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City of the Changers: Indigenous People and the Transformation of Seattle's Watersheds

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Between the 1880s and the 1930s indigenous people continued to eke out traditional livings along the waterways and shorelines of Seattle's urbanizing and industrializing landscape. During those same years, however, the city's civic leaders and urban planners oversaw massive transformations of that landscape, including the creation of a ship canal linking Puget Sound with Lake Washington and the straightening of the Duwamish River. These transformations typified the modernizing ethos that sought to improve nature to ameliorate or even end social conflict. The struggle of the Duwamish and other local indigenous people to survive urban change, as well as the efforts by residents of nearby Indian reservations to maintain connections to places within the city, illustrate the complex, ironic legacies of Seattle's environmental history. They also show the ways in which urban and Native history are linked through both material and discursive practices.

Seattle was a bad place to build a city. Steep sand slopes crumbled atop slippery clay; a river wound through its wide, marshy estuary and bled out onto expansive tidal flats; kettle lakes and cranberried peat bogs recalled the retreat of the great ice sheets; unpredictable creeks plunged into deep ravines—all among seven (or, depending on whom you ask, nine or fifteen) hills sandwiched between the vast, deep waters of Puget Sound and of Lake Washington. But built it was, and generations of Seattle's leaders and everyday residents have wrested enormous wealth, comfort, and order out of the dynamic and messy ecology that first confronted the city's founders in 1851. Seattle's watersheds are among its most

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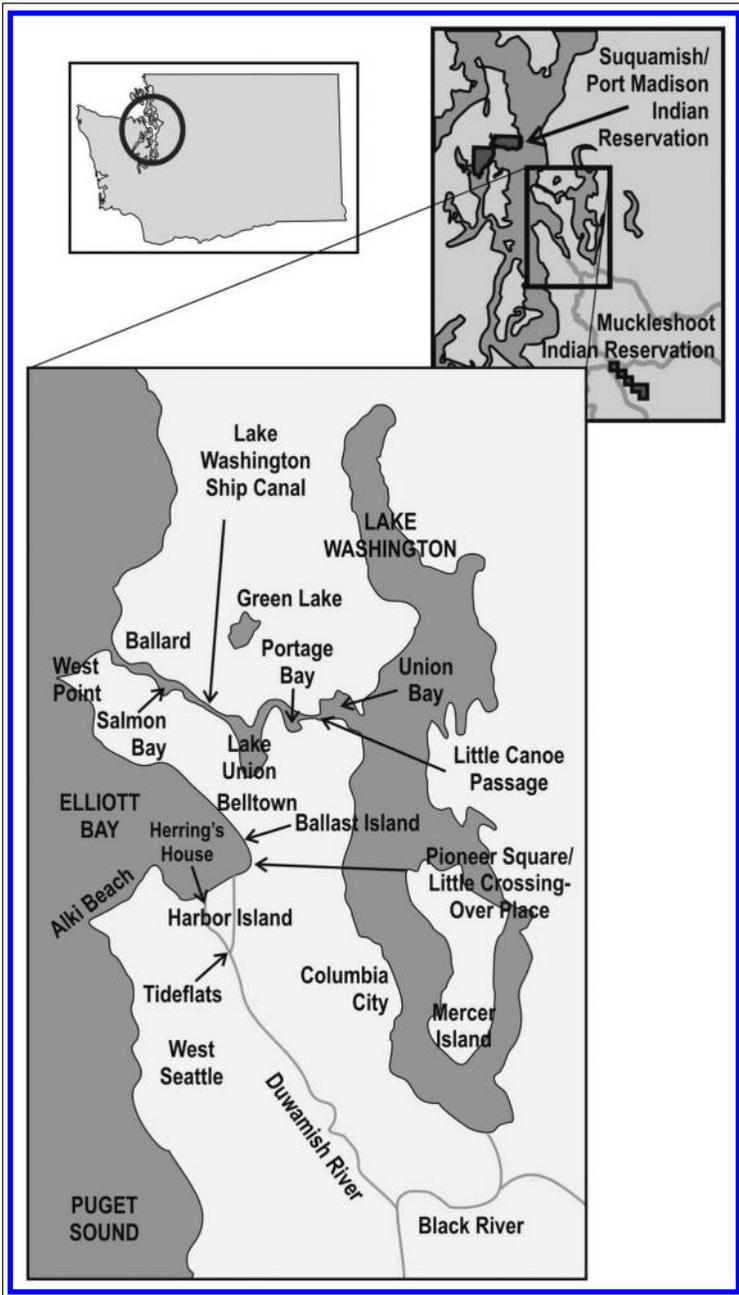


Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in this article, created by Jacquelyn C. Ferry.



transformed landscapes. Where four rivers once joined to become the Duwamish, now only one flows; Lake Washington empties to the west instead of the south and is shallower by some twenty feet; peat bogs, creeks, wetlands, and beaches have been paved, culverted, drained, and bulkheaded. The result is a city of “second nature,” to borrow environmental historian William Cronon’s term for the mix of ecology and artifice that typified the American ideal of progress throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹

In the twenty-first century many Seattleites are second-guessing this second nature. Engineers, mayors, and others whose visions inspired the ship canals, regrades, and other projects described in this essay often gave little thought as to the long-term environmental consequences of those visions. Such efforts were paragons of the modernist, technocratic paradigm in which progress and improvement were inexorable and inevitable. But today many Northwesterners, particularly those living in cities such as Seattle, have become all too aware of the environmental costs of such transformations of local ecology. The evidence is there in endangered species of salmon, SuperFund sites in urban neighborhoods, and infrastructure that often seems as though it was designed specifically to collapse during the next big earthquake. Part of Seattle’s “green” persona is a profound ambivalence about its own urban past, perhaps best symbolized by the popularity of community-based organizations and government programs aimed at urban ecological restoration.²

Less well known, and therefore a less visible element of Seattle’s second guessing, are the social consequences that resulted from the

1. For “second nature,” see William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991). For a scholarly study of Seattle’s environmental transformation, see Matthew W. Klinge, “Urban by Nature: An Environmental History of Seattle, 1880–1970” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2001); for a recently published popular account that covers some of the same territory, see David Williams, *The Street-Smart Naturalist: Field Notes from Seattle* (Portland, Ore., 2005).

2. For one unapologetic criticism of Seattle’s environmental history, see Mike Sato, *The Price of Taming a River: The Decline of Puget Sound’s Duwamish/Green Waterway* (Seattle, 1997). Among the websites, see: www.longfellowcreek.org (Longfellow Creek), www.homewatersproject.org (Thornton Creek), www.fautleroy.net/aboutcreek.htm (Fautleroy Creek), and www.ci.seattle.wa.us/mayor/issues/CreekRestorationOverview.htm (the mayor’s official website). Restoration efforts in the Seattle area have achieved greater momentum, support, and attention since the listing in 2001 of the local chinook salmon under the Endangered Species Act.



city's environmental history. As Matthew Klinge has shown in his research on Seattle's environmental transformations, urban development schemes, typically perceived as bringing new order and solving ecological and social "problems" such as flooding and squatters' camps, often had the result of exacerbating social divisions, placing the greatest burdens upon the most vulnerable, unleashing new ecological challenges, and creating new kinds of disorder. Many of those social consequences remain today, visible in PCB counts in poor neighborhoods, in signs in immigrant languages like Lao and Spanish warning of contaminated fish, and in deep, seemingly intransigent cultural divides over who should pay for the next attempt to make things better in the city. In most cases, the negative legacies of Seattle's environmental history are seen by residents and planners as just that: environmental. There is, however, one exception to this rule: Indians. In public discourse—thanks in no small part to the insistence of living Native people—the dispossession of Seattle's indigenous population is often mentioned alongside changes to the city's original landscape. Yet the specific social and ideological mechanisms by which that dispossession took place remain vague at best and invisible at worst.

