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John Owen was responsible for the administration, research and graphic production of this report.

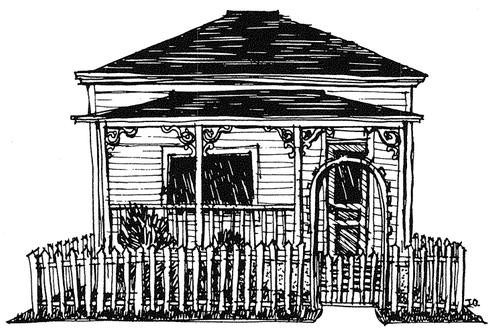
The inventory technical staff and their primary responsibilities were:

Mauri Tamarin - Graphics
Ron Christiansen - Photographic Processing

Most importantly, the project was dependent upon the work of volunteers from the community whose cooperation and efforts were crucial to its success.

CENTRAL AREA VOLUNTEERS

Jim Russell
Paul Armistead
Judd Eddy
Geoff Robison
Emrys Black
Evelyn Rubenstein
Allen Nemeiroff
Clint Buswell
Rick King
Larry Kreismann
Paul Putnam
Lin McGinn
John Hendrickson
Mary Stuck
Emery Roberts
Mike Dodd
Fred Hobby
Paul Stappenbeck
Steve Sears
Steve Smith
Larry Thomas
Frank Lau
Scott Lawson
Dan Ekoes
Mark Bessermin



Since the information included is preliminary, corrections and additional information is solicited to provide refinement of the documents. Please send information to Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, 714 Smith Tower, Seattle 98104

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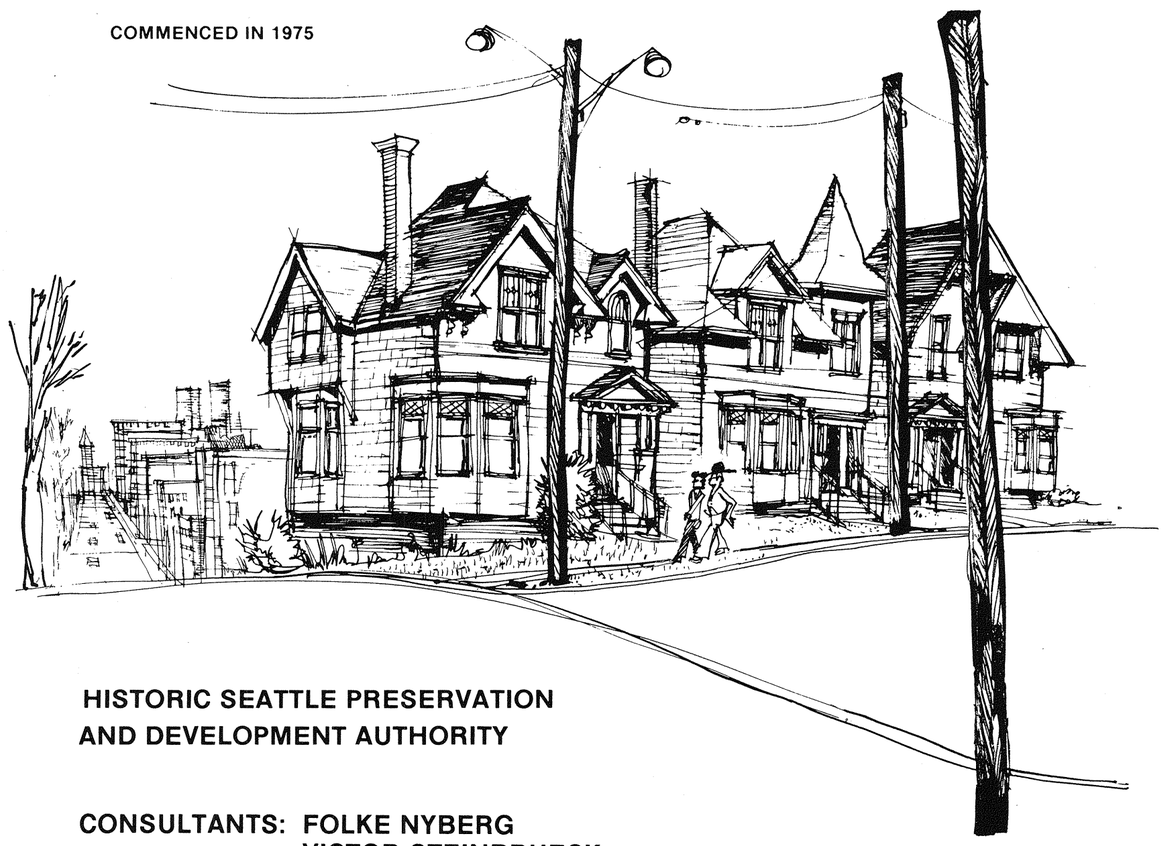
CENTRAL AREA

