

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Purnell Apartments

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2603 Elm Street

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

city or town Bellingham

vicinity

state Washington code WA county Whatcom code 073 zip code 98225

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

WHIP ONLY

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	district
	site
	structure
	object
1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

NONE

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK (vener)

roof: SYNTHETICS: tar

other: STUCCO

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Purnell Apartments are nine residential units in a two-story masonry building. Built by Bellingham resident William Lewis Purnell on a corner lot adjacent to his home, the apartments are located at 2603 Elm Street, approximately one mile northwest of downtown Bellingham. The building was constructed in 1925 according to the assessor's office and the Polk City Directory, which first lists the "Purnell Apartments" in the classified section that year. The building has a modified rectangular footprint because the northeast corner of the building is clipped, corresponding to an approximately 60-degree angle where Elm Street intersects with Northwest Avenue. Located on a major thoroughfare, the apartments have been used as rentals for working middle-class tenants from the time of construction and continue in that function today. The Spanish Eclectic inflection of the building, while subdued in execution, testifies to the popularity of revival styles in the 1920s. The building communicates its original function as an urban apartment house, visually prominent on a distinctive intersection, with convenient access to downtown.

The siting of the Purnell building, with its expansive horizontal massing on an irregularly shaped lot, adds interest to what might be otherwise a simple, symmetrical form. A walk-up with a 3,227 square-foot floor area on each level, the building was planned to maximize coverage of its 4,356 square-foot lot, and it abuts the property line in the front. The character-defining feature of the building is its use of parapets on three elevations. Above the front porch at the roofline, a shaped parapet constructed of staggered brick contributes to the Spanish style. Parapets are also built up on roofline corners: the roofline is highest at the corners and dips in the middle of each elevation. The heavy reinforced corners of the building where the chimneys are located resemble pylons and produce a fortress effect.

Setting

The apartment building, located in the North Street Addition of the Columbia neighborhood, is highly visible in a mixed-use district. The front doors to the three of the downstairs units and the lobby open directly to the sidewalk at street level. It is unusual for a historic apartment building that is not a rowhouse to feature doors for individual ground floor units opening directly to the street. But this arrangement adds internal square footage and avoids the long, dark halls characteristic of nineteenth-century tenements. In the back, a grassy area fills most of the five-foot wide strip between the building and the rear property line. A small graveled parking area is located at the rear, south end of the property.

The building's construction followed in the wake of a streetcar line extension in 1913 and increased automobile ownership in the 1920s. Highway 99 (also known as Pacific Highway 1) passed directly in front of the building and, while the area surrounding the property is still a major artery, it became less commercial following the construction of Interstate-5. The combination of the brick cladding, often used for commercial buildings, and its location at a major intersection on an arterial that was once a highway, contribute to its character as an urban multifamily dwelling.

Exterior

The Purnell building's plan has irregular dimensions: the front (east) elevation measures 79' with a 22' angled corner to the north, and the back (west) elevation measures 98'; the sides are 34' at the south elevation and 24' at the north. On the main façade, the entrance to the lobby is off-center. The public entrance is sheltered by an arched, painted wood open porch supported by two squat Craftsman-style wood piers resting on brick pedestals. Wrought iron light fixtures at the sides of the lobby entrance, with their cone-shaped shades, add to the Spanish inflection. Tenants and visitors enter the lobby through a single French door flanked by a pair of original multipane sidelights. The French door was custom-built to replicate its historic wood original.

The apartment building is clad in brick veneer, laid in a running bond, and scored with vertical imprints. In some places, the brick has been painted, and the main façade is punctuated with several external wall vents. This façade bears strong visual evidence of former features shown in photographs from the 1930s and 1990s: the brick above the first floor units to the south is marked horizontally where a wood awning was formerly attached. A dark ghosting over the door of unit 102, to the southern end, suggests there may have been a wooden arch resembling the porch overhang at this end of the building. Two brick pedestals at this end of the building, near units 102 and 103, remain where Craftsman-style wood piers identical to those supporting the porch have been lost.

The majority of the windows for the entire building are sash vinyl; however, almost all the replacement windows are fitted into their original openings, framed in a wide, flat molding shown in a historic photo. A few are vinyl casements or fixed picture windows. Some of the units have sidelights next to the doors at the front or rear of the building; these are replacement windows, but the sidelight openings were originally used for windows to provide light to the bathrooms. An original window is visible on the Elm Street façade, corresponding to unit 102; it is a large, fixed wood picture window, topped by three panes and protected by an original storm window. The building's windows feature brick lintels, with the brick laid in a soldier course. Sills are created of exposed brick ends. The apartment entrances doors are almost all replacements. Some are vinyl panel doors, others are simple, painted wood doors. Two original doors have an affixed panel covering that obscures their character.

At the northeast corner of the front façade, unit 104 has a somewhat different appearance because its clipped corner creates an angular building face. On the first floor, it has no sash windows but is punctuated by a replacement picture window with painted wood paneling beneath. On the second floor are three symmetrically placed sash vinyl windows. The corners of this portion of the structure are marked by extruded brick pilasters.

The south façade faces West North Street. A historic photo also shows an awning, similar to the one sheltering the entrance, over a large picture window on the first floor south elevation; the overhang appears to have been supported by a pair of cut-out brackets, another original Craftsman feature now lost. The side elevations to the south and north have the same fenestration as the rest of the building. The mortar on the south and north elevations has been tuck pointed. On the north elevation, an original door with a lintel was replaced by a painted wood panel on which power boxes are mounted.

At the rear of the building, the west elevation is parged and painted, corresponding to the original treatment.¹ This roofline does not have a parapet, and the corners where the south and north parapets join the rear elevation reveal the flat, torch down composition roof. Sturdy rafter tails protrude below the projecting eaves, with a narrow molding below. The back doors to the first-floor apartments and two metal staircases to reach the upper units are located on this elevation. The steel stairs were added in the 1990s, replacing an original wood open porch with decorative latticework that extended the width of the building and was destroyed in a fire. The wall surface bulges where the porch was attached. One of the center units retains a pair of the original wood double-hung windows on this elevation. As on the front façade, the majority of windows are vinyl sash with a few vinyl casement replacement windows. Unit 203 has a wood screen door that appears to be original or period. To the north end of the rear is a door marked "mechanical room."

