

Nomination Form

City/County Historic Landmarks Commission
Fourth Floor - City Hall
Spokane, Washington 99201-3333

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Royal Riblet Complex

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Fruit Hill Road at Riblet Point

city, town Spokane vicinity of

state Washington county

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" 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 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 type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name David Mielke

street & number 4506 E. Buckeye

city, town Spokane vicinity of state Washington 99207

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Spokane County Courthouse

street & number W. 1116 Broadway

city, town Spokane state Washington

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Washington State Inventory of Historic Places

date 1976 federal state county local

depository for survey records 111 W. 21st Avenue KL-11

city, town Olympia state Washington 98504

Condition excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moved date _____**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Royal Riblet Complex perches on the edge of a massive cliff that drops 435 feet to the Spokane River. The large house, with suggestion of mediterranean styling, commands an impressive view and itself is visible throughout the valley.

The entrance to the estate is marked by rock gate posts. These were originally lighted by large glass globes in the top of each rusticated pillar. The gates at this entrance were controlled electrically from the mansion. Beyond these gates is a private drive to the house. A two-story rock gatehouse straddles the road, which then curves to the main house. Other buildings in the circle created by the cliff and road are a rock office building, a storage building, and an open vista house that overlooks the cliff.

The overall impression the house gives is one of great height and massiveness. It is two stories with a basement which, on cliffside, is above ground. The mansion measures 24x58 feet and rests on a foundation of native stone which, at its base is three feet thick. Stucco walls rise to a red tile hipped gable roof. Overhanging eaves are supported by brackets. A chimney is located centrally on the long west facade of the house. Fenestration, particularly on the east face, is notable for the size of the windows and the variety of shapes. A second story bay overhangs the first floor at each corner, and there is a wrap-around gallery at the basement level. Double garage doors are the principal feature of the north face.

Entry to the house is through rock arches of the portecochre. Wide arches, capped by a low gable roof, lead to the entrance on the east facade. There are windows along the inner walls of the gallery. On the south, rock veranda is overhung by the upper floors of the house. The veranda has a pair of half arches to each side of a full length arch opening on a walled sunken garden and lawn.

The interior of this fourteen-room house is divided into three functional areas by the floors. The ground floor, or cellar, has utility and laundry rooms, refrigeration plant, fruit cellar, furnace room, water and oil tanks, as well as double garage. The main floor has living areas, dining room, and kitchen, as well as enclosed porches at either end of the building. The upper floor has a unique arrangement of rooms. A large landing at the top of the stairs has a built-in linen closet opposite. A trio of windows in a stairstep arrangement provide light for the staircase. Each of the four bedrooms suites is divided into an unheated, sparsely furnished bedroom and a furnished, heated dressing room. One side of the floor has two single suites with a shared single bath. On the other side of the floor is a large suite with a double sleeping room, a single sleeping room, two dressing rooms and a shared bathroom with shower. Royal Riblet believed an unheated sleeping room was healthier than a heated one, but he enjoyed dressing warmth. The connecting door between the two sections permitted one to select either warmth or chill.

The estate is also noteworthy for the great variety of other buildings on the grounds as well as extravagant fancies of landscaping. Most notable of the lesser estate structures is the three-room gate house. This two story building resembles a fanciful castle with turretted battlements. It is divided on ground level by the roadway arch. The walls are two feet thick and are double insulated. The interior contains a small cozy apartment originally intended for the gardner.

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Other sites of note near the house and cliff include the bridge that leads to the vista house and the croquet court. In addition to its use for croquet, the court was also used for winter skating and Easter sunrise services for Spokane Valley churches. Another intriguing attraction was the nine-hole miniature golf course with metal owls marking holes. Thrubbery has replaced this feature. The most spectacular of the landscaping effects is the 25 foot square checkerboard.

Alteration to the grounds have been slight. Principal changes have been removal of the runway, and the enclosing of the porches on the main floor of the house. Otherwise, the estate is intact.

Liblet Point is such a prominent location that the house receives much wider recognition than any other Spokane home. Despite the many changes that have passed in the Valley below, the house itself has remained an outstanding and remarkable landmark.

o. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1924-1925

Builder/Architect

Royal Riblet/ George Keith

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

Royal Riblet's home has dominated the Spokane Valley landscape since 1925. Innovative in design and its use of technology, the house reflects the ingenuity of its owner and planner, Royal Riblet, widely known Pacific Coast inventor. Riblet's inventions, from improvements in bicycles to tramways, were notable developments in the first half of the twentieth century. As executed by architect George Keith, the house is a picturesque and outstanding manifestation of Riblet's imagination.

Born in 1872 in Iowa and raised in Aberdeen, South Dakota, Royal Riblet was to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished brother, Byron C. Riblet, a University of Minnesota graduate engineer. B.C. Riblet arrived in Spokane the year before the great fire of August 1889. Principally a railroad engineer for the Washington and Idaho Railroad, operating to the Couer d'Alene mines, B.C. Riblet early developed an interest in conveyor transportation, building his first tramway in 1897. Royal arrived in Spokane in 1892 to work as chain man for the city engineering department. BY 1893 he had left the city for British Columbia where his brother Walter was U.S. Consul, and he did not return until 1903.

