

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 00000976

Date Listed: 8/10/2000

Helmer and Selma Steen House
Property Name

King
County

WA
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

8/10/00
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Cultural Affiliation:

The term *Norwegian* is deleted from the Cultural Affiliation blank since the property is not being nominated under Criterion D and it exhibits no identifiable ethnic features or design characteristics.

U. T. M. Coordinates:

The correct UTM coordinates should read:

- A. 10 539560 5255990
- B. 10 539760 5255990
- C. 10 539760 5255640
- D. 10 539560 5255640

[Properties over 10 acres must include three or more UTM points.]

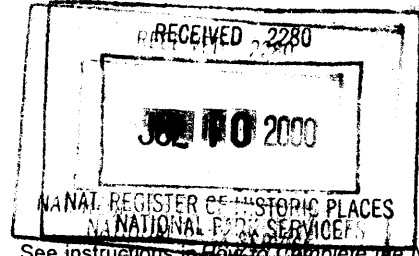
These revisions were confirmed with the Lauren McCroskey at WA SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

974



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Helmer & Selma Steen House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 10924 SW Cove Road N/A not for publication
city or town Vashon N/A vicinity
state Washington code WA county King code 033 zip code 98070

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
____ See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
____ See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other (explain.)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Paul R. Foye

8/10/00

Helmer & Selma Steen House
Name of Property

King, Washington
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
2		buildings
0		sites
0		structures
0		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN:
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD: Weatherboard
STUCCO

roof WOOD: Shingle

other CLINKER BRICK
RIVER ROCK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Helmer & Selma Steen House
Name of Property

King, Washington
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1911

Significant Dates

1911

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Norwegian

Architect/Builder

Helmer Steen

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property.) SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record# _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

King County Landmarks & Heritage Program
506 Second Avenue, Room 200
Seattle, WA 98104

Helmer & Selma Steen House
Name of Property

King, Washington
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 12.5 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

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Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.) SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.) SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Julie M. Koler, Historic Preservation Officer
organization King County Landmarks & Heritage Program date April 14, 2000
street & number 506 2nd Avenue, Room 200 telephone (206) 296-8689
city or town Seattle state WA zip code 98104

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Sam & Jana Rentfro
street & number 10924 SW Cove Road telephone (206) 463-7763
city or town Vashon state WA zip code 98070

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Continuation Sheet - [STEEN HOUSE]

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DESCRIPTION

Setting

The Helmer and Selma Steen House is a very well-preserved dwelling located in a pastoral setting about one mile northwest of the town of Vashon on Vashon Island. The handsome, Bungalow/Craftsman style house is set back from Cove Road on a 12.5 acre parcel; Steen's original tract was originally 80 acres but portions have been separated and sold. The property today is bounded on the south by Cove Road, on the west by the Vashon Airport; on the north by several contemporary houses on tracts of less than two acres; and, on the east by a 24-acre parcel with a single dwelling.

The Steen House is approached from the south off Cove Road via a winding 350-foot long gravel lane that terminates at the rear of the house. The house is oriented to the south, and toward Cove Road, on a bench above a large open field and wetland area. The field was originally the site of Steen's Mill and millpond. The mill equipment was moved in 1923 when Steen relocated the mill operation to Tramp Harbor in Ellipsisport. Several barns, fence enclosures and other non-contributing structures associated with the current owners' large ostrich farming operation are located to the north (rear) and west of the house. A concrete walkway extends around the north, west and south elevations of the house, and a garage, which appears to be contemporary with the residence, is located off the northwest corner of the house. The garage is believed to be have been one of the first automobile garages built on the Island.

The immediate landscaping around the house consists of a number of mature deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs; however, the extensive ornamental plantings, including flowerbeds visible in a 1938 photograph, are no longer extant.

Exterior

The Steen House has a rectangular footprint; 40' x 57', and its main axis runs east west. It is a large two-story, wood-frame building set on a concrete foundation with a finished daylight basement. The roof form is a low-pitched, side-gable with large central front and rear gable dormers. The roof is clad with wood shingles. A large offset cutaway porch wraps around the southeast corner of the house. The porch contains two sets of stairs: one provides direct access to the primary façade entry and the other provides access to a secondary entrance on the east elevation. Two bay windows, each bracketed by kneebraces, project from the exterior walls; one wraps around the southwest corner of the house and the other is located at the east side of the north elevation. A two-story bay is centered on the north elevation; it exhibits a broad moulded cornice distinguished by four sets of shallow brackets. A large brick masonry chimney is located on the west end wall of the house; it replaced a river rock chimney, which was destroyed by an earthquake in April 1965.

The prominent low-pitched roof is a hallmark of the Craftsman style. Wide eave and rake overhangs are present not only on the main side gable and dormer roofs but also above the porches and bays. Rafter tails are exposed and the bargeboards terminate in a distinctive horizontal block, details that are evocative of Japanese architectural motifs. Deep kneebraces decorate the gable ends and low

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Tudor arch headers distinguish the porch. According to the arbiters of the Craftsman style, the wide bargeboards, as well as the rest of the wooden trim, were intended to be left in a natural state. All trim would have been simply oiled and varnished to show the grain of the wood. Reportedly, the trim on the Steen House was left in a natural state for a period; however, a 1938 photo shows that it had been painted a dark color.

The first floor exterior wall surface is clad with a narrow bevel siding, and is separated from the brick basement level by a wide board watertable. The second floor level exterior surface is a decorative half-timbered finish with pebbled stucco applied between flat board "timbers." The use of clinker brick [a rough faced, burnt brick] is a highly decorative feature of the house; used in the construction of the entire raised foundation level of the house and entry stair cheeks. Large multi-paned windows are set into the foundation wall and the brick lintels of two of these windows have been altered. Below the porch, rough-cut brick lunette openings include iron grills that are not part of the original construction. River rock is another highly distinctive material incorporated into the design of the cutaway porch. The porch features square wooden columns that rest on square, riverrock piers with "s" concrete caps. A low balustrade with square balusters and a wooden porch deck further details the porch.

The Steen House is further distinguished by the extensive use of multi-paned sash, beveled glass and stained art glass windows. The main entry features a massive, varnished fir door with a beveled light over a single panel. The door is flanked by sidelights of diamond pattern beveled glass. This pattern is repeated in the upper sash lights of large cottage windows and transoms used elsewhere in the house. The bay windows on the facade and north elevation each feature tall narrow one-over-one sash windows with beveled glass. Multi-light sash, featuring small square panes, is also installed throughout the house: at the basement and second floor levels. The most prominent individual feature of the house is the set of three large stained glass windows located on the north elevation, which serve to illuminate the interior stair landing.

Interior

The interior of the Steen House contains 14 rooms: five on the first floor, five on the second floor and four in the basement. The first floor contains the entry hall, main parlor, dining room, kitchen and study. The second floor contains four bedrooms, an expansive stair hall, and a bathroom. The basement has four fully finished rooms, which retain their original light fixtures and detailing. The house initially included an oil-heated hot water system; this system was adapted for an oil burner at an unknown date. The original hot water heater and heat radiators are still in use. With the exception of the kitchen, which has been extensively remodeled, the interior of the Steen House remains remarkably intact. It retains many significant interior features including light fixtures, art glass, wood trim and paneling, window and door hardware, and hardwood floors with inset parquet.

Varnished natural fir is a significant interior design element found throughout the house. From within the large entry hall, an expansive staircase is the focal point of the first floor with its dark wood illuminated by the beveled and stained glass windows situated at the stair landing. The large, square newel post retains its original lamp, a metal (probably brass) column electroplated in an "antiqued"

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finish and topped by the original cut glass ball shade. Flat, thin board balusters feature a cutout pattern design; a spade at the top, connected by a long cutout rectangle to a trefoil. The stairwell has paneled wainscoting to handrail height. The paneled wainscoting is carried throughout the entry hall. A central hanging light fixture (Craftsman in style) has the same black and gold mottled "antique" electroplated finish as the newel lamp. The shades on this fixture are also original, as are the large majority of the light fixtures throughout the house. The hall floor is of fir, with an inset parquet border. The door and window hardware is brass executed in an Art Nouveau stylistic design. A darkly stained fir box beam ceiling follows the perimeter of the entry hall. Contemporary stenciling has been added to the plaster around the beams. An original heat radiator with gold paint highlighting the cast metal features remains in use.

The main parlor is open to the left side of the entry hall and framed by a colonnaded opening composed of fluted square columns on side piers. This large rectangular room features a darkly stained fir box beam ceiling with a more complicated pattern than that used in the entry hall or dining room ceilings. The beams extend around the perimeter, intersecting near the corners. Additional beams are used to form a second smaller rectangle, which is connected with short beams back to the center of each of the beams forming the exterior rectangle. Still functional are the original single-bulb light fixtures situated at each of the outer corners and at the points where the beams intersect. Original chandelier and wall sconces also remain in place.

A brick fireplace with red tile hearth and a wood mantel is situated opposite the entry to the room. The original sandstone fireplace was replaced at the same time the exterior river rock chimney was replaced with brick masonry due to earthquake damage. The southern part of the room features large windows with beveled glass in the upper lights. A bay window seat occupies the southwest corner of the room. The walls are textured plaster, and the floors feature the same inlay around the perimeter as that seen in the entry hall and the dining room.

The study is the smallest room on the first floor and features large windows overlooking the porch. It features an original darkly stained fir built-in wall unit with decorative stained glass doors. The wall unit consists of two symmetrical flanking cabinets, extending about two-thirds of the way to the ceiling. The stained glass doors of the cabinet feature a floral motif, which resembles a pair of tulips stylized in an arts and crafts motif. The lower portion of the doors is darkly stained fir with a recessed panel. A double-door cabinet with a recessed center panel on each door is featured in the middle of the wall unit. Below the cabinets, the unit is open to the floor. Continuous crown moulding unifies the piece.

The opening between the entry hall and the dining room the entry hall is enframed by darkly stained, square fir columns. The dining room features a darkly stained fir box beam ceiling with dentil moulding at the edges of the boxes. Still functional, original single-bulb light fixtures are situated at the intersections of the beams and in the center of the longer members. A central light fixture hangs in the middle of the room and appears to be original. In contrast to the wood panel-type wainscoting used elsewhere, the dining room features an "lincrusta" type finish with a pressed pattern. A broad plate rail supported on brackets placed encircles the room above the wainscot. A darkly stained fir-swinging door leads from the dining room into the kitchen. On the north side of the room, a bay

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window seat is situated beneath the five-panel window unit. A darkly stained fir door also leads from the dining room and outside to the porch.

The second floor stair landing area is open to the elaborate three panel stained glass window above the stairwell and features an original central light fixture. Several five-panel doors with a dark stain finish and transom lights open off this ample stair landing area. The door surrounds are flat with elaborate crown mouldings. Newly installed etched glass, with a floral pattern derived from the interior design motifs within the house, has been placed within the transoms. The bathroom has been extensively altered with only a combination gas and electric lighting fixture remaining from the original room. The configuration and finishes within the bedrooms are little altered. The flooring throughout the second floor is fir, with the exception of the bathroom. Walls and ceilings are finished with lath and plaster and typically include fir base and a picture rail. Some of the bedrooms have combination gas and electric fixtures that appear to be original. These light fixtures consist of one electric down light and a gas jet that does not presently have a lamp. The presence of combination fixtures suggests that electricity was not entirely reliable despite the fact that electricity was supplied to the home from the adjacent lumber mill.

Garage/Storage Structure

Builder-owner Helmer Steen owned one of the first automobiles on Vashon Island and built a 14 x 16 foot garage near the northwest corner of his home to house it. The one-story, wood frame building has a gable roof and is clad with clapboard siding. The roof is clad with wood shingles and has deep eaves with exposed rafters and knee brackets. Records indicate that the original flooring was wood plank, however a concrete slab and some concrete footings have been added. Currently, this small building is in a somewhat deteriorated condition.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement

Located on rural Vashon Island and built in 1911 for a successful Norwegian immigrant and lumber mill owner, the Steen House is a particularly well-preserved example of Craftsman style architecture. Popular throughout the United States during the early decades of the 20th century, the Craftsman style is fully exhibited with the design and construction of this home for Helmer and Selma Steen. The design of the house incorporates an open first floor plan and characteristic roof form and details. It includes a wide range of highly distinctive construction materials and elaborate interior features to form one of the finest examples of Craftsman design in unincorporated King County.

Vashon Island Historic Context

The Steen House is located in a central upland valley of Vashon Island, near the north end of the Island. Once heavily forested, this area now contains a mixture of second and third-growth forest and pasture lands, and relatively limited physical development.

Most of Vashon Island is known to have been the aboriginal territory of predecessor bands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, who established winter villages along the shores of Quartermaster Harbor, toward the Island's southern end. Ancestors of the Suquamish and Muckleshoot Tribes may have also inhabited northern and eastern portions of the Islands.

Euro-American settlement of Vashon Island began during the 1850s, primarily along the shores of Quartermaster Harbor, with logging and farming being the earliest vocations. Island pioneers purchasing land through the Donation Land Act, established individual timber and homestead claims. Logging and milling companies including the Puget Mill Company purchased large tracts of timberland.

During the latter part of the 19th century, numerous communities were established along the Island's shoreline, serving a growing population with limited commercial establishments. It provided important maritime transportation connections to commercial markets in the growing cities of Tacoma and Seattle. Settlement of the inland areas of the Island occurred more slowly, due to the limited rugged roads that connected the uplands with well-established steamboat landings dotting the shorelines.

Early industrial activities included shipbuilding and brick-making operations which were typically located on waterfront sites, with easy access to maritime transportation, and took advantage of abundant natural resources; fir and cedar trees, clay, sand and gravel. Brick making became the second most prosperous industry on Vashon after logging, acquiring materials from the blue-clay bank beaches of the Island. Quartermaster Harbor served as the location of several brickyards, the largest one being the Bleeker yard on the Burton peninsula. By 1893, at least eight brickyards were in operation around Quartermaster Harbor, with additional yards located along the eastern shore of the Island. Major shipbuilding operations were developed at Dockton, at the outlet of Quartermaster

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Harbor on Maury Island, with secondary activities at smaller waterfront communities on Vashon and Maury Islands. However, logging continued to dominate the local economy, as thousands of acres of timber were harvested and milled at both local and off-island mills.

Settlement patterns and the early industrial history of Vashon are clearly reflected in the development of the Island's built environment. The construction of late 19th century vernacular buildings reflects the rough living conditions with log cabins with shake roofs being prevalent. As lumber mills became more widespread, wood-frame construction with board and batten cladding became most common. By the late 1880s, when planed lumber became generally available, builders had greater ability to construct more elaborate Victorian residences.

Steen House Historic Context

Donation claims, and later homesteads, created a checkerboard settlement pattern across Vashon Island during the 1860s. While initially concentrated along the shorelines, settlement gradually spread inland from numerous small waterfront communities. The Steen parcel was part of a 160-acre tract pre-empted by Miss Lizzie Markham in 1884. Other members of the Markham family also acquired property elsewhere on the Island, which established the Markhams as a well-known family in the pioneer history of the Island.

Helmer Steen, along with his brothers August, Karl, and Ludwig, came to Vashon Island in 1890. Originally from Norway, the brothers migrated to the Pacific Northwest after a brief period of residence in North Dakota. They began a small logging operation on the Island using ox teams, flumes, and skidding. The brothers' first mill was located about a mile to the northeast of the subject property, near the current site of the Vashon Elementary School.

In 1907, Helmer Steen purchased the lower 80 acres of the Markham homestead. Exhausting their supply of timber near the initial location of the mill, the Steen brothers relocated their operation to a new site on Helmer's property. They also expanded the capacity of the mill with additional machinery. Helmer gradually constructed a log pond, installed a short spur-logging railroad in 1915, and made numerous other improvements to the property.

Some historical archaeological remnants of this mill exist about 240 feet to the south of the subject property within a wetland and meadow area. These remains consist of a series of three concrete features that run in a north-south alignment for a distance of about 80 feet; a small concrete pad with two crushed bolts, a rough patch of concrete, and a large engine mount block (10 x 3 ft) with a dual set of machine bolts.