Interior

The entrance leads into a small lobby, running east and west, with a staircase to access the four second-story apartments. The staircase occupies the south end of the lobby and mailboxes are located on the wall to the north. At the back of the lobby, a hallway branches out to the north. This hall contains the entrance and exit doors to unit 100; unit 101 also has its entrance on this hallway, but exits to the rear of the building. Under the staircase is a small service closet with an original paneled door. Another hallway branches off and leads to the back of the building and an exit door. This hall is not original, but was carved out of space from unit 101, historically used as the manager's unit. The staircase leading to the second floor is comprised of two ramps rather than stairs. The ramps are apparently original and were intended to facilitate moving furniture.² The hallway upstairs runs north-south and services all the second-floor apartments. Natural light is provided by two skylights; the glass has been replaced, but the deep wells remain unchanged. The walls of the upstairs hall feature boxcar siding as wainscoting.

The majority of the apartments are approximately 720-square foot, one-bedroom units. Units 103 and 104 are studios, and a former laundry room was combined with 104 to enlarge it.³ Some apartment entrances open directly into the kitchens, with the living rooms off to one side; the corner units open into the living rooms. The corner units are particularly well lit due to the a proliferation of windows on two sides of the living rooms. Unit 102, on the southeast corner, has an original fireplace although the tile in front of it is of a more recent era. Steam heat is provided by the original radiators. Some of the units' flooring is new, but original floors that remain are of oak or fir, the latter in 2- and 4-inch widths. Many of the kitchens feature period built-in wood cabinets with glass doors. The kitchens used wall coolers, the cabinets of which remain in several units; they vented on the front and rear elevations. Several apartments also retain their original sinks and drain boards. Five units have original claw foot bathtubs; four have shower stalls. Other built-in furnishings of the apartments have been lost: the studios and at least one of the one-bedroom units had Murphy beds.⁴

¹ Thad H. Buchanan (long-term neighbor and building caretaker), conversation with Lynette Felber, July 10, 2012.

² Ibid.

³ Howard Scott (property owner), conversation with Lynette Felber, June 29, 2012.

⁴ Buchanan.

Integrity

The Purnell Apartments retain excellent integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, and workmanship. The building's external architectural composition and plan remain, without modification, as they were in 1925. The character-defining parapets and brick veneer cladding communicate the builder's conception of massing and style. Situated on a distinctive corner lot highly visible from Elm Street, the building conveys the same urban character shown in a 1930s photograph. The majority of the apartment units retain their original organization of space. Integrity of design and materials are compromised by the loss of the original windows, doors, and some external ornamentation. Most of the exterior loss occurred in the 1990s, as aging and deteriorated materials suffered from tenants' wear and tear. Many of the lost elements, documented in a 1993 assessor's photo, could be replicated in a future rehabilitation.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

_____**Period of Significance**

1925

Significant Dates

1925

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

_____**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance begins and ends with the construction and occupancy of the building in 1925. The location of the Purnell Apartments at the Elm Street and Northwest Avenue intersection marked the inauguration of a new housing type in a neighborhood previously characterized primarily by single-family dwellings. As the automobile became the major form of transportation, replacing the streetcar in Bellingham by 1938, the corridor in which the apartments were located on Highway 99 was well travelled by residents and an increasing number of tourists. After the completion of the first link in Interstate-5 in the 1960s, however, the Elm and Northwest corridor began its transformation to a less tourist-oriented character. Today, this remains a dense neighborhood of mixed use, but it is no longer a busy tourist route.

8. Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Purnell Apartments are historically significant under National Register Criterion "C" as a local example of the 1920s apartment house as an architectural subtype. The building's shaped parapet and other Spanish Eclectic features also evince the popularity of revival styles during this period. The proliferation of the apartment house was characteristic of urban growth in the 1920s, as streetcar line extensions and automobile ownership broadened the distances workers could travel from home to their workplaces in the Central Business District.

The Purnell Apartments, built in 1925 on a bustling transportation corridor, sit on the corner of Elm and Northwest Avenue, an intersection so sharply angled that the footprint of the building corresponds to the bend in the street. The construction of the Purnell Apartments dates to the period in which streetcar and automobile use coexisted. During this era, the middle and working class continued to take streetcars while the upper-middle and upper classes became automobile owners.⁵ Bus service and the automobile eventually replaced the streetcars, which were eliminated in Bellingham in 1938.

The Purnell Apartments are locally significant as one of a select number of extant historic apartment buildings in Bellingham and in the Columbia neighborhood. Previously, a few apartments had been built downtown, in the area that was the outer border of the Central Business District at the time of their construction. Currently, some extant apartment houses, such as the Purnell Apartments, remain in the outlying areas. As in other urban areas, apartment buildings were constructed further from the downtown as new transportation systems developed. Before the 1920s, the architectural subtype of the apartment house was relatively uncommon in Bellingham; renters more often lived in lodging houses or single-room occupancy hotels. But construction of apartments increased in Bellingham, as nationwide, in the wake of improved transportation and the national prosperity that ended with the Crash of 1929. The tenants of local apartments, such as the Purnell building, were working middle class, often single persons or young couples with jobs as clerks, musicians, or mill workers. Located one mile from downtown, the Purnell Apartments would have been convenient for these tenants and included amenities such as an on-premise laundry room, steam heat, Murphy beds, and built-in cabinets. Characteristic of many apartment buildings of the era, it was identified by its original owner's name. The Spanish features of the Purnell Apartments also reflect the post-World War I proliferation of period styles with foreign precedents.

