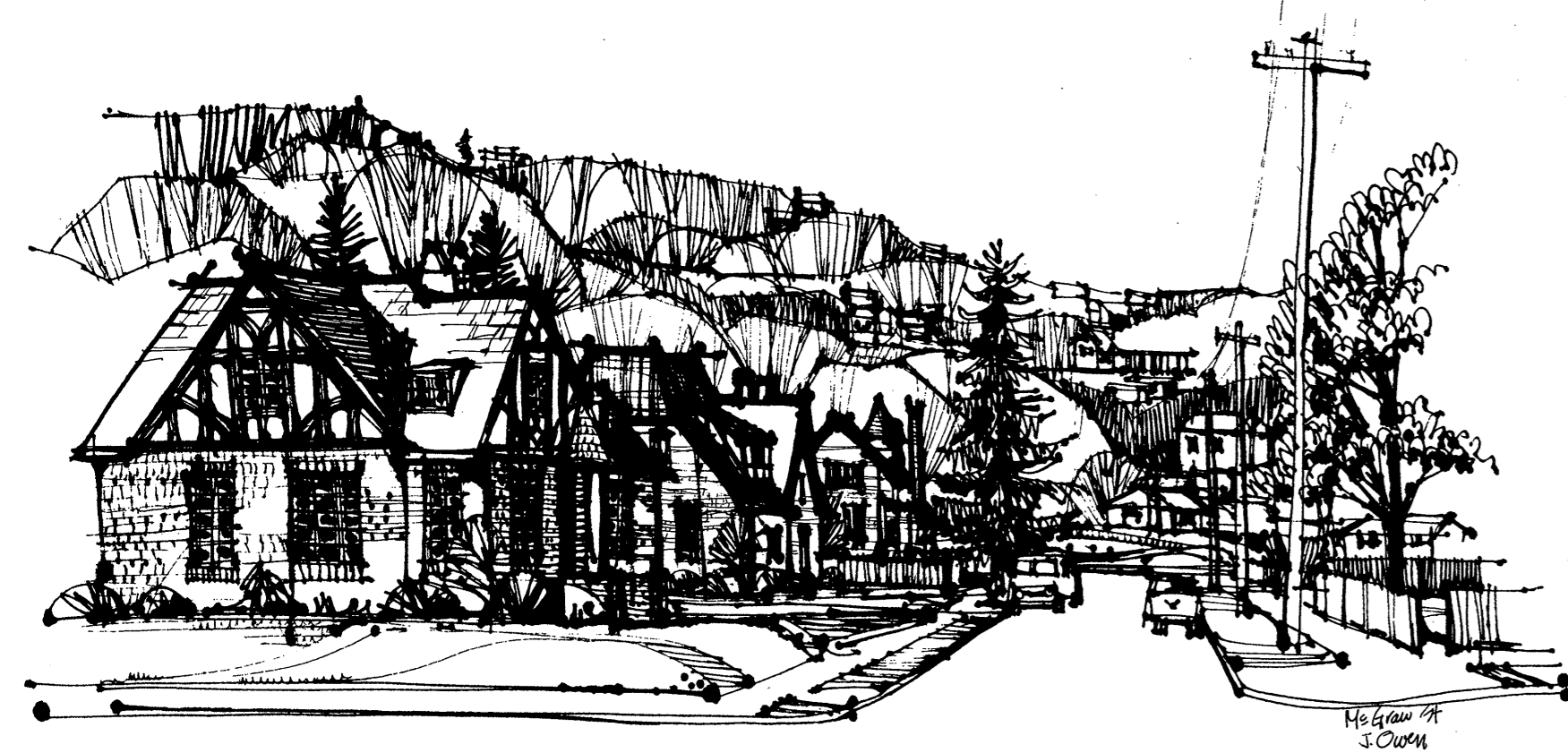


MONTLAKE

AN INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS
AND URBAN DESIGN RESOURCES

COMMENCED IN 1975



HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

CONSULTANTS: **FOLKE NYBERG**
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Ron Christiansen - photographic processing

