Kirsten Freeman received her MS in Historic Preservation in 2017 from the joint graduate program of Clemson University and College of Charleston. After graduation she completed an internship through 4Culture in Seattle, Washington, related to the landmark designation process in the City of Seattle and greater King County. This article is based on the work completed during that internship.

Toward Equity in Historic Preservation: A Study of Seattle and Greater King County, Washington

By Kirsten Freeman

The Beyond Integrity Working Group, comprised of preservation professionals of King County, Washington, initiated the Equity in Preservation internship with the goal of contributing to a larger discussion in the historic preservation community. 4Culture serves as a cultural services agency for King County and focuses on the four program areas of arts, heritage, historic preservation, and public art.

4Culture’s historic preservation program is committed to increasing the diversity of cultural resources that are identified, protected, and interpreted, to be more representative of the multicultural populations in King County. The program aims to encourage more comprehensive identification and stewardship of historic cultural properties associated with underrepresented communities.

In the summer of 2016, 4Culture’s first Equity in Preservation Intern completed an initial assessment of whether designated historic landmarks in Seattle and greater King County reflect the historic diversity of their communities. The first intern focused on gathering a set of data on designated landmarks, including 128 King County properties and 348 properties located in Seattle. The data was used to produce multiple maps illustrating the distribution and the varying levels of association with underrepresented communities (referred to as ‘UC association’).

The creation of a second Equity in Preservation Internship in the summer of 2017 aimed to further the study. The goal of this internship was to add to the data collected the previous summer and to identify properties with high potential for significance to underrepresented communities. These properties were the subject of more focused investigation, including research on their history and significance. Finally, a series of case studies analyzed potential for nomination (for never-nominated...
able and thorough source proved to be property files located at the City of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods office. Key areas of interest for review in a property’s file were the landmark nomination reports, criteria recommendations, and criteria evaluations. In the nomination reports, the statement of significance often provided clues to possible UC associations. Recommendations written by landmark board staff provided guidance on what criteria they believed the property qualified under, while preservation consultants or architectural firms were often responsible for evaluations which assessed each criterion to determine whether the property in question met any criteria.

A spreadsheet tracked the information gathered from the sources. Besides basic information on a property such as date built and address, other data collected included: level of association (LOA), underrepresented community association (UC association), area of significance, nomination criteria, and a notes section. Level of association was a number based scale created to indicate the degree to which a property was associated to an underrepresented community based on information found in nominations and designation reports. The scale was from zero to three, with zero having

**METHODOLOGY**

The first part of the internship was devoted to data collection and followed the model and methodology set in 2016. Two lists were generated to gather information on properties which had not been designated in King County and Seattle. The list for King County consisted of nine pre-selected properties never nominated for landmark designation, but thought to have a strong UC association. The King County Historic Preservation Program provided previously gathered information about these properties as the source for data collection. The list for Seattle consisted of one hundred and one properties which either did not qualify for landmark nomination or reached nomination but failed to be designated. This set of properties was considered for landmark nomination between 2008 and 2016. A variety of sources provided data for the Seattle properties, but the most reli-

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[Graphs by author]
no association and three indicating a strong UC association. Label of association fell into seven categories: not applicable (N/A), communities of color, women, LGBTQ, labor history/working class, early European settlers, and other. Reference to early European settlers was not considered a contributing factor in the LOA rating; however, these references were noted to illustrate the imbalance between groups considered important to the region’s historical narrative and those considered to be less important. The category of ‘other’ included these subcategories: homeless, low income, veterans, and persons with disabilities.

The second part of the internship involved selection of properties for cases studies to gain a more in-depth understanding of the challenges that the nomination and designation process presents for properties associated with underrepresented communities. The properties selected were mostly associated with African American or Asian American communities and spanned the decades from
the 1890s through the 1970s. They included such diverse resource types as commercial buildings, residences, school, farming cooperative, and a golf club. Case studies fell into one of three categories, with one or two properties selected per category. The three categories for case studies were:

1. Non-nominated properties – one property from the King County list was chosen for a case study, as well as one property in Seattle known to have a UC association, but never nominated.

2. Non-designated properties – two case studies examined properties nominated but not designated as Seattle Landmarks, each with a high level of association with underrepresented communities.

3. Designated properties not fully engaging UC association – for this case study, the 2016 internship spreadsheet was consulted for a property indicating a low LOA, but known by the Beyond Integrity group to have a high UC association.

The non-nominated pair of case studies were approached as potential landmark nominations for King County and Seattle. This necessitated gathering as much information as possible to document a strong UC association. The non-designated pair of case studies focused mainly on documenting the reasons why the properties were denied landmark designation and also finding additional information on their particular UC association. The already
designated case study focused mainly on finding supplemental information on the property’s UC association that was missing in the nomination report or not presented to the board during the nomination process. The addition of this supplemental information to a property file would help to more completely convey its significance.

Properties nominated but not achieving landmark designation, and the property which had reached designation but did not reflect its UC association, required a follow up trip to the Department of Neighborhoods for a more thorough examination of the nomination reports and other supporting material in property files. Reports related to integrity or general information on alterations to the specific buildings required further investigation. Meeting minutes provided commentary from the public and Landmarks Board regarding integrity and placed importance on cultural and social aspects of the property. Public comments included in the files as well as supplemental information showed what was deemed important by the public and the Landmarks Board when considering landmark designation. General research into the properties’ UC association was also important for determining if the nomination left out any important information.

FINDINGS
Once entered into the spreadsheets, properties associated with underrepresented communities began to emerge. Of the nine properties from King County five had a LOA of 3, while seven of the one hundred and one Seattle properties had an LOA of 3. It is likely many more properties have a strong UC association that simply was not included in the statement of significance, since the nomination report provided the basis for these ratings. In terms of the level 3 associations, of which there were 7 from the Seattle list, there are interesting observations related to criteria worth pointing out: two of the seven were not recommended for landmark designation under any criteria by landmark staff, three of the seven were deemed ineligible under any criteria by a consul-
tant performing an evaluation of the building, and two of the seven were recommended by landmark staff based at least partially on their association to an underrepresented community.

Upon further analysis of the data, general observations emerged for both the King County and Seattle properties. First, LGBTQ, Native American, and Latin American communities are largely absent when looking at properties considered for a UC association. It is unclear if this means that properties associated with these communities are simply not being nominated or if the UC association is not being presented. Similarly, the role of women is rarely described in nominations and if mentioned as part of the significance, it is very brief. At least half of the nominations mentioning women involve an association to a woman or group of women who are important enough that a greater degree of research would have surely uncovered more information.

In terms of the case studies, certain characteristics stand out within each of the three types. The non-nominated properties were rich in history and significance related to an underrepresented community. Both properties even seemed to have more information to research than the case study properties that were nominated for landmark designation.

When examining the two non-designated case studies, meeting minutes and the focus of the nominations indicated that integrity was the main obstacle to designation. Focus on alterations made to the buildings overwhelmingly dominated in the nomination reports, rather than factors such as social or cultural significance. Also, in both cases the nomination reports submitted by consultants included little content related to an UC association. Both of these properties clearly had a rich social and cultural history associated with an underrepresented community; however this part of the significance was not presented to the extent of other topics related to the architecture itself. It was also notable that both of these properties had a very strong backing for designation from the community. In both instances the community felt it necessary to provide supplemental information about the social and cultural significance of the property, pointing out that this was lacking in the nomination reports and landmark meetings.

When researching the nomination and designation process for the case study of a designated property not fully engaging its UC association, some observations were worth pointing out. The nomination report focused almost exclusively on the architectural significance, despite having a very well-known association with an underrepresented community. The only reference to any social or cultural significance in the report was a few sentences. When questioned about the property’s cultural significance by a board member at the nomination meeting, the preparer of the report couldn’t answer the question.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations were that the two non-nominated properties be considered for landmark nomination. Buildings on both properties were still standing and had more than enough information on significance to be successfully designated and hopefully protected in the future. Also recommended was that the other four properties with a LOA of 3 on the King County list be considered for landmark nomination. All of these properties had information to support a nomination based on their social or cultural significance and with likely more information to uncover with further research.

In terms of the non-designated properties used as case studies, both were demolished after they...
failed to achieve landmark designation. These properties should serve as cautionary examples for the future. The other properties with a high UC association that are still standing and previously denied designation could re-nominated, with additional research to substantiate their significance. (In Seattle, re-nomination is allowed five years after a designation is rejected.)

Based on the findings when conducting research on properties that were not designated, another recommendation is that a UC association and any sort of social or cultural significance be thoroughly researched and given equal importance as architectural significance. Also recommended, if landmarks staff find information on the UC association or social/cultural significance lacking in the nomination report submitted, they may ask the preparer to conduct further research on these topics and resubmit the report.

Lastly, designated properties that do not fully engage their UC association could benefit from further research. This research would seek to provide supplementary information not included in the original nomination report. The supplemental information could then be submitted to landmarks staff and placed in its property file to further inform the significance of the property.

REFERENCES