

North Slope Historic District

Where Yesterday meets Today

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form Section 7 Description

{The nomination form submitted to the National Park Service has two narrative descriptions, Section 7, called "Description" and Section 8, called "Statement of Significance". The following is a condensed version of Section 7.}

The North Slope Historic District is a trapezoidal-shaped residential district located in Tacoma, Washington, on a portion of land above the south shore of Commencement Bay. The area is known to most of us 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 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. It 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. The District lies on a gentle hillside with the high point 400 ft. above sea level at the intersection of N 8th and Cushman Ave

As a summary, the following resources were found in the district:

Historic Contributing buildings	698 or 73%
Historic Non-Contributing buildings	145 or 16%
Non-Historic Non-Contributing	85 or 10%
Vacant	8 or 1%
Total Buildings	936
Total Accessory Structures	357

TOTAL CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES 909

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 any one stage of growth. Seventy-eight percent of the homes were built prior to 1930. It took an additional 25 years for another 12 percent of the homes to be added. Such a development pattern has resulted in the varied architectural style and types found on any block.

Setbacks are various and usually deep enough to give most dwellings separation from the street. Side setbacks 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.

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. Many of the sidewalks were built by the WPA in the 1930s, and are crosshatched on 5 and 6-ft. widths. Driveways off the main roads are infrequent and most garages are accessed from the alleys. It wasn't until 1995 that the first three car, front facing garage type of home was built in the District.

Within the district you will find three types of streetlights. Also located in the District is an exposed 2-block brick street. Two other, two-block sections are paved with cobblestones. The cobblestones reportedly 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 of streets paved over with asphalt.

Within the district there is a new park (established 2002) called the North Slope Historic District Park. Also you will find several churches. St. Patrick's Catholic Church (1906), Immanuel Presbyterian Church (1908), and Christ Episcopal Church (1969) are the largest ones.

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 variety of styles including the Stick Style, the Queen Anne, the American Foursquare, the Craftsman Style, and the Tudor Revival style.

The variety of architectural styles, is a reflection of the District's 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, Queen Anne and Stick style predominate.

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 Foursquare designs and Craftsman style dwellings. The second boom came to an end with the onset of World War I.

The third "building boom", from 1919 to 1929, greatly influenced building in the District. During this time, the Craftsman style gained in popularity, slowly replacing other building styles.

Ancillary structures are another category of building found throughout the District. Almost all of the detached garages are located off the alleys, with 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. 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.

Many of the apartment houses in the District were designed by prominent Tacoma architects. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, many one-story clinker brick apartments were built. These clinker brick apartments are considered historic-contributing. Many two-story apartment buildings were built in the District after 1955. The city of Tacoma changed zoning in that year and inexpensive home prices allowed builders to demolish the older homes to build apartments.

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.

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 laundry was built in 1910.