AN INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS AND URBAN DESIGN RESOURCES

COMMENCED IN 1975



HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

CONSULTANTS: FOLKE NYBERG
VICTOR STEINBRUECK

HISTORY

The Central Area, unlike many other Seattle communities such as Ballard, Fremont, or Georgetown never existed as an autonomous town. Nor was its development part of a unified real estate scheme with coordinated public improvements and citizen support such as in Mount Baker. Thus, the history of the Central Area reflects the changing character of its residents and the general environmental conditions which have gradually, but constantly changed over the years.

The Central Area contains some of Seattle's oldest residential neighborhoods. This district was logged off quite early; the logs being skidded down Yesler Way, which was then known as skid road, to the saw mill. This left a large, flat area suitable for residential development as soon as convenient transportation could be provided up the steep slopes from the business district. In 1884, a hack (wagon) line was started, making these trips daily out Jackson Street to Lake Washington. In 1888, Seattle celebrated the opening of its first cable car, which ran out Yesler Way to the lake and returned on Jackson Street. The area then quickly developed into a middle class residential neighborhood with institutions such as churches, synagogues, and hospitals, public schools, fire stations and libraries following in due order.

From the early 1890's, the Central Area was the home of different racial and ethnic minority groups. The history of the settlement of Black families into the area is particularly interesting, as it was related to a unique Black pioneer, Mr. William Gross. Gross was born in Washington D.C. in 1835. After military service in the Orient under Commodore Perry, Gross was asked by Washington's territorial Governor Stevens to open a hotel in Seattle. His hotel, named "Our House" was the city's second largest at the time. He assumed a dual role as hotel owner and labor employer which led him into friendships with Yesler, Denny and other Seattle pioneers. Between his arrival in Seattle in 1859 and his death in 1898, Gross acquired considerable property and acted as leader of the local Black community. In 1890, Mr. Gross was given a large section of the hill between 21st and 23rd Avenues near Madison Street as settlement for a debt. The Gross household moved to the hill and were soon followed by several other Black families. Despite opposition from existing White residents, the area quickly became Seattle's most important and stable Black neighborhood. Soon after, Blacks began moving to other Central Area neighborhoods, most notably in the vicinity of Jackson Street and Cherry Street.

The migration of Japanese Americans into the neighborhood began in about 1916 and continued until World War II. The major portion of them settled in the vicinity of Yesler Way. The Judkins neighborhood was the center of the German and Italian communities at the beginning of the century, and the several synogogues in the Central Area reflects the once significant Jewish population.

As the years passed, however, middle class residents moved out which left the aging houses to low income minorities and elderly citizens. Housing blight, exploitation and disinvestment (redlining) contributed to the decline of environmental conditions and exacerbated social problems. Increasing arterial traffic through the area to outlying suburbs further fragmented the neighborhoods and the continued threats of the R. H. Thompson freeway contributed to instability.

Beginning in the middle 1950's various planning and community action efforts have been made to improve conditions in the Central Area. In 1956, a group of citizens began seeking ways to obtain funds for local improvements. Before federal funds could be received, a Washington state law was required. It took several years for an Urban Renewal Program to be initiated but finally in 1964, the Yesler/Atlantic Urban Renewal Project was commenced.

The major objective was to remove substandard housing and replace it with high density, government subsidized units. In 1969, after scores of buildings had been demolished within the Yesler/Atlantic project area, the federal administration removed the housing subsidies which would have encouraged new development. Thus, there remains acres of vacant land varying in size from single lots to full blocks scattered throughout the Yesler and Atlantic neighborhoods.

In addition to the Urban Renewal project, the federally funded Model City's Program was awarded grants in 1968 to improve the area's economic and social conditions. Although this resulted in some social and economic benefits to the Central Area residents, the program did not focus on physical environmental conditions. Thus, despite the extensive improvement efforts, there remain significant problems to be solved if the Central Area is to become the strong and stable community that community leaders hope for.

References

City of Seattle Department of Community Development. "Mann Minor Neighborhood Improvements Plan". Seattle, 1975

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION

As its name implies, the Central Area is located at Seattle's geographic center, midway between the Central Business District and Lake Washington. Topographically it consists of a series of north-south ridges and valleys. The ridge tops run mainly along 18th Avenue and 20th Avenue South from Madison Street to Lake Washington Boulevard, 23rd Avenue in the vicinity of Garfield High School and all along 30th Avenue. Except in the areas north of East Madison Street and along 20th Avenue South, there are few dramatic viewpoints.

In fact, the Central Area consists of several physically distinct neighborhoods: Yesler/Atlantic, Judkins, Mann/Minor, and Stevens. There is no single community focal point or "town center" which physically unites the Central Area into a cohesive whole. Moreover, major arterials, namely Yesler Way, South Jackson, Twenty-third Avenue and Empire Way further fragment the neighborhoods.

Besides the lack of an identifiable and stabilizing physical structure, another major physical problem is the maintenance of the housing stock. The highest concentration of Seattle's oldest houses lies in the Central Area (see "Common Building Types"). Some of these are in excellent condition, but a high proportion require immediate attention. However, even the oldest portions of the existing housing stock should be regarded as an important economic, social and historical resource. Much of the existing housing can be economically revitalized to provide safe, sound and pleasant residences.

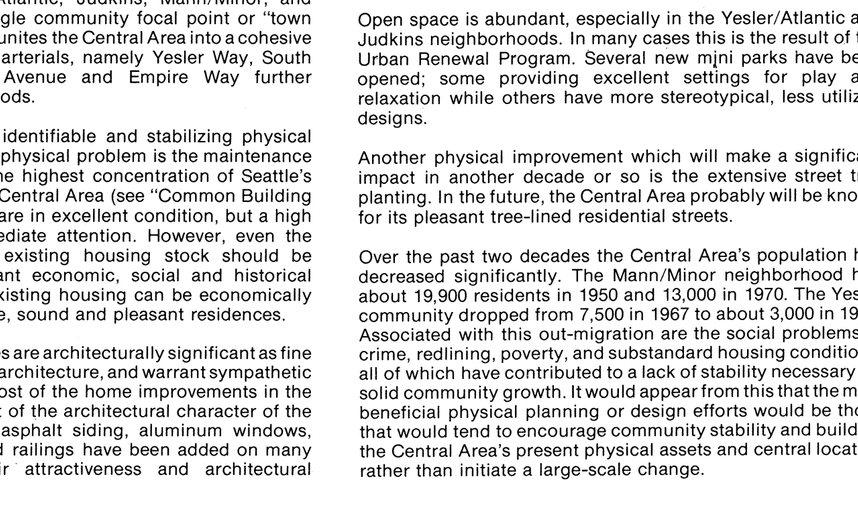
Many groups of old houses are architecturally significant as fine examples of early Seattle architecture, and warrant sympathetic restoration. Presently, most of the home improvements in the area are to the detriment of the architectural character of the buildings. Metallic and asphalt siding, aluminum windows, metallic porch posts and railings have been added on many homes, destroying their attractiveness and architectural authenticity. There is a critical need for a program that would encourage home improvements that are consistent with the houses' architectural qualities.

There are many important institutional buildings. The Garfield High School, Providence Hospital, the S.O.I.C. building and the many important religious structures serve as visual and cultural landmarks. The Yesler Cultural Arts Center, the Cherry Hill Neighborhood Facility and the Odessa Brown Health Station are all excellent examples of adaptive use projects which have created community facilities out of old institutional buildings.

Open space is abundant, especially in the Yesler/Atlantic and Judkins neighborhoods. In many cases this is the result of the Urban Renewal Program. Several new mini parks have been opened; some providing excellent settings for play and relaxation while others have more stereotypical, less utilized designs.

Another physical improvement which will make a significant impact in another decade or so is the extensive street tree planting. In the future, the Central Area probably will be known for its pleasant tree-lined residential streets.

Over the past two decades the Central Area's population has decreased significantly. The Mann/Minor neighborhood had about 19,900 residents in 1950 and 13,000 in 1970. The Yesler community dropped from 7,500 in 1967 to about 3,000 in 1976. Associated with this out-migration are the social problems of crime, redlining, poverty, and substandard housing conditions, all of which have contributed to a lack of stability necessary for solid community growth. It would appear from this that the most beneficial physical planning or design efforts would be those that would tend to encourage community stability and build on the Central Area's present physical assets and central location rather than initiate a large-scale change.



COMMON BUILDING TYPES

An important chapter of Seattle's architectural history is recorded in the Central Area's many late nineteenth-century houses. Sometimes unadorned, but at other times lavished with Victorian "gingerbread", these houses represent the common middle-class housing types of that era. Although many have been stripped of their ornament, and unsympathetically refaced with aluminum windows and artificial siding, others are in mint condition. Between these two extremes is the large majority of the housing stock that has been neglected and holds great potential for sympathetic restoration.

A most valuable public program would be one that would assist homeowners to renovate their houses in harmony with their unique architectural character, thus enhancing both the visual character and liveability of the residential neighborhoods.

Among the varieties of late nineteenth-century houses are the Pioneer Style, the Classic Box, and the Ornate Victorian. The Pioneer Style houses are generally the oldest houses, built by the area's first settlers. Typically, they have two stories, simple gable roofs, single porches and little or no ornamentation. This type of house is common throughout New England and the Midwest and reflects the early settlers' need to house themselves in a simple, direct, and familiar manner.

As Seattle's economy grew in the 1870's, 1880's and 1890's, more sophisticated homes appeared. The Classic Box with its hipped roof, and rectangular symmetrical shape, represents an effort on the part of its owner to attain a more formalized and traditionally conservative status. The classic box house was quite popular in Seattle and variations of this type were built until World War I.

Examples of ornate Victorian architecture began to appear in Seattle in the late 1870's. The term Victorian Style actually refers to a wide range of eclectic styles which developed in England during the reign of Queen Victoria. By the time these styles reached Seattle, their principles and devices were so diluted and transmuted that the general term Victorian is specific enough to define this direction. Also, the Victorian Style represents an attitude towards house design favoring vertically oriented assymetrical massing, romantic imagery and flamboyant ornamentation.

Of course, there are many examples of early twentieth-century houses scattered throughout the area. These cover a wide range of stylistic treatments ranging from Bungalow and Craftsman examples to the Tudor and Colonial Revival.

Another architectural attitude that has been traditionally strong in the Central Area is the reuse of existing buildings to house new activity. Long before "adaptive use" was a key word in architect's vocabulary, Central Area residences were remodeling old store fronts to house "store front churches", meeting halls, and cafes. More recently, there have been several fine examples of buildings being effectively recycled to provide space for new public facilities, such as the Odessa Brown Health Station, the Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center and the Cherry Hill Neighborhood Facility.

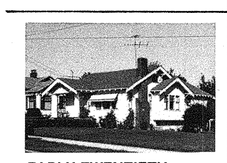
PIONEER STYLE HOUSE 1855-1900 Typical of Seattle's earliest homes, featuring a simple rectangular plan with porch, a gable roof and little or no ornament.

DECORATED PIONEER STYLE HOUSE 1860-1900 Similar to the plain pioneer style but with simple ornament, made either with standard milled members or scroll saw cut pieces.

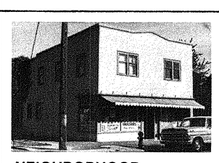
CLASSIC BOX 1870-1918 A symmetrical, hipped roof and a bulky rectangular form are the identifying characteristics of this pre-World War I house type.

VICTORIAN STYLE 1975-1900 Characterized by asymmetric composition of elements and "gingerbread" ornament, there are wide variations in original design and existing condition.

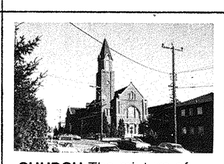
COMPANY COTTAGE 1885-1910 Standardized houses differing only in minor details were typically built for mill workers' families and are precursors of today's tract homes.



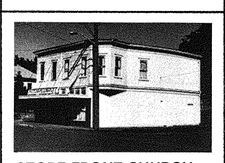
EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOUSE 1900-1930 Bungalow, Craftsman, Tudor, Colonial and eclectic combinations of these styles are scattered throughout the Central Area.