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Surrounded by the steep hillsides of Interlaken Park to the south and west, the University of Washington Arboretum to the east and Portage Bay to the north, Montlake is one of Seattle's most uniquely located small residential communities. Although Montlake has always been a somewhat enclosed, secluded community, the area now contains a major urban freeway interchange connecting traffic north to the University with the east-west traffic from I-5 and the Evergreen Point Bridge. This new east-west freeway, which cuts through the north portion of the community has had a severely detrimental effect by separating portions of the area from each other and from the water line. It has also caused noise and air pollution, and traffic congestion. Nevertheless, Montlake remains a tightly knit, active community, partially because of the sheltering ring of parks and water coupled with the area's homogeneous, middle class residential character. These factors add much to its sense of identity and cohesiveness.

Montlake is well endowed with public open-space. In addition to the passive open space and landscaping of the Arboretum and Interlaken Park, the area also includes Montlake Playfield, West Montlake Park and the Foster Island Trail near the Museum of History and Industry.

There is only one small commercial area, while several institutions also play a role in the community's physical structure. The Seattle Yacht Club, the Fisheries Bureau Laboratory, the St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, and the Museum of History and Industry add diversity without detracting from the area's fine residential qualities.

Its close proximity to the University of Washington has made Montlake a desirable residential area for faculty and staff. The amenities of the Washington Ship Canal, the Arboretum, and the shorelines of Lake Washington and Union Bay are added attractions, making Montlake a water-oriented neighborhood rich in recreational opportunities.

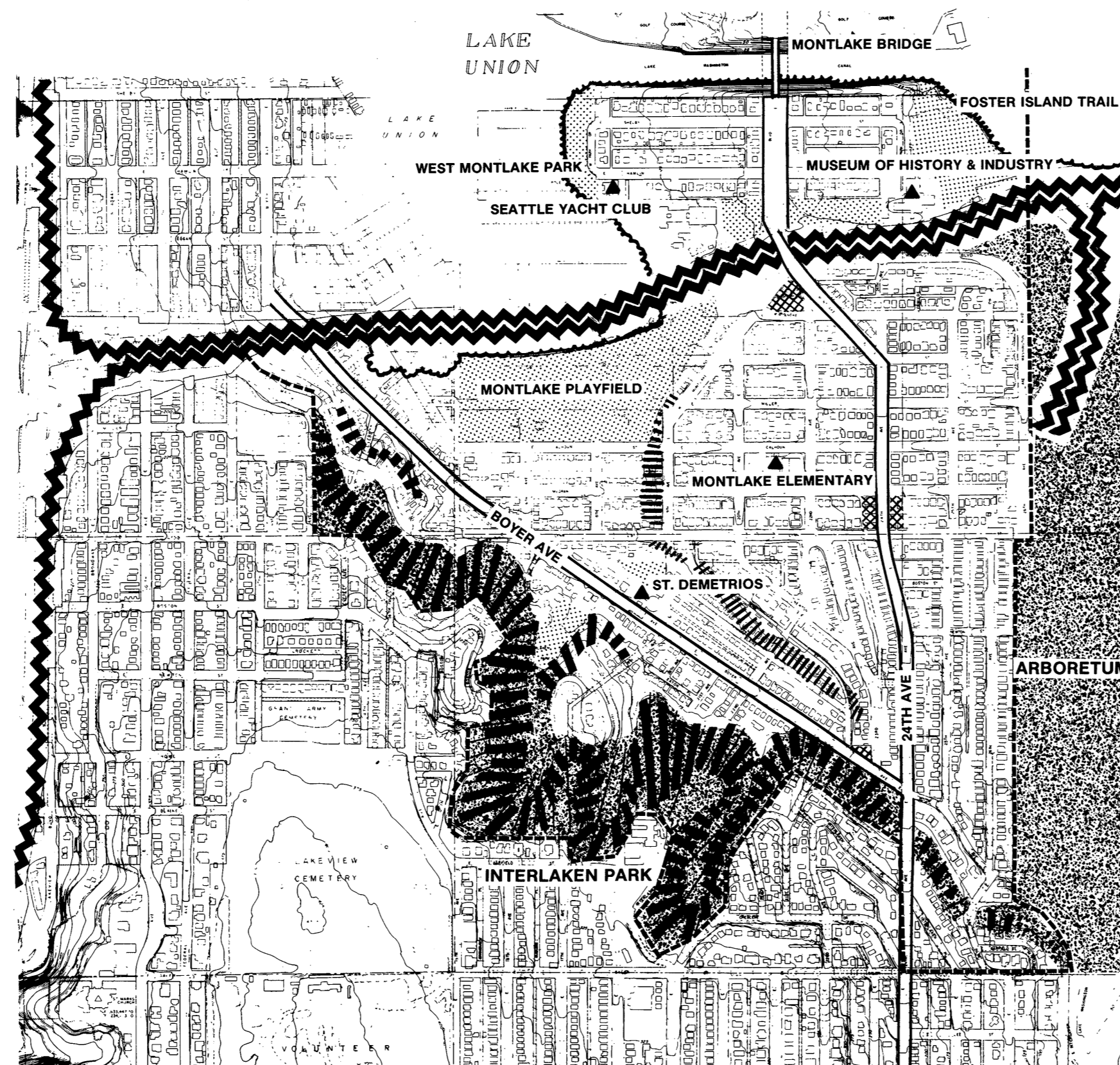
The residential streets are generally lined with modest, but well maintained houses of varying architectural styles. The gridiron street pattern and relative homogeneity of the size and spacing of houses produce a continuity and structure to the residential area. An abundance of public open space, views, and street landscaping adds variety to the streetscapes, preventing the housing groups from being monotonous.

