THE NORTH COAST CASKET CO. BUILDING
"THE COLLINS BUILDING"

Documenting & Commemorating History: 1926-2010
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Along the waterfront in Everett, Washington, there lies a history of industry and manufacturing, which spans three centuries. Much like the ebb and flow of the Everett port tides, the economic industry has seen its share of change over the years. The North Coast Casket Company building, which housed casket manufacturing companies on the Everett waterfront, reflects the nature of the integrated industries during these changing times.

Over the course of the building’s history, it was the site for many different casket manufacturing companies and the host to many influential figures, who helped position Everett as an industrial and economic leader.

Because of its association with Everett’s early years, the North Coast Casket Company building, which is also known as the Collins Building, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. Costs made the building’s renovation impractical, and in 2010, the building was deconstructed. The following account serves as commemorative history of the North Coast Casket Company building, built by the William Hulbert Mill Company in 1926.
Timeline

As the migration from the Midwest occurred in the late 1800s, Everett soon became a city of progress and industry. The North Coast Casket Company building’s history is deeply rooted in the early days of Everett, Washington, due to its industrial and mill town roots. The history can be further explored in the following timeline.
Early 1890s
Due to its strategic location along the Port Gardner peninsula, where the Snohomish River empties into Puget Sound, the City of Everett began as an industrial hub supporting pulp and paper mills, commercial fishing, a smelter and a shipyard. The city’s industrial revolution increased the population from a few dozen residents in 1890 to several thousand just two years later.

Mid-1920s
As Everett’s economy shifted to focus on the timber industry and automobile access improved, timber production increased significantly. The William Hulbert Mill Company’s workforce topped 200 employees, producing 80,000 board feet of cedar lumber and 350,000 shingles per day.

“Everett was heralded as ‘the leading lumber, logging and shingle center of the Northwest, in fact, it might be said of the entire world.’”– The Evolution of a Vibrant Everett Waterfront: A Story of Sawdust, Salmon and Speedboats

1926
As the lumber industry diversified, the William Hulbert Mill Company built a three-story, pile-supported building for casket manufacturing. The North Coast Casket Company, managed by William G. Hulbert, utilized scrap and end materials from the neighboring mill to build caskets. The building later came to be known as the Collins Building.
1932
North Coast Casket Company superintendent, Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins, formed the Collins Casket Company, which worked out of the second and third stories of the Hulbert-owned building. North Coast Casket Company remained on the building’s first floor. Collins Casket Company was the longest-running business on site.

1944
North Coast Casket Company changed its name to Cascade Casket Company, with former North Coast shipping manager, Edwin C. Dams and Theodore “Dode” Johnson at the helm.

1954
In 1954, Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins retired from the Collins Casket Company and his son, Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins, became the manager of the company.

1956
On August 3, 1956, a four-alarm fire struck the William Hulbert Mill Company, destroying the planer mill, a storage building, eight dry kilns filled with lumber, and the adjacent Jamison Mill office building. The Collins Building, which housed the Cascade Casket Company and the Collins Casket Company at the time, remained intact.

1962
The Collins Casket Company built a concrete tilt-up building east of the Collins Building casket manufacturing plant for the purpose of building metal casket shells.

“Rasty Collins produced the gamut of caskets. Whatever kind we wanted we could get. They had the KD plant—that’s the Knock Down plant—where they produced the low-end caskets and they had higher end caskets. Later they produced steel. Rasty was quality...a quality person...quality merchandise.” – Jim Cassidy
**1963**

By 1963, the co-owners of Cascade Casket Company, Edwin C. Dams and Theodore “Dode” Johnson, retired. Their casket manufacturing company was purchased by the William Hulbert Mill Company, which still retained ownership of the Collins Building.

**1970**

The Collins Building receives a series of building modifications including replacing the original wood-framed loading dock with a smaller concrete loading dock in the building’s northwest corner.

**Early-1970s**

The two casket manufacturers who operated out of the Collins Building—Collins Casket Company and Cascade Casket Company—eventually merged under the name Collins Casket Company. Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins served as the president and William G. Hulbert Jr served as vice president. Rasty’s salesmanship helped the company become the longest-running casket business in Everett, Washington.