If Seattle's most famous visual images are the Space Needle and Mount Rainier, then its most famous literary images come from a speech attributed to the city's namesake, an indigenous leader of Duwamish and Suquamish parentage named Seeathl.³ Said to have been uttered during the treaty process of the 1850s but only committed to print a quarter-century later by a white physician, the Chief Seattle Speech has become a "fifth gospel," thanks to its potent combination of Victorian flourish, ecological longing, and imagined indigenous nobility. Most notably for our purposes, it included a powerful vision of the future of Seeathl's people in Seattle's urban future. In the 1850s, when Seattle's urban promise seemed to require the dispossession of local Native peoples, he reportedly said:

3. I have chosen to spell the indigenous leader's name in this way for several reasons. First, it avoids confusing the man with the city named after him. Second, it avoids the ongoing, and somewhat beside the point, competition between "Seattle" and "Sealth," two anglicizations of his indigenous name. Third, as with other indigenous names in this study, it is an attempt to get as close as possible to the pronunciation of the indigenous original, given the confines of the English alphabet. The result is still imperfect; the final sound in the name should be pronounced like the Welsh double-ll sound.



Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe. Even the rocks, which seem to lie dumb as they swelter in the sun along the silent seashore in solemn grandeur, thrill with memories of past events connected with the lives of my people.

And when the last red man shall have perished from the earth and his memory among the white men shall have become a myth, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe; and when your children's children shall think themselves alone in the fields, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude.

At night when the streets of your cities and villages will be silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with returning hosts that once filled and still love this beautiful land. The white man will never be alone.

While local historians, tribal people, and others continue to debate the veracity of the speech, it remains a powerful—and on a global scale, extremely popular—story about the social, and even spiritual, costs of ecological transformation and Native dispossession.⁴

The problem is that the speech, regardless of whether it was fabricated or merely embellished, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In it, as in so many representations of Native people throughout American history, Indians and cities are mutually exclusive. They seem to exist at opposite ends of the American trajectory: One represents the past, the other the future. For all their differences, last Mohicans, final showdowns at Wounded Knees, and lone Ishis wandering out of the California foothills are all variations on the same theme: the inevitable disappearance of indigenous peoples before the onslaught of American progress. Cities, on the other hand, are the ultimate avatars of that progress, representing the pinnacle of American technology, commerce, and cultural sophistication. It

4. For the original printing of the speech attributed to Seeathl, see *Seattle Star*, Oct. 29, 1887. For discussion of the speech and its various interpretations and uses, see Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception," in Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds., *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (Berkeley, 1987), 497–536; Vi Hilbert, "When Chief Seattle Spoke," in Robin K. Wright, ed., *A Time of Gathering: Native Heritage in Washington State* (Seattle, 1991), 259–266; Denise Low, "Contemporary Reinventions of Chief Seattle: Variant Texts of Chief Seattle's 1854 Speech," *American Indian Quarterly*, 19 (1995), 407–422; Albert Furtwangler, *Answering Chief Seattle* (Seattle, 1997); and Crisca Bierwert, "Remembering Chief Seattle: Reversing Cultural Studies of a Vanishing American," *American Indian Quarterly*, 22 (1998), 280–307.



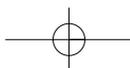


Figure 2. Charles Bussell's brochure was used to promote the industrialization of the Duwamish River's estuary. C. B. Bussell, *Tide Lands: Their Story* (Seattle, 1906?), available in Rare Books Collection, University of Washington, Seattle. As in countless other representations, Native people are here located outside the urban sphere.

comes as no surprise, then, that many nineteenth-century representations of American expansion show Indians watching forlornly as townscapes appear on the horizon. John Gast's famous *American Progress* (1872), for example, shows Progress, embodied as an enormous white woman floating westward over the continent, trailing telegraph wire. Behind her, a locomotive steams across the plains, and a great city of bridges and smokestacks sprawls in the sunrise, while ahead of her, Indians and buffalo flee into the fading night. Seattle's counterpart is a 1906 brochure selling real estate on the tideflats south of downtown, featuring figures that look suspiciously like Hiawatha and Pocahontas gazing over placid waters toward a belching urban skyline. One kind of history ended, it would appear, as soon as another began. Like the Chief Seattle Speech, the Tide-lands brochure is a kind of urban tautology, reflective of the "vanishing red man" narrative, that simultaneously justified, shored up, shaped, and then elided much of the nation's policies toward Indian peoples. As tautologies, they tell us very little about what actually happened.⁵

If popular culture has placed cities and Indians at two ends of

5. For images of Indians in the American imagination, the classic work remains Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978). Images of John Gast's *American Progress* can be found easily on the Internet; one example is the Central Pacific Railroad Museum website, at cpr.org/Museum/Ephemera/American_Progress.html. The Seattle example is C. B. Bussell, *Tide Lands: Their Story* (Seattle, 1906).



the nation's historical imagination, then academic scholarship has given that placement its legitimacy. The deep connections between urban and Indian histories—in Seattle and across the nation—have yet to be made, even in studies of the American West, a region defined both by its urbanization and by the persistence of Native peoples. From the Allegheny Mountains to the Pacific Coast, cities were the vanguards of American conquest, with towns and cities appearing (and sometimes disappearing again) with stunning rapidity. The survival of Western cities hinged on their ability to control hinterlands of people, places, and things—loggers, goldfields, water—and so the consolidation and conquest of the American West was an urban phenomenon. In urban histories, however, Indians all too often appear only in the introduction or first chapter, then exit stage left after a treaty or a battle. With its regional mythology, and much of its scholarship, still defined largely by the battle between civilization and savagery, the American West—and by association, the nation—seems to have room for either cities or Indians, but not both. Only recently have scholars begun to understand that urban development and the conquest of the continent's indigenous peoples are, in fact, two elements of the same story.⁶

The story of the transformation of Seattle's urban watersheds and of its effects on indigenous people still living in and around Seattle demonstrates how closely linked urban and Indian histories can be. As the city's planners straightened rivers, lowered lakes, filled tidelands, and built canals, they reoriented not just landscapes but lives, remaking not only indigenous places but indigenous people, indigenous memories, and even the term indigenous itself. Indian people struggled to survive among these changes, and some managed to maintain connections to the transformed places in memory if not in body. Along the lakes, rivers, and shores of Seattle, environmental inequality was literally built into the city's new water-

6. For three works that explicitly link indigenous history and urbanization in the American West, see Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (Berkeley, 1995); Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), 17–48; and Eugene P. Moehring, *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840–1890* (Reno, 2004). For the frontier's place in American thinking about the West, see John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays* (New York, 1994); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1957); and Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (Berkeley, 1997).



