

How to Write a Statement of Significance

What is a Statement of Significance?

The statement is a basic history that describes why a house/structure/object/landscape is important on a local/state-wide/national level. It does not have to be of earth shattering importance. “John Doe, a waiter, lived here from 1920 until his death in 1965” is as valid for our purposes as “George Washington slept here.”

The statement is compiled from a variety of sources. The most commonly used are City Directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, and Property Deeds. Additional sources include Census Records, Probate Records, Oral Histories (including interviews and personal communications), other types of maps (Donation Land Claims, Metzker Maps, etc.).

City Directories tell us who lived at a given address. Often they include additional information, such as whether a person was an owner or renter, what his/her occupation was, and who the members of his/her family were. Ownership information can also be tracked with property deeds; however, this is more labor intensive than city directories. Deeds additionally supply information on land purchases, which can help to narrow down who actually built a house and when it happened. Sanborn maps help to set construction and alteration dates for houses. For example, if a parcel appears vacant on a 1911 map, the house that’s there now was built in or after 1911. If the house that’s there now is in the style of the 1880s, there’s a good chance it was moved to the site from elsewhere.

“Statement of Significance” is an actual field in the Washington State Historic Resources Inventory Database. What you submit to us will be submitted to the state (possibly slightly edited). It will also be used, in an abbreviated form, in the National Register District Nominations for Lettered Streets, York, or South Hill if the property falls within the district boundaries we determine.

What the Statement of Significance Not?

The statement is not a complete history of someone's family tree. We do not need to know who someone's great-great-great grandfather was unless it is specifically related to the property in question (i.e. he built the house). If you have already done extensive genealogical work, feel free to include that in a separate section of the document you pass on to us. While it will not appear in the official database that is submitted to the state or in a National Register District Nomination, the information will be accessible and helpful to local researchers through the museum, library, and/or city.

Be VERY selective about using details of personality or recollections. While they can flesh out the statement, particularly if a resource had one long-term owner, you should limit yourself to one or two sentences, at most. With our example, John Doe, the waiter you might note that he worked at Luigi's for twenty years and was well known for singing "O Sole Mio" every time someone ordered Spaghetti. If you know more than that, you can include it in a separate section of the document you give us.

Limit the inclusion of architectural details. They will be discussed in greater detail in the "Physical Description" section of the database. However, you can mention some things that relate specifically to a builder/inhabitant. For example: "As a lover of modern architecture, John Doe decided to hire Frank Lloyd Wright," or "After witnessing the destruction of the San Francisco Earthquake and subsequent fires, W. R. Hearst insisted that San Simeon be built of reinforced concrete." Again, anything extra that you know (e.g. the house's foundation is Chuckanut Sandstone) is helpful to us and can be included in a separate section.

What We're Looking for, or, How Long Should it be:

Most statements of significance are one paragraph long. The average statement for an average, working or middle class house is about 100 words long. Sometimes they can be as short as 35 words. A big house that belonged to several major personages might run to 500 words. Be selective about what you include, keep it succinct.

Notes on Formatting

Ideally, we'd like to receive your Statement of Significance as an MS Word document that is emailed to househist@gmail.com. We can handle several other formats as well, including text files (.txt and .rtf), or, insert your text in the body of an email.

The document should include:

- A one paragraph statement of significance
- A bibliography of the sources you used
- Extra text that you did not include because it was outside of the scope of the main statement, e.g. detailed biographies, assorted good stories and rumors, things you know about a house's construction materials.

Not computer enabled? We'll take typed and neatly handwritten documents as well. These can be delivered to Kolby Labree during one of her library help sessions, or at one of our other meetings, or leave a phone message at: 503-778-8953 to arrange an alternative.

We'd also like copies of everyone's notes.

Putting it Together

Once you're done with your research you should have a couple of lists (hopefully chronological) of names and dates. You'll want to try to correlate these. So, for example, if you've done a deed search, gone through City Directories, and looked at Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, you might note that in 1910, 101 Main Street was owned by John Smith (deeds), that Bob Brown was living in it (City Directory), and that the house was enlarged between 1904 and 1913 (Sanborn Maps). From this you can infer that Bob Brown was renting the place from John Smith. As to the enlarged house, does the 1904 footprint resemble the 1913 footprint? If so, it appears that an addition was made. If it's radically different, it could be that John Smith demolished an older structure and built a new one. Is Bob Brown the only person living at the address or are there other people? Is John Smith listed as living somewhere else or at 101 Main?

