

# Guide to Seattle Districts & Neighborhoods

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## Duwamish Valley

Prior to contact with the Europeans the Duwamish had village at several locations on both sides of the delta and up the river. It was a relative land of plenty for fishing, hunting and gathering. Even before the met the Europeans, the Duwamish's lives were decimated by them from introduced diseases that preceded them. The likes of the Hudson Bay Company had probably come through earlier, but in 1850, John Cornelius Holgate canoed up Puget Sound and explored the Duwamish but neglected to register a claim. The next spring Maple and Van Asselt registered claims and started farming, in the area that is now Georgetown. Some of the Duwamish tried to assimilate and helped to build and service the village of Seattle to become the town of Seattle. Despite this, laws were made to prohibit them from the city and their largest village was leveled by arson in 1893. Besides Georgetown, upriver, the farming communities of South Park, Allentown, Riverton, Foster, Orillia, O'Brien, Thomas and Christopher pushed the Duwamish out. Starting in 1905 the river began to be channelized. The estuaries and meanders were filled and with the exception of a few bedroom enclaves the land was devoted to industry. The ecology of the valley was wrecked to the extent that Duwamish people literally starved to death in the same place that decades earlier had provided for them so comfortably.

## Pioneer Square

Pioneer Square has been the heart of Seattle's popular culture for much of its history since it was a peninsula in the tide flats and the terminus of the "crossing over place." It has reinvented itself more than any other neighborhood. Pioneer Square started as Seattle Village and Indian Village (Illahee). A lot of the labor in early Seattle was done by natives, though the native population had already been decimated by disease before the pioneers even thought about converging on the Duwamish. Pioneer Seattle also had notable Black and Asian business leaders. Much of the business was shops, hotels, restaurants, theaters (like the opera house) and employment agencies. The population balance didn't shift dramatically toward Europeans until the railroad arrived in the 1880's. The wozy boom was short lived as the district was leveled in the Great Fire of 1897, but like a phoenix rising from the ashes, 130 buildings were built between 1889-1892. The economic catalyst for "new Seattle" didn't come until the Yukon Gold Rush in 1897. Still for most of its first century Pioneer Square and Seattle economy revolved around the forest and sea. This was hard labor, seasonal and not usually prosperous. Pioneer square was where many of those laborers lived and entertained themselves when they were in town. It gave the world the term skid row (Mill St/Yesler Way). With greater industrialization, after the turn of the century labor organizing halls located here. The Great Depression of the 1930s left it a backwater for decades and in ways it reverted to Illahee. In the 1950's it became more bohemian. In the 1960's it was the center of the jazz scene. In 1970 it became "Historic Seattle" – not the Indians history. This also was the start of serious rejuvenations and the restoration of many building into professional office space, but it also signaled the loss of Single Room Occupancy hotels and the employment that support these residents. The new businesses were bookstores, bakeries, boutique, galleries and of course reinvented entertainment. The rock and disco eras slipped by without much notice by Pioneer Square, but, the grunge era found a home here. Clubs, such as, Colourbox Velvet Elvis, Fenix, OK Hotel and Squid Row, all since closed, were where bands first got to play the grunge punk style of music that Seattle came to be known for. Seattle's hi-tech identity is relatively recent manifestation, not really taking root until WWII and later -- way later for Pioneer Square. The 1990's also saw a few dot com's flourish and disappear here. In the new millennium Pioneer Square maybe reinventing itself again.

## International District / Chinatown

Initially, Chinatown was centered around 2nd and Washington. Occidental was the western boundary for the Asian community and they weren't much welcomed north of Yesler. When it outgrew this area, the city extended Second Ave, and the slopes of First Hill were given a radical retrenching, Chinatown moved to the other side of the smoky railroad

