

HISTORY: EDWARDS PARK  
11/6/76

When the Duwamish tribe inhabited the land between the Whulge (Puget Sound) and Hyas Chuck (Lake Washington), the hills along this part of the bay sloped steeply into the waters. The flat strip along the waterfront from Yesler Way to Smith Cove is the result of fills. European explorers renamed many geographic features. In 1791 Captain Vancouver named Puget Sound to honor Lt. Peter Puget of his crew. The Wilkes Expedition of 1841 honored a crew member; Edward Meany claims it was the chaplain, Rev. J. L. Elliott, but in 1954 Howard Hanson found that Midshipman Samuel Elliott was honored with the name for Elliott Bay. Lake Washington was named in 1854 by Thomas Mercer.

The Denny Party landed at Alki Beach in November of 1851 to establish a permanent settlement. They had scarcely finished construction of four cabins when a passing brig stopped, looking for a cargo of timber piles which the settlers eagerly provided. But it was obvious that deep water off shore was needed for a harbor. So they changed the site of the settlement to the shore of Elliott Bay. In 1853 Henry Yesler arrived and began the commercial development of the waterfront with the construction of a sawmill. At first, skid roads, wagons and boats were able to supply the demands of the vessels from San Francisco and other ports of call, but when coal was discovered in the 1860's a faster means of overland transport was needed - the railroad. Tracks were laid from the growing town to the south end of Lake Union and by 1874 went to Renton and the mines of New Castle. A transcontinental railroad was authorized in 1864 and Seattle wanted to be the western terminus. But Tacoma was chosen. Then followed a long period of bitter rivalry. Finally Seattle chose to build its own connection to a transcontinental rail system and the only route open was to the north. In 1887 the West Coast Railroad Company was formed and built a pile trestle along the waterfront from Columbia Street north across the tide flats of Smith Cove, on to Ballard and thence along the shoreline of Shilshole Bay and on north. In 1890 the name was changed to the Seattle and Montana R.R. and James Hill built a rock fill pier at Smith Cove. Then the Great Northern ended the 17-year rivalry by purchasing the operation and made Seattle the terminus of its transcontinental route via Stevens Pass.

The shoreline at the foot of the hills soon became a wide thoroughfare of planked roadways and railroad tracks on piling but this intense development was never extended beyond Bay Street. An 1894 map shows a pier at the foot of Bay Street, but First Avenue was not extended to Denny Way from downtown until 1898. In 1903 the Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects of Brookline, Mass., made note of "the boat house at the foot of Battery Street where there . . . are now moored most of the yachts and small craft of the city." The Olmsteds recommended the development and expansion of this facility - or at "another site, which doubtless would be cheaper . . . a triangle of land south from John Street" to (Bay Street) and including a steep bluff. The name suggested was Harbor View Park. They envisioned an extensive people and boat oriented park and, if the water was not too contaminated, a sandy bathing beach.

In 1912 the voters approved the construction by the Port Commission of two new piers (#40-41) at Smith Cove (besides James Hill's rock fill pier) and they were rated as "the largest commercial piers in the world". When trade with the Orient was developed they became the transfer point for the fragile silk cargoes from ship to high speed silk trains racing across the continent to eastern mills.

In 1917 a seawall was completed between Washington and Madison Streets and the fill behind it came from the regrade street projects in the area. It was not until 1936 that the seawall was extended to Bay Street, and Alaskan Way ended abruptly with a turn east across the railroad tracks. However, a fill had been placed along the shore in 1920 from Madison Street to Smith Cove, completing the filling of the tide flats of the Cove that was begun in 1916 as part of the Pier 40-41 project.

In 1948 the City Planning Commission, in cooperation with other official agencies, citizen groups and the general public, began a study to provide a general framework for the public and private growth requirements of Seattle for the next 25 years from the date of the publication of this Comprehensive Plan in 1956. Specifically, the Plan identified a waterfront

