

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED DEC 8 1976

DATE ENTERED NOV 7 1977

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Morse (Robert I.) House

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 1014 North Garden Street

CITY, TOWN

Bellingham

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd - Congressman Lloyd Meeds

STATE

Washington

CODE

53

COUNTY

Whatcom

CODE

073

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**NAME Mr. Iver R. Heinrich  
c/o Walston Realty Co.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

437 South State Street

CITY, TOWN

Bellingham

VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington 98225

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Whatcom County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Bellingham

STATE

Washington 98225

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Washington State Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

1975

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington 98504

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

#### GENERAL STATEMENT

Constructed between 1895 and 1896, the Robert I. Morse House was one of the most fashionable homes erected on the hillside overlooking Bellingham Bay in the consolidated town of New Whatcom prior to the turn of the century. It was designed in the Queen Anne Style by leading local architect Alfred Lee. As was not uncommon among large homes of a by-gone era, it was subdivided for apartment use at least by the 1960s, and it has been maintained as a multiple-family dwelling ever since.

#### LEGAL DESCRIPTION

The Robert Morse House is located in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec. 31, T.38N., R.3E., of the Willamette Meridian. It occupies Lots 4 and 5 of Block 91 of the New Whatcom Plat.

#### THE SITE

The elevated site on the east, or up-hill side of Garden Street commands a northwesterly view of the busy port and much of Bellingham Bay, and its treatment heightens the effect of the house. A six-foot retaining wall of regularly-coursed rock-faced sandstone provide a sturdy underpinning for the sloping bank and the vertical mass of the house. Access fro the street is provided by a masonry-lined serpentine stairway, the head of which is aligne with the foot of a curved staircase offset to one side of a raised porch. The bank is planted with two varieties of evergreen ground cover, and the northerly boundary of the yard is lined with a screen of mature trees and shrubbery.

The surrounding neighborhood, presently a high-density residential zone, is experiencing a transition from single-family to multiple-family housing. Multi-story apartment buildin have been erected opposite and in back of the property in recent years. Owing to the comparatively steep gradient, however, the view from the house has not been impeded by develo ment across the street thus far. Neighboring houses on the southerly end of the block are apparent in any view of the Morse House from the street because they are no longer separ- ated by planting screens of any kind. These houses generally post-date the turn of the century and, with their detail derived from Colonial Revival and Classical Revival Styles, they are unrelated to the Morse House stylistically. The foreyard bank of the home immediately south of the landmark has been terraced for use as a vegetable garden.

#### THE BUILDING

The two and a half story frame house is situated on a stone foundation and basement. Essentially rectangular in plan and oriented longitudinally along the common line of adjoining lots, it measures 40 by 58 feet. As is typical of buildings in the Queen Anne Style, its elevations are asymmetrical, broken by assorted bays and projections.

The core of the house is covered by a steeply-pitched hipped roof presently surfaced with asphalt shingles. The three main elements of the front elevation are a gable-roofed poly- gonal bay extending to a height of two and a half stories, a central gable-roofed porch with decorated verge boards matching those of the taller bay, and a two-story octagonal bay with turret. Red brick flare-top chimneys, the largest of which simulates clustered flues, crown the roofline.

Above the high sandstone ground course, first story walls are clad with horizontal siding, and upper stories are surfaced with fish-scale shingles. Surface decoration is appropriately varied and eclectic, much of it, apparently, standardized millwork. Square panels scribed with geometric sunburst motifs form a frieze at the base of the turret in imitation of pargetry the ornamental plasterwork which was a staple of Queen Anne Revival building in the high style. Tapered and spool-turned balusters, lattice-like railings and drop ornaments are used on the porches and verandas. Stylized bosses decorate verge boards, and fretwork and chequered paneling fill gable ends. Windows, for the most part, are fitted with double-hung sash, and several on the front elevation are glazed with colored and leaded panes. The oriel, or tall window projecting from upper stories of the facade's polygonal bay contains a rectilinear picture window framed by an arresting horseshoe-arched frame of art glass.

