



*Celebrating 100 Years of Growth*

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## *Introduction*

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Point Defiance Park. For many generations of Tacomans, this magnificent peninsula standing sentinel over the waters of Puget Sound has been the crown jewel of our city's public spaces. The year 2005 marks the one-hundred-year anniversary of Point Defiance Park as the formal property of the citizens of Tacoma. In that century, the Park has served as an urban oasis, a forested refuge, and a place of gathering for occasions both leisurely and momentous. It is a significant heritage of beauty, natural history and stewardship that we have inherited from past generations and will bequeath to those of the future. This legacy of ours was apparent even in the early years of the twentieth century, when a visiting landscape architect stated in open admiration of Point Defiance:

*"Probably no other city in this country has such a beautiful natural park. Its setting, and relation to the city are unique and ideal...every citizen of Tacoma should feel it a duty and a privilege to become one of the guardians."*<sup>1</sup>

The occasion of Point Defiance Park's 1905-2005 centennial is therefore a fitting opportunity for an exploration of the history of this treasured civic asset. Join us as we survey all the changes over time as witnessed by these forests and shores over the past one hundred years...

### *Geology and Ethnography*


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Bordered on three sides by the tidal waters of Puget Sound, the unique shape of Point Defiance was carved into being by glaciers during the successive advances and retreats of ice sheets in the Puget Lowland over tens of thousands of years. In between these periods of glaciers covering the region, streams deposited other sediments ranging from clays to sands, gravels, and boulders, resulting in the curious layering seen in the cliffs around Point Defiance, which were cut mainly by wave action in the Narrows and Dalco Passage. Waves cut away at the base of the cliffs at high tide and during storms, and eventually the material in the cliffs collapsed down onto the beach. In this process that continues today, the cliffs retreat through geological time and new areas of the sedimentary layers are exposed. Earthquakes over the centuries have also shaped the geology of Point Defiance, most notably causing the sands and gravels above the layers of clay to give way, triggering landslides near present-day Salmon Beach as recently as 1949 and 2001.<sup>2</sup>

Once formed by eons of geological forces, over time the flora and fauna of Point Defiance developed into a native forest with plant and animal biodiversity characteristic of the Lowland Puget Sound.

*"The core of the forest is a mix of hemlock, fir and cedar...with intermixtures of native alder,*





*maple, and madrona . Madrona groves are common along the west bluff, maples flourish along sun-exposed edges, and willow and alder thickets cover wet areas...doubtless elk, cougar, black bear, spotted owl and goshawk once dwelled in the park”<sup>3</sup>*

Though today, compared to its existence of past centuries, the wildness of Point Defiance has been somewhat tamed by the encroachment of population and settlement, wild animals ranging over the peninsula still include deer, mink, raccoon, and birds such as woodpeckers, bald eagles, and both migratory and resident songbirds. The natural history of this peninsula remains

*“unique in the Tacoma region for its extensive stand of old-growth coniferous forest. The fine large trees and lush understory furnish an aesthetic setting equal to the pre-settlement grandeur of the Puget Sound lowlands. This environment is of inestimable value as a constant reminder of our natural and cultural heritage”<sup>4</sup>*

### *Point Defiance and the Southern Puget Sound Salish People*

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Though in cultural rather than scientific terms, the native peoples who inhabited this area of Puget Sound for centuries before the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century arrival of Europeans and Americans also had their own explanations and names for the interesting geography of Point Defiance. In “Whulshootseed”, the language of the Southern Puget Sound Salish people, the name for Point Defiance was pronounced *s-cheet-oos*, which linguists translate as meaning “near face” or “near cliff” and interpret as referring to the closeness of Point Defiance to the land across the Narrows. The name *jeeq-shud*, meaning “wet feet”, referred to the incurved shore on the western side of the Point, while the name *cho-cho-thlap*, meaning “vine maples”, referred to the area where the Asarco smelter operation more recently existed, and denoted the site of a good clam digging beach. Given the geographical prominence of Point Defiance, its beaches were also used as campsites by the itinerant Nisqually and Puyallup for generations, as they traveled by canoe between the lower and upper reaches of Puget Sound.<sup>5</sup> However, while there were trails crossing the forest and down the bluffs, there is no record of any permanent settlement by indigenous people on this peninsula which was to become known as Point Defiance.<sup>6</sup> Historically, the name “Point Defiance” only came into existence in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this was courtesy of an officer of the United States Navy.