The Steens began the construction of the Craftsman style house in 1910, using lumber supplied by the adjacent mill. Helmer's construction knowledge and his direct association with the construction industry are reflected in the design of the house and the wide range of highly distinctive building materials and elaborate interior features utilized for construction. By 1911, Helmer and his wife, Selma, announced in the local newspaper that they were holding an open house for the Island neighbors to view their newly completed residence. Selma was a popular socialite, who hosted many

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parties and entertainment functions, and used the elegant and distinctive qualities of the house to their fullest advantage. The Steens' home was one of the few on the Island to have electricity, which the sawmill operation supplied. In a similarly innovative fashion, Helmer became the third Vashonite to own an automobile, which he stored in the adjacent garage designed in character with the new house.

The Steens continued to live in the house until c.1923 when they apparently moved to Seattle. It was at this time that the logging operation again exhausted the readily available timber supply. The mill operation was relocated to Ellisport, south of Vashon, to land owned by the Fuller family, another prominent Vashon pioneer family. Lumber milled at the new location was used by Mr. Steen to build an elegant Craftsman home for the Fuller family, using a floor plan similar to that of the subject property, however on a smaller scale. Like the subject property, the Fuller's house contained elaborate interior fixtures, stained glass windows and decorative woodwork. Poor management and a downturn in lumber demand during the Great Depression forced the Steen sawmill operations to close entirely in 1932. By this time, Helmer and Selma Steen were residing in Seattle, where Helmer died shortly thereafter, in May 1933.

Following the Steens' use of the house, Maybelle M. Park during the 1920s and 1930s, and Dagmar Andersen during the 1940s occupied the property. Since that time, the property has had several individual owners who collectively made very few alterations to the house. An earthquake in April 1965 seriously damaged the original river rock chimney and sandstone fireplace that was subsequently reconstructed with brick masonry. During a period in the late 1970s or early 1980s, the Church of the Divine Man rented the property, and remodeled the kitchen to provide an institutional-scale cooking facility needed to accommodate large gatherings that the group hosted. The Steen House is currently owned and occupied by Janna and Sam Rentfro, who use the historic house as a bed and breakfast and meeting facility and operate an ostrich farm in the pastureland to the north of the house. In December 1996, it was designated a King County Landmark by the King County Landmarks and Heritage Commission for its architectural and historic significance.

The Craftsman Movement

The Steen House is a remarkably well-preserved example of Craftsman style architecture, exhibiting distinctive exterior and interior features characteristic of the style. The extensive use of natural building materials and unique commercially available products and fixtures enhances the property's significance as an outstanding example of the period in unincorporated King County, and especially on Vashon Island. In addition to many characteristic Craftsman design elements, several features and materials are manifestations of the owner's direct association with the construction industry as well as the lingering influence of Victorian architectural styles.

The Craftsman style evolved in the United States during the last decade of the 19th century and into the first three decades of the 20th century. This style represented a synthesis of the principles and design ideas of the English Arts and Crafts Movement, and earlier American architectural styles including the Queen Anne style and the Stick Style, and was then influenced by the contemporary Prairie Style pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright. Craftsman architecture became especially popular in

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the western United States from about 1905 until the early 1930s, as both its practical building elements and its underlying principles resonated strongly within the context of the region's growth and identity.

In part, as a reaction against trends toward an increasingly mechanized and industrial society, the Arts and Crafts movement was hailed in England and on the European continent as a movement toward a clean and uncluttered aesthetic, drawing inspiration from natural materials and natural forms. The simplicity of this style was viewed as a deliberate departure from the ornate forms of Victorian architecture, contrasting strongly with the complex and sometimes jumbled designs of this earlier era.

