

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit

Other

Date Of Construction: 1937

Architecture/Landscape Architecture

Architect: Joseph Wohleb

Builder:

Engineer:

Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places:

No

Property is located in a historic district (National and/or local):

No

Property potentially contributes to a historic district (National and/or local):

Statement of Significance

The Frederick W. Schmidt House is significant as a distinctive interpretation of the English Revival Style, with outstanding landscaping, designed by Olympia's premier architect, Joseph Wohleb and built for members of one of the area's most important business families. The house is also significant for its innovative construction, building materials and as the centerpiece of the development of this area of Olympia, initiated by its builder. The house was built in 1937-1938 for Frederick G. Schmidt whose family founded and operated the Olympia Brewery for many years. Schmidt was a director and assistant treasurer of the Olympia Brewing Company. He was also an executive of Western Metalcraft, located in the brewery complex and manufacturers of kitchen cabinets after World War II. According to Frederick A. Schmidt, the original builder's son, the design of the house was conceived by Mrs. Schmidt, Elsa Heiser Schmidt. Frederick Schmidt was interested in concrete construction however, and according to his son asked Frank Lloyd Wright to provide information about radiant heat in concrete construction and even sent him \$500.00. Wright pocketed the money. The house was built with baseboard heat. Schmidt did build the house with concrete construction however after testing the water absorption of brick made of concrete and clay, concluding concrete absorbed no more moisture than clay. The house was built on a concrete pad with eight inches of railroad cinders under the floor to limit moisture absorption. A two foot skirt around the foundation also limited moisture. Greystone, a local manufacturer provided the concrete brick for the construction of the house which was built concurrently with and by the same contractor who was constructing the new Olympia Brewery during this time. Schmidt also included innovative fire prevention for the house which has a large expanse of cedar shingle roofing on its steep gables. Schmidt specified two inch watermain sprinklers for the roof. The house originally featured copper drains and down spouts and boasted a zinc cap on the shingle ridge to deter the growth of moss on the roof. If Frederick Schmidt provided the technical aspects for the house, it was his wife Elsa Heiser Schmidt who provided the soul of the house. She, according to her son, envisioned the "English Farm House" and specified the hand polished concrete floors, specially plastered walls, hand stained and waxed woodwork, and the specially designed and engraved hand stained and waxed woodwork, and the specially designed and engraved oak fireplace and book cases. The west side "L" originally provided the space for a ball room. In the garage a specially built cool box accommodated food storage. Mrs. Schmidt specified the copper-roofed bay window on the south side of the house to fit a grand piano and planted a special fir tree outside the window to provide for an annual Christmas tree without bringing one inside. Mrs. Schmidt, and avid gardener planned the landscaping as well. An elaborate gravity fed system watered the ground which featured a substantial holly hedge, cutting gardens, birches, fruit trees and an expanse of lawn. The holly hedge was planted in a bed of tin cans, which nourished the hedge from locally grown cuttings. Included in the grounds were a trout pond fed by its own well. Mrs. Schmidt routinely provided flowers for the hospitality room of the Olympia Brewery from her garden. Olympia's premier architect, Joseph Wohleb, designed the house for the Schmidts. Wohleb was also the architect for the Brewery. Wohleb came to Olympia in 1913 from Southern California and went on to design hundreds of homes, businesses, public buildings and manufacturing facilities until his death in 1958. Several of his works are listed on the National Register including the Lord Mansion and McCleary Mansion in Olympia. The Frederick Schmidt House is a clear departure from other works by Wohleb in both style and material. Wohleb specialized in Mission Revival design homes and used stucco extensively, reflecting his California roots. This area was historically adjacent to and part of the Cloverfields Farm, a model dairy farm built by Hazard Stevens, son of first Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens. Frederick W. and his brother Franck Schmidt built several houses as the first development in the area during the late 1930's and early 1940's subsequent to the construction of this house. Olympia Architect Joseph Wohleb designed the houses. Because of a shortage of wood during the World War II years, the Schmidt's developed concrete block homes. The houses featured concrete block construction erected on a concrete pad. Some houses also utilized concrete roof trusses. The foundation pad was placed on top of a subfloor of gravel and ash to deter drawing moisture. The concrete block was also extended to the interior of the houses some of which have interior concrete walls while others had some wood framed construction. Concrete block came from the Greystone Concrete Company in Olympia. Frank Hallmeyer did the concrete work and B. Jensvold also assisted in the project. The use of concrete work and B. Jensvold also assisted in the project. The use of concrete bricks in the Schmidt House reflects his interest in that building material for his own residences and those he developed in the area. The house is unique in its scale and use of fine materials, although several of the concrete block houses in the area were also designed in the English Cottage/Revival style. The Frederick Schmidt House was the centerpiece of the Schmidt's development in Southeast Olympia.

Description of Physical Appearance

The Frederick W. Schmidt House is a large, rambling L-shaped structure situated on a large landscaped corner lot bordered by a tall holly hedge in southeast Olympia. The one-and one-half story, side gabled structure, of simplified English Revival style is set on a concrete foundation. The house is distinguished by its tall, steeply gabled roof line which diminishes in height and width in three sections from north to south, with the smallest section on the south end. The roof is clad in wood shake shingles and has close eaves. The walls of the brick topped by chimney pots rises at the south end of the front facade. The gables are clad with wide rusticated clapboards. The central front entry door is recessed in a segmental arch with sandstone quoins. Fenestration includes narrow multi-pane casement windows in groups of two and three. The windows have brick sills. A wide, multi-paned bay window with a copper hooded roof extends from the south end wall. A rear (west) wing contains a triple garage which opens onto a parking court to the north. One of the garage doors has been filled in with glass blocks and an entry door. Above the garage doors are gabled dormers. Interior features include hand-stained and waxed oak woodwork, beamed ceilings in the cathedral ceiling living room which also has an ornate finished, polished concrete floors and specially hand-applied plastered 3/4 inch putty coat walls. Construction details include an eight inch deep railroad cinder base under the concrete pad foundation, water proof skirting on the foundation, and a rooftop fire-protection water system. Landscape features include a large holly hedge which encompasses the rear yard of the house, birch trees, fruit trees and a fish

Historic Property F. W. Schmidt House
Inventory Report for 2831 Southeast Orange Olympia, Thurston 98501

Major Letter from Frederick Schmidt Jr., October 22, 1985.
Bibliographic Interview with Frederick A. Schmidt, July 21, 1994
References Obituary for Frederick W. Schmidt, Daily Olympian, October 24, 1962, pg. 12
 Interview with Alvin Padget, July 21, 1994
 Maddox, Dawn, "Joseph Wohleb: Resident Architect of the State's Capitol," Landmarks, Vol IV, No. 4.

PHOTOS



View of SE corner
taken 9/18/1985
Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):
 18-5A
Comments: