

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Rustic Wooden Shingles

By George Cushing

Have you considered putting a historic wooden roof on your vintage house? Do some research. You might discover that the rough-sawn wooden shakes we see on many newer houses would almost never have been seen in historic Forest Grove.

The reason for this is simple. But first, a little history. In Europe, where wood was expensive or unavailable, thatch, slate and tile were the preferred roofing materials. In North America, trees were plentiful. Therefore, shingles made of wood quickly became the favorite roofing material in the new world. Wooden shingles had the advantage of being lightweight and easily made with available hand tools and were easy to install. The only real difference was in the trees available. Almost without exception, only the inner section or the heartwood was used as the softer sapwood deteriorated quickly.

Traditionally (prior to the early 1800s), wooden shingles were hand split from log sections known as bolts. The bolts were quartered or split into wedges. Then a mallet and froe (or ax) was used

to split or rive out thin planks of wood along the grain. Because the hand splitting was somewhat irregular, they were generally planed on a shaving horse to make them fit evenly on the roof. The smoothing of the wood was necessary to provide a

tight fitting roof over sheathing boards or lath. The smoothing or dressing of the shingles was done almost universally no matter what kind of wood was used or where in North America the home was built. As you can imagine, this cutting, splitting and planing took quite a bit of time and produced a non-uniform, rustic looking shingle.

Then, in the early 19th century, the

steam-powered sawmill was invented. Steam-powered sawmills revolutionized shingle fabrication. These mills were capable of producing uniform shingles in mass quantities which could then be shipped practically anywhere, eliminating the need for hand dressing. Architectural styles such as Carpenter Gothic and Queen Anne, which prominently feature wooden shingles, gained in popularity. The sawmills were providing readily available mass-produced



Leila B. Smith House with Rustic Wooden Shingles

shingles in the period in which Forest Grove was settled. Even in the early 1860s, rough-sawn shakes were considered crude and utilitarian; no one with a modicum of sophistication would employ them.

Besides wooden shingles, there were other popular roof choices, including slate, in regions with that material available. Some western boomtowns used sheet metal because it was light and easily shipped. Slate, terneplate and clay tiles were used on more ornate structures. Some cities outlawed wooden shakes because they were flammable. But wooden shingles were never abandoned. Even into the 20th century, architectural styles such as the Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival used wooden shingles.

Modern wooden shingles continue to be made, but they are different from historic ones. Modern commercially available shakes are generally thicker than their historic, hand-split counterpart and are usually left "undressed" with a rough, corrugated surface. The rough-surface shake is often considered more "rustic" and "historic", but in fact, this is a modern fashion. You would not have seen them a hundred years ago in Forest Grove.

Thanks to Wikipedia, Wood shingle, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wood_shingle

"Southside" Historic District Research Continues

By James Reitz, Senior Planner

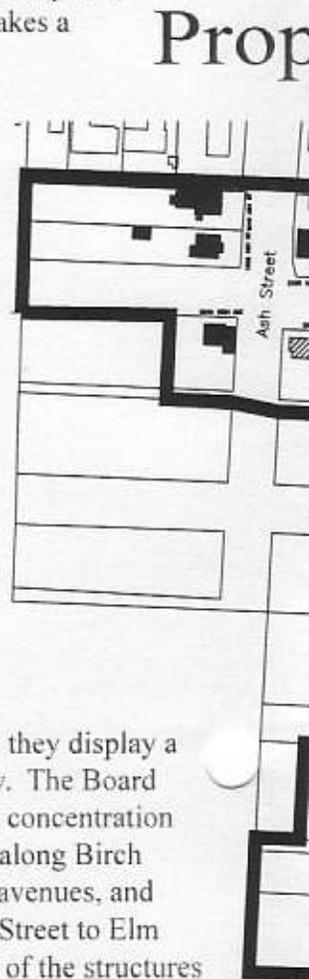
In 2002, Forest Grove achieved a milestone: the National Park Service approved the city's first-ever National Register Historic District. The Clark District has the distinction of not only being the first such district in Forest Grove; it is also one of just two in all of Washington County (the other being located in downtown Beaverton). Now, the Historic Landmarks Board is working toward the nomination of a second district in Forest Grove.

What are the benefits of living in a historic district? The benefits of historic designation are

numerous, and are both tangible and intangible in nature. As many in the Clark District already know, historic district designation encourages and enhances neighborhood stability and improvement. This, in turn, makes a neighborhood more attractive not only to purchasers, but to residents. Pride of place and community is enhanced. In addition, the assurance that these culturally-significant structures will be preserved for future generations to enjoy is critical.

The "Southside" District would be a logical, southerly extension of the Clark District. As a procedural note, a national historic district can only be nominated if at least 50% + 1 of the structures within it are "historic contributing," i.e., they display a high level of historical integrity. The Board has determined that the highest concentration of eligible resources is located along Birch Street from about 16th to 12th avenues, and along 15th Avenue from Birch Street to Elm Street. In that area, about 57% of the structures are considered historic contributing. While there clearly are other historic contributing sites in the area, they are not geographically concentrated and if included within the boundary could "dilute" the nomination to below the required 50% threshold.