yard -- along King St. It also became more pan-Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and later Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai and other ethnic groups), hence the International District (ID). Most of the buildings in this district were built between 1908-1929. At the same time Japantown formed up the hill along Main St. Washington, and Yesler. Japantown was mostly wiped out by "urban renewal" in the 1930s, the internment in the 1940s and the freeway in the 1950s. Historically men radically outnumber women in the ID. A lot of the buildings were SRO (single room occupancy) hotels. The neighborhood is filled with social clubs that are structured around family name or place of origins. The clubs provide immigration protection, social services, employment services, legal help and social life, which wasn't always legal activities. Early in the 1900, they were secret societies. In the 1980's Little Saigon developed around 12th and Jackson. The Chinese-American community worked for fifty years to get a gate, but that was already fifty years after it was multi-ethnic (1908). The gate is suppose to keep out the bad and let the good flow in. A second gate is planned for the east end of the district. The ID is on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Central District**

The Central District was one of Seattle first suburb. With street cars and improved streets it became practical for the middle class and wealthy to escape the undesirable elements of the downtown. Neighborhoods were largely defined by their views, but there were large Victorian houses throughout the area. There was some segregation by religion. For the first half of the 20th century there was a Jewish enclave east of 14th between Yesler and Cherry Streets with several synagogues, kosher delis and bakeries. Immaculate Conception Church on 18th and Marion was the center of the Catholic Community. With increased motorization the White communities moved out to the next suburbs. From 1940 to 1950 to 1960, the White population went from 86% to 60% to 25%. From its earliest development Black settled in the corridor east along Yesler and north along 23rd. This included the Black Victorian (elite), who lived in the large Victorian houses. Later housing covenants in other parts of the city restricted them to this area. This seemed to restrict them to a limited choice of schools and subsequently opportunities. During good economic times the community thrived (i.e. the jazz scene), but during economic downturns the area became blighted, social problems increased and the community had trouble escaping downward spirals. The problems weren't unnoticed in the 1950 but progress was slow until things came to a head with race riots in 1968. With the help of a variety of Great Society funded programs, and funding from other sources, education, health care and housing were all addressed. The area went from 9% Black in 1940, to 79% Black in 1970, to 21% Black in 2010. This is the neighborhood that Quincy Jones and Jimi Hendrix grew up in and Wonder Bread was baked there. The Seattle Black Panthers had a house here, from which they organized a breakfast program for students. All that remains is the "People's Wall". The area is now quite gentrified but there are also enclaves of Ethiopians and Somali, and institutions to support those communities.

## **Pike-Pine**

Post-WWII this corridor was Seattle's auto row, with a variety of associated auto service activity. Most of the dealerships have long since left for the suburbs except for a last high-end make Ferrari/Maserati and Mercedes (BMW left in 2010). A number of auto repair businesses have also endured. The general economy of the area was stagnant for a long time with the most stable businesses being neighborhood bars and baths. In recent decades there has been a resurgence of boutiques -- mostly owned by members of the local gay community, but everyone is welcome. Among the newest attractions in the neighborhood are the relocated Elliot Bay Book Company and the second shop for Molly Moon ice cream.

## **Capital Hill**

A new streetcar spurred development in 1891, and development brought Seattle first bike tracks in the green belts around the hill. It was called Capitol Hill as a publicity stunt -- fake bid for state capitol (Ellensburg & Vancouver were the leaders) to raise its stature. The plan called the capitol building to be located on the east slope of the hill between 19th & 21st between Prospect and Ward -- a lot of the west slope was very boggy. The "campus" was then platted for expensive new houses. Capital Hill had some of Seattle first million dollar mansions. For the last fifty years, the apartment houses and other non-view property has been the home base of Seattle gay community, interspersed with bohemians, hippies, punks, x-geners and the other young edgy urban groups of the time. A lot of Seattle history is buried at Lakeview Cemetery (with views of both lakes); Princess Angeline, Bruce Lee, Brandon Lee, the Dennys and Mercers (founders moved twice to get here), and leaders of the Jewish and Chinese communities. Next door is the Grand Army of the Republic cemetery. The Volunteer Park, honoring volunteers in the Spanish-American War, is home to the Black Sun,

Conservatory, Seattle Asian Art Museum and a water tower with a viewing level at the same height as space needle. Déjà vu, a street car is returning to Capital Hill and light rail will soon be linking it with downtown and the University District.

