



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

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

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 343/03

Name and Address of Property: **Gibbs House**  
**1000 Warren Avenue N.**

Legal Description: Block 17 Lot 6-7-8 Mercers Add to N Seattle E 44.5 ft of S 38 ft 6 & all 7-8 less St. All in the NW one quarter of Section 30, Township 25N and Range 04E.

At the public meeting held on November 5, 2003, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Gibbs House at 1000 Warren Ave. N. as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

(D) *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.*

### **DESCRIPTION**

The Gibbs House is a two-story and basement Italian Renaissance Revival residence of wood frame construction, faced with ivory colored terra cotta. All decorative elements of the exterior are terra cotta. The central block has a green ceramic tile hipped roof with a projecting hip roofed wing on the north elevation.

Two one-story wings of unequal size with flat roofs are attached to the east and west elevations. The principal elevations visible from the street are the south elevation, facing the major garden parterres, and the west elevation, facing a smaller parterre and garden fountain. The east elevation faces the steep down slope of the hill. The north elevation faces the adjacent uphill slope, main entrance driveway and an uphill stairway to an upper garden parterre and pool on north slope of the property.

#### The South Elevation

The main block of the house is asymmetrically flanked by one story pavilion wings on the east and west elevations. The central doorway of the main block is framed by a shallow terra cotta porch supported by square engaged columns whose shafts are faced with renaissance revival decorative panels (garlands, urns and ribbons) and topped by stylized Corinthian capitals. Molding courses on

the entablature include egg and dart and dentil patterns. A small-scaled balustrade crowns the cornice of the porch. Wood frame glazed double doors are flanked by narrow wood frame glazed side panels.

The main floor window pairings which flank the central doorway are surmounted with blind arches and lined with beaded courses. All exterior windows and doors are tall and narrow, set in wood frames and sashes. There are no mullions in the individual windows. Upper floor windows are surrounded with simple molded terra cotta frames. Pairs of windows on each side of the main block feature protruding fluted and curved window boxes supported by classical brackets set in the archways of the first floor windows. The center window system of the second floor, above the main doorway, is divided into three parts by two banded colonnettes.

The upper frieze and architrave of the main block are banded with egg and dart and cyma reversa courses. Foliated panels highlight the southeast and southwest corners of the frieze. Attenuated scrolled brackets support the soffit and cornice construction.

The east pavilion wing contains three glazed double door openings, each with architrave trim similar to the windows of the central block. A southeast corner pilaster repeats the decorative details and panels of the entrance porch columns. A massive chimney on the east elevation is trimmed with molding courses echoing those of the main block upper story.

#### The West Elevation

Symmetrically composed, the west elevation features windows on the main floor with blind arch surrounds identical in shape to those on the south elevation main floor. The second floor windows likewise repeat the detailing and window boxes as those of the south elevation second floor. The projecting one story pavilion wing is glazed on the exterior walls with tripartite window systems and narrow transoms. Corner pilasters and decorative courses repeat the details of the east pavilion wing.

#### The North Elevation

A two-story wing projects from the main block of the house from the center of the block. There are setbacks on either side of this wing, leaving shallow, one-story wings projecting from either side of this main entrance. An entrance porch, deeper than that of the south elevation, repeats the decorative ornament, the paneled columns (here used as pilasters) and general profile of the entrance on the south elevation, with slightly greater elaboration and articulation. This now serves as the main formal entrance to the house. Decorative courses on the upper frieze and architrave repeat the patterns of the other elevations.

#### The Roof

The hipped roof is of green terra cotta Gladding McBean curved roof tile on the main block of the house. The projecting east and west pavilion wings have flat composition roofs.