Community History: The City of Bellingham

The City of Bellingham is located in Whatcom County on the northern portion of Washington's Puget Sound. Prehistorically, the area near Whatcom Creek was inhabited by the Lummi, Nooksack, Nuwaha, and Samish tribes about ten thousand years ago. During the nineteenth century, the area was settled under the Oregon Land Bill, signed by President Fillmore in 1850, and the individual land claims formed the basis for later settlements, plats, and additions. Early land speculation was facilitated by the Donation Land Bill of 1850. Through this legislation, early settlers were able to claim land surrounding Bellingham Bay, forming the basis for later plats and additions. Since the claims included mineral rights, a few settlers tried to seize as much land as possible in order to sell the rights for coal mining. Three men – William Reed Pattle, James Morrison, and John Thomas – filed donation claims in 1853. The early history of Bellingham is one of shifting names and boundaries. Four original settlement towns -- Whatcom, Sehome, Bellingham, and Fairhaven -- were located in close proximity within a two and one-half mile expanse surrounding the bay. Indeed, water was the primary source of transportation before the forests were logged and the roads were built. The towns shared utilities but wanted to consolidate to avoid the expense of duplicating services and governments. Although consolidation was discussed as early as 1858, the rivalries among the four towns and the property interests of the various claimholders impeded the process. The expectation that one of the four boom towns would become the location for a railway terminus incited land speculation and led each town to promote itself to attract residents and investors. This speculation ended when Tacoma, Washington was selected as the terminus, and its line was completed in 1883. Whatcom and Sehome merged to become "New Whatcom" in 1891, and the two cities subsequently became "Whatcom" through an act by the State Legislature in 1901. Because Whatcom and Fairhaven had been the fiercest rivals, the consolidated city may have been named for the least developed of the four as a compromise. The city named "Bellingham" emerged after a vote in December 1903, and a new city charter was adopted in January of 1904.

⁵ Linda Flint McClelland, David L. Ames, and Sarah Dillard Pope, *Historic Residential Suburbs in the United States, 1830-1960*, National Register Bulletin (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), E-5.

A census for the newly consolidated Bellingham in 1904 found a total population of 22,632. During its settlement, the area's economy was largely reliant on natural resources such as lumber, coal mining, and fishing, and these resources were taken for quick gain. After most of the timber had been logged, entrepreneurs turned to land sales, and the city experienced a real estate boom in the 1920s. A survey by the Chamber of Commerce in 1925 found the population to be 35,891 within an area of 21 square miles. Furthermore, a survey of businesses and residents in 1926 found that the city claimed 13 office buildings, 29 hotels, 58 multifamily dwellings (housing 422 families), and 53 churches. Among the residents' occupations, 6,258 were school children, 275 worked in restaurants and cafes, and 948 in retail. The significance of the new automobile transportation was apparent as the survey found 35 gas stations and 314 residents working in the auto industry.⁶

Historical Context: Transportation and Residential Development in the Columbia Neighborhood

The unusual intersection at Elm Street and Northwest Avenue takes its form as the result of roads developed late in the nineteenth century. Elm Street approximately follows the Nooksacht Trail, which led north to Ferndale. Bellingham's Guide Meridian provided a central northern arterial that ran nearly parallel to Elm Street on a north axis, and Elm bent to align in a northwesterly direction.⁷ Northwest Avenue, identified as the N.W. Diagonal Road on Sanborn maps from 1913 and 1931, was earlier called Ferndale or Nooksack Road, and dates to circa 1887.⁸ Highway 99, developed early in the twentieth century, ran through downtown Bellingham on Holly Street, then turned north of Whatcom Creek near Pickett's Bridge; it reached Elm Street and took the angle of Northwest Avenue at the northeast corner.⁹ Residential use in this area began circa 1880s, with houses appearing on Park, Elizabeth, Elm, Kulshan, and Meridian Streets.¹⁰ In the streetcar era, commercial businesses such as groceries were often constructed on the intersections of major lines, and apartment houses also contributed to these clusters of development.¹¹ Corresponding to this trend, new housing and commercial buildings appeared along Elm and Meridian Streets when the area became accessible through the extension of the Courthouse streetcar line, and developers sold lots for new houses in the "North Addition."

As American automobile ownership increased, residences and new neighborhoods radiated further outward from central business districts. Nationally, the era between 1918 and 1929 was one of "an intense period of suburban expansion" in the United States.¹² In 1925, there was a construction boom in Bellingham: 1,205 permits were issued, and 287 buildings were completed that year for a finished value of \$1,622,894.¹³ The construction of the Purnell Apartments dates to the period in which automobile ownership use was becoming more common, and Sanborn maps reveal small garages on the alleys in the neighborhood, including one behind the owner's adjacent Craftsman-style bungalow at West North Street.¹⁴ Elm Street became a shopping corridor and acquired a grocery, a barber, a butcher, and a candy store.¹⁵ Businesses convenient to the Purnell Apartments in the 1920s included the Elm Meat Company at 2328 Elm and an automobile service station at 2620 Northwest, first listed in the City Directory in 1925. Directly across the street from the Purnell Apartments, the Elm Street Service Station and Grocery dates to 1925 and was still in operation at 2600 Elm as the Richfield High Octane Station in 1939. Some buildings used by neighborhood businesses in the early streetcar and automobile eras still remain, such as Goodard's Elm Market, operating today at 2404 Elm Street as Gifford's Market.

Automobile use on Highway 99 also precipitated commercial development in the Columbia neighborhood: Northwest Avenue had a Hi-Way Market and Grocery Meats in 1935.¹⁶ Historic postcards from the automobile era describe Northwest Avenue as a "scenic drive," but it developed into a much busier route than scenic Chuckanut Drive to the south

⁶ Lottie Roth, ed., *History of Whatcom County*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Pioneer Historical Publication Co., 1926), 1: 599, 602, and 605.

⁷ City of Bellingham, *Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan*, October, 2010, 5.

⁸ The Northwest Diagonal Road appears on a U.S.C.G.S. topographical map from 1887, reprinted in James Berg, *The Nooksacht's Trail and Crossing* (Everson, WA: Tuxedo Publishing 2003), 43; Jeff Jewell, Historian and Photo Archivist, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington, conversation of July 6, 2012.

⁹ Larissa King, "Old Highway 99: Shaping Bellingham's Future," City of Bellingham Website, <http://www.cob.org/services/planning/historic/hwy-99/ref.html>.

¹⁰ City of Bellingham, 7.