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Park from Bay Street to Pier 88 (the new number for Hill's pier). The Plan also identified the extension of Alaskan Way as an expressway between the railroad and the proposed park strip. According to the P.I. (in 1965) the property between Thomas and Bay Streets was purchased in 1944 at a King County public auction for \$15,000 (mostly covered by tidewater); during the construction of the freeway through Seattle, the parent company of the property owners dumped during 1965 considerable excavated material on the site and thus became improved land at an increase in value; the south half was then sold for \$181,000. Then the property was publicly offered to the Park Board who had no funds for its purchase and the news media became critical of the "official short-sightedness . . . if a great opportunity was rejected". (The City did not have a revolving property fund; instead property acquisition was mandated by the voters through bond issues or by City Council appropriation.) City Council backed up the Park Board in refusing to accept the offer of \$761,250 for the property, "an increase of about 8000% over its earlier estimated value." (In 1959 City Engineer Roy Morse endorsed acquisition of this waterfront to protect the marine view alongside the proposed expressway and proposed establishment of a land acquisition fund - but to no avail. Times 1965.) The Times went on to agree that the price was too high but pointed out that the land was, in 1944, available to the City at small cost. The City Council authorized condemnation proceedings. By the time proceedings came to trial in 1968, the Forward Thrust bond issue had been approved by voters; the park on Elliott Bay north of Bay Street was in the program.

Meanwhile the Port Authority had acquired the waterfront south from Pier 88 to Thomas Street with plans for a Grain Terminal; unloading from railroad cars, storage silos and ship docking and loading facilities. Another storm was unleashed. The marine view was seriously threatened now by the construction of 68 silos and other structures, including mammoth tankers berthed for loading. Despite community wrath, filling along the shoreline was completed and construction proceeded.

Due to separate ownerships, the north half of the proposed Elliott Bay Park came to trial first and the jury award was for a value of \$718,000, twice the City's estimate and offer. The Department's initial recommendation was to reject the award and drop the project and to concentrate on the Magnolia Tidelands acquisition project. Then it developed that total acquisition of tidelands was not necessary to retain open and public use. Also, the public ownership of the grain terminal presented a significant opportunity to develop the waterfront drive. Further, the availability of Federal (HUD) and State (IAC) matching funds and willingness of the owner of the south half of the project to negotiate. The pollution of Elliott Bay waters significantly declined following the installation of the Interceptor Sewer by Metro in 1968 (a regulator station was built on the site). As a result of all these evaluations, the decision was made to accept the award and proceed.

But when City Hall asked the Port Authority to join the Parks Department in the development of a pedestrian/bike path along the waterfront from Bay Street to Prospect Street, the Authority was vigorously opposed; it would not be an income-producing activity. But four of the five Port Commissioners were sympathetic to the park plan and after considerable controversy a limited plan of park-like development was approved.

In 1955 Mrs. F. F. Powell retired from City Council after 20 years service to take a world tour for Moral Rearmament. As her replacement Council chose MRS. MYRTLE EDWARDS, a graduate of the University of Illinois, a pianist and vocal soloist who gave up her career to marry Harlan, an engineer, in 1918. In 1941 the Edwards moved to Seattle, residing in Laurelhurst. Myrtle obtained a Bachelor degree in Political Science from the U.W. and became active in the League of Women Voters, becoming local and then state president. Her appointment to Council was quickly endorsed by the voters. Mrs. Edwards succeeded Mrs. Powell as Chairwoman of the Harbor and Public Grounds Committee of Council, later changed to Parks and Public Grounds. She was unanimously elected President of City Council in 1969.

"She was always at the forefront of campaigns and programs to preserve Seattle's natural beauty and to enhance it with new parks, plantings and sculpture." One of her projects was the acquisition of Gas Plant site on the north shore of Lake Union, which she began to promote soon after joining City Council. In 1962 the City entered a 10-year contract to purchase

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the plant site for park purposes. But Myrtle Edwards did not see the park become a reality for she died in 1969, the result of a tragic automobile accident in Idaho.

However, the park on Lake Union was named in her honor in 1969. But as it became evident that the park design would feature the "domineering" preservation of industrial (plant) sculpture, Myrtle Edwards' family requested that her name be withdrawn in 1972. (Harlan Edwards died in 1975) In 1976 her family approved the renaming of Elliott Bay Park as MYRTLE EDWARDS PARK. During her tenure on the Council she frequently was the lone dissenting or moderate voice, but many times her quiet persuasion won over her eight male opponents. "A woman . . . in political office should be just as well informed as her male colleagues, maybe even more so." Said one of them: "She was always willing to hear new ideas and change her mind."

Myrtle Edwards received many awards, including Matrix Table, National Business Women's award and Hadassah's Better World Citizen Award; she was an advocate of converting the Civic Auditorium and ball field into a new Seattle Center through the establishment of the 1962 World's Fair on the site and proponent of the earlier Metro plan to rid Seattle waters of pollution. She was a prime mover in organizing Horizon (retirement) House. (1895-1969)