



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649  
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 526/08

Name and Address of Property: **Dr. Annie Russell House**  
**5721 8<sup>th</sup> Ave NE**

Legal Description: The east 125 feet of Lot 15 in Day's Acre Gardens, as per Plat recorded in Volume 3 of Plats, at page 66, Records of King County Auditor; except that portion thereof as condemned for street under ordinance 22149 of City of Seattle; situate in the City of Seattle, County of King, State of Washington.

At the public meeting held on September 17, 2008, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Dr. Annie Russell House at 5721 8<sup>th</sup> Ave NE as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- B. It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the City, state, or nation*
- D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction*
- F. Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrast of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.*

### **DESCRIPTION:**

#### **Present and original physical appearance and characteristics**

#### *Setting:*

The Annie Russell house is in the northwest corner of the University District neighborhood, an area characterized by modest houses on small lots. The exceptions to this nearby are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints just south of the house, the commercial buildings along Roosevelt Way Northeast (two blocks to the east) and Blessed Sacrament Church and Rectory four blocks south. The Annie Russell house is just east of Interstate 5, and approximately three blocks south of tree-lined Northeast Ravenna Boulevard. The house is

located on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue Northeast, which is a typically residential street with limited traffic, two sides of parking, and some significant trees.

The house is located on a 15,871 square foot lot. The lot was originally almost an acre in size, but in 1958 the rear portion was purchased for the construction of I-5. The later expansion of the church parking lot to the north also took a portion of the lot. Due to the topography of the site, which slopes up from the front of the property to the west, the house sits about five to ten feet above the street level. Along the street, a fence and rockery separate the sidewalk from the property. Along the fence, shrubs and large trees screen the house from the street. The main entry to the building is through a gate on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and up the stairs to the front porch that leads to the main entry at the northeast corner of the home.

The driveway is located just north of the stairs along the northern property line. The driveway, which is also used by the Homer Russell house to the north, goes up from street level. On the right is the garage for the Homer Russell house and to the left is parking for the Annie Russell house, which has no garage. Around the south and west perimeter of the site, there is a three- to five-foot stone retaining wall with a fence on top, covered with shrubs and ivy. This vegetation screens the site from the adjacent church driveway and parking lot. A small shed is located in the southwest corner of the site.

Except for the buildings and driveway, most of the property is covered with grass, with a garden of shrubs and flowers in the front yard. Several significant trees are located in the front yard (east), the rear yard (west), and in the Homer Russell property to the north of the site. These trees and the wood facades of the Annie and Homer Russell houses provide a natural setting for the homes despite their location adjacent to the highway.

### ***Exterior Description***

The house is a one-and-a-half story building of wood frame construction. It has a rectangular floor plan with eight rooms including four bedrooms, a living/dining room, a kitchen, a den, and a bathroom. The total living area is approximately 3,500 square feet. In addition, it has a 330 square foot unfinished basement and a 630 square foot front porch.

The home has a side gabled roof with a large cross gable at the southeast corner, facing the front. To the north of this are two large shed dormers. The roof has a low to medium pitch with very wide eaves and exposed wood beams that extend beyond the eaves. Two knee braces appear to support the roof on either side. The original wood shingles on the roof have been replaced with asphalt shingles.

One of the most interesting elements of the building is its exterior walls. The first floor walls are made of untrimmed logs of varying lengths, extending well beyond the corners. The logs are unplanned, so the knots remain and give the house a more natural rustic look. Long vertical cedar shakes cover the second-story exterior walls as well as the rear wall on the first story. The additions are clad with similar wood shake that are newer and shorter in length. Some of the shakes on the original building are unstained and lighter in color, so that they

may be newer in-kind replacements from an unknown date. There are some simple decorative features typical of the style, such as beams extending beyond the wall. The building has a concrete foundation clad with rounded river stones that are also used for the three fireplaces, very typical of the Craftsman style. The house has been described as a chalet showing an “expressionistic use of wood” in “the over-long logs crossing at the corners, and porch posts with the knots left unplanned” (Woodbridge and Montgomery 1980).

Most of the original windows appear to be intact. Most are ten-light wood casement windows. At the southeast corner, below the cross gable, is a secondary entry with a pair of ten-light French doors and a sun porch with a group of ten-light casements extending around to the south façade. To the north, in the center of the first story, are two pairs of ten-light casements. The basement level, which is visible on the east façade, has two pairs of nine-light windows and a horizontal four-light window. On the second story, each of the front shed dormers has three pairs of six-light casement windows. To the south of these, the cross gable has a newer picture window.

The north elevation has two groups of three windows; each group has a pair of eight-light casements flanked by two pairs of ten-light casements. The south elevation has a pair of ten-light French doors leading to a low deck. To the east of this are the large casement windows of the corner sun porch; to the west are four pairs of eight-light casements. The second story has four tall, narrow twelve-light casements, with a pair of smaller casements in the gable end. At the southeast corner are five double-hung windows. The rear (west) façade has three 12-over12 double-hung windows on the second story. The only windows on the first story are two newer fixed-pane sash in the 1970s addition to the kitchen.

The building has a large recessed porch along the north end of the house. The entry is at the recessed northeast corner, with the remainder of the area beneath the overhanging second story used for wood storage. Wood stairs with newer wood railings lead up to the entry. A second porch, located at the rear adjacent to the kitchen, was enclosed in the 1970s. A smaller porch remains next to the addition. A covered porch in the rear is used for storage.

The site has a small shed located off the southwest corner of the house. The front gabled structure is rectangular, measuring approximately. It is similar in style to the house, with wood shakes, double wood doors with missing glass in the upper panels. The large wood garage to the north of the house was once used by the Russells but is now part of the adjacent Homer Russell house property. The date of the buildings is not known.

### ***Interior Description***

The first floor of the building is characterized by large open rooms. The double-height foyer is open to the second floor, with a hanging light fixture, a stone fireplace, and a built-in bookshelf. The foyer opens into the combined living and dining rooms, clad with wood paneling. At the north end of the living room is a large stone fireplace flanked by a pair of windows. The wood ceiling is about 9 feet high, with exposed beams. At the south end of the dining room, four windows extend most of the length of the wall and provide light into the room. The den, located off the foyer, was part of the 1940s addition that enclosed one of the porches. It has large windows, still another fireplace and similar wood paneling to the

rest of the house (even though it is a later addition); some of the paneling covers the logs that used to extend beyond the corner of the house.

The kitchen is located in the rear of the building and contains all of the normal fixtures. An addition on the kitchen in the rear of the house in the 1970s added a breakfast nook and a bathroom.

The second story of the house has smaller, more enclosed rooms. The stairs ascend to a balcony-like open space overlooking the foyer. South from there is a small bedroom and office. The bedroom has wood paneled walls and ceiling while wallpaper covers the office walls. The master bedroom is just west of the office and connects directly to the bathroom. The large bathroom features a clawfoot bathtub. To the north, the bathroom connects to a hallway.

The hallway leads to another bedroom where Annie Russell may have performed abortions. The 1970s kitchen addition removed the door and staircase at the west end of the hall; these were reportedly used to sneak many of Dr. Russell's patients into the house. Just north of the staircase is a large storage room. The final bedroom is located at the top of the stairs.

### ***Alterations***

No permit records have been located, but several alterations have been made over the years.

- In the 1970s a small shed-roofed addition was made to the rear of the house, expanding the kitchen and adding a second bathroom. A rear door and secondary staircase to the second story were removed for this addition. There may have been another porch at the southeast corner; if so, it was enclosed many years ago. The doors open onto a low deck, which was added.
- The original wood shingles on the roof have been replaced with asphalt shingles and gutters have been added by the current owner.
- The exterior wood stairs and railings have been replaced.

Despite these alterations, the building is largely intact. The layout is intact with the exception of the additions. The siding is intact as are most of the windows.

### **Statement of Significance**

The Dr. Annie Russell house has been noted as significant in numerous surveys, including the Nyberg/Steinbrueck inventory of 1975; the city's comprehensive survey of historic resources in 1979; *A Guide to Architecture in Washington State* by Sally Woodbridge and Roger Montgomery (1980); and the city's University District historic resources survey of 2002. The *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* for Sound Transit's Central Link (1999), prepared by Shirley Courtois, Kate Krafft and Cathy Wickwire, identified the house as significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Subsequently,

the Federal Transit Administration determined that it is eligible for listing, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation concurred with this determination.

### ***Neighborhood Context***

The Russell House is located in the northwest portion of the University District at 5721 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE between NE 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Ravenna Boulevard NE, just east of I-5. It is in Day's Acre Gardens, one of the first plats (1889). The first Euro-American settlers in the U-District were Christian and Harriet Brownfield, who arrived in 1867 to claim 174 acres south of today's NE 45<sup>th</sup> Street. Other early property owners in the area were Morton Hunter (1870), Thomas Emerson (1882), Edgar Bryan (1883), and Pope and Talbot (1866). These were rural settlements, as most owned 80-acre tracts (Tobin and Sodt 2002).