¹¹ McClelland, Ames, and Pope, E-5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Building Work in City Being Rushed," *Bellingham Herald*, November 20, 1925; Roth, ed., 1: 602

¹⁴ Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Bellingham* (New York: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company), 1913 and 1931.

¹⁵ City of Bellingham, 5 and 6.

¹⁶ King.

of town. Visitors looked for inexpensive lodging near the road, precipitating construction of new building types such as auto courts and motels. In Bellingham, many auto courts and camps were located on the north side of town, where tourists camped at Cornwall Park in the 1920s. Polk Directories show a concentration of auto camps on Northwest Avenue; in 1936 five of a total of nine listed were on this street. The McMurtrie Auto Court (1939) at 3005 Northwest was built in a revival style, suggesting Tudor and medieval influences with its half-timbering in the apex of its gables and a playful castellated parapet on one of the rear units. Renamed the Colonial Court Apartments, its units are rented as apartments today. Automobile tourism thus added another layer of development, and new kinds of resources, to the previously more residential, suburban Elm Street and the surrounding neighborhood.

A State traffic study in 1950 found that Highway 99 was used by 38,000 cars each day (with a total city population of only 34,000). Because the highway was inadequate for this level of use, the study recommended a new highway. For a time this new highway, which ultimately became Interstate-5, was dubbed the "99 Expansion." Although Northwest Avenue is still a major artery that connects with Interstate-5, the impact of in tourism in the Columbia Neighborhood and the area to the north diminished after the completion of the first section of the Interstate in 1960. A 1997 traffic study found the average daily trips on Elm Street and Northwest Avenue had actually decreased to 8,500-12,700, for a population roughly three times greater.¹⁷ The neighborhood surrounding the Purnell Apartments is no longer used for tourism, but is densely developed with a mix of single-family houses, some apartments, a grocery, and other commercial businesses.

An Architectural Subtype: The Apartment as a Building Type

The apartment as a housing type developed due to the high costs of land and the need for residents to live near their work in the cities, leading to multifamily housing. As New York City architect Ernest Flagg explained, "an economy of space is the reason for, and the object of this class of building."¹⁸ The apartment building also blurs the lines between the privacy of the single-family home and the public, shared space of the streets.¹⁹ Although the notion of the apartment may be traced to earlier antecedents in Europe (the Palace at Versailles, for example, had 10,000 residents in 1710), in the United States apartments evolved as alternative to lodging or boarding houses; early examples were called "French flats."²⁰ Apartment buildings are one of the most flexible building types: their units can be broken up into small rooms, or combined into massive living space. In fact, the word "apartment" derives from the Latin verb *partire*, "to divide" or "to share." Two defining features of apartment buildings are their usual arrangements of rooms along a central hallway and their "single primary entry with a sheltered vestibule and a lobby."²¹

Gunter Barth traces the apartment house in American to the period of massive urbanization in the 1830s, which led urban residents to boarding houses and tenements.²² Architects proposed urban apartment houses in the 1850s because New Yorkers could not procure adequate housing.²³ There are various theories about why there was inadequate housing at this time in New York City, where the apartment as a housing type finally came to dominate by the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The small size of New York City lots supplies one reason. In addition, after the Civil War disgruntled Southerners fled north; those who made fortunes during the war often moved to New York City. As a result, rents were high and single-family houses scarce, preparing the way for the dominance of the apartment among those who found boarding houses unacceptable.²⁴ In the Western states settled later, such as Washington, boarding or lodging houses were precursors to the apartment because there was an early shortage of housing: newcomers are often listed in city directories as lodging or in "rooms." But lodging houses did not assure the privacy, independence, or respectability of an

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ernest Flagg, "The Planning of Apartment Houses and Tenements," *The Architectural Review* 13 (August 1903): 85.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City, 1869-1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 7-25.

²¹ Mimi Sheridan, "Seattle Apartment Buildings, 1900-1957: Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places," November 2008, F-4 and F-5.

²² Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 46.

²³ Cromley, 27.

²⁴ Amy Kallman Epstein, "Multifamily Dwellings and the Search for Respectability: Origins of the New York Apartment House," *Urbanism Past and Present* 5 (Summer 1980): 32.

apartment. Apartments also provided some of the conveniences and spaces of single-family dwelling such as hot and cold water, a kitchen and private bathroom, and a recognizable address.²⁵

By the 1920s the apartment was well established as a popular housing type – no longer just for those who had no other alternatives, such as tenement dwellers. In 1929, *American Architects* marked the housing type's coming of age with a special issue.²⁶ As with other housing types, the terms used to describe various kinds of apartments varied over time: "tenements," "flats," "apartment hotels," and "town houses" to name perhaps the most significant. Over the course of their existence, many subtypes of apartments have developed: the buildings can consist of a few units, as in the fourplex, or can contain a large number, as in the apartment hotel. Moreover, apartment houses are not only identified and named by various subtypes, they are also sometimes given proper names, as the well-known "Dakota" in New York City. Elizabeth Hawes notes that the "custom of assigning descriptive labels to domestic architecture was borrowed from the rural English, who named their manor houses and rural estates to expedite the delivery of mail through the unchartered countryside."²⁷ As apartment dwelling became more common, the buildings were not only given names reflecting the nation's English heritage or exotic names drawn from European cities, but were sometimes named for states, usually in the exotic West: the Wyoming, the Nevada, and the Oregon were all found in New York City.²⁸ This naming was not so much descriptive as used for sales value and cache.

Apartment Houses in Bellingham, Washington

In Bellingham apartments were built because of scarce housing rather than a scarcity of land: the area was still being settled and developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before the 1920s, apartment houses were relatively uncommon in Bellingham, and very few buildings date back to the era directly after the City's consolidation: the rowhouses on East Chestnut Street (c. 1904) and Gilbert's Flats on Commercial Street (c. 1906), are two examples. Other extant apartment buildings located downtown are the Glenclair and the Cissna Apartments, both dating to the 1920s. Listings in the Polk Directory classifieds illustrate the blurring of housing categories prior to this era. In 1918, for example, the directory combined "Hotels, Apartments, Boarding and Rooming Houses" into one classification. Apartment houses were first listed as a discrete category in the business pages of the Bellingham Polk Directory for 1921-22, at which time there were 44 buildings listed. Not all were purpose-built apartments: "lodging houses" and the Sehome Hotel were also listed under the heading. There was an increase of the listings only three years later: in 1925, 59 apartments were listed, but again some were not apartment houses, but rather single-room occupancy units above retail (e.g. the Daylight Building) or hotels. In 1945, there were 56 apartment buildings listed, and the number continued to increase in subsequent years. The areas in which apartments were built also became more numerous, along with an expansion of the kinds of structure listed. In particular, there was a growing number of apartments near Western Washington State College (renamed Western Washington University in 1977), particularly on High, North Garden, and Indian Streets; by the 1970s, the directory listings filled over two pages and included town houses.

