

# North Slope Historic District

From the North Slope Historic District Nomination form

Narrative Description:

## Summary

The North Slope Historic District is a trapezoidal-shaped residential district located in Tacoma, Washington. The district is located on the upper portion of an area above the south shore of Commencement Bay, known to most for its historic homes and tree-lined streets. The streets are laid out parallel to the Commencement Bay water line, 'while the rest of Tacoma is in an North-South, East-West orientation. The District encompasses 228 acres.

As a whole, the District is mainly residential, the exceptions being along the arterials that define' the District. There is one cluster of 3 commercial stores in the center of the district. The district is attractive with well-maintained residences and many of the homes have mature landscaping and large, old trees. The mixture of housing styles, along with the narrow streets, give the District a unique character.

The North Slope Historic District retains strong overall integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Individual historic properties vary in their retention of historic character, and the integrity of individual properties was evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The numbers of contributing vs. non-contributing resources are as follows:

Historic Contributing buildings = 698  
Historic Non-Contributing buildings = 145  
Non-Historic Non-Contributing = 85  
Vacant = 8

Historic Contributing Accessory Structures = 211  
Historic Non-Contributing Accessory Structures= 36  
Non-Historic Non-Contributing Accessory Structures = 110

## Setting

Tacoma, Washington lies on the banks of Commencement Bay, where the Puyallup River flows into Puget Sound. The city is 30 miles south of Seattle, north of Interstate 5, and 30 miles north of the capital city, Olympia. To the west, a suspension bridge, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, connects the city to the Kitsap peninsula. Through the

community, a main railroad line runs south to California and north to Canada, with another line crossing the Cascades into eastern Washington.

The city of Tacoma has a rich history and an abundance of historic architecture. Founded in 1874, Tacoma was an important destination for the transcontinental railroad system. The railway connection to the deepwater port on Commencement Bay established the city as a major link in national and international commerce. Today there are nearly 200,000 citizens in Tacoma.

Downtown Tacoma has had to re-invent itself after the flight of many businesses to the Tacoma Mall in the 1960s. However, urban renewal largely passed Tacoma by, and this became a boon in the 1990s when preserving and restoring historic buildings led to a renaissance of the downtown built largely on enhancing the arts and converting historic buildings to new uses.

Today Tacoma boasts a number of re-furbished historic buildings. Among them is the old Union Station Railroad -Depot, which was rehabilitated into a Federal Court House and numerous warehouses that have been converted into the Tacoma campus of the University of Washington.

#### Site & Streetscape Character

The District is bounded by North I Street, a main arterial on the north of the District. Division Avenue is a main arterial on the east, while N Steele Street, a busy residential street, holds down the west. North Grant Avenue caps off the south end of the trapezoid. There are 228 acres in the District and it contains a total of 1,285 resources.

The District lies on a hillside, ascending upward to the south from North I St. to N Cushman Ave. where it drops off slightly going south to Grant Avenue. There are three low points along N I St. One at each end, the NE and NW corners of the District, and the third is at N 9<sup>th</sup> and I Street. All of these locations are about 290 feet above Commencement Bay. The high point is 400 ft. at the intersection of N 8th and Cushman Ave. However, in general, the elevation gain from block to block never exceeds 25 ft.

The entire North Slope Historic District was settled primarily as a residential neighborhood, the same use the area has today. It contains a wide variety of architecture, from the humble bungalow, to the elegant Queen Anne mansion. The neighborhood has, for the most part, retained its street trees (mainly horse chestnut and maple), which contribute significantly to the area's historic character.

The district developed over time and it is common to find structures built as early as 1900 standing beside structures built 20, 30 and 50 years later. According to various

Tacoma street maps, structures were built " sporadically throughout the area rather than showing a concentration of building in one area at anyone stage of growth. Seventy-eight percent of the homes were built prior t01930. It took an additional 25 years for another 12 percent of the homes to be added. Such a development patten has resulted in the varied architectural style and types found on any block, which is readily apparent to the casual observer.