It was not until the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern Railroad's Fremont to Union Bay line opened in 1887 that the U-District became attractive for development. In 1891, the City of Seattle annexed the University District (then known as Brooklyn). That same year, the streetcar line arrived in the area, and in 1892, it was extended up University Avenue (then Columbus Avenue) to 45<sup>th</sup> Street (then Franklin Street).

More intensive growth of the U-District began with the re-location of the University of Washington in 1895. In 1899, the University Heights Addition was platted, on the eastern side, extending up to NE 55<sup>th</sup> Street. The peak of subdividing took place between 1900 and 1910. By 1910, almost the entire district was platted (Tobin and Sodt 2002). Although developers platted the area, development was slow to occur.

The growth of the area exploded with the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held on the UW campus in 1909. The Day's Acre Gardens plat surrounding the Russell House was mostly divided into smaller lots at this time. When the Russell House was built around 1908, the area was sparsely developed. Most buildings in the University District date from 1895 to 1914. However, the Russell house is in the north part of the University District, so the homes in this area were mostly built during the end of this period. Many of the homes built were large ones located on small lots.

The immediate area around the Russell house developed predominantly with single-family residences. Larger one acre parcels were subdivided into small lots. A significant amount of development occurred here in the 1920s, including nearby churches, parks and schools. The homes surrounding the Russell house are mostly modest bungalows and vernacular houses (Tobin and Sodt 2002). Most of the commercial development in the area is located along the major streetcar routes of University Avenue, 45<sup>th</sup> Street and Roosevelt Way.

### ***Plat and Immediate Vicinity***

The Russell House was built on a large parcel of approximately .94 acre (40,788 square foot), on Tract 15 of the Day's Acre Gardens Plat. This was one of the earlier plats in the vicinity, filed by owner John S. Day on February 25, 1889. This was the same year that William and

Louise Beck purchased the land that they would plat as the town of Ravenna, seven blocks to the east. Day's plat was arranged in two long blocks, between Conover Street (now 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE), Day Avenue (now 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE) and Crawford Street (where I-5 is today). The forty lots were each slightly less than an acre, measuring approximately 133 feet wide and 308 feet deep.

By 1914, people had built homes on more than half of the lots in Day's Acre Gardens. Some property owners to the east replatted their parcels into approximately eight lots each. By 1928, most of the properties to the east were replatted. However, the Russell property and its vicinity remained as the larger one-acre parcels, giving the area a more rural feeling until after World War II (Baist and Kroll Maps).

In 1949 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was built just to the south of the Annie Russell House, bringing a larger-scale institutional presence to the neighborhood. Even more significantly, Interstate 5 was built just to the west of the Russell's house in the 1960s. The Washington State Department of Highways purchased the western portion of the Russell properties in 1958. Demolition and grading for the new freeway began that year and the freeway opened between Mercer Street and NE 75<sup>th</sup> Street in 1963, after nearly five years of construction. In this vicinity the western half of this block on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and the two blocks west to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE were taken for the new facility. Numerous houses were demolished along NE 56 and NE 59<sup>th</sup> streets, with another ten demolished on the large interior parcels. Not only did the construction itself cause disruption to residents and businesses, but the new highway structure created a permanent barrier between the University District community and Wallingford (formerly known as Latona/Brooklyn), which had always been part of it.

### *History of the House*

This house was built for Dr. Annie Russell by Walter G. Frost and his two sons. Frost's daughter Cora was married to Dr. Russell's son Homer. The date of construction is unclear, as no building permit has been located. Some sources date it as early as 1904 (Woodbridge 1980; Sound Transit 1999). The conservative date of 1908 is used here because the 1908 Baist map does not show any buildings on the site, and this is the date that is listed in the King County Property Report Card.

It is known that the house to the north, now known as the Homer Russell House (5803 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE), was built in 1906, as it is described in the July 1906 issue of *Washington Magazine* (Attachment D of the Nomination Application for this landmark). The magazine says that it is being built for Dr. Annie Russell and designed by F. A. Sexton; the accompanying sketch shows Homer Russell's house. The article notes its unique design, rustic appearance and its quiet, forested setting. "The walls and roof are made of shakes, while the balconies, porches and other exterior trimmings are of poles, the poles and shakes being cut from the ground owned by the doctor". The interior was not yet finished, but was to be stained wood with a field stone fireplace.

In the rear portion of the lot, two small cabins were constructed (1914). These cabins, and much of the lot, were removed due to the construction of Interstate 5 and the expansion of the

parking lot for the church located just south of Annie Russell's lot. Today the lot is only 15,871 square feet (0.36 acres), retaining its full 132 foot width, but reduced to 119 feet deep.

The design of both houses has been attributed to Sexton (Woodbridge and Montgomery 1980).

After Annie Russell's death, her son Homer and his wife Cora moved into this house from the northern one, where they had been living, and remained here until his death in 1962. The *Seattle Times* noted the home for its collection of Native American artifacts like baskets, footwear, rugs and other relics from tribes from Mexico to Alaska. For a time the building was used as a Native American museum because of the collection. The building was used as rental housing for students at the University of Washington. One of those students bought the house, Mark Holmes. He then sold the home to the current owners, Robert and Baerbel Rodieck in 1978.

***Original Owner: Dr. Annie Russell***

Dr. Annie Russell (1868-1942), the original owner, is significant in Seattle's history because she was one of the first female physicians in Washington State and the City of Seattle. She was a colorful character, with an adventurous personality and an interesting history. She was also a controversial figure in the Seattle medical community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first female physician in Seattle was Mrs. S. D. Coryell Hewes who arrived in Seattle in 1877 with her physician husband. However, she only remained in Seattle for 2 years (Prosch 1901). The first "regular" female physician in the state was Dr. Mary Archard Latham who came from Cincinnati to practice in Spokane in 1888. The medical community accepted her and considered her one of the state's best doctors (Andrews 1989).

Dr. Russell arrived in Seattle before 1890 (Sound Transit 1999). Little is known about her early life, except that she was born in Janesville, Wisconsin on February 17, 1868 (Russell passport application). She was living in Unalaska, Wisconsin, in 1880, when her son was born, but it is not known if she was married or what happened to her husband (Death takes Dr. Homer E. Russell). She and her son moved to Washington in the 1880s, perhaps to Bellingham, where it was reported that she worked as a nurse fighting the smallpox epidemic in the early days of statehood (1889). Her educational background is not known, although news articles later said that she had studied abroad in Rome and Paris. Her professional life matched her colorful personal life. Dr. Russell was originally known not only as one of the first female physicians in the area, but for the controversy that surrounded her later when she lost her medical license. One newspaper article reported that she lost a tooth in a fight with the family of a patient

The *Polk Directory* listed Dr. Russell as both a physician and a surgeon. She also owned the Russell Realty and Mining Company, which owned and rented land (including these houses). Dr. Russell was an adventurous woman who traveled to Europe and Mexico. When she climbed El Popo, Mexico's second high peak at 17,802 feet, with a group of men, she was the only one to go into the crater of the active volcano. She was a protector of Northwest Native Americans and collected many artifacts, some which are still in the house today.

Dr. Annie Russell had settled in the Seattle area by 1890 and by 1903 was a practicing physician and surgeon at 54 Hinckley block. Her offices moved to 410 Hinckley block (1905), 424 Lumber Exchange (1910), and finally to 211 Union (1912) where she practiced for most of her remaining career. Her son Homer was also a doctor. He graduated from the University of Washington and from the University of Oregon Medical School in 1910. In 1912, he joined his mother's practice at the 211 Union office (Polk directories).

Dr. Annie Russell was a controversial figure in the medical community because she performed abortions in one of the bedrooms in her home. Dr. Ernest Crutcher had labeled abortions in 1903 as "the crowning sin of civilization." In 1915 a jury, which included several women, found Dr. Russell guilty, convicting her as an abortionist. Her medical license was revoked (Andrews 1994 and Dunning 1989). Dr. Russell hired lawyers and borrowed legal books to attempt to get her license back. Dr. Russell failed to pay the lawyers and did not return the books when asked (the books are still located in the home today).

Governor Ernest Lister pardoned Dr. Russell, and according to County Clerk George A. Grant "restored her to all the privileges and rights she forfeited by of her conviction and confinement." On February 8, 1926, the director of licenses, Charles R. Maybury, quietly reinstated her medical license. When it became public later that month, the action was attacked by Robert O. Jones, executive secretary of the Public Health League and drew legal action ("Reinstatement of Dr. Russell Starts Fight," 1926 and "Secrecy Veils Lifting Ban on Women Medic," 1926). The legal challenges were not successful and Dr. Annie Russell's medical license was restored. The later years of her life were apparently less eventful than her earlier years, and little is known of her activities until her death in March 1942 at the age of 74.

### ***Building Style***

Dr. Russell had many experiences traveling abroad. After one trip to Switzerland, she is believed to have come up with the idea to construct her home in the Swiss Chalet style (Sound Transit 1999). She then commissioned architect Frederick A. Sexton to design her home. The building has elements of the "Rustic" style, Swiss Chalet style, and has many Craftsman elements making the home an interesting hybrid.

At the designation meeting (meeting of the Landmarks Preservation Board) for the Annie Russell House on September 17, 2008, architectural historian and Landmarks Preservation Board member Henry Matthews noted that the house was constructed in the Rustic style, with Swiss Chalet style as a possible influence. He said the house was under the general category of Rustic architecture, in the spirit of the Adirondack lodges; he noted the outdoorsman quality of the design that attempts to evoke the feeling of being away from civilization. Mr. Matthews said the Annie Russell House was a forceful example of employing natural and rustic materials into a design; it is a significant American type that is different from Picturesque architecture.

The Swiss Chalet style is characterized by low-pitched gable roofs with wide eaves; exposed construction elements including large brackets, knee braces, rafter tails, trusses and

decorative corbels and vergeboards; decorative carving and profiles; balconies and balustrades; bands of windows; and wood bands and panels sometimes painted in bright colors (Swiss Chalet Style 2007; Poore 2007; Jacquet 1963). The Craftsman style is characterized by low-pitched gabled or hipped roof lines, deep overhanging eaves, exposed rafter with decorative brackets, covered front porches, divided-light windows, hand-crafted stone and woodwork, and a mix of materials throughout the building (American Craftsman 2007; Winter and Vertikoff 2004). The Swiss Chalet and Craftsman styles share many similar elements like low-pitched gabled roofs, wide overhanging eaves, exposed beams and bracings, and the use of wood. The Russell House incorporates elements of both styles. The lower pitched gabled roof with wide eaves is typical of both the Craftsman and Swiss Chalet styles. The use of wood is typical of both styles; however, Swiss Chalet structures tend to have details that are more ornate, which the Russell House lacks. The building's use of wood and stone materials is typical of Craftsman structures. Both styles typically have exposed beams and brackets as seen in the Russell House.

The Swiss Chalet style is relatively rare in the Seattle area. The most prominent example is the Seattle Golf and Country Club in The Highlands, designed by Kirtland Cutter in 1908-09 (Matthews). Other examples are the Lewis B. Peeples house (1909, 948 Harvard Avenue E.), also designed by Cutter, and the Johanson House (1909, 2800 Broadway E.). The Russell house shares the horizontality, broad eaves and cross gable and asymmetry of the golf club. However, the Annie Russell and Homer Russell houses are far more rustic (with extensive use of logs and river rock) and simpler in detail than the Seattle examples of the Swiss Chalet style. The two Russell houses are unique examples in Seattle of Rustic architecture that incorporates elements and materials from other stylistic influences.

### ***The Architect: Frederick A. Sexton***

Frederick A. Sexton was a prolific designer, using numerous styles for a wide variety of building types. Sexton was born in England in 1851 and immigrated with his family to Minnesota at the age of 9. No information about his early life or education is available, but he is known to have practiced architecture in Tacoma from 1887 to 1891. During this time he designed a number of commercial buildings, large residences and, most notably, the main building for the University of Puget Sound (1890, destroyed). In 1891, he moved on to the newly-developing town of Everett, where he made a name for himself as a designer of schools (Monroe School, 1892, destroyed), commercial buildings and residences.

Sexton opened his architecture office in Seattle in 1900. Locally, his works include a number of prominent buildings, such as Bay View (later Webster) School in Ballard (1907, now the Nordic Heritage Museum) and the Mueller Wholesale Block (1910, now 101 King Street) in Pioneer Square, which was owned by John Mueller, a brewery executive who had been mayor of Georgetown. Sexton's major work of this period was the Georgetown City Hall (1909), which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a City of Seattle landmark. The date and place of Sexton's death are not known. (*Pacific Builder and Engineer* 1907; Dietz, Peckham 1979; Ochsner 1994).

Sexton was particularly well known for his residential designs. Perhaps his best known work is the Parker-Fersen House, a 1909 Colonial Revival mansion located just south of Volunteer Park at 1409 E. Prospect Street; it is a City of Seattle landmark. Nearby is the earlier C. L. Roy House (1907, 1104 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue E.), in the English Arts and Crafts style. He also designed a number of elegant variations on the American Foursquare, including the Henry McBride House (1905, 342 W. Kinnear Place), R. C. Saunders house at 2701 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue E. (Swope 2005) and the 1905 E. B. Palmer House. However, the style of the Annie Russell house is very different from most of the rest of Sexton's single-family residential work.

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***The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:***

- The exterior of the building
- The first floor interior, including the central hallway and stairway to the second floor, but excluding the kitchen and bathroom
- The site and the shed

Issued: October 1, 2008

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

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