Although Royal, like B.C. Riblet, was principally an engineer and inventor, his interests were always broad. Prior to returning to Spokane in 1903, he became the South Dakota bicycle champion at four different distances. While in Aberdeen, South Dakota, he manufactured bicycles as he did later in Nelson, British Columbia. A bicycle he designed for his young daughter in 1901, at one time the smallest pneumatic tired cycle in the world, was used for a time by Barnum and Bailey circus. Working for Hescher Wire Rope Company, a blacksmith shop that manufactured trams for Canadian mines, Royal, like his brother became interested in tram design. Royal Riblet first patented a tram in 1900.

In 1903, Royal Riblet listed himself in the city directory as a manufacturer of wire-rope tramways. In 1905, B. C. Riblet became President and Treasurer of Riblet Tramways with Royal as Vice-president. Although the tramways they would build before World War II were principally for movement of materials, B.C. Riblet's design for carrying miners is dated 1906 (postdating by eight years one used in Alaska's Chilkoot Pass). The Riblet Company was one of the first tram manufacturers and Riblet had constructed a 21 mile tram in Latin America. The range of expertise earned in the 1930's gave the company a world wide reputation. Today the concern is the largest single manufacturer of Ski-Lifts and similar equipment. The capital generated by the concern enabled company president, Byron Riblet, to build a magnificent estate on the Little Spokane River in 1910. Royal in 1924 decided to build a country estate in one of the most inaccessible spots on the Spokane River.

Royal Riblet severed his connection with the Riblet Company in 1935 and formed his own Company, Airline Tramways. This company manufactured trams in 1935 until World War II.

Royal Riblet's fortune came not only from his design of trams. At his death in 1960, he had over thirty separate patents in his name. Many of his inventions were simple improvements on existing ideas, but others were startlingly original. Best known of his

(over)

Bird, Margaret and Fey, Margaret. "Riblet Castle 900 feet above the Spokane". Spokesman-Review. March 11, 1986

Kay, E.I. "Royal Riblet's castle in the sky". Spokesman Review. July 21, 1968.

continued on attached sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property about 70 acres

Parcel # 04545-9053
04545-9054

Verbal boundary description and justification The Riblet Estate consists of a bluff bounded on the east by Hutton Settlement, on the south by Plants Ferry Park, on the west by a sheer cliff and on the north by Pleasant Prairie.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state _____ county _____

state _____ county _____

11. Form Prepared By

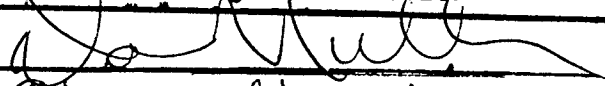
name/title Candace Frasher Director of Communications

organization Arbor Crest Winery date 6-11-86

street & number E. 4506 Buckeye telephone (509) 927-9463

city or town Spokane, WA state Washington 99207

12. Signature of Owner(s)


C. Howard Miller

For Office Use Only:
Date Received: 6-5-86
Date Heard: 8-13-86
Commission Decision: APPROVE
Council/Board Action: _____
Date: _____

Attest: _____
City Clerk
Approved as to form: _____
Ass't. Corporation Counsel

We hereby certify that this property has been listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places:

Mayor, City of Spokane or Chair, Spokane County Commissioners

Chair, Spokane City/County Historic Landmarks Commission

City/County Historic Preservation Officer

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SIGNIFICANCE #8

contn'd

inventions were a square-wheeled tractor, a mechanical parking garage and a tracklaying device that was used in World War II by the Armed Forces. Riblet continued an active life until his death in May 1960 at the age of 88.

Spokane is a city with many distinguished homes both old and new. The significance of Royal Riblet mansion is not for luxury or even its prominent and precarious location. Its fame is more justly derived from the innovative construction, furnishings and utilization of 1920's technology.

Royal Riblet had been impressed by the location of the cliff above the Spokane River since the 1890's, but, until the mid-1920's, technology to make use of the location for a residence was of a prohibitive cost. Royal roughed out the designs for the estate with architect George H. Keith. Keith, although not one of Spokane's best known architects, had undeniable talent. In 1922, the Weiss residence, designed by Keith and Harold C. Whitehouse, was named one of the finest houses in the city by the architectural jury chosen by the City Planning Commission. Keith, who designed in the city from 1907-1930, completed the Riblet mansion, in those last flamboyant days before the depression.

As executed by Keith, the mansion featured some highly unusual details, Riblet, like most Spokaneites, had become accustomed to electricity as part of everyday life since it was introduced in the city in the 1880's. He determined to make the fullest possible use of electricity in the house.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES #9

Selig, Raymond A. "Riblet home overlooking valley is marvel".
Spokesman-Review Magazine. November 29, 1925

Ulrich, John. "Story of Spokane's Famed Makers of Chairlifts is
Entrepreneurial Tale of Great Idea". Arcus March 17, 1967

Riblet Aerial Tramway. Spokane: Shaw & Borden, 1930

"'Tagle's Nest' is Aerie for Tramway Man". Spokane Valley Herald.
November 19, 1953

"Passing of the Riblet Tramway". Spokane Valley Herald. November 1, 1960