



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 430/07

Name and Address of Property: Fitch/Nutt House  
4401 Phinney Avenue North

Legal Description: The south 15 feet of Lot 14 and all of Lot 15, Block 1, Sunset Heights, according to the plat thereof recorded in Volume 5 of Plats, page 37, in King County, Washington

At the public meeting held on November 7, 2007, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Fitch/Nutt House at 4401 Phinney Avenue North 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, 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.*

### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **Neighborhood Setting**

The Fitch/Nutt House is located at the north end of the Fremont neighborhood on the south extension of Phinney Ridge. The house is prominently sited at the top of a steep slope and has expansive views of the Ship Canal and Olympic Mountains to the west. The Fremont neighborhood extends from the Ship Canal on the south to North 50<sup>th</sup> Street and the Woodland Park Zoo on the north. Fremont's eastern boundary is Stone Way Avenue North and the approximate western boundary is 6th Avenue Northwest.

#### **Neighborhood Context**

The house is in a residential neighborhood with a mix of single-family houses, apartments, and townhouses. Many older single-family houses are being converted to townhouses or

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The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

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small apartment buildings. It is located in an L-1 (Lowrise 1) multifamily zone. The L-1 zone extends from North 43<sup>rd</sup> Street to North 45<sup>th</sup> Street and includes property from Palatine Avenue North (on the west) to Evanston Avenue North (on the east). The property one lot north of 4401 Phinney Avenue North, which is under the same ownership as the Fitch/Nutt House, is currently being developed and there are several new townhouses and one older brick apartment building on the same block. To the immediate south of the Fitch/Nutt House, across North 44<sup>th</sup> Street, there is an older multiplex structure that has been altered. Several new townhouse projects have been constructed within the last ten years across Phinney Avenue North and within a few blocks of the Fitch/Nutt House. An older commercial building is located on the northeast corner of North 45<sup>th</sup> Street and Phinney Avenue North.

### **Development of the Fremont Area**

Although the earliest (1850s) known white settler in the Fremont area was John Ross, a trapper and woodsman who helped found Ross School, the core of today's Fremont neighborhood was part of William A. Strickler's homestead. Following Strickler's death in 1872, his heirs sold off a portion of the homestead to meet delinquent taxes. In 1883 Henry L. Yesler and the Lake Washington Improvement Company bought a strip of property for a canal right-of-way, and the same year Judge Thomas Burke purchased land for his railroad. The impetus for developing the area north of Lake Union was spurred by the construction of the Seattle Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad by Judge Burke and Daniel H. Gilman. This railroad line connected the north shore of Lake Union and Ballard with downtown Seattle via Smith Cove. Train service began in 1887 serving the Fremont area twice daily, and the fare was only five cents to downtown. Fremont's early development was further spurred by the addition of streetcar routes through Fremont, including a line added in 1905 to Greenwood that ran directly past this house on Phinney Avenue. The street railways played an important role in Fremont's early development providing transportation for mill workers and other laborers to Fremont from throughout the city.

In 1887, at the same time that the railroad line was being completed, Edward Blewett, a wealthy businessman from Fremont, Nebraska, visited Seattle and decided to invest in the area at the northwest corner of Lake Union. On March 20, 1888, Blewett and his wife Carrie purchased the town site for \$55,000 under a mortgage held by John P. Hoyt. With the help of their agent, Luther H. Griffith (also of Fremont, Nebraska), the Blewetts prepared a plat for the area. This plat, known as Denny & Hoyt's Addition, was approved by King County on May 8, 1888. Blewett named the community Fremont after his hometown, which commemorated the explorer, John Charles Fremont. Most of the platting of the Fremont area occurred in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and the Sunset Heights plat, where the Fitch/Nutt House is located, was filed on May 6, 1889.

In 1888, Isaac Burlingame moved his sawmill operation from Tumwater to "Fremont Bay." There was a small clearing in the forest at the mill site, with a single frame building that housed the workers. The most important industry in the Fremont area was the sawmill. In 1896, the Bryant Lumber and Shingle Mill purchased the Fremont Milling Company. The Bryant Lumber Mill had been organized by Edward G. Verd and Thomas Sanders at Bryant, north of Arlington in Snohomish County in 1890. Their Fremont mill originally manufactured shingles,

and then added cut lumber; by 1905 it reached a capacity of 50,000 board feet of lumber per day. Following a fire in 1902, it was substantially rebuilt; however, it suffered other fires in 1912 and 1914. The mill continued to operate until it was burned to the ground in 1932.

The Blewetts returned to Nebraska, leaving Griffith and his partner, Ward, in charge of selling lots. Lots were sold from a waterside tent for as low as \$200. Dr. Edward C. Kilbourne, a Fremont dentist turned entrepreneur, ran a horse-car line from Pike Street to the south end of Lake Union. Griffith joined Kilbourne in a plan to bring electric streetcars to Fremont. Soon the Seattle Electric Railway Company carried passengers to Fremont via a wooden trestle on the west side of Lake Union, today's Westlake Avenue.

Fremont got its start from the sawmill, but the primary impetus for its growth was its strategic location at the northwest corner of Lake Union, which placed it at the intersection of north-south traffic and east-west traffic north of the lake. In the early years, in addition to SLS & E railroad line and the streetcar lines, Fremont was a hub of water traffic on the lake, and it continued as a stopping point after the Ship Canal connected with Lake Union. Guy C. Phinney, who owned Woodland Park, started his own streetcar line from lower Fremont to Woodland Park, and eventually local streetcars ran through Fremont to Green Lake, Ballard, and Meridian/Wallingford. The route of the Seattle-Everett Interurban also passed through Fremont. The former trolley barn on the corner of North 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Phinney Avenue North is a Seattle Landmark.

As a crossroads, Fremont developed quickly with housing for mill workers, groceries, hardware stores, drug stores, a dairy, cigar stores, cafes, hotels, schools, and churches. By the time Fremont was annexed to Seattle in 1891, the area had 5,000 people. In addition to its commercial structures and wood-frame houses, the community is characterized by its schools, churches, streets, bridges, and public buildings. B.F. Day School, the Fremont Bridge, the Fremont Baptist Church, and the Fremont Public Library are all key structures that help to define the community's identity.

One of the earliest and most important of these structures is the elementary school. In 1890 the Benjamin Franklin Day family donated a portion of its 160-acre farm for a school. On May 4, 1892, B.F. Day School opened as a twelve-room, two-story brick schoolhouse. Thus the school has been a prominent "landmark" on the hill above Fremont's commercial district since pioneer days. The building was expanded in 1902 and 1916, and is Seattle's oldest school in continuing use. It is a designated Seattle Landmark.

Corner grocery stores were common in Fremont as in other early Seattle neighborhoods. Two nearby examples are the Lighthouse Roasters coffeeshop, formerly Young's Grocery, at the corner of North 43<sup>rd</sup> Street and Phinney Avenue North, one block south of the Fitch/Nutt House, and the former Golden Rule Grocery building at the southeast corner of Phinney Avenue North and North 45<sup>th</sup> Street.

Another important element of Fremont's history that persists today is the Fremont Bridge, which is also a Seattle Landmark. The first bridge was a rickety wooden structure at a much lower grade than the present crossing. After a washout in 1903, the City raised the bridge to the level

of Ewing Street (34th). During Ship Canal construction in 1914, this new bridge was washed away when the spillway dam operated by the Bryant Mill at Fremont broke and Lake Union dropped 10 feet in 24 hours, leaving many houseboats on dry land. Fremont's first high bridge over Lake Union opened to traffic on May 31, 1911, called Stone Way Bridge and Fremont was proclaimed a neighborhood of Seattle. The Stone Way Bridge closed when the present bascule (French for teeter-totter or seesaw) Fremont Bridge, built as part of the Lake Washington Ship Canal project, opened to traffic on June 15, 1917.

Fremont's original street names commemorated some of the community's founders: Blewett Avenue, today's North 35th Street, honored Edward Blewett; Kilbourne Avenue, now North 36th Street, was named for Dr. Edward Kilbourne; and Ewing Avenue, now North 34th Street also recalled an early settler. Before 1901, Fremont Avenue was known as Lake Avenue. The other Fremont street names were not changed to numbered streets until about 1920. The original street names in the Sunset Heights plat included Onsum Avenue, now Phinney Avenue North, and Anrud Avenue, now Francis Avenue North. The Onsums and Anruds filed the plat of Sunset Heights. The name Phinney Avenue commemorates Guy Phinney, the original owner of Woodland Park, who started his own streetcar line.

