

# ARTIFACTS FROM ORIGINAL NSHD UTILITIES

By Roger Johnson

The North Slope Historic District is rich with classic architecture from the early years of Tacoma's infancy. Trees line the narrow streets first designed for horse and buggy and narrow trolleys. Beneath the pavement are the original utilities, installed shortly after the turn of the century. Water, sewer, storm drains and industrial gas pipes all reside under the surface.

The industrial gas was produced by a coal distillation plant located on the Foss waterway. The coal gas provided fuel for gas lights, cooking and heat. The gas plant closed when natural gas became available and proved to be cleaner and cheaper. The water lines, sewer lines and storm drains, however, are still in use. The city has moved forward with some select repaving of streets in the NSHD and before the paving they are replacing those original utilities. At the corner of N. 8<sup>th</sup> and N. J St. they removed an original sewer manhole dating from 1906. The cast iron lid at the street level hid a brick cylinder 4 ft. in diameter that was 12 ft. deep. It was made in- place by masons, brick by brick. As it neared the surface it tapered to the size of the manhole cover. A graphic reminder that in the early days, manual labor built this city.

As the crew replacing the sewer reached N. K St. they came across another reminder of the past - rail spikes from the North K Street Trolley Line that ran out to UPS. They were found in the dirt beneath the old road surface, an historic reminder that before the private car dominated our streets, public rail transportation was available in the NSHD.

The obvious historic reminders are visible here, but there is history beneath our feet too.



Rail spikes are 5 5/8 long