1 NAME
   HISTORIC
   Salmon Beach Historic District
   AND/OR COMMON
   Salmon Beach

2 LOCATION
   STREET & NUMBER
   Salmon Beach
   CITY, TOWN
   Tacoma
   VICINITY OF
   6th - Floyd Hicks
   STATE
   Washington

3 CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY
   X DISTRICT
   _ BUILDING(S)
   _ STRUCTURE
   _ SITE
   _ OBJECT
   OWNERSHIP
   X PUBLIC
   _ PRIVATE
   _ BOTH
   STATUTORY
   X OCCUPIED
   _ UNOCCUPIED
   _ WORK IN PROGRESS
   _ ACCESSIBLE
   _ IN PROCESS
   _ BEING CONSIDERED
   PRESENT USE
   _ AGRICULTURE
   _ COMMERCIAL
   _ EDUCATIONAL
   _ ENTERTAINMENT
   _ GOVERNMENT
   _ INDUSTRIAL
   _ MILITARY
   _ MUSEUM
   _ PARK
   _ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
   _ RELIGIOUS
   _ SCIENTIFIC
   _ TRANSPORTATION
   _ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
   NAME
   Multiple
   STREET & NUMBER
   CITY, TOWN
   VICTINITY OF
   STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE,
   REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
   Pierce County Courthouse
   STREET & NUMBER
   CITY, TOWN
   Tacoma
   STATE
   Washington

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
   TITLE
   None
   DATE
   _ FEDERAL
   _ STATE
   _ COUNTY
   _ LOCAL
   DEPOSITORY FOR
   SURVEY RECORDS
   CITY, TOWN
   STATE
The Salmon Beach Historic District is a collection of simple and modest cabins built principally by their owners; its individual appearance and continued maintenance as a "do it yourself" community owes much to its inception as an information gathering place on the shores of Puget Sound near the city of Tacoma.

The dwellings are located at the foot of a steep tree-covered bluff which ends immediately at the beach fronting the Narrows, a constriction of Puget Sound about one mile wide. The only access to Salmon Beach is by one of several trails leading from parking lots and access roads at the crest of the bluff; the pathways and stairs provide the only approach from the land side. A narrow path at the base of the bluff continues immediately behind the three-quarter mile long row of cabins and provides access to all structures on the beach. The cabins themselves are typically built on posts or piles with usually only one facade founded on the bluff face; at high tide, water flows freely under the buildings and permits the use of boats to bring in materials and supplies from the water side. For the purposes of this nomination, the Salmon Beach Historic District is defined as a narrow strip of land located in Government lots 1, 2 and 3; Section 22, Township 21 North, Range 2 East of the Willamette Meridian; and extending southward approximately 3800 feet from the common boundary of Sections 15 and 22, bounded on the west by the inner harbor line and on the east by the intermediate crest of the bluff at the western most edge of the parking lots.

Home owners indirectly lease their homes from three major property owners although there are no lot parcels as such. Some 111 lots were surveyed in 1950 and the houses renumbered in 1953 to agree with the lot numbers; currently, some vacant lots are held in common by the Salmon Beach Improvement Club (the primary lease holder), some are absorbed by adjacent lots and some vacant lots are subleased to individuals. Ownership of the structures is confused because there are no public records of deed transfer -- the structures as chattels are conveyed from the owner to the next by a simple bill of sale. The Improvement Club is charged with collecting rent from the subleasees of lots, based on waterfront footage, regardless of the number of structures on the lot.

