

Culturally Significant Places on Beacon Hill

by

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September 12, 2023

**4Culture / Beyond Integrity
Equity in Historic Preservation Undergraduate Internship Report**



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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Holly Taylor, Emily Lawsin and Maria Batayola for their guidance and support on this project. Thank you to the many who helped along the way, an email here and a library reference there. And a special extension of gratitude to those who are the voices of this narrative; to each of the neighbors for a summer full of impactful conversations, who were generous enough to share their time and their stories with me.

Introduction

This project was conducted in the summer of 2023 as a part of the Beyond Integrity Equity in Historic Preservation Internship. It was carried out in partnership with both 4Culture and the Beacon Hill Council (BHC). The BHC is a volunteer-based organization that advocates for the well-being of the Beacon Hill community. I was guided by Chair of the BHC Maria Batayola and University of Washington College of Built Environments affiliate faculty member Holly Taylor.

This research is focused on Mid and South Beacon Hill, although it also includes some sites in North Beacon Hill. Essentially, this work is an attempt to assess the cultural significance of Beacon Hill sites in the context of a historic preservation survey. Through employing ethnographic methods in the context of preservation, we are better able to center the voices and experiences of community members who have long been excluded from the work of historic preservation. So, this report is both a catalog of culturally significant sites on Beacon Hill as informed by oral history interviews with Beacon Hill neighbors as well as a critical response to the inequities of traditional preservation practice in the form of a blended methodology study.

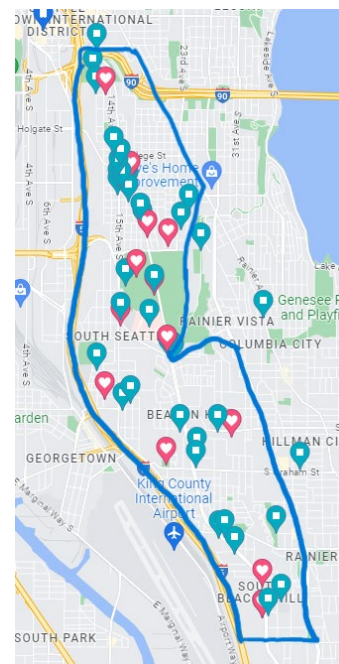
Methodology

Geographic Scope

The geographic boundaries we set for the neighborhood are I-90 to the north, I-5 to the west, Rainier Avenue/ Martin Luther King Jr. Way S to the east, and Carkeek Drive S to the south. Due to the lack of research that has been done in Mid and South Beacon Hill, our focus area was on these particular portions of the hill. We defined this area as south of Jefferson Park and made a concentrated effort to include stories from those regions; seven of the eleven discussed sites fall into this area.

An Ethnographic Spin on a Historic Sites Survey

In order to learn about what places the community cared about, I took to the field that is Beacon Hill, conducting eight formal interviews. Interview narrators were selected based on recommendations from project advisors. These conversations occurred both in person and virtually and ranged in length from half an hour to a few hours of discussion.



Map of Beacon Hill + Sites

Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Beacon+Hill,+Seattle,+WA/>

- **Tess LeNoir and Maura Shapley** - Beacon Hill residents, owners and operators of Day Moon Press.
- **Larry Matsuda** - Beacon Hill resident, author, poet, social justice activist, teacher, and leader in Asian American activism and education.
- **Ron Chew** - Lifelong Beacon Hill resident, Executive Director for the Wing Luke Asian Museum, Editor in Chief of the *International Examiner*.
- **Matt Remle** - Beacon Hill resident, a Hunkpapa Lakota environmental and human rights activist, and community organizer.
- **Adam Alsobrook** - Senior Architectural Historian at Willamette Cultural Resources Associates and former member of the King County Landmarks Commission.
- **Esther Little Dove John** - Beacon Hill resident, peace activist and artist.
- **Larry Seng** - President of the Khmer Buddhist Society from 2011-2019, the board that oversees the operation of Watt Dhammacakkaram.
- **Betty Jean Williamson** - Beacon Hill resident, former Director at Beacon Arts, a volunteer nonprofit aiming to build community through arts, and on the 2021 Board of Directors for the Beacon Hill Council.

In addition to these interviews, I carried out supplementary research at the Bellevue Library as well as through both online and physical texts. At the beginning of the summer, I attended the Beacon Arts Street Fair on Roberto Maestas Festival Street, casting an initial wide net in asking vendors and fairgoers for suggestions of culturally significant places in the neighborhood in order to start compiling a comprehensive list of sites to work from. From this longer list documenting 74 sites¹ neighbors mentioned to me, I put together a shorter list of 11 locations to look into that were mentioned with frequency and passion or have particularly rich, unique, and vulnerable histories.

Generally, places are deemed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places if they are at least 50 years old, although places that are newer or that derive their significance from more recent events may be eligible if they are considered exceptionally significant. Seattle's Landmarks ordinance requires properties to be just 25 years old. For this project, we generally regarded the city's benchmark of at least 25 years old as a guide, but made some exceptions.

One inherent condition of a focused study is that I was unable to explore the histories of every site that was shared with me. It is my hope that this project creates a foundation upon which future researchers can continue this work. If anything can be drawn from this study, it is that this neighborhood is clearly and fiercely loved by those who call Beacon Hill home.

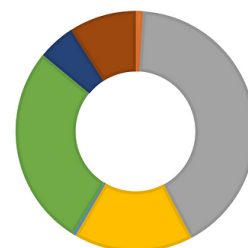
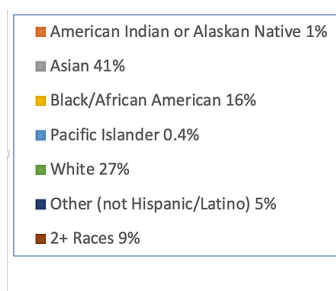
¹ This longer list of 74 sites is included as Appendix A

Background

A Brief History of Beacon Hill

Beacon Hill is an especially dynamic and diverse community—there is a particular energy on the hill that sets it apart from other neighborhoods of Seattle. The revolving door of immigrant groups that settle in the neighborhood creates a special kind of environment where a truly global community has been cultivated. The original inhabitants of what we now know as Beacon Hill are natives of the Duwamish tribe. The Duwamish call the hill qWátSéecH (pronounced QWAH-tseech) meaning "Greenish-Yellow Spine" in the Lushootseed language (Thrush 2007: 230). Before white settlers drove them out of the area, the Duwamish had a village at the foot of the hill called Tal-tal-kus (Wilma and Curtis 2001). In 1851, Henry Van Asselt, an immigrant from the Netherlands, was the first white settler to lay claim to a portion of Beacon Hill. Later, in 1889, M. Harwood Young, a Union Army veteran, named the hill after Boston's historic Beacon Hill (Wilma and Curtis 2001).

The neighborhood sits on the top of a mesa rising to 350 feet in elevation, stretching 6 miles in length, and 1.5 miles in width. Its geographic isolation from the rest of Seattle has maintained a distinctive culture in the neighborhood. The value of Beacon Hill's diversity cannot be overstated. According to the Beacon Hill Council, which cites the 2020 Census data, over 70% of Beacon Hill residents identify as Black, Indigenous, or as a Person of Color (Beacon Hill Council). Roberto Maestas, a regionally known civil rights activist, founder of El Centro de la Raza, and Beacon Hill resident described "the immigrant mix on Beacon Hill [as] one of the neighborhood's greatest strengths... 'it has become a reflection of the worldwide demographic patterns of people migrating to the United States'" (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 42). A part of the reason why Beacon Hill is home to so many minority communities is because of a rampant history of redlining and housing discrimination in Seattle that drove communities of color into South Seattle. Because of this, intergroup solidarity was and is imperative. Don Duncan, who grew up on Beacon Hill, reflects on this necessity, particularly in finding secure housing: "The only way you could survive was to share" (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 95-96).



Beacon Hill demographic data from the 2020 Census

Source: Beacon Hill Council

When I asked Ron Chew, a life-long Beacon Hill resident, what he thinks makes Beacon Hill a special kind of place, he told me that “there was some core of energy and history [in Beacon Hill] ...that still tugs on people’s emotions” and continues to draw them to the area. Matt Remle moved to Beacon Hill in the late 1990s and draws from his Lakota background to understand his role in the community. “It’s part of who we are as Lakota. That means to be a good relative, and that’s to be a good relative to not just our own families,” but to the wider community as well as “our non-human relatives.”

Larry Matsuda, a long-time resident of Beacon Hill, shares the details of what is to be a part of this community. “You see Hispanics, you see Chinese immigrants, you see Japanese people, and we walk Jefferson Park, and you see all these people playing and being together as a community...we’re diverse and we are beside each other,” he says. “I think there is some level of tolerance for being physically different and Asian on Beacon Hill. When I was growing up people would call you names, I mean drive by in a car and yell at you and call you something, and that didn’t happen on Beacon Hill so much. It happened elsewhere. So, I think there’s that sense of diversity and living together and sharing and tolerating and all these things that make it richer...And they’re all picnicking and then we see the little children working in little teams, and so it’s rather nice, there is a feeling, somewhat, of acceptance.”

Beacon Hill’s Development Eras & the Post-Amazon Era

The City of Seattle’s Beacon Hill Historic Context Statement, published in 2004, organized the history of the community into six development eras: Prehistory and Pioneer Settlement (to 1879), Early Development of Beacon Hill (1880-1899), Growth and Development (1900-1919), 1920s Development and Buildings (1920-1929), Depression and World War II (1930-1945), and Into the Modern Age: Post-World War II Development (1946-1963). These time periods are primarily defined by political and economic shifts throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. The report concludes around the start of the construction of Interstate 5 through Seattle in 1962, which completely transformed the region, further reinforcing Beacon Hill’s isolation from the rest of Seattle (Tobin 2004: 48).

Since then, additional eras have organized time and life on Beacon Hill. One of the most impactful additions to the neighborhood that residents marked as a turning point in local development was the construction of the Sound Transit Link light rail station in North Beacon Hill. A *Seattle Times* article detailing the displacing impacts of the Beacon Hill station referred to the “light rail line planned from Westlake Center to Tukwila [as] the city’s biggest public works project since the building of Interstate 5” (Ramirez 2004). Esther Little Dove John, a long-time community member and peace activist, told me about the major changes brought about by the Link, citing community opposition to the station. “There were houses and businesses that were destroyed because of the Beacon Hill station, and I was part of the people who were protesting against the light rail going through Beacon Hill.” Construction for the station began in

2003 and it was officially opened in 2009. In the process of its construction, Sounds Transit's choice of location displaced several Beacon Hill businesses, including Perry Ko's South China Restaurant, which had been a center of community in the neighborhood since the late 1950s.

Neighbors described Perry Ko's as "the kind of place that's woven into the fabric of the community...it's become a second living room for dozens of locals" (Fryer 2002). The restaurant relocated to Bellevue shortly after its closing in 2004, but despite being just a 12-minute drive away, their new location was "mentally, even emotionally, out of reach for Beacon Hill residents, who have few options in an ever-fragile business district" (Ramirez 2004). The displacement of local businesses has serious repercussions for the culture of the community: "Losing Perry Ko's is like transplanting Beacon Hill's heart elsewhere" (Ramirez 2004).

The addition of the Link station and its disturbance of local businesses is just one example of a pattern of gentrification on the hill. When I ask Chew about the beginning of this period of intensive development, he refers to it as "the post-Amazon era." In 1999, Amazon moved its headquarters into the former Pacific Medical Center facility at the north tip of Beacon Hill, which accelerated the pace of gentrification in the neighborhood. In 2010, Amazon's headquarters moved to South Lake Union. It was "the birth and evolution of high tech that brought these pressures to Beacon Hill and other neighborhoods," he says.

Displacement and the Fracturing of Community

A serious consideration of this research is the displacing impacts of development. Gentrification deteriorates the cultural heritage of the community at large while creating serious economic instability for neighbors: pushing individuals out of their homes and making it impossible for families to sustain their small businesses. With every property that is bought out and developed, each time rent is increased, and long-time neighbors are expelled from the community, the vibrant cultural heritage that has been a long-time marker of Beacon Hill is risked. In prioritizing equity in the work of historic preservation, we must consider and amend how "this ethical dimension of preservation's relationship to displacement is often ignored" (Taylor 2020: 36).

Many of the neighbors I spoke with expressed concern for the future of their neighborhood. In reviewing the history of displacement in Beacon Hill, the neighborhood has been rearranged time and time again. Starting with the Jackson Street and Dearborn regrades in 1909, in which the elevation of the hill was reduced: "the hill was sluiced hydraulically and the soil was washed down into the tidelands to help fill in what is now the industrial area south of the downtown core" (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 15). In this process, "houses were demolished over the protests of homeowners, and whole neighborhoods were destroyed..." to the "despair of homeowners on the north end of Beacon Hill" (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 15). This is a familiar story on the hill. Neighbors were displaced again when I-5 construction began in 1962,

and once more in 2004 when the light rail station was introduced. This constant reshuffling forms neighbors' sense of security and place. "There still is a sense that the city could come in and just plow through the houses, making something or other," Matsuda laments. Before his family moved to the hill, the Matsudas "lived in the Chinatown area which is now the Dearborn exit of I-5," he tells me. "They just plowed it under. Our church was there too, it's gone." The land has seen as much continuous displacement and restructuring as the residents of Beacon Hill have. As of 2020, 44% of Beacon Hill's population is made up of immigrants and refugees—a community that is more familiar than most with displacement and insecure relationships with home and place (Beacon Hill Council 2020).

Maura Shapley, founder of the local print shop Day Moon Press, moved to Beacon Hill in 1982. She recollects her impression of the quiet yet active neighborhood she and her husband moved to. "Every time we'd walk, we would see somebody out in their yards, poking at their garden or sitting on the porch, it was definitely still a feeling of a modest neighborhood being lived in, and I just that loved that," she reminisces. "I don't know if I walked around now, would I get that same first impression or not? Would I see too many condos?" Shapley points to this contrast, telling me how she has experienced the community growing apart over time. "We've got neighbors, right here, they look at me every day while I'm in my garden watering and weeding and I have no idea who they are...those 'storefronts,' I have no clue what's going on in either one of those...no idea of what's actually happening in the new buildings."

Chew seconds this sense of a disjointed relationship with newcomers to the neighborhood, explaining that one impact of gentrification is the tension it creates in the community, "both spoken and unspoken." He shares an experience he had with one of his new neighbors as he was trying to drive home: their kids were playing in the street and they wouldn't let him pass, preventing him from conveniently getting to his house. "I thought they'd have the courtesy to let me come through," he tells me. So, "there's this kind of disconnect. They live a couple blocks from me, but I have no idea who they are, and they have no idea who I am, and we have separate worlds." He contrasts this with the tight-knit culture of the diverse, working-class community of his childhood. "We knew most of the neighbors...that's kind of the mood that I grew up in," but "now it's become gentrified, it's an odd and mix of folks who are of my parent's generation... [and] the more well-to-do Caucasian Americans who have moved to the area because they wanted to move Seattle, that post-Amazon era," he says. "They're scarfing up the homes and of course now everything's unaffordable."

A part of the economic viability of living on Beacon Hill and its rapidly changing culture is what kind of businesses locals have access to. I spoke with third-generation Beacon Hill resident Christina Olson at the Beacon Arts Street Fair. She concisely makes note of how the hill's business offerings have evolved over time: "You used to not have to leave the hill for anything, it's not like that anymore." Shapley also struggles with the range of business offerings in her neighborhood that are within walking distance. "There have to be more services besides

restaurants that could be here,” she says, acknowledging the fact that “it’s harder to encourage small retail commercial service businesses” given the continuously rising cost of rent. “It did used to be that you could at least move to Beacon Hill. It was still affordable for a while and has not been for 10 years.”

Her daughter, Tess LeNoir, tries to make sense of what happened to the local commercial district and why it is oversaturated with businesses that do not actually serve Beacon Hill. She explains that it is partially a design issue. Although new condos and apartment buildings are multi-use, designating the first floor for commercial space, these areas are of such a small square footage that they can only realistically host offices. “They’re not there to receive walk-ins, so you just end up with a bunch of commercial spaces that are theoretically doing business in the Beacon Hill area, but they’re not actually available for Beacon Hill residents to engage with them.” Furthermore, what businesses are able to withstand the skyrocketing price of rent, “ends up being a lot of higher-end consumptive stuff,” like expensive restaurants that “attract people from other neighborhoods who don’t live here.” Although LeNoir is encouraged by people from other areas spending time and money in the community, “the people who live here don’t eat out every night so what do they get to do in their own neighborhood that is engaging?” she asks.

Esther Little Dove John is also concerned about who is going to benefit from the construction on the hill and how that development is going to impact the long-standing diversity that makes Beacon Hill what it is. “I’m not sure that the construction is meant for...the ethnic minorities who live here and that concerns me...I’m hoping that we can help maintain its multinational character,” she says, acknowledging the significance and vulnerability of the neighborhood’s demographic makeup. “If the gentrification continues to proceed, I’ll do whatever I can to help keep the neighborhood multi-racial.” Chew speaks to these local reactions to the changes in their neighborhood and questions what to do to stop it from happening. “There’s some resentment by locals...a lot of the immigrant population, they can’t really compete with other folks who have more resources,” he explains. “Gentrification is here. How do we protect the ability of a lot of fragile seniors who can’t afford to pay the tax on their houses? How can we make sure that they’re able to stay in the neighborhood because they’re part of the texture of the history.”

New neighbors and old juxtapose one another, Chew tells me. He illustrates these different worlds that sit beside each other. “Right across the street there is a woman who was a sewing worker who my mom knew...she’s, of course, probably in her 90s, but I think about the fact that you got somebody with this nice, expensive home that’s built fairly high to take advantage of the view and nicely landscaped yard with stone benches and landscaping and so forth, then you’ve got this Chinese garment worker who can’t even mow her own lawn because she’s too elderly and the house has never been fixed up and she’s lucky just to get the grass mowed and [there are] metal bars on the lower windows just to make sure nobody breaks in and tries to assault her.” He makes the contrast clear. “So, it’s just these strange, separate worlds.”

Chew hypothesizes that this breakdown in a sense of community is also a result of new residents' ignorance of the history of Beacon Hill. "It's our lack of a sense of history. Until you acknowledge that history, until you embrace it, you'll always be creating a divide," he explains. "First of all, let's understand what that history is and then figure out a way to acknowledge, embrace, highlight that, and then make sure people know it."

Adam Alsobrook, a local architect and cultural resource management professional, speaks to the pressure of time in capturing these histories as community members pass on and buildings get replaced. "Some of the more interesting and notable buildings that...used to be on Beacon Hill no longer exist and they've just disappeared within the last few years," he says. "Now is really the time for communities to really go out and do oral histories and interview people in the community."

An Anthropological Perspective on Preservation

The initial challenge I had with this project was that I do not have a background in historic preservation, rather, I have been trained as a student of anthropology. This became both an obstacle and a benefit. From an outsider's perspective, I had much to learn about the complicated world of historic preservation, all the acronymed organizations and precise standards, as well as the ways in which preservation is structured in surprisingly inequitable ways. In line with my anthropological sensibilities, I was shocked and frustrated to learn that cultural significance is a negligible part of historic preservation work.

In my review of traditional historical neighborhood surveys that focus on architectural integrity, I looked over the 2010 Historic Resources Survey Report for Seattle's Fremont neighborhood. As the researchers reviewed their methodology, they included a brief section on "Historical or Cultural Significance." They explain that "Surveyors were instructed to attempt to identify properties with known historical or cultural significance...with the proviso that historical or cultural significance is *very difficult to assess in the field*" (Krafft 2010: 5). This is a concise description of preservation's perspective on assessing intangible cultural heritage and including it in their research. The solution to what was "very difficult" for preservationists seemed obvious to me—if you want to know about cultural significance, just ask. But this is not the methodology preservationists are taught.

Holly Taylor spells this out in her writing on community-centered preservation. Striving to understand "...present-day significance requires ethnographic research and community engagement, in addition to the usual historical research. Architects, archaeologists, planners and architectural historians rarely have a skill set that includes social science research. Anthropologists, sociologists and folklorists have those skills. So, preservation needs more social scientists, not as an afterthought but as core disciplines for good surveys" (Taylor 2020: 37). So, in mapping out a plan for this project, the challenge then became how to incorporate the work of

ethnographic skills of social scientists into the already existing structure of preservation policies and practices. Enacting structural change is a difficult thing to carry out and not many preservationists are invested in doing so. Alsobrook is an advocate for centering cultural significance in historical preservation work and explains why others could be reluctant. “People in my general cultural resource management profession, we just are not having these conversations because they affect our bottom line,” he says. “It’s our livelihood; why would I want to destroy the system that puts bread in my mouth, right?”

As this project is a new attempt in preservation to turn our attention toward cultural significance, my background in conducting interviews and in the practice of ethnographic work carried me through this research. A part of determining a new methodology—of how to appropriately employ ethnographic methods in a preservation context—is that we had to determine our route along the way. Centrally, we aimed to assess what historic sites on Beacon Hill are valued by the community and why people care about those places. We wanted to establish and affirm the credibility of neighbors as the people who know neighborhoods best, not only preservation professionals who examine the physicality of buildings through the narrow lens of their training.

The Significance of Equity in Historic Preservation

This research is an endeavor to widen the scope of traditional preservation practices and reconsider the grounds upon which places have been deemed “historic” or significant enough to preserve. For the most part, this premise has been an inequitable one, excluding vernacular buildings that are steeped in cultural significance for minority communities while maintaining only the histories of those in seats of power. Many older surveys are focused on architectural significance and association with a famous person, Alsobrook explains, “So that’s why, stereotypically, you ended up with a lot of really grand, old, Victorian houses that were owned by dead, white men who were bankers and industrialists.” The lack of criteria and methods to thoroughly assess cultural significance leads to the loss of places that are important to other demographics of people. “Saying that [a site] doesn’t have integrity and therefore is unable to convey its significance...will doom something to an almost certain demolition,” he says. “And then people will come back after the fact and say ‘How could you let that go? That was the last remnant of this historic community.’” The goal of this project is to turn traditional preservation on its head. To identify sites to document and preserve principally based on cultural significance to communities whose histories have been excluded from the landmarking process while those places still exist.

Cultural significance often appears in intangible forms that are challenging for material-minded preservationists to grasp. By “cultural significance,” I am referencing Taylor’s definition: “the meanings and associations that historic places hold for people today. This follows from an anthropological understanding of culture as...based in collective experience, the

transmission of knowledge across generations, and continuity of traditional practices in places that communities care about” (Taylor 2020: 31). By integrating these interpretations into the preservation practice, we are able to move “toward a more truly people-centered preservation” (Taylor 2020: 37). People-centered preservation is one that relies on the dissemination of power that preservationists vest only in themselves. It is a practice that “invests communities with the authority to determine what is culturally significant in the same way that typical preservation approaches rely on experts (historians, architects, architectural historians and archaeologists) to assess significance under other criteria, and this sharing of authority makes some professionals uncomfortable” (Taylor 2020: 31).