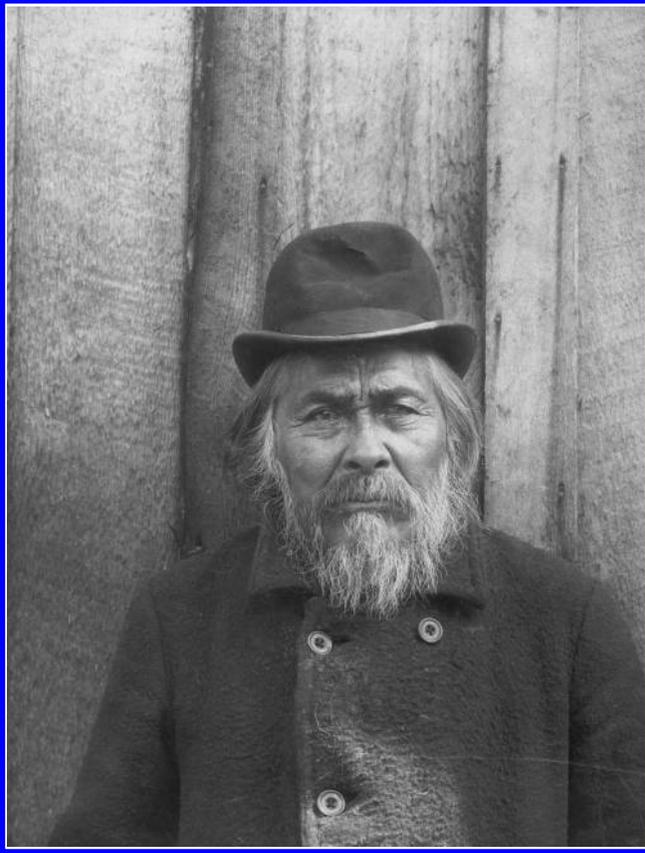


Figure 3. Seetoowathl, or “Old Indian George,” was a Duwamish man who continued to live on the river named after his people. He was a key source for anthropologists working in the Seattle area, providing place names and other ethnographic information. Negative 2176, Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI), Seattle.

sheds, and its legacies resonate down to the present day. It is a history far more complicated than the pathos of the Chief Seattle Speech, the bluntness of a real estate brochure, or the grandeur of Progress’s drift across the continent.

It is more complicated, in large part, because this story has actors, people who made concrete efforts to write indigenous people out of Seattle’s urban story. Seethl knew who they were, and local oral tradition includes a very different kind of speech offered by the headman during treaty proceedings, in which he warned his people to pay special attention to the Americans, their government, and



their hunger for the lands and waters. “You folks observe the changers who have come to this land,” Chief Seeathl told those gathered: “You folks observe them well.” In calling the Americans “changers,” he invoked the figure of the Changer, who had organized the chaotic post-Ice Age landscape of mythic time and made the world habitable for the human people. It was a particularly apt choice of terms. As powerful forces reshaped Seattle in the decades around the turn of the century, local indigenous people found themselves caught up in a transformation of their world nearly as dramatic as the one described in the ancient stories. By 1920 Seattle had become the city of a new kind of changers, whose narratives of urban progress and vanishing Indians had very real, if also ironic, outcomes for real Native communities.⁷

* * *

When Ollie Wilbur was a little girl living on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation in the years around the beginning of the twentieth century, she and her family would often travel by horse and buggy to visit her grandmother’s brother, who lived in a float house surrounded by canoes near the mouth of the Duwamish River in Seattle. Seetowathl, as he was known to his relatives, still lived in the place of his birth, called Tideflats in Whulshootseed, the local indigenous language. He shared the house with his wife, who was either “quite insane” or “the meanest old _____,” depending on who was describing her, and made a living by catching dogfish and rendering their oil. (“That’s all he does, is fish, the old man,” Ollie recalled in the 1990s.) The monotony of fishing was broken for a week every September, when Ollie and her parents came with canned blackberries and other fruit from the foothills of the Cascade Mountains.⁸

Ollie Wilbur’s memories of her great uncle provide evidence that even at the beginning of the twentieth century, a half-century after the signing of treaties between Indian peoples and the U.S.

7. Amelia Sneatum, recorded by Warren Snyder, 1955, and reprinted in Wright, ed., *A Time of Gathering*, 262.

8. Thomas Talbot Waterman, *Puget Sound Geography*, ed. Vi Hilbert, Jay Miller, and Zalmi Zahir (Seattle, 2001), 62, 66; interview with Ollie Wilbur by Lynn Larson, May 26, 1994, in Lynn L. Larson, *Alki/Transfer CFO Facilities Project Traditional Cultural Properties*, available in Muckleshoot Tribal Archives, Auburn, Washington; Thomas F. Gedosch, “A Note on the Dogfish Oil Industry of Washington Territory,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 59 (1968), 100–102.



government, indigenous people still lived within the urbanizing landscape. In the case of Seetoowathl, whose white neighbors called him “Old Indian George,” that meant eking out a living amid grain terminals, cement plants, and steel bridges, but if his persistence was perhaps remarkable, it was far from unique. As the young city leapfrogged over surrounding hills and waterways in the late nineteenth century, fueled by the arrival of the railroad and the resulting immigration, Native people were caught up in the weave of Seattle’s first urban sprawl. In the 1880s, for example, indigenous men and women could be found all around the edges of the growing town. In the Belltown neighborhood just north of downtown, construction of new homes disturbed ancient graves while living Native people camped along the beach. At Salmon Bay to the northwest of Seattle, where a dozen indigenous families had been living when settlers arrived in the 1850s, some still remained. The small cedar plank home of Hwelchteed and his wife Cheethlooleetsa (also known as Salmon Bay Charlie and Madeline) was a distinctive landmark on the shore opposite the American settlement of Ballard. Cheethlooleetsa and her husband harvested clams, salmon, and berries to sell in Ballard, using the income to purchase items from area merchants or for ceremonies held with visiting relatives. Like another Salmon Bay Indian nicknamed Crab John, whose shouts of “salmon, ten cents” were a fond memory among many Ballard residents, Hwelchteed and Cheethlooleetsa were living links between the indigenous town of Tucked Away Inside and the American town of Ballard that had replaced it. Meanwhile, on Portage Bay at the eastern end of Lake Union, Chesheeahud and his wife Tleebuleetsa (known as Lake Union John and, confusingly, Madeline) regularly entertained visitors and relatives from area reservations at their homestead. Across Portage Bay, another Native man named Jim Zackuse owned several acres on the north shore of the lake. And south of there, “Indian Jack” and his wife Eliza owned an acre in Columbia City, a new suburb at the head of a slough along the lake. These and other indigenous residents of Seattle connected ancient indigenous geographies to modern urban places.⁹

9. Edmond S. Meany, “The Last Lake Union Indians,” *Seattle Times*, June 11, 1898; “Indian John in Hospital,” in *ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1905; “Indian John Holds Potlatch,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 29, 1906; Edmond S. Meany, “Story of Seattle’s Nearest Indian Neighbors,” in *ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1905; Schedule of Unenrolled Indians, Records of the Bureau of



The fact that only a few indigenous families remained in indigenous places spoke to the dispossession that had accompanied urban growth on central Puget Sound. All too often, that dispossession left little record in American archives, but oral tradition reveals the processes by which indigenous communities were literally burned out of their homes in and around Seattle. During a landmark 1920s land claims case, for example, older Duwamish, Muckleshoot, and Suquamish Indians recalled what had happened to Native settlements as Seattle grew around them. Major Hamilton described how, “when the settlers came, they drove us away and then they destroy the house and even set fires to get us away from these villages.” Similarly, Jennie Davis, Chesheeahud’s daughter by his first wife, portrayed the transition from Native to settler residences: “Some of them [the Indian houses] was gone and I see where the construction of some of the buildings.” Sam Tecumseh, a Duwamish leader closely allied to several of Seattle’s founding families, recalled the large “potlatch house” that had once stood at the indigenous town of Herring’s House on the West Seattle shoreline. The result of two summers of labor by nearly a score of skilled builders, it was valued in 1920s currency at around \$5,000. “When the white settlers came,” he told the courtroom through an interpreter, “then they took possession of their [the Indians’] cleared land and also destroyed the house.” In 1893 the remaining structures at Herring’s House were razed by a white man known only as Watson, just as West Seattle had begun to experience its first building boom with the establishment of a daily ferry run across Elliott Bay from Seattle. The refugees from this fire, their canoes full of furniture and other personal belongings, turned up for a time at Ballast Island—literally a pile of ballast dumped just off of the downtown waterfront—before moving on to area reservations or an exposed squatters’ encampment at West Point, north of town. The deliberate destruction of Herring’s House might have been unique in the amount of attention it received from the mainstream press, but in other ways, it was

Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Northwest Region, Seattle; J. A. Costello, *The Siwash: Their Life, Legends, and Tales* (Seattle, 1895), 86–87; Real Property Assessment and Tax Rolls, Pacific Northwest Regional Archives, Bellevue, Washington; Margaret Wandrey, *Four Bridges to Seattle: Old Ballard, 1853–1907* (Seattle, 1975), 21, 25, 82; Thomas Talbot Waterman, “The Geographical Names Used by the Indians of the Pacific Coast,” *Geographical Review*, 12 (1922), 189.



all too familiar: Urban hunger for land and shore was a driving force in the dispossession of indigenous communities.¹⁰

In fact, not just in Seattle but throughout Puget Sound, indigenous people were finding fewer and fewer places to call their own. While the treaties of 1855 had allowed Indians to leave the reservation, *living* off-reservation was another matter, especially as the non-indigenous population increased. Bureau of Indian Affairs agent S. A. Eliot described the situation in the 1910s. “The most serious situation among the Sound Indians,” he wrote,

is occasioned by the large number of homeless vagrants. . . . The reservations on the Sound are now all allotted and there remains a remnant variously estimated at from one to three thousand Indians who are landless and homeless. These people wander up and down the Sound, living on the beaches and constantly evicted or ordered to move on by their white neighbors. In one or two places they have established considerable villages, but they have nothing there but squatter’s rights.

In the 1920s Suquamish tribal member Charles Alexis reported seeing other Indians living in impoverished conditions on sandspits and in other marginal locations around Puget Sound in earlier years. While Alexis and Eliot had very different perspectives on these landless Native people—one as a government advocate of Indian “industrial and moral development,” the other as a tribal witness in a land claims case—they both saw Indian landlessness in urban Puget Sound as a dilemma.¹¹

For many Native people, allotment at Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Tulalip, and other reservations remained the most realistic solution to this dilemma. In their applications for allotment, Indian men and women exchanged connections to Seattle’s indigenous landscape for a new kind of security on the reservations. Even “Lake Union John,” a man named for his place, left the city. Soon after his wife’s

10. *Duwamish et al., Indians v. United States*, 79 Ct. Cl. 530 (1934). See also *Consolidated Petition No. F-275* (Seattle, 1993), 683–687, 695, 701; “Indians Burned Out,” *Seattle Times*, March 7, 1893.

11. S. A. Eliot, *Report upon the Conditions and Needs of the Indians of the Northwest Coast* (Washington, D.C., 1915), 21; and *Duwamish et al. v. United States*, 4. See also Frank W. Porter III, “Without Reservation: Federal Indian Policy and the Landless Tribes of Washington,” in George Pierre Castile and Robert L. Bee, eds., *State and Reservation: New Perspectives in Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson, 1992), 110–135.



death in 1906, Chesseeahud sold his property on Portage Bay, making him one of the richest Indians on Puget Sound, and removed to the Port Madison (later Suquamish) reservation, where he died four years later. The only reminder of his presence there was the name of the plat set up on his former homestead; even today, legal descriptions of lots in the neighborhood designate them as part of “John’s Addition.”¹²

The dispossession of indigenous people in urban places had been a key part of Seattle’s history throughout the late nineteenth century, even as some Native families managed to stay longer than most civic planners, Indian agents, or urban historians would have expected. But in the first two decades of the twentieth century, this process of dispossession accelerated. During those years the city undertook a series of massive engineering projects that radically transformed the watershed. These Progressive Era projects turned hills into islands, straightened one river while obliterating another, and reshaped entire watersheds, driven by what urban historian Carl Abbott has called the “leveling impulse.” Seattle civic leaders had long held ambitious visions for improving what they called the “natural advantages” of their city, in particular the potential for connecting lakes Union and Washington with Puget Sound and for turning the Duwamish River into an industrial waterway. By the end of the nineteenth century, technology and capital had finally come to match urban ambition. Beginning in the first years of the twentieth century, for example, the Seattle General Construction Company began filling the tidelands with sediments dredged from the Duwamish River. Eight years and 24 million cubic yards of silt later, the company had replaced much of the river delta with the world’s largest man-made island—flat, dry, and ready for industrial tenants. Meanwhile, the flood-prone and meandering Duwamish, long a source of frustration, itself became the focus the Duwamish Waterway Commission, and by 1920 only one original bend of the river remained within the city limits—the place known as Tideflats to See-

12. Applications for Enrollment and Allotment of Washington Indians, 1911–1919, National Archives Microfilm M-1343, roll 3, National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Northwest Region, Seattle; “Lake Union John, Aged 90, Buried,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 12, 1910; and *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Seattle, Wash.* (Philadelphia, 1905), plate 14.



toowathl and his relatives. The rest was a more or less straight, fifty-foot-deep channel ideal for large sea-going vessels.¹³

The most dramatic project, however, took place under the leadership of Hiram M. Chittenden of the Army Corps of Engineers and Seattle City Engineer Reginald H. Thomson. The Lake Washington Ship Canal would link Puget Sound, Lake Union, and Lake Washington through state-of-the-art locks at Salmon Bay, opening the lakes to maritime traffic beginning in 1917. The Lake Washington watershed had been reoriented entirely; instead of flowing south out of the Black River, it now moved north and west through the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks in Ballard, while the lake itself was ten to twenty feet lower, and more than 4,000 acres of wetlands had been destroyed. Eelgrass beds that had sheltered young salmon and armies of herring were gone, buried under fill. The oxbows and bends of the Duwamish, once home to clouds of waterfowl, had become avenues for global shipping. Perhaps most devastating, the Black River, whose bed now lay above Lake Washington's waterline, had ceased to exist. Duwamish descendant Joseph Moses described that day:

That was quite a day for the white people at least. The waters just went down, down, until our landing and canoes stood dry and there was no Black River at all. There were pools, of course, and the struggling fish trapped in them. People came from miles around, laughing and hollering and stuffing fish into gunny sacks.

Meanwhile, on Lake Union, business and residential development had wiped out the trout population. "Too much house now—all gone," Chesheehud told one observer, a couple of years before he sold up and left for the reservation. The result for many local Native people—or at least for their traditional uses of places in the city—had been disastrous.¹⁴

13. Carl Abbott, "Footprints and Pathways: The Urban Imprint on the Pacific Northwest," in Dale D. Goble and Paul W. Hirt, eds., *Northwest Lands, Northwest Peoples: Readings in Environmental History* (Seattle, 1999), 113. For studies of Seattle's large-scale engineering projects, see Klinge, "Urban by Nature"; Sato, *The Price of Taming a River*; Dick Paetze, *Pioneers and Partnerships: A History of the Port of Seattle* (Seattle, 1995); and Paul Dorpat and Genevieve McCoy, *Building Washington: A History of Washington State's Public Works* (Seattle, 1998).