The distribution of dwellings in Tacoma's North Slope Historic District is fairly dense, but this varies from block to block. While historic residential structures dominate, there have been contemporary multifamily apartment dwellings introduced into the neighborhood in several locations. When the District was platted, a 25-foot wide lot was the norm. Most early houses utilized an entire block for the house and garage. As time went on, portions of the block were sold off and houses were built on 1, 2 or more lots.

Setbacks are various and usually deep enough to give most dwellings separation from the street.-Sidesetbacks were not mandated by the city and some houses are built almost lot-line to lot-line. In some cases roofs overhang from one house to the next; in other cases, 40 feet may separate each house. And for every rule, there is an exception in the District. For example, where N 11th St. intersects N Steele, an apartment house, (1415 N 11<sup>th</sup> St.) is built triangular shaped from sidewalk to sidewalk with only a 3 ft. setback.

Due to the slope of the ground, rising up from N I St., many houses are raised above street grade and retaining walls have been built along the sidewalk. They range in material from stone, to granite, to concrete. Today, stacked concrete blocks are being utilized as a replacement material. There are few fenced front yards. Those that are usually have chain link or picket fences. Many old-fashioned varieties of roses, lilacs, irises, lilies, stock, phlox still exist in f1owerbeds. Hedges are of laurel or pruit and most commonly found on sides or backs of lots.

'Driveways off the main roads are infrequent and most garages are located in the alleys. It wasn't until 1995 that the first three car, front facing garage type of home was built in the District.

The streets of the District are narrow, mostly tree-lined, and often change in width as one progresses down the street. Sidewalks are a mixture of old and new, with many damaged by street tree roots. Many of the sidewalks were built by the WPA in the 1930s, and are crosshatched on 5 and 6-ft. widths.

Within the district you will find three types of streetlights. The earliest streetlights have reinforced concrete bases and fluted metal posts with glass globes. These operated electrically in a series, so when one light went out they all did. These early street lights no longer function, but still stand in some locations. The second, newer versions of the streetlights nearly duplicate the originals, but are a few inches taller. Installed in 1986, these also have fluted metal posts, but have plastic globes instead of glass globes. The

third type of streetlight found in the district is the luninaire or cobra head type of light. The cobras are found mainly on the arterials roads within the district. Also located in the District is an exposed 2-block brick street from N 9th St. from N I St. to N K St. Two other, two- ~ block sections, N 10th and N 11th from I St. to K St., are paved with cobblestones. The cobblestones reportedly M came as ballast stones brought in ships arriving from California to load lumber at Tacoma and Old Town docks. The gutters throughout the District still show the original bricks on numerous streets, with centers paved over with asphalt.

Within the district there is a new park (2002) called the North Slope Historic District Park. It was dedicated to the late Valerie Sivinski, a former Tacoma Preservation Officer and community activist who was instrumental in the" formation of the first residential historic district in Tacoma.

Development Primarily residential, within the North Slope Historic District neighborhood, you will find several churches, among them St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Christ Episcopal Church. There are also three small grocery stores, a laundry, neighborhood live theater, a service station, two taverns, a 7-11 store, prescription pharmaceutical store, professional offices, and small shops along Division Ave. and North I St.

Also of note within the district is the variety of architectural styles, which is a reflection of its development and growth pattern. The average number of homes being built spiked at three different times. The first "building boom", occurring between 1888 and 1893, and was composed of simple vernacular structures with front-end gables. During this era;the more stylish Queen Anne-and Stick style, visible expressions of the buildings' design and playful elaboration of textured surfaces, can be found. These more elaborate Queen Anne structures were made possible with the newly mass-produced millwork that was readily available at the locally level.

By 1902 the second building boom started,lasting until 1915. During this era, Tacoma's housing returned to a more classically inspired formal design. Dwellings consisted of a variety of classic and regional American signs and Craftsman style dwellings. The second boom came to an end with the onset of World War I.