“Beyond Integrity” is an initiative in historic preservation to move the field beyond the limited scope of architectural integrity. Alsobrook speaks to preservation’s exclusivity: the “whole arena of historic preservation...there's a lot of gatekeeping that's going on. And I object to that because the National Park Service has excluded the input of a lot of people because they have these professional qualification standards.”² Beyond Integrity is about reinstating power in the hands of communities who have not been allowed to participate in their own world-making. It is about “expanding the individual person's ability to learn about places that matter to them and not relying on a professional to tell them what's significant and what's not significant. I think that that needs to be more widely democratized,” he says. It’s about “going beyond the professional...it's getting more members of traditionally underrepresented communities to have a seat at the table.”

Religious Sites in Preservation

Religious properties occupy a unique space in the world of preservation in that they are generally not considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Sites unless they are especially architecturally significant. This consideration has become an adopted convention in preservation at the local government level and is, in part, due to the general rule that matters of the church and state are to be kept separate. Furthermore, in the City of Seattle, the permission of the property owner is not a requisite for a landmark nomination, except in the case of places of worship. A Washington State Supreme Court decision mandates that places of worship cannot be designated as landmarks without the consent of the congregation that owns the property. In this project, I am considering the social aspects of religious properties that render them vehicles of the history and cultural identity of the wider community.

Past Preservation Work in Beacon Hill

The focus area of Mid and South Beacon Hill was selected because of the trace amounts of research that have been done on these sections of this particular neighborhood. Frederica Merrell and Mira Latoszek’s *Seattle's Beacon Hill* is one of the only texts available presenting an

² See Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section for further discussion.

overarching history of the neighborhood and was an indispensable resource. Additionally, the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods commissioned numerous essays and reports for the 2011 Southeast Seattle Community History Project detailing the history of the region and the people who have called Southeast Seattle home. However, this project was not specific to Beacon Hill as it also included adjacent neighborhoods like the Rainier Valley and Columbia City.

Despite the general absence of information, there have been efforts to identify historic sites in Beacon Hill. For instance, in 2019, the BHC compiled a list of historic properties in the neighborhood using the city's online inventory of historic sites. However, the available data primarily consisted of North Beacon Hill residences that were evaluated as potentially eligible for city landmarking based almost entirely on architectural significance. As such, there was little crossover with sites the neighbors told me they cared about preserving. In 2004, the Department of Neighborhoods published a Historic Context Statement specific to Beacon Hill, but once again, only focusing on North Beacon Hill (Tobin 2004: 8). As such, it was clear that more efforts needed to be directed towards documenting the stories of the Mid and South areas of the neighborhood.

Designated Beacon Hill Landmarks

As of 2023, the City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board has designated only seven landmarks in Beacon Hill. Of these seven, most have been nominated and designated on the basis of architectural history or without regard to cultural significance for underrepresented communities.

Beacon Hill First Baptist Church - 1607 S Forest St, Seattle, WA 98144

Located in North Beacon Hill, “this church was designed by locally prominent architect” Ellsworth Storey who is known for his unconventional designs which “inspired the Northwest Regional style and residential design” (Kreisman 1999: 58-59). The site was designated as a landmark in December 1981 “because it represented an outstanding example of Storey's work and because of its distinctive architectural style” (Criterion D and E) ([History Link](#)).

Black Property - 1319 12th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

In 1896, local businessman Frank D. Black constructed a “Swiss chalet style home” in North Beacon Hill ([History Link](#)). The estate featured “landscaping, driveways and walks, cobble retaining walls and stairs, a beehive-shaped milk cooler, a cobble gatehouse (or teahouse), cobble gateposts, and a Japanese garden” ([History Link](#)). The cobblestone gate lodge was composed of one large room with an adjoining “verandah that took advantage of a panoramic view of the city and Puget Sound. Although cobblestone was used in a decorative manner in Seattle, and no other extant building was it used as extensively, authentically, or carefully graded as at the Black estate” (Kreisman 1999: 59). The site was designated in December 1981 on the basis of its distinct architectural style (Criterion D) ([History Link](#)).

Cheasty Blvd South - Beacon Ave S to S Winthrop St & S Winthrop St to MLK Jr Way S

Cheasty Boulevard was originally a part of Seattle's 1903 Olmsted Plan, a system of parks and boulevards designed to connect all the way through the city. In their original proposal, “no resident would be more than one-half mile from a park” ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). Although the full plan was not adopted and established, much of it was and the boulevard is considered “a significant aspect of the city's heritage and cultural development” ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). The site was designated as a landmark in January 2003 due to its contribution to the heritage of the community (Criterion C), distinct architectural style (Criterion D), well-known designers (Criterion E), and role as an identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood (Criterion F).

Pacific Medical Center/ Former U.S. Marine Hospital - 1200 12th Ave S

Located at the very tip of North Beacon Hill, this iconic hospital is a signature landmark of the neighborhood and in the city. Originally built in 1932, the hospital has been a symbol of Beacon Hill; its “prominent Hilltop location... make this one of the most colorful and exciting buildings on the skyline” (Kreisman 1999: 62). The building emulates distinct characteristics of the art-deco architectural style and was designed by three prominent Seattle architects: Charles Bebb, Carl Gould, and John Graham ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). The site was designated as a landmark in August 1989 due to its contribution to the heritage of the community (Criterion C), distinct architectural style (Criterion D), well-known designers (Criterion E), and position as an identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood (Criterion F).



Pacific Medical Center

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Tower_%28Seattle%29

Seattle Fire Station #13 - 3601 Beacon Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

Located at the very north of Jefferson Park on Beacon Avenue, Fire Station #13 was completed in 1928. Between 1900 and 1910, Seattle’s population nearly tripled and there was a pressing need for expanded fire protection services. Fire Station #13 is one of the ten stations completed between 1921 and 1930; made of reinforced concrete, it replaced an earlier 1904 wood-frame fire station in North Beacon Hill. As the neighborhood expanded southward, a more centralized fire station was needed ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). The building was designated as a landmark in January 2005 because of its contribution to the heritage of the community (Criterion C), distinct architectural style (Criterion D), and role as an identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood (Criterion F).



Fire Station #13, just north of Jefferson Park

Source: <https://tinytrees.org/2016/06/20/love-letter-jefferson-park>

Turner-Koepf House / Jefferson Park Ladies' Improvement Club / Beacon Hill Garden House - 2336 15th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

Located in North Beacon Hill along 15th Avenue, the site is known to be the first home built on Beacon Hill in 1886 (Wilma and Curtis 2001). It was originally constructed by the Turner family as an Italianate style house. After the home was sold to the Koepf family in 1890, it was converted into a Queen Anne style. In 1924, “the Jefferson Park Ladies’ Improvement Club purchased and remodeled the house and conducted club events in the building” ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). In 1977, it switched hands once more to the Washington State Federation of Garden Clubs. As a community club-owned house, the site has served as a community meeting place for many different Beacon Hill organizations over the years. The building was designated as a landmark in April 2019 because of its contribution to the heritage of the community (Criterion C), distinct architectural style (Criterion D), and role as an identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood (Criterion F).



Beacon Hill Garden House

Source: <https://frontporch.seattle.gov/2019/01/24/landmarks-preservation-board-consider-nomination-turner-koepf-beacon-hill-garden-house/>

Van Asselt School - 7201 Beacon Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108

Built on the western edge of South Beacon Hill, the Van Asselt school was originally constructed in 1909. It is named for Henry Van Asselt, a Dutch immigrant who was the first white settler on Beacon Hill in September 1851. The Van Asselt school has moved several times and other schools have operated in the building, but the subject structure is known as Original Van Asselt. The architectural style of the building is a unique, “free interpretation of the Tudor style,” of which there are not many examples in the U.S. ([City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)). The site was designated as a landmark in May 2019 due to its contribution to the heritage of the community (Criterion C) and distinct architectural style (Criterion D).

The Pacific Medical Center and the Turner-Koepf/ Garden House are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, alongside El Centro de la Raza and Jimmie and Betty Eng’s House at 8310 Beacon Ave South.

Beyond this list of landmarks that successfully made it through the nomination and designation processes are the sites that were nominated but were denied landmark status. In 2010, the Beacon Reservoir Gateway met this fate, the Jefferson Park Golf Course in 2012, and the Jefferson Park Golf Clubhouse in 2013. In 2017 H&K Foods did not pass, Kimball Elementary School in 2020, and in 2021, Asa Mercer Middle School was denied.

Preservation through landmarking is not the best solution for every building. Sometimes, sites receive community verbal and written statements of support, as well as opposition to the nomination. For instance, in the case of Asa Mercer Middle School, the Landmarks Preservation Board received over twenty letters of opposition to the site's nomination. Over email correspondence with Erin Dougherty, Landmarks Coordinator for the Board, she explains that, especially in the case of public schools that often shuffle buildings, "there are instances in which the community has strong feelings about the significance of the school's history and its people, but do not think the significance resides with the building itself" (Dougherty 2023). In other cases, receiving landmark status provides communities with some degree of agency to have a say in what is happening in their developing neighborhoods. As Maria Batayola, Chair of the Beacon Hill Council wrote in her letter of support for the nomination of H&K Foods, "During this time of aggressive gentrification and displacement, the approval of its landmark status would allow us to influence the incoming development to include architectural features and functionalities that reflect the character of south Beacon Hill" (Batayola 2017).

Focus Sites

In considering which sites to delve into, I tried to be as representative as possible in such a limited list of the vast ethnic diversity of the community as well as highlighting the different kinds of sites communities can form in. These sites tell the stories of the neighborhood. Of the local grocery stores, of the parks, the schools, the places of worship, and the places of burial. They share stories of cultures coming and cultures going, of Japanese life and loss, of a family of artists, labor unions, Indigenous leadership, early European migrants, interracial activism, Filipino advocacy, and African American histories. In these places we can understand what it is that people love, what it is they fight for, and what it is they mourn the loss of. These sites tell the stories of the diverse, vibrant, and resilient communities that make up Beacon Hill. Those eleven sites are: El Centro de la Raza, the Ponce Torres Family House, the Rasmussen Family House, Day Moon Press, Jefferson Park, Watt Dhammacakkaram, Saint George Catholic Church, MacPherson's Fruit & Produce, Fou Lee Market & Deli, Comet Lodge Cemetery, and the African American Academy.

El Centro de la Raza

Historic Name: Beacon Hill Elementary School

Address: 2524 16th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

Parcel number: 057000-0340

Owner's name: El Centro de la Raza

Owner's Address: Same

Building or site type: Community Services Building

Date of construction: 1904



The front of El Centro de la Raza, previously Beacon Hill Elementary School, as viewed from Roberto Maestas Festival Street.
Source: <https://www.nps.gov/places/beacon-hill-school-el-centro-de-la-raza.htm>

Physical Description: The main entrance of this property faces Plaza Roberto Maestas and Roberto Maestas Festival Street. It is flanked on either side by mixed-use low-income apartments and community center facilities.