Early tenements in the United States were unnamed and only identified by their street addresses. A few were given the first name of a female family member.²⁹ This gendered trend is perhaps reflected in the name of the Christine Apartments at "F" and Girard Streets or the Lottie Roth Block in Bellingham, although the latter was originally built as office space and was converted into apartments in 1915. Even in modestly-sized Bellingham, some apartment buildings were given exotic or geographically suggestive names such as the "Alamo" or the "Glencarin." But naming an apartment for its first owner or builder was a pragmatic form of tribute that also served to identify landlords. In Bellingham, naming apartments after their original owners and/or builders was fairly common. In addition to the Purnell building, the Laube, Schermerhorn, Stephen Court, Doxsee, and Cissna Apartments of the 1920s, as well as the earlier Gilbert's Flats, were all named after their original owners or builders.

Property History

Original Owner: William Lewis Purnell

William Purnell (1860-1944) moved to New Whatcom in 1900. Purnell was born in Fountain County, Indiana and married Mary Olive "Ollie" Bryan on July 8, 1883. According to the 1910 Census, the couple had four daughters. Purnell worked

²⁵ Christine Hunter, *Ranches, Rowhouses and Railroad Flats - American Homes: How They Shape Our Landscapes and Neighborhoods* (New York: Norton, 1999), 210-12.

²⁶ Hawes, 251.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁸ Andrew Alperin, *Luxury Apartment House of Manhattan: An Illustrated History* (New York: Dover, 1992), 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

in farming, mercantile, and real estate; he was employed as a driver for Smith's Grocery and as a clerk for Allan Gorrie, a dairy at 1303 Dupont Street. He also took care of Captain Henry Roeder in his final years.³⁰ Roeder (1824-1902) was one of the first settlers in Whatcom County and, with Russell Peabody, built a sawmill at the mouth of Whatcom Creek in 1853.³¹ Roeder's Queen Anne-style mansion "Elmheim" (1896), at Elm and Monroe Streets, was located near the apartments. Circa 1901-03, Purnell lived on the property of Elmheim, or "Roeder's Reserve," at 2421 Elm Street, in a small house next to the mansion, shown on the 1904 Sanborn Map. The smaller house was Roeder's first home, built on the property in 1858 for his wife Elizabeth. Purnell subsequently became the owner of the original Roeder home and had it moved to the northeast corner of Elm and Jefferson Streets in 1904. He then replaced the roof shingles and also painted and remodeled the house.³²

In 1925, Purnell and his family lived in a house at 1306 West North Street, adjacent to the apartments. For the Purnells, as for the next owner, the house served initially as the family home, and the apartments were used for rental income. His daughter Virginia lived with her parents in the adjacent house in 1925, but in 1926 the couple and Virginia were all listed as living in the apartments at 2603 Elm, with Virginia renting unit 203. Virginia was the proprietor of "The French Gown Shoppe" at 126 ½ W. Holly. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Purnell constructed the apartment building from salvaged or recycled materials, and "reading the building" supports this idea. The brick is not all identical, and some square bent nails were used. Different kinds of moldings, apparently original, surround internal doorways in the units. The variety of seemingly original flooring (oak and different widths of fir) may also add credence to the oral history. Purnell's previous experience in "recycling" the 1858 Roeder house suggests a thrifty nature and adept building skills.³³

Second Owner

The Purnells retained ownership of the building for only ten months; the apartment mortgage was then assumed in October of 1927 by Peter (or Peder) and Annie Samuelson, along with the house on 1306 West North Street.³⁴ As with the previous owners of the apartments, the Samuelson family, including a daughter, Katherine, and sons Harold and Peter Jr., lived in the adjacent house. The elder Peter Samuelson was a native of Norway, born in 1869, who immigrated to the United States in 1888. A relation identified in property records as a "bachelor," Ole Samuelson, is also listed in the City Directory as living at the West North Street house for that year and apparently had some financial interest in the apartment building. In 1934, Katherine Samuelson became the manager of the apartments and lived in unit 101. She lived in this unit, or #103, until 1945 or 1946. The house and the apartment properties stayed in the Samuelson family until after the deaths of Annie and Peter Samuelson in 1947, when their estate was settled, with quit claims sent to seven children of Ole Samuelson in Norway and Puyallup, Washington.³⁵

Israel and Eva Karsh owned the apartments from 1947-65. The property was next purchased by Vernon A. and Merriel M. Hawkins in 1968. They were only short-term owners and sold the building to Robert G. and Jeanette Beck in 1970. Marvin B. and Ellen Vaughn owned the property from 1970-98, when it was sold to the current owner, Howard R. Scott.

Tenants

Classified ads in the *Bellingham Herald* show that in 1925 a furnished three-room apartment rented for about \$20.00 although some rented for as little as \$10.00 per month. The renters of the Purnell Apartments were mostly single persons, equally divided between men and women. One of the earliest tenants (1927-32) was Loren Boxill (#104), a laborer at the Bellingham Coal Mines and a piano tuner. One long-term tenant, Mary W. Bond (#102), a teacher at Roeder Junior High, lived with her sister Ethel, a nurse, in the 1930s. Mary Bond lived alone in the apartment for several years and then took a roommate, Mrs. Octavia Jenkins, probably a widow, in 1938. A long-term tenant later in the building's history (1945-66) was Mrs. Minta King (#100), a cook at the Bon Marche. Also a building manager, Mrs. King lived with her son Denny. He tended the furnace for \$17.00 a month, and the family received their rent in exchange for their services.³⁶ About half of the units turned over with new tenants each year. During some of the Depression years, as many as three of the nine units were listed as vacant in the City Directory, but the apartments were fully rented most of the time in the building's later history.