The third "building boom" (1919-1929) greatly influenced building in the District. During this time, the Craftsman style gained in popularity, slowly replacing other styles of buildings. The California-inspired bungalow eventually became the most popular variant of the Craftsman style. Excellent examples of the bungalow abound in the area and can be readily observed walking along any of the streets in Tacoma's North Slope Historic District. Architectural Styles:

The majority of the structures in Tacoma's North Slope Historic District demonstrate a liberal interpretation of classic architectural styles. The styles are heavily influenced by the local topography, available materials, the skills and practices of local carpenters,

builders and architects. and especially the independent pioneering spirit of its residents. Housing styles were adapted, modified, and translated to generate a unique local flavor. Available pattern books combined varied builder skills and experience, unique geography and personal preferences to create homes that placed Victorian bays on the sides of rigid Foursquares, and Craftsman-inspired brackets and decorative shingles applied to the Foursquare and Dutch Gable homes. For example, at 1501 North 5th Street, a Victorian and a Foursquare collide; the hip roof arrests a corner turret, while the otherwise symmetrical mass is wrapped with a corner porch detailed with delicately turned wood balusters. The house at 1521 North 5th Street, also a hybrid foursquare, has a Victorian era wrap-around porch with a corner entrance, a deep, cut-out deck on the second floor, and does not regain its symmetry until it rises to the broad bracketed eaves, hipped roof and dormers. At 1619 North 9th Street, a classic foursquare corner bay hangs on to a large Craftsman house. It is this unique patchwork of styles and details that makes the periods blend together into a cohesive neighborhood.

The North Slope Historic District contains housing stock that dates from 1881 to the present. About 90 percent of the homes were built before 1955 and those that came after that date were constructed on locations where an older house was demolished. Within the district you will find a number of styles including the Stick Style, the Queen Anne, the American Foursquare, the Craftsman Style, and the Tudor Revival style. The following is a brief description of the predominant architectural styles found in the District.

One of the earliest and most distinctive styles found in the district is the Stick Style, a derivative of the Queen Anne style. This style is noted for its exterior surface decoration of wood framing which gives the expression of the inner structure of the building on the exterior. Most often found in the gable ends and upper stories, this "stick" work was usually a series of boards intersecting at right angles and applied over the clapboard surface to symbolize the structural skeleton. Sometimes diagonal boards were incorporated to resemble half timbering. Other details include a profusion of jigsaw and lath work in wood, surfaces divided into panels and a frequent use of projecting turned knobs as a single or repeated decoration. Examples of Stick Style found in the district are: 318 N I, 324 N I, 912 N I, 607 N K, 720 N K, 822 N M, 802 N J, 817 N J.

Many homes in the district were designed in or influenced by the Queen Anne style. The style emphasized vertical----- rather than horizontal proportions, and steeply pitched roofs and substantial chimneys play significant roles in the overall design. The Queen Anne style is distinguished by the use of a wide variety of elements such as towers or turrets, bay windows, overhangs and wall projections. Often stone or brick was used to highlight a first story of

wood clapboard. The upper stories are often decorated with stucco or decorative-cut wood shingles. Other characteristics include predominant use of hipped roofs, decorative brick patterns or molded brick, stained or colored glass windowpanes, and an irregular versus symmetrical plan. Examples of Queen Anne style found in the district are: 408NK, 1601N8th, 1021N5th, 903NK, 301NI, 424NM, 701NJ.

The Craftsman Style, built in the period between 1905 and 1930, is very dominant in the district. Imported originally from India, characteristics that distinguish this style are low, broad, horizontal lines, deep covered porches with wide-pitched roofs, visible structural elements like rafter tails and knee brackets, and solid porch columns. The style was usually built to blend in and extend the natural environment as much as possible. Wood siding was stained or painted earth tones, and local stone was often used for foundations or columns. Interiors are notable for their exposed beams and natural woodwork. Examples of the more decorative Craftsman dwellings found in the district are: 515, 520, 718 N Ainsworth. Other Craftsman examples are: 809 N J, 810 N J, 1018 N 5<sup>111</sup> • 1002 N L, 919 N Ainsworth, 515 N Ainsworth.