Statement of Significance:

El Centro de la Raza is an icon of civil rights activism—its story was one of the first things I learned about Beacon Hill. Not only is it a community center in its own neighborhood, it is a regional touchstone of civil rights history. The revered community center started as Beacon Hill Elementary School, one of the first schools on the hill, which closed and was left vacant in 1971 (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 119). On October 11, 1972, Roberto Maestas, a Spanish teacher at Franklin High School, who was frustrated with the decentralization and “decimation of Chicano-centered social services” led a three-month-long occupation of the then empty building (Cabotaje 2022).

Maestas was initially galvanized by a sit-in at Franklin High School led by the Black Student Union. Maestas, empathetic to their cause, “was the only teacher who stayed to hear their concerns” (Large 2010). Ron Chew, a lifelong Beacon Hill resident and decorated community leader himself had Maestas as his Spanish teacher and clearly recalls this event inspiring a change of identity for his teacher. “He was Robert Maestas and then, all of a sudden, he was Roberto Maestas.”

Maestas encouraged members of the community to rally behind his idea to repurpose the boarded-up building: “You can go here, and you can go there, you go elsewhere and good luck. or we can stick together and be a family” (Merrell and Latoszek 2004:119). On that October day, Maestas and a few other Chicano activists “posed as potential buyers for the vacant Beacon Hill School...after the Seattle School District facilities manager unlocked the front doors, 60 others hiding nearby strode toward the entrance” and the occupation began (Cabotaje 2022). For

three long months, “hundreds of activists slept on hardwood floors” in the abandoned building without running water or electricity (Cabotaje 2022). The occupation was only possible because it was a community effort. In support of the Chicano community, “like-minded activists of all races—Black, white, Asian, Indigenous—were [there]” (Cabotaje 2022). The activists in the building were upheld by the broader community: “...eight dollars here, groceries there, sleeping bags and electric heaters to make cold nights with a broken furnace more bearable, Chinese and Japanese and soul food, countless buckets of water ferried over from nearby restaurants and gas stations to make up for the busted plumbing...” (Cabotaje 2022). El Centro was made by the community, and it was made for the community.

On January 20, 1973, the Seattle City Council finally yielded the building to the activists who signed a 5-year lease at \$1 per year. The activism that El Centro is rooted in was one of the first attempts in the Seattle area to start a community institution that fights for better conditions for the people (Castaneda 2006). It is not only a community center for Chicanos but is dedicated to building “coalitions with activist groups rooted in other ethnic communities” as well (Castaneda 2006).



“In December 1972, Larry Gossett, Estela Ortega, and Roberto Maestas (top) celebrate the successful school occupation.”

Source: Tom Barlet / MOHAI - <https://www.seattletimes.com/news-and-city-life/2022/03/el-centro-de-la-raza-beacon-hill-occupied-protest-seattle>

Roberto Maestas, who passed away in 2010, summarized what kind of place El Centro is, which, through what I have learned from neighbors, is also representative of the kind of place that is Beacon Hill. “We’ve been here 30 years now. Thousands of people have come here to learn, read, write, grow, and talk about what’s happening in the world. We have programs for little kids, for elders, for young people in between. We find jobs for people, and we feed people who don’t have any food. We send out young people to study in other places in the world. We have baptisms, wakes, memorials. It’s a three-ring circus. I’m not sure how it all happened, but it’s a beautiful place because everybody’s welcome. We sing, we dance, we party, we work, we rejoice, we learn, we argue, we bicker, we make foolish mistakes, and we try to correct them, and we love everybody. That’s what we do” (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 120).

El Centro de la Raza is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, however, the information in the National Register nomination is mainly related to its history as Beacon Hill Elementary School, not the history of the community services organization that is El Centro de la

Raza. Additionally, El Centro is not a Seattle Landmark, nor is it listed in the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods' database of historic sites. In 2019, the Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation sponsored a context study of Latino heritage in the Greater Seattle area. In the report that came out of this project, the authors thoroughly review the history of El Centro. It is worth noting that a potential related site of significance is the Maestas family home, which could be identified and explored through further research.

For additional reading, consider:

- [El Centro de la Raza website](#)
- [National Park Service: Beacon Hill School--El Centro de la Raza](#)
- [History Link: Chicano/Latino Activism in Seattle, 1960s-1970s](#)
- [Latino Heritage of Greater Seattle - Context Survey](#)

Ponce Torres Family House

Address: 1346 13th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

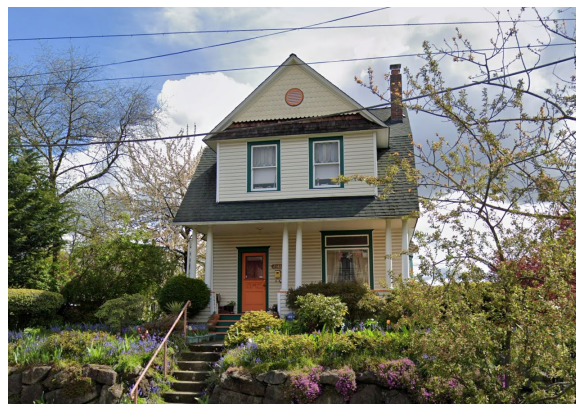
Parcel number: 766060-0050

Owner's name: Flordeliza E. Torres

Owner's Address: Same

Building or site type: Multi-family home

Date of construction: 1903



The front of the Ponce Torres family house, as viewed from 13th Avenue.
Source: https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/1346-13th-Ave-S-Seattle-WA-98144/49050367_zpid/

Physical Description: Built in 1903, this two-and-a-half story Queen Anne style house is on the corner of South Atlantic Street and Thirteenth Avenue South. The front of the building is oriented towards Thirteenth Avenue.

Statement of Significance:

Ponce Torres, a Filipino American community leader, immigrated to Seattle in 1925. From 1949 through 1970, Torres lived in this home on the north end of Beacon Hill (Seattle Historic Sites Database). In 1933, Torres helped to establish the first Filipino-led labor union in the United States: the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union. This organization was formed by “Alaskeros” — Filipino salmon processing workers who went up to Alaskan fish canneries during the summers. The Torres family provided housing for many Alaskeros who were in Seattle in between work.



Alaskeros processing salmon in a fish cannery.
Source: <https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/cwflu.html>

Many young Filipino men came to work in the United States in the 1920s after the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 prevented Chinese and Japanese workers—the preceding dominant groups of migrant laborers—from entering the country. However, because the Philippines was a U.S. territory, Filipinos were considered U.S. nationals. As such, “they had the right to travel to the mainland even after immigration laws prevented other Asians from doing so” (Fresco 1999). Once in the United States, Filipino workers were only hired for the least desirable forms of work and experienced rampant discrimination and hostility in the workplace. Alaskeros sought out support from one another. The union was a novel organization at the time that was founded on the strong sense of community amongst Alaskeros. The Union's motto was “Unity is Strength” (Fresco 1999). In 1933, the organization started with 200 members, three years later, in 1936,

membership had risen to 2,000 (Fresco 1999). In the 1940s, Torres became a leader of the union, known at the time as Local 7 of UCAPAWA, and later as Local 37 ILWU.

Torres' widow, Flordeliza still owns the house today and lives there with her daughter Annaliza.

For additional reading, consider:

- [University of Washington Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project: Cannery Workers' and Farm Laborers' Union 1933-39](#)
- [History Link - Filipino Cannery Workers](#)

Rasmussen Family House

Address: 3425 21st Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

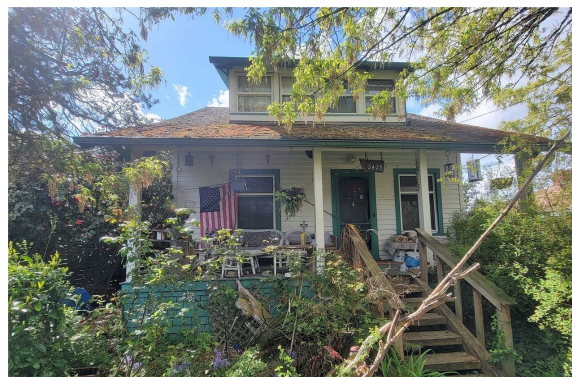
Parcel number: 644440-0010

Owner's name: Meadowlark Holdings LLC

Owner's Address: 1920 N 34th St, Seattle, WA 98103

Building or site type: Single-family home

Date of construction: 1908³



The front steps and porch of the Rasmussen house

Source: <https://www.redfin.com/WA/Seattle/3425-21st-Ave-S-98144/home/169007>

Physical Description: Built in 1908, this Craftsman style home is located immediately north of the Jefferson Park Golf Course. A wooden set of stairs leads up to a wide porch at the front of the house.

Statement of Significance:

The Rasmussen House has been home to generations of Indigenous leaders on the Duwamish Tribal Council. The home was originally built by Nellie Tuttle and Myron Overaker in 1908. The land was initially set aside as School Trust Lands but was later sold to the couple (Cummings 2020: 67-68). In fact, this area of Beacon Hill was platted by Overaker and Tuttle and became known as Overaker's Plat (Joseph 2002: 2-3). The family's role in shaping and stewarding this land cannot be overstated and their continued presence on Duwamish land for generations is remarkable. Three generations after the house was constructed, "Nellie's granddaughter, Ann Rasmussen, raised her own children in the home, steeped in the stories of their ancestors and of the homestead that sheltered their family in the years after the treaties dispossessed the Duwamish of their lands" (Cummings 2020: 57). This continuity is in part possible because of the practice of interracial marriage between white settlers and the Duwamish. Ann's son, James Rasmussen, explains this as a part of his descendency: his Duwamish ancestor, "Anne Tuttle, she was royalty with the Duwamish Tribe, high-born. And Abner Tuttle was a Civil War hero...and [was] considered worthy of her. And the way I've learned it is, it was a way for Duwamish people to survive here in town."

In 2002, JonLee Joseph carried out the Duwamish Tribe Oral History Project, speaking with a number of Duwamish individuals in the Seattle area with one clear research question: "What does it mean to you to be Duwamish?" Joseph spoke with Ann and James Rasmussen

³ B.J. Cummings' book cites this date as 1897—it is possible that the date Nellie Tuttle and Myron Overaker originally moved to this plot of land, was in 1897. As the land was owned by the state when they moved there, it is likely the years they moved there, built the house, and officially received the deed to this house are different (Cummings 2020: 67-68). The 1908 date comes from the site's property record card at the Puget Sound Regional Archives.

who, in answering this question, both made reference to their home on Beacon Hill. Ann recalled



the frequent family reunions and the stable sense of place their home offered her and her family, as well as Duwamish individuals at the end of their lives. The Rasmussen House was a destination for folks who wished to have a proper and culturally appropriate burial. “They all came to the house to die...I think everybody knew that my grandfather would bury them,” she said. “And that was important. They wanted to be buried and so my grandfather buried [them]” (Joseph 2002: 4-5).

The back of the Rasmussen house, as seen from the backyard.

Source: <https://www.redfin.com/WA/Seattle/3425-21st-Ave-S-98144/home/169007>

Being raised in this house on Duwamish land has had a tremendous impact on James’ sense of home and place: “I wasn’t raised on a reservation, my grandfather would never let it happen to us...” (Joseph 2002: 32). To James, the house is intertwined with what it means to be Duwamish. “The way I look at it, it’s a sense of home. It’s a sense of place and that’s something that’s really hard to relate to somebody who doesn’t have that...the roots that I have in this house are not pioneer roots. They go deeper than that” (Joseph 2002: 39-40). As a leader in ecological activism on behalf of the Duwamish River, James’ care for his home extends beyond the physical house, into the neighborhood, the hill, and the region itself. He calls back to Chief Seattle’s famous speech: “Every place in this land is sacred to my people. It’s what I feel, you know, this is my home, this is my home. Everything here is important to me” (Joseph 2002: 41-42). James told Joseph that he has no desire to live anywhere else, as nowhere else is his home: “I want to live here, because this is where I’m supposed to be” (Joseph 2002: 1-2).