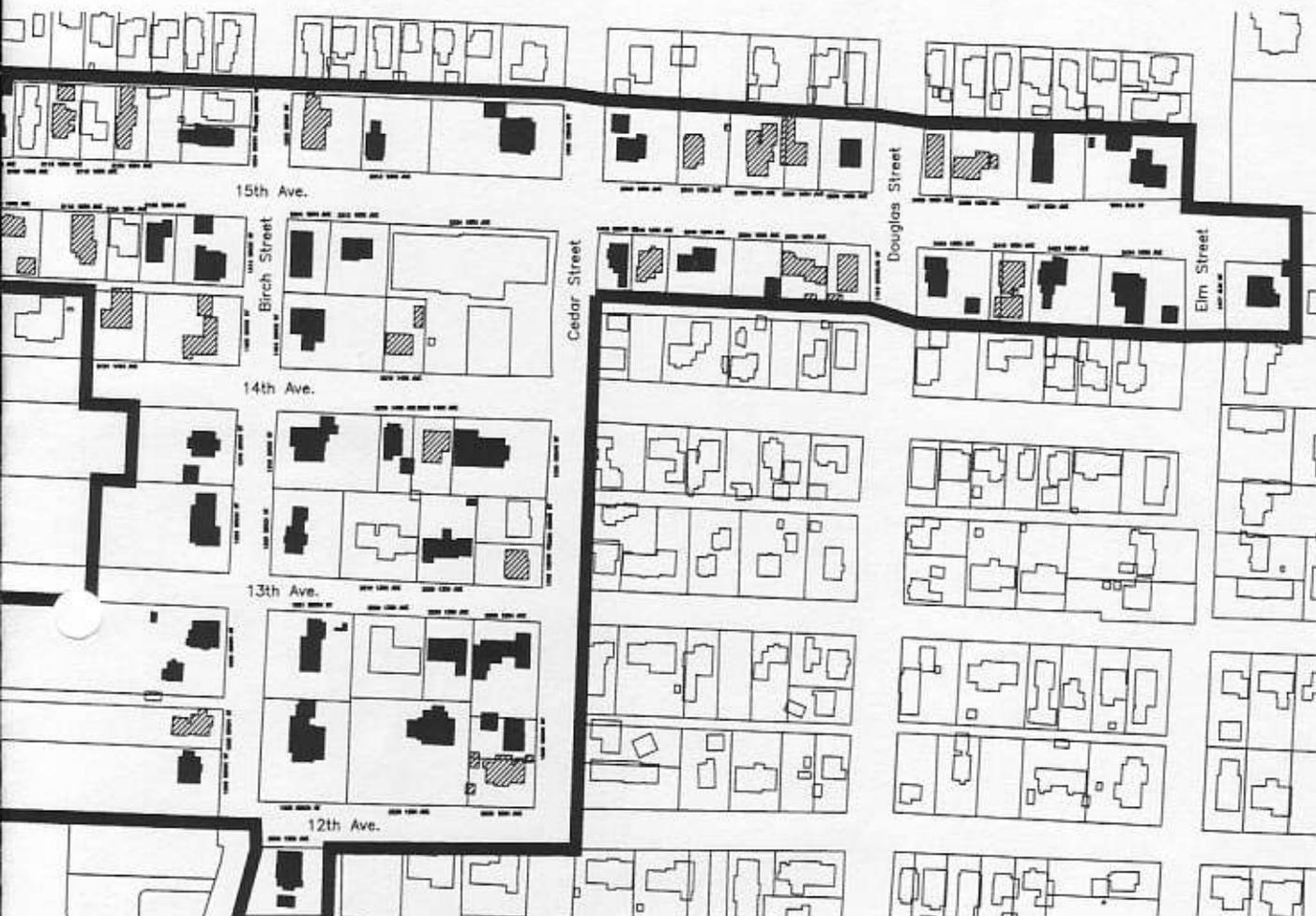
Kim Fitzgerald, a historic preservation consultant, has contracted with the City to prepare the district nomination. She has been working with the Board over the past three years to develop an inventory of the historic resources in the area generally south of 16th Avenue to Highway 47, and "B" Street to Maple Street. She and the Board are now refining the data, and have developed a working boundary for a potential district.



So what happens next? A Southside District Introduction and periodic updates from the Board will be mailed to all property owners in

within the proposed district area. SHPO will then initiate its own notification process and invite additional public comments; this process often

Proposed Southside Historic District



the potential district. Articles describing the idea behind the Southside District and the historic nomination process will be placed in the News Times. Residents will also be invited to share whatever historical data they possess that they feel would aid the nomination. Board meetings are, of course, always open to anyone who wishes to present their ideas or views.

The Board anticipates having the nomination completed by this May. It will then be forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), but only if there is demonstrated public support

takes several more months. Assuming, as with the Clark District, that a majority of the property owners within the proposed district support the proposal, SHPO would then forward the nomination to the National Park Service later this year.

(By the way, you probably noticed that the word "Southside" is in quotes. While this name is geographically descriptive, it is just a working title. If you have a suggestion for what the district should be called, we would love to hear from you!)

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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In this issue:

Rustic Wooden Shingles

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