



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue · 4th floor · Seattle, Washington 98104 · (206) 684-0228

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 257/04

Name and Address of Property:      Pantages House  
803 E. Denny Way

#### Legal Description:

Nagle's Addition, Block 34, Lots 5 and 6  
West 42½ ft. of Lot 6 and North 50 ft. of the West 42½ ft. of Lot 5,  
Block 34 John H. Nagle's Addition to The City of Seattle, County of  
King, State of Washington

At the public meeting held on August 18, 2004, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Pantages House at 803 E. Denny Way 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 community, 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, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.*

### **DESCRIPTION**

#### **The Site**

Situated on the southeast corner of East Denny Way and Harvard Avenue, the property site is located in a residential neighborhood in the heart of the Capitol Hill business district, one block west of Broadway. Despite the proximity to bustling Broadway and its location on well-traveled Denny Way, the immediate surroundings consist of early and mid twentieth-century apartment buildings and single family residences, rich with landscaped lots and mature plantings, and newly constructed apartment buildings.

Set within the context of a typical urban grid pattern, the property is surrounded by an almost even mix of early twentieth-century houses and later apartment buildings. The property site contains a primarily intact ca.1907 house, decidedly larger and more ornate than its original neighbor houses. For the past ninety-four years, the exterior has remained virtually unchanged. Ownership has changed six times, and the house has served a variety of uses, mostly residential. The elevated 4,675 square foot lot slopes gently to the west, the southern portion used as a shared parking area. The site dominates the corner of East Denny Way and Harvard Avenue. Its grassy slopes rise steeply to the mid-basement level of the house. Defining the lot and engaging passersby is a wide, bowed, poured concrete staircase with low curvilinear balustrades leading almost a full story to the front porch.

### **Exterior Features**

The unusual combination of ornate and simple details reflect a transitional hybrid of the Queen Anne and Craftsman styles interspersed with Beaux Arts detailing. The house features a low-pitched, cross-hipped roof with a semi-circular roof appendage on the northwest corner that follows the curve of the house and porch. A single rectangular chimney is centered on the southernmost roof plane. The roof projects on all sides into widely overhanging eaves with exposed and carved rafter tails typical of the Craftsman style. The clapboard-sided structure is divided between the first and second stories by a tall, trimmed belt-course of horizontal, flush-mounted planks continued around the primary elevations (north & west) as the fascia to the porch deck. The fascia is altered at the porch by the use of vertical, chamfered boards (a later addition). A splayed, projecting molding runs entirely around the house at ground level and a second drip molding, also projecting, runs the perimeter at first floor level but is missing at the porch floor.

The north elevation features the main entrance that sits centered at deck level on a partial wall approximately three and one-half feet from grade.

A Queen Anne style tower forms the bulged and cylindrical corner section of the building. The tower's large, matching first & second story curved windows are prominent elements of this distinctive feature.

The building's wrap-around porch is its most prominent feature. This element is surmounted by a second-story deck, which archival photographs demonstrate were not original to the house. The north and west elevations are symmetrically interspersed with seven classically-inspired columns with splayed capitals that support the deck level. One of these columns is uniquely employed as a structural feature for the southwest corner of the house. Low, exaggerated Renaissance-style balustrades between the columns are original to the house. The spindle work deck railing is a later addition.

The house's fenestration is comprised of sash windows of varying sizes and shapes. Wide, simple, classical moldings punctuate these elements. All sash windows in the primary rooms have leaded mullions with a repeating ogee arch pattern on the top sash. Interspersed throughout the second story of house are numerous deeply-set Beaux Arts-style roundel windows.

A stylized quatrefoil window with clear glazing sits above raised panel moldings that frame the inner two-thirds of the front door. A large sash window dominates this bay as does a large Beaux Arts-

style bracket on the upper corner. The second floor features a double porch door leading to the deck surrounded by the two roundel windows described earlier.

On the east elevation the northeast corner projection continues the bay supported by oversized, ornate classically-inspired modillions. These are framed by a large sash window and capped on either side by matching large brackets. Low basement windows, a service door, and numerous windows punctuate the remainder of the elevation.

The south, or rear elevation has a wood-frame staircase leading to a recessed bay with a transom-topped door leading to the kitchen. Two dissimilarly sized windows flank this entry. The second story has at its center a roundel window flanked by two matching sash windows.

The southern portion of the western elevation features a tripartite bow window flanked by columns on the first level. Immediately above, a bay window supported by two decorative Beaux Arts style brackets on the second level mirrors this feature. This bay window is flanked by two roundel windows.