James Rasmussen by the Duwamish River.

Source: <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/this-departing-seattle-activist-helped-save-the-duwamish-river-heres-what-he-wants-you-to-know/>

In May 2022, the Rasmussen house was sold to Buffalo Ventures LLC and James Rasmussen has since moved out of state (Beekman 2022).

For additional reading, consider:

- [The River That Made Seattle by BJ Cummings](#)
- [Duwamish Tribe Oral History Project 2002 by JonLee Joseph](#)
- [Seattle Times article: This departing Seattle activist helped save the Duwamish River. Here’s what he wants you to know](#)

Day Moon Press

Historic name(s): Kinsel Drugs, Falsetto Family grocery store, Japanese family grocery store

Address: 3320 Beacon Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144

Parcel number: 365010-0030

Owner's name: Jack LeNoir and Maura Shapley

Owner's Address: Same

Building or site type: Mixed-use, apartment above store

Date of construction: 1930



The Day Moon Press storefront, an old printing press is typically visible through their windows

Photo by Day Moon Press

Physical Description: This two story brick building, built in 1930, is a combined commercial/apartment building. It is on Beacon Avenue South just north of Jefferson Park.

Statement of Significance:

Day Moon Press is a letterpress print shop that has been in operation for over 40 years. It was started by Maura Shapley and Jack LeNoir in 1976 and is now operated by their daughter Tess LeNoir, who is a fourth-generation printer. The family still lives in the apartment above the shop.

The brick building that is now the print shop has passed through many family-owned businesses over the years. Shapley tells me when she and Jack moved to Beacon Hill in 1982, they bought it from acquaintances of theirs who used it as an artists' studio. The building was constructed in 1930 by its first owners, the Kinsel Family, who operated it as a small drugstore. After Mr. Kinsel died in the 1940s, Mrs. Kinsel sold the building to the Falsetto Family who ran a grocery store until the early 1970s. From the Falsettos, it once again switched hands to a Japanese family who also ran the grocery for a few years until they sold it to Shapley's acquaintances.



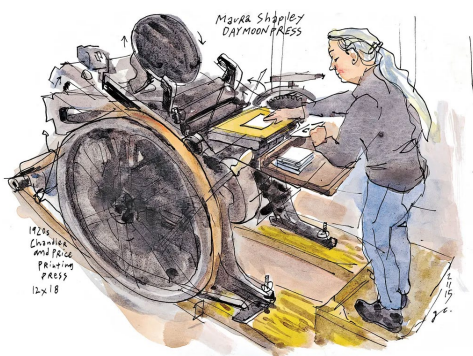
Maura Shapley + family dog Cici

Source: <https://violajgaskell.blog/2014/11/07/dog-days/>

Shapley has heard stories from this time when her home was a store and her backyard was a play area for the community. "When we first moved in here...I did have people stopping in and actually telling these stories about their history with this building. They were older folk

who have lived in the neighborhood forever and talked about ‘Yeah, I’d come in and I’d get what I wanted at the store, and then we would go out the back and sit by the pond’” she reiterates, gesturing to the backyard. “So, people actually literally passing through the building to the backyard and hanging by the pond and throwing things in.”

The backyard has not been the only gathering spot at 3320—Shapley tells me about early morning interactions she and her daughters would have when they left for school in the morning. “People at the bus stop—which was right there,” she says, pointing out the shop’s front window, “would harbor in the doorway here...because it’s raining out there, of course, you’re going to stand in the doorway. For a very long time when the bus stop was still here...we would very often have to open the door and move through a couple of people who’d be standing there sheltering in the doorway. It was really actually fun for me, I liked that,” she reminisces. “Often it was people I couldn’t say more than ‘hi’ to, but it was a really nice intersection with neighbors who didn’t necessarily speak English very well or feel comfortable talking to me, but it would be just a place where I could warmly greet people who wouldn’t ever have anything to do with what I did inside, it was just a sweet little intersection.”



An illustration of Maura Shapley operating one of Day Moon’s printing presses.
Sketch by Gabriel Campanari - Seattle Times

When Shapley and her husband first moved into their home, they didn’t know anything about living on Beacon Hill, it was the building that were after, and it fit their needs like a glove. They sought after a combined live-work space that had the dimensions to fit their business. Although the downstairs business area required some urgent reworking when the Day Moon Pressers moved in, “the apartment itself is beautiful. It was not messed with very much,” Shapley tells me. “Literally the varnish on the windowsills and the door frames is the same as when it was built, no one’s ever touched it.”

Day Moon Press is situated on a quiet block just north of Jefferson Park and just south of the busier Beacon Avenue business district in North Beacon Hill. It is one of the only businesses on the block that has remained afloat for so long. The string of businesses across the street resurface and get priced out every few years, they explain to me. LeNoir notes the important fact that a key reason their business is still in operation is because her family owns the building. “We don’t exist if we were paying rent,” she says, both to me and her mom. “So, the fact that you own the building is the only reason that this is viable.” Shapley tells me that they paid off the building as soon as they could, but when her kids were growing up, she considered moving her family to a more typical, standalone house. Upon considering other options, that was simply not what they

cared about or wanted. She reflects on the longevity of her family's tenure in this building, the only place her daughters had ever lived before going off to college, and jests that this is the nature of owning a business that requires machines that weigh as much as her printing presses do. "Twelve tons of equipment does tend to keep you in place," she laughs.

For additional reading, consider:

- [Day Moon Press website](#)
- [Seattle Times article: Inside a time capsule where printing by hand still thrives](#)

Jefferson Park

Address: 3801 Beacon Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108

Parcel number: 162404-9270

Owner's name: City of Seattle Public Utilities and Seattle Parks Department

Owner's Address: 700 5th Ave STE 4900-RPS, PO Box 34018, Seattle, WA 98124"

Building or site type: Park

Date of construction: 1898



Jefferson Park slides and Splash Pads.

Source: <https://www.thatoundsawesome.com/listing/jefferson-park-seattle/>

Physical Description: Jefferson Park is a 52.4-acre park in the middle of Beacon Hill. The park sits partially atop a water reservoir which was covered in 2009. It includes the Jefferson Park Golf Course, the Jefferson Community Center, tennis courts, and the Food Forest, among other amenities.

Statement of Significance:

Parks are an undeniably significant part of their communities and Jefferson Park is no exception. Larry Matsuda tells me about how growing up across the street from another local park, “Beacon Hill Park, was a big deal...There were four of us who lived in a one-bedroom apartment because of housing and redlining...it actually could drive you nuts,” he explains. “So, I spent a lot of time in the park, playing basketball, baseball, tennis, anything we could get out of the house...the park was an extension of our house in many ways...all my friends were there, and we had fun.” This fundamental role of sports in growing up on Beacon Hill was echoed by



Roberto Maestas, “Whenever thing's got tough, horrible sad things, deprivation, and poverty, and all the shit that goes with it got hard, we would just get a baseball and play and play and play and play” (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 12). Just about every neighbor I spoke with mentioned a connection to the park, learning to ride bikes, going for walks, and attending community events. As such, Jefferson Park is both metaphorically and literally at the center of neighborhood life on Beacon Hill.

Jefferson Park Community Recreation Center.

Source: <https://www.seattle.gov/parks/all-community-centers/jefferson-community-center>

The site that is now Jefferson Park was initially set aside as School Trust Lands, and later, an isolation hospital was established on the grounds. After changing hands to the City of

Seattle in 1898, the park was included in the Olmsted Brothers' plan to establish a connective parks system throughout the city (Wilma and Hinchliff 2001). In 1909, inmates in Seattle's Municipal Workhouse and Stockage "worked off their sentences by clearing the land set aside for Jefferson Park" and the adjacent golf course (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 63). During World War II, the park became a G.I. recreation center, primarily occupying "the southern portion of the park" (Tobin 2004: 43).

Before the reservoir was covered, the park offered only a modest playground and a bleak, chain-link fence topped with barbed wire surrounded the reservoir. Through the advocacy of the neighbors via the Jefferson Park Alliance, the park was reconstructed and had an expansive reopening in 2010. This revamping also had an impact on local businesses surrounding the park. Maura Shapley of Day Moon Press explains Jefferson Park's reconstruction as a turning point in the neighborhood. "We really did start seeing foot traffic from neighbors...walking down to the park and coming back again," she says, pointing out a person with a stroller passing by the window as we're speaking. "It definitely made a difference to me, seeing all these people gone by with strollers, families." Although Shapley and her family share many memories of the old Jefferson Park, having such a high-quality facility in their neighborhood made a difference in what it felt like to live there. "Just getting out there and getting that view of downtown Seattle from here... and having this beautiful park, it really felt like a sense of ownership in place that was secure and lovely and beautiful."



View of Downtown Seattle from Jefferson Park

Source: <https://beautifulwashington.com/king-county/parks/seattle/552-jefferson-park.html>

Jefferson Park Golf Course

Jefferson Park Golf Course, the first municipal golf course in Seattle opened in 1915 (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 63). The course was, and still is, a noteworthy site for kids growing up on Beacon Hill. Pete Caso caddied at the course as a kid, sharing that he and his friends learned a lot from the game of golf, how to work, as well as how to play: "We grew up in this clubhouse" (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 64).



Jefferson Park Golf Course

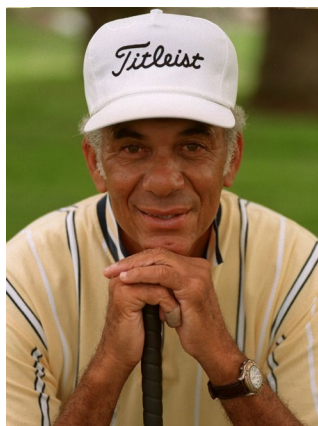
Source: <https://www.golfnow.com/courses/1037843-jefferson-park-golf-course-details>

The clubhouse was also an important place for deciding who was welcome on Beacon Hill. These rules on exclusivity started with the Board of Park Commissioners closing the course to women during certain days and times, which, after immediate protest, was later rescinded. “As a municipal golf course, Jefferson Park was intended to be open to anybody: Beacon Hill’s diverse ethnic population was welcome, and the low cost of play made the sport accessible to the working class. “By the end of World War II, African Americans and Asian Americans were becoming more active in the sport,” but they were denied access to private golf clubs and thus tournaments on the basis of their race (Wilma and Hinchliff 2001). In response to this exclusion and bans on the county level, minority golfers took matters into their own hands and founded their own clubs. The Seattle Cascade Golf Club (1951) and the Fir State Golf Club (1947) opened the door to make Jefferson Park’s Golf Course a true public golf course. Both of these clubs are still in operation and continue to guide a diverse new generation of golfers (Wilma and Hinchliff 2001).



Jefferson Park Golf Course Clubhouse

Source: <https://www.bassettiarch.com/portfoliodetails/jeffersonparkgc>



The BHC is leading an effort to get Seattle Parks and Recreation to rename the Golf Course after African American golfer Bill Wright Jr., who grew up on Beacon Hill, learned to golf at Jefferson Park, and was the first Black golfer to win the United States Golf Association U.S. Public Links tournament in 1959 (Beacon Hill Council 2023).

