

West Seattle can be called Seattle's first neighborhood. The first settlers who developed the area we know today as Seattle arrived on Alki Point in 1851. Authur Denny, the leader of the group, was the main founder of the area and his name can be readily found throughout the present city of Seattle. He called the West Seattle peninsula, "...as wild a spot as any on earth".⁵ The Duwamish and Suquamish Indians originally inhabited West Seattle. These tribes welcomed the Denny landing party. Originally, the Denny Party had wanted to name the area 'New York', but the name never stuck because of its counterpart on the East coast. Soon the people migrated from the beach at Alki to across Elliot Bay to the larger and faster growing Seattle.

In the early days, West Seattle did not have many public services like electricity, sewers, or good transportation. However, with the completion Luna Park, many prospective builders and homebuyers flocked to the West Side. Luna Park was proclaimed to be the "Coney Island of the West" and "The Nation's Greatest Playground on the Pacific Coast".⁶ The twelve-acre amusement park welcomed people from all around to visit the tiny peninsula.



The only thing left of Luna Park Today, 2004.

More people visited the area and saw the potential this area held for developing

neighborhoods and housing areas. As the park attracted people across the water, the real estate market became flooded with people wanting to buy a home on the peninsula. However, the park did not last forever and in 1931 a fire demolished the beloved park beyond restoration.⁷ Even though the park was gone, people still made their way across the water and into West Seattle to seize the opportunity to obtain a plot of land and start a home.

In the early 1900's real estate agents boasted that, "Transportation is the major influence that is promoting the rapid advancement of West Settle..."⁸ The real estate agents believed as long as West Seattle stayed separated from the main land that no one would want to buy a home or live in the area. They pushed to have the city of Seattle invest more money into the area to bring the public services more on par with that of Seattle. Soon, the area was equipped with the needed public services to handle the growing population. Rumors of building a better bridge and improving the ferry service started and today, almost 100 years later many West 'Seattlelites' wish the area would have stay separated.

Real estate agents had a hay day with selling magnificent homes with views. Almost every home along the west side had a great view of Puget Sound and the neighboring Islands. The hilltop along the center of the peninsula on what we know today as 35th Avenue lies 512 feet above sea level.⁹ In the early development of the city, the steep grade hindered a great deal of construction, but today the area is

⁵ Seattle/ King Co. History Link.org. www.historylink.org. <Date Accessed: 16 May 2004>.

⁶ Filer, Patricia. *All Aboard for Luna Park*. Log House Museum, Seattle, WA: 2000 page 3.

⁷ Filer, Patricia. *All Aboard for Luna Park*. Log House Museum, Seattle, WA: 2000 page 31.

⁸ *West Side Story*. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 149.

⁹ *West Side Story*. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 151.

heavily populated with high rise condos and single family homes. Developers flocked to this area to capitalize on the opportunities. Many claimed the area around 35th and Myrtle as "...the most prominent and beautiful residential spot in all Seattle."¹⁰ The Herald suggested "While we (West 'Seattlelites') are proud of the fact that West Seattle is a leading home owning section, reports would indicate that several apartment houses were opened for occupancy...A few apartments would bring in many persons who are prospective home-buyers and would thus aid the reality business."¹¹ Soon apartments were popping up all over West Seattle, from California Avenue to Walker Street and to the Admiral area.

However, although the real estate market was opening up, it was only open to select individuals. Many signs could be seen stating, "No lots will be sold to anyone but WHITE AMERICANS." Another sign near the Faunterloy neighborhood read, "The addition is restricted and every effort is made to sell only to select buyers so that the development will result in fine homes and a choice neighborhood."¹² Due to this level of discrimination, community and neighborhood groups began to form. The Delridge Improvement Club formed a group "to foster law and order by seeking to maintain the racial pattern of the community".¹³ Low-income housing areas started to sprout around the area

and were subjected to a great deal of scrutiny. One of these housing developments, whose complex racial issues sparked a great deal of controversy all over the West Seattle peninsula, was High Point. Originally, it began as a wartime housing project around the 1940's. High Point was the focus of the federal government. The government needed to construct inexpensive homes for the large amount of defense workers and their families.¹⁴ The West Seattle residents were opposed to the racial integration the federal government was imposing. High Point lies between Juneau and Myrtle to the north and south and spans from 26th to 32nd Avenues east and west.¹⁵ Today, the area is primarily consists of a large population of minorities and low-income families.



35th and Myrtle Today, 2004.

In the 1960's, the term "Rat City" could be heard quite often when referring to the low-income housing developments and the amount of taverns and pubs that grew up around them. The Seattle Housing Authority and the King County Housing Authority turned many neighborhoods, like High Point and White Center Heights into low-income housing in the 1950's and 1960's. The change took place gradually so not as

¹⁰ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 151.

¹¹ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 151.

¹² West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 151.

¹³ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 153.

¹⁴ Seattle/ King Co. History Link.org. www.historylink.org. <Date Accessed: 16 May 2004>.

¹⁵ Seattle/ King Co. History Link.org. www.historylink.org. <Date Accessed: 16 May 2004>.

much conflict would arise. However, residents adjacent to these areas became quite involved in the changes the city was making. Their fight was persistent, yet the areas still remain the center of low-income housing¹⁶.

Also during this time on the other side of the peninsula, Alki residents were in an upheaval about a new apartment high rise being built on the 1300 block of Alki Avenue. Mrs. Robert Confer stated, "We are fighting to protect a residential community from the in-roads or towering apartments."¹⁷ The construction along the shoreline seemed to be blossoming of condos and apartments. The construction was deemed almost uncontrolled. The 1960's brought an end to the once peaceful neighborhood and tremendous views that early real estate agents used as bait to lure new homebuyers to West Seattle.

With the growing numbers of people now residing in West Seattle, the population density on the peninsula is becoming more and more of an issue among residents. The only way for West Seattle to expand is to build up since it does not have the ability to sprawl out. This vertical developing has offended some people with the obstruction of views and pleased others with more housing units in which people have the chance to live affordably. A main argument during the 1970's was that the people were coming, and there was no room on the peninsula to house them. Apartments and condos seemed to be the only solution and developers were not holding back. With this onset, the 1970's brought in stricter zoning laws in

which to regulate this increase in developing. As the federal government was opening up more neighborhood projects in which it was going to invest, sparked more zoning regulations in the blocks. Communities opposing this soon created individual community councils to oppose the developing. One community council group in particular was the Fauntleroy Environmental Association created in 1979 to oppose the expansion of the ferry terminal.¹⁸ No matter how much people united together, the City of Seattle and government policy was a stronger force. The ferry remains in Fauntleroy, yet there are rumors today of it closing down because residents of the area complain about the high traffic volumes.

In 1975-1976 voters OK'd a community improvement fund to be used for the Delridge and Duwamish areas of West Seattle.¹⁹ However, when high-rise apartments were a part of the improvement, more zoning regulations came into view. A nine-story subsidized building for the elderly became a hot topic in 1977. Security Pacific, Inc, was planning on developing this building near the Junction business area.²⁰ However, trying to obtain federal approval for the rent subsidy and then city approval for the zoning change to build higher than regulated became a hurdle that the company was going to have to overcome. West Seattle was seeing its population age, yet it lacked the special housing units needed for these people. Local housing policy was not adapted for the changing population of West Seattle and it seemed that

¹⁶ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 155.

¹⁷ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 155.

¹⁸ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 155.

¹⁹ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 156.

²⁰ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 156.

residents were set in their ways. They did not want vertical change introduced into their neighborhoods.

The elderly development was not the only project that was opposed. The North Delridge Community Council was opposed to changing the zoning regulations from single family to duplex housing. In 1986, an approval finally came through to construct a 76-unit project. The community's main problem with the quick development is that it was not focused on their benefit, but on the developer's profit. Mark Dragul, of the Duwamish Peninsula Community Commission (DPCC) stated, "The residents feel they support development, but it should be in the interests of the community, not just in the interests of the developer making a buck."²¹ Development was needed, yet it became quite a challenge to appease the current residents and to accommodate the growing population.

The 1980's saw a large growth in population for the West Seattle peninsula. A great deal of this growth was due to the fact that the high bridge over the Duwamish opened up a greater avenue of traffic to the area in 1984.²² Development increased, yet many long-arm residents have argued the bridge brought more bad than good. To this day the bridge remains a high point on the afternoon traffic report. Some people cringe when they know they need to cross it at certain times of the day. But the most substantial impact the bridge has had is the swarm of new residents. These residents needed housing units so once again developers started to look up for more space.

With all of the development, many people became worried about the environment. In the 1980's, people again rallied together in against more re-zoning laws concerning the preservation of forests and natural vegetation. The 1983 re-zoning laws limited private landowners from further building on their plots if they had areas of woods and natural vegetation. One argument by resident Robert Pontius was, "Next thing you know they will be telling you how to paint your house. Where does it stop? Hell, it is un-American!"²³ In 1986 King County Superior Court found the zoning law unconstitutional and it was dismissed. Government policy tries to preserve areas, whether historic or natural, but when it infringes on the individual rights of the homeowner, it soon becomes an attack on those homeowners. West Seattle has become very successful in forming community councils and banding together to oppose any unwanted changes. This trend has stayed with the area and will probably always be present.

West Seattle remains today a very community centered environment. West 'Seattlelites' still feel as though they are independent from the mainland. They fight any and all movements to connect them any further. One present day example is the opposition to the monorail. Many of the West Seattle residents feel as though the monorail will take away from aesthetics, it will be too costly, and it will not improve the already horrible traffic conditions the City of Seattle faces.

²¹ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 156.

²² West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 156.

²³ West Side Story. West Seattle Herald/ White Center News. Robinsons Newspapers, July 1, 1987, page 156.