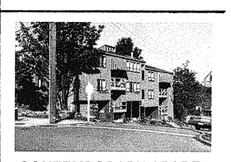
NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY Providing for day-to-day needs in a personalized manner, family-owned corner groceries serve as intimate neighborhood focal points.



CHURCH The mixture of racial, ethnic and religious groups residing here is reflected in the variety of religious buildings scattered throughout the area.



STORE FRONT CHURCH Relatively unique to the Central Area, these churches show creative improvisation based on social and cultural needs.

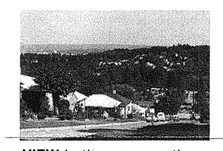


CONTEMPORARY APARTMENT The new apartments vary widely in their sensitivity toward human needs and urban context.

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENTS

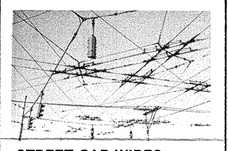
With the exception of several landmark institutional buildings, the Central Area's most important urban design resources are associated with its residentially-scaled streetscape qualities. Groups of houses and apartments of similar sizes and designs are important in establishing the architectural character of the individual neighborhoods. Likewise, large plantings of street trees add much to the pleasantness of several areas. Although panoramic views are not common, sections north of East Madison Street and to the south of Jackson Street have quite spectacular territorial views. Several mini parks which have recently been built add interest to the otherwise rigid rectilinear grid street pattern. Because one of the community objectives is to establish more stable, pleasant residential neighborhoods, small-scaled amenities such as these are particularly important.

The vast areas of vacant property are a neglected resource. These spaces offer an opportunity for innovative types of housing development. There is also a potential use as community or recreational open spaces. The painted murals, wall paintings and signs comprise the area's most interesting and characteristic public art. Sometimes created by skilled painters, and other times by untrained residents simply wishing to express themselves, the murals are public art in the truest sense, adding spice to the local townscape.



VIEW In the areas north of Madison Street, the eastward views are an important amenity.

A



STREET CAR WIRES Resembling the handiwork of a giant spider, the web of wires is so extensive that it becomes a decorative, space-defining element at the intersection.

B

STREET TREES Besides screening some noise and visual pollution, street trees can add a sense of spatial enclosure and imageability.

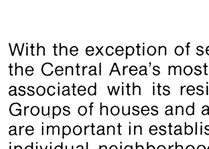
C

STREET MARKERS A small detail that adds a pleasant touch of verbal communication to an otherwise non-descript pavement.

D

VACANT LOTS Often the result of extensive Urban Renewal clearance, such open space is presently unused except by children at play and gives the area almost a semi-rural appearance.

E

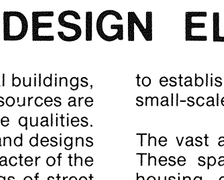


RESIDENTIAL GARDEN This impeccably kept Japanese Style garden is the contribution of one individual Mr Nakano and has become a local landmark.

F

PAINTED MURAL An expression of the Black Awareness Movement, this colorful painting is a good example of "People's Art."

G

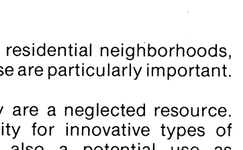


APARTMENT BUILDING This well-maintained, brightly-painted apartment is such a strong element on Yesler Way that it acts as a visual gateway to the Central Area.

H

HOUSE GROUP Once adorned with a Victorian ornament, this group, with proper restoration could still be a unique example of a nineteenth-century residential streetscape.

I



APARTMENT GROUP This row of apartments with consistent setback and massing make the 1100 block of 17th Avenue a unique urban street.

J

SPRUCE STREET PARK Landscape Arch: C. Jordan This well-used park includes a pleasant, naturalistically-landscaped space; a rare feature in the Central Area.

K

FIRE HOUSE PARK Landscape Arch: Richard Haag. One of the City's more imaginative mini-parks which provides play and relaxation opportunities for all age groups.

L

NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS CENTER There are several small commercial nodes scattered throughout, each serving as a local activity focus.

M

PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL The impressive massing accentuated by the tower makes this a pleasant landmark as well as meeting the strict functional requirements of a hospital.

N

SPOT CLEANERS A landmark which poses the question: "At what point does a building become a sign? Or, when is a colorful sign a work of art?"

O