

Historic Homes Come in all Sizes

By Elizabeth Anderson

Past Historic Preservation Officer, Tacoma WA

When considering the historic significance of any district, impressive size and elaborate styles do not particularly equal historic and important. The reverse is often true. In residential historic districts, smaller homes - cottages and bungalows built during the late 1800s and first half of the 20th Century - figure in the historic fabric of neighborhoods nationwide and especially in the North Slope Historic District. Concern for preservation of this walkable, welcoming neighborhood motivated residents to ask the City of Tacoma to add the North Slope neighborhood to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places more than 25 years ago.

To understand the historic qualities of the North Slope neighborhood, be sure to take note of homes of modest size and ornamentation, not just of the diverse, eclectic building styles and impressive large homes. Together, they represent the lives of the builders of this place, which continues to feel just right to many of us.

Small houses have deep personal historic qualities because of their residents who were part of the life of the city through good times and bad. Houses that remain tell of the times and styles in which they were built; looking a bit further can give insight to their early residents.

The North Slope was first developed as an alternative to what was then perceived as the wilder side of waterfront workers in the homes and saloons of Old Town. North Slope residents were people who participated in the commercial, domestic, and civic development of Tacoma while just going about their own daily lives.

The diversity of occupations among them is one reason the district is historically significant. The homes, the buildings themselves, represent this diversity with their varieties and mixtures of styles.

Most of the North Slope's smaller houses are Pacific Northwest versions of the vernacular residential styles popular in the United States prior to 1940. A vernacular mode or style results from a modest approach to design and construction specific to a region and period. The builders, who are seldom architects, rely on the use of local materials and construction techniques. Vernacular house types often carry out simplified elements of style.



1001 N 9th St. Hugh P. Swann Home, Built in 1925 Photo c. 1977

Craftsman Bungalow. Craftsman elements include eave brackets and window configuration. Windows appear original. Roof accented with triangular eyebrow windows. Porch roof distinguished by rafters with curved ends. Horizontal wood clapboard siding.



1515 N 9th St. Edger M. and Eva Phelps Home, 1925 Photo c. 1998

Fred H. Madson, builder Residential Vernacular. Brick, with side-gabled roof and small gabled front porch extension supported on decorative brackets. The centered front door is flanked by wood panels and large picture windows. Home of Edger Phelps, district freight agent for Canadian Pacific RR Co. & Duluth S. Shore & Atlantic RR

Continued on page 4

From page 3

In Tacoma's North Slope, vernacular residences will have general forms and details drawn from Craftsman, Queen Anne, or other varieties of American styles. In a compact version, Craftsman becomes a bungalow: often one-story, with a deep porch with roof supported by square columns, and visible roof brackets; built with wood, wood siding and stone. Queen Anne, popular in the late 1800s and into the very early 1900s, becomes more of a folk Victorian, with vertical lines, a steeply pitched roof, and a bit of ornamental woodwork. The American Colonial type maintains a symmetrical appearance, with a central front door and a small porch capped with a gable-end roof.

Using available materials, local carpenters and builders adapted and modified housing styles, generating a unique local flavor. Much of their work combines elements of more than one style —just for fun, or personal favorites, it seems. Their homes reflect the character of the owner: their tastes, their means, their origins, their aspirations, not only the tastes of the time when they were built.

The work of city and state historians, not only professionals, but dozens of volunteers, documented the built details and added early resident's names and occupations to the addresses. Their effort established both local and national historic significance for the homes and district. They found unique buildings and people who were railroad employees, bookkeepers, grocers, newspaper workers, homemakers, lumbermen, automobile salespersons, carpenters, postal employees, florists, tailors, electricians, a watch-maker, widows, bank cashiers, teachers, machinists, and a baseball player. All of these people built and made their homes here on the quiet streets above Commencement Bay.

Let's appreciate and celebrate these smaller homes, the lives and times that created them - and our own time with them.

So how do you find out if the house that catches your interest had notable builders or residents? What are the stylistic elements? The North Slope Historic District website offers easily accessed descriptions developed for the National Register.

<http://tacomanorthslope.org/>

Further information on properties, including archival maps, newspaper articles, and city directories can be found using this guide, produced for the Northwest Room of the Tacoma Public Library. Or call Spencer Bowman, Librarian, at 253-280-2800

<https://northwestroom.tacomalibrary.org/index.php/buildingsguide>



1106 N M ST



**924 N SHERIDAN
PHOTO C. 1977**



913 - 915 N AINSWORTH



1204 - 1206 N 9TH



1014 - 1016 N 12TH