

WEST MONTLAKE PARK - History

Construction of the Portage Canal in 1885 and the Ship Canal in 1917 had little effect upon the physical conditions of West Montlake Park, for both canals preserved the natural level of Lake Union (Portage Bay) through a system of locks; the Ship Canal lowered the level of Lake Washington by 9' to the level of Lake Union. The Portage Canal locks were between Lakes Washington and Union and between Lake Union and Salmon Bay, while the Ship Canal locks were built in Salmon Bay, raising a portion of the tidal bay some 20'. However, the presence of the canals had considerable effect upon the development of the park - and adjacent shorelines, for they provided an ideal location for yacht clubs and pleasure boat moorages for the semi-exclusive Montlake and University communities.

This shoreline park was dedicated - and the name taken from - the plat of MONTLAKE PARK Addition filed in 1908. At that time Seattle was preparing for its first Expo - the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific on the adjacent University grounds. The plat set aside a "Casino Grounds" on the site now occupied by the Yacht Club. Since most of the park area was in the water, the State deeded that portion to the City in 1909. The Annual Report of 1911 predicted that time would prove this to be a very valuable adjunct to the system, being the only frontage on Lake Union. (Montlake PF was not acquired until 1933.)

The "Casino Grounds" were purchased by the Seattle Yacht Club and they desired the cooperation of the Park Board in the development of the adjacent properties and in the moorage of their yacht "fleet". A wooden bulkhead was built out in the water on the pierhead line and filling began behind it, using cinders from various public buildings. But moorage was in the jurisdiction of the Army Engineers who issued a permit for the development of a series of moorage piers abutting the park bulkhead (1918). The permit was renewed periodically but the permanent piers and boathouse were not built until 1924. Meanwhile, the fill material had changed to refuse and there were objections to the "stench" created; and the presence of the boathouse "in the view" so it was relocated to the south pier. 13 poplar trees were planted along the shoreline, next to the new walk along the bulkhead (and piers).

The Old Portage Canal had been left high and dry upon the lowering of Lake Washington by the Ship Canal and the Old Right-of-Way was "leased" to the Park Department for development as an extension of Washington Park. But the Yacht Club had a Big Plan to develop the Old Canal route as a golf course. However, the developers of the Montlake Park Addition led the successful opposition to this plan (and the course was built across the new canal on U.W. land?). In 1929 the U. S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries was permitted to build a laboratory on the Old Canal property adjacent to the Yacht Club. The Old Canal had never been filled in, except for Montlake Boulevard when the old bridge was removed. So in 1932 Noble Hoggson, a landscape architect, proposed creation of an aquarium built into the "canyon" of the Old Canal adjacent to the new Fisheries laboratory. It would have occupied the site of the old locks - by then lost in the jungle of trees and undergrowth. Though highly endorsed, this plan never materialized. In 1963 a new "Canal" was dug in the Old Right-of-Way: this one for the flow of vehicles to the new Evergreen Point floating bridge. (One segment of the Old Canal is preserved alongside the Museum of History and Industry/McCurdy Park.)

In 1953 the State replatted the shorelands of Portage Bay, including approximately the moorage area of the permit to the Yacht Club. As the abutting upland owner, the City had the preferential right to purchase the newly created shoreland; the State rejected the City's application for a transfer without cost. The City had no funds available for purchase, so nine years later, to prevent an "adverse purchase" of this shoreland, the Park Board entered into an agreement with the Yacht Club - "deemed to be in the public interest" - assigning to the Club the City's preferential right to purchase these shorelands for the conditions of club purchase (\$77,000), conveyance to the City of property and any improvements existing 40 years from 1962 or upon abandonment by the club at any earlier date, approval of City Council for structures impairing the view from property

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north of Shelby Street and forfeiture to the City should the club be unwilling or unable to carry out conditions of contract. Evidently two piers had been covered at an earlier date(s) with approval of the Army Engineers (?), so in 1965 permission was sought from Council to cover the moorages of the northerly pier - the Shelby Street one. The Park Board expressed concern, backed by the Board of Adjustment, and the Council held a stormy hearing followed by a second one in which Council approved covering of the moorages on the south side of the pier. Councilman Eckmann, a club member (and through the years Park Commissioners have also been club members) claimed that the City was indebted to the club for developing the social and economic assets of the City and that the City should cooperate. Opponents claimed that use of the waterfront for less than \$2,000 a year is cooperation - "Indeed, a bargain!".

Park Board minutes of 6/16 and 8/31/54 note an agreement with the Yacht Club to pay \$200 per year (estimated to be one half) of the cost of maintenance of the park due to their extensive use of it, including the flagstaff (lower and top mast, yard and a gaff, flying the U. S. Yacht ensign and Yacht Club burgee, since 1920).

In 1971 the U. S. Army Engineers constructed a "Canal Waterside Trail" along the south side of the Montlake Cut (it was known as "Erickson Cut" in 1910) consisting of paths, observation deck and fishing pier and benches. Plantings were planned and contributed by the Seattle Garden Club coordinated with the City and U.W. The western terminus of the Trail is adjacent to the north end of West Montlake Park and joins the U.W. Arboretum Waterfront Trail adjacent to East Montlake Park.

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