**1977**

Collins Casket Company was sold to Cliff Carlson, who operated the business out of Spokane, Washington. William G. Hulbert Jr. continued production of casket shells in the Collins Building after the company was sold.

**1991**

The Hulbert Mill Company Limited Partnership sold their 35-acre waterfront property, which included the Collins Building, to the Port of Everett. The existing leases remained intact. The Collins Building exterior siding was then painted red and white for marketing purposes.

**1996**

After purchasing the casket manufacturing business from the Hulbert family, Michael Keys, the former manager of the Collins Casket Company, continued operating a specialty and custom-designed casket company until it closed its doors in 1996. Keys operated the Collins Building’s last casket manufacturing company.
**1996-2004**

Following the end of casket manufacturing at the Collins Building, non-casket related businesses leased space in the Collins Building.

**2005**

As part of the marina development, the Port of Everett proposes the removal of the Collins Building. The Port of Everett partners with the local, historical community to explore possible rehabilitation options, in order to preserve the Collins Building.

**2006**

The Collins Building is placed on the National Register of Historic Places, under its original name the North Coast Casket Company.

**2007-2010**

The local historical community rallies support to save the Collins Building after rehabilitation efforts prove unsuccessful. Historic Everett, an organization dedicated to preserving the heritage of the City of Everett, earns the State Historic Preservation Officer Award for their efforts to save the Collins Building.

Efforts to preserve the building were unsuccessful, and in fall 2010 the Collins Building was deconstructed. To preserve the history of the Collins Building, the windows, columns and beams recovered from the deconstruction were given to qualifying entities for historic properties.
The Collins Building was a landmark on the Everett waterfront. It represented Everett’s position as the “capitol of casket manufacturing” in the Pacific Northwest. Influential figures shaped the blue-collar character and casket manufacturing industry for 70 years.

Photos: Top left: The Dams Family, Top right: Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins and his wife, Jeanne Collins, Bottom left: William M. Hulbert, Bottom right: Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins pictured in back row fourth from the left.
Fred K. Baker Lumber Co.

In 1914, Fred K. Baker, a lumberman who first came to Everett, Washington in 1901, built the Fred K. Baker Lumber Company mill at the foot of 12th Street on Everett’s bayfront. By 1917, William M. Hulbert purchased the mill, which later became the William Hulbert Mill Company and the future site of the Collins Building.

Fred K. Baker (1861-1957)

In 1901, Fred K. Baker moved from New York to Everett, Washington, and founded the Ferry-Baker Lumber Company. After selling his interest in the Ferry-Baker Lumber Company, he moved from Everett to Bellingham in 1909, only to return to form the Fred K. Baker Lumber Company. Fred K. Baker is considered a pioneer of the lumber industry while indirectly securing the waterfront site on 12th Street in Everett, the future site of the Collins Building.

“[Fred K. Baker was] a vibrant link between this community’s present and its past...and one of the few pioneers who lived to see the dreams of the early arrivals in this area come true.”

– Everett Daily Herald

William Hulbert Mill Co.

In 1916, William M. Hulbert secured interest in the Fred K. Baker Lumber Company, which served as the foundation for the William Hulbert Mill Company in Everett, Washington. The mill produced lumber and shingles. In 1925, scrap lumber from the mill was also used for casket manufacturing under the name North Coast Casket Company. The North Coast Casket Company building, which was built adjacent to the William Hulbert Mill Company in 1926, was later known as the Collins Building.

By 1988, the Hulbert family re-established as the Hulbert Mill Company Limited Partnership. In 1991, it then sold the 35-acre waterfront property, including the Collins Building, to the Port of Everett.

“When Hulbert started manufacturing caskets, they looked like patchwork because the wood was different colors left over from the mill. It was all good wood and the color didn’t matter because it was covered with cloth.” – Betty Ressegue

William M. Hulbert (1858-1919)

After settling in Snohomish County, Washington, William Marion Hulbert married Meda Lyons in 1888, a daughter of the county’s early pioneering families. William and Meda had five children together: William Glen, Ruth, Aida, Fred and Meda.