The most distinctive elements of the Craftsman style are its extensive use of natural local materials and its emphasis on quality workmanship and a harmonious relationship between structures and their natural setting. Typical design features included the use of river rock which served as building materials for columns, porches, fireplaces, and chimney elements, and which embodied the Craftsman emphasis on establishing an organic relationship between houses and the natural environment. Extensive use was made of local timber products, including numerous exposed wood elements that were both structural and decorative. Examples include triangular knee braces beneath overhanging eaves, heavy wood rafters and exposed rafter ends, large porches, and wood shingle roofs. Interior design elements included hand-beveled, leaded glass, unadorned walls with natural stain treatments, inlaid wood paneling, doors, and flooring, built-in fixtures such as window seats and benches, and accompanying hand-crafted furnishings. The Steen House includes noteworthy examples of all of these features.

The most elaborate realization of the Craftsman aesthetic was found in the work of two California architects, brothers Charles Summer Greene and Henry Mather Greene, who practiced together in Pasadena from 1893 to 1914. The Craftsman movement began to influence architecture in the Puget Sound area just after the turn of the century, initially through the designs of Seattle architects Ellsworth Storey and Andrew Willatsen. Proponent architect Gustav Stickley published a widely circulated national magazine called Craftsman Homes, which helped to popularize both the architectural style and its associated furnishings.

Builders' plan books offered the interested homebuilder standardized house plans for a variety of Craftsman style houses, from popularly built bungalows to elaborate multi-story rustic mansions. A proliferation of such plan books after the turn of the century further promoted and increased the popularity of the style. The subject property, built as the Craftsman era was fully emerging in the Pacific Northwest, was very likely based on one a plan book design.

In a 1909 issue of Craftsman Homes, Stickley wrote that a home built in the Craftsman style was "a house reduced to its simplest form," one that "never fails to harmonize with its surroundings, because its low broad proportions and absolute lack of ornamentation give it a character so natural and unaffected that it seems to sing into and blend with any landscape." Despite its original association with California imagery and warm climates, the Craftsman style was beautifully integrated with the Northwestern landscape dominated by rivers, evergreen forests, and mountains, and ultimately contributed to the development of the Northwest vernacular Rustic style. The ubiquitous fireplaces

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made from river rock or rustic clinker brick, which served as the living room centerpiece and in turn the focal point of a Craftsman home, were especially appropriate for the wet, cool winters of the Pacific Northwest.

This idea of the "natural house" was not only reflected in the predominant use of local, unrefined materials, but also in a conscious focus on opening the house to the outdoors. Open porches created an intermediate space between the interior of a house and its surroundings, and complementary landscaping designs reflected Craftsman ideals of harmony and simplicity. Numerous examples of these features are exhibited in the Steen House, including the expansive front porch, which provides a sheltered recess with a southern exposure from which one can view the rolling landscape.

The Craftsman style was often associated with a rugged individualism and a return to a simpler way of life. This association is especially appropriate to the use of the Craftsman style on Vashon Island, with its rural, relatively isolated, back-to-nature setting. The natural surroundings of the Island encouraged both self-reliance and use of local building materials such as fir for lumber and clay for bricks.

Ironically, this style that developed out of a rejection of industrial mechanization and an emphasis on a return to hand-craftsmanship, ultimately achieved its greatest popularity in the 1920s through the availability of mass-produced house plans. Plans such as those distributed by the Sears Roebuck Company, and even standardized "house-kits" containing completely pre-cut packages of lumber and detailing to be assembled by local laborers.

Helmer and Selma Steen's elegant Craftsman home is a reflection of their direct involvement in the settlement and commercial development of Vashon Island. At a time in King County's history when the initial settlement era had essentially ended, and remote hamlets were maturing into established communities, the built environment increasingly reflected the region's economic growth and prosperity. The Craftsman style of architecture expressed a level of formal comfort that was elegant without being ostentatious and appealed to the growing American middle class which Helmer and Selma Steen had successfully joined. This particularly well preserved home is as an outstanding example of Craftsman style architecture in King County and an evocative reminder of one of Vashon's important pioneer families.

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Fuller, Larry
Casper, Kathy and Bill
Sipple, Nancy
Steen, Barbara
Steen, Karl Jr.
Rentfro, Sam (April 2000)

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description:

Tax lot 190 in the northwest quarter of Section 30, Township 23 North, Range 3 East.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary for the nominated property includes the entire current legal land parcel directly associated with the Steen House and garage.