#### Exterior Materials

The principal architectural material of note is the extensive use of terra cotta, originally fabricated by the Gladding McBean Company in their Renton, Washington and Dixon, California plants. The company furnished the architects with a complete set of shop drawings both for the initial 1933

construction and for an addition made to the house in 1937. (Note: There is no record in the City of Seattle files for any permit secured for this addition). The exterior skin includes over sixteen tons of handmade ornamental architectural terra cotta units, combined with over twenty tons of glazed wall units and curved barrel terra cotta roof tiles. To this day, Gladding McBean remains one of the premier experts in terra cotta and one of the only remaining major manufacturers of ornamental hand-sculptured terra cotta in the United States. The Gibbs House is one of the few examples of architectural terra cotta used extensively on a private residence in Seattle.

### Interiors

As is evident from available interior photographs of the house from the 1930's, the interiors originally had a similar attention to detail as the exterior. Understated wallpaper covered lathe and plaster walls and, on clearly visible maple floors. Wrought iron room dividers separated the living and dining rooms from the vestibule. A highly stylized wrought iron frieze served as a fireplace screen for a decorative stone fireplace and mantle in the living room. Two prominent crystal chandeliers were suspended from ornamental plaster ceiling medallions in the living room.

Although the basic configuration of the public rooms remained unchanged, extensive changes had been made to the decorative details of the interiors by the time that the current owner acquired the house in 2000. All of the interior elements noted from the photographs are gone, including, wrought iron room dividers, decorative frieze, chandeliers, original plaster walls, and maple floors. No original interior decorative elements remain. 1960's and 1970's interiors were demolished for the 2003 renovation, and the fireplace surrounds were replaced. A major change in the ground floor was the reorientation of the central staircase. The vestibule was extended and opened to the full length of the house from north to south. The small curving original main staircase which was entered from the south was demolished, and a new staircase, visible from the north entrance, was constructed. The rectangular living room features shallow arched openings leading to the vestibule on its east wall, fireplace on the north wall, and an opening to the one story pavilion wing on the west wall. The dining room is entered to the east of the vestibule. On the dining room's east wall is a shallow arched opening to the family room, the new east pavilion wing addition. This family room is also accessed from the east wall of the kitchen. Extension of the vestibule to the north permitted construction of a new powder room to the west and a service stair and pantry to the east. The second floor rooms were reconfigured to include a new master bedroom, bathroom and living room, guest bedroom, baths and dressing room. Glazed double doors from master bedroom and master bath access the terrace above the new family room wing. Interior finishes include wood flooring, simple linear moldings and dado on the walls in the main and second floor rooms. The basement plan was dramatically reconfigured to create new utility and mechanical rooms, wine cellar and storage rooms, an expanded entertainment room, guest bedrooms and baths, as well as tunnel access to the new subterranean garage built into the west slope of the site.

### Additions and Alterations

The original design of the north façade was asymmetrical and informal and not clearly visible the public. In 1937 a two-story, asymmetrical addition was made to the north elevation of the house. The ground floor of this project added a family room with new fireplace and chimney and provided a new exterior entry and vestibule into the kitchen. The second floor was expanded to allow for an additional bedroom, bathroom and storage room. The exterior of the addition was clad in terra cotta

to match the existing house. A hipped roof was added with green terra cotta tile, again matching the original material. This addition did not include the extensive exterior detailing found on the other elevations. The 2003 rehabilitation adds new terra cotta detailing to this addition to correspond with the other elevations.

For the last several years (prior to 2003) the classical detailing had been hidden by overgrown English ivy, trees and other brush. The terra cotta had slowly deteriorated. Prior to restoration the mortar and grout were crumbling and in poor condition. The metal anchors that secured the terra cotta units to the building frame had corroded and sometimes were entirely missing. Moisture penetration caused deterioration of the substrate, which resulted in spalling of the terra cotta and degradation of the grout joints. Portions of the wall on the south elevation and the original ground floor window systems were removed in the 1970's, and four large aluminum framed "picture windows" were inserted. The window headers were structurally inadequate to support the terra cotta of the upper story, which over time sagged dramatically and caused significant structural damage. The current rehabilitation work re-establishes the basic original window configurations (with a window panel inserted between each pair of ground floor windows), repairs and replaces damaged terra cotta, and replaces the aluminum windows with wood frame windows. The original design for the north elevation was asymmetrical and informal. It did not serve as the primary entrance. The 1937 renovation added an asymmetrical addition to the north elevation. A second story with hipped tile roof matching the original roof was added above the original north wing. Additionally an in-fill, a flat roofed addition, was created to the east of the north wing.

The current design by Cardwell Architects was completed in late 2003 and takes its cue from the original plans and elevations. Great care was taken with the historic exterior fabric of the house, including the roof. Terra cotta wall and roof tile was carefully removed, cleaned and documented by the architects. Each missing or damaged piece was re-cast from new molds by Gladding McBean. The terra cotta was then re-grouted and attached to the frame walls with a system of stainless steel attachments and anchors. Aluminum and deteriorated wood windows have been replaced with new wood frame windows to recall the original window profiles.

Two new additions have been made to the original house during this current work. A new main entry was created to center in the north elevation, on axis. In details and general profile it recalls the original south entry portico. A new addition was made to the east of the new entry and new window openings were designed to balance the elevation. The new one-story addition to the east is clad in terra cotta, with roof terrace and balustrade that recall the detail of the original west pavilion wing. These two new additions served to stabilizing the heavy structure. The south and west elevations and rooflines have been restored to the original 1933 design.

### Landscape Design

There is little information on the original landscape design plan for this house. It is known from photographs that at one time it had two fountains. The principal fountain area is being restored by the landscape architect firm, The Berger Partnership. One can guess or hypothesize, giving Hudson's extraordinary faithful interpretation of Gould's Albert Rhodes house, that this house (like the Rhodes House) must have had a very formalistic "Italian style" design of carefully chosen plants of Mediterranean origin, where the landscape design's principal function is to serve as a setting that accentuates the architectural character of the house. By the 1970's the landscaping had become

overgrown and must have lost much of its semblance to the original design. Clusters of trees and shrubs had grown so tall that they completely obscured the house from its neighbors.

Other elements of the previous landscape/garden that we can determine from older photographs indicates that previous plantings consisted of bedding plants, pillar cypress, azaleas and rhododendrons and were all arranged adjacent to the house in narrow beds or along the outside perimeter of the property. A wrought iron fence enclosed the outside limits of the property along the east, south and west sides. A rectangular masonry parterre was attached to the south elevation and ringed with low-growing annuals and clipped shrubbery. A concrete walk meandered from the southwest corner of the parterre down the southwest slope of the lot and descended in steps to Warren Avenue. Rough-hewn stone retaining walls ringed the west and south edges of the property on Ward Street and Warren Avenue. A small circular pool with pillared fountain basin and terra cotta decorations (small frogs at the corners of the pool and a tall crane or ibis crowing the fountain) stood just outside of the west wing pavilion, surrounded by a narrow cement walk. A similar round pool and fountain stood in a semi-symmetrical location on the east side of the house. Plantings were intentionally low on the south and west so that views were not obscured. Most of the level areas of the south and west were planted with lawn.

#### New Landscape Plan

The landscape plan completed in 2003 was designed by the Berger Partnership. Other elements of the landscape/garden would note the plan's intention to accommodate the north and east extensions of the house, as well as the construction of a street level garage immediately west of the house, an "auto court," "sport court," and cabana and swimming pool on the terraced area north of the house. Planting areas adjacent to the house were restricted to narrow beds along the south and northwest and northeast elevations. The south parterre was extended, paved with grooved cement and given an elliptical shape on its south extremity. Paved areas now surround the house. Lawn planting is confined to a circular area at the southwest corner, ringed with low clipped shrubbery and beds of bulbs and seasonal flowers.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although it has long been a prominent urban design focal point on the South Slope of Queen Anne Hill, there is brevity of information available in the usual record on the design and construction of the Gibbs House.

