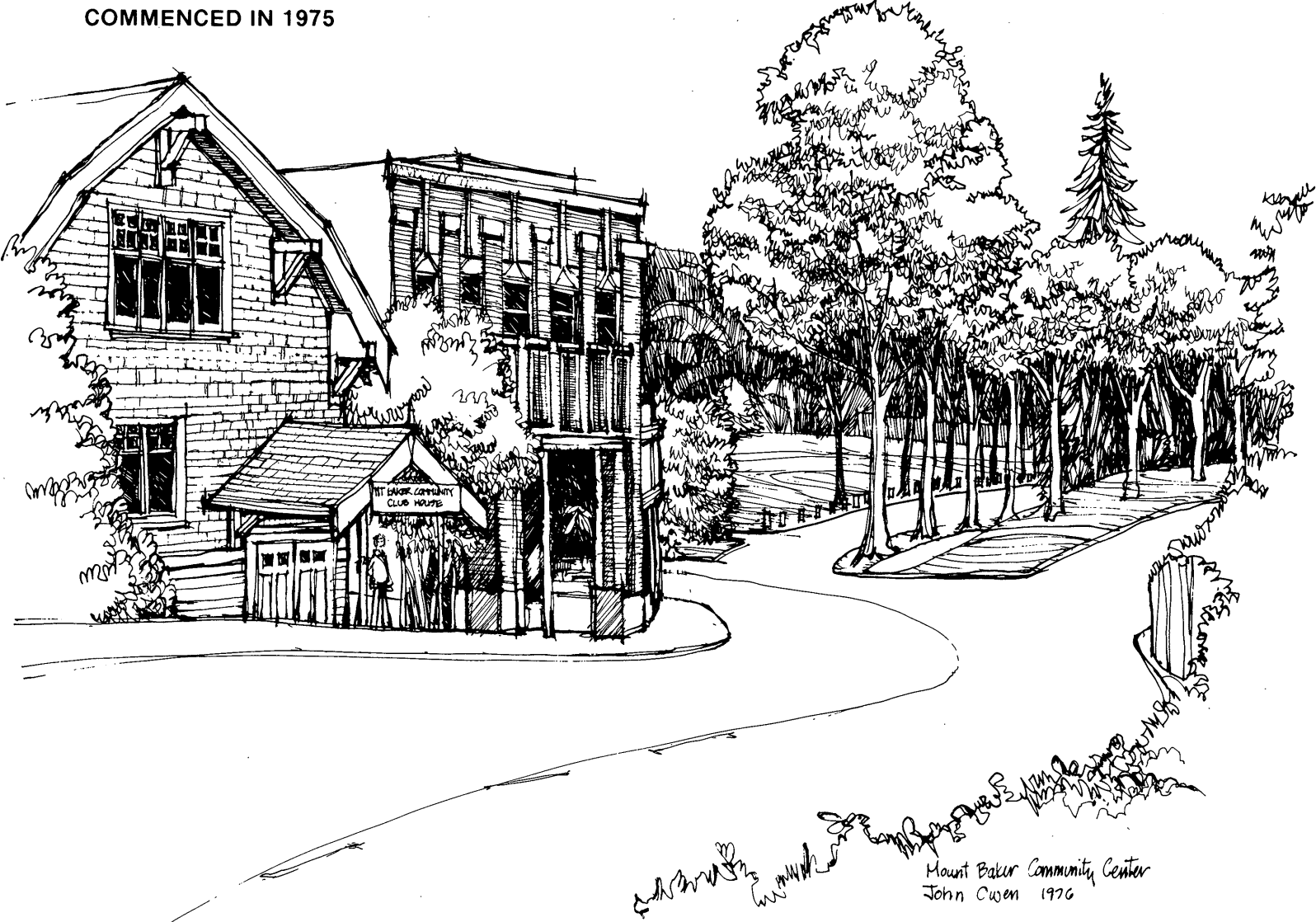


# MOUNT BAKER

## AN INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS AND URBAN DESIGN RESOURCES

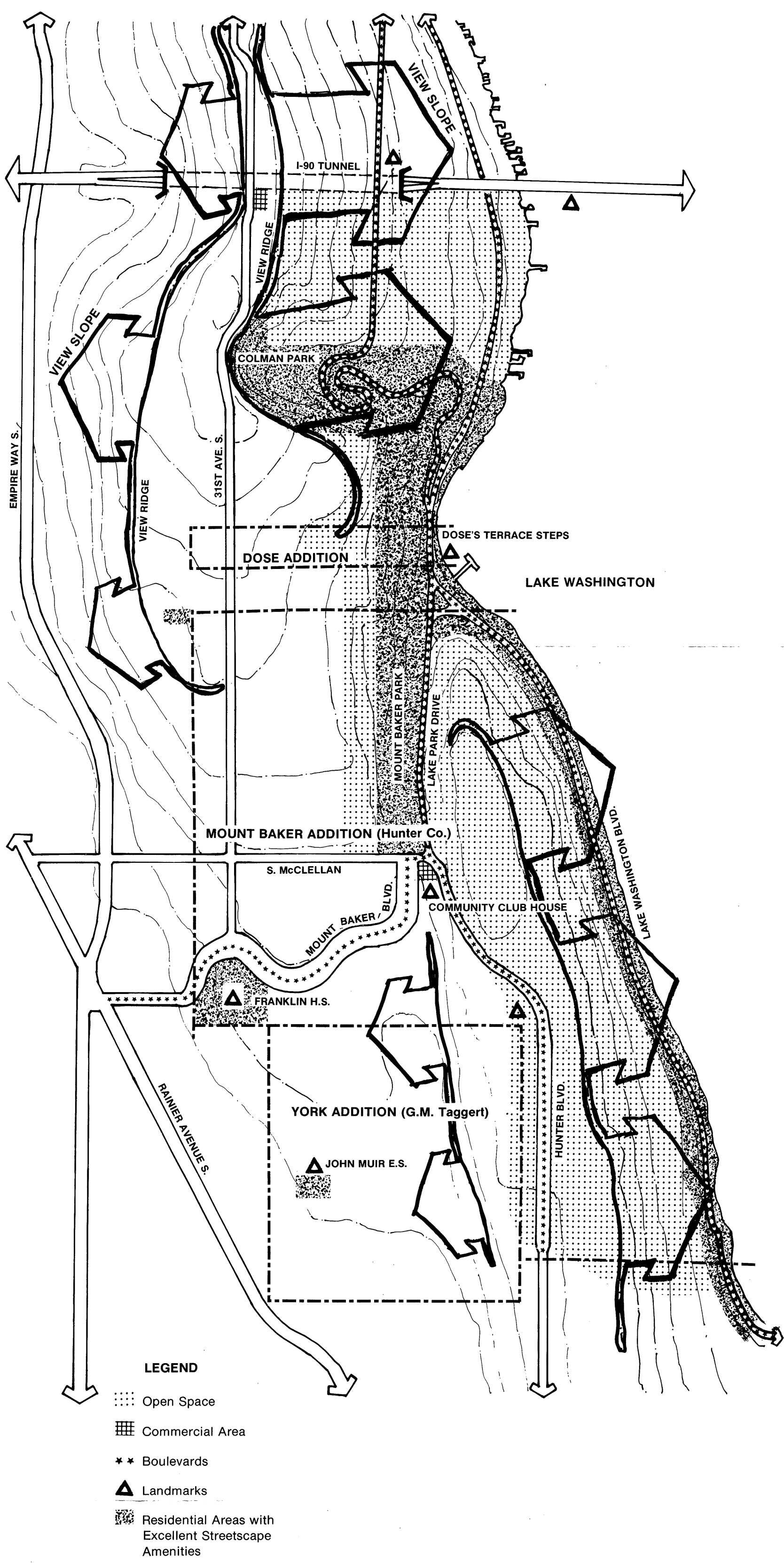
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HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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### VISUAL STRUCTURE MAP