### **Interior**

Rectangular in plan, the house measures thirty-eight feet in depth by thirty-three feet in width. The total living area comprises 2,300 square feet, while the porches provide an additional 270 square feet of floor space.

The front door opens to a modest foyer, with the main stair landing and a window seat at its base. This main stair is not a part of the original configuration. Much of the first floor plan has been altered over time. From the front door, facing west, is a doorway leading to the large parlor whose focal point is a curved wall and three large curved sash windows on the northwest corner. What may have been the original dining room lies west of the parlor. The living areas are spacious while passages and service areas such as the kitchen are more modestly sized.

Across from the kitchen a staircase leads down to a large dark-stained trim, finished basement interspersed with doorways to various service rooms. Natural light streams through high windows on the north elevation and one of the two main support beams that run east west is finished in raised panels. A tall dado runs the perimeter of the room capped by a china display shelf supported by decorative brackets. The full basement has high windows above grade, and has concrete walls.

The second floor evokes more of the Craftsman style with door and window height dado trim and overhanging lintels. The interior reflects a hybrid Craftsman/Queen Anne mix, and employs multiple room sizes and finishes. The wide, plain trim work used throughout is painted except for a bedroom that has dark-stained finish work. Original maple plank flooring is employed throughout the house.

Due to the very low pitch of the roof, only a crawl space exists in the attic area.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Neighborhood Context**

Located to the east of Lake Union and north of First Hill, Capitol Hill experienced its initial growth after other areas of the city. Unlike First Hill and South Lake Union, Capitol Hill's growth was largely residential, with single-family homes predominating and with most commercial activity and multi-family housing centered along the routes of the street car lines. For the most part, the neighborhood has remained as such over the course of the twentieth century but with an increase in multi-family dwelling units in some areas.

While real estate developers recorded a number of plats on the western and southern slopes of Capitol Hill in the last several decades of the nineteenth century, little development occurred in these areas until the streetcar lines provided adequate access in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The Nagle's Addition was platted in October of 1880 by David T. Denny (1832-1903).

Development of the more than two hundred acres of vacant land at the top of the hill to the south and east of Volunteer Park did not occur until after 1901, the year James A. Moore platted and improved his first Capitol Hill Addition. In general, the high-priced lots on the western slopes with views of the city below attracted wealthy families that tended to build larger, architect-designed homes while the southern slopes and the top of the hill developed with solidly middle-class builder-designed homes.

As in other areas of the city, construction of a streetcar line stimulated the residential and commercial development of platted land along its edges, primarily to the west of its route. Development along the Broadway corridor was spurred by a line that ran from the James Street Cable to tracks heading north on Broadway that crossed to Tenth Avenue East and Federal Avenue East before terminating at the northern limits of the city at East Lynn Street. The 1889-90 Madison Street Cable Railway had already begun to spur development along its route, which crossed the southern end of Capitol Hill and proceeded northeast to Lake Washington down its eastern flanks. In 1901, streetcar lines were established along Fourteenth Avenue East to East Mercer Street and along Fifteenth Avenue East to East Prospect Street, later extended to East Galer Street. This coincides with the platting and improvement of James A. Moore's first Capitol Hill Addition, which lay mostly to the east of these lines.

### **Capitol Hill Housing**

The early development of multi-family housing on Capitol Hill occurred primarily along the routes of the street car lines, and created corridors of apartment blocks along Bellevue and Summit Avenues, Broadway, and Fifteenth and Nineteenth Avenues, as well as their adjacent cross streets. Due to the building restrictions within the Capitol Hill Addition, most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century apartments are located to its south and west between First Hill and downtown Seattle.

As was the case on First Hill, the earliest buildings were low-rise wood-frame structures followed by larger, more substantial brick apartments. However, there are none of the high-rise, luxurious units on Capitol Hill, such as those found on the more densely settled First Hill. The majority of Capitol

Hill's multiple unit dwellings were built prior to the Depression of the 1930s. This decade also saw a general decline in the neighborhood as a whole, which accelerated after the Second World War with the post-war flight to the suburbs.

In the early 1960s, the construction of Interstate 5 sliced through the western flank of Capitol Hill, severing it from the downtown, and the Cascade and Eastlake neighborhoods. The oldest areas of development in the southern and western portions of the neighborhood were most affected while the area within the Capitol Hill Addition remained relatively untouched. During this period of decline, the population in the affected areas became increasingly poor and a number of older residences were demolished for new apartments and condominiums. This trend continued as the neighborhood experienced an upswing and gentrification beginning in the 1970s. Today, Capitol Hill is one of the city's most desirable residential neighborhoods with rapidly appreciating real estate values making it also one of the most expensive.

### **Alexander Pantages**

The name Pantages is synonymous with theatres and entertainment on the West Coast. Alexander Pantages was the man behind the most successful chain of vaudeville theatres and the largest independently owned movie theatres and vaudeville houses in the United States. A fierce competitor, he did much to popularize vaudeville in the U.S. His success was based on tirelessly pursuing and producing what audiences wanted versus what he thought they might want. His incredible success and often sordid life is the quintessential American rags to riches story of which much has been written.

Born Pericles Pantages on the Greek island of Andros in 1876, he found his way to the West Coast of the United States, worked a series of menial jobs, and ended up in Skagway where he got his first taste of the theatre business during the Klondike gold rush. He arrived to Seattle in 1902 with \$4,000 and opened the Crystal Theatre, featuring a mixed variety of live acts, the formula that would become his trademark. Known as a shrewd businessman, Pantages would often cut acts in half and speed up the silent movie projectors in order to handle crowds waiting for shows. His second theatre was the first of many to bear his name.

By the time he commissioned architect Thomas West to design his first house at 803 East Denny Way, the subject of this nomination, Pantages had opened his third theater. He would go on to own or control more than seventy vaudeville theatres around the nation.

His early success in Seattle was so great that by 1909, only two years after building the 803 East Denny Way house, Pantages commissioned architect Arthur L. Loveless of Wilson & Loveless to design a larger and more prestigious Capitol Hill house on the southwest corner of 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Madison Street. Though altered, it still stands.

Locally, Pantages developed a reputation as a ruthless competitor. His well-documented rivalry with fellow showman John Considine reached ridiculous heights, each attempting to steal acts from each other. So well-known was the rivalry that performers would set up tentative agreements with each, then, upon arrival in Seattle, see who would offer them more money. Conversely, Pantages had a reputation for integrity in his other business dealings, earning the trust of creditors and investors.

Pantages personal life was fraught with scandal, starting with the breach of promise suit filed by “Klondike Kate” Rockwell, known as “The Queen of the Yukon,” after marrying another woman. His most damaging notoriety came as the result of his arrest and trial in the alleged rape of seventeen-year old showgirl Eunice Pringle in 1929. The same year his wife Lois was arrested and charged for killing a man while driving under the influence of alcohol. After a long and often contentious life, Alexander Pantages died at his home in Los Angeles in 1936. In his obituary B. Marcus Pretica was quoted as saying that Pantages always considered Seattle his home – “He [Pantages] got his start in the theatre business here and was grateful to the city.”

### **Thomas L. West, Architect (Knapp & West)**

Little has been recorded about the architectural firm of Knapp & West, whose principals Thomas L. West and Jacob Knapp, were both Seattle residents. According to Seattle City directories, the partnership was listed from 1905 through 1909. Beyond that, no mention of either can be found with the exception of a reference to Thomas L. West in partnership with Charles C. Dose and Claude A. Reinoehl who together published *Architecture of Dose, West & Reinoehl* in 1908. Dose, the son of well-known real estate developer is known for having designed numerous Craftsman style houses.

Thomas L. West was, most likely, the creative force in the firm of Knapp & West. At the time of their partnership a magazine known as *The Coast* covered the cultural, natural and built environments of the Pacific Northwest in the early part of the twentieth century. West, introduced as “one of the most successful architects of the Northwest,” contributed monthly from February 1906 through May 1907 through a series titled “Architecture of the Pacific Northwest.” The articles feature numerous designs from the firm of Knapp & West accompanied by photographs and plans of many of the firm’s designs.

The articles provide a unique insight into the prevailing tastes in residential architecture of the Northwest in that period and are the only known record of the work of the firm. Interestingly, Jacob Knapp was not mentioned in any of the articles. His name alone appeared on the photographs. Further, before 1905 Knapp was listed only as a draftsman for the Fred L. Fehrens Company while West was already established as an architect at that time. After 1909 West was listed alone in the city directories and Knapp’s name no longer appeared anywhere in subsequent directories. Further, advertising by West in 1909 and 1910 feature photographs with Knapp’s name crudely scratched off.

Few of Knapp and West’s buildings are extant. None illustrated within contemporary publications of the team’s work suggest the highly eclectic and ornate nature of the Pantages House. The house at 803 East Denny is an aberration, much more elaborate than West’s more conventional Craftsman-styled four-squares that resemble many extant examples in Capitol Hill, especially on numbered avenues east of 15<sup>th</sup>. Its uncharacteristic ornamentation and form suggest Pantages,’ the client’s, dramatic predilections.

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***The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:***  
**The exterior of the building and the site**

Issued: August 24, 2004

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Betsy Hunter  
Heather MacIntosh  
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