Bill Wright Jr., African American golf champion.

Source: <https://www.bassettiarch.com/portfoliodetails/jeffersonparkgc>

Samoan Cricket League

The Seattle Samoan Cricket League was formed in 1986, officially organizing a highly valued pastime. “About 22,000 people of Samoan descent live in Washington” and teams from all over the Puget Sound area come to the Jefferson Park Playfield, atop the now-covered reservoir, to compete in Seattle’s league (Doughton 2019). On most Saturdays during the warm months, several hundred Samoans can be found at the playfield and along its sidelines. With four games running every weekend and matches lasting one or two hours, it is a daylong affair (Chinn 2011).

The history of Samoan cricket, kirikiti, begins in the 1880s when it was brought to the Samoan Islands by way of British missionary expeditions (Kemezis 2010). Since then, however, kirikiti has taken on a distinctly Samoan twist, turning a rather uptight sport into a lively game, electric with vibrancy and steeped in cultural value. This tradition is unique in Samoa amongst other Polynesian cultures, rendering it even more significant for Samoan people.

For the Samoan diaspora in the Seattle area, the league represented an opportunity to gather, to break bread, to dance and sing, and to be with one another. The “league educates Samoan American children in their heritage and provides an opportunity to connect to their parents and grandparents” (Kemezis 2010). It offers American-born youth a sense of guidance, supportive role models, and an opportunity to learn about teamwork and work ethic. The league’s presence in the lives of youth also offers an alternative to patterns of gang membership in the Samoan community. Ultimately, there is a simple desire for the youth of the community “to get along with each other...stay out of trouble, and learn about our culture,” says team captain Malaki Feo (Doughton 2019). Members of the older generations are committed to keeping this tradition alive “as a way to connect young people to a history and heritage that might otherwise be lost” (Doughton 2019).

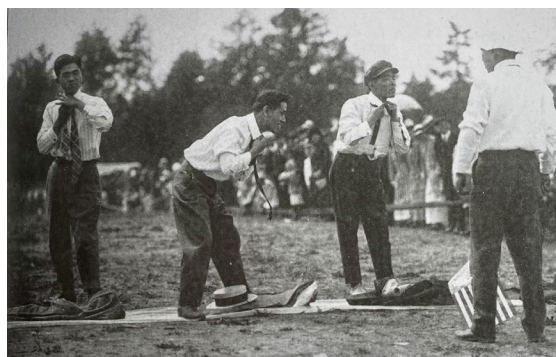


Kirikiti teammates run past each other on a concrete pitch at Jefferson Park.

Photo by Ellen M. Banner, <https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/0825-cricket/>

Japanese American Picnics

Before World War II, the Japanese Language School, a thriving after-school program serving the then-bustling Japantown, hosted annual picnics in Jefferson Park for the Japanese American community. Larry Matsuda shares with me what he remembers his mother telling him about the tradition. Families would bring blankets to sit on and “they would have contests, like sack races, wheelbarrow races, all kinds of stuff and they offer prizes like sacks of rice, things like that,” he reminisces. “My mother participated...and I believe she won at least one three-legged race.” These picnics were highly valued and attended because of the dense and vibrant population of Japantown in the International District.



An event symbolic of the blend of Japanese and American cultures: “This photo shows the adult relay race at a Japanese American picnic, c. 1920. The men race to the center line, put on a traditional kimono costume, race to the end line and then back to the center line. As shown here, they then remove the traditional costume, put on a modern hat and tie, and then run to the finish line” (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 45).

Source: Seattle’s Beacon Hill by Frederica Merrell and Mira Latoszek

However, after the war, when Japanese Americans returned to Seattle from the internment camps they were suddenly forced to in 1942, “they couldn't resettle there,” Matsuda explains. Their homes were repopulated by new waves of migrants, and rampant redlining practices made it difficult to find new housing. “The businesses declined, people were spread out, people didn't return, and so the Language School didn't have the kind of nearby capacity of people” to continue the Jefferson Park picnic tradition. Many Japanese Americans resettled in Beacon Hill because discriminatory housing practices prevented them from finding new homes elsewhere. “My parents tried to get a loan in the 1950s and no bank in Seattle would lend to them. Not one bank,” Matsuda tells me. After hearing of a bank up in Bremerton that would lend to Japanese, they made the trip to the Kitsap Peninsula and were finally able to get the mortgage money for a home for their family.

Additionally, after the war, proclaiming one's Japanese identity “was not popular,” Matsuda says. “People wanted to be American because it was because they were Japanese that they were put in prison.”

For additional reading, consider:

- [Seattle Times: Samoa's lively version of cricket turns Jefferson Park into 'a little piece of home'](#)
- [History Link: Seattle Samoan Cricket League forms in 1986](#)
- [History Link: Jefferson Park Municipal Golf Course](#)
- [Jefferson Park Alliance](#)

Watt Dhammacakkaram

Common Name: Watt Chas

Address: 3006 S Juneau St

Parcel number(s): 785700-1005

Owner's name: Khmer Buddhist Society

Owner's Address: 3008 S Juneau St, Seattle, WA 98108

Building or site type: Buddhist temple

Date of construction: 1989



Watt Chas as seen from the top of the adjacent hill.

Photo by author

Two additional adjacent properties:

Address: 3014 S Juneau St

Parcel number(s): 785700-1000

Building or site type: Parking lot

Address: 3021 S Juneau St

Parcel number(s): 785700-1110

Building or site type: Single family residence, vacant

Date of construction: 1906

Physical Description: A three-story, bright orange Cambodian Buddhist temple peculiarly isolated in a corner at the bottom of Juneau Street. A vibrant, pink stair structure leads up to the adjacent plot, where a large Buddha sculpture sits. The top of this hill beside the temple also serves as the parking lot, the edge of which appears to be a cliffside.

Statement of Significance:

Watt Dhammacakkaram is the oldest Cambodian Buddhist temple in Washington State, and is also the temple my family has attended for the last 25 years. As a Cambodian American myself, I was excited by the coincidence of this familiar site falling into the focus area of this project. The temple is colloquially known as Watt Chas, “watt” meaning “temple”⁴ and “chas” meaning “old” in Khmer. There are few people who hold the institutional memory of the Watt and one of them is Larry Seng, President of the Khmer Buddhist Society from 2011-2019. He is also, conveniently, my uncle. He tells me that the Watt was founded in 1982 by Khmer refugees who, at the time, lived in Holly Park, one of the two main housing projects on Beacon Hill. This effort was led by Ung Mean, head of an old Khmer family in Seattle. This initial group sought a place to create a temple for their community and found a two-story, three-bedroom house at the end of Juneau St. They pooled their funds and were able to establish a home for the Khmer Buddhist Society.



Larry Seng, previous President of Khmer Buddhist Society

⁴ A note on spelling: the transliteration of temple in English can be interchangeably spelled both “watt” and “wat.”

Photo by Larry Seng

Many Cambodian traditions are deeply linked with Buddhism; the religion has existed in Cambodia since the 13th century. As such, the Watt is an extremely significant center of the Khmer community, especially for diasporic populations who seek a connection to their home cultures and traditions (Woolsey 2023: 16). Khmer Americans I spoke with expressed that their visits to the temple were core childhood experiences and something that marked their relationships with their families and their Khmer identities (Woolsey 2023: 17). Kevin Reang, a second-generation Khmer American who was born and raised in White Center, just a 15-minute drive from Watt Chas, expresses a strong sense of connection when visiting the watt: “I feel more connected to myself and our people and our culture.” (Woolsey 2023: 17). The significance of the watt as a site of social organization can only be fully understood after acknowledging how the Cambodian diaspora and Cambodian Buddhism are uniquely marked by the experience of the Khmer Rouge, a genocidal event that occurred in the late 1970s. This is the reason that many Khmer refugees are in Seattle to begin with. “For Cambodian immigrants, the wat is an especially delicate vehicle for the preservation of a culture that was nearly exterminated. Kevin explains the profundity of this role: ‘The wat is a place to be with your people and a place of belonging and home, especially because I think many of our parents have difficult and negative memories of what Srok Khmer was like and so being at the wat is a way for them to be home with all the good things and all the good people’” (Woolsey 2023: 22).



The temple's main entrance.

Photo by author

After a fire in 1991, the original structure was lost, and they began to rebuild on another part of the property. In 2008, an ongoing lawsuit between the temple's monks and overseeing board coupled with a second fire closed the temple's doors for years. But in May 2011, Seng was determined to reestablish this core of the Khmer community. The congregation voted in a new board and Seng was elected president. He painstakingly renewed all of the temple's paperwork that had expired during the time it was closed and strived to get the temple licensed as a commercial entity. In 2012, Watt Chas reopened to the community for festivals and ceremonies, and monks were invited to return to the temple to live full-time.

Before every large festival and ceremony at the Watt, Seng makes a round in the surrounding neighborhood to let neighbors know of the coming noise and traffic. He tells me that many of the neighbors are “so nice,” even opening up their own driveways for additional parking if needed. Beyond this amicable exchange, Seng laments the fact that the temple is not able to engage with the larger community of Beacon Hill given the divisive language barrier. The

monks, many of them newly sponsored to the United States, “don't speak English. When the monks don't speak English...they cannot communicate because neighbors all English speaking.” Betty Jean Williamson lives right up the street from the Watt and she recognizes that “it's a regional center, and that's true with many of the churches. The original immigrants may have lived here, but over time they've moved away. But those centers that were...their spiritual centers remain. And so they commute.”

And commute they do. When my mom, grandma, and I were making this very journey down to the Watt during the course of this project, I was telling them about the great coincidence that the temple falls into this research, pointing out sites I had been learning about as we passed by them. This place is called Beacon Hill, I explained. “Beacon Hill?” my mom repeated, trying the words out like she was saying them for the first time. It was then that I realized that although they have been coming to this neighborhood for longer than I have been alive, it is not known to them as Beacon Hill. Despite weaving through the neighborhood from I-5, down 15th Ave alongside Jefferson Park, past MacPherson's and the VA Hospital on Columbian Way, right by Fou Lee and Seattle Super Market as we turn right onto Beacon Avenue, they are not coming to Beacon Hill, they are coming to Watt Chas.



The vibrantly colorful main altar within the temple, one main Buddha sculpture sits with other smaller Buddhas, flowers, candles, incense, and other offerings.

Photo by author

The relationship between the temple and the neighborhood is loose, to say the least. Just as Williamson explains, the Watt primarily serves a community that does not live near it and does not know much about what surrounds it. It is for this reason that, prior to this project, I was completely unaware of the area surrounding the temple. To me, Beacon Hill was the temple grounds, its edges the cliffside that surrounds the parking lot I was carefully instructed not to tread too close to as a child. In the course of this research, when I told people about the existence of a vibrant Khmer temple in Beacon Hill, many reacted with a surprise that mirrored my mom and grandma's lack of familiarity with Beacon Hill: “I had no idea that was there,” they'd say, which is fair. The temple only has the capacity and general interest in serving the Cambodian diaspora, and if one is not a part of that group or doesn't live nearby, it is likely that they would have never heard of this gem hidden in a crevasse at the bottom of Juneau Street.

Despite the generally distant connection, there is at least mutual concern between the Watt and its neighbors: the looming threat of development. In 2018, Seng refinanced his own home in order to personally purchase a house that went up for sale immediately next to the Watt.

