

INVENTORY SHEET FOR GROUP NOMINATIONS: IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BOISE, IDAHO

ada County

NOMINATION: (TOURTELLOTE AND HUMMEL ARCHITECTURE ~~IN IDAHO~~ TR)

Garden City vic.

✓ SITE NAME: Pierce-Borah House

SITE NUMBER: 1

off U S 26

✓ LOCATION: ~~North of Highway 26~~, West of Garden City, Ada-County (001), Idaho.

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS:

Vernon K. and Victoria H. Smith
Rural Route No. 4, West of City
Boise, ID 83704

QUADRANGLE AND SCALE: Eagle, 7.5 minute

ACREAGE: two and one-half acres

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nomination includes the Pierce-Borah House and the property on which it stands, the NW 1/4, NW 1/4, SW 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 26, T4N, R1E, Boise Meridian. Legal description on file at the Ada County Courthouse, Boise, Idaho.

UTM(S): 11/5,56,240/48,34,10

WINNER
9/1/83

DATE OR PERIOD: 1897

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

EVALUATED LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

CONDITION: Excellent condition unaltered moved 1959

DESCRIPTION:

The Pierce-Borah House is a Queen Anne style of residence of frame construction. It was described at the time of its construction as in "the gothic style of architecture, modernized considerably."¹ The reference was no doubt to its seven steep gables with flared eaves and individually and elaborately decorated bargeboards.

The house presents a strongly irregular and asymmetrical aspect, but despite its short ends it is nearly rectangular in plan. The several ends emerging from the hipped main block are covered on the upper half-story with steep gabled roofs. Besides the gables--two each on the north, south, and east (front) elevations--three turret caps enliven the exterior. A square two-story tent-roofed tower room, originally containing the den, rises behind and to the left of the entrance. A low conical first-story turret cap is set over a gazebo-like section of the porch, which runs around the southeast corner of the house. A taller, thinner cap with

flared eaves is set over a small round bay with false upper half-story to the right of and behind the entrance ell. Each of these turret caps terminates in a differently formed metal finial, and each is supported on a differently designed system of brackets. The surface treatment of the house provides still greater variety. The lower story is clapboarded; the upper gable faces are covered with shaped shingles. The main front-facing gable includes several patterns of shingles set into geometric patterns within a low-shouldered arch design. The bargeboards, as noted, differ from gable to gable; the window treatments are equally various, with several variations on the Palladian type present. Room has been found for a classical motif as well in the Doric columns and pilasters of the porch and the north turret.

The metal cresting designed to run along the numerous ridgebeams has been lost, and the roof has been resurfaced with asbestos shingle, but the house is otherwise nearly in mint condition. The shrubbery planted after the structure was moved to its present site in 1959, the mature trees that surround the grounds, and the pergola that gives access to the front walk are compatible with and indeed highlight the historic architectural qualities represented in the house itself.

1. (Boise) Idaho Daily Statesman, 30 December 1896, p. 3, c. 2.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Pierce-Borah House is architecturally significant as one of the two earliest buildings in the Group and as one of those we can attribute to John Tourtellotte. It is the premier example in the Group, and a ranking example in the state, of the Queen Anne style in wood at the cottage scale. The house is historically significant for its occupation during most of its early history by Idaho's internationally known United States Senator, William E. Borah (1865-1940). Borah acquired the house from a person of local historical importance and of particular importance as a client to Tourtellotte and Hummel, realtor and entrepreneur Walter E. Pierce.

The Pierce-Borah House dates from 1897, when it was built at a reported cost of \$4,000. Only the Eoff-Brady House of the same year, shares its position in Tourtellotte's work in age, distinction, and state of preservation. The massive, unusually ambitious two-and-a-half-story masonry Eoff house, which was added to the National Register as part of the West Warm Springs Historic District in 1977, is actually less typical of Tourtellotte's output in this period than is the smaller, frame, Queen Anne cottage. Of at least fourteen other houses known to have been designed in this style and scale during the last three years of the nineteenth century, only a few survive intact (e.g., the Johnson and Mickle houses, sites 2 and 3, and the Vaughn House [National Register, Harrison District, 1980]). None approach the Pierce-Borah House for elegance and elaboration of decoration.

The man who commissioned the house from Tourtellotte was Walter Pierce, who has been described as Boise's leading real-estate promoter from 1890 to 1930. Pierce proved to be a good source of business over a number of years: his 1900 residence (site 8) and 1909 store-office building (site 59) are surviving buildings included

in the present Group, among a list of commissions that also included a 1902 business block and apparently the entire architectural package for the offices and stations of the Boise and Interurban Railroad, of which Pierce was a primary promoter. Pierce's partners in real estate, John Haines and L. H. Cox, also commissioned Tourtellotte and Company residences (Haines House, site 29; Cox House, [Warm Springs Historic District, National Register September 22, 1980]).

Pierce's custom was to build a new residence every few years, and he owned this one a shorter time than most--in fact may not have occupied it at all: it was reported as ready for the plasterers in late September 1897, and sold to William Borah in July of 1898.

William Borah (1865-1940) came to Boise in 1890 from the Midwest. By 1892 the young attorney was Republican state chairman. He developed a national reputation during the 1890's as a lawyer for a number of criminal cases in Idaho, including the trials of Diamondfield Jack Davis in the 1896 sheep and cattle conflicts, Paul Corcoran in the 1899 Coeur d'Alene mining union troubles, and William D. Haywood in the IWW-supported Steunenberg assassination. After several unsuccessful bids for election to Congress, Borah was elected in 1906 to the first of six consecutive terms in the United States Senate. He was a leading isolationist with a powerful voice as chairman and ranking minority member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

The Pierce-Borah House was moved to its present site west of Boise to avoid demolition in 1959. A number of factors identify it as a significant resource and lead us to nominate it as an exception to the original site guideline: its state architectural significance, not only as one of the earliest structures by John Tourtellotte in his independent practice, but as one of that has been described as a masterpiece; its historical significance as the home from 1898 to 1907 as one of Idaho's preeminent historical figures; and its appropriate and visually accessible landscaping and site.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

(Boise) Idaho Daily Statesman, 10 April 1892, p. 6, c. 1-2; 9 February 1893, p. 8, c. 4; 23 July 1897, p. 6, c. 1; 24 September 1897, p. 6, c. 1; 1 January 1898, p. 5, c. 3; 15 July 1898, p. 6, c. 2.

Boise, Idaho. Idaho State Historical Society. Copies of original drawings, signed by John Tourtellotte.

Hart, Arthur A. Historic Boise: An Introduction to the Architecture of Boise, Idaho, 1863-1938. Boise: Boise Historic Preservation Commission, 1979.

Neil, J. M. Saints and Oddfellows: A Bicentennial Sampler of Idaho Architecture. Boise: Boise Gallery of Art, 1976, pp. 182-183.

Wells, Merle W. "William E. Borah: the Lion of Idaho." Idaho Yesterdays (Fall, 1957); 1/3:3-5.