The Salmon Beach community began as a series of summer camps and fishing platforms built just prior to World War I. As the use of the area became more extensive, some permanent and semi-permanent residents began the gradual improvement and modification of their dwellings that is the hallmark of Salmon Beach today. Homes, shanties and cabins were gradually modified by one or more owners to meet changing needs over the years. The approach was pragmatic and without recourse to any architectural persuasion; the appearance of the district today is unified by the economic and geographic constraints that have continuously shaped the linear row of beachfront dwellings. The use of found or salvaged materials, the small scale of the work, the exclusive use of wood (both as a framing and a finishing material) and the modest proportions of the end product mark the typical Salmon Beach home. It is the distinct quality of participation by the owner as builder and most often as designer that lends a particular uniformity to the structures, although in recent years some architecturally developed homes have been built shoulder to shoulder with their more randomly conceived neighbors. Disparate in design, they continue in the Salmon Beach tradition through their use of wood and their approachable scale, maintaining the essential quality of a Salmon Beach residence, the appearance of having been crafted where it stands. Since a school of design is absent and since the continued modification of the structures is a significant part of their existence, the nomination does not contain the standard
analysis of structures as primary, secondary or intrusive. Individual dwellings are classified by approximate age only; intrusions within the district are limited and are composed of only those structures which do not represent the physical scheme of Salmon Beach as outlined above. At present only Number 34, a house trailer, and Number 33, a modern contractor style home, are identified as intrusions.

Basically unaltered structures over 50 years old:

Number 21: A three room summer camp (1910), 39 feet long by 15 feet wide with a wide (seven and a half feet) covered open porch with lattice railing. It is of rough-sawn wood frame construction with mismatched windows and doors, capped by a low gable roof. The two most visible changes, a corrugated metal roof and a small electric stove are being replaced by the original shingles and wood stove by the preservation-minded owner, the Salmon Beach Historical Committee.

Number 53: A small cottage (1915), 20 feet by 24 feet with an early bedroom addition on the north side. Exterior cladding is clapboard with a gable roof; a recent shed addition to the rear has obscured the original exterior treatment but it is visible from the waterfront. Site of one of the largest moonshine raids by the Pierce County 'dry squad' on December 30, 1925.

Number 73: A large cottage (1915), 22 feet by 32 feet with a steep-pitched hip roof and dormer window in front, including partially open front porch.

Number 97: A small camp (1916), 14 feet by 18 feet with a porch in front. The best example of "fishing shack" structures commonly found on Puget Sound prior to World War I and nominated to the National Register in May, 1976.

Altered structures over 50 years old:

Nos. 7 and 8: Both these small camps (ca 1917) have had their open porches closed in, and two-story additions adjacent to the trail tend to dominate the former low profile of the roof lines.

Number 10: A steep-pitched two-room shake-sided cabin (ca. 1918) with open porch removed in 1972. Interior converted to large room with sleeping loft in former attic. A dormer window and bay window have been added.

Number 20: A formerly small, 15 feet by 19 feet camp (1913) with low gable roof. The front half has been extended by raising the rafters to a nearly flat slope which more than doubled the size of the house. A large deck was then added in the late 1960s.

Number 25: A typical bachelor's camp (1910) owned by former "mayor" Charley Chase, until his death in 1962. Nearly square (23 feet by 21 feet) it has a hip roof of thick cedar shakes. However, the open front porch was removed in 1965, and an aluminum framed sliding
glass door fitted into the water side facade.

Number 39: The sole survivor of another era amid newer and fancier houses. The front room has been identified from photographs as an original one room camp built about 1905. The kitchen, bedrooms, and enclosed porch were added in the early twenties by the Marshall Eaton family, who named it "Chautauqua". Camps on both sides were lost in slides around World War I. It is presently 24 feet by 30 feet with an irregular plan and a steeply-pitched gable roof with flatter extensions covering porch and rear bedroom.

Number 64: A two-room camp (1913) with later additions. This house was badly run down when purchased by the present owner, who has restored the interior and added a workshop.

Number 65: A three-room 20 feet by 28 feet, gable-roofed cottage (1914) with large front and side decks. A formerly functional wood shed was converted to a detached guest room, following installation of electric heat. Although the exterior retains the old "beach camp" appearance, complete with outside cooler and swayback roof line, the interior has been modernized.

Number 79: A low-roofed camp (1912) which typifies the continual modifications made to Salmon Beach buildings. Originally only 10 feet wide and 24 feet long, it is now 34 feet by 24 feet. It is also remarkable for having survived several severe mud slides in 1951 and 1972, which destroyed houses on both sides.