Get started with a simple sentence that states what and where you're writing about. Something like: "The house at 101 Main is located in the York Neighborhood." After that, move on chronologically, in complete sentences, not lists of owners and occupants.

Rules of Thumb:

- Provide a history for all houses built or moved before 1960. Always identify the prior location of the residence, if it is known.
- Identify the earliest owner and occupant of each residence.
- Do not infer or assume if information is lacking, but do qualify the statement. Use "is likely" or "it appears" or "although ... is unknown."
- Do not list every owner or tenant, if either changes frequently.
- Do not get bogged down in genealogy.
- Do not use "home," but instead house, residence, property, or resource.
- Circa dates should appear as "c. 1910;" time periods as the "1930s" (note: no apostrophe).

Common Situations and Suggested Wording:

1) Lack of Early Information (i.e., c. 1910 house with no information until 1930)

“Although the early history of this house is unknown, by 1930 it was owned (or occupied) by ...”

2) Uncertainty of Party Responsible for Construction (i.e., c. 1925 house)

“John Doe purchased this property (i.e. the unimproved land) in 1920, which he sold to Bob Smith in 1925. As such, it is unclear which owner is responsible for the construction of the residence. However, by 1926 it was occupied by...”

3) Owner Not Listed in Directories as Occupant

“Although Jane Doe owned the property from 1910 to 1940, there is no evidence that she ever occupied this house. It appears to have been a rental during this time, with tenants including...”

4) Frequent Change in Owners

“During the 1920s and 1930s, this property had a number of owners, none of whom retained it for more than a few years. This included a salesman, a baker...”

5) Frequent Change in Renters

“During the 1930s, this house was used as a rental. Its short term tenants included a math instructor at WWU, a newspaper reporter, and...”

Sample History Blurbs (most from a project in Corvallis, Oregon):

1) This house was constructed in c. 1939 for Edward G. and Alice Locke. Mr. Locke was an assistant professor of Chemical Engineering at Oregon State College (now OSU). The couple occupied the residence with their two children until 1944. At that time, it was purchased by Harvey L. Wells, a manager at JC Penney Co., and his wife, Bertha. In 1948 the Wells sold the house to Michael B. and Joy Bavendich, who were responsible for enlarging the garage.

[Note: Inclusion of appropriate degree of architectural detail, the enlargement of the garage.]

2) This property was purchased in 1926 by Wilfred C. and Abbie H. Bleamaster, and the (c. 1930) house was likely constructed on their behalf. The couple, proprietors of Rawleigh

Products, do not appear to have ever occupied the house, but instead used it as a rental. Tenants in the 1930s and early 1940s included a city police officer and a truck driver. By 1947, the house was occupied by George Austin, the manager of Western Auto Supply Company. He and his wife Helen were deeded the property in 1955.

[Note: Qualifiers “likely” and “do not appear to...” instead of assuming that inference is fact. Also, some, but not all, tenants are listed.]

3) As the ownership of this property changed numerous times between 1913 and 1924, when it was purchased by Nora M. Hamlin, it is unclear who is responsible for the construction of the (c. 1917) house. Hamlin occupied the residence until 1932, when it was sold to Idella Mershon. She lived there with her husband L. J., who worked for the State Highway Bridge Department. The property remained in the Mershon family until 1947, when it was purchased by Tony O. and Margaret Davis.

[Note: Multiple owners in early history are omitted. Also, use of “it is unclear...” qualifier.]

4) The first owners of this house were William and Mabel Schoenfeld. Mr. Schoenfeld came to Oregon as a representative for the Northwest Federal Farm Board and Bureau of Agricultural Economics. In 1931, he became Dean of the School of Agriculture and Director of the Experimental Station at Oregon State College (OSU), a position he held until the 1940s. Schoenfeld was also known for his collection of autographed photographs of famous politicians. He and his wife continued to own and occupy this house until 1954.

[Note: Appropriate use of professional and personal detail, although, the bit about the photographs is pushing it.]

5) This house was reportedly constructed in 1919 for Robert D. Gates. Its ownership changed frequently over the next few years until purchased by Edith McLean. She continued to own and occupy this residence until 1956.

[Note: Short and sweet. Sometimes that’s all there is to it.]

And then, here's a long example with a sample bibliography (more on that later), from Silverton, Oregon. The amount of biographical information about the main subject's father is a bit much, but is justified in this case because the family was one of the town founders.

6) Eva Coolidge, had this house constructed in 1912 at the time the Park Side Addition (encompassing Coolidge Street and Jerome Avenue) was being platted by the Coolidge family. The April 19, 1912 issue of the Silverton Appeal announced: "Miss Eva Coolidge also intends erecting an up-to-date residence upon her property just opposite the George Hubbs place...when completed [it] will be one of the nicest pieces of property in the city."

Eva Coolidge, born August 22, 1956 in Silverton, was one of six children born to Ai and Sarah F. Alien Coolidge. Ai Coolidge, a native of Ohio born in 1823, came overland to Oregon in 1851 and settled along Silver Creek in the Milford (once about a mile up stream from Silverton). He opened a general store in Milford and soon afterward moved it to the newly platted town site of Silverton. His successful business enabled him to purchase several thousand acres of land near Silverton, becoming instrumental in the early development of the community and Marion County. In 1868 and 1870, he served as a Marion County commission. He rebuilt an early Silverton flour mill and co-founded, with Adolphus (Jake) McClaine, the Coolidge and McClaine Bank in 1880. Coolidge served as bank president for many years.

Following Ai Coolidge's death in 1908, Eva Coolidge soon afterward became president of the Coolidge and McClaine Bank. She had the distinction of being the only woman bank president in Oregon in the 1910s. Seven years after construction of her house on West Main, she died unexpectedly on February 28, 1919 at age 63.

Soon after her death, Myron C. and Edith M. Woodard bought the house and took up residence. Myron C. Woodard was born in 1875 in Watertown, Wisconsin. He was first employed in the timber industry in Minnesota where he was trained in all aspects of the business. In 1908 he moved to Oregon where he built the Westport Lumber Company plant at Westport. He moved to Silverton in 1912 and became associated with the Silver Falls Timber Company. While still managing the Westport Lumber Company, Mr. Woodard started construction of a railroad to timber stands in the Cascade Range foothills about 30 miles east of Silverton. Silver Falls Timber Company began operation in 1916. M.C. Woodard moved permanently to Silverton that

year. Myron Woodard had a prominent and successful career. He was founder and president of the Silver Falls Timber Company and a director of the First National Bank of Portland.

Myron Woodard married Edith M. Ireland, born on June 9, 1873 in Watertown Wisconsin on April 4, 1900. Myron died April 20, 1946 at his home on West Main Street in Silverton. Edith Woodard, then a trustee of Lewis and Clark College, moved to Portland following her husband's death and died there in October 1956.

The Woodard couple sold their West Main home in 1937 to H. W. Preston, a sales manager at Silver Falls Timber Company, and his wife, Hope. Seven years later in 1954, the Preston couple sold the property to F.E. and Ruth M. Chalfan.

Parkinson, Nola. Interview with David Pinyerd, August 27, 2007.

Evans-Hatch, Gail. "Silverton, Oregon, Cultural Resource Inventory." City of Silverton, 1997.

Clark, Robert Carlton. "History of the Willamette Valley, Oregon, Vol. III." Chicago: S. J.

Clarke Publishing Company, 1927,451-52.

"Death Takes Lumberman." Oregonian, April 21, 1946.

Engeman, Minnie, compiler. "Collection of Obituaries of Silverton Country Pioneers." Silverton, OR: Minnie Engeman, 1980.

"Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon." Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1903, 387-88.

Property ownership book, Park Side Addition. Ticor Title Company, Salem, Oregon.

Salem and Marion County Directory. Portland, OR: R.L. Polk and Company, 1911-1945.

Sanborn Map Company. "Silverton, Oregon." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1915, 1922 and 1939.

Turley, Gladys. "Horse-and-Buggy Bank Days," Oregonian, July 19, 1953 (Magazine Section).

