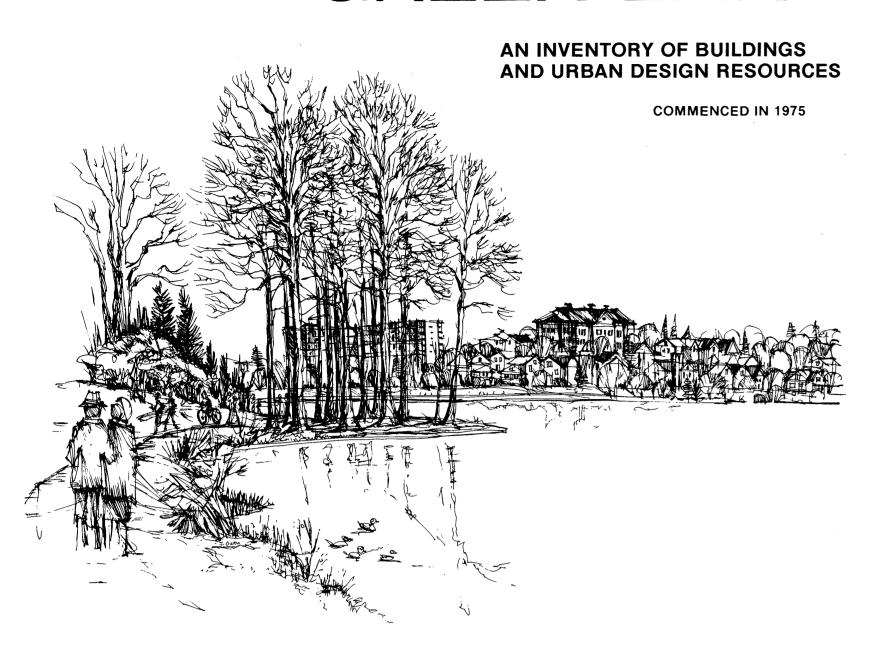
# GREEN LAKE



HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

CONSULTANTS: FOLKE NYBERG VICTOR STEINBRUECK

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This inventory and report are projects of the Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority; Executive Director, Lawson A. Elliott; Project Coordinator, Ann Brians; Council Members, Ralph D. Anderson, Kay Bullitt, Brewster C. Denny, Polly Friedlander, Gary Gaffner, David Ishii, Paul Hayden Kirk, Geri Lucks, Louis Michaelson, Vicki Reed, Frank Soderling, and Bruce Zielsdorf; Inventory Review Committee, Kay Bullitt, Peggy Corley, Lee Elliott, Earl Layman, Gerald Pomeroy and Vicki Reed.

Appreciation is tendered to the National Endowment for the Arts and the City of Seattle for financial assistance.

Thanks are also extended to the Green Lake Community Council which helped organize the volunteer effort, and also collected the field information.

Urban design and architectural consultants, Folke Nyberg and Victor Steinbrueck were responsible for the educational program and inventory review process as well as this report.



John Owen was responsible for the administration, research and graphic production of this report.

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Most importantly, the project was dependent upon the work of volunteers from the community whose cooperation and efforts were crucial to its success.

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This project was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency. Upon recommendation of the National Council of the Arts, the "City Options" program has been designated a Bicentennial activity. Funds were allocated to projects which can have a demonstratable impact by 1976.

Since the information included is preliminary, corrections and additional information is solicited to provide refinement of the documents. Please send information to Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, 714 Smith Tower, Seattle 98104



Skaters on Green Lake in 1916

#### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Green Lake Community derives much more from Green Lake than its name alone. The lake is the physical heart of the community, dominating all other features; and also serves as the community's social center where local residents meet while strolling, jogging or cycling around the pathway, or at the community organizational and social functions held at the recreation center.

Moreover, the lake's unique qualities are important factors in attracting a diverse residential population, including younger families for the variety of recreational opportunities available, and the elderly for visual amenities as well as the stable social setting.