Numbers 85, 87, 89, 95, 96, 100, 101, 103 and 104: These are all pre-World War I fishing camps or little cottages which retain at least part of the original exterior. Numbers 87 and 89 have been expanded in both width and height, a second story being added. Numbers 85, 96 and 100 are the original size with former open front porches enclosed and recent decks extended seaward. Numbers 95, 101 and 103 have structural additions, as opposed to extensions and the roof line differs from the original portion near the trail. Number 104 is undergoing a complete rebuilding of the unsound early front addition with a companion restoration of the older rear portion. This section of Salmon Beach is noted for the relative absence of mud slides, hence the large number of older structures.

Number 111: A very old camp surrounded by additions, a development similar to Number 39, known humorously as Tranquility Gap because of close proximity to the southern tunnel portal on the Burlington Northern mainline. Because of the misfortunes of fire and slides at the extreme south end of Salmon Beach, this house is separated from the nearest house by about 125 feet of vacant beach, making it the most isolated house within this isolated community.

Essentially unaltered structures over thirty-five years old:

Numbers 42, 66, 67, 3, 4, 17, 18, 43, 46, 49, 58, 63 largely shingled and unpainted, are good examples of Depression-era cottages and represent an interesting era at Salmon Beach.
Unemployed family men, particularly carpenters, had lots of time, but little money. They would "scrounge" loose logs, cut off any identifying marks of ownership, paint with lye to give a weathered look, and tow them by rowboat to a small mill in Gig Harbor some three miles distant for cutting into building materials. Holes for pilings (technically posts) were hand-dug three to five feet into the rocky beach, often imbedded two feet in solid clay. The greatest bonanza in cheap materials occurred with the stripping of falsework timbers and boards from the concrete towers of the first Narrows bridge, immediately south of Salmon Beach.
The tract of land upon which the community of Salmon Beach developed has a long and controversial history. Between the years 1883 and 1905 the tract bordering the east side of the Tacoma Narrows passed through a series of five speculative land owners and was successively logged, claimed, challenged and contested in court. What is surprising here is not so much the controversy and ensuing litigation over a parcel of land, but rather that an embryonic community of workers began to develop camps on this land seemingly unmindful of the possibility of legal removal. This same unmitigated optimism is still present on Salmon Beach today, where a tenuous land leasing arrangement, mudslides and potentially destructive winter weather fail to discourage a diverse but cohesive community.

The central factor enabling such apparently unwarranted faith is the geography of the community. Bounded on one side by the swirling Narrows, a mile wide passage through which the waters of Puget Sound rush, and on the other by a precipitous 200 foot bank, the area enjoys a sense of isolation which is both passively protective and actively functional. The topography served to restrict industrial and conventional residential development at the turn of the century. Later with the Volstead Act and the economic collapse of '29, it functioned to provide a secluded spot for bootleggers and an inexpensive living environment for impoverished families. Today the steep bank serves as a buffer between the ongoing community of Salmon Beach and the encroachments of Tacoma's suburban residential development while the water and beachfront continue to influence the picturesque qualities of Salmon Beach.

By the later 1890s, Tacoma's waterfront, running northwest from the city waterway to the Tacoma Smelter, was being developed by the rapidly expanding lumber industry. Tacoma's principal green space, Point Defiance Park, did not accommodate overnight campers and workers began to look toward the undeveloped land facing the Narrows as a weekend family and fishing retreat. Soon temporary structures, shacks and tent platforms began to appear. These buildings were constructed with salvaged materials on severely limited incomes. Campers had to work in cooperation with their neighbors, and the pioneering virtues of self reliance, ingenuity and tenacity were prerequisites demanded by economics and geography.

Beach camps soon dotted the shoreline from Point Defiance south several miles to Titlow Beach and Day Island. However, when the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads acquired waterfront land in 1909 for main line development, the campers south of the proposed Nelson Bennett Tunnel, just south of the Salmon Beach community today, three miles to Titlow Beach, were forced to vacate. This caused such an escalation in building on the remaining available land (from Point Defiance south to the tunnel) that by 1915 there existed a tightly packed linear community in which there was little room for new structures.
For a community of this nature to survive, much less thrive, mutual assistance was essential. Building would prove impossible without neighborly assistance with pilings and bulkheads. An informal but effective referral system of services and goods rarely failed to turn up the needed expertise or tool. The community worked together in dealing with the common problems of slides, storms and landowners. This ability to mobilize community resources in response to community problems reached its ultimate formal manifestation in 1950 with the incorporation of the Salmon Beach Improvement Club. The non-profit organization was formed for the purpose of obtaining and stabilizing a leasing arrangement, an issue with which it continues to struggle.