## University District

1st settled in 1867, the street car came in 1887 or the summer of 1891. University of Washington opened new campus in 1895. In 1909 it was the site of the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition. The legacy of AYP is the layout of the campus around Rainier Vista. (Drumheller Fountain came in 1961.) During the AYP, at the foot of Rainier Vista was the boat rental concession – the Lake Washington was bigger then. The U District was severed Wallingford from the University District by I-5 in the 1960's but this provided a direct walkway from the University to the Federal Buildings downtown for anti-war protesters in the late 1960's. The Ave, of course, not an avenue at all, because it is University Way, (earlier names were Columbus Way and Fourteenth Ave.) was the center of "hippy" culture in the 60's & 70's with leather, candle, poster, head-shops and counterculture boutiques. In the 80's low price restaurants took over. In the 90's generation Y dominated the street scene.

## Ship Canal

The ship canal can form the basis of a history tour in itself: In 1860, Harvey Pike (son of Pike Street honory John Pike) digs ditch at Montlake. In 1883, Thomas Burke (former chief justice and founder of chamber of comm.), David Denny and other land owners on Lake Union from Lake Washington Improvement Co. envisioned a canal between the salt water and fresh water. They contracted Wa Chong, who hired 25 men, to widen and straighten Ross Creek between Salmon Bay and Lk Union. In 1885, Wa Chong and his men made a 16 foot-wide cut between Lake Union and Lake Washington, to allow passage of logs from Union Bay to Portage Bay. In 1893, at the other end of the city ex-Gov Eugene Semple's friends in legislature passed law to fill tide lands. In 1895, Semple started work on Beacon Hill route. For the next seven years civic leaders (with dollars at stake) squabbles between proposed routes at the Duwamish, Denny regrade and the present location. In 1906, Hiram Chittenden, Army Corps of Engineers arrived to champion an improved version Salmon Bay route. In 1910 Congress appropriated \$2,275,00 and the next year construction began on plan with concrete locks. July 4, 1917, was the grand opening of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, now busiest in US - primarily pleasure boats. National Register of Historic Places. The salmon runs are: Steelhead Jan-May (Mar-Apr); Sockeye (Red) Jun-Oct (July); Chinook (King) Jul-Nov (late Aug); Coho (Silver) Aug-Nov (late Sept)

## Fremont

"The center of the Universe"; 1857 John Ross moved to Fremont and started sawmill. Named by LH Griffith and E Blewett's for their hometown in Nebraska. With Dr EC Kilbourne, they platted Fremont in 1888. That same year, the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern railroad came from Seattle and head NE to Lake Washington. In 1889 the hillside was clear cut creating an ecological disaster. 1890: Guy Phinney built the first street car line from Fremont to carry visitors up the hill to his private Woodland Park. 1891: Fremont annexed itself to Seattle. 1892: A street car was built from downtown. 1905: The Car Barn was built. 1910: Stone & Webster's Seattle-Everett Traction Co inaugurated. 1916: Fremont Cut completed. 1932: Aurora Bridge built. The railroads quit in 1939 and Fremont drifted into near obscurity for forty years--the bikers knew about it. Artist deserve a lot of the credit from bring it back from the brink, building a community and giving it its quirky character (Fremont Troll, rocket ship, Solstice Parade, etc). Today it prides itself on its art, eclecticism and controversy, but the artists have been marginalized for gentrification.

## Ballard/Shilshoal

Shilshoal was a major Salish community when the Europeans arrived. The waterways had salmon, the tidal zone had prodigious clam beds and the upland areas bounties of game and a wide variety of edible harvest. The first Europeans settled in the 1850, it was incorporated from 1890 to 1906. It was annexed by Seattle in 1907. Fishing and millwork were its mainstays. At the turn of the 19th century it was the world's biggest producer of wood shingles. In 1913 30% of the population was Scandinavian. It still celebrates its Nordic heritage. Today, it is a mix between a working waterfront and middle- and upper-middle-class residential. Old Ballard is a historic district (1976).