### *The Wilkes Expedition*

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The United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-42, popularly referred to as the Wilkes Expedition after its U. S. Navy commander Charles Wilkes, was principally a scientific voyage of inquiry, but it also mapped and named areas that would shortly become a part of the United States in the Treaty of 1846 with Great Britain. The Wilkes Expedition spent the summer of 1841 in this region - long before the city of Tacoma or the state of Washington even existed - creating maps and charts. While the name “Point Defiance” is not mentioned in Wilkes’ official narrative of the expedition, it does appear on his 1841 map of Puget Sound, which seems to be the first recorded use of the name. In 1849, Charles Wilkes published a personal account of the expedition under the title *Western America*, which contains the earliest written explanation of the reasoning behind the unusual name for Point Defiance. Describing the Narrows, Wilkes wrote:

*“The banks rise nearly perpendicular, and are composed of sand-stone; a great variety of shrubs grow along their base. This narrow pass seems as if intended by nature to afford every means for the defense of Puget’s Sound. Point Defiance, on the east, commands all the approaches to it...the Narrows, if strongly fortified, would bid defiance to any attack, and guard its entrance against any force.”<sup>7</sup>*

## *A Military Reservation of the U.S. Government*

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This naming of Point Defiance in the 1840s by a naval officer, with its descriptive recognition of the peninsula's strategic location, paved the way for the United States government's interest in claiming title to this property for possible military purposes. In 1860, soldiers stationed at the U. S. Army outpost of Fort Steilacoom made reconnaissance surveys to Point Defiance to evaluate it as a source of fresh water, as well as a potential site for fortification.<sup>8</sup> Just a few short years later in 1866, soon after Job Carr built one of the first cabins in what became Tacoma's Old Town area, President Andrew Johnson set aside the approximately 640 acres of Point Defiance by executive order as a federal government military reservation.<sup>9</sup> This was not unique to Tacoma – in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. government reserved many prominent and strategic Puget Sound locations for possible future use as lighthouse or fortification sites. So, while the new settlement of Tacoma grew and prospered in the 1870s and into the 1880s, the Point Defiance acreage was off-limits to development, due to its federal reservation status. Its considerable distance from the small city of Tacoma, combined with the lack of road improvements and land transportation, also precluded much interest in the heavily wooded peninsula, other than the odd adventurer arriving by water to camp on its beaches or the occasional opportunist cutting firewood.<sup>10</sup>

### *“To the Point”*


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The history of the use of land surrounding Point Defiance as a park actually begins in 1888. The early real estate developers of Tacoma's western edge were quick to plan for a streetcar line to link the new residents to the jobs and commerce of downtown Tacoma. They recognized that having a prominent park at the end of the residential development would give additional impetus for people to move into the area. With a streetcar going all the way out to “the Point”, a park might even be a destination in its own right for the people living in a few miles away in “the city”.<sup>11</sup>

Tacoma's “movers and shakers” of the day - notably Isaac W. Anderson, Allen C. Mason and Hugh Wallace - spearheaded the move to petition the U. S. Congress to let the City of Tacoma use the undeveloped military reservation as a park. All these men had financial interests in housing developments and streetcar lines, but conflict of interest seems not to have been an impediment in the Tacoma of the 1880's, but rather an impetus! A major problem was that Washington was still a territory, not yet a state, and it didn't have a senator of its own to represent local interests in the U.S. Senate in Washington D.C. Wheels had to be greased and palms crossed to make all this happen. Mason kicked in \$500 of his own money and Wallace went off to Washington D.C to enlist the aid of the territory's representative to the House of Representatives to make it all happen.<sup>12</sup> The legislation passed Congress, but President Grover Cleveland promptly vetoed it in August of 1888.<sup>13</sup>