Excellent salmon fishing off Point Defiance prompted Andrew Foss, owner of a prominent tug and barge company, to float in the Narrows boat house and another structure in the spring of 1906. Salmon fishing was important both as a sport and a commercial industry. The large fish (three-foot salmon were not uncommon), abundant in Puget Sound waters, offered the local residents the opportunity to supplement their meager incomes by selling their surplus catch to Tacoma's markets. Foss's boat rental business proved a lucrative venture especially on Sundays when many local workers spent their day off fishing the Narrows. Year-round residency grew gradually on the beach from this time. However, it was not until Charlie Ziegler opened the other Foss building as a general store in 1918 that the community found its name. Charlie dubbed his operation the "Salmon Beach Store", and soon the adjoining boathouse and entire community to which fishing had become so important became know collectively as Salmon Beach.

By 1918, Salmon Beach was a restricted access, waterfront community of around 100 cabins. Residents were largely young Tacoma working class families attracted by inexpensive living, good fishing and the beautiful setting. Because of limited space, growing needs and a somewhat inhospitable environment (i.e., landslides, high waters and severe weather), the tiny cabins were already embarked upon the process of perpetual alteration which continues today. Though many of the structures have changed substantially over the years, it is doubtful that this should be viewed as a breach of integrity; change to accommodate human needs has been a defining quality of the community since its inception.

Economic considerations and the problem of moving heavy building materials into the geographically isolated area served to restrict builders to materials they could utilize from existing structures or salvage and float in by water. These factors, in addition to severe space limitations, encouraged a sense of architectural freedom and improvisation that produced designs particularly well suited to the environment. Construction under such conditions taxes the imagination and ingenuity of the builder and houses tend to become the personal expressions of those who build and alter them. Human variety is well reflected in community form and structural diversity. Today, as in the past, alteration is readily visible, but original structures are rarely destroyed and salvaged goods continue to make up the bulk of building materials. Salmon Beach exists today as a document of the resourcefulness of the community's members, past and present.
In January of 1919, Salmon Beach was hit by one of the worst landslides ever recorded in the Puget Sound area. Fourteen cabins were destroyed. Fearful because of the continuing danger, most residents evacuated, many returning only to claim their belongings. With this disaster and the passage of the Volstead Act later the same year, Salmon Beach made the abrupt transition from a family community to a Roaring 20s shanty town, its residents preoccupied with the production and enthusiastic consumption of home brew. The natural isolation helped to keep out the dry squad and the Narrows just out front provided a quick escape by water. With spring water, ideal for brewing, and an ever expanding market in booming Tacoma just over the hill, the home brew industry prospered. Devilfish Pete, Harvey Bennett, Charlie Chase and Grandma Wardle were colorful figures associated with this era of the community.

Throughout the prohibition years, the beach population was composed primarily of unemployed bachelors, many of whom were forest workers displaced by mechanization in the logging industry. But with the Depression, low-cost housing came into widespread demand and families were again attracted to the community's inexpensive dwellings. It was during this period that housing alteration became most prevalent. With large families cramped into the small cabins, expansion became essential. Open porches were closed in and cabins extended back towards the bank to provide optimal living space. These alterations are readily visible today; the skylights, lofts and dormers reflect more recent additions.

Salmon Beach remained a family community through the forties. With a severe earthquake and accompanying landslides in 1949, it entered a period of extended litigation. Tacoma's mayor called for an exploratory survey to determine the likelihood of future slides. When geologists gound the entire bank unstable, eviction notices were posted by the landlord. Most residents clung tenaciously to their community and joined together in an effort to meet the threat of legal removal. With the incorporation of the Improvement Club, Salmon Beach entered a period of legal uncertainty which existed to 1958 when a short term leasing arrangement was agreed upon. The ability to live with the insecurity of a year-to-year leasing arrangement has been a prerequisite of Salmon Beach residence since.