Compiling the Bibliography

For those of you who enjoy this sort of stuff (and I know there are a few of you out there), the style manual we generally use is Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

That said, the Microsoft Access Database that we (and the state) uses does not support formatting niceties such as footnotes, underlines, or italics. That means you do not have to add footnotes. If you use information that's from an uncommon (and uncorroborated) source, such as a personal interview, you may want to add something like, "according to John Doe the house was seriously damaged by fire in 1960" in the body of your statement. If you use a direct quote from a

published source in your text you also want to cite that. For example, the long statement of significance above includes: *The April 19, 1912 issue of the Silverton Appeal announced: "Miss Eva Coolidge also intends erecting an up-to-date residence..."* Common sources used for research, such as City Directories, Deeds and Sanborn Maps do not need to be called out in the text, but should be included in the bibliography.

The basic rule for biographies is that you want to help someone in the future track down information, so give as much as you can, preferably alphabetically by the first line of the citation (we're doing this a little simplified because of the limits of *MS Access*):

For books with one author:

AuthorLastName, FirstName. "Book Title." Publisher City: Publisher Name, Publication Date, Page Numbers.

Example:

Carhart, Edith Beebe. "A History of Bellingham Washington." Bellingham, WA: The Argonaut Press, 1926, 29-31.

For books with two authors:

Author#1LastName, FirstName and Author#2FirstName, LastName. "Book Title." Publisher City: Publisher Name, Publication Date, Page Numbers.

Example:

Gilliland, Miki and Pete Redpath. "Entering Bellingham." Bellingham, WA: Bayside Press, 1989, 12.

For edited collections:

EditorLastName, FirstName, ed. "Book Title." Publisher City: Publisher Name, Publication Date, Page Numbers.

Example:

Roth, Lottie Roeder, ed. "History of Whatcom County Washington. Vol. 1." Chicago & Seattle: Pioneer Publishing Company, 1926, 183-84.

For books with no author:

“Book Title.” PublisherCity: PublisherName, Date, Pages

Example:

“Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon.” Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1903, 387-88.

For newspaper or magazine articles with an author:

AuthorLastName, First Name. “Title of Story,” NewspaperName, PublicationDate.

Example:

Turley, Gladys. “Horse-and-Buggy Bank Days,” Oregonian, 07/19/1953 (Magazine Section).

For newspaper or magazine articles with no author:

“Article Title.” NewspaperName, PublicationDate.

Example:

“Death Takes Lumberman.” Oregonian, 04/21/1946.

For internet articles:

AuthorLastName, FirstName. “Title of Article or Webpage.” Available online at:

<http://www.website.com>, accessed mm/dd/yyyy.

Example:

Lawhead, Bonita. “St. Augustine Parish has long history on Spokane’s South Hill.” Inland Register, the Official News Magazine of the Diocese of Spokane. April 12, 2001. Available online at: http://www.dioceseofspokane.org/Communications/IR_2001/ir041201/augustine.htm, accessed 02/18/2008.

For Personal Communications:

IntervieweeLastName, FirstName. Interview with InterviewerFirstName, LastName,
mm/dd/yyyy.

Examples:

Parkinson, Nola. Interview with David Pinyerd, 08/27/2007.

Parkinson, Nola. Letter to David Pinyerd, 08/27/2007.

Parkinson, Nola. Email to David Pinyerd, 08/27/2007.

For City Directories (you can copy this directly and insert the appropriate dates & publication city for your research):

Polk City Directory, Bellingham, Washington. PublicationCity: R.L. Polk & Co., yyyy-yyyy.

Note: There is some variety in the city directories titles and publication city. If you are using directories for Fairhaven and Bellingham, you'd want to have one listing for each, with their respective date ranges. If the titles (and occasionally publication cities) vary from year to year you can just indicate that with parentheses, e.g.:

Polk City Directory, Bellingham (or Whatcom County), Washington. Bellingham (or Seattle):
R.L. Polk & Co., 1908-1978.

For Sanborn Maps (you can copy the ones that apply to you and insert the appropriate dates for your property):

Sanborn Map Company. "Whatcom, Washington." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885 and 1888.

Sanborn Map Company. "Sehome, Washington." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885.

Sanborn Map Company. "New Whatcom, Washington." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1890, 1891, 1897.

Sanborn Map Company. "Fairhaven, Washington." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1890, 1891 and 1897.

Sanborn Map Company. "Bellingham, Washington." New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1904, 1913, and 1950.

For Deed Research (you can copy this directly):

Whatcom County Government Deeds, 1853-1965. Washington State Archives, Northwest Regional Branch.