

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **OCT 22 1985**

date entered **NOV 21 1985**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Sprague Building

and/or common N.A.

**2. Location**

street & number 1501-05 Pacific Avenue not for publication

city, town Tacoma vicinity of

state Washington code 053 county Pierce code 053

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name The Nielsen Fund

street & number 600 Court in the Square, 401 Second Avenue South

city, town Seattle vicinity of state Washington 98104

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pierce County Tax Assessor

street & number 2401 South 35th Street

city, town Tacoma state Washington 98409

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

1) Washington State Inventory of Cultural Resources  
title 2) Tacoma Cultural Resources Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date March 1981  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records 1) Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
2) Tacoma Office of Historic Preservation

city, town 1) 111 West 21st Avenue, KL-11, Olympia Washington 98504  
2) 747 Market Street, Tacoma state Washington 98402

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Sprague Building, located at 1501-05 Pacific Avenue in Tacoma, was erected between 1889 and 1890 on a sloping lot in the newly-established jobbers district of the city. Designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style by Tacoma architects James Pickles and Albert Sutton, it was constructed by local contractors Dougan and Bringham. Although there have been some ground level alterations of the storefronts, the Sprague Building displays a high degree of exterior integrity. Originally designed for use as an office/showroom/warehouse by a wholesale hardware firm, for the most part it continues to be used for that purpose. The building, which occupies the northwest corner lot of the block bordered by Pacific Avenue and 15th Street, measures 105 by 100 feet. The load-bearing brick and stone construction on the exterior supports a wooden post-and-beam structural system on the interior. The building, four stories in height on Pacific Avenue, increases to five stories on the rear (east) elevation. Across 15th to the north side of the building is the ten story Schoenfeld's Furniture Store. At the rear of the structure, a new branch of the interstate freeway is under construction. To the south is a wedge-shaped vacant lot, former location of the Sprague Block (1888), demolished in the 1960's.

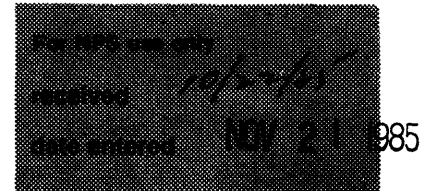
Divided into equal-width bays (six on the north and seven on the west), the primary elevations convey the squat, heavy appearance that is indicative of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. On the front (west) elevation, a two story rusticated stone arcade dominates. Blocks are rough cut on the face, smooth finished on each flank, and laid in regular courses. Originally, the entrance to the upper floors was located in the center bay. A carved name plate ("Sprague") and date ("1889") appeared below the arched second floor window. This bay has been bricked-in and it is unknown whether these features still exist under the brick covering. Secondary, recessed entrances to the Pacific Avenue storefronts originally appeared at the second and sixth bays. These have been removed and the sole entrance on Pacific Avenue is through the third bay.

The original storefront windows were composed of a sixteen light transom over two large single panes above a pierced iron bulkhead. These have been replaced by large windows divided into four lights with flower boxes at the street level. The proportions of the newer windows, set into aluminum frames, do not duplicate the historic configuration. Separated from the first story windows by a broad, recessed sill and spandrel, the arched second story windows are original, and are composed of a tripartite grouping of one-over-one panes set into an arched frame surrounded by radiating stone voussoirs. The center window is operable.

An unadorned, projecting belt course separates the base and upper floors. Anchored by a wide corner pier decorated by a colonnette set into a chamfered niche, the upper floor bays of pressed brick with extremely narrow joints are composed of identical groupings of paired, one-over-one double-hung sash windows recessed between piers. The third floor windows are set in recessed wooden frames and topped by rough cut stone lintels. Delicate, slip-glazed terra cotta panels with a pierced geometric pattern ornament the spandrel between the third and fourth floors. Fourth floor windows rest on rough cut stone sills. The arched frames of the fourth floor windows are set into curved pressed brick surrounds and encase fixed lunette transoms. Corbelling is prominent at the cornice level. Dentils and eight-course corbels create a comb-like effect below the large dentil and belt courses at the parapet level.

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The less ornate but finely detailed north elevation is identical above the second floor to the west elevation. The transition between the heavily textured stone on the front is effected by the use of slightly projecting quoins. Originally, only the northwestern-most bay was glazed at the first floor level, although all six bays were fitted with the second story arched windows. At the first floor level, the other bays were bricked in totally, with the exception of the second bay, in which a paneled loading door was located.

