

# 105 years ago: Smith Tower opens to the public, then the tallest building in Seattle

By [Natalie Guevara](#), SeattlePI Updated 7:35 am PDT, Friday, July 5, 2019



Photo: From The Seattle Public Library's Special Collection



IMAGE 1 OF 162

Smith Tower, pictured in 1914.

Looking at the [Seattle skyline](#) today, it's almost hard to believe the historic Smith Tower was once not only the tallest building in the city, but the tallest building west of Ohio.

The tower's height of 462 feet (489 feet if you include the antenna spire) seems modest by modern standards, but when it first opened 105 years ago today, on July 4, 1914, it was a sight to behold. The second-tallest building in the city's skyline at the time was about half the height of Smith Tower.

By 1985, the tables had turned. Smith Tower was about half the size of the now-tallest building in Seattle, the 937-foot Columbia Center.

A total of 1,400 doors, 2,000 windows and 40,000 feet of molding went into its construction, and it took over three years to build. The building was erected atop a foundation of 1,276 concrete piles, each 22 feet long.

Smith Tower remains an icon for the city, and it's easy to spot out in a glassy skyline with a white terra-cotta facade and pyramid topper.

The building was created from the vision of New York industrialist Lyman Cornelius Smith and his son Burns -- the Smith of Smith Corona typewriters. When Lyman died in 1910, Burns decided to build the skyscraper on a property the duo had purchased in Seattle, located at 506 Second Ave. Burns said building a skyscraper there was his father's dream.

Burns initially planned for the tower to open in 1912, but it took an extra year and a half or so to finish.

It was formally opened to the public on July 4, 1914, giving residents and visitors a chance to see the Emerald City from atop its then-highest building.

The building took an estimated \$1.25-1.7 million to construct, and it's unclear if it ever turned a profit for the owners. The Smiths sold the tower just 10 years after it opened.

Today, you can still visit the top of **Smith Tower**, where a bar and walk-around view greet you at the top of the 35th floor. It costs \$20 to go up for adults, or \$12 for locals. You can also get married, or host other private events, there.

To see photos of Smith Tower through the years, click through the slideshow above.

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*Historic information for this article was sourced from [HistoryLink.org](https://www.historylink.org) and [SeattlePI](https://www.seattlepi.com) archives.*

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