

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form Section 8 Statement of Significance

{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 8.}



Tacoma's North Slope Historic District is eligible for the National Register as a cohesive neighborhood that represents the broad pattern of the social and economic history of Tacoma. The district represents a cross culture of individuals, both famous and ordinary, whose skills and talents contributed to the development and growth of the city. Early residents included professionals, business proprietors, railroad employees, independent trade people, and celebrities, all living in a close knit neighborhood.

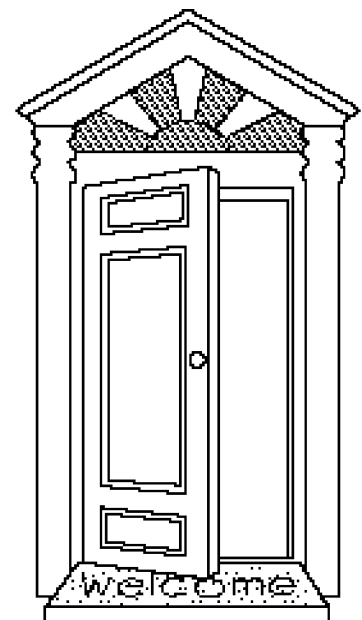
The district is also eligible as an area that embodies the distinctive characteristics of homes built in Tacoma from 1881 to 1953. Many of these dwellings represent the work of a master craftsmen and/or architect, and a majority of the resources possess high artistic values representing significant characteristics of architectural styles popular during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The homes in the North Slope Historic District are uniquely separated from surrounding neighborhoods by the street layout of the 1880s. The streets were laid out wide at Commencement Bay and narrow at the south end of the District where N Grant Ave. runs between Division Ave and N Steele St.

While the District's homes are only part of Tacoma's rich historical treasure chest of historic homes, this area offers a high concentration of intact historic resources.

The settlement pattern and building styles are a direct reflection of the periods of national economic growth and stagnation as their dramatic fluctuations impacted Tacoma. Stylistic influences from the East Coast, Midwest, and California combine with local vernacular styles and material created a unique local appearance. The common influences and represented styles include Victorian and Stick style structures, the classic American Foursquare, the Craftsman style, and the California bungalow. Three waves of development, plus architectural and social trends, combined to create a neighborhood reflecting local history, character and diversity.

As Tacoma's North Slope Historic District developed, buyers had many available lots to purchase. This wide range of choices gave rise to a checkerboard or hopscotch pattern of development. Such a pattern is reflected today in the building styles and construction dates of the houses throughout the area where the Victorians and Foursquare homes are juxtaposed with Craftsman bungalows. The buildings manifest the influence of locally available lumber and an eclectic Northwestern mixing of styles. These physical features are distinguishing characteristics of the homes in the District.



The period of significance for Tacoma's North Slope Historic District begins in 1881, the date of the oldest, still-standing house in the District. By 1902, 25 percent of the houses in the District had been built and by 1914, one-half of the homes had been built. By 1929, 78% of the homes had been built in the District. Building became a slow steady process after that and by 1955 another 11 percent had been added making a total of 89 percent.



By the end of 1955 homes that fit the form and feel of the "older" homes stopped. In 1955 the City of Tacoma changed the zoning laws encouraging apartment houses to be built. As a result, many historic homes in the district were destroyed in the name of progress.

Early in the 1850s, the tree-lined shores of Commencement Bay began to lure sawmill operators and loggers eager to provide lumber for the California Gold Rush, and quickly a tiny, dreary lumber-mill settlement grew at the mouth of the Puyallup River, on what is known today as Tacoma's Tide Flats. Tacoma officially began in 1852, when Nicholas Delin filed a Donation land claim at the head of Commencement Bay and built a small sawmill to supply local settlers with lumber. Many of his mill workers built cabins in the area around the mill.

The Donation Land Law of 1850 brought growth to the Oregon Territory (present day Washington State was a part of this territory). The law provided that 160 acres could be given to each settler. To obtain title, the settler had to cultivate his claim for four years. The Homestead Act passed Congress in May 1862, and provided that a settler could obtain title to 160 acres if he lived on the land and improved it. In addition, a settler could obtain title to 160 acres if he paid \$1.25 per acre for the land, and by purchasing the land direct there was no residence requirement. The Homestead Act attracted thousands to the West.

Also influencing development in Tacoma was legislation signed by President Abraham Lincoln, on July 2, 1864, which offered up to 40 million acres of public land as reward for completion of a railroad between the Great Lakes and Puget Sound. Like previous laws, this one allowed public land to be purchased for \$1.25 per acre. These land claims were for 320 acres to individual male settlers or 640 acres to married couples. Speculators were eager to stake claims and develop their homestead because word was out that a railroad was coming.