This was “critical,” he says. “I really work hard for that place, otherwise, they going to build another seven house right there on that one-acre land...and when they build a house, the temple cannot extend the land no more, no matter how much money you have...it's all done.” He eventually transferred the title over to the Khmer Buddhist Society and added a third parcel to the Watt’s ownership. In the coming years, they hope to construct a Cambodian Community Hall at this site. Seng has high hopes for the impact this will have on the Khmer community in the Seattle area. “My goal, I really want the temple to be useful for the community,” he says. He wants this site to serve as a common meeting place, a location for Khmer language classes for the youth, and caregiving for the elders. At the end of the day, Seng’s goal is a sense of peace for his community. A place where they can rest after turmoil has lined their lives. “I have a big picture there,” he tells me. “I want to create that place to be not just a temple, but a garden, the place for people to enjoy under the trees... a park for people to gather, have a picnic...birthday parties, wedding parties...a lot of trees, plant a lot of flowers.”



The temple’s ornate sign one would see as they drive into the temple grounds.

Photo by author

Saint George Catholic Church

Address: 5306 13th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108

Parcel number: 792510-0200

Owner's name: Corporation of the Catholic Archbishop of Seattle (CCAS Property & Construction)

Owner's Address: 710 9th Ave, Seattle, WA 98104

Building or site type: Church

Date of construction: 1952



Saint George Catholic Church as viewed from the street below, stairs leading up into the building.

Source: Dominick DT - Google Maps

Physical Description: Constructed in 1952, this two-story Spanish Eclectic–styled church sits on the corner of 13th Avenue South and South Bennett Street. The main sanctuary faces 13th Avenue South where a wide set of stairs leads from the street to the main level.

Statement of Significance:

In 1903, the Catholic community in Georgetown started St. George Parish and as the congregation grew, they moved to the church’s current location in 1952. The church is a representative of Beacon Hill’s historical and contemporary diversity.

Many of the churches in Beacon Hill, both Catholic and Protestant, served a broad mix of European immigrants (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 107). St. George was no exception. In the early days, their “congregation consisted of Austrians, Belgians, French, Irish, Italians, Germans, Poles and Spaniards” (St. George Parish). Churches are the site of many important life events, baptisms, weddings, funerals, as well as social events like dances and potlucks, and thus became “... important social centers for the various ethnic communities on the hill, providing a source of identity and opportunities for community gathering, celebrations, and youth education” (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 108). Eventually, as new immigrants from Asia moved into the neighborhood, the congregation expanded even more. “In 1980, the Korean Catholic community was invited to use worship space” and the two communities became close, sharing the space as well as their faith (St. George Parish).

In the early 1920s, the church founded the adjoining St. George Parish School, which has always served a diverse student body. Initially, this included “Austrians, French, Irish, Belgians, Italians, Bavarians, Poles, and Hispanics. This gradually shifted; and, today, the students are predominately Caucasian, Filipino, Asian, and Pacific Islanders” (Seattle Historic Sites Database).

Betty Jean Williamson explains the different layers of affiliation communities have with their local churches. Oftentimes, places of worship are connected to different ethnic immigrant groups, this, in some cases, is because churches often sponsor refugees out of camps. Once in the U.S., these new migrants depend on the church for support in acclimating to their new homes and thus renders the church a core part of that new community. Furthermore, Williamson adds, a secular affiliation between churches and neighbors developed when women began to enter the workforce in higher numbers and churches started offering childcare services.

Christina Olson, a third-generation Beacon Hill resident, describes how over time, St. George's parish changes in accordance with the needs of these new migrant groups coming into the community. This is one of the core components of the Parish's character. As the church itself puts it, the history of the Parish "has been enriched by the cultural heritage of parishioners: many coming, first, from European lands; and later from Pacific rim countries. This diversity of people, united in one faith, has proven to be one of the great strengths of St. George" (St. George Parish).



The main chapel of Saint George Catholic Church, sunlight filters through the windows.

Source: Dominick DT - Google Maps

For additional reading, consider:

- [St. George Parish website](#)
- [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Historic Sites Database: 5306 13th Ave](#)

MacPherson's Fruit & Produce

Address: 4500 15th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108

Parcel number: 367940-1205

Owner's name: Gregory James MacPherson

Owner's Address: Same

Building or site type: Grocery store

Date of construction: 1960



MacPherson's' open-air interior is visible from the street behind their vibrant, handwritten signs.

Source: MacPherson's Fruit & Produce

Physical Description: Constructed in 1960, this one-story marketplace has a forest-green exterior and sits at the fork of South Columbian Way and 15th Avenue South. The interior of the open-air fruit market is visible from the street behind the bright, handwritten produce signs and beneath the iconic “MacPherson's Fruit & Produce” sign.

Statement of Significance:

“Oh, everybody knows MacPherson’s, you’ve got to do MacPherson’s.” This is a line I heard many times over during the course of this summer, demonstrating the passion with which neighbors regard this classic Beacon Hill fruit stand. MacPherson's Fruit & Produce is well-loved by the community for its low prices, busy, open-air atmosphere, and diverse range of products.

Christina Olson speaks highly of MacPherson's, explaining their dedication to hiring locally and acting as a bustling crossroads for the neighborhood’s various migrant communities. They specialize their products with the changing needs of Beacon Hill’s diverse and constantly revolving immigrant community. Betty Jean Williamson echoes this sentiment of how MacPherson’s is a worthy representative of the neighborhood: “It's a great place to see a cross-section of our community,” she says. “There's always multiple languages being spoken by the shoppers there whenever you go.” A well-loved marketplace offers more to its surrounding community than just food, especially when its inventory is familiar, fresh, and low-cost. “Grocery stores...were one source of support for the new immigrants” moving into Beacon Hill (Merrell and Latoszek 2004: 42). An affordable place to shop alleviates financial insecurity and stress for neighbors and has the power to make other endeavors possible. For instance, Williamson tells me how the low prices at MacPherson’s is what got her through school, “I would go shopping at MacPherson's and buy the cheapest produce known to man...and because I could get the produce so cheap, it put me through massage school.”

Jennifer Joy, a Beacon Hill local, spells out her love for the market in a Google review: “Long live MacPherson's!” they proclaim. “I really love the open-air shopping experience, great prices, great produce, really friendly staff. Great location in a neighborhood that absolutely needs their existence.”



MacPherson's' open-air interior—an array of fruit and vegetable pallets are on display.

Source: Pablo Zayas - Google Maps

Fou Lee Market & Deli

Address: 2050 S Columbian Way, Seattle, WA 98108

Parcel number: 367790-0050

Owner's name: Lewis Steven

Owner's Address: PO Box 97010, Kent, WA 98064

Building or site type: Grocery store

Date of construction: 1963



The Beacon Ave S facing side of Fou Lee Market & Deli.

Source: <https://intentionalist.com/b/foule-market/>

Physical Description: Located on the corner of Beacon Way South and South Columbian Way, Fou Lee is a short one-story building. The main entrance faces Beacon Way S.

Statement of Significance:

Fou Lee is a regionally known Asian marketplace—they match their diverse customer base with their wide range of imported Asian grocery products. Their shelves are constantly stacked high and packed to the brim. Betty Jean Williamson recounts her experiences shopping at Fou Lee’s over the years, “So when it started it was a produce stand, first and they were also selling mostly Filipino canned goods and package foods,” she recollects. “Then they expanded into the produce out on the north side.” Fou Lee also features an expansive and tantalizing deli. Williamson lists off some icons of their menu by memory: “They have deep fried prawns, whole fish, and then they have pancit, and bánh mì sandwiches and sticky rice in banana leaves. Yeah, that's just always on the counter. And the produce is always mangoes. Always,” she laughs. “If you need mangoes, you can get them at Fou Lee.”

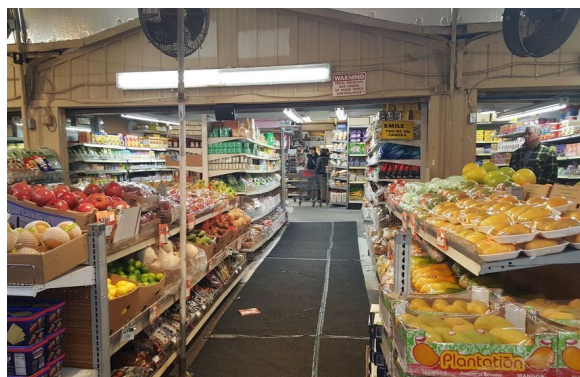
Shayla Hufana, a Filipina American artist who was tabling at the Beacon Arts Street Fair speaks passionately about her love for Fou Lee. She was raised in Beacon Hill and has since moved to Kent, but still makes the half-hour drive up to do her grocery shopping at Fou Lee. She tells me that the familiar faces at the local market and the sense of community she finds there bring her back north. Shayla hopes that one day she can move back to the hill but explains that, right now, it’s just too expensive.

The community’s love and gratitude for the market can be summarized by Monica, an online review writer who pens “A love letter to Fou Lee.” They write, “Dearest Fou Lee — Thank you for feeding me so many pounds of food from your deli over the years when I am indecisive and hungry and about to become unreasonable. Your deli has saved me so much grief and your aisles always have the right fresh fruits and veggies that I need. I can’t even begin to

count the number of times I have had to rush to a last minute potluck and picked up a bunch of banh mi or rambutan and become the hero. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” (Intentionalist 2021).

Adam Alsobrook, a local architect and cultural resource management professional, explains how local grocery stores, especially markets selling culturally appropriate and affordable foods, can become so meaningful for their community of patrons. “Markets are places where people conduct monetary transactions, other than just exchanging money for goods and

services...they're sending money back home, it's a community center, you run into your neighbors, they have the food that you eat so that's why you shop there because the other places only had the proverbial “ethnic foods” section, you didn't have a car, so you couldn't get out of neighborhood, so you shop in that market,” Alsobrook explains. “There's all these multitude of reasons for why that is a community landmark in every sense of the word.”



The produce section in Fou Lee, where mangoes are a constant on their shelves.

Source: <https://intentionalist.com/b/foulee-market/>

Comet Lodge Cemetery

Address: 2100 S Graham St, Seattle, WA 98108

Parcel number: 212404-9241

Owner's name: King County Property Services

Owner's Address: Mailstop ADM-ES-0800, 500 4th Ave, Seattle, WA 98004

Building or site type: Cemetery

Date of construction: 1895



Comet Lodge Cemetery sign on the corner of 23rd Ave S and S Graham St.

Source: Alex Garland - South Seattle Emerald

Physical Description: This two-acre lot⁵ on South Graham Street sits right on the periphery of Interstate 5. The property is peppered with a few headstones, scattered boulders, and tall trees.

Statement of Significance:

The Comet Lodge Cemetery, officially established in 1895, was initially a Duwamish burial ground (Shephard 2008). After Seattle's earliest white settlers moved into the region in 1851, they too found a final resting place in Odd Fellow's Comet Lodge (Shephard 2008). Today, a passerby would hardly be able to tell that a cemetery sits there, disuse and a lack of maintenance obscuring the few headstones that remain. The overgrowth makes it impossible for someone to even walk through what semblance of the cemetery might remain.

After hundreds of Duwamish and early pioneers were buried at Comet Lodge, the burial ground "fell into disuse in the 1930s" (Shephard 2008). Fifty years later, development interests grew, and in 1987, the City of Seattle apparently permitted the bulldozing of "parts of the property, including a children's burial area," in order to construct eleven homes on the site, above the graves (Shephard 2008). The city has disrupted the resting grounds in various calloused ways, digging utility lines through the cemetery, constructing streets, and exhuming graves.



