

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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



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

1. Name

historic

and/or common Wagner Houseboat, or (The Old Boathouse)

2. Location

street & number 2770 Westlake Avenue North

not for publication

city, town Seattle

vicinity of

congressional district

state Washington

code

county King

code 033

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 type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input checked="" 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 | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input checked="" 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. and Mrs. Richard E. Wagner

street & number 2770 Westlake Avenue North

city, town Seattle

vicinity of

state Washington, 98109

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Assessor's Office

street & number King County Administration Building

city, town Seattle

state Washington

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None to date

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>1938</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Wagner Houseboat is presently moored at the base of the high-level Aurora Bridge in the northwesterly portion of Seattle's Lake Union. The structure enjoys a prime waterfront position at the end of its dock in one of several houseboat neighborhoods that line the shores of Lake Union. This early, virtually unaltered houseboat is now headquarters for a small wooden boat business, as well as home for a family of four.

Built prior to 1912, the houseboat is a symmetrical design of balanced scale and proportions. The main roof is a shallow gable with broad overhangs on both the eaves and gable ends. These overhangs cover the deck on all sides creating substantial exterior "porch" spaces. A partial second story with a gabled roof runs perpendicular to the axis of the main roof. This narrow, inset upper story reduces the apparent mass and overall height of the structure, similar to the effect of a boat's cabin.

The houseboat is sheathed with lapped cedar siding and shingles, both painted. Most of the windows are the original multi-paned sash, some sliding. A large bay window which fronts the water from the living room was converted in the 1930's from a three-sided rectangular projection to its present two-sided triangular form with large paned glazing that extends nearly to the floor. The only other significant exterior alteration has been the replacement of shingles by roll roofing.

The interior of the houseboat is essentially unaltered. Varying ceiling heights provide spatial variety and the use of natural materials, mostly native woods, provides a continuity and timelessness. The flooring is of painted fir, tongue-in-groove. The walls are of natural cedar in some areas, and of painted tongue-in-groove in others. The various ceilings are of T&G, painted exposed joists, or painted exposed rafters. A brick fireplace in the living room may be original, or may replace an earlier wood-burning stove. The kitchen has been updated with modern appliances, but the original floor, ceiling, and tongue-in-groove cabinets remain the predominant feature. On the whole the cabin conveys an atmosphere of warmth and serenity.

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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900– | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Community Development |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | |

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Wagner Houseboat is one of very few intact examples of Seattle's earliest floating homes. At their peak, over 1,200 houseboats resided on Seattle's waterways. Today there is a stable community of over 445 floating homes on Lake Union and Portage Bay. The Wagner Houseboat was built prior to 1912 as a summer home on Lake Washington and was towed in later years to its present location on Lake Union. It is not only a unique and unaltered specimen of early houseboat design, but also a tangible reminder of the floating resort communities that once prospered on Lake Washington.

Seattle's houseboat community has a long and colorful history. The first floating homes were residences of working stiffs -- loggers, millworkers and fisherman. These houseboats were shacks built upon log rafts, old barges or abandoned hulls. The earliest known colony, inhabited mostly by fishermen, was moored to the public piers in Elliott Bay. The city banished this ragtag community in 1908, and many of the boats were moved into the mouth of the Duwamish River. Single working men, many of them loggers, lived along the shores of the Duwamish for a number of decades. This houseboat colony actually expanded during the depression years.

Another kind of houseboat community had begun to flourish in another part of Seattle. Sometime before 1905, floating summer homes had sprung up along the shore at fashionable Madison Park on Lake Washington. Local newspapers reported on the growth of this phenomenon and recognized it as an exciting new element in Seattle's life fabric. Dance pavilions at Madison Park and Leschi also contributed to the resort atmosphere of the lake front. Cable car lines connected these parks to the city center, increasing their accessibility for summer outings.

The Wagner Houseboat is pictured in a 1912 photograph as the scene of a lively social gathering, where canoes of middy-bloused girls paddle about around its sheltered deck. By 1910, however the trend-setting houseboat lifestyle had become more than a fad. By then houseboats served a substantial number of working men, as well as middle and upper class families as vacation retreats or year-around homes.

The promise of a ship canal connecting Lake Washington to Puget Sound was the impetus for industrial, business and residential development around Lake Union, a small body of water between the two larger ones. In 1909 boosters of the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition convinced the State Legislature to sell private plats around Lake Union. These factors influenced the growth of houseboat living on Lake Union, and encouraged the casual mixture of working-class and professional houseboat ownership which prevails even today. In 1917, when the long-awaited ship canal joined Puget Sound with fresh water Lake Washington, the Lake's water level was lowered by some 9 feet. At that time and in the years that followed, many summer houseboats were towed to Lake Union, among them the Wagner Houseboat, moved in 1938.

Seattle's houseboats are now nationally recognized as more than individual floating dwellings. They have captured an image of freedom and independence. The Wagner Houseboat is a fine example of the early 1900 cottage style of houseboat design and is especially significant as an intact survivor of the golden heyday of floating summer homes on Lake Washington.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Dennis, Ben & Case, Betsy. Houseboat. Smuggler's Cove Publishing, 1977.
Droker, Howard. Seattle's Unsinkable Houseboats. Seattle, Watermark Press, 1977.
Pettus, Terry. Founder of Floating Homes Association. Interview - Nov., 1980
Steinbrueck, Victor. Seattle architect and historian. Interview - Nov., 1980

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name SEATTLE NORTH, WASH

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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| Zone | | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is identified as King County Assessor's Houseboat #326.

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 Richard E. Wagner

Edited by: F. K. Lentz, OA&HP,
Olympia, WA

organization

date November, 1980

street & number 2770 Westlake Avenue North

telephone (206) 282-0985

city or town Seattle

state Washington

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Paul E. Thon

date 1/4/82

For HCPS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date 2/19/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration