



Queen Anne Cobblestone

The Newsletter of the Queen Anne Historical Society

November 2014

All in the (Almost One) Family: Polson House

By Michael Herschensohn, PhD.



Early view of the Polson House. Photo from The Argus: A-Y-P Edition.

Perry and Kate Polson's house at 103 Highland Drive is simply exceptional. The Polsons and their descendants owned and occupied the house that hovers high over Highland Drive's intersection with First Avenue North from 1908 to 2004. In those 96 years, the family loved the house, and however they altered it, they never jeopardized the views to the city, Elliott Bay and the Olympic Mountains. Consequently, they left us one of the best preserved residences in the city whose new owners, Rosemary and Ken Willman, have done a major and meticulous restoration since buying the house in 2011.

It is rare to have a building stay practically unaltered and almost forever in the hands of the same family. The Stimson-Green Mansion at Seneca and Minor on Capitol Hill is similarly untouched. There is a sweet coincidence between the Polson and Stimson-Green houses, since the Polsons bought their plot of land in 1906 from the Stimson Land Company. The

nearly intact preservation of these two houses makes one wonder how many other Queen Anne residences remain in the family that built or first owned them. The Queen Anne Historical Society would love to know about them (president@qahistory.org), even if the first owners moved in last year.

Perry Polson's (1854-1923) story is quintessential Seattle: Swedish background, late-19th-century arrival in the Skagit Valley with the intent to farm, clever founding of a business (Polson Implement Company) that moved to Seattle just as miners flocking to Seattle arrived on their way to the Klondike and subsequent fortune that sustained at least three future generations. Following her father's death in 1870, Kate Hinckley Polson (1858-1933) moved to Seattle from Shasta City, California when her mother married her uncle. Kate was 21 when she married Perry and bore four children:

See **POLSON HOUSE** page 2

Next Meeting: November 20 at the Masonic Lodge

The November meeting of the Queen Anne Historical Society takes place at the historic Masonic Lodge #242 at 1608 4th Avenue West. Consistent with this year's theme of multi-family house, Mimi Sheridan explores the past, present and future of these small-, large- and medium-size structures that do so much to define neighborhood character. Sheridan's master's thesis, available on qahistory.org, is the go to source of information about the apartment buildings on Queen Anne's south slope. Since completing her studies, Sheridan has become one of the best regarded preservation historians in Seattle. Come a little early to explore this former telephone company building where operators once connected Queen Anne to the world. Light refreshments follow.

CHECK OUR WEBSITE

We continue to improve our website (www.qahistory.org), including better organization of our historical database and images. Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- President's Letter.....Page 3
- Kim's Musings.....Page 4



CULTURE

Queen Anne Historical Society

Page 2

POLSON HOUSE: An Untouched Jewel Over Highland Drive

from 1

Minnie, Helen, Olaf and Harold. Harold's grandson, Robert Polson Kummer, sold the house in 2004.

Inside and out, the house reflects the transition from Victorian to Craftsman design. The turret on the southwest corner repeats a feature of the Queen Anne style that nearly every large house on the hill sported up until that time. By 1908, the turret was definitely an anachronism, but its three stories of curved double-hung windows captured the phenomenal southern and western views. The Moorish pointed arches of the wrap-around porch and the Arts and Crafts influence in the carvings on the white oak newel posts add to the assortment of styles used by architects Timotheus Josenhans (1853-1929) and Norris Allan (1867-1932). Even the gable ends are stylistically different from one another with the flush timbering of the west gable contrasting with the stick style of the north and south gables. The combination of a basement with concrete scored to resemble brick, a first story clad in brick and upper story shingles set off by light-colored wood trim creates a picturesque ensemble.

The interior of the house is cleverly divided east and west between more formal family spaces on the western side with those fantastic views and servant or guest spaces on the eastern side. The formal side of the first floor is separated by pocket doors into four equal spaces:

entry hall and stair, parlor, dining room and library. The fireplace in the parlor is distinguished by beautiful tiles hand-crafted in Pasadena by Ernest Batchelder, while a projecting curved bay is the most prominent feature of the library. The ceilings of all the formal spaces on

includes the kitchen and a south-facing office or den that now forms a breakfast room integrated into the recently updated kitchen.

Upstairs the same west/east division prevails. On the west side, four bedrooms belonged to the owning family while on the east end a bedroom and bath may have been set aside for guests or the servants who kept up the 8,000-square-foot house. The master suite faces the great western view and has absorbed the sleeping porch and the northwest bedroom, now a bathroom and closet. The top floor has seen many uses. The east end holds a servant's bedroom and bath while the rest of the space may have been arranged at different times into sleeping spaces or even a living room for some of Perry and Kate's grandchildren. Photographs taken in June 1943 at Laura Polson and Lt. George Scholfield's wedding reception show the grand open space as it is today. The basement lay undisturbed until 2004 when the second owner finished it into an apartment with city views.

Marvin Anderson Architects oversaw Rosemary and Ken Willman's recent renovation and restoration of the house. We are lucky to have such an untouched

jewel preserved at a prominent spot in our neighborhood.

