

# History of Cadillac Hotel

## Affordable Lodging

The Great Fire of 1889 sparked immediate demand for new “fireproof” masonry buildings in Seattle’s commercial downtown. Within six months the Cadillac Hotel, designed by James W. Hetherington, and 24 other buildings rose from the ashes. Of the original 25 buildings, only eight remain relatively unaltered.

The Cadillac Hotel’s residents—longshoremen, laborers, and prospectors—played a critical role in the city’s early industrial growth. Shipyards, railroads, the timber industry, and the Klondike Gold Rush attracted thousands of workers and prospectors to the city. The hotel provided inexpensive rooms within walking distance to industrial jobs and the major rail and shipping lines along Elliott Bay.



Pioneer Square – Post Fire – Occidental Hotel

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First Avenue from Columbia Street after Seattle fire of June 6, 1889

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW5947



Cadillac Hotel, 1937

Washington State Archives, Puget Sound Branch, King County Assessor Property Record Card Collection photograph (1937)

Although waterfront activity declined in the early 20th century, both world wars stimulated Seattle’s economic growth and energized the industrial ship and rail yards. The Cadillac Hotel continued to offer inexpensive lodging to laborers working in these wartime industries.



Hotel Cadillac, ca. 1916–1922

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# Cadillac Hotel Pre-Earthquake

## Falling on Hard Times

A turbulent post World War II economy reduced the number of visitors and transient laborers passing through Pioneer Square. The neighborhood deteriorated and the Cadillac Hotel fell into disrepair as its vacancy rate soared. To halt the blight, Seattle established the Pioneer Square Preservation District in 1970. Unfortunately, historic designation did not immediately stimulate widespread restoration of neglected buildings.



Grand Central Hotel

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Intersection First and Cherry

Historic Seattle Photograph Archive

**FIRE!** On March 20, 1970, an arson fire at the Ozark Hotel at Westlake Avenue and Lenora Street killed twenty people. The City of Seattle passed an ordinance requiring hotels to either install sprinkler systems or close for business. Faced with a slow economy and high vacancy rate, the owner of the Cadillac Hotel, along with other building owners throughout Seattle, chose to close upper floors rather than install costly sprinklers. For 31 years, the upper floors of the Cadillac Hotel remained uninhabited and continued to deteriorate until the Nisqually earthquake in 2001 inspired new preservation efforts.



610 Second Avenue, Hotel Corona

Historic Seattle Photograph Archive



Hotel Ozark Fire, March, 1970

Photograph by The Seattle Times



# Cadillac Hotel Post-Earthquake

## Picking up the Pieces

**EARTHQUAKE!** On February 28, 2001, the Puget Sound region suffered an intense 6.8 magnitude quake causing severe damage to the Cadillac Hotel and numerous buildings throughout the area. The unreinforced masonry structures within the Pioneer Square neighborhood were susceptible to earthquake damage. Many had been built on unstable fill during the civic engineering and re-grading projects of 1898 to 1930.

The Cadillac Hotel was also susceptible to damage because since the early 1970's it was not adequately maintained. In an effort to clean the exterior of the building, sandblasting caused damage to the exterior brick and mortar and for many years the roof leaked and rafters and floor joists subsequently deteriorated.