³⁰ Willard D. Purnell (nephew of William Purnell), interview, June 29, 2012.

³¹ Roth, ed., 1: 322.

³² "Old Home of Captain Roeder Moved to New Location After Fifty Years," *The Daily Reveille*, June 26, 1904.

³³ Purnell; Buchanan; Scott.

³⁴ Chain of Title, Metroscan Property Profile, Whatcom, WA, Real Estate Solutions (Bellingham: Stuart Title).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Denny King (former tenant), conversation, July 27, 2012.

Summary of Significance

The Purnell Apartments were built during a period of growth, optimism, and prosperity in the United States during the decade preceding the Great Depression. Bellingham and Whatcom County had flourished economically after 1917 because the country's participation in World War I resulted in demand for Pacific Northwest resources, particularly timber. By the time of the mid- to late 1920s, Bellingham was in a third wave of economic and physical development.³⁷ The Purnell Apartment building and its location in a bustling corridor reflect the influence of new transportation systems on residential development. It exemplifies the local emergence of the apartment building as an architectural subtype. In addition, the building's muted Spanish character illustrates a Pacific Northwestern interpretation of popular revival styles of architecture in the 1920s.

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³⁷ Kathryn Franks, "Commercial Buildings of the Central Business District of Bellingham, Washington, 1882-1915." National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Nomination," April, 2003, E-17.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>10</u>	<u>5-37-677</u>	<u>54-01-217</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary includes the entire lot at 2603 Elm Street, from Elm Street at the east, North West Street to the south, the alley to the north, and the property line to the west. The legal description is Lot 11, Block 154, otherwise known as parcel 380224 504141.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the nominated property encompasses the entire urban tax lot occupied by the Purnell Apartments.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynette L. Felber / Historic Preservation Consultant

organization None date July 30, 2012

street & number 507 14th Street telephone 360.738.2346

city or town Bellingham State WA

98225 code

e-mail lfelber@comcast.net

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Howard Scott

street & number 700 Sunset Pond Lane, Suite A 2

telephone 360.441.5801

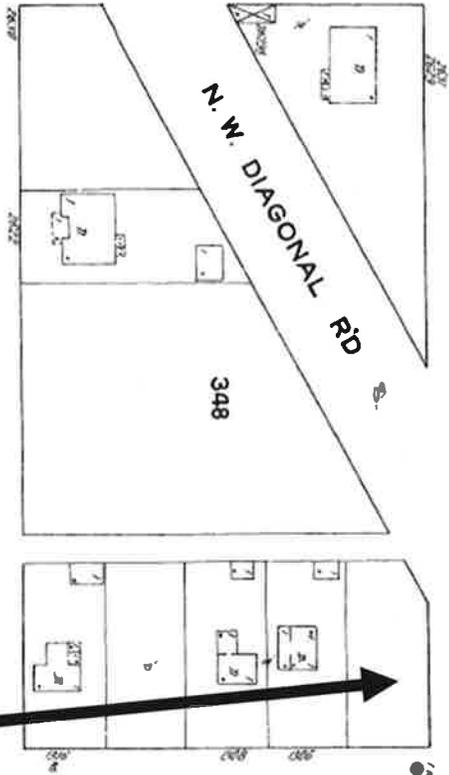
city or town Bellingham

WA 98226

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

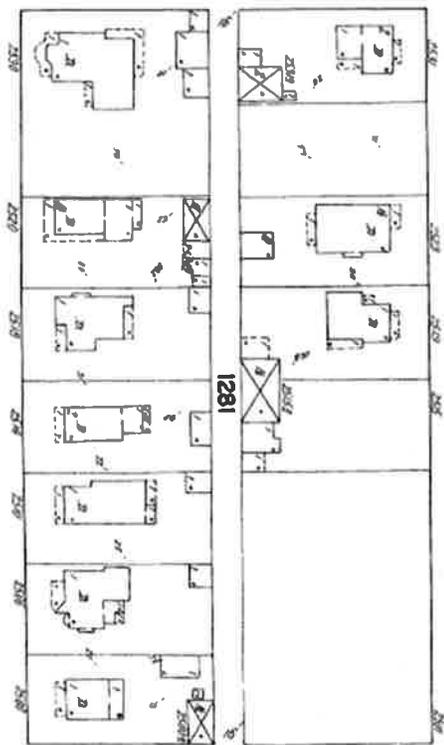
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