Some of the other early houses in Fremont dating from the 1890-1900 period include the Goddard/Dr. Patterson House (1891), 916 North 36<sup>th</sup> Street; the Nelson House, 911 North 36<sup>th</sup> Street (ca. 1890); 3840 Linden Avenue North (ca. 1904); and several houses (ca. 1900) east of Aurora Avenue on Whitman Avenue North. These houses are closer to Fremont's commercial center than the Fitch/Nutt House in "upper" Fremont.

By the 1920s Fremont was booming, and automobiles and streetcars congested the downtown area. During Prohibition, speakeasies flourished despite police raids. This era saw the decline of Fremont, brought on by the downturn in the economy of the Depression coupled with the construction of the Aurora Bridge, which bypassed Fremont. Over the years, grocery stores, banks, drug stores, and other shops either failed or left the area. In 1939, following the closure of the Bryant mill, J.R. Burke purchased the waterfront property for his millwork company.

Despite the economic downturn for Fremont businesses, the Fremont, Wallingford and Phinney neighborhoods continued to be important areas of residential growth. In the mid-1950s, with a decline in lumber milling and related activities, the Burke Millwork Company closed, and J.R. Burke transformed the old sawmill site into the Burke Industrial Center. In the 1960s, Fremont became a haven for hippies and unemployed people, who moved into the Fremont and Triangle Hotels.

The community's renaissance began in the 1970s, and the first Fremont Fair was held in 1972. Several events of the 1970s contributed to a turnaround for Fremont. The Fremont Public Association, organized in 1974, sponsored a variety of social services, arts, and community development projects in the area. Several years later, the Fremont Arts Council was created, which promoted Fremont's arts projects, including *Waiting for the Interurban*, Fremont Canal Park, and many murals and sculptures. Fremont was the first community in Washington State to start curbside recycling and became known as "the district that recycles itself." Honorary Mayor Armen Stepanian ran the recycling operation for many years. During recent years, the

vitality of the Fremont business district has continued to grow with a variety of arts galleries, antique stores, specialty shops, restaurants, and offices. Also, there has been considerable new residential development in Fremont during the last 20 years, primarily apartments, condominiums, and townhouses. One cluster of residential development is south of North 39<sup>th</sup> Street close to Fremont's commercial center and another is in "upper" Fremont, primarily between North 43<sup>rd</sup> and North 46<sup>th</sup> Streets from Greenwood Avenue North on the west to Stone Way on the East. The Fitch/Nutt House is located in this second area of residential growth.

### **Early History of the Fitch/Nutt House**

The Fitch/Nutt House is located in the Sunset Heights Addition, which was platted on May 6, 1889. The land in the plat was owned by H.A. and Oline Onsum and O.E. and Matilda Anrud. The Fitch/Nutt House was one of the first houses constructed in the Sunset Heights Addition. The realtors who marketed the property were Sander-Boman Real Estate Company.

The Fitch/Nutt House has an unusual construction history. The land was vacant in 1896 but had a building by spring 1900, which apparently was used initially as a barn according to the 1902 building permit. It is not clear whether this building was part of the current Fitch/Nutt House because the original building permit for the structure was not found. It is probable that the 14x22 gable section in the rear (west end) was constructed about 1900, and the side gable addition (east section), now the main front section of the house, was built in 1902. According to Seattle building permit records, a 14x32 foot side gable section was added to the front (east end) in 1902 (permit #17536).