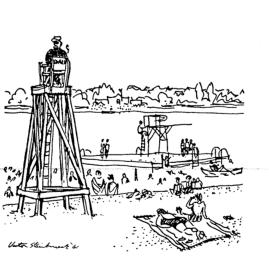
The area's bowl-like topography enhances the lake's unifying focal role by providing views of the water and by forming an imageable community-scaled topographic "room." The most identifiable physical boundaries are formed by Phinney Ridge on the west and the Central Freeway on the east. To the southwest, lower Woodland Park provides a pleasantly forested green belt as well as numerous athletic fields and a miniature golf course. The land to the north rises more gradually from the lake so that the topographic enclosure is less pronounced.

Although the Freeway and Aurora Avenue North are intrusive upon the residential neighborhoods, producing noise and air pollution and separating some areas from the lake, they provide the community with excellent bus and auto access to downtown and other locations. Green Lake is connected to the University District by the Ravenna Boulevard bike path, making the area attractive to college students. East-West arterials include North 80th and North 85th Streets to the north, and North 50th Street to the south.

The residential areas surrounding the lake are quite similar in their housing types and in their environmental qualities. The houses are generally modest in size but vary widely in age and stylistic treatment. The residential streets are often well landscaped and many offer views of Green Lake and the mountains beyond.

There are several small commercial districts of widely differing character. The Green Lake shopping district is the most central to the community. Its pleasantly curving streets, and proximity to the lake make it potentially one of the city's most physically attractive community shopping districts. Aurora Avenue to the North of 80th becomes northern Seattle's oldest and largest highway-scaled commercial strip. Phinney Avenue North and Greenwood Avenue North form a more modest neighborhood commercial strip serving the Phinney Ridge area with groceries, barbershops, drug stores, cafes, and other local services. In contrast with Aurora Avenue's bustling, brightly lit and garish character, the Phinney Ridge strip has a lower-keyed, well-worn appearance.

Just as the lake itself is the key element in the area's identity and environmental amenities, so is it an important factor in many of the community's problems and concerns. Not only is the lake heavily used on a day-to-day basis, but many special events such as motorboat racing, Fourth of July fireworks and water sports events are scheduled during the summer, drawing large crowds of spectators. Proper clean-up and maintenance as well as thoughtful scheduling of events in the park lands is therefore a major issue if Green Lake's attractiveness is to be preserved. A further problem is that the heavy use of the lake often causes congestion of local streets and parking lanes.



Close proximity to recreational open space and good access to downtown and the University make the Green Lake area attractive for apartment development, Consequently there have been many new apartments built recently to the north and east of the lake. While portions of the community are suitable for new apartments, it is important to insure that new developments do not interfere with important view corridors to the lake, nor intrude into the residential setting either visually or by causing parking and traffic congestion. Obviously, careful management of land-uses and zoning issues is in order.

The maintenance and upgrading of existing housing stock is another problem which the local community has addressed. Because of the widely varying ages of houses in the area, many of them require work if the housing stock is to remain solid. The influx of young families suggests that many of the smaller cottages and houses will be enlarged, or altered in order to meet the new requirements of today's life style. In response to this interest in remodeling and restoration, the Green Lake community has recently sponsored a series of home repair workshops which have been widely attended by people from all over the city as well as by local residents.

Thus, new problems as well as potentials are emerging with the lake's increasing popularity and the renewed interest in the area's pleasant residential neighborhoods. Realization of these potentials will depend upon the coordinated efforts of community residents, businesses, and the Seattle Parks Department.



immers at Green Lake.

# SUMMARY MAP SHOWING VISUAL STRUCTURE

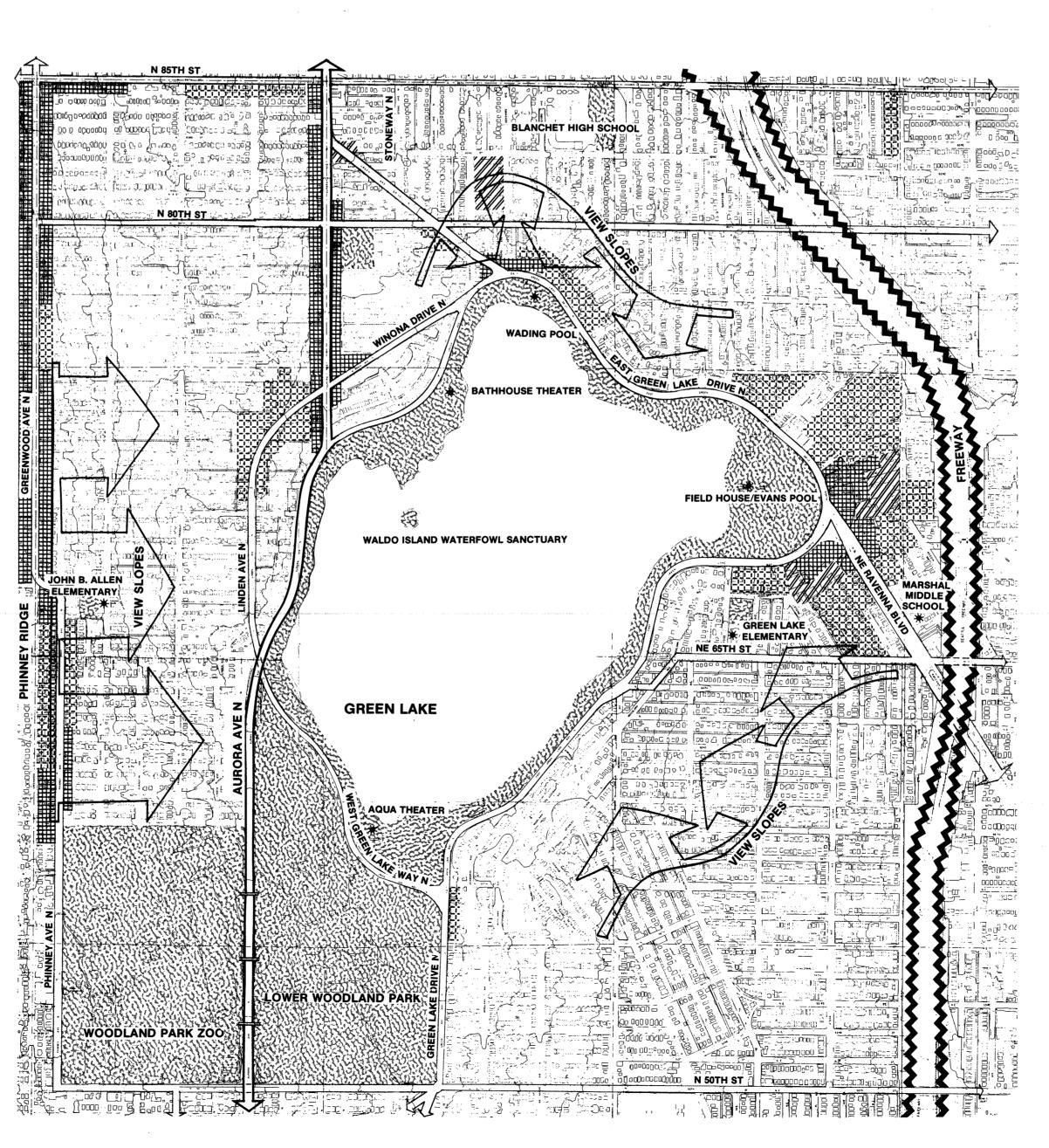
LEGEND

Predominantly Multi-Family Residential

Community Businesses

Parks/Open Space

Other Commercial Uses



#### **HISTORY**

Natural amenities such as lakes, viewpoints and shorelines have always been prime targets for urban development. However, all too often, such development has exploited these amenities to their detriment. Green Lake is unique in that its attractive characteristics have been retained for public enjoyment rather than being subdivided for private gain. From its rugged glacial beginnings to such threatened proposals as filling it to create a golf course, the lake survived somehow. It thrives as a people place — a very important asset to all of the city.