Currently, the first three bays are glazed at the first floor level. They present the same window configuration as those on the west elevation, with paneled bulkheads instead of flower boxes. Brick piers separate the arcaded bays and an arched hood molding provides texture. Tie plates of several sizes and shapes appear at the spandrel level on this elevation. As the street level drops on 15th, segmentally-arched window openings lead to the rear elevation, which was originally serviced by a spur line of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

The rear elevation is loosely composed into five bays. Segmental and round arched openings are located at the first and second floors. Several have been bricked in or paneled and window treatment is composed of modern casement and fixed pane glazings. On the three upper floors, the majority of the window openings are constructed of two-over-two double-hung sash set into wooden frames within segmentally-arched brick openings. Sills are concrete. Two vertical groupings of windows have been bricked in. The faded remnants of a painted wall advertisement, "Tacoma Drug Co.," can still be seen on the east elevation. The south elevation, once a party wall for the earlier Sprague Block (1888) is unadorned with the exception of tie plates, and two brick relieving arches. The entire building has been painted.

Originally, the interior above the first floor was used as warehouse space. A post-and-beam structural system is evident throughout the building. Combinations of round and square wooden columns with iron or wooden capitals support the east/west oriented beams. A mezzanine remains essentially open. On the second floor, modern office space has been constructed, and the structural system is basically disguised. Elements of the damaged pressed tin ceilings are visible on the north half of the second floor. The third and fourth floors more closely relate to the historic period and are more intact. Although partially damaged by water leakage from the roof, the open floor system, composed of the same post-and-beam construction, is intact.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1889-1890 (construction) **Builder/Architect** James Pickles & Albert Sutton  
 1889-1907 (period of significance)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Sprague Building, erected in 1889-90, is significant to the city of Tacoma for its association with General John W. Sprague, prominent developer, financier, businessman, and general superintendent of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Designed by Pickles and Sutton in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, it is also one of the earliest and finest examples of a type of commercial structure designed specifically to house a wholesale business in the Union Depot area.

Historical Background

Development of the city of Tacoma began in the late 1860's on the shores of Commencement Bay, a sheltered harbor at the southern end of Puget Sound. Although nearby resources included fertile farmland, seafood, lumber, and coal, promoters focused considerable attention on the city's favorable location. The sheltered waters of Commencement Bay were considered a natural entryway for cargo arriving from ports on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. When coupled with the vision of Tacoma as the terminus of a trans-continental railroad, the city's future as one of the great shipping centers of the Pacific Northwest seemed assured.

Tacoma's ambitions were fueled in the early 1870's when it seemed likely that the city would be the western terminus for Jay Cooke's Northern Pacific Railroad. The road broke ground in Duluth, Minnesota, in early 1870 with plans to reach a location somewhere north of the mouth of the Columbia River. The company directed engineer and civil war veteran General John Sprague to travel west to select a point on the Columbia where the railroad would turn north. Kalama, Washington, was chosen and construction began.

Spurred by this beginning, towns all along Puget Sound began competing with each other to lure the Northern Pacific to their communities. On July 14, 1873, promoters in Tacoma received word that by offering Northern Pacific the most acreage and waterfront property at the lowest cost, they had succeeded in winning the terminus for their city. By late December 1873, the tracks were completed between Tacoma and Kalama. But Jay Cooke, who had financially overextended himself, was bankrupt. The tracts from the Midwest had reached only as far west as Bismarck, North Dakota.

Although hopes of being a terminus city in the 1870's were dashed, Tacoma did benefit from improved transportation between communities on the Columbia River and Puget Sound. Land claims were platted, divided, and sold; streets were laid out and graded. But the real growth in Tacoma's fortunes as a mercantile center came in May 1888, when the Northern Pacific completed its northern Cascade route, linking eastern Washington with Commencement Bay. At last, Tacoma's boom began in earnest.

The establishment and growth of the wholesale industry in Tacoma was a direct result of the completion of the Cascade line, which linked markets and consumers on Puget Sound with those in central and eastern Washington, Idaho, and Montana. In a report issued in 1890, the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce noted that no "exclusively wholesale house had

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(continued)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Tacoma South, WA (7.5)

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

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 Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1 through 4, Block 1502, Plat of New Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John M. Tess, President

organization Heritage Investment Corp. date

street & number 123 N.W. Second, Suite 200 telephone (206) 228-0272

city or town Portland state Oregon 97209

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

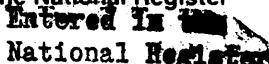
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *John M. Tess*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date October 8, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in  National Register

date 11-21-85

*Melrose Byer*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date

Chief of Registration

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commenced operations in Tacoma up to January 1, 1888." But, in the next few years, numerous wholesalers, including grocers, produce dealers, hardware dealers, and liquor and drug merchants, had set up shop in the city.