"Piles of headstones and bases are covered with ivy after having been bulldozed to this spot in the 1980s."

Source: Alex Garland - South Seattle Emerald

⁵ Anderson's 2006 article states the original cemetery comprises of five acres, now half covered by houses. The square footage of the site as stated in King County's parcel viewer converts to two acres.

John Dickinson, a Georgetown resident and dedicated community advocate for the cemetery, is motivated to preserve the site in remembrance of his own ancestors who rest at the neglected and misused plot. Due to the pressures of neighborhood concern, in 2008, the Comet Lodge Cemetery sign was put in, facing the corner of South Graham Street and 23rd Ave S, and the site was cleaned up. Over the years, the cemetery has gone through cycles of care and neglect--maintenance of the site has been dependent on the oscillating advocacy of neighbors over time.



In his attempts to do what he could to maintain the site, Dickinson acquired a city permit to clean up the stifling overgrowth and preserve what headstones remain. He was then instructed by the city to halt his efforts and was barred from continuing to look after the site on account of their assertion that the cemetery had never existed to begin with. Dickinson thus “could not tidy up a cemetery that isn't there” (Anderson 2006).

A group of headstones were incorrectly and aesthetically replaced by the City in an attempt to demonstrate property maintenance.

Source: Alex Garland - South Seattle Emerald

Dickinson maintains a list of the 450+ men, women, and children who remain at Comet Lodge to this day. “Emma Rigby, Seattle's first female doctor. Jacob Maple, one of the first settlers. Samuel Bevan, South Park's last mayor—my great-great-great grandfather,” he reads. “Should we just forget them? Their history?...It's a graveyard, no matter how deep you bury it” (Anderson 2006).

For additional reading, consider:

- [UW's *The Daily*: The Ghosts of Comet Lodge Cemetery](#)
- [Seattle Terrors: Comet Lodge Cemetery](#)
- [South Seattle Emerald: A Changing of Worlds: The Liminal Space of Comet Lodge Cemetery](#)
- [Seattle Weekly: No Stone Unturned](#)

African American Academy

Current Name: Rising Star Academy

Address: 8311 Beacon Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118

Parcel number: 724350-0160

Owner's name: Seattle Public Schools

Owner's Address: MS 33-343 - PO Box 34165, Seattle, WA 98124

Building or site type: School

Date of construction: 2000



The school's library is in this turret on the southeast corner of the building.

Source: <https://www.rolludaarchitects.com/african-american-academy>

Physical Description: Designed for the African American Academy, the building's colors and structure complement the original school's African American cultural focus, referencing Afro-centric design concepts. The school sits close to the southern end of Beacon Ave.

Statement of Significance: The African American Academy was founded in 1991 and moved to this building in 2000. It was designed by architect Mel Streeter especially for the academy. Streeter moved to Seattle in 1955 and after struggling to initially find a firm that would hire an African American architect, opened one of the first African American-owned architectural firms in Seattle: Streeter and Associates (Large 2006; King 2007). Streeter was a part of the design teams for Seattle icons T-Mobile Park and Lumen Field (King 2007). The South Beacon Hill school was one of his final projects.

After the Seattle School District's various and convoluted attempts at racially integrating their schools, parents, and teachers of Black students made note of how average test scores for their students were lower in comparison to students from other racial groups (Collins 2015). They were frustrated with how Black students were still not receiving adequate and equitable support and thus were not excelling in school (Heffter 2007). Black education activists considered "cultural differences in teaching and learning styles for Black children as well as the absence of African American teachers in their schools" and concluded that what their children deserved was an intentionally designed education (Collins 2015). These community members "lobbied the Seattle School Board to designate one of the city's ten alternative schools" as an African American-centered school (Collins 2015). The curriculum was rooted in African American cultural principles, included African history and heritage, and introduced students to an African American history that didn't start with slavery (Heffter 2007; Collins 2015).

During their two-decade run, the school never quite reached its full vision as a national model for serving African American students. Students continued to receive persistently low test scores and the school struggled to gain full-hearted support from the District. In 2009, the academy was closed due to the district and the school's shrunken enrollment (Woodward 2011). Currently, Rising Star Elementary operates in the building, their poster hanging just below the original "African American Academy" sign.



The African American Academy, one year after it closed.

Source: Joe Mabel - <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/african-american-academy-1991-2009-0>

For additional reading, consider:

- [BlackPast: The African American Academy \(1991-2009\)](#)
- [Seattle Times: Seattle's African American Academy gets one more try](#)
- [Seattle Department of Neighborhood - Southeast Seattle Community History Project: Southeast Seattle Schools: World War II to Present](#)

Additional Sites

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of sites that no longer physically exist but remain intact in the memories of community members. Although we are unable to preserve these structures physically, we are still able to commemorate their histories through documentation and interpretation. Additionally, there were a few sites that neighbors mentioned to me as marking their experience of living in Beacon Hill that fall outside of the technical boundaries of the neighborhood into Rainier Beach or up north in the Chinatown/ International District. Although the scope of this report does not extend to these areas, their histories include and impact neighbors on Beacon Hill. Three of these sites are discussed below.

Built in 1938, Sick's Stadium was a baseball park in the Rainier Valley; the park was home to the minor league Seattle Rainiers and Seattle Pilots (Stein 1999). It was demolished in 1979 and replaced by a Lowe's home improvement store 20 years later. There is a commemorative sign outside the store marking the historic site, an example of how we can memorialize places that are no longer physically intact.

Kubota Gardens, a Japanese-style garden was planned and cultivated by self-taught gardener Fujitaro Kubota. Kubota moved to the U.S. in 1907 and started the garden in 1927; since then, the 20-acre plot has been a public park since 1987 (Stiffler 2008). Kubota strived to cultivate the native plants of his new home in the Pacific Northwest with traditional Japanese garden designs, a great example of the diaspora's blend of cultures. Larry Matsuda told me about the post-war Kubota Garden picnics that replaced the annual get togethers at Jefferson Park. Alongside Matsuda's parents, Kubota was at the Minidoka internment camp in Idaho where his skills as a gardener persisted. "He made a garden in front of Block 26," Matsuda tells me, the same block he and his family lived in. After the war, Kubota "invited people from Block 26 to come to his South Seattle garden for picnics." In addition to the Block 26 reunions, Matsuda recalls that the Hiroshima Kenjinkai, an organization of people who came from Hiroshima, also gathered for picnics at Kubota Garden.

Seattle Farm, the oldest family-owned and operated horse farm in Seattle, started in 1919 and has persisted for over one century. Originally started by Spanish immigrants, Amador and Visitación Seijas, the farm is still in operation four generations later (Seattle Farm). The farm is a lone representative of an area that once was predominantly rural. Recently, the farm has been pressured to sell out to developers and is in constant threat as prices in the area continue to rise (McNichols 2016). Despite these pressures, the farm continues to survive the regional gentrification.

Beacon Hill in Artwork

The spirit of Beacon Hill also gets preserved through art that is sited in the community. The fact that this location sparks artistic creativity marks and perpetuates the neighborhood's cultural significance.

Beacon Hill Boys, a novel by Ken Mochizuki, follows four Japanese American teenagers navigating their Asian American identities as they come of age on Beacon Hill in the early 1970s. The book was later adapted into a 43-minute-long short film by Dean Hayasaka and Bill Blauvelt—film students at Evergreen State College (Mochizuki 2015). The film demonstrates the culture of young adult life in Beacon Hill in the 70s, featuring music and fashion trends, dating culture, multigenerational home life, and its complexities, as well as memorable locations like Imperial Lanes, the go-to neighborhood bowling alley. More recently, Blue Scholars, a hip-hop duo based in Seattle, have featured Beacon Hill in their work. They have a song called *Fou Lee* after the widely loved Asian marketplace. In their [music video](#) for the tune, released in 2011, they filmed in the aisles of the market and included drive-by clips of other iconic Beacon Hill storefronts including Aloha Market and Seattle Super Market. Beacon Hill is also the backdrop of Larry Matsuda's book *My Name is Not Viola*, which is based on the life of Matsuda's mother. Parts of the story unfold in the familiar streets and sections of Beacon Hill. One portion of the book features the Japanese Language School picnics that were annually held at Jefferson Park.

Conclusion

It was a thoughtful choice that this particular project, a culturally sensitive study of historic properties, was carried out in these specific sections of Beacon Hill, home to communities whose experiences have been ignored by the field of historic preservation and are especially vulnerable to the pressures of gentrification. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to amplify the histories and lives of those whose experiences that have been obscured by a system that does not have them in mind. It is possible to assess cultural significance in a built environment context and the value of community perspectives should be recognized. In fact, there is a wealth of community resources showcasing the cultural heritage of Beacon Hill that exists in the people who live there. At this moment, it is important to continue to be diligent about carrying out oral history work to capture these stories before they are pushed out of the community or lost to time. What this project asks of community members, what it prompts about their favorite places in the neighborhood, and what the community was like when they first moved to Beacon Hill, "that's really, really important work," Adam Alsobrook emphasizes. "It needs to be so much more comprehensive before more of these individuals pass on."

In the conclusion of her book, *The River That Made Seattle*, B.J. Cummings makes an argument for a collaborative movement towards equity. Although she speaks in regard to ecological advocacy on behalf of the Duwamish River on Beacon Hill's west side, her line of

reasoning also applies to the advancement of the same goals in the field of historic preservation. “None of this work is easy, and its success is not guaranteed. But most consider the rewards of creating a new model of collaboration to be well worth the trouble...For this to happen, everyone will need to be at the table—listening, problem-solving, and lifting their share of the historical and contemporary burden—in order to provide for the needs of the city's diverse Native and immigrant communities” (Cummings 2020: 175).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Many of the aforementioned sites are portals for exploring the histories of various communities on Beacon Hill and South Seattle. That being said, there are many more stories and communities to uplift and much more to the narratives we covered. The owners of the mentioned businesses could be interviewed in order to develop a more detailed history of each location, especially for MacPherson's and Fou Lee, which were challenging to research the history of given the lack of information available online.

Other sites reveal other stories. As I was limited to a finite number of places to consider in this report, there are ripe grounds for additional research. The sites explored here are just 11 of the 74 places neighbors named to me, roughly 15%. Although we were able to uplift some of the narratives of Beacon Hill's communities, there is much more to the story of Beacon Hill. For instance, there is more to be said about specific histories of Chinese and Japanese Americans in the South Seattle area and what led to their migration to Beacon Hill from Chinatown and Japantown as related to the Chinese Exclusion Act, Executive Order 9066, and discriminatory redlining practices. In exploring the dynamics of gentrification and displacement as it affects population makeup, there's more to be said about the history-shifting demographics of Beacon Hill, the causes of those demographic developments, and the impact of groups of people coming and going. The history of redlining and housing discrimination feeds directly into the rampant housing insecurity experienced on Beacon Hill today.

In learning about the field and history of historic preservation, there is a more specific conversation to be had about where the multi-layered inequities in preservation stem from. My conversation with Adam Alsobrook spoke to some of these origin points, one of which pertains to who is deemed qualified to do the work that guides and comprises historic preservation. "If you're going to have that discussion about broadening potential areas of significance then you should also have the conversation about who is doing the work," he encourages. "Because the profession—unfortunately it still looks very much like me...there need to be more people at the table." We discussed previous failed attempts, the last in 1997, to broaden the field's professional qualification standards to include social scientists. The inequities in historic preservation have been formally considered and continuously disregarded for over 25 years. In order to understand the professional inequities of historic preservation, it would be important to take a closer look at those decisions.

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