Following his father into the logging business, William bought controlling interest in the Fred K. Baker Lumber Company in 1916. William M. Hulbert would later become president of the company until his passing in 1919. His wife, Meda, and their children continued his legacy and maintained active roles in the company through 1991.
Meda L. Hulbert (1866-1948)
Meda Lyons Hulbert married William M. Hulbert in 1888. With her husband’s death in 1919, Meda became president of the William Hulbert Mill Company and her eldest son, William G. Hulbert, served as secretary-treasurer. The couple’s youngest son, Fred Hulbert, later became manager of the family-owned North Coast Casket Company. Until her death in 1948, Meda was an active contributor to the family lumber business and various social organizations in Everett, Washington.

William G. Hulbert (1893-1963)
As the eldest son of William M. Hulbert and Meda L. Hulbert, William Glen Hulbert became secretary-treasurer of the William Hulbert Mill Company in 1919. Upon his mother’s death in 1948, he became the company president. William G. Hulbert was very active within the Everett community and served many leadership roles, including the First National Bank of Everett Board of Directors and the Community Chest (predecessor to United Way).

William G. Hulbert married Katherine Baker, the daughter of Fred K. Baker, and together they raised their only son, William G. Hulbert Jr. Their son would later become president of the family-owned company when William G. Hulbert retired in 1956.

William G. Hulbert Jr. (1917-1986)
William Glen Hulbert Jr. maintained his position as the president of the William Hulbert Mill Company after inheriting the business from his father in 1956. Simultaneously, he also served as the chief executive of the Snohomish County Public Utility District No. 1.

William G. Hulbert Jr. later served as vice president of Collins Casket Company, after the Collins Casket Company merged with Cascade Casket Company in the 1970s. Consistent with his family legacy, he maintained involvement with the Snohomish County and Everett communities. William G. Hulbert Jr. played an influential part in the founding of the Snohomish Boys Club.

North Coast Casket Co.
Founded in 1925 by the William Hulbert Mill Company, North Coast Casket Company was originally located at the intersection of Grand Avenue and California Street in downtown Everett, Washington. A year later, the North Coast Casket Company moved to the Everett waterfront in a new building adjacent to the William Hulbert Mill Company. This strategic location allowed the casket company to use the mill’s scrap lumber and end materials to construct casket shells.

Fred M. Hulbert (1901-1935)
Following the death of his father, William M. Hulbert, Fred Marion Hulbert became the manager of the North Coast Casket Company from 1925-1932. North Coast Casket Company produced the initial casket shells on the first floor of the Collins Building, while other companies completed the casket finishing work on the second floor, the sewing and storing of finished caskets occurred on the third floor.
Rasmus M. Collins (1888-1959)

With experience managing casket companies in both Spokane and Seattle, Washington, Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins moved to Everett and partnered with Fred Hulbert in order to run the North Coast Casket Company. From the company’s inception in 1925, Ross Collins served as the superintendent until purchasing the finishing portion of North Coast Casket Company and forming the Collins Casket Company by the early 1930s. He eventually retired in 1954 after bringing his son, Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins, into the family business.

Cascade Casket Co.

In 1944, North Coast Casket Company changed its name to Cascade Casket Company. Wood casket manufacturing remained on the first floor of the Collins Building. Cascade Casket Company was operated by Edwin C. Dams and Theodore “Dode” Johnson and was later purchased by the William Hulbert Mill Company. In 1961, a concrete tilt-up building was added next to the Collins Building in order to meet the market demands and expand production into metal casket shells.

“When metal caskets became popular, Rasty [Rasmus C. Collins] went to New Orleans to learn more about them. A $5 bill had to fit in the lid and not be pulled out to ensure a seal. This kept water out [which was] important in New Orleans.”
– Betty Resseguie


When North Coast Casket Company changed its name to Cascade Casket Company in 1944, Edwin C. Dams, the former North Coast shipping manager, took over operations along with Theodore Johnson.


Collins Casket Co.

Founded in the early 1930s, by Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins, the Collins Casket Company purchased the finishing portion of the former North Coast Casket Company. In the early 1970s, the company merged with Cascade Casket Company, under the Collins Casket Company name.