Green Lake's history began 15,000 years ago with the Vashon

Glacier radically changing the topography as it moved southward from Canada extending to Olympia between the Olympics and the Cascades. This glacier of over three thousand feet in thickness carved the Puget Lowlands. As the glacier receded, the melt off formed prehistoric glacial Lake Russell, extending from Olympia to Everett and covering the Puget Sound area. Once the glacier receded north of the Strait of Juan De Fuca the lake was destroyed by the incoming sea water, and the water level dropped 150 feet to the present sea level. A drainage basin was formed in North Seattle from Bitter Lake to Green Lake continuing through the Ravenna Ravine into Lake Washington. What remains of this large drainage system are Bitter Lake, Haller Lake and Green Lake; which were the major depressions. Reforestation took place as the climate became warmer and drier. Silting of the lake caused by wind and rain allowed the lake to change from its inorganic state to a productive lake. The continuing warm climate encouraged water plant and animal life which added to the nutrients of the water and in turn increased the lake's sediment. This normal lake process continues to the point where a lake becomes a swamp and eventually fills up and becomes a meadow. Almost two-thirds of the lake's original volume was filled with sediment when homesteaders arrived on the scene. No doubt the greenish color of the lake inspired its name. The silting of the lake continued even more readily because erosion occurred due to the logging-off of the area. The urban development which followed at the turn of the century stopped the silting process, but also greatly reduced the lake's supply of fresh water as streets and sewers were built. From this point the lake's character was determined more by engineering projects than by natural processes.

Erhart Saifried, also known as "Green Lake John" was the first settler. He built a cabin on the northwest shore in 1869, and by 1876 he had homesteading neighbors. On the east shore by the Ravenna Creek outlet, A.L. Parker built a sawmill and a logging railroad to Fremont. He rafted his logs in a cove where the Evans Pool, Recreation Center and Playfield are now situated. Saifried sold out in 1888 to W.D. Wood, a realtor, and Dr. E.C. Kilbourne, an electrical engineer, who platted the area. A trend of realtors at this time was to develop "out of town" places for "Sunday outings." Wood and Kilbourne did that by creating a ten-acre amusement park on the site now known as West Green Lake. This stretch is the only original lake shore that remains today. A transportation system to get people to and from the park was included in their schemes. A trolley car line ran from the amusement park around to the sawmill site on the east shore. The stop was called "Woodland Station." The trolley line continued down to Fremont where riders could take a boat to the south shore of Lake Union to catch a trolley car to Pioneer Square, the center of the city's trolley system.

While the development of West Green Lake was underway, Guy Phinney was developing his estate at the south end of Green Lake. His development was called "Woodland Park" and included a zoo, conservatory, ball fields and facilities for swimming, boating, and picnicking as well as his own trolley car line to Fremont. The West Green lake amusement park was quite small in comparison to Phinney's establishment, and it is believed to have been closed down by the depression of the 1890's. By 1909, the park was merely known as the "Old Picnic Grounds." The Green Lake area was annexed to Seattle in 1891 and W.D. Wood became Seattle's mayor in 1897. The realtors had persuaded nearly 1500 people to move to the Green Lake area by 1900 and the first general/feed store was established by George W. Hill and George Green in the present Green Lake shopping district in 1901. Phinney's estate, which was still a virgin forest, was purchased by the city in 1900.