Another style found in the District is the Colonial Revival. As one of the most popular architectural styles in American history, Colonial Revival refers to a rebirth of interest in early English and Dutch houses of the Atlantic seaboard. Within the period you will find several sub-styles including the Cape Cod, the Williamsburg and the Dutch Colonial. Pure Colonial Revival homes are defined as symmetrically balanced one or two story homes of wood or brick. Typical details include multi-paned windows, modillioned cornices, pediment doorways and side gable roofs with cornice returns. Examples of the Colonial Revival found in the district are: 1315 N 5, 908 N M, 815 N M St.

Popular in the 1920s and 1930s, the Dutch Colonial style, a sub-style of the Colonial Revival, is readily identifiable in the district by its unique gambrel roof. However, under the roof is a formal Georgian Colonial design complete with a formal room layout and classically inspired details. A number of these styles of home were built in the District and are found at: 414 N Sheridan, 702 N K, 724 N I, 1114 N 11'h. 1101 N 5th Also located in the district are numerous examples of the American Foursquare design. As a type, rather than a style, the foursquare can be clothed in Craftsman, Spanish, or Colonial detailing. The form is distinguished as a two-story rectangular dwelling, usually square, but sometimes rectangular. The foursquare has a hip or pyramidal roof and sometimes boasts a variety of dormers on one or more facades. Examples of the American Foursquare found in the district are: 510 N Sheridan, 420 N Sheridan, 1509 N 5th, 710 N Cushman, 517 N Ainsworth, 1409 N Steele.

The Tudor style home takes its cues from the late medieval English buildings of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the designs range in execution from the simple cottage of a common farmer to the grand manor house of the wealthy English gentry. The American Tudor style arrived during the 1920s and 30s as a revival of the English designs. Steep roofs, casement windows, heavy chimneys and half-timbered gables appear on most Tudor homes. Examples of Tudor Revival style found in the district are: 708 N I, 1023 N Cushman, 818 N Ainsworth, 1015 N 11<sup>111</sup>, 1506 N 10<sup>111</sup> •

Within the North Slope Historic District you will also find a variety of homes that don't fit easily within a stylistic category. They may be large or small, but are usually frame constructed with a pitched or gabled roof. Examples of these homes are found at: 712 N Sheridan, 1305 N 8'h, 1508 N 7<sup>111</sup>, 1202 N 9<sup>111</sup> and 714 N Cushman.

#### Accessory Structures, Garages:

Ancillary structures are another category of building found throughout the District. Almost all of the detached garages are located in the alleys, and there is about 1 garage for every 3 houses. Most are gable-roofed and wood-framed. Usually they are clad with horizontal clapboard or drop siding, and often include one or two fixed pane windows. Flat-roofed garages are also found in the District.

Many new garages have been built in the District, as the older garages were not big enough for the longer cars of today and were replaced with garages with roll-up doors and clad in T-1-11 plywood. The apartment houses have long carports extending along the entire alley behind the apartments. A large number of garages have been creatively altered, many times, since 1950. Typical changes include additions of carports, attachment to house or to one another, installation of new garage doors, and new siding.

#### Apartment Houses:

Many of the apartment houses in the District were designed by prominent Tacoma architects. For example:

The Kellogg Apartments, 3-story, brick building built in 1908, was designed by Danmer & Cutting. The contractor was G. Frier.

A 3 story, multi-family apartment dwelling was designed in the Italianate Style and built in 1913. It is located at 417 N L St. Mrs. D. P. Wheeler, Bldr, J. E. Reeder, Contr.

Annobee Apartments at 319 N I St. is a three-story multi-family apartment structure designed in the Italianate Style. Oscar B. Clow, bldr, C. F. Dandson, contr. c.1924

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, many one-story clinker brick apartments were built.