Historic Seattle Photograph Archive

Cadillac East Elevation – Post Earthquake



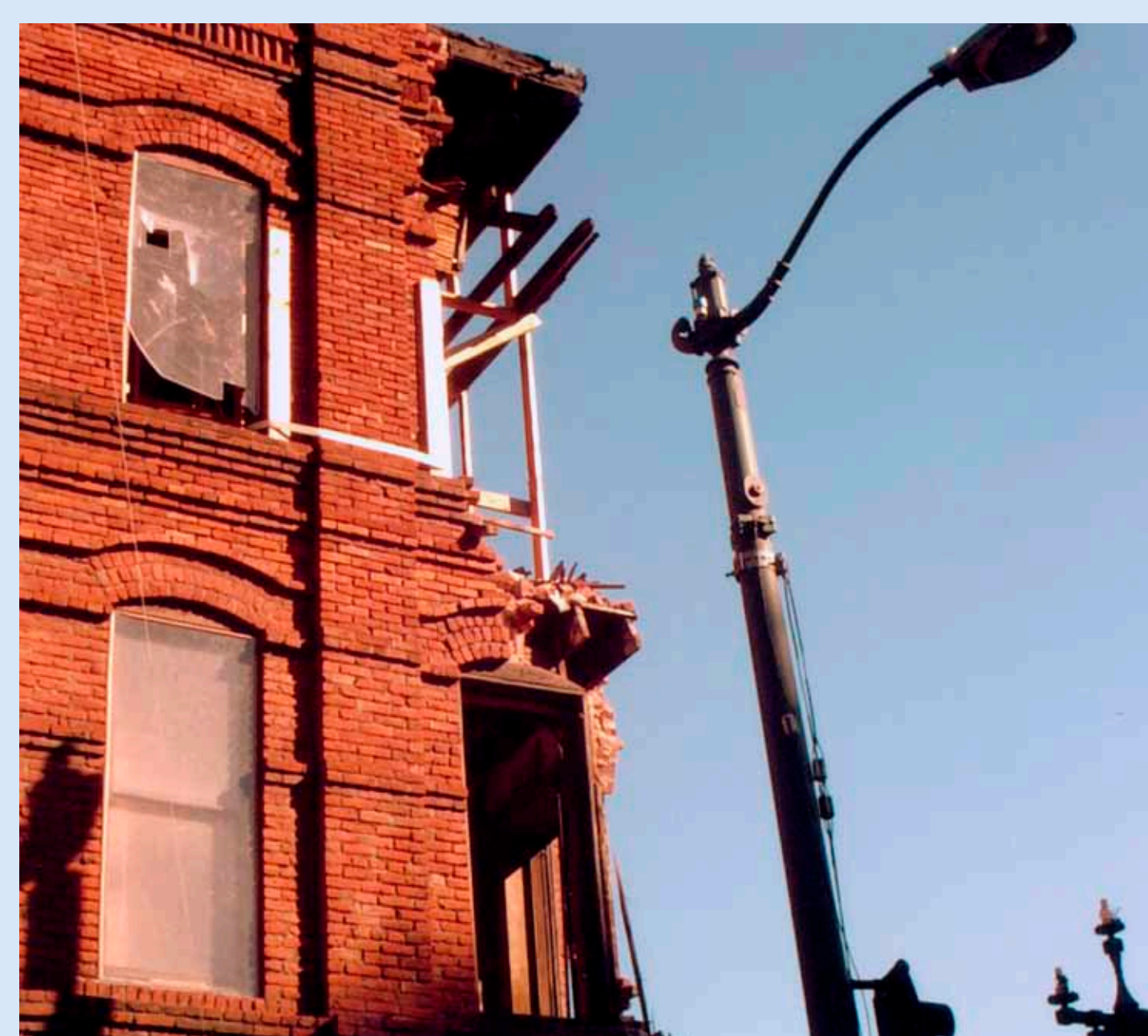
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Cadillac East Elevation – Post Earthquake / Owner Demolition



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Cadillac South Elevation – Post Earthquake



Historic Seattle Photograph Archive

Cadillac Corner of Second and Jackson – Post Earthquake / Owner Demolition

After the earthquake, the owners of the building were concerned about large sections of loose and damaged masonry potentially falling to the sidewalk and street below. On March 8, 2001 the exterior wall on the southwest corner of the building between the third floor window sills and roof was removed. The future of the Cadillac Hotel was in jeopardy when preliminary analysis from structural engineers recommended demolition of the building.



# Rescuing the Cadillac Hotel

Cadillac Rehabilitation Time Lapse



July 24, 2004



August 4, 2004



August 10, 2004



August 13, 2004



August 19, 2004



September 14, 2004



January 5, 2005



April 10, 2005

## The Cadillac Legacy

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and Historic Seattle quickly mobilized to prevent the Cadillac Hotel's demolition. Historic Seattle assembled an experienced team of experts to develop a stabilization strategy and then negotiated the purchase of the building.

The National Park Service provided Historic Seattle with a valued partner as the building was adaptively re-used and sensitively converted from its original residential use. The building was structurally stabilized, seismically reinforced, new plumbing, mechanical and electrical systems were installed and, when possible, historic finishes were restored. The Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park opened in June, 2006.

Thanks to the visionary efforts of many individuals and organizations, the Cadillac Hotel once again plays an important role within Pioneer Square and Seattle. The building is now a prominent landmark telling the story of those prospectors, laborers, and settlers whose lives contributed to the history, culture, and economic development of Seattle.



August 15, 2009

The Cadillac Hotel, August 2009. © Marissa Narkin

The life story of the Cadillac Hotel is told thanks to the generous financial contributions from these project partners:



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