The house originally contained twelve rooms and a bath and, in addition, five finished rooms in the basement. The main floor plan included double parlors with a common fireplace, entry and rear halls, a dining room, butler's pantry, and kitchen. Bedrooms were located in the upper stories. The house is presently divided into five separate apartment suites, but much of the historic finish work and hardware has been retained.

While the house is well-preserved externally, its character has been affected somewhat by certain modifications. It is understood that in 1914 a 10 by 24 foot two-story shed-roofed sleeping porch was added to the southwest corner of the house, adjacent to the octagonal, turreted bay which forms a part of the facade. The porch was enclosed during the remodeling of recent years, and while modern aluminum window sash was used, an effort was made to march the horizontal and shingle siding of the main block. Among decorative elements which have disappeared over the years are a galvanized iron finial at the apex of the core roof (that of the octagonal turret is still in place), decoration spanning the triangular space between verge boards of the gable sheltering the oriel, and stylized acroteria at the crest of each gable. The most significant alteration of Queen Anne aesthetics which has occurred may be reversible to some extent. The house was last painted unrelieved black, and the only contrasting coloration is now provided by green composition roofing shingles and the sandstone ground course. Originally, of course, the color of the house was as variegated as its surface texture, though essentially ruddy, and verge boards, "pargetry" panels and other trim were painted a contrasting ivory or similar light tone.



# 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

---

SPECIFIC DATES	1895-1896	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Alfred Lee, Architect
----------------	-----------	-------------------	-----------------------

---

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### GENERAL STATEMENT

The Robert Morse House is significant to the city of Bellingham as a well-preserved example of Queen Anne architecture designed by one of the city's leading early-day architects, Alfred Lee. Lee is best known for his design for the New Whatcom City Hall (1892) and for supervising construction of the main building of New Whatcom Normal School (1896-1899) and designing its later additions of 1901 and 1907. The civic-minded Morse was one of the respected members of the business community for thirty-six years. Upon his arrival in 1884 at the place first known as Sehome, he founded the Morse Hardware Company, and he headed its management until his demise in 1920. Morse's company, perhaps the oldest continuing business firm in Bellingham, is still in operation at its original location on State Street, two blocks northwest of the fashionable house he built in 1896.

### EARLY SETTLEMENT ON BELLINGHAM BAY

Settlement of Bellingham Bay on Puget Sound in the extreme northwest corner of Washington's mainland is generally dated from December 1852, at which time Henry Roeder and R. V. Peabody took up claims and erected a saw mill at the mouth of Whatcom Creek, which was named for the native Indian term meaning falls, or "tumbling water." Land claims subsequently were taken up by others all round the bay.

While coal was discovered at Pattel's Point on the bayfront several miles south of Whatcom Creek in 1853, active coal mining was first begun the following year on the Vail claim between Whatcom Creek and Pattel's Point. The site of the Robert Morse House lies on the north boundary line of the Vail claim, near the northeast corner of the claim. In 1858 the company operating the coal mine on the latter claim platted a portion of it and called the place "Sehome". Two months later, Roeder and Peabody had their holdings on Whatcom Creek platted under the name of "Whatcom". These primitive settlements developed suddenly after gold was discovered that year along the Fraser River in British Columbia. The influx of miners moving north to the gold field in British territory, first by overland trail, and then by steamship to Victoria, left in its wake a well-developed staging point, complete with wharves and permanent structures.

In 1883 the Whatcom townsite was re-surveyed, a large new mill was erected to replace the original at the falls of Whatcom Creek, and the town was legally incorporated. In the following year Robert Morse arrived at the neighboring Sehome Townsite and started the hardware business which would be his life's work. In 1890 Sehome was incorporated under the laws of the new State of Washington as the City of "New Whatcom". In 1891 the adjoining towns were consolidated under the name of New Whatcom, and the name was changed again to "Whatcom" by an act of the State Legislature in 1901.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dancey, Joan, preliminary National Register nomination form on the Robert Morse House, undated.  
The Coast, Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1907). Issue devoted to Bellingham. A photograph of the Morse house appears on page 171. It is useful because it documents the building's appearance prior to the addition of a sleeping porch SW corner in 1914.