General John Sprague

As an official of the railroad, and an experienced merchant, General John Sprague was well-positioned to take advantage of the growth in Tacoma wholesale commerce. Sprague had arrived in Tacoma in 1870 at the age of 53, as general superintendent of the Northern Pacific Railroad west of the Rocky Mountains. Born in New York State, he attended the Polytechnic Institute in Renssaler, New York, afterwards entering the wholesale and retail grocery business. Moving west to Ohio, he founded a freight forwarding and commission business which operated on the Great Lakes. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted as a volunteer, serving for five years, and emerged with the rank of general at the age of 49. After the war, he became manager of the Winona and St. Paul Railroad in Minnesota. Four years later, he accepted his position with the Northern Pacific Railroad, which he held for 13 years. A promoter of the Northern Pacific Railroad Cascade route, he became a respected financial and political leader in the city of Tacoma.

In addition to his role as a developer, Sprague was elected the first mayor of the city of Tacoma upon consolidation of the old and new sections of the town in 1884. He was the founder and first president of the Tacoma National Bank incorporated that same year. In 1892, he helped establish and was president of the Union Savings Bank and Trust Company, whose headquarters were directly opposite the Sprague Building on Pacific Avenue. In addition, he was the first president of the Chamber of Commerce, the Tacoma Steam Navigation Company, and a Chancellor and Regent of the Washington State University, Seattle (now the University of Washington). He died in Tacoma in December 1893 at the age of 76.

The Sprague Building and the Wholesale District

General Sprague, with his experience in the wholesale and retail grocery and commission business on the Great Lakes some 40 years earlier, understood the storage and transportation needs of the warehouse businesses growing in Tacoma. He had first-hand knowledge of sailing and steam shipping of goods as well. Finally, his 13 years with the Northern Pacific Railroad enabled him to anticipate Tacoma's opportunity to become the wholesale merchandising center of the Pacific Northwest. Conditions and timing were right; rail and water transportation were in place; and new constomers of the Northern Pacific Railroad's Cascade Line were ready for Tacoma's goods.

In the Sprague Building, the General and his architects built a structure which was representative of Tacoma wholesale warehouses for the next twenty years. Construction began on the four story building in July 1889, and was completed in February 1890, one year after completion of the neighboring Sprague Bock (a separate three story, brick "flatiron" building demolished in the 1960's). As with the earlier block, General Sprague commissioned the architectural firm of Pickels and Sutton to design his new building. Contractors were Dougan and Bringham of Tacoma.

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Materials for the quickly-assembled, load-bearing masonry walls were readily available from any of the half-dozen brick yards in and around Tacoma. The large interior space used for storage of machinery and hardware was left open for ease of movement of goods by the rows of wooden columns on each floor. This post-and-beam construction increased the ability of wooden floors to support heavy machinery while leaving interior areas free. A large freight elevator at the rear of the building opened directly onto a spur line of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Goods could arrive via water or rail and be shuttled to the warehouse by train; there was no need for intermediate transfer of merchandise by horse and wagon from railroad to warehouse. However, because the lot slopes downhill from the front to the back of the building, it was also easy for a customer to drive a wagon to the back of the warehouse to pick up a small piece of equipment. In addition to the open floor spaces and the high ceilings of the interior, large windows on the north, east, and west sides of the building provided generous natural lighting throughout the interior.

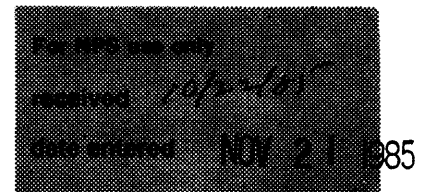
Contrasting with the unadorned "business side" (east elevation) of the Sprague Building, the public Pacific Avenue facade boasted handsome materials and rich detailing. Four arched display windows alternated with the main entryway and two other recessed doorways. Customers entered either of the two smaller doors into showrooms or climbed the main flight of stairs to the office on the mezzanine level. The use of rusticated granite and dressed sandstone, terra cotta panels and brick details around windows and the cornice clearly indicated the two uses of the building: sales and service at the front, pickup and delivery at the rear.

This design pattern was one which was repeated in other warehouse buildings in what was to develop between the 1890's and 1920's into a wholesale or "jobbers" district located near the Union Depot (listed in the National Register as the Union Depot-Warehouse Historic District). While the Tacoma Land Development Company, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad, often dictated the building use and materials of new structures south of 15th Street, the facades and arrangements of interior spaces were often similar to the Sprague Building--that is, load bearing masonry walls, large undivided storage spaces generous natural light obtained from numerous windows, display windows and office spaces at the ground level, and freight handling areas delineated from "public" areas by differences in treatment of materials. The Sprague Building is separated from the Union Depot-Warehouse Historic District by some intrusions, but is among the finest examples of its type and period in the area.