### Gould, Gibbs and Hudson

Constructed in the depths of the Depression in 1933, the Gibbs House is a close study by architect Harry Hudson of an earlier project, the Albert Rhodes House (1913-1914), by Seattle architect Augustus Warren Gould. Gould was one of Seattle's most entrepreneurial and stylish architects in the first two decades of the 20th century. His design for the Rhodes house was a remarkable and lavish interpretation of a classic Roman villa and was sited on the north side of Seattle's Capitol Hill, along Tenth Avenue East. Anecdotal information from the Gibbs family indicates that the Gibbs House was designed with the Rhodes house particularly in mind. The siting and landscape design also make conscious use of spectacular views to the south, east and west.

The Gibbs House was built for the Seattle financier, local politician, property manager and real estate developer, James A. Gibbs. The architect of record for the Gibbs House was Harry Hudson (1881-1963).

Hudson was also Gibbs' partner in the real estate development business. During an extensive professional career in Seattle that stretched over five decades, Hudson did not produce an extensive portfolio of houses or buildings. He is remembered primarily for his association with Gibbs and their architectural/property management and development firm, "Gibbs and Hudson." In his role as a partner with Gibbs, Hudson designed a number of small-scale and large-scale apartments on First Hill, in the Central Business District, Wallingford and in the Denny Regrade. Included among those buildings are the Lexington-Concord apartments in the Regrade and the Lowell apartments on First Hill. Like Gibbs, Hudson was active on a variety civic commissions and boards in which a developer/architect might seek membership. He served 10 years as president of the County's Parks Board.<sup>1</sup>

Construction of the house was informally handled by day workers rather than an outside supervising contracting firm, likely reflecting the economic structures of the times as well as the usual contracting arrangements for Gibbs' development company.<sup>2</sup>

James Gibbs died in his house on May 26, 1958. The house remained vacant and unoccupied from 1960-1964. Between 1964 and 1975 it was owned by Lawrence D. Brill. Wayne Ross and family owned and occupied the house from 1975 until 1999. Richard and Jennifer Redman purchased the house in 200. The King County Assessor's Office and Recorder's Office and the Polk City Directory for city of Seattle and King County list various addresses for the house, including 1004 Warren Avenue North and 1000 Warren Avenue North.

James A. Gibbs was described as a "self-made man " who eventually developed a number of economic, political and social ties to Seattle. Born in a small logging town in British Columbia in the 1870's, he developed his wealth and business skills at an early age in the Yukon Territory in the

late 1890's. There he was associated with the theatrical business and ran delivery services for miners and trappers in the bush. After serving in the First World War he moved to Seattle and launched his property management and real estate development business.

That he knew how to make money and keep it is evidenced by his ability to commission such a substantial private residence at the nadir of the Depression, a time when most private residential construction work had come to a halt. He eventually acquired an interest in a number of properties and a controlling interest in the Prudential Mutual Savings Bank. The bank survived the bank failures that occurred in Seattle and throughout the country during the Depression.

Gibbs participated in a wide variety of civic organizations and the typical assortment of social and fraternal organizations befitting a member of Seattle's business establishment at the time. He served 12 years on the County's Park Board and 10 years on Seattle's Planning Commission. Active in Republican politics most of his life and, in retirement, he was appointed to the King County Council in 1950.

He won re-election in his own right, but was defeated for reelection in 1956. He then was appointed the County's Property Agent (a position that today would be equivalent to the director of the County's "Real Property" Division), a position that called on his ample knowledge of the local real estate market. James A. Gibbs, Sr., died at the house that he had commissioned on May 26th 1958.<sup>4</sup>

Gibbs largely raised his family in the Gibbs House on Warren Avenue North. His son, James A, Gibbs, Jr., became a noteworthy West Coast maritime historian and artist, perhaps drawing inspiration from the commanding views of Seattle's port and harbor from the house on Warren Avenue North. He produced a number of popular histories of the maritime industry. Included among these are, West Coast Windjammers: in Story and Pictures and Shipwrecks of the Pacific Coast. He was also the long-time associate editor of the Marine Digest.<sup>3</sup>

### Queen Anne Hill's Visual Image and Neighborhood Characteristics

There are a number of physical and topographical features that collectively give the Queen Anne Hill Neighborhood its unique character and make it, in the words of one of the city's architectural historians, "Seattle's most cohesive neighborhood."<sup>5</sup> The pedestrian scale of much of the neighborhood and the visual accessibility of the "hill" from and to the city both make a contribution to that cohesive image. Another image shaping element that gives Queen Anne Hill its sense of visual cohesion is the way the Hill itself is framed by the contrasting images of clearly definable public avenues and hill-hugging promenades and boulevards that snake through the neighborhoods. This visually strong urban design image has been derived as much from the built features of the Queen Anne Hill as its topography. As Victor Steinbrueck noted in his and Folke Nyberg's "An Urban Resource Inventory for Seattle, (Queen Anne Hill)" Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, (1975),

Queen Anne Hill is uniquely endowed with urban design resources that are appreciated by the general public, including views, tree lined boulevards and landmark structures at the tops of the hill. Major groupings of trees and vegetation along the edges of the hill give it an appearance of being endowed with abundant green open space creating a streetscape which presents a sense of continuity and order.<sup>6</sup>

The street grid system, is softened by the plantings along its edges and the very topography of the hill, with its topographical outcroppings and nodes creates a visual image visible from other parts of the city. This man-made framing system is also accentuated by many of the imposing buildings that "crown" its crests. Together they help to create a visual image of islands and nodes that are linked together by these serpentine and regular "spines" of avenues and promenades. Although there are hidden valleys and apparent isolated peaks and crests scattered throughout the Hill, this "framing system" gives it a sense of organic wholeness. One result of the topography and overlay framing system is to create a neighborhood of striking vistas, from which much of the city of Seattle is both seen and the vista points identified from below.

### Site and Neighborhood

Perched on the top a prominent spur of the south slope of Queen Anne Hill, the Gibbs House has a commanding view of most of major portions of the city of Seattle, including the central business district, the industrial areas to the south and east, as well as much of the maritime traffic on the Sound.

Because of the specific differences in its localized topography, primarily the 40 foot difference between the street elevation and its ground floor, the house has a sense of separateness from a number of the neighboring houses. For these houses it is like being located at the foot of Douglas Fir, you know it's there, but its full grandeur is not apparent until you get some distance away. From Seattle Center and even from Capitol Hill the house has a commanding presence.

A number of the houses in the immediate vicinity of the Gibbs House were built at the turn of the twentieth century and in the late teens and early 20's. The house immediately north of the Gibbs House, for example, was built in 1918. This house, like a number of others in the neighborhood, (and Queen Anne Hill) is an eclectic blend of Craftsman style and Tudor Revival. In the Steinbrueck/Nyberg survey a number of homes in close proximity to the Gibbs House are identified as a buildings "significant to the city" (the 'Gibbs House' is one of those identified). Also included in that list are a number of homes that still remain, including the Chappell House (1906) the Riddell House (1898, Edwin Houghton). Several of the structures surveyed and evaluated by Steinbrueck and Nyberg in the neighborhood have been subsequently demolished (the Robertson House, ca. 1900) or irretrievably altered (the Whitney House, 1905). Although a number of original older and historic homes still remain in the neighborhood, the economic pressure to acquire these structures and demolish them for larger and more modern buildings remains strong.

In the immediate neighborhood there are no intrusions of the apartment houses built in the 1950's and 60's that so intrude on other parts of the Hill. Two blocks to the west of the Gibbs House, some of these apartment houses have spread over several former home sites.

The characteristics of the neighborhood and its street system, with their truncated avenues and winding streets, at once isolate the house from its neighbors while making it a visible and identifiable building on this side of Queen Anne Hill.