The topography, the freeway, and the irregular shoreline physically divide Montlake into smaller areas, each with its own characteristics. The neighborhood north of the freeway is somewhat isolated but enjoys visual and physical access to the water and finely landscaped streetscapes. The central portion of Montlake, bounded by the Freeway to the North, 19th Avenue to the West, Boyer to the South and 29th to the East is also defined by its topography which forms a low hill with Montlake Elementary School at the top. The lower, filled area between the playfield and Boyer Avenue features many homogeneous groups of houses; mostly of the builder Tudor cottage, colonial and ranch house varieties. The steep slopes south-west of Boyer are characterized by contemporary houses on wooded lots while the area east of 24th Avenue East is oriented primarily toward the Arboretum.

SUMMARY MAP SHOWING VISUAL STRUCTURE

LEGEND

- FREEWAY
- DENSE VEGETATION
- STEEP SLOPES
- OPEN SPACE
- BUSINESS AREA
- COMMUNITY LANDMARK
- INVENTORY BOUNDARY



HISTORY

As early as 1854 Thomas Mercer realized the potential for a canal linking Lake Washington with Puget Sound, and so he named Union Bay and Lake Union. In 1869, the land between Union Bay and Lake Union was called Union City, but because there were very few homes in the area, the name was seldom used. Union City was annexed to Seattle in 1891 and by 1908 developers James Corner and Calvin Hagan renamed the area Montlake to make it more alluring with the idea of mountain and lake views. The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition on the University of Washington campus, the trolley car lines, and the new Interlake Blvd. drew people to the Montlake area. A single family residential character was established and continues to the present.

Since its development, Montlake has been populated primarily by families of young professional workers, drawn to the area by its pleasant qualities and proximity to the University. As a result, Montlake was, and is, a community whose residents took extreme pride in their rows of well maintained houses and park-like surroundings. Throughout its history, however, the liveability of the area has been threatened by encroaching development such as freeways, University expansion and commercial centers. In response to these threats, the residents united together to form a tightly organized, politically sophisticated community lobby to protect its distinctive environmental character.

The Lake Washington Canal was foreseen not only by Mercer but also by Major General George B. McLellan, captain of engineers, in 1853. He reported to the Secretary of War that a canal linking the lake with Puget Sound was "intended to create the finest naval resort in the world." In 1860 Harvey L. Pike began digging a ditch by his own individual labors with a pick and shovel; but quickly realized the futility of his efforts. A canal with locks was built by Judge Thomas Burke's Improvement Co. in 1885 which could accommodate log rafts and small boats. It was known as the Portage Canal. (Portage Bay was later named by the Port Commission to honor the portage route of the early pioneers between the two lakes.) A portion of the Old Portage Canal can still be seen from the south windows of the Museum of History and Industry. The canal was adequate for Henry Yesler's sawmill on Union Bay but not for sea going vessels so plans were made for a ship canal. After many years of continuous controversy, construction began in 1911 and was completed in 1917.

The history of the University of Washington Arboretum

begin in 1900 when Puget Mill Company deeded 62 acres to the city in exchange for certain water extensions. This acreage became the nucleus for Washington Park; a city park on the Arboretum's present location. The park grew in size several years later when the city purchased additional lots. The Olmsted Brothers designed the Boulevard in 1904 with the intentions of keeping the natural beauty. When the University of Washington moved to its present site in 1894 Edmund Meany pushed to see his idea of an arboretum on the campus. However, the campus was cleared for the Alaska Yukon Exposition in 1906 and the opportunity for an on-campus arboretum was lost. Dean Winkenwerder proposed the area below the railroad tracks for an arboretum, but no funds were available and in 1923 the Broadmoor Golf Course was established on that area. Washington was unable to make plans for the arboretum at that time. With the depression upon them, garden clubs raised money to hire the Olmsted Brothers to design a master plan for the arboretum. WPA labor was used partially to complete the arboretum's landscaping.

The development of the Montlake Playfield and recreation center also has been a long and involved history. In the late 1920's the principal of Garfield High School discussed the problems of juvenile delinquency in the community with the local PTA. Their conclusion was that Montlake needed a playfield and recreation center.

Mr. and Mrs. Russell Brackett picked a 30 acre site on the shore of Portage Bay and presented a massive district petition to the park board for its acquisition. Most of the 30 acres comprised Mrs. J. W. Wheeler's dahlia garden which she used to stock her flower shop on Boyer Street. Mrs. Wheeler objected to the city's offer of 40¢ a square foot and was joined by neighboring houseboat owners who faced eviction if the park was developed. The City Council held a public hearing, and after much emotional testimony, the mothers won the playfield. Mrs. Wheeler went out of business, and the houseboat owners weighed anchor to seek moorage elsewhere.

Even after it had approved acquisition of the property, the city decided not to pay for the 30 acres. The residents then assessed themselves \$16 to \$20 apiece for its purchase. In 1931, Brackett and Mrs. George Kirschner (wife of a noted cellist) persuaded the city council to fund \$10,000 for improvements to the land. By 1932 the depression was really pinching the city's budget, but still the stubborn Montlake residents persuaded the city to spend the \$10,000

on materials and to hire federally-subsidized unemployed workers to do the construction. Thus by 1935 the community succeeded in building its park and fieldhouse despite the depression, and inaction by the city bureaucracy.

Ironically, in supporting the recreation center the city and federal governments helped to create a community meeting place which served as a focal point for local activism—most of which was directed against government endorsed projects. In recent years Montlake community groups have successfully fought against the widening of the Montlake Bridge, encroaching commercial development, expansion of the University, and the fencing of the Arboretum.

By far the most threatening projects to the area were the Evergreen Point Freeway and the proposed R. H. Thomson Freeway. Local opposition to the Evergreen Point project and the Montlake interchange in the early 60's was too weak and disorganized to stop its construction. However, in the late 60's, Montlake residents played a strong part, along with other communities and the University, in stopping the R.H. Thompson Freeway, which threatened to all but obliterate Montlake's residential character.

Architect Andrew Willatsen had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright before coming to Seattle to produce courageous architecture in the Wright manner, which, with its organic quality, strongly expressed roof planes, and definite patterns, appeared most fitting to this region. Most other architects at that time were working in traditional styles. This house was built in 1913 at 2021 East Lynn Street in the Montlake district.

From Victor Steinbrueck's *Seattle Cityscape*.



Thus, Montlake's present fine residential qualities and amenities are in large measure a result of the community's past and ongoing efforts to direct and enhance its physical surroundings.

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