The Collins Casket Company assembled and finished caskets on the second and third floors of the Collins Building. At the height of production, the Collins Casket Company had 17 workers producing 12,000 caskets annually. The caskets were sold to funeral homes throughout the Pacific Northwest region.

Judy Collins Baker always thought of it as “The Hulbert Building,” not the Collins Building.
Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins (1888-1959)
In 1925, Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins became the superintendent of the North Coast Casket Company. By 1932, he purchased the finishing portion of the company and formed the Collins Casket Company. He eventually retired in 1954 after bringing his son, Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins, into the family business.

Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins (1917-1987)
By 1954, Rasmus C. “Rasty” Collins was the manager of the Collins Casket Company, which was founded by his father in the early 1930s. The family remained invested in the company through 1977, with Rasty eventually taking on the role of president. His two siblings, Russell and Johanna Collins Holdencamp, also worked at the plant.

Rasty and his wife, Jeanne, were well-known in the community, and it was his natural salesmanship that helped make the Collins Casket Company the largest and longest running casket company in the Collins Building.

“Jo (Holdencamp) [Rasty’s sister] made a bassinet [for my baby], using materials from the Collins Casket factory... wood, silk, bows and ribbons like they did with the caskets.”
– Mary Dearmin

“Every Monday my father took three or four funeral directors out to lunch. These people to this day say ‘the highlight of my week was always Monday morning when your dad would show up to my shop and we would go out to lunch with three or four other guys.’ He went to Bellingham, Gray’s Harbor...all over. He was extremely outgoing and extremely likeable. They would have this big oyster feast every year and invite family and friends and funeral home directors.”
– Judy Collins Baker

Denton “Dent” Maulsby (1905-1984) and Lois Maulsby (1911-1996)
Following the death of Rasmus M. “Ross” Collins in 1959, Denton “Dent” and Lois Maulsby, the former owners of the Sound Casket Company, came out of retirement and partnered with Rasmus C. “Rasty” and Jeanne Collins to co-own the Collins Casket Company. Dent ran the casket manufacturing portion of the business, while Rasty worked as a salesperson and company president. After 10 years, Dent retired from the Collins Casket Company.

Michael Keys (1952 - )
Though the Collins Casket Company sold in 1977, the William Hulbert Mill Company continued to manufacture casket shells in the Collins Building. When the mill re-formed as the Hulbert Mill Company Limited Partnership, and sold the 35-acre property and the Collins Building to the Port of Everett, the casket company was the last remaining business in operation.

In an effort to reinvigorate the business, the former Collins Casket Company manager, Michael Keys, purchased the Collins Casket Company from the Hulbert family. Michael, whose father had previously worked at Collins Casket Company, operated the last custom casket manufacturing business out of the Collins Building until the business closed its doors in 1996.
In the late 19th century, early settlers of Everett leveraged the natural resources of Port Gardner Bay and the Snohomish River to build an economic epicenter around the forestry, commercial fishing and agricultural industries.

By 1910, Everett boasted 95 manufacturing plants, 22 of which were located on the waterfront area known as the 14th Street Dock. The availability of lumber and mill scraps, combined with rail and automobile access, made Everett an ideal hub for casket manufacturing.
Casket Manufacturing Industry

Leader
Beginning in the early 1920s, Everett was the home to many different casket companies. By 1950, Everett maintained three of Washington state’s 11 casket factories. Additional casket manufacturing businesses were later established in Everett, including North Coast Casket Company, Cascade Casket, Northwestern Shell, Collins Casket Company, Sound Casket and Everett Casket.

“Everett was the capitol of caskets in the Northwest.”
– Rod Keppler

Materials
Due to the proximity to the Everett lumber mills, diversification into casket manufacturing was a business venture in the 1920s. The William Hulbert Mill Company utilized the scrap and end materials from its lumber mill in order to produce caskets.

While most casket manufacturers used hardwoods, such as cherry or mahogany, the William Hulbert Mill Company was a pioneer by also using cedar scrap lumber for its caskets, as it was considered a decay-resistant material. The mill scrap ends were different wood species, which created patchwork caskets that were then covered with wood trim and fine fabric.