(continued on attached page)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 0	5, 3, 8, 4, 4, 0	5, 3, 9, 8, 9, 8, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Elisabeth Walton Potter, Historic Preservation Specialist

ORGANIZATION

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation - October 1976

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 1128

TELEPHONE

(206) 753-4117

CITY OR TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington 98504

## 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

*Arthur M. Skolnik*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

November 30, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

*Charles H. ...*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

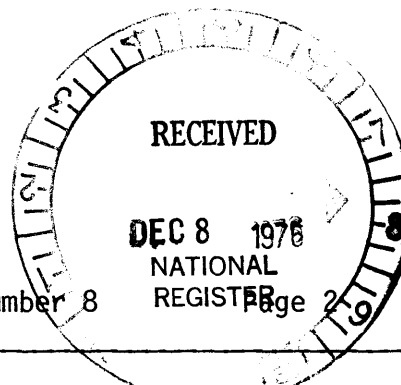
DATE

11/21/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

12-2-77



Item Number 8

DEC 8 1978  
NATIONAL  
REGISTER

Page 2

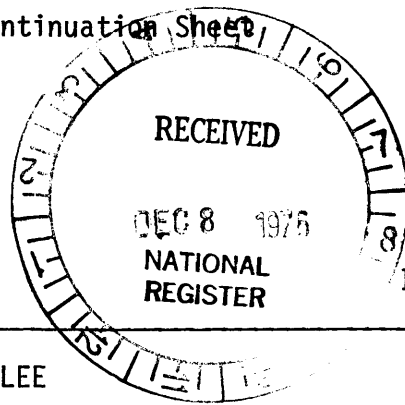
Meanwhile, two additional townsites, settled as early as January 1853, had been developing more slowly along the bayfront to the south. Bellingham townsite, adjacent to Sehome, was platted in 1871 and again in 1883, at which time a large lumber mill went into operation there. Adjacent to Bellingham on the south, the contemporaneous townsite of Fairhaven was platted by Daniel J. Harris. In 1888 these two southerly townsites were purchased by railroad interests and were legally incorporated under the name "Fairhaven" in 1890. In 1903 voters approved consolidation of Fairhaven and Whatcom, the only separate municipalities remaining of the original four adjoining settlements. When the charter of the resulting city was adopted in 1904, "Bellingham" ranked fourth among Washington cities with a population of 22,632.

#### ROBERT I. MORSE: PIONEER BELLINGHAM BUSINESSMAN

Robert I. Morse (1858-1920), one of eight children raised on a Maine farm, came West to San Francisco in 1875 at the age of seventeen. There, after pursuing several short-term jobs, he was employed by his uncle's hardware and paint store. Over a period of years he completed his education at night school and enrolled at Dow's Business College.

In 1884 Morse came to Bellingham Bay and opened his own hardware store - reportedly the first in Sehome - with a stock of hardware, paints, oils, glass, and wallpaper he had brought with him from San Francisco. The frame store he built on State Street (originally named Elk Street) between Laurel and Maple Streets, was enlarged in 1892 and expanded still later by a three-story brick masonry addition on stone foundation. A large general warehouse was erected at the rear of this considerable establishment fronting the north-south thoroughfare, and spur trackage from two railroad lines was laid so that cars could be unloaded directly at the warehouse. Morse is credited with having built and operated the principal Sehome wharf of the 1880s and 1890s, and he is remembered for having given employment to many during the economic doldrums in the process. It is reported, also, that for a time he developed a fur-trading sideline after sending a schooner to Alaska for pelts in 1894. In 1897, a year after Morse's imposing home on Garden Street two blocks up the hill was completed, the Morse Hardware Company was incorporated with a capital stock of \$25,000 for the purpose of entering the wholesale field. Morse was named president and manager, positions which he held the rest of his life. Eldest son Cecil A. Morse succeeded his father as president and manager of the family enterprise upon his father's death in 1920. The company Morse founded is still in operation in the buildings he erected on State Street.

