

DESCRIPTION:

Present and original physical appearance and characteristics

Overview

West Home Chapel is located in West Seattle at the southeast corner of California Avenue and SW Genesee Street. The site contains three original buildings, (1) The Main Building [see Figure 1], (2) The Barn [see Figure 2], and (3) The Carriage House [see Figure 3]. The site, which was constructed in 1910, originally served as the home of Seattle Lighting Company which was later known as Seattle Gas Company. It is believed to have served as a WPA office around 1940. In 1941, the main building and the original barn were drastically renovated into a mortuary and on-site residence, respectively. The current owners are planning to renovate the interior of the main building into dentist offices and transform the quaint carriage house into a coffee house.

Setting

The West Home Chapel site is located along the main commercial arterial for the neighborhood of West Seattle. The site is located three blocks north of the West Seattle Junction which is considered by many to be West Seattle's Downtown intersection. California Avenue today is an eclectic mix of commercial buildings that primarily date from the 1950's and 60's interspersed with high-density mixed-use buildings of the late 1990's and early 2000's.

In the early 1900's however, California Avenue was a much different place. The Historic Baist's Survey from 1912 shows the West Home Chapel building to be one of only three other brick buildings that existed along California Avenue during that period. The block on which the site is situated was completely undeveloped in 1912, except for the West Home Chapel site which at the time was a private manufactured gas facility. Along California Avenue ran one of the typical historic street car systems that were common in the land speculation era typical of Seattle's "suburban" neighborhoods in the early 1900's. The existing West Home Chapel is only one of the two remaining brick buildings that were indicated in the 1912 Baist's Survey.

Description

Following are descriptions of the three separate buildings located on the West Home Chapel Site. The descriptions are divided into two sections pre-1940 and post 1941 remodel.

The Main Building

Pre-1940 The Main Building on this site, which served as the primary commercial and administrative offices for the manufactured gas companies of Seattle Lighting Company and Seattle Gas Company. Based on the floor plan sketches from the 1937 Property Survey and several historic photographs [See Figure 4], the Main Building was an L-Shaped building that had three offices that fronted California Avenue SW and 4 offices that fronted SW Genesee. The single-story building was built of what

has been referred to as Seattle Paving Brick, a beveled brick that added an interesting subtle design feature to the exterior of the building. The roof was composition and the foundation made of concrete. A single wood-burning brick fireplace was located along the southern wall of the southwest office suite.

The offices that fronted California Avenue featured what appears to be a primary entrance at the office located at the northwest corner of the building. A large arched window graced the Genesee frontage of this office suite. The two remaining offices featured large plate glass windows that were divided into three sections. Divided transom windows ran the length of these offices along California Avenue. The offices along Genesee featured rectangular windows composed of three divided panes. Each office had three of these window sets.

Post 1941 Remodel - As mentioned earlier, a drastic remodel of the Main Building occurred in 1941. Figures 5 & 6 show the exterior blue print for the Main Building remodel. In this remodel the footprint of the building changed from L-Shaped to simply rectangular. The large plate glass windows and formal entryway that addressed California Avenue were replaced by large brick walls divided into three segments that featured tri-paned rectangular windows similar in style to those found along the Genesee frontage. The formal entryway was relocated under the impressive arched window on Genesee Avenue and complimented with plate glass side windows reminiscent of a religious institution. The use of the Main Building also changed as the interior space was now transformed into one large room that served as the formal chapel for the mortuary business. The exterior of the three remaining window sets along Genesee were not disturbed and remain as an original feature of the building today.

Another interesting architectural detail evident in later pictures and still today is the presence of several triangular decorative tile inserts around the exterior of the main building. [See Figure 7] Although not evident on original photographs of the building, these features also appear to be an original feature that survived the remodel.

The Barn

Pre-1940 - Although no clear pictures were found of the original barn structure, it is easy to see the original barn shape and function associated with this structure. This two story building is located at the southeast corner of the site and originally had large barn doors and hay loft that opened to the interior courtyard of the site, facing the north. The barn was built of the same beveled brick found on the exterior of the main building.

Post 1941 Remodel - Again, a major remodel changed the exterior, interior, and use of this building. This building's use was changed from a barn to an on-site resident for a member of the mortician's family. The large barn doors were replaced with large wood framed windows and the hay loft replaced with an attractive arched window feature. The west façade of the barn features two dormers which appear to be original features. The main entry to the residence was relocated to this side. [See Figure 8]

The Carriage House

The Carriage House is the one structure on site that appears to have maintained its original structure from 1910 to today. The single story structure is located on the southwest corner of the site and is comprised of the same beveled brick found on the other site buildings. Two massive wooden doors are found on the north façade of this building.

HISTORY

West Home Chapel was built in 1910 as the West Seattle offices for the Seattle Lighting Co. According to newspaper articles from the 1950's, this private manufactured gas company's lineage can be traced back to Henry Yesler's Seattle Gas Light Company which was the first private gas services company established in Seattle in 1873.

At the turn of the 20th century, manufactured gas was competing with electricity as to which service would become the power of choice for municipal lighting. Manufactured gas (which was manufactured for the region at Gas Works Plant on Lake Union) was also used as a heating source for the blossoming residential and commercial sections found in many early 1900 urban settings. This competition played out in earnest along California Avenue (and the rest of Seattle) as 18 miles of gas lines were laid to service the booming neighborhood. Interestingly, of the three brick buildings along California Avenue during 1912, one belongs to Seattle Lighting Co. (manufactured gas) and one belonged to Seattle Electric Light (electricity)!

In 1929, Seattle Lighting Co. became Seattle Gas Co. Also, by the 1930's manufactured and natural gas were now being used primarily as commercial/residential heating product and electricity had become the king of public lighting projects. Seattle Gas Co. closed it West Seattle Office in 1938-39.

In 1941, the West Home Chapel, under the direction of C.L. Haggard bought the site at California and Genesee. West Home Chapel became an integral part of West Seattle history for over 60 years as a family run business. In 2001, the West Home Chapel closed it doors and sold the building to the current owner, Lisa Kinnon Meyer.

Significance

The West Home Chapel is definitely associated with the Broad Patterns of History/Development of West Seattle and Seattle.

- a. West Seattle. One of the first brick commercial buildings along California Ave (the main commercial arterial for West Seattle). According to the Baist's Surveys of Seattle (1912), the Seattle Lighting Company buildings were only one of three brick buildings along California Avenue. Also, the Seattle Lighting Co. buildings were the only structures located on Block 48 of the Boston Co. Plat of West Seattle in 1912.
- b. Street Cars – Electric Railways. A cornerstone of the history of Seattle's development is the story of the electric railways that connected Seattle's

City Center with numerous outlying land development projects, including West Seattle.

- c. Seattle Lighting/Seattle Gas Cos.
Not only is the building associated with these specific historic gas companies, but the site can be more broadly associated with the pattern of commercial manufactured gas distribution and retail at the turn of the city. The site remains somewhat intact as you can see the relationship of the main building to the barn to the carriage house. The relationship of the site to the broad urban history story of utility development is also significant.
- d. West Home Chapel - Continuous operations (60+ years) is definitely a significant contribution to the West Seattle Business Community.
- e. William R. Grant – This is the architect for the remodel that occurred in 1941. As a matter of significance, he appears to be a local architect of some renown as he designed the Naval Reserve Center at South Lake Union, assisted by Marcus Priteca, the prominent theater designer. This building is eligible for the National Register.