This article owes a great debt to The Polson House: A History by Marvin Anderson and Megan Meulemans, published by Marvin Anderson Architects, PLLC. for Historic Seattle's open house in October.



Western elevation today. Photo by Marvin Anderson Architects

the first floor are intact, with original lighting fixtures and hand-painted or stenciled ornament in realistic floral and conventionalized Arts and Crafts designs. The dining room is unusually well preserved with a clever warming oven topping the steam heated radiator. The less formal portion of the first floor

President's Letter

By Michael Herschensohn, PhD.

Although the society adopted multi-family dwellings as its theme for 2014-2015, it is mushrooming into a much larger issue. As the conversation at Union Bank on September 25 revealed, historic neighborhood character as witnessed in the Pike-Pine Corridor and along upper Queen Anne Avenue needs critical attention. A good example of the problem is the recent rejection by the city's Landmarks Preservation Board of landmark designation of the Fionia, located at 109 John Street mid-block between Warren and First North.

The Fionia is a modest building of mostly one-room studio apartments constructed in 1922. The terracotta details of this brick apartment house are simple gothic forms especially above the central entrance on John. The Queen Anne Historical Society's Landmark Preservation Committee attended the November 5 meeting of the Landmarks Preservation Board at which the landmark designation was rejected.

The society noted in its testimony that BOLA Architects, the firm that prepared the nomination, had traced more than 20 buildings in Uptown that resembled the Fionia, at least in form, function and general period of construction. BOLA concluded that because there were so many of these simple early-20th-century apartment buildings, the Fionia was not exceptional and did not meet landmark criteria. What went unsaid was the degree to which the Fionia contributed to the historic character of the neighborhood.

In my view, the vote against the Fionia raises an enormous red flag. It challenges us to define rigorously what constitutes "historic neighborhood character" and should inspire us to join with other preservation organizations, historical museums and societies to lobby for historic thematic dis-

tricts in Seattle which could protect "contributing buildings" like the Fionia. There is huge resistance in the city's Department of Neighborhoods to the creation of new historic districts with contiguous buildings (e.g. the Ballard Avenue Historic District), so the battle for thematic districts with discontinuous buildings will be even more of a struggle. It helps to have already one such thematic district, downtown's Historic Theatre District. We are already in conversations with Historic Seattle about the matter.

On yet another subject, I am thrilled to report that with support from 4Culture all 150 oral history tapes have been digitized by Jack Straw Productions. In the next month or so we'll put the last fifty history logs on our website where you'll be able to check them out and see which stories of early- to mid-20th-century life on Queen Anne you'd like to hear. When you find a recording you'd like, just send us an email at help@qahistory.org and for a small fee we'll burn a copy and send it to you. Each recording sells for \$10, which includes sales tax and postage. All we ask in addition is that you credit the society when citing a recording. Citation instructions come with each history. If you just want to listen without buying, the recordings can be heard in our archives by appointment. The stories are permanently stored in our archives and at Jack Straw, so come tornadoes, floods or earthquakes, these precious documents will always survive.

Finally, put the evening of Thursday, January 22 on your calendar for Diana James' presentation on the history of women developers in Seattle, particularly those who built apartment buildings. James is the author of *Shared Walls: Seattle Apartment Buildings, 1900-1939*, who notes, "They were a way of life, more than anything."

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“KINNEAR HOME”

Kim’s Musings: Part Two

By Kim Turner, Chair of Research Committee

I left off the Musings in the last Cobblestone regarding travels to the Uptown shopping district. If more than one of us went (major shopping), we walked down to Mercer, originally from Third North at the foot of the stairs, and after February 1952, from the house at 1207 Sixth Avenue North. From that location we still walked down to Mercer, but via Sixth to Ward Place, from there to Fifth Avenue North, then down by the Auditorium Apartments and west along Mercer to the Safeway (where the Chase Bank is today).

If we had time, we walked around the corner, crossed over to the west side of Queen Anne Avenue, and went to the record shop in the middle of the block.

G. O. Guy’s Drug Store, which I believe became a Rexall before it finally closed, was on the QA-Mercer corner. There were brand new records for purchase, and they cost \$1 each plus luxury tax. Nine tax tokens were the equivalent of the three cents tax.

We would cross back over to Van De Kamp’s, where the Pagliacci Pizzeria is today. The windmill with its moving vanes was something to see back then, and one of my aunts worked there over a period of years. Their “plum torte,” a special spice cake which my mom loved, could only be purchased at that store. Walking back along Mercer Street, we might go into Warren’s Ice Creamery, part of the site which is now T. S. McHugh’s.

At Warren’s, we could purchase cones, malts, shakes, sodas or take home hand-packed ice cream—much better than the “bricks” which came along later. Some of the best ice creams and sherbets were available to the consumer!

Walking along Mercer, from either direction, the aroma of freshly baked bread would catch you as you walked by the Hansen’s Baking Company, which covered the south half of the block between First North and Warren and Mercer and Roy Streets. At the corner of Third North and Mercer, the endless carousel movement of the bottles being capped at the Parti-Pak Bottling Company was a fascinating sight to see, or it was, for a pre-teen!