

Report of the Annual Conference 2008

by Phil Gruen and Caroline Swope

The 2008 annual conference of the Marion Dean Ross/Pacific Northwest Chapter of SAH was held October 2-4 in Tacoma, Washington and welcomed conferees from California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska. More than a dozen cooperating host organizations and agencies opened venues, sponsored tours, and handled logistical details.

The pre-conference excursion was a walking tour of Tacoma's North Slope Historic District. The district, which encompasses more than 1,200 properties, and showcases a number of styles ranging from Victorian and Craftsman to Colonial Revival and Four-square. Several private homes were opened for our members, including the Rhodes mansion. The conference formally opened Thursday evening at the University of Washington with Michael Sullivan, of Artifacts Consulting, speaking on the rejuvenation of Tacoma's warehouse district and the formation of the University of Washington's branch campus in Tacoma. The Tacoma Historical Society opened an exhibit showcasing vintage photos of prominent Tacoma buildings.

The lofty "Castle Hall" of the downtown Tacoma Knights of Pythias Building, designed by Tacoma architect Frederick Heath in 1906, provided a majestic setting for the Friday morning paper session. The seven papers were split into two sessions, organized loosely around the conference theme: "Re-use, Recycling, and Rebirth: Architecture and Preservation in the Pacific Northwest." The expected computer glitches became a boon to the first session of the program: speakers responded to audience questions immediately after their talks, while session organizers scrambled to ready the next presentation.

Anne Marshall opened the first session with a report about a preliminary study, conducted with her students, questioning whether the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* has heeded John Maass's 1969 call for wider, more contextual, and more interdisciplinary research. Her paper, "How Has Scholarship in JSAH Changed in the Last Forty Years," demonstrated that scholarship has indeed become less exclusive, but not across-the-board in all of Maass's original criteria. Elena Napolitano followed with a paper entitled "Envisioning 'French Rome' in the Seventeenth Century: Israël Silvestre and the Panorama di Roma dal Pincio." She argued that Silvestre's representation viewed Rome from a French perspective, coinciding with France's political interventions into Rome's Baroque urban fabric. Michael Houser's paper, "Day Walter Hillborn: Built to Last" focused on a mid-twentieth-century local architect from Vancouver, Washington. Hauser's research uncovered more than 700 documented Hillborn designs from 1927-1960, some of which have inspired local pride, yet Day Hillborn remains largely overlooked in Washington's architectural history. Jeffrey Ochsner concluded the first session with "Origins and Development of Victor Steinbrueck's Seattle Cityscape (1962)." By examining a series of original sketches later chosen for that book, Ochsner showed how Steinbrueck intentionally chose non-monumental settings which best characterized his personal experience of the city—an experience that illuminated Seattle's humanity in the face of rapid technological change.

Following a short break, the second session featured three papers, all of which dealt with issues regarding the built environment of the intermountain Northwest. Wendy McClure began with a close look at three former mining towns—Park City, Utah; Kellogg, Idaho; and Telluride, Colorado—and

questioned the design guidelines that have governed their redevelopment. McClure's paper, "Negotiating Cultural Sustainability in the Adaptive Use of Three Historic Mining Towns," demonstrated that Telluride's morphologically-based guidelines, among her three case studies, have been most comprehensive in retaining the patterns of an earlier mining-era legacy. Phillip Mead also examined an intermountain Northwest town long transformed into a site for tourism and recreation in "The Transitional Role of Environmental Health Spa Planning in the Rebirth of Ketchum/Sun Valley, Idaho." With an investigation of early promotional materials to the resort, Mead argued that the Sun Valley's planning and architecture drew upon nineteenth-century medical theories and sold itself as a place of health and well-being. Miranda Anderson's paper, "AgCulture: The Future of Ag-industrial Sites in the Pacific Northwest," directed audience members' attention to the value of grain elevators, warehouses, and silos in the historic fabric and cultural memory of the rural Northwest. Anderson spoke to their potential for preservation rather than demolition or abandonment, and thus her talk provided a fitting conclusion for a conference oriented around recycling, re-use, and rebirth in the Pacific Northwest.

The afternoon was spent examining two of Tacoma's highest profile preservation projects, the University of Washington's Tacoma campus and Stadium High School. The UWT tour was hosted by Sian Roberts of the Miller-Hull Partnership. Miller-Hull was one of several organizations that worked on the Cherry-Parkes Building and the Mattress Factory, an amazing adaptive reuse and rehabilitation project that is the University's first certified LEED silver project. The gritty urban nature of this project contrasted sharply with Stadium High School. Stadium High, originally built as a French Renaissance Revival luxury hotel by the Northern Pacific Railroad is a striking building that dominates Tacoma's skyline. The building went through a massive two year renovation in 2004.

The keynote banquet was held at the sleek and newly renovated Hotel Murano. Rueben McKnight, Tacoma's Historic Preservation Officer, addressed some of Tacoma's greatest preservation challenges and triumphs of the past decade.

The next day attendees traveled farther afield and visited the modernist Widmeyer residence in Fircrest and Weyerhaeuser corporate headquarters in Federal Way. Docomomo-WEWA was instrumental in providing access to the Widmeyer residence, a fantastic jewelry-box of a house that was showcased in the 1958 edition of *Pacific Architect and Builder*. The final site visit, Weyerhaeuser, was an unprecedented look through the SOM designed corporate headquarters, complete with terraced vine covered balconies and stunning vistas. This project was awarded the AIA's "Twenty-Five Year Award" in 2001.