Carpenter Jackson D. Fitch (b. 1862), originally from Illinois, arrived in Seattle in 1899. In August 1899 Fitch purchased three platted lots in the Sunset Heights subdivision of Seattle. Fitch probably built the 14x22 foot gable structure soon after he acquired the property, completing it by late 1899 or early 1900. Fitch lived on Capitol Hill during the time that he owned the property in the Sunset Heights plat, moved to north Beacon Hill in 1902, and was no longer listed as living in Seattle by 1905. Since Fitch did not live there, he probably rented the house out during the early boom years of the Alaska Gold Rush period. At the time Fitch built the house, the Green Lake streetcar line ran down Woodland Park Avenue about eight blocks from the house, and the Bryant Mill in Fremont was in full operation. By 1902, Fitch got a job working for the Moran Shipyard on the Seattle waterfront, and he sold his Sunset Heights subdivision lots to carpenter and house builder Thomas W. Nutt (b. 1859).

Thomas W. Nutt (b.1859), a southerner from Tennessee, came to Seattle about 1897 via Texas and Oregon. He had married Pamela (b. 1859) from Missouri, and they had a son and daughter (b. 1887 and 1891) along the way. Nutt and his family apparently rented the house from Fitch from 1900 until 1902 when he purchased it. Nutt purchased other lots within the block, increasing his holdings to nine lots, and began to move buildings around. In August 1902, a barn sited at 4401 Phinney was moved to a different location on the same property (Permit #15716). The 1905 Baist Real Estate Atlas does not show any barn on the property. It either, burned down, moved off the property, or most likely, incorporated into what later became the west wing of the house. Three months after the barn was moved, Thomas Nutt

was issued a building permit to construct a 14x32 foot side gable addition to the front (east end) of original 1900 house (Permit # 17536). The addition included a balcony and three distinctive gable dormers. After living in the enlarged house for five or six years, Thomas Nutt and his family moved to various homes between Lake Union and Green Lake starting in about 1909, and he and his family left the Seattle area in 1914.

During the summer of 1922, the house was moved again for the final time by owner Norman P. Ward to its present location. At this time, the residence was moved south about 10 - 15 feet on the lot (permit #215726). This move appears to have occurred in order to provide room for the house to the immediate north of the Fitch/Nutt House.

### **House Ownership and Rental History**

Other early owners of the Fitch/Nutt House included F.W. and R.W. Rickards from about 1910 until at least 1920. Norman P. Ward and F.H. Pingree were two owners during the 1920s, and F.M. Bird owned it in the early 1930s. Grace Sheets purchased the house in 1933.

The Fitch/Nutt House has been occupied by renters during most of its 100-plus year history. In 1937 the house rented for \$15.50 per month. From the late 1930s through World War II, Warren P. and Edith C. Palmer lived in the house. Warren Palmer worked for Seattle Gas Company as operator engineer. During the war, housing was difficult to obtain in Seattle, and U.S. Navy serviceman S. Carson and Patricia P. Carson rented a room in the house during the war. By the late 1940s, J. J. and Dorothy M. Skillingstead moved in. J. J. Skillingstead worked as a modelmaker for Boeing Airplane Company.

In 1951 John H. Swihart purchased the property, including the house to the north. By 1953 Vincent L. Yuhas, another Boeing employee, lived there with his wife Jewell. Nellie Elliott purchased the property in 1956. From 1961 to 1963, Mark D. and Betty J. Goble occupied the house.

By the mid-1970s, the house was owned by K.P. Gronvold, and has remained under Gronvold ownership ever since. It has continued to be occupied by renters during the Gronvold ownership.

### **Architectural and Historic Context**

The Fitch/Nutt House is one of the oldest buildings in the north part of Fremont, and it is more intact than most other turn-of-the-19th-century homes in the area. It is immediately recognizable for its relatively unusual form and distinctive detailing, including the decorative barge boards in the front gabled dormers. The other noteworthy early Fremont homes are mostly closer to Fremont's center, such as the grouping at North 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Winslow Place North and several scattered houses east of Aurora on Whitman Avenue North between North 39<sup>th</sup> Street and North 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The Fitch/Nutt House is an example of an early working-class residence, which exhibits unique wood detailing by a skilled carpenter, presumably Thomas Nutt. The unusual wood

trim and carefully planned and executed wood frame house design befit a neighborhood with a busy sawmill industry.