W. CONNECTICUT



KULSHAN

W. NORTH

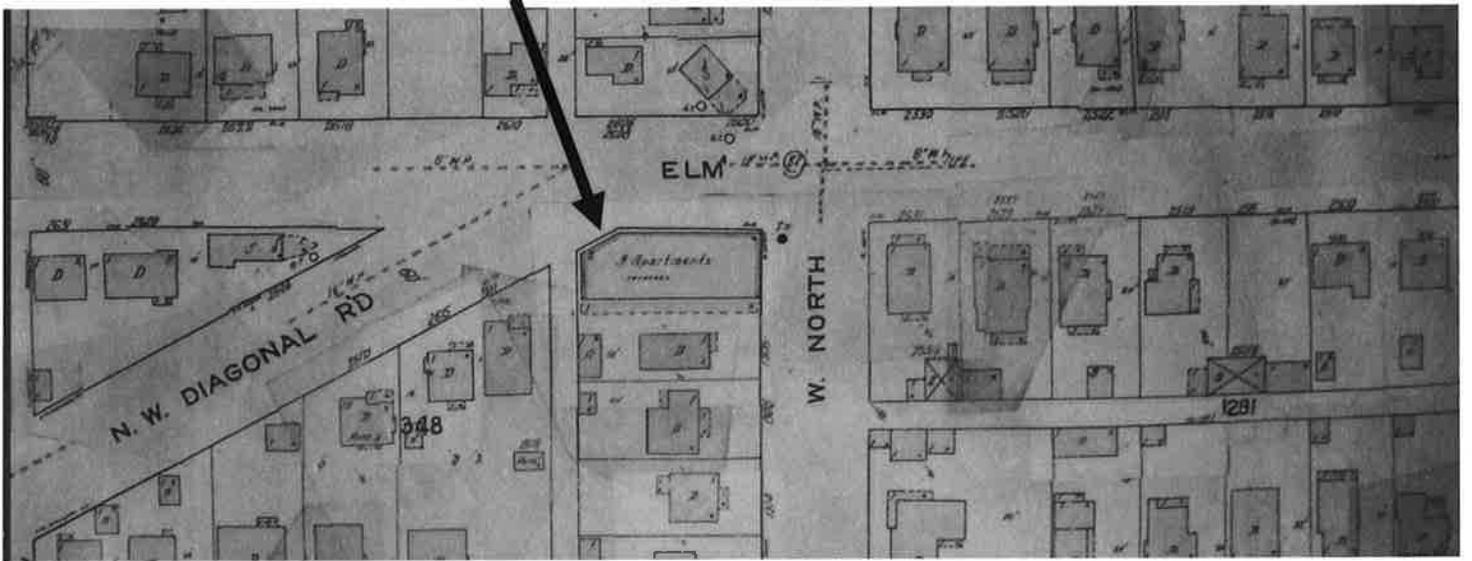


JEFFERSON

ELM

12

Sanborn Map: Bellingham, 1913, Sheet 11



Sanborn Map, Bellingham, 1931, sheet 11



TOWNSHIP
38

RANGE
2E

SECTION
24

MAP NO.
00

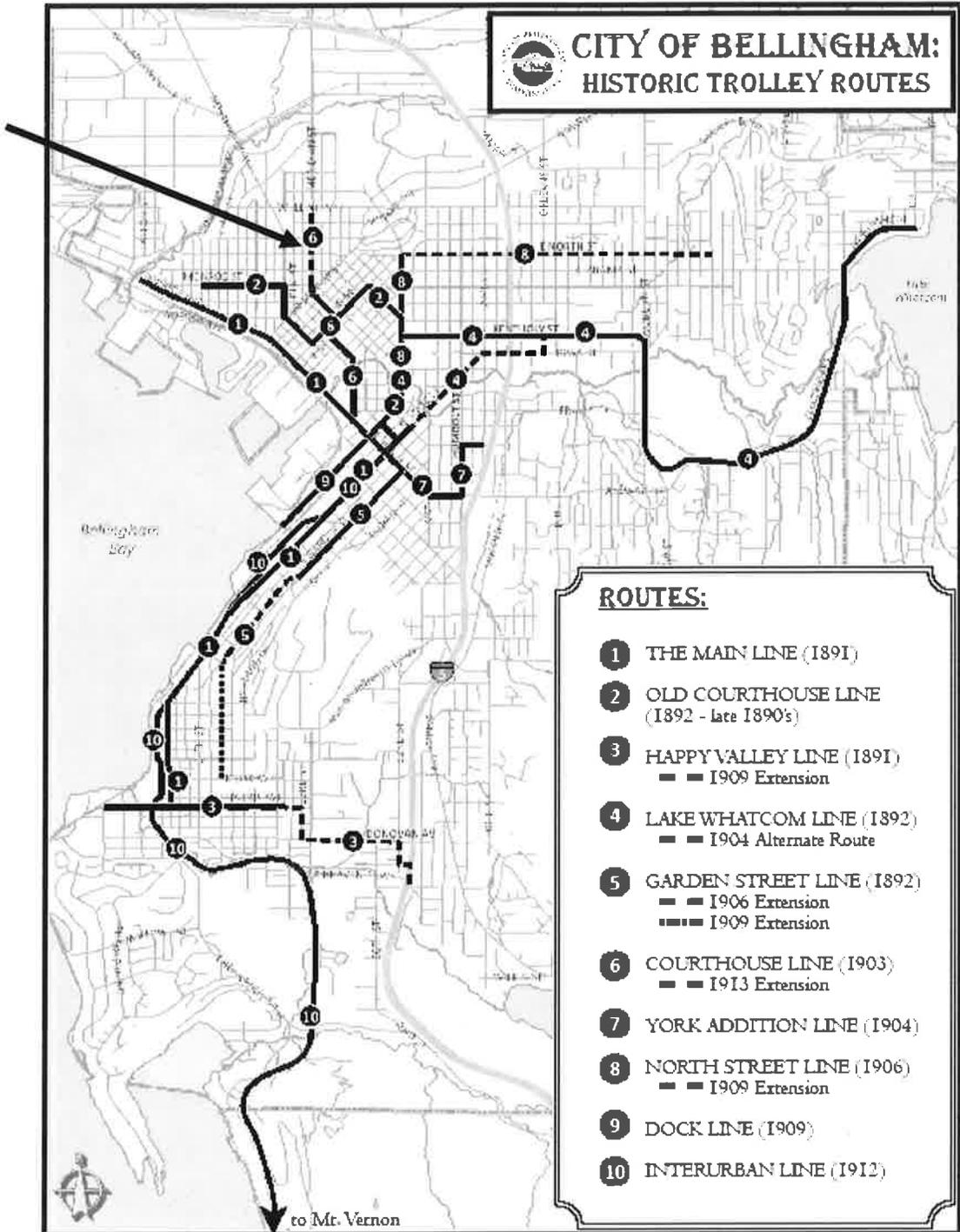
SCALE
1" = 500'

DATE
7/19/00

MAR 02 2009

THE MAP IS FOR
RECORDING IN
PROPERTY RECORDS
AND NOT GUARANTEED
FOR ANY OTHER
PURPOSES

Map showing location of Purnell Apartments. Source: Whatcom County Assessor's Office.



The 1913 Courthouse Line stop was two blocks from the Purnell Apartments on Meridian Street.

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Purnell Apartments

City or Vicinity: Bellingham

County: Whatcom

State: Washington

Photographer: Lynette Felber

Date Photographed: July 4, 2012 (exterior) and July 10, 2012 (interior)

Historic Photographs**Exterior**

1 of 9. South and east (main) façades (circa 1930s). Source: Whatcom County Assessor's Office.