With the increasing popularity of the lake area, prominent local residents requested its designation as a city park. In 1905, GreenLake was given to the city for this purpose. The Olmsted Brothers had recommended this park plan in the previous year and also urged the acquisition of the lake shore property. The boulevard which circled the lake, exclusive of Woodland Park, was approved by the Olmsteds with the only objection that it ran too close to the water. Since the trolley car tracks were already established it was proposed to lower the lake's level by four feet to achieve the desired space. The city had, with some difficulty, acquired the shore property and lowered the lake by seven feet, and had also begun diking and filling to improve the shorelines and beaches by 1911. The major fill, which was also recommended by the Olmsted Brothers, was that of the old sawmill cove. The diking and filling project drastically reduced the size of the lake and closed off the outlet to the Ravenna ravine. This project which took some twenty years to complete, added approximately 100 acres to the park and beaches.

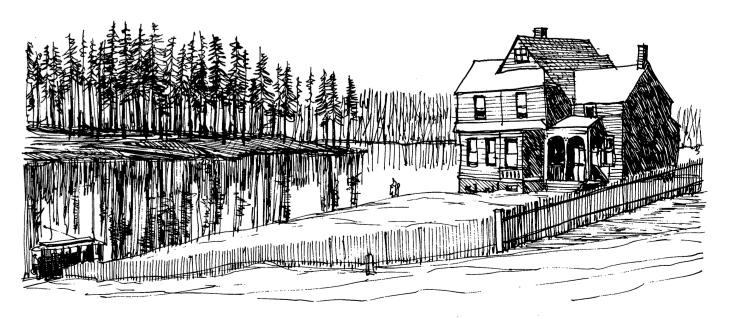
However, the Lake faced grave problems of stagnation with the elimination of creeks and springs from the construction of streets and sewers, and for the next thirty or forty years a continuous debate ensued on solving the lake's problems. Many proposals were made for the "improvement" of Green Lake, but fortunately none of them were implemented. There were ideas of land filling the lake completely and making a new park, thus eliminating the lake, or partially filling it to accommodate an 18hole golf course. Another proposal was to drain the lake and replace the fresh water with salt water piped in from Puget Sound. To prevent the stagnation in this plan, water would be piped in and out creating the lake's own tidal flow. One idea was to "install batteries of floating glass-covered evaporation condensing cells energized by solar rays for distillation of lake water and its eventual purification." There were swimming only proposals and fishing only proposals, along with the idea of building a 150-feet high multi-colored illuminated fountain in the center of the lake "to rival Old Faithful." The Green Lake Commercial Club proposed diking off a section and heating the water to create a "year around tropical beach right here in Seattle." These are just a few of the more outlandish suggestions to improve Green Lake, but they did little to address the Lake's serious ecological problems. In the 1920's the Lake's water quality suffered because of sewage pollution. Again in the 1930's the origin of Green Lake's name became apparent with masses of floating algae. The algae not only created difficulties for swimmers and boats but also emitted a foul odor. Dredging, cleaning up the shore, re-diverting springs back to the Lake, and the use of copper sulfate finally brought the situation under control. However, by 1941, the complaints of "swimmers itch" were heard as the algae reappeared. During the 1950's the beaches were frequently closed due to sewage problems. Furthermore, the State Highway Commission proposed to use the lake as a giant drainage basin for storm water from the new Interstate-5 freeway. Of course the recreational uses of the lake for swimming would have been

This project finally brought about serious action to save the lake. It was decided to pump surplus water from the city's reservoirs into Green lake on a daily basis. The constant flow of water made Green Lake once again an attractive public asset. After all the dredging, diking, chlorinating, and tampering with nature, man found a system, most like nature itself, to restore and renew its waters. With all the engineering and political headaches Green Lake is now an attractive place with many recreational activities: swimming, jogging, bicycling, fishing, and picnicking. It is also the heart and focus of the Green lake community

Prepared by Judy Johnson

### REFERENCES:

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Sherwood, Don, Description and History of Seattle Parks, Seattle Parks Department, 1975



F.A. McDonald home at 5722 E. Green Lake Way N. circa 1890. Note street car at water's edge. The house is still standing but the cove shown here has been filled