### Albert Rhodes House and Gibbs House

There are few examples in Seattle of such an extravagant gesture in copying the work of an earlier architect. Hudson's interpretation of Gould's original design embodies the distinctive features of Beaux Arts architectural vocabulary. Its subtle and restrained architectural ornament is faithful to classical revival tradition. Courses of egg and dart moldings, fluted terra cotta window boxes, classical brackets and volutes, arabesques in the flat column panels, ornamental balustrades - all these are hallmarks of this stylistic vocabulary.

They are well proportioned, judiciously placed and do not detract from the massive horizontal character of the structure itself. The terra cotta cladding and green tile roof create the sense of elegance and permanence -- very nearly the feel of a public or commercial building. When the house was completed in 1934 the influence of Beaux Arts-inspired historical eclecticism was on the decline in the architectural profession. A.W. Gould's Albert Rhodes house had been completed nearly 20 years previously, and most architects had moved on to work in other idioms and styles. Hudson, acting on his client's wishes, replicated the earlier design in an almost pious fashion.

A hallmark of the Beaux Arts style focused on the interrelationship of structure and site. In Gould's own design work (and his planning/conceptual recommendations for the siting of public buildings, his early work to help create the Municipal Plans Commission) this emphasis on location and siting is apparent.

As a student of Gould's architecture has observed, "Gould displayed a restrained sense of ornament, favoring instead to accent the splendor of site arrangement and visibility of structure." <sup>7</sup> Hudson knew very well how to translate Gould's Rhodes house design, both in terms of ornament and structure, but also in terms of site composition. It is clear from even a cursory comparison the Gibbs House is almost a copy of the Albert Rhodes House. We will likely never know exactly what were the real intentions of Gibbs or Hudson in erecting this copy on Queen Anne Hill. We do know from the recollections of Gibbs' granddaughter that it was intended to be an exact copy: "I remember my mother always talking about her dad sending Mr. Hudson over to Capitol Hill to make these measured drawings of that house. He wanted to get it just right." <sup>8</sup>

Imitations, while they flatter the original creation, are almost always a pale version of the original; this is not the case with the Gibbs House. Architect Hudson's almost reverential copy of Gould's original amounts to a faithful recreation of Gould's Albert Rhodes House on the south slope of Queen Anne Hill. But because of its long association with the neighborhood and its magnificent setting this house has obtained a singular identity of its own.

## **End Notes**

1. Obituary of Harry E. Hudson, Seattle Times, 8/29/63, p.53.
2. “City of Seattle Department of Buildings, Application for Building Permit, Permit, No. 308475,” 7/13/33. Available on Microfilm, Department of Construction and Land Use, City of Seattle.
3. Obituary of James A. Gibbs, Seattle Times, 5/28/58, p.36. Material on James A. Gibbs, Jr., from Seattle Post-Intelligencer, “Northwest Magazine,” 10/01/78, p.2.
4. James A. Gibbs Obituary, Ibid.
5. Lawrence Kreisman, Made to Last: Historic Preservation in Seattle and King County, (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1999), p.57.
6. Victor Steinbrueck and Folke Nyberg, “An Urban Resource Inventory for Seattle, (Queen Anne Hill)” Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, (1975).
7. Dennis A. Andersen, “Augustus Warren Gould,” in Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects, ed. By Jeffery Karl Ochsner (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1998), p.109.
8. “Interview with Shirley King,” June 3, 2003, Seattle, Washington.

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

The exterior of the house, including the roof, acknowledging that the east wing and the north entry addition, designed by Cardwell architects, were completed in 2003 and are not part of the original design and construction.

Issued: November 26, 2003

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Richard and Jennifer Redman  
Rev. Dennis Andersen  
Richard Cardwell  
Padraic Burke  
Virginia Wilcox, Chair, LPB  
Diane Sugimura, DPD  
Cheryl Mosteller, DPD  
Ken Mar, DPD