14. Quoted in Sato, *The Price of Taming a River*, 57; Meany, "Story of Seattle's Nearest Indian Neighbors."



In 1910 a Duwamish couple named Billy and Ellen Phillips made headlines after a winter storm destroyed Billy's crabbing boat, their primary source of income. Press coverage of their troubles illustrated the cumulative effect of these watershed transformations on indigenous people. Identified as a nephew of Chief Seattle, Billy (known as Sbeebayoo in his own language) and his wife were struggling to survive in their cabin at the foot of Stacy Street, just south of the Pioneer Square neighborhood. Both were malnourished, Billy was nearly blind, and Ellen was suffering from chest pains; for some time they had been surviving on neighbors' stale bread and fish donated by a nearby cannery. As *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporters milked the story for all its pathos, they chronicled the process by which a skilled fisherman and his wife had been reduced to such dire circumstances. His camping places along the Puget Sound shoreline had become private property, and the new owners resented Indian "trespassers." Both game and fish were harder to come by, as habitat loss, pollution, and commercial fishing took their toll. Even Billy's canoe had been lost. These factors, combined with age and ill health, had nearly spelled the end for Ellen and Billy. But with the help of cousins from Suquamish and donations from non-Indian Seattleites, the couple moved into a new cabin on Salmon Bay, next to that of Hwelchteed and Cheethlooleetsa, who may have been kinfolk. The little enclave would not exist much longer, however. Sometime during construction of the new ship canal locks, Cheethlooleetsa died, and three months later Indian agents from Suquamish came to take Hwelchteed to the reservation. Soon after that, Sbeebayoo burned Hwelchteed and Cheethlooleetsa's home, in keeping with indigenous strictures against moving into a house where someone had died. The Phillipses appear to have stayed for only a short time; no indigenous people remained at Salmon Bay when the locks were complete in 1916.¹⁵

For the men who envisioned and then enacted these changes, indigenous people like Ellen Phillips and Cheethlooleetsa were irrelevant. Chittenden, for example, argued that "scenic concerns" must yield to the demands of necessity, that the transformation of

15. "Chief Seattle's Nephew Ruined by Gale," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Jan. 6, 1910; "Fund Is Started for Indian Billy," in *ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1910; "Help Comes for Old Indian Billy," in *ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1910; and "Members of Dying Race Whom Advance of Progress Crowds off Seattle Waterfront," in *ibid.*, May 11, 1910.





Figure 4. The cedar-plank home of Hwelchteed (“Salmon Bay Charley”) and Cheethlooleetsa (“Madeline”), photographed by the Webster & Stevens studio in 1905, stood directly across the narrow opening of Salmon Bay from the ancient Shilshole community of Tucked Away Inside, from which Hwelchteed was descended. He owned several acres of land here, opposite the settler town of Ballard that had replaced Tucked Away Inside. Negative 83.10.9067, Webster & Stevens Collection, Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI), Seattle.

lakes, river, and sound was “distinctly a case where utilitarian ends can be accomplished without any sacrifice of sentimental interests.” Nowhere in the plans and proposals did any of the engineers and urban dreamers mention Native people. This should come as no surprise. Adherents of this modern urban planning tradition looked to abstracted, progressive models in which attachments to place and past bore little relevance; indigeneity and modernity were mutually exclusive in the minds of urban planners. When urban Indians were mentioned at all, it was as part of the “underclass,” a grouping that would serve as the bogeyman in planning schemes for decades to come. In 1892, for example, one observer described the “Shantytown” neighborhood around the waterfront home of Keekeesabloo (“Princess Angeline”), the daughter of Chief Seeathl, as “a blemish on this fair and growing city . . . holding a heterogeneous mass of humanity, . . . huddled together—little children with old faces,



unkempt men and women, dirty dogs, stray cats, the sewage from unclean sewers pouring down contagion and filth, moral and physical ill-being." While included with other urban "undesirables," Indians had a special role to play in the civic imagination, their portrayals falling into the "vanishing race" trope so common in American thinking about Indians. They were typically described using terms like "fast falling band of Siwashes" (a derogatory term derived from the French *sauvage*), "jetsam thrown up by the ebb and flow of human activities," "Our Citizens of Yesterday," or a "wretched remnant." Simultaneously invisible and worthy of the front page, the lastness of these "last Indians" seemed a self-fulfilling prophecy, an urban tautology.¹⁶

At the same time that they destroyed the indigenous present and future, large-scale watershed engineering projects often revealed evidence of Seattle's indigenous past. In 1913, for example, construction of the Ship Canal lockpits exposed a deep shell midden that had once been part of the indigenous town of Entering and Emerging. Among clamshells and fish bones, workers found artifacts of everyday lives: grinding stones, net weights, and adzes. And when Lake Washington fell in 1916, rows of wooden posts were exposed at Union Bay; these were the remains of the fishing weir at a Native town called Little Canoe Passage. Meanwhile, ancient stone hearths, laid millennia earlier when the lake had been an inlet of Puget Sound, resurfaced along the new (but also old) shoreline. But even these discoveries were arguments for the "improvements" to Lake Washington. In the *Town Crier*, M. J. Carter wrote that the hearths, created by a "dusky race of primitive men," proved that the canal was a "natural" improvement. "Nature moves slowly and on many feet," he wrote, "but man, harnessing the pent forces of the earth to his needs, strikes with irreverent hand, and the entombed secrets of the past stand revealed." Rather than serving as evidence of the importance of these places to local indigenous people, these

16. Hiram M. Chittenden, "Sentiment versus Utility in the Treatment of National Scenery," *Pacific Monthly*, 23 (Jan. 1910), 29–38; Leonie Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities* (Chichester, U.K., 1998), 33–54; Rose Simmons, "Old Angeline, the Princess of Seattle," *Overland Monthly*, 20 (1892), 506; "Squaw Comes to Meet Mrs. Leary," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 12, 1907; "Mary Seattle Is Badly Hurt," *Seattle Times*, April 15, 1906; "Our Citizens of Yesterday," *Seattle Argus*, Dec. 22, 1900; and Abbie Denny-Lindsley, "When Seattle Was an Indian Camp Forty-Five Years Ago," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 15, 1906.



archaeological discoveries only highlighted the necessity and natural-ness of the engineering marvels that revealed—and then obliterated—them.¹⁷

In the end, there was an element of truth in the “lastness” of indigenous men and women like Chesheehud and Tleebooleetsa. In many ways, they *were* the last generation of indigenous people to inhabit Seattle. Certainly, many people with Native heritage lived throughout the city, and in them the “vanishing race” carried on. Many of these people’s descendants would become members of the present-day Duwamish Tribe, discussed below. But in terms of indigeneity—which we might define by subsistence patterns, connections to traditional places, firsthand experience with the pre-urban landscape, and, not insignificantly, the perceptions of observers—the years of watershed transformation did in fact mark a discontinuity in Seattle’s Native history. It was not the end of Indian Seattle, but the Progressive Era did mark the end of *indigenous* Seattle.

Meanwhile, for Indian people whose ancestry went back to Seattle-before-Seattle but who now lived on area reservations, places in the city remained important: clam beds, fishing sites, camping places. Yet urban watershed change would also erode connections between outlying Native communities and indigenous places within the urban fabric. In a 1994 interview, for example, Muckleshoot elder Art Williams, born in 1913, described traveling to the Duwamish River and the Seattle waterfront to fish, clam, and trade with other Indian people. Accompanied by drumming, songs, and stories, the annual trip to Alki Beach was a continuation of older seasonal rounds and a chance for the Williamses and others to “have a big potlatch . . . everybody come there and say goodbye to one another . . . ’til next year comes, and then have it over again.” But as Art Williams got older, these annual trips became more difficult. Native fishing was outlawed, and, as urban development filled in the shorelines, Indian encampments were less welcome. “No, no, no camping no more,” Williams recalled. “They said no, no more camps. They wouldn’t let us.” By the 1920s annual sojourns had become furtive forays. Williams recalled how “we used to go out, sneak

17. The Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture has accession records for fifty-seven objects unearthed during the construction of the locks. See also Waterman, “The Geographical Names,” 476; and M. J. Carter, “Lake Washington’s New Beach Line,” [*Seattle*] *Town Crier*, April 14, 1917.

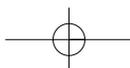




Figure 5. The same vicinity as in Figure 3, ten years later. The construction of Seattle's ship canal, today named after chief engineer Hiram M. Chittenden, linked Puget Sound (behind the photographer) to Lake Union (in the distance) and Lake Washington (over the horizon). The locks radically transformed Seattle's urban watersheds and in many ways brought an end to indigenous Seattle. The home of Hwelchteed, who was relocated to an Indian reservation across Puget Sound just before construction began, stood immediately to the right of this photo. Negative 2002.3.2022, Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI), Seattle.

around and get 'em. Sneak around different places.”¹⁸ It was not just a matter of laws or pollution or fill, however, that brought an end to the clams and other riches of the shoreline: Williams said that shellfish harvests at Seattle declined because Indian people were no longer allowed to go there and pray for the clams' continued abundance.¹⁹

And much more than clams had indeed disappeared. Seattle's watershed transformations also destroyed the numinous forces that had given many local places their meaning. In conversations

18. Interview with Art Williams by Lynn Larson, May 3, 1994, in Larson, *Alki/Transfer CFO Facilities Project Traditional Cultural Properties*; Sophie Frye Bass, *Pigtail Days in Old Seattle* (Portland, Ore., 1937), 16.

19. Williams interview.



with ethnographer John Peabody Harrington in the 1910s, one Duwamish elder described the effects of urban development on a supernatural horned serpent known to inhabit the Lake Washington shoreline. He told the anthropologist that the serpent, once employed by some of the most powerful and revered doctors, was “gone, not there now.” A creek near Ballard, once inhabited by a spirit power used in soul retrieval rituals, had been tapped as an urban water source, befouled by settlers’ cattle, and ultimately buried in a pipe. Meanwhile, in West Seattle, a boulder inscribed with shamanic power figures was buried under fill and new buildings some time around the turn of the century. In the late twentieth century, some Indian people would return to sacred sites in Seattle, claiming that the powers were still there and waking up the ceremonies that accessed them. But during the years of the city’s most rapid growth, many elders lamented that urban change had destroyed or dispersed many of the watershed’s spiritual, and thus most fundamental, qualities.²⁰

Yet there was also persistence. Along the Duwamish River, for example, were three hills associated with a deep-time legend that sounds remarkably like a cultural memory of the Ice Age. The three hills are also geological anomalies, stable places surrounded by millennia of devastating mudflows, earthquakes, and other catastrophes. Despite changes to the river, urban development, and even dynamiting, those hills still exist, and Native people have stayed connected to them through story and memory. Muckleshoot elder Florence “Dosie” Starr Wynn, for example, recalled trips with her grandmother to the city along the river in the 1930s: “We . . . used to go up there. And . . . we’d go through that road through Duwamish, that way. And she named all the rocks. The hills . . . they had names for every one of them rocks down there. . . . Stories about those hills. All along that valley, there.” The landscape might have been changed almost beyond recognition, but the memory of these places remained vital for the descendants of Seattle’s indigenous people. In 1931, for example, Suquamish elder Mary Thompson told a *Seattle Times* reporter that, although she seldom visited the city named after her great-grandfather, she remained connected to the place. “I always feel that I own it somehow,” she said. And then there is the

20. John Peabody Harrington, *The Papers of John Peabody Harrington in the Smithsonian Institution, 1907–1957*, ed. Elaine L. Miles (New York, 1981), frame 344; Waterman, *Puget Sound Geography*, 55, 59; and Marian W. Smith, “Petroglyph Complexes in the History of the Columbia-Fraser Region,” *Southwest Journal of Anthropology*, 2 (1946), 315.



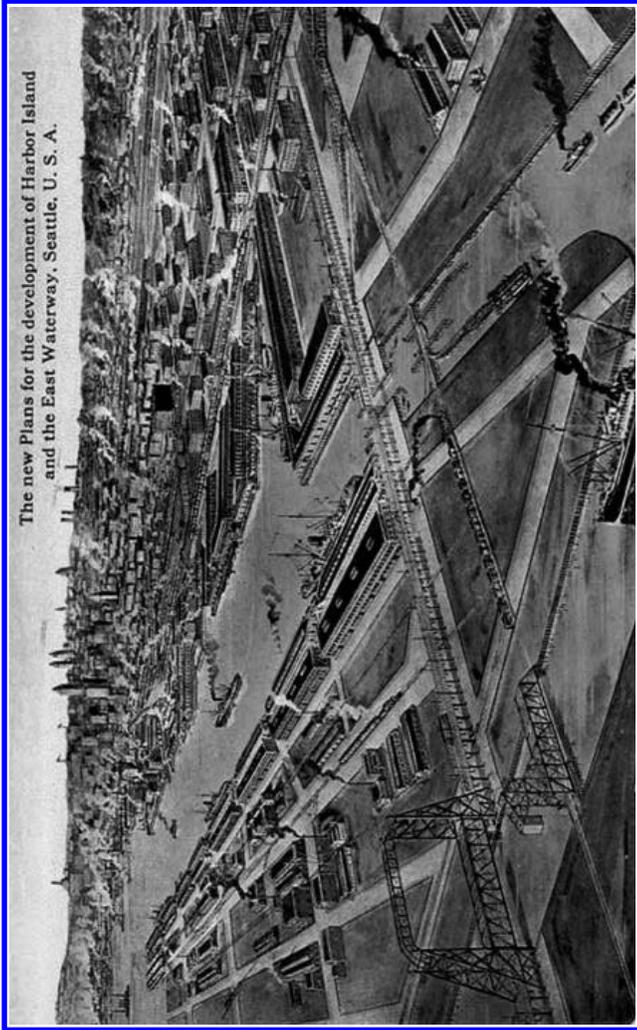
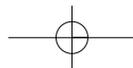


Figure 6. This postcard, printed in 1915, captures the scale of changes wrought in the Duwamish River's estuary. All of the flat land in the foreground was newly created, most of it with earth removed during the city's regrades. The effect of these changes on Native people like Setootowathl was often profound. The Smith Tower, a symbol of Progressive-era Seattle, can be seen directly above the largest steamer in the East Waterway. Negative 5987, Seattle Postcard Collection, University of Washington, Seattle.



indigenous name for the city itself. When ethnographers like Harrington and Thomas Talbot Waterman in the 1910s and Marian Wesley Smith in the 1940s interviewed Whulshootseed-speaking elders throughout Puget Sound, they found that most did not use the name borrowed (or, according to some accounts, stolen) from Seeathl. Instead, they called the city Little Crossing Over Place, after an indigenous community of several longhouses that had been replaced by Seattle's Pioneer Square. The memory of places now lost in the urban landscape continued to resonate in tribal memory, but this kind of knowledge, like the language in which it was embedded, increasingly resided outside the city.²¹

* * *

By the 1920s urban watershed transformations had spelled the end of indigenous Seattle, as changes to the rivers, lakes, and shorelines made indigenous ways of life in the city nearly impossible. Progressive values of urban order had little room for the practices and knowledges that indigenous people carried. Nowhere was this more evident than at the place called Tideflats, where Seetoowathl had lived with his unpleasant wife. The couple had struggled in the first years of the twentieth century as the dogfish oil industry collapsed with the introduction of petroleum products. Some of their neighbors moved on to the reservations, while others passed away. Meanwhile, the Duwamish River around them had changed dramatically. Their house had somehow escaped all the dredging and filling and straightening, and by the 1920s it floated on the last remaining original bend of the river. Relatives came less frequently; Ollie Wilbur and her parents had stopped coming because they "didn't care to go there anymore." It might have been isolation, together with infirmity and the degraded urban environment around them, that spelled the end. In the winter of 1920 Seetoowathl and his wife starved to death. "He died, you know," recalled his great-grandniece Ollie, "and they just cremated his body, you know."²²

21. Interview with Florence Wynn by Lynn Larson, June 15, 1994, in Larson, *Alki/Transfer CFO Facilities Project Traditional Cultural Properties*; "Great-Granddaughter of Seattle is Hostess at Her Home in Suquamish," *Seattle Times*, Nov. 29, 1931; Marian W. Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually* (New York, 1940), 54.

22. Waterman, "The Geographical Names," 188; Gedosch, "A Note on the Dogfish Oil Industry"; Wilbur interview.



The crazy woman and her husband had chosen to stay on the river, and the cost was lethal. The fact that two old people, indigenous or otherwise, could starve to death in Seattle in 1920 is in part an indictment of the failings of the Progressive Era. The city now had over 300,000 residents and had achieved remarkable successes. Its first radio station had just sparked to life; an innovative sanitary landfill, the first of its kind in the region, promised to usher in a new period of hygiene; and the tallest building west of the Mississippi stood within sight of the Duwamish River, a testament to wealth, competence, and confidence. From the Smith Tower's upper floors, one might have been able to see, through the smoke of new industry, the curve of river where Seetoowathl's home rose and fell on the tides. But the Progressive ethos of reform, charity, and order, for all its successes, could not make the cognitive leap from skyscraper to floathouse. Then again, the Progressive Era was also the era of Jim Crow, the Alien Land Law, and the disaster of Indian allotment. Why should Seattle have been any different?

Of course, not every indigenous person in Seattle starved to death. Some stayed put, making do as best they could, often by pursuing what appeared to be a path of assimilation. In contrast with Duwamish people whose descendants told stories of the city from afar, these Duwamish people told stories of the city from within the city itself, even as ethnographers and journalists ignored these "invisible" descendants of Seathl. Others gave up on traditional places within the urban landscape and relocated to area reservations, but even from a distance, their descendants continued to tell stories about those places and their meanings. But much had been lost as well. During construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, engineer Hiram Chittenden had written that critics of the canal disliked such projects "simply because they destroy old associations. . . those who have been familiar all their lives with certain conditions are naturally loth to see them changed." For many people descended from the indigenous communities of Seattle, the "old associations" had been destroyed almost completely.²³

* * *

If history tells us anything, it is that things rarely go entirely as planned. This is particularly true of environmental and indigenous

23. Chittenden, "Sentiment versus Utility," 31.



histories, in which “tamed” ecologies and “vanishing” people resist, adapt, and assert themselves in ways that are far from expected. In the case of Seattle, even several decades after the nadir of the 1910s, two Native communities descended from local indigenous people began to reclaim authority over the landscapes that had once been inhabited solely by their ancestors. As they did so, their actions intersected with transformations of Seattle’s urban narrative and the policies and politics that grew out of a new civic identity.

As late as the 1960s, Native people, some of them descended from the Duwamish people on whose territory Seattle was built, continued to make use of traditional resources in the city’s watersheds. In the case of the Muckleshoot tribe, that meant catching fish on the Duwamish River despite the *de facto* criminalization of the fishery. As Seattleites became increasingly concerned about environmental issues in the wake of postwar affluence and deindustrialization, these Indian fishermen became scapegoats for the decline of fish runs in Puget Sound. Never mind the sewage outfalls, denuded riverbanks, pesticide-soaked lawns, and toxic effluents. When Muckleshoot gillnetters were arrested upstream from Seattle in 1963, Harold E. Miller, the director of an agency charged with overseeing restoration of water quality, claimed in the pages of the *Seattle Times* that “all we have done in the Duwamish is being offset by this [fishing] activity.” Arrests, “fish-in” protests, and numerous legal battles ultimately led to the thunderclap of *United States v. Washington*, in which a federal judge decreed that western Washington tribes had the right to half the harvestable salmon in Puget Sound and its rivers, and that they had a stake in co-managing natural resources.²⁴

Empowered by their new legal status, the Muckleshoot and other tribes began to assert authority over the urban landscape. In 1982, for example, the Muckleshoot intervened against the proposed Seacrest Marina, a \$13 million project that would have occupied 1,600 feet of shoreline near the mouth of the Duwamish. Tribal concerns over the impact on fisheries, along with opposition from

24. “Nine of Ten Netted: METRO Perturbed as Indians Block Salmon Spawning Run,” *Seattle Times*, Sept. 20, 1963. For overviews of the “fish wars,” as the struggle for treaty fishing rights on Puget Sound is called in Indian communities, see American Friends Service Committee, *Uncommon Controversy: Fishing Rights of Muckleshoot, Puyallup, and Nisqually Indians* (Seattle, 1972), and Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley, 1998), esp. 218–244.



urban environmentalists, led to the scrapping of the Seacrest proposal. Despite opposition from developers, right-wing ideologues, and many commercial fishermen, tribal efforts to manage urban nature earned positive reviews from environmental organizations and the mainstream press. When the Muckleshoots created a tribal fishing reserve in Elliott Bay in 1989, for instance, the *Post-Intelligencer* referred to the tribe as a “fine conservation example,” a total reversal of the scapegoating so common only twenty years earlier. In the twenty-five years since the landmark “Boldt decision,” local tribes have exerted their authority over environmental issues just as those issues were coming to dominate civic consciousness.²⁵

But there is an irony in the Muckleshoot tribe’s co-management of Seattle’s salmon runs. The legal basis for tribal fishing in the waters in and around Seattle is based on treaty language assuring access to the “usual and accustomed stations” that indigenous people had managed for millennia, but those places have often been transformed beyond recognition by urban development. As Muckleshoot fishing nets tangled with pleasure boats in the Lake Washington Ship Canal in the 1980s, for instance, they did so in a waterway that did not exist at the time of the treaties; the same engineering marvels that had destroyed indigenous subsistence in and around Seattle had also created a new and spectacular fishery that was neither usual nor accustomed. Meanwhile, despite tribal influence on the city’s environmental policies and a strong environmentalist ethic among many Seattleites, by the end of the twentieth century the salmon were almost gone; indeed, some of them had been placed on the Endangered Species List.²⁶

25. Lee Moriwaki, “Indian Fishermen’s Worries Could Sink West Seattle Marina Project,” *Seattle Times*, Aug. 20, 1982; Brad O’Connor, “Sports-Fishing Preserve Carved out of Elliott Bay,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Oct. 2, 1988; “Protecting a Steelhead Run: Muckleshoots Set Fine Conservation Example,” *Seattle Times*, Jan. 25, 1989. For more on the Boldt decision, see *Duwamish et al. v. the United States of America, Consolidated Petition No. F-275* (Seattle, 1993).

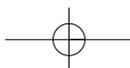
26. Richard Seven, “A Snarly Problem in Ship Canal,” *Seattle Times*, Oct. 8, 1987; Peter Lewis, “Marina Plan Gets Its Permit, but Tribes Pledge Court Fight,” in *ibid.*, July 25, 1987; Robert T. Nelson, “Permit Is Reissued for Marina,” in *ibid.*, March 17, 1988; Steve Miletich, “Tribes Win Halt to Work on Magnolia Bluff Marina,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 2, 1988; Gil Bailey, “Magnolia Marina Agreement,” in *ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1989. For the listing of local salmon runs under the Endangered Species Act, see Klinge, “Urban by Nature.”



The Muckleshoot, who include among themselves some descendants of the Duwamish of Seattle, are a federally recognized tribe. Another group of Duwamish people, most of whom continue to reside in and around Seattle, are not. In 1979, five years after the decision in *U.S. v. Washington*, the Bureau of Indian Affairs removed the Duwamish and four other Puget Sound Native communities from the list of tribes eligible for treaty fishing rights. As justification, the agency cited the failure of the Duwamish to meet one criterion for federal recognition: a continuous political and leadership structure reaching back to the 1855 treaty. The BIA noted that there was a ten-year gap in Duwamish leadership from 1916 to 1925. Of course there was: These were the years of the channelization of the Duwamish, the construction of the Ship Canal, the lowering of Lake Washington, and the destruction of the Black River. That any tribal organization was able to rise out of this chaos is a testament to Native persistence. In the years since the ruling, the Duwamish have used genealogical research to show the connections between the two generations of tribal leadership, but while their petition seems to have satisfied the Clinton-era BIA—they were granted recognition on the last day of Clinton’s administration—it has not done so for President George W. Bush’s BIA. Four days after receiving recognition, the Duwamish were notified that the decision had been reversed. At present, they are still struggling to obtain federal status.²⁷

Despite their failure to regain federal recognition, the Duwamish have been extremely successful in bringing to the forefront of Seattle’s civic consciousness the social consequences of the city’s environmental history. When a Port of Seattle bulldozer nearly destroyed an important archaeological site on the Duwamish River near Tideflats in 1975, for example, Duwamish tribal leaders and

27. Sara Jean Green, “Chief Seattle’s Tribe Clings to Its Identity,” *Seattle Times*, June 18, 2001; Paul Shukovsky, “Ballard Locks’ Creation Left Tribe High and Dry,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 24, 2001; Shukovsky, “Tribal Fate in Hands of a Few Federal Employees,” in *ibid.*; Stuart Eskenazi, “Reversal of Tribe’s Status Blasted,” *Seattle Times*, Jan. 11, 2002; Eskenazi, “Duwamish Tribe’s Recognition Hangs on a Small Technicality,” in *ibid.*, March 5, 2002; Paul Shukovsky, “Religious Leaders Back Recognition for Duwamish Tribe,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 14, 2002; Shukovsky, “Decision is Death Knell for Duwamish,” in *ibid.*, May 11, 2002; Stuart Eskenazi, “Duwamish Mull Next Move,” *Seattle Times*, May 14, 2002; and Paul Shukovsky, “Duwamish Will Take Their Case for Recognition to Congress,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 9, 2002. For an analysis of the Duwamish tribe’s struggle for federal recognition in broad global context, see Bruce Granville Miller, *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2002), 94–97.



their supporters in the local press used the outrage to reframe Seattle's urban story. In one interview, tribal chairwoman Cecile Maxwell lamented that "we have no culture left, no history left. That's because we have no land base," linking the Port's blunder to a longer history of dispossession. Meanwhile, Indian activist and journalist Terry Tafoya pointed out in the *Post-Intelligencer* that Europeans "were in the dark ages" when the longhouses of the disturbed site were built and that, "perhaps a thousand years from now, Indians will discover the decaying remains of the Space Needle." One editorial board even asked, "Who says that Seattle was founded in 1851?" And when the dig went public in 1978 with free tours, the site was interpreted as "a boon, not only to the public, but also to the Duwamish people," presenting a chance "to learn about the way of life of the Duwamish people, whose past has almost been completely wiped out by a growing city." Since that time, the Duwamish have been an important presence at historical events, such as the 2001 sesquicentenary of Seattle's founding and in efforts to clean up contaminated sites on the river named for them, articulating a kind of cultural authority over the urban landscape, even if official legal authority continues to escape them. Meanwhile, they are working with their many allies in the environmental and religious communities to raise funds to build a longhouse and cultural center across the street from the archaeological excavation that had garnered them so much attention.²⁸

In both the Duwamish and Muckleshoot cases, these new kinds of Indian authority over urban landscapes could not have been possible without a corresponding change in Seattle's urban imagination. During the same years that tribal activists were offering themselves up for arrest and speaking to news reporters, Seattle's urban identity changed dramatically. In short, Seattle had become ecotopian. In truth, well before the 1975 publication of Ernest Callenbach's mediocre but wildly popular utopian novel *Ecotopia*, in

28. Erik Lacitis, "We 'Have No Culture Left,'" *Seattle Times*, July 17, 1976; Terry Tafoya, "Minority Voices: Indian 'Roots' Uncovered on Duwamish," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 26 1977; "Uncovering Seattle's Hidden History," in *ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1977; Maribeth Morris, "Indians Ask Duwamish Relic Area," in *ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1977; James E. Lalonde, "A Pipeline through History," *Seattle Times*, March 5, 1986; and Pablo Lopez, "Archaeologists Dug up Artifacts That Could Help Duwamish Tribe," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 7, 1986. For additional information on the Duwamish longhouse project, see www.duwamishtribe.org.



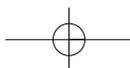
which Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco became the centers of a secessionist nation organized around environmentalist principles, Seattle's culture of nature was undergoing a radical transformation.²⁹ Confronted by the pollution attendant to rapid urban and suburban growth, and inspired by a growing emphasis on health, aesthetics, and an outdoor lifestyle, Seattleites began in the late 1950s to undertake massive campaigns to undo environmental damage in and around the city. Cleaning up Lake Washington, protecting green spaces, and enhancing salmon runs became major civic projects, while Seattle became a haven for environmentalist organizations that hoped to change policy throughout the region and beyond. By the 1970s these efforts had helped to shape an environmentalist ethic in Seattle that, if by no means monolithic, dramatically reoriented the city's self-image. Gone was the Seattle that prided itself on lumber mills and regrades and rail connections; in its place was one of the few cities in the world that one moved *to* in order to get closer to nature.³⁰

Few things reflected this cultural shift or had more implications for Native people than the symbolic resuscitation of Seeathl. Just as Seattle the city was born again as an environmentally friendly metropolis in the 1970s, Seattle the symbolic Indian was reborn as the city's first environmentalist. This was not just a local phenomenon. Following the publication of an augmented version of the speech in which the Native leader anachronistically mourned the coming of the railroad and the passing of the buffalo, the words attributed to the him became famous around the world, particularly among European environmentalists, progressive Christians concerned with human rights, and some Native activists. Soon the city's public image became closely linked to the ostensible environmental message of its namesake, as well as to a growing concern for the predicament of Indian peoples. It was this new eco-friendly civic identity that Native activists exploited to challenge the dominant, if shifting, urban narrative.³¹

29. Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (Berkeley, 1975).

30. See Klinge, "Urban by Nature," and Roger Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present* (Seattle, 1976).

31. For overviews of 1970s reworkings of the speech, see Bierwert, "Remembering Chief Seattle," and Furtwangler, *Answering Chief Seattle*.



In doing so, they proved that Seattle's urban and Native histories are as linked to each other as ever. Muckleshoot tribal fisheries staff patrolling the waters of Lake Washington, Duwamish activists picketing archaeological digs, and the continued symbolic place of Chief Seattle in civic iconography show that the city's Native history never ended, despite the massive transformations that dispossessed indigenous people like Seetoowathl and the others. They challenge us to consider the ways in which Indian and urban histories are linked and to confront directly the human costs of both material and discursive practices. Seattleites live with both urban and Indian history and with the injustices and ironies that have arisen from them. Those injustices are not merely environmental. They are also historical, and they compel historians of both urban and Indian history to reexamine what we think we know about the past, about who belongs where and when, and about how the stories at either end of the American historical imagination—the "Indians of the past" and the "cities of the future"—are in fact the same story.