Job Carr, a Civil War veteran, was one such speculator. He arrived in Commencement Bay in November 1864, and filed a claim on the southern shore of Commencement Bay where it flows into Puget Sound. In 1865 his sons, Anthony and Howard, helped him build a cabin in present day Old Town. Carr had learned the Northern Pacific Railroad would be building a line to Puget Sound which would bring growth to the area, and he hoped his claim would be the terminus of the railroad.



Carr built his cabin and settled in to wait for the railroad. However, it was M. M. McCarver, a Portland promoter that got real estate development started in Tacoma. McCarver promoted his new "Tacoma City" to the railroad, and sold lots that brought in residents.

During this time, speculators were still unsure of the location for the "end" of the railroad and had to wait until 1873 to learn that Tacoma was selected as the terminus of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad. Unfortunately for Carr and McCarver, the railroad stopped two miles short of

McCarver's "Tacoma City". Instead the railroad started its own city, called "New Tacoma". This left McCarver and his supporters high and dry. The Railroad selected the New Tacoma site because of the large accumulation of property and long stretch of waterfront that a group of shrewd developers had managed to assemble just south of the fledgling community of Tacoma City.

Once the ending site was chosen, the Northern Pacific Railroad engaged an aggressive campaign to attract investors and working families from the East and Mid-west. The Tacoma Land Company, headquartered in the Northern Pacific Railroad Building, posted invitations advertising:

Land speculators, as well as every type of businessman and entrepreneurs began to move into the bustling railroad town along Commencement Bay where the rails ended and wharves and mills quickly proliferated. As a result, Tacoma rapidly developed as an important point of shipment for the Pacific Northwest's vast untapped natural resources (and eventually the many agricultural products of the interior) to destinations along the West Coast and to the far off Orient and South Pacific. The city's importance expanded exponentially when the railroad tracks were finally completed to St. Paul, Minnesota in 1887, connecting Tacoma with all points East.



Land speculation in Tacoma led to the platting of residential lots far in advance of the market and McCarver, after hearing that he lost his bid to have his city become the ending point of the railroad, shifted his focus on the North Slope becoming a residential neighborhood. Quickly he hired a civil engineer to survey the property that he had purchased from Job Carr. Carr's sons, Howard and Anthony, ran the lines and the survey was soon completed. The street plat for this area was laid out starting parallel to the waterfront of Commencement Bay, and continuing up the hill. When the plat for "New Tacoma" was completed, the streets followed a north-south, east-west grid making a 45-degree offset in the previously laid out area. The offset remains today and uniquely defines Tacoma's North Slope Historic District.

Tacoma City became known as Old Town, and that area became a working class neighborhood occupied by fishermen, longshoremen and mill workers who patronized the many saloons found there. The North Slope area was considered part of "New Tacoma" and it became the middle class neighborhood. Then in 1886 when Tacoma submitted its territorial charter, the two cities joined together and became "Tacoma".

The area of the bounded by the North Slope Historic District, first belonged to Job Carr, his son Howard Carr, and James W. King. These three had the original homestead claims for almost all of the property in the District. Job Carr's farmhouse was located at the present day address of 715 N Sheridan. Roland Borhek, an architect, who replaced Carr's farmhouse with a two-story frame house, tore down his farmhouse in 1920.

The Pacific Northwest's untapped natural resources were a draw that caused the population of Tacoma to grow rapidly. Many people came to "get rich", as they expected money to flow in because the railroad would open up the mid-western and east coast manufacturing centers to the area's products.

The waterfront tracks, warehouses and docks were part of an infrastructure that connected shipments of grain, lumber and manufactured goods to stations and ports up and down the West Coast. The fact that Tacoma's port was sheltered from all except north winds played a major factor in the selection of Tacoma as the western terminus of the railroad and as a shipping port.

While all of this was occurring, the North Slope Historic District neighborhood maintained a clear physical proximity to the business and commercial core of Tacoma. As such, the neighborhood still attracted both middle and upper class citizens. The people who built Tacoma lived here.

Streetcars took residents to the North Slope neighborhood from the downtown. Cable cars were used in the neighborhood until 1938. They were replaced by trolleys then replaced by buses. The old trolley lines are still visible in N 11th St. from N L St. South to N Cushman Ave. where a concrete ribbon, a few feet wide, extends down the center of the entire street.

As more and more families came to settle in Tacoma, city officials wanted to insure that residential areas remained residential. By 1895, Tacomans had begun to establish zones where certain uses, specifically saloons, would be allowed. Local property owners could reject the location of other business within residential parts of Tacoma. By 1918, Tacoma had a zoning code, dividing the city into residential and industrial areas. A planning commission came two years later.