The house is of a type called an I-house by a historian who found similar buildings in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois (Michael Houser, personal communication, 2007). This is a common Folk Victorian house type, which is characterized by a one-and-a-half or two-story form that has a side-gabled roof and is only one room deep. Most of these houses are two rooms wide. The three gabled dormers on the Fitch/Nutt House and indented porch flanked by two bays comprise a three-bay version of the I-house. Although these houses are quite widespread in the central part of the U.S., they are found in all regions of the country (McAlester, p. 309). Many I-houses are ornamented with Victorian detailing; the cutout details in the gabled dormers of the Fitch/Nutt House are relatively restrained. There are few extant examples of the I-house type in the Seattle area, and no others known in the Fremont area. The I-house type is more common in rural, agricultural-based communities.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **Current Appearance**

The building is sited on a corner lot at the northwest corner of North 44th Street and Phinney Avenue North. It is a vernacular style building with some Folk Victorian elements, including the decorative bargeboards in the gabled dormers above the second story windows and the turned porch posts. The decorative bargeboard details are commonly found on Queen Anne style houses. The deep cornice returns on the side gables are an element from the Greek Revival style.

The lot is about 4,000 square feet in area and has a steep slope, with the southwest corner of the lot about 15 feet lower than the northeast corner.

The cross-gable vernacular house was constructed over a two- to three-year period. The one-and-a-half story side gable residence (I-house type) was constructed about 1900 with an addition in 1902. The rear (possibly earlier) structure has wood shiplap cladding, and the 1902 front portion has clapboard siding.

Among the house's most distinctive features is the variation of the I-house with two bays connected by an inset porch with turned Victorian style porch posts. The side gable section has a turned cornice, and the deep cornice returns are features from the Greek Revival style. There are three gabled wall dormers with decorative bargeboards on the east elevation.

A 5x27 foot one-story flat roof section with a recessed porch extends the east (front) section of the house. The turned porch posts appear to be original. A low wood porch railing has been added. This projecting one-story section of the house had a mansard roof, which was altered sometime after the mid-1970s. The roof of this section serves as a deck, which is accessed by a door in the center gabled dormer, and appears to be original. The original narrow sloped roof "trim" that separated the first floor from the deck has been squared off.

The posts around the deck have been replaced and are taller but generally similar to those that were in place in the 1930s. There is an extended porch on the north side of the rear (original) portion of the building. This porch appears to be original.

The house has simple wood one-over-one double-hung windows. The windows on the east, north, and south elevations of the front section of the house appear to be original. Two windows on the south elevation of the rear section of the building are new. The openings for two windows on the south elevation of the rear portion of the building have been closed off and covered but are still evident in the siding. Two double-hung windows on first floor of the south elevation of the rear house section are in their original location but may have been altered slightly. The three small single-pane windows in the shed dormer on the south elevation are probably original. Two large fixed-pane windows on the west elevation of the original building are new; there was probably a smaller window opening in that location, or possibly two smaller double-hung windows. A second-floor window on the west elevation has been closed off and covered with shiplap cladding.

Although some of the windows have been changed, the main (east) section of the building remains quite intact. The two chimneys have been removed. The basement, which presumably dates from 1922 when the house was moved, is not visible from the sidewalk. It is not known if the basement windows are still intact.

There is a small one-story flat-roofed garage on the northwest corner of the site. It was built in 1925 and is not architecturally or historically significant.

The interior of the house was not available for inspection. According to King County Assessor's records, the house has a total living area of 1,630 square feet. The first floor is approximately 900 square feet, and the half floor is 730 square feet. The basement occupies 530 square feet. The house has four bedrooms and one bath.

### **Condition and Alterations to Original Appearance**

The following are the primary alterations to the house:

- Removal of the mansard roof and the squaring off of the roofline over the front bays and inset porch. Clapboard siding has been added above the windows and porch posts.
- Changes to the following windows: removal of two first floor windows on south elevation of the rear section of the house; minor changes to two other windows on the south elevation of the rear section of the house; removal of second floor window on west elevation; and two new fixed-pane windows on the west elevation (probably replacing other windows).
- New wood railings on the deck that are taller than the original railings and have different posts. New low wood railings on the porch.
- Removal of two chimneys.



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

The exterior of the building and the site.

Issued: November 20, 2007

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Kirk Gronvold  
Richard Hill  
Caroline Tobin  
Paul Fellows  
Stephen Lee, LPB  
Stella Chao, DON  
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