### A NOTE ON ELLSWORTH STOREY

Ellsworth Storey, one of Seattle's finest architects, designed several homes in the Mount Baker neighborhood. Storey came to Seattle in 1903, having just been married after graduating in architecture at the University of Illinois. He had visited Seattle during his high school years, and despite objections from his parents, he was firmly resolved to return here to live and practice his profession. His first project was a pair of homes for his parents and his family on Dorffel Drive. These Puget Sound-style homes were connected by a conservatory with the large house being for his parents, who also came west. This first effort

exhibited some of the qualities that were to become his trademark: the preference for natural materials (particularly wood), a decorative window treatment, and emphasized roof forms. His use of materials was always simple and direct with little superficial embellishment. This may partially have been a reaction to his mother's overzealous interest in applied decoration.

The cottages at Colman Park are among Storey's earlier works. He purchased and developed the site himself to provide, in his own words, "good low rental housing." The first group of four was built in 1911, and eight more were added in 1915. At a time when the California bungalow was immensely popular, Storey used many of the same ideas: large porches, single-wall carpenter-like construction, and naturally finished wood, but in his own unique and more delicate manner.

In addition to the Mount Baker Community Club, built in 1914, Storey designed two other notable buildings in Mount Baker. The Dyer House (1922) clearly shows the influence of the Swiss Chalet on his work. His knowledge and appreciation of Wright's work as well is shown in the Evans House (1915).

The Great Depression prematurely shortened Storey's career. His lack of competitive drive dissuaded him from reopening his office, yet it produced in his few works an architecture that is never overbearing, but warm and harmonious, and that apparently nourished the growth of the present Northwest Regional Style.



Evans House 1915  
E. Storey - Arch.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

The inventory technical staff and their primary responsibilities were:

- Ron Christiansen - photographic processing
- Terry Berggren - research

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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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### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Mount Baker district is unique in Seattle largely because of early planning which successfully integrated street and residential developments into the natural amenities of the area. It is one of the best local examples of the English or "picturesque" type of landscape planning. Plating restrictions limiting use to single-family residences with one location for commercial development have further established the special quality of the neighborhood. A generous endowment of parks, well landscaped boulevards, along with the curvilinear street layout relating to the topography are an additional asset.

The area's topography is mainly defined by north-south ridges along 31st Avenue South from South Judkins Street to Mount Baker Boulevard; and along St. Helen's Place South and Hunter Boulevard South, including most of the Hunter development tract. The eastern slopes of the ridges offer sweeping panoramas of Lake Washington and the hills and mountains in the distance. The majority of the more luxurious homes are in these locations. Lake Washington Boulevard along the lake shore is an obviously pleasant continuous definition of the eastern perimeter. The western slopes have more limited views of the Rainier Valley commercial and light manufacturing

developments with Beacon Hill beyond.

Mount Baker remains an exclusively single family residential community of consistently substantial homes with rigid lot setbacks and sideyards. Some street layouts by the Olmsted Brothers have added an additional environmental quality. There are areas of modest middle-class homes to the south and west as well as the luxurious prestige residences which are often associated with the community. While many places are well maintained and landscaped, some homes have been neglected or are in need of better maintenance and repair. Some locations appear to be moving through a transitional period with improvements occurring in recent years through the Mount Baker Housing Rehabilitation Program. This program, which is sponsored by the City of Seattle and several financial institutions, was organized to provide low interest home improvement loans to facilitate necessary rehabilitation of residences and consequently the entire neighborhood. The resultant upgrading is effectively restoring the community's strength as a neighborhood along with the improvement of its physical quality.

### HISTORY

Mt. Baker is one of Seattle's earliest planned residential communities, and as such, was an experiment in residential development. Its present physical character is largely a result of that effort. The area's early residential development is of historic interest. David T. Denny, the first pioneer to own land in this area, acquired property in the 1860's and later sold it to the Seattle and Walla Walla Railroad. The Railroad then sold it to Dan Jones, a real estate developer, of the Hunter Tract Improvement Company. The Hunter Company platted its holdings in 1907 as the Mt. Baker Park District. George M. Taggart had already platted the York Addition in 1902 and Charles Dose the Dose Addition in 1906, so that by 1907 the area was ready for rapid development.

The Hunter Company seems to have been the most innovative in their attempts to create an exclusive, upper-income residential district. Their program called for extensive community cooperation and planning in everything from streets and sewers, to landscaping, education and social affairs. They hired the Olmsted Brothers (who were also responsible for much of Seattle's parks and boulevards system) to lay out streets and lots fitting the topography in order to provide views, privacy, and pleasant streets for each residence. The area was restricted to single-family dwellings, with strict property requirements for side and front yard setbacks.

Like the Hunter Company, Taggart and Dose were also interested in developing a prestigious residential area and donated land for amenities and other projects to increase the area's desirability. In 1902 Taggart donated the first lot of his plat for a Methodist Church, and in 1903 built the Whitmore School. The school was later renamed York School and today is known as the John Muir Elementary School.

The streetcar line was essential for commuters into the city. Originally the streetcar stopped at 31st Avenue South and Atlantic Street, but Dose and Jones petitioned to have the line extended into the center of the community. In 1910 the tracks were extended south along the Hunter Boulevard center strip. Later, the tracks were removed leaving room for a wide grass area in addition to the fine boulevard trees.

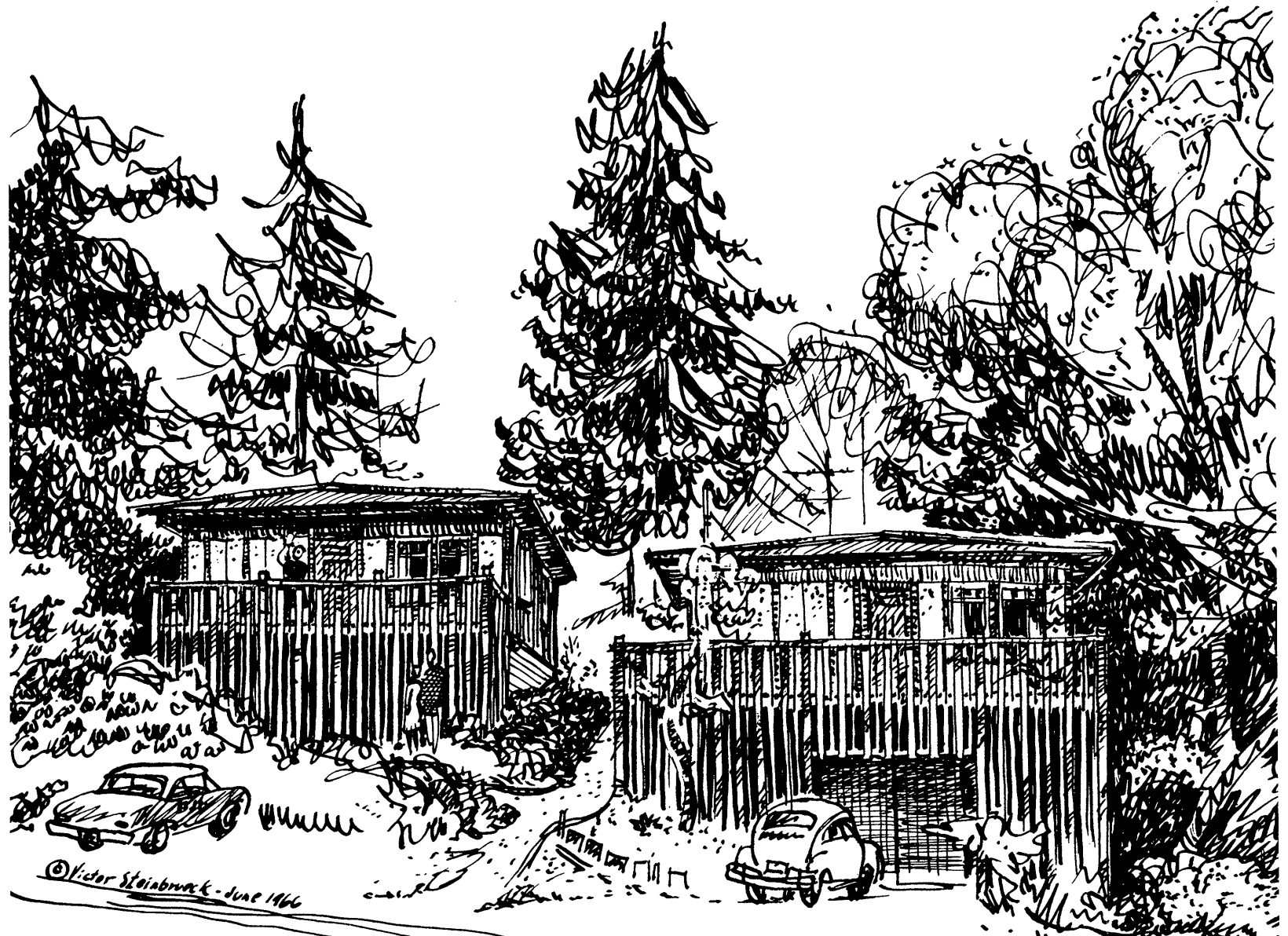
Dedication of local parks and boulevards was also an important strategy in the Mt. Baker development. Mt. Baker Park, portions of Colman Park and a recreational development at the foot of Lake Park Drive added open space and increased the park-like setting of the community. In addition, the boulevards provided

unique opportunities for "scenic motoring."

By 1910 Dose, Taggart, and the Hunter Company succeeded in establishing Mt. Baker as an exclusive residential "district with character." Drawn by the dramatic views, quiet parks, and excellent residential setting, wealthy families moved into the area at a rapid rate. Some of the early residents had gained their fortune in the logging business or the Alaskan Gold Rush. Others were young, aggressive business men eager to find a fresh, new community in which to grow and prosper. In 1909, the Mount Baker Park Improvement Club was organized to "promote the physical development of Mt. Baker Park, the beautification of the Park as a whole, to encourage homeowners to personal effort to develop and improve their property and to organize and aid various neighborhood clubs which may benefit the community by social, cultural, educational and charitable work." From early accounts of Mt. Baker community and social activities, there was indeed a great amount of community cooperation in public affairs and social functions. Perhaps this was in part due to the new residents' relatively progressive and youthful nature. A 1914 publication lists the Club's primary accomplishments as "the laying of paving, installing sewerage system, lights, water mains, development of small parks and the location of the Franklin High School." The first Mt. Baker Rose Show took place in 1911 and was so popular that it became an annual event. Another celebrated annual function was "New Year's Men's Day" during which the men in the community travelled en masse throughout the area visiting open houses and the parties held for them.

The Great Depression in the 1930's brought hard times to Mt. Baker as well as other communities. Many of the older established families were forced to leave. By 1945 the community was no longer an exclusively upper-class area. Construction of the Mercer Island Floating Bridge disrupted the northern portions of Mt. Baker and the arterial traffic tended to separate Mt. Baker from the downtown area. The proposed construction for I-90 threatens further detrimental impacts.

In recent years, Mt. Baker has shown a considerable increase in community activity. Interest has developed in Mt. Baker as a prestigious and pleasant place to live. The area's fine houses, panoramic views, excellent residential amenities, and convenient access to downtown still possess the same attraction today that they did during the first two decades of the century: a testament to the foresight and energy of early developers and members of the Mt. Baker community.



Storey Cottages - 1911