The success of the Sprague Building's design is reflected in the long and diverse list of tenants. By 1890, the wholesale hardware firm of Hunt and Mottet occupied the entire building. Listed in the West Coast Trade Magazine as "Importers and Jobbers of Hardware," their merchandise included builder's hardware; logging, blacksmith and mechanic's tools; carriage hardware and woodwork; ship chandlery; water wheels; boilers and engines; as well as "Hercules, Champion, and common blasting powder." Hunt and Mottet remained at this location until 1907, when they moved into their new building at 2114-16 Pacific Avenue. After 1907, the Sprague Building occupants included J.S. Kean Furniture Company (1908-11), Standard Paper Company (1916-29), Tacoma Drug Company (1935-1947), the State Employment Security Division (1951-58), and Puget Sound Office Interiors (1968 to present).

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Hunt and Mottet Hardware Company

The Hunt and Mottet Hardware Company was one of the first wholesale firms to incorporate in Tacoma. In business by 1887, they handled "heavy hardware, mill supplies, and machinery" from their original location at 1219 Pacific Avenue. When General Sprague's new building at 1501-05 Pacific was completed in February 1890, they moved three blocks south and occupied all four floors of the structure. Other types of wholesale businesses founded in 1888 (such as the Tacoma Grocery Company) had already moved into the 15 store-fronts of the Sprague Block (1511-47 Pacific Avenue) next door to the Sprague Building. However, even with two floors of storage space plus office and display area on the ground floor, room for expansion was very limited. Consequently, as some of these wholesale businesses prospered, they moved out of the Sprague Block into warehouse buildings of their own south of 15th Street. Hunt and Mottet's square footage must have been adequate for their needs for some time, as they remained the sole occupant of the Sprague Building until 1907, a period of 16 years. No doubt the railroad spur which extended from the main tracks of the Northern Pacific Railroad to the back of their building, as well as the large freight elevator, insured ease of transfer of merchandise. They added retail sales to their wholesale offerings in the early 1890's and served farmers, blacksmiths, and building contractors as well as the railroads, mining companies, steam and sailing ships, logging and milling businesses. When Hunt and Mottet moved out of the Sprague Building in 1907, it was to move into their new eight story building three blocks further south. They had survived the depression of the 1890's, and were ready to sail into the second "boom," which began soon after the turn of the century.

Pickles and Sutton

General John W. Sprague commissioned the Tacoma architectural firm of Pickles and Sutton to design both the Sprague Block (1888-89) and the Sprague Building (1889-90). Little personal information is known about James Pickles except that he was born and educated in England. He and his partner, Albert Sutton, arrived in Tacoma in 1888 and both left between 1895-96. They are listed in the Tacoma City Directory as partners in their firm in 1888 and the relationship continued until 1893 when Pickles began his own practice. Sutton then formed a new partnership with Ambrose J. Russell, which lasted for approximately two years. At that time, both Pickles and Sutton left Tacoma; Russell remained and continued his practice.

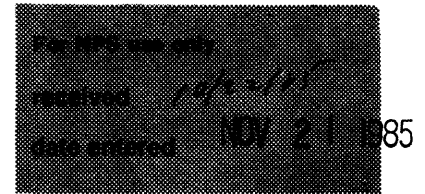
Albert Sutton was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1867, and was reared and educated in Portland, Oregon. After attending the University of California for two years, he was employed as a draftsman by the Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1888, he moved to Tacoma, where he formed two separate partnerships in seven years. In addition to the two buildings for General Sprague, he and his partner designed other structures including the "New" Post Office (ca. 1889-90), Uhlman's Block, the Baker Building, and the Wolf Building.

After leaving Tacoma, Sutton traveled to San Francisco, where he established the firm of Sutton and Weeks with which he remained until 1910 when he moved to Hood River, Oregon. He opened an architectural office in that city and also owned a ranch 11 miles out of town. In 1913, he formed a partnership with Harrison Whitney of Portland, but maintained



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his residence in Hood River until 1916, when he relocated to Portland. He and Whitney conducted an active business in Portland until 1919-20 when Sutton returned to Tacoma, practicing under the firm name of Sutton and Whitney until his death in November 1923 at the age of 56. In Portland, some of his work includes the Gill Book Building, Scottish Rite Cathedral, Multnomah Hospital (Infirmary), and the Meier and Frank Warehouse. He is also credited with the design of the Hood River Library and, in California, the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank in Oakland, remodeling of the State Capital in Sacramento, and structures for John A. Roeblings Sons Company, and Pacific Hardware and Steel Company, all in San Francisco. Buildings in Tacoma designed by the firm, some in association with Earl Dugan, include the Scottish Rite Cathedral, College of Puget Sound, Annie Wright Seminary, and the Rust Building.

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