



TO: Elizabeth A. Pauli
FROM: Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Services
Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution adding the Henry J. and Nettie Craig Asberry House to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places – January 4, 2022
DATE: December 17, 2021

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

A resolution designating the Henry J. and Nettie Craig Asberry House, located at 1219 South 13th Street, as a City Landmark and placing said property on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

BACKGROUND:

This department’s recommendation is based on the recommendation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the Asberry House a City Landmark, following a public hearing on December 8, 2021. The Asberry’s were among the early leaders of Tacoma’s and Washington’s emerging African-American community, and Nettie Asberry played a pivotal role in early 20th century civil rights in Tacoma and the Pacific Northwest.

The house was built in 1887 and is a remaining example of the initial settlement of Tacoma’s emerging Hilltop neighborhood, but its major significance comes from it being the longtime residence of Henry Joseph and Nettie Craig Jones Asberry from 1903 until 1966.

Nettie Asberry was the organist and music director for the Allen AME Church. For some 50 years, she taught hundreds of children of all races to play the piano in the music room of her home. Washington’s African American women’s club movement began in 1908 with Nettie organizing the Clover Leaf Art Club, in Tacoma, to create an exhibit of needlecraft and artwork of black women in Pierce County. Nettie would go on to start a number of improvement clubs, in 1917 she became a charter member of the Washington State Federation of Colored Women’s Organizations, for which she would serve as president and participate on many of its committees. Eventually the Clover Leaf Club would be renamed the Tacoma City Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. Today the Asberry Cultural Club of Tacoma continues Nettie Asberry’s legacy as part of the Tacoma City Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (TCACWC). In 1970, Governor Dan Evans dedicated the new TCACWC building. Its music room, which houses her library and instruments, is named in her honor.

In 1909 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. Nettie and Henry Asberry became two of the founders of the Tacoma chapter of the NAACP. Nettie also helped establish branches in Seattle, Spokane, and Portland, Oregon, as well as cities in Canada and Alaska. In 1943, The Crisis, the official magazine of the NAACP, published an account of her achievements and listed her as one of the “First Ladies of Colored America.”

At the age of 101, Nettie left her beloved home of 63 years at 1219 South 13th Street, moving to a nursing home. She died two years later in 1968 at the age of 103 and is buried with Henry in Tacoma’s Oakwood Hill Cemetery. The following year, Mayor A. L. Rasmussen proclaimed May 11, 1969, as Nettie Asberry Day in Tacoma.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

The nomination was researched and submitted by Historic Tacoma, and is part of a broader effort to acquire, restore and preserve this historic residence. As part of the 2021-23 biennium budget, the Washington State Legislature awarded the TCACWC an appropriation of \$919,000.00 through the Department of Commerce’s Local Projects program to acquire the historic Asberry home site for future renovation and public benefit. Forterra NW joined the TCACWC as a partner on the request, and is acting as the fiscal and project manager for the TCACWC for the duration of the transaction. Plans are underway for assessing the condition of the house and developing a restoration plan.

The house was listed as a “priority property for future nomination” in the Hilltop Neighborhood Multiple Property Nomination of Tacoma’s 1993 Cultural Resources Inventory. This nomination is the result of a years’ long partnership between the Historic Preservation Office, TCACWC, Historic Tacoma, Forterra, and the current property owner.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

Livability: *Equity Index Score:* Moderate Opportunity

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.
Improve access and proximity by residents to diverse income levels and race/ethnicity to community facilities, services, infrastructure, and employment.

Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).

This historic designation is a step towards improving representation and diversity of histories that are included in the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. By placing this building on the historic register, it will memorialize and celebrate an important figure in Tacoma’s black history while also allowing the TCACWC to continue with its plans to restore this building to its historic appearance and utilize it as a community space.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. No historic designation.	The site would have no development restrictions resulting from historic designation.	The site would not be protected. It would be a missed opportunity to preserve and celebrate this important figure in black history. The lack of historic designation would have a negative effect on funding resources needed to complete project.



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

The City of Tacoma Historic Preservation Office and Landmarks Preservation Commission is a partner in the Asberry Project and will continue to work with the TCACWC, Forterra, Historic Tacoma, the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation and the State of Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation to ensure the success of this project.

STAFF/SPONSOR RECOMMENDATION:

On December 8, 2021, the Landmarks Preservation Commission unanimously recommended that the Asberry House be added to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, and staff concurs with this recommendation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact.