

In Praise of the Northwest Room

by Velda McDonald

Have you ever investigated the information available in the Northwest Room at the Tacoma Library? It has a marvelous collection for either personal genealogy or for the genealogy of your house. So most people don't think of the history of their homes as genealogy but in many ways it is the same kind of research using the same sources. And the Northwest Room has resources no other library can supply to its community. The standard items are there and we'll come back to them. The real jewel is Brian Kamens' The Tacoma neighborhoods index information on greater Tacoma neighborhoods, subdivisions, additions and housing projects from the Tacoma Daily Ledger (1883-1937), the Tacoma News Tribune (1938-1941) and other sources (call number NWR 979.778 K128T). A smaller bound version is The Tacoma house and building index information on greater Tacoma homes and buildings from the Tacoma Daily Ledger (1883-1919) with a similar (NWR 979.778 T121T). NWR denotes items available in the North West Room of the main library. All of these materials are research materials and not available for circulation.

The North West Room has R.L. Polk's city directories available. They were first published in 1885 with spouses listed beginning in 1911. It is cross referenced by address for the first time in 1928. If your house was built after 1928 you do not need to know who occupied it to find it. Just look up the address and you will know. You can make this work for older houses, to a point. With the possibility that the person who lived at an address in 1928, was there in 1927, you can work backward. It isn't foolproof but a start.

I used the city directories to add to the information that was available for two of the bed and breakfast houses in another article. For example, the story of the Cushman house apartment conversion places it in the 1940s. The city directory for 1942 listed Frank C Hart as the occupant. I decided to check the telephone directory for 1945. (These are also available in the NWR.) Frank C Hart, Dr. was listed at the 723 N Cushman address, in apartment 3. We could decide, from

this information, that the conversion took place in the 40s and that Dr. Hart was responsible. Additional information, Dr. Frank C. Hart had an office in the Fidelity Building with the telephone number, Broadway 2685. Using the city directories and telephone directories, I found that in 1945, the 619 North K house was occupied by Fredrick D. Dean who was the owner of Dean Drug Co. The Drug Store was located at 2612 6th Ave. The telephone number was Main 2726. That address puts Dean Drugs in the same block with Shakabrah Java (for newer residents of the North Slope).

Reprint from Trolley Times Oct Nov Dec 2003