The Rise and Fall of Casket Manufacturing
While Everett’s casket manufacturing industry flourished until the 1960s, the industry eventually declined due to several factors:

• A shift in demand from wooden caskets to metal caskets
• Increased cremations rather than burials
• Increased labor costs
• Increased competition from non-unionized casket manufacturers in the Midwest

While the Collins Building continued to support the production of casket shells until 1996, the changing environment could not sustain the 70-year-old industry. The last remaining casket company in Everett, Sound Casket Company, was eventually bought by a Canadian firm in 1991. The production line closed and the sales offices relocated to Arlington, Washington.

“In those days [late 1970s], it was just the start of cremation, and people were spending less on funerals. The Midwest companies mass-produced interiors. All of ours were hand-sewn. We had seamstresses there and our quality was three times better. We just couldn’t compete. We shut our manufacturing down. We ended up buying the Midwestern caskets in truckloads and selling them. The employees didn’t believe it for several years. It was sad. Everybody was very, very sad.” – Rod Keppler
Casket Manufacturing Production

The production process for manufacturing wood caskets in the Collins Building was complex. While ownership and casket companies varied over the years, the Collins Building maintained a fairly consistent process on each of its three floors.

First Floor
The first floor of the Collins Building received mill end and scrap materials from the adjacent Hulbert Mill. Using the scrap lumber, casket shells were constructed and sent up by freight elevator to the second floor.

Second Floor
Upon receiving the casket shells on the second floor of the Collins Building, the caskets were then assembled and received finishing hardware, latches, mattresses and fabric lining, which was sewn on the third floor. Several of the finished caskets were then put on display in the casket showroom, which was located in the northwest corner of the Collins Building.

Third Floor
As the caskets were completed on the second floor of the Collins Building, they were sent up the freight elevator to the third floor for sewing of the casket lining and storage until future distribution. Caskets produced at the Collins Building were then sold and distributed to funeral homes nationwide.
Architecture

The North Coast Casket Company “Collins Building” has embodied Everett’s long-standing industrial heritage since it was constructed in 1925. As such, it is important to look at the defining characteristics that make the building a landmark, as well as the efforts to preserve and reuse the building materials after its deconstruction.

Unique Features

**Exterior**

The following were a few exterior characteristics of the Collins Building architecture:

- The three-storied building with an approximate 200 feet x 100 feet imprint, ran longitudinally north and south.
- The exterior walls were 35 feet high with 6-inch beveled cedar siding, which likely came from the adjacent Hulbert Mill. The original wood siding was likely treated or stained wood, but it was painted red in 1991.
- Horizontal wood-sash windows wrapped the perimeter of the building and each of the three floors. The northwestern corner of the Collins Building second floor did not have windows, as the casket showroom required sedate lighting.
**Interior**

The following were a few of the interior characteristics of the Collins Building architecture:

- Structural post and beam columns ran north to south, spaced 10 feet apart and spaced 20 feet apart east to west, which was considered a common build for the 1920s.
- Scrap Douglas fir, likely from the Hulbert Mill, was used for the structural post and beams, and flooring within the building.

**Deconstruction & Reuse of Materials**

Due to the costly repairs, the Collins Building was deconstructed in 2010. In an effort to preserve the history of the Collins Building, the windows, columns and beams recovered from the deconstruction were given to qualifying entities for historic properties. Materials not claimed for historic properties would be sold to a reuse company and used to rehabilitate the Port of Everett’s historic Weyerhaeuser Building.
Credits

As part of the Memorandum of Agreement, dated August 2005, the Port of Everett was tasked with developing and executing a meaningful mitigation strategy if the Collins Building were removed.

The Port of Everett would like to thank the following interviewees that shared their memories and history associated with the Collins Building, along with interviewers Ellen Hiatt and Catherine D’Ambrosia, for their efforts in collecting the historical accounts:

- Judy Collins Baker
- Jim and Carol Cassidy
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- Al Dams
- Margaret S. Davis
- Mary Dearmin
- D.M. Hibbert
- Rod Keppler
- Michael and Judy Keys
- Don Oberg
- Betty Resseguie
- Jerry Wynne

Additional Resource Credits:
- Everett Public Library
- North Coast Casket Company Building Historic Structures Report

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