With a future shaded by doubtful lease renewal, the ever present potential of natural calamity and an expanding metropolitan center less than a mile over the hill, Salmon Beach exists much as it always has, an isolated but functional community. Under the provisions of the Shoreline Management Act of 1971, local governments were required to prepare master programs for the regulation of shoreline use on the local jurisdictional level. The implementation ordinance from the Tacoma Planning Department suggested that Salmon Beach be conserved as an historic area of the city.

The late Virna Haffer, a photographer of some repute, summered at her cabin at Salmon Beach and was particularly successful in capturing the character of the community on film. Her studies of the changing moods of the Narrows Bridge and the aging pensioners who lingered on at the beach helped her win several awards and honors, among them the Gold Medal of the Photographic Society of America (1962) and the Master of Photography degree...
by Professional Photographers, Inc. (1965). It is, however, for her contributions to the technique of photogrammy that she is most noted. The photogram -- an image created on light-sensitive paper by interposing objects between the paper and a light source -- was brought to a high point of development by Miss Haffer. The use of several tiers of objects led to effects not before created; one of her photograms has been included in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York. She exhibited widely and critics cited her "richness of ideas, ingenuity, resourcefulness and skill" and found her photograms to be "advanced and highly personalized." She died in 1974 and much of her Salmon Beach materials are retained by the Salmon Beach Historical Committee.

Though Salmon Beach has a rich and colorful history and an interesting, adaptive architectural form, it is the community's continued ability to function as an intact social entity that constitutes its primary significance. Today Salmon Beach accommodates around 150 full time residents. No longer bound to the beach by economic necessity, residents range from professional people to self-employed craftsmen. Families and singles, men and women, children and older folks represent a community of diversity, united in a common environment. Community members retain the sense of mutual dependence in dealing with the same problems that past residents united to solve. But it is more than a group response to common problems; it is a sensitivity to Salmon Beach as a continuing culture, its past and present -- it is a way of life.

The geography of the community continues to encourage a life style based on cooperation, ingenuity and self-reliance. Such qualities are not the vestigial remnants of a past culture but integral parts of a continuing way of life. Salmon Beach has functioned for some 70 years as a human community and its scale today is distinctly human. Houses for the most part are small and built by those who live in them. Materials are of local origin, often salvaged and construction is primitive. This intimate relationship between people and structures is reflected in a community form worth preserving.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Narrows Realty Co. vs. State


(continued on attached sheet)

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4.7

UTM REFERENCES

A

ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING
1
513.5
23.0

B

ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING
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6.0

C

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Oscar F. Graham

ORGANIZATION

DATE
October 15, 1976

STREET & NUMBER
2211 North Cedar

TELEPHONE
(206) 759-0823

CITY OR TOWN
Tacoma

STATE
Washington

98406

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL
STATE
LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE
State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE
November 30, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

GPO 885-445
Unpublished notes of Salmon Beach Historical Committee. (Roger C. Edwards)
Tacoma News Tribune, June 8, 1975. Magazine, "Salmon Beach Photo Legacy".
Tacoma News Tribune, June 14, 1970; "Tacoman Widely Honored in Field of Phography".
Tacoma News Tribune, May 21, 1967, "Photographer Says Abstracts are Everywhere".
Salmon Beach Historic District

Tacoma, Washington
Jacob Thomas
April, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.

View of the Beach to the northeast.

1 of 6
Salmon Beach Historic District

Tacoma, Washington
Rich Thacker
October, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.
Cabin Nos. 53, 54, 56, 58, 60, facing northeast

2 of 6
Salmon Beach Historic District
Tacoma, Washington
Florence K. Lentz
October, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.
Cabin Nos. 54, 56, facing south
3 of 6
Salmon Beach Historic District
Tacoma, Washington
Florence K. Lentz
October, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.
Cabin Nos. 61, 63, 64, facing north.
4 of 6
Salmon Beach Historic District

Tacoma, Washington
Florence K. Lentz
October, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.
Cabin No. 79, facing south.
5 of 6
Salmon Beach Historic District

Tacoma, Washington  DEC 8  1976
Florence K. Lentz
October, 1976
Washington State Parks and Recreation Comm.
Cabin No. 82, facing south
6 of 6