An example is 601 N J St. built in 1951. A few of these are L shaped with courtyards in the center of the L. These clinker brick apartments are considered historic-contributing.

An example of an L shaped clinker brick apartment is located at 702 N L St.

Many two-story apartment buildings were built in the District after 1955. The city of Tacoma changed zoning in this year and inexpensive home prices allowed builders to demolish the older homes to build apartments.

#### Churches:

There are three prominent churches in the District and several smaller ones. St. Patrick's Catholic Church (1906), Immanuel Presbyterian Church (1908), and Christ Episcopal Church (1969) are the largest ones.

Others:

Commercial: A small commercial element has always had a presence in the District. Today there are only 27 buildings with commercial use. The "corner store" still exists in its historic location. There are still professional offices and they, like all but three commercial businesses, have moved to either Division Ave. or N I St. The service station, historic Richfield Oil Service Station, c 1937, still sells gas under a new name; however, its "service" element was converted to a small grocery store.

There is still a laundry, although in a different location. Originally the laundry was called the Samuel Glenn Laundry and was located at 1006 N I St. The Samuel Glenn Laundry opened in 1910 and immediately met with controversy. A 1911 article states that "Judge Clifford Rules That Plant Shall Shut Down Completely", and continues to say that so long as the plant runs, noises and smoke will necessarily trouble neighbors." The laundry was to close its doors a month from the date of the ruling.

#### Integrity and District Boundaries

Individual historic properties within the district vary in their retention of their historic character. The integrity for each property was weighed by assessing the type, extent, and alteration in the context of the District's own houses, and in the context of similar properties in the greater Tacoma area. Alterations to roof configuration, major additions, and enclosures of front porches, result in the greatest detrimental effect to integrity of design. Alterations to windows and siding, depending on degree and cumulative effect, also have detrimental effect on integrity of materials and workmanship. In general, if a small change was made, that alone does not destroy integrity.

"Historic Contributing" are properties that were built during the historic period of significance (1873-1955) and retain sufficient integrity in location, materials, design and setting, workmanship, feeling and/or association to convey a sense of history. The overall ability of the property to "read" as a construct of the historic period was the determining factor in ranking.

- Total number of Historic Contributing properties in the District = 698 or 73%

"Historic Non-Contributing" are properties that were built during the historic period of significance (1873-1955), but do not exhibit sufficient historic integrity in location, materials, design and setting, workmanship, feeling and/or association to convey a sense of history.

- Total number of Historic Non-Contributing in the District = 145 or 16%

"Non-Historic, Non-Contributing" are properties that were constructed after the period of significance (after 1955) for the district. ',

- Total number of Non-Historic Non-Contributing properties in the District = 85 or 10%

"Vacant" are parcels of land that is undeveloped. Most of the time the vacant properties in the District are' yard space of an adjacent house.



- Total number of Vacant properties in the District = 8 or 1%

#### Accessory Structures

Accessory Structures are structures that are not the primary structure on a property. They usually are garages or sheds and many show signs of being converted stables. Some accessory structures are secondary houses built on the side or rear of the lot. Historic Contributing Accessory Structures are properties that were built during the historic period of significance (1873-1955) and retain sufficient integrity in location, materials, design and setting, workmanship, feeling and/or association to convey a sense of history. The overall ability of the property to "read" as a construct of the historic

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period was the determining factor in ranking. In the case of garages, the type of door was not considered a factor in classification.

- Total number of Historic Contributing Accessory Structures properties in the District = 211 or 59%
- Total number of Historic Non-Contributing Accessory Structures in the District = 36 or 10% • Total number of Non-Historic Non-Contributing properties in the District = 110 or 31%

Combined 1,285 resources are located in the North Slope Historic District.  
Historic Contributing = 909 or 70% Historic Non-Contributing = 181 or 14% Non-Historic Non-Contributing = 195 or 16%

Inventory of Tacoma's North Slope Historic District properties

Dates given in the following inventory are based on Pierce County Assessor's records.