2 of 9. West elevation, rear of building (circa 1930s). Adjacent owner's house at 1306 West North Street also shown. Source: Whatcom County Assessor's Website.

Historic Contexts

3 of 9. Aerial hot air balloon photograph showing Elm Street and Northwest Avenue intersection (1912). Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W. Sandison Collection.

4 of 9. Courthouse Line streetcar (circa 1910). Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.

5 of 9. Elm Street Service Station at 2600 Elm (February 14, 1939). Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington..

6 of 9. Goddard's Market at 2404 Elm, NE corner of Elm and Monroe Streets. Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W. Sandison Collection.

7 of 9. McMurtrie Auto Court at 3005 Northwest Avenue (circa 1939). Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W. Sandison Collection.

8 of 9. Apartment buildings at edge of CBD on and near Chestnut Street in 1926, including row house (1904). Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.

9 of 9. Newly constructed "Exotic" Alamo Apartments (1926) at 421 E. Maple on boundary of CBD. Source: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.



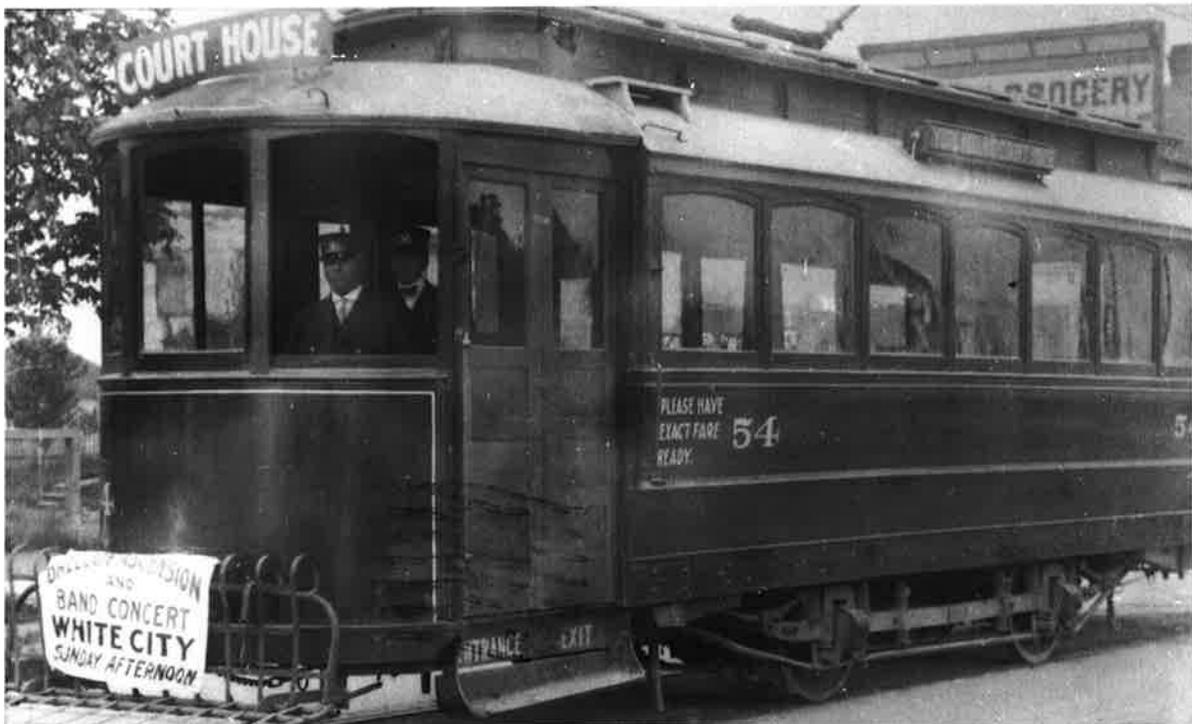
Purnell Apartments, south and east (main) façades (circa 1930s)
Source: Whatcom County Assessor's Website.



West elevation, rear of apartment building (circa 1930s). Adjacent owner's house at 1306 West North Street also shown.
Source: Whatcom County Assessor's Website.



Aerial hot air balloon photograph showing Elm Street and Northwest Avenue Intersection (1912)
Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W. Sandison Collection.



Courthouse Line streetcar (circa 1910)
Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.



Elm Street Service Station at 2600 Elm, February 14, 1939
 Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.



Goddard's Market at 2404 Elm, NE corner of Elm and Monroe Streets, circa 1941
 Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W. Sandison Collection.



McMurry Auto Court, circa 1939

Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. J.W Sandison Collection.



Apartment buildings at edge of CBD on and near Chestnut Street, in 1926. Rowhouse (1904), lower right.

Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.



Newly constructed "Exotic" Alamo Apartments (1926) at 421 E. Maple near boundary of CBD
Photo Courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.

Photo Log

Exterior

Photograph 1 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0001)
Main (east) and south façades, taken from southeast (7/4/12)

Photograph 2 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0002)
Main façade (7/4/12)

Photograph 3 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0003)
Entrance to lobby in main façade (7/4/12)

Photograph 4 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0004)
Northeast elevation (7/4/12)

Photograph 5 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0005)
North elevation (7/4/12)

Photograph 6 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0006)
South façade and portion of main façade, taken from southeast (7/4/12)

Photograph 7 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0007)
West (rear) elevation (7/4/12)

Photograph 8 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0008)
Main and south façades, taken from southeast
Source: Whatcom County Assessor (February 1993) [Shows original Craftsman ornamentation]

Photograph 9 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0009)
Main façade, wrought iron sconce, lobby entry (7/4/12)

Interior

Photograph 10 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0010)
Lobby and newel post (7/10/12)

Photograph 11 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0011)
Original door to service closet under stairs, downstairs hallway (7/10/12)

Photograph 12 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0012)
Living room, downstairs southeast corner (7/10/12)

Photograph 13 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0013)
Original built-in kitchen cabinet (7/10/12)

Photograph 14 of 14: (WA_Whatcom County_Purnell, William, Apartments_0014)
Original built-in bathroom vanity cabinet (7/10/12)

