, 1976 sums up the architectural significance of the Olympic. "Due to the fact the Olympic is one of the few hotels left where the style and sweep of architecture reflect a time and opulence of social behavior from another era,.....it was chosen for the filming of the ballroom scene in the Eleanor and Franklin television series."

George Browne Post 1837-1913

The Olympic was designed by the architectural firm of George B. Post & Sons of New York. Design of the hotel was begun a few years after George Browne Post's own death in 1913, when the practice was in the hands of his sons William and James. But in such large, strong, and famous firms, and particularly when the practice is passed on within the family, directions established by the founder normally persist well after his death or retirement. This was certainly the case with the Post firm, and therefore a resume' of Post's career is relevant.

Post was born in 1837 in New York City. Upon graduation from NYU in 1858, he began work with the famous architect Richard Morris Hunt; in 1860 he began his own career. Between that time and his death he gained great distinction. He was one of the architects selected for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893; a publication of 1898 identified Post, together with Hunt, as standing at the top of his profession; he was one of the Great American Architects identified by Architectural Record between 1895 and 1899; and he received the Gold Medal of the A.I.A., the Institute's highest honor, in 1911. An in-depth study of Post's career and that of the subsequent firm has yet to be done. But among a large number of major commissions by the firm, best known are The Equitable Life Insurance Company, Western Union, Mills, Produce Exchange, the World (or Pulitzer), New York Times, Cornelius Vanderbilt House, New York Stock Exchange, all of New York and all of which were constructed between 1868 and 1904. These buildings are of high quality: they utilize a single dominant theme adeptly handled, their elevations express internal functional and structural organization, and they represent thoughtful answers to site use and provision of light and air. The Equitable Building was the first commercial



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building designed to exploit the elevator; the Mills Building was the largest office building of the time, the Pulitzer the tallest. The Produce Exchange Building has a valid claim to first use of skyscraper construction as does Jenney's Home Life Insurance Building of three years later. The building for the Exposition utilized the largest span erected to that time, surpassing even the Galerie des Machines of 1889.

Other designs by Post, particularly the Union Trust Company Building of 1889-90 in New York, seem to presage Sullivan's formula for tall office building design by dividing the building into base, shaft, and crown, and employing this tripartite division as a means for giving logical organization to the exterior treatment. Thus in exploitation of elevators and skyscraper construction, in structural daring, in scale, plan arrangement and aesthetic treatment, Post was at the forefront of developments in design of large American urban buildings.

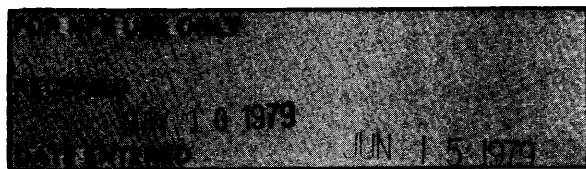
The Olympic Hotel is clearly an offspring of this career. Its intended H-plan, maximizing usable exterior wall on a large city block, is related to that of the Mills Building, an early successful example of the same plan type, while the Olympic's base, shaft, crown organization derives from Post's own pioneering work in that motif. These devices, furthermore, are handled in the Olympic with a finesse appropriate to the firm's experience. The firm's location in New York City is also of importance, since there the influence of McKim, Mead and White was close at hand, and this influence also is reflected in the care given to the Olympic in proportion, detail, and choices of materials, both inside and out.

Grant Smith - Master Builder 1868-1923

Grant Smith died after the Olympic project was well under way. A contemporary tribute in the Seattle Times stated that he was one of the "real builders of modern times. New York drinks through the gigantic Catskill aqueduct which he built. Seattle drinks her famed Cedar River water through the pipelines he constructed." He was a pioneering contractor of the west and between the years 1893 - 1923 played an important role in the development of Washington State. His wife was De Ette McAuslan daughter of a pioneer Seattle family. Many of the largest engineering contracts of the United States to that date had been built under his direction. Early in his career he was associated with the firm of Smith, Hauser, and McIsaacs with head offices in New York City. His career involved irrigation projects, railroads, bridges and tunnels. He headed Grant Smith & Company located in Seattle with a branch office in St. Paul, Minnesota. He lived on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill in a home he built at the corner of Comstock and Willard. Seattle, his home, was also the location of the last work of his career.

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Seattle, WA 98104