Morse promptly became active in community affairs upon his arrival at Sehome. In 1888 he was named a trustee of the town of Sehome, and he later served the City of Whatcom as a councilman-at-large. He was a leader in the Chamber of Commerce and the Whatcom County Agricultural Association, and he served on the local school board. Moreover, Morse was an organizer and trustee of the New Whatcom Baptist Church. The church building, which stood on a knoll at Commercial and Flora Streets (it is no longer standing), was designed by Alfred Lee, and it is presumed that Morse engaged Lee to design his Garden Street home as a consequence of this association. Morse had the home built for his first wife, Etta Fowler, whom he had married in San Francisco, and their five children. Etta Fowler Morse died in 1906, and three additional children were the issue of Morse's subsequent marriage to Ada M. Chisholm. Morse continued to reside at 1014 Garden Street after his second marriage in 1909.



Item Number 8

Page 3

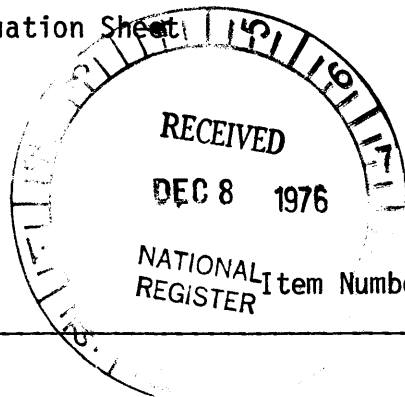
---

THE ARCHITECT: ALFRED LEE

Alfred Lee (1843-1933), a native of Missouri, emigrated overland to Oregon with his parents in 1852. His father having died of cholera in the Snake River, he settled in Yamhill County, Oregon, with his mother and younger brother and sister and was apprenticed to a wagon-maker. By 1874 Lee had married and moved his family to Forest Grove in a neighboring county, where he started a shop for the manufacture of farm machinery, carriages and wagons.

In 1890 Lee relocated his family once again to Bellingham Bay in Washington, where he appears to have launched his architectural practice. He is not known to have had any formal training in the profession, but he had a mechanic's know-how and is believed to have studied the subject since his apprentice days. Lee soon was commissioned to design the New Whatcom City Hall, and he supervised its construction, completed in 1892. Now maintained as the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, the building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In the same year that his design for the Robert I. Morse House was executed, Lee submitted plans for the New Whatcom Normal School, and although his proposal was not selected by the school's board of trustees, Lee was given a contract to supervise construction of the winning scheme. Moreover, he designed wings added to the Normal School main building in 1901 and 1907. To Lee's credit, in addition to the important public commissions just mentioned, were a number of fashionable homes, the New Whatcom Baptist Church, of which Robert Morse was a trustee; the Northside and Southside High Schools and the Northside Library. Around 1907, as an increasing number of professionally-trained architects arrived in the burgeoning manufacturing center, Lee quit his practice of architecture and resumed the mechanic's trade, making and repairing gasoline engines in a shop at his home. His was one of the early automotive works in Bellingham.



Item Number 9

Page 2

---

Roth, Lottie Roeder, ed., History of Whatcom County (Chicago - Seattle: Pioneer Historical Publishing Company, 1926). Two volumes. Notwithstanding certain shortcomings in organization, this is the best available general source for Bellingham history. Vol. 2, pages 34 and 37, biographical note on Robert I. Morse.

Obituary article, architect Alfred Lee, Bellingham Herald (December 20, 1933), 10.

Biographical note on architect Alfred Lee, one-page typescript prepared by the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham. Undated. Based on an item in Bellingham Herald (February 28, 1966).

Correspondence from Mrs. James A. Tarte, Ferndale, Washington, former daughter-in-law of Alfred Lee, September 9, 1976.