

ELEMENTARY ESSAY #3

The Puget Sound region was home to the First Peoples for thousands of years before non-Native groups arrived. The First Peoples lived here because of the mild climate and because it had everything that they needed to thrive and survive. When explorers, pioneers, and immigrant groups discovered the promise of this land and its many natural resources, they too decided to call it home.

Each new group brought new ideas, new traditions, and new ways to appreciate the region, build homes, establish communities, and develop industries. It is important to understand that each unique group that has called the Puget Sound region their home has contributed to its development. They have each had a lasting influence on neighborhoods, business districts, and the natural environment. This essay looks at several unique groups who lived and worked in the SR 520 region.

Native Americans:

The First People who lived on the shores of Lake Washington were the Lakes Duwamish people. These Native Americans called themselves the dkhw'duw'absh or "the people of the inside." The Lakes Duwamish fished in the waters of Lake Washington for salmon, bass, and trout. They hunted for ducks and geese in the marshland along the southern shore of Portage Bay.



Native American children near shelters, n.d. [Courtesy Museum of History & Industry](#)

Near where the Roanoke Park neighborhood is now located, there was an open prairie. There the Natives gathered berries, roots, and other important foods that were needed for a healthy diet. The Lakes Duwamish who lived in the Madison Park neighborhood called that area "Where One Chops."

In a Lakes Duwamish village, families of 20 or more lived in cedar-plank longhouses during the winter months. At one time, according to old records, there were five longhouses and a fishing weir near Ravenna Creek. A large village called hikw'al'al – or "big house" – was located on the southern shore of Lake Union. One of these settlements was located south of Seward Park and was called xaxao'Ltc, or "forbidden place."

The Lakes Duwamish moved to temporary camps to hunt, fish, and gather food during the summer and fall months. These camps were built around lightweight structures made of cattail mats. These shelters could be put up and taken down easily and placed in the bottom of the canoe when it was time to move again. This annual movement was based on a "seasonal calendar." This calendar followed the different life cycles of food, animals, birds, sea life, and other resources.

The Duwamish used canoes carved from cedar trees to travel between villages. In addition to gathering food, they traveled the waters of lakes, rivers, and Puget Sound to trade goods with members of other tribes and to visit friends and family. A narrow span of land connecting Lake Washington and Lake Union provided a place to move boats and supplies from one lake to another. This connecting

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piece of land was level and only one-quarter of a mile across. It was called “Swa’tsugwL,” which is translated as “carry a canoe.” Early settlers also used this transportation route to carry goods across what they called the Portage.

In the mid-1850s, the treaties of Medicine Creek and Point Elliott pushed the Lakes Duwamish out of their traditional homes. Many were forced to move to reservations. By 1885, the City of Seattle charter prohibited Indians from living within the city limits. Just two Indian families, the Zakuse family and Cheshiahud and his wife Madaline, were allowed to remain on their small farms on Portage Bay.

In 1916, Lake Washington was lowered when the Montlake Cut canal was opened between the lakes. As a result, the marshes dried up. Some also had been filled with material removed during the construction of the cut. Between about 1912 and 1936, an area near Washington Park – known as the Miller Street Landfill – served as a dump for the city. Construction of the Arboretum and State Route 520 transformed the natural environment of the Montlake area even more. These changes made it difficult for Native communities to continue fishing, hunting, and gathering there.

Settlers:

Beginning in the mid-1800s, pioneers began to arrive in the Seattle/King County area. Many came from the Midwest or the East Coast to start new lives. They had heard that that weather was not as cold – or as hot – as it was where they came from. And they



Strawberry pickers in the field, ca. 1921.
Courtesy Museum of History & Industry

could have free land! The U.S. Congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act. This act allowed the government to give 160 acres of land to every male over the age of 18 years. This would allow them to build homesteads and farms. Women could also have 160 acres of land – but only if they were married.

The first pioneer to explore the Lake Washington was Isaac Ebey. He named the big beautiful lake Lake Geneva. The name did not stick, but settlers moved to the lakeshore to farm, log, and fish.

The first American settlers in the Seward Park neighborhood were Edward A. Clark and John Harvey. They filed claims in 1853. They built their cabins along the common boundary of their properties to provide safety and friendship. Another settler was David Graham, who farmed on the land for 10 years. He later traded the land to his brother Walter, who grew a large orchard there.

In the 1860s, Judge John J. McGilvra bought 420 acres of land at Madison Park. He was the first American to buy land in this area. He only had to pay \$5 an acre at that time because the land was being sold to raise money to build the University of Washington. McGilvra was from Illinois and once practiced law with Abraham

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Lincoln. To reach his land from downtown, he cut a road through the forest. Today this road is known as Madison Street. It was named after U.S. President James Madison, and it is the only direct land route in Seattle between the salt water of Puget Sound and the fresh water of Lake Washington.

The McGilvras were the only residents of this section of the Lake Washington shoreline for over 20 years. When the judge sold his land, he saved 24 acres for public use and called it Madison Park. Within 10 years, Madison Park became very popular for camping, band concerts, and other fun summer activities. The “Seattles,” the first professional baseball team in the Pacific Northwest, practiced on a simple ball diamond there in 1890.

In 1872, Charles Waters purchased 350 acres in the Seward Park neighborhood. He called his development Somerville to honor his hometown in Massachusetts. By 1876, a school was established for the children of the loggers and farmers of this neighborhood.

In 1888, developer J. W. Edwards purchased land in the Seward Park area that he called Sunnyside. He divided the land into five-acre sections called “tracts.” Each tract was then grouped into blocks of eight, totaling 40 acres. At that time, 40 acres was about as much land as could be worked by one man and one mule. Edwards laid out roads and named them after things grown by fellow pioneer Walter Graham – Cherry, Plum, Pear, Peach, Hop, and Fruitland.

In 1891, an electric-trolley line was completed down the Rainier

Valley to Columbia City. This opened southeast Seattle to development. In 1902, Clarence D. Hillman bought up most of the Sunnyside development between Somerville and Brighton Beach. He named the project Hillman City and renamed the streets after people rather than Walter Graham’s produce.

On the east side of Lake Washington, farming and logging settlements grew up around the same time. Settlers established homesteads and farmed and logged the area. Ira and Susan Woodin established a farm in 1871 in the area that would become known as Woodinville. Just to the south, in Kirkland, the Popham and MacGregor families in 1871 became the first non-Native people to settle the area. They located their homesteads along the lake and farmed the land.

The first homesteaders in the Bellevue area were William Meydenbauer and Aaron Mercer, who both arrived in 1869. Meydenbauer, a baker born in Germany, settled alongside the sheltered bay, which now bears his name. Mercer, originally from Ohio, farmed to the south, along what is now known as the Mercer Slough.

At the southern end of the lake, at what would become Renton, Coal Creek, and Newcastle, coal deposits drew miners, including Chinese and European immigrants and local settlers, to the hills above Lake Washington.

Immigrants:

When gold was discovered in the late 1850s, many Chinese immigrants came to the Northwest. Most were from a province in China

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called Kwangtung, where there was little food for their families. Once they arrived here, they helped develop the land and build the railroads. They were hardworking and did not demand as much money as other workers. By 1880, there were more than 3,000 Chinese living in Washington Territory, about 4 percent of the local population. These were among 300,000 Chinese in the entire United States.

Many of the Chinese immigrants settled in the growing city of Seattle. They worked as cooks, domestic servants, and laundrymen. Chinese workers were recruited to work in lumber mills and canneries, on hop farms, in coal mines, and on road construction projects. They also sold vegetables grown in gardens near what is now the Seattle Center and along the Duwamish River. There were also professionals: doctors, priests, editors, and students.

Through their work on transportation projects, the Chinese greatly influenced the development of the Lake Washington area. In Seattle, a crew of Chinese workers dug the first canal connecting Lake Union with Lake Washington. Chinese laborers on road and railroad projects helped make it possible to move people and natural resources more easily.

Not many Chinese immigrants lived along Lake Washington's shores because most other settlers did not welcome them. In some areas of Seattle, there were laws that prevented Chinese and other Asian immigrant groups from owning land. There were even certain areas of the city where they were not allowed to live. They were prohibited from marrying whites and had to pay special taxes. In 1882, the

national Chinese Exclusion Act prevented any more Chinese from immigrating to the United States, and in 1886 anti-Chinese mobs forced most of the Chinese immigrants to leave Seattle. Some families and businesses eventually moved back to Seattle to an area near downtown's Pioneer Square. The International District of Seattle was established in that area in 1910.

There were many other immigrant groups arriving in the Pacific Northwest by the 1880's. English immigrants purchased lots in the Seward Park area and named the neighborhood Brighton Beach, after a resort town in England. When the railroads reached the Pacific Northwest, large numbers of people of Norwegian and Scandinavian heritage arrived to live and work in the region. Because there was so much water and timber to be found here, it reminded them of home. It was a place where they could use their skills as farmers, fishermen, seamen, and loggers. They lived in the neighborhoods along the lake. This group of immigrants also helped to plan and work on important construction projects in what is now the SR 520 corridor. Throughout the twentieth century, King County became home to dozens of other cultural and ethnic groups, including Italians, African Americans, and people of Japanese descent. Many were drawn by the land and opportunities within the SR 520 project region. The descendants of those cultural groups still live and work in this area as transportation and industry continue to develop.

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This essay was developed using facts and terminology from the following HistoryLink.org essays:

- **5086** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Brighton Beach](#)
- **10176** [Seattle Yacht Club](#)
- **10221** [Montlake Cut \(Seattle\)](#)
- **2808** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Madison Park](#)
- **10170** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Montlake](#)
- **3143** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Seward Park](#)
- **2060** [Chinese Americans](#)
- **3476** [Norwegians in Seattle and King County](#)
- **3473** [Swedes in Seattle and King County](#)
- **1059** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Medina](#)
- **313** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Bellevue](#)
- **208** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Kirkland](#)
- **9800** [Seattle Neighborhoods: Woodinville](#)

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Boundary: edge or border

Cannery: a business where food products are packaged into cans

Cattail: a reed that grows in very wet areas and can be used for weaving things like baskets or mats

Common boundary: the dividing line between two properties

Domestic servant: a person who works for someone doing housework or looking after children

Dredging: digging underwater using a large machine

Editor: one who checks to make sure written work is accurate

Environment: surroundings

Excavated: dug out

Hop farm: farm where hops are grown (hops are used in the production of beer)

Immigrant: one who comes from another place to live

Influence: produce an effect on something or someone

Marshland: land near water where the ground is very wet

Non-native: anyone who is not of Native American descent

Orchard: special area where fruit trees grow

Platted: divide a large piece of land into building lots, streets, and public spaces like parks

Prohibited: did not allow

Province: specific area in certain countries, similar to a state in the United States

Restrictions: rules that specify what could not be included or done

Seasonal calendar: calendar based on the life cycles and growing seasons of plants and animals

Span: the space between specific starting and ending points

Temperate: mild, not too hot and not too cold

Temporary: for a short time

Thrive: grow without problems

Tract: a specific section of land

Tradition: a belief, practice, or story that is related to the past