Cleveland's reasons for vetoing the bill are not clear, but a feature contained in the bill that ultimately passed, was a reserve clause to guarantee the federal government that the land could be reclaimed in case of necessity.<sup>14</sup> The whole process was started over again, and on December 17, 1888 President Cleveland signed a new bill that had just passed Congress. Tacoma had a park, but in name only. Before Point Defiance Park could be developed, a few key things had to happen. First, the streetcar line had to be completed. Allen C. Mason delivered, sometimes advancing his own money for the construction. On March 1, 1890 Mason drove the final spike at an opening day ceremony.<sup>15</sup> Another partner in the Point Defiance Tacoma and Edison Railway Company was Stuart Rice, elected Tacoma's Mayor in May of 1890.<sup>16</sup> Newly-elected Mayor Rice promptly appointed a Board of Park Commissioners on June 14, 1890, which reported to the City Council, to administer the fledgling park system that initially consisted of Wright Park, Ferry Park and Point Defiance Park. The first Park Board included Allen C. Mason and Isaac W. Anderson as members.<sup>17</sup> Tacoma's park system was off and running, initially as a department of city government. Not until seventeen years later, in 1907, would it become the





independent park district with separate taxing authority that we know today as Metro Parks Tacoma.

### *The Olmsted Tradition*

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The establishment of a park system in Tacoma in the 1880s and the appointment of its first governing body in 1890 were very much in keeping with a national American trend in the second half of the nineteenth century. Planning park spaces and designing their landscapes for public use and enjoyment were advocated by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), designer of New York's famed Central Park and considered to be the founder of American landscape architecture. Olmsted's philosophy - in a very small nutshell - was the improvement of American society through harmonious landscapes and public spaces, which would be open to all people and which would serve as an antidote to the increasing urbanization of post-Civil War America. Parks were to be graceful, democratic, pastoral and rejuvenating, separate from the intrusions of daily life, and sheltered as much as possible from conflicting uses. This seems pretty standard to us now, but it was a fairly dramatic concept when it was new. Tacoma's setting aside of tracts of land and planning for their improvement and public use was therefore at the forefront of the movement advocated by Frederick Law Olmsted, and prominent in the City of Tacoma's park development was its most impressive acreage, Point Defiance.<sup>18</sup>

### *From Peninsula to Park*

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The first order of business to make Point Defiance into a park was to clear a large amount of fallen timber and underbrush. The Park Board authorized a subscription to raise funds for this purpose, and Tacoma citizens contributed \$3,600 for this project.<sup>19</sup> Landscape architect Edward O. Schwagerl surveyed the park and produced a detailed topographical map that was the basis for park planning throughout the 1890's. Schwagerl was also responsible for the early planning of Wright Park, but his contribution to Point Defiance has gone largely unnoticed. Unfortunately, his original topographical map for Point Defiance apparently no longer exists today, although it was noted as being in the possession of the city engineering department as late as the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> In the summer of 1890, Ebenezer R. Roberts was hired as a foreman to employ the necessary men to assist him in the work of clearing the park and carrying out Schwagerl's vision.<sup>21</sup> Roberts was a noted Welsh landscape gardener who had served as a gardener in Britain at several large and well-known estates. He immigrated to the United States as a young man and began a career that ultimately included appointment as Tacoma's Superintendent of Parks.<sup>22</sup> One of the first issues that Roberts and his workers faced was clearing out a number of residents who were informally occupying land in Point Defiance. Park Board minutes of the 1890s referred to them as "squatters", concerned that they were a drain on resources and a presence that could not be managed. Actually, there *was* a long-standing tradition of people building temporary summer huts or creating campsites for extended stays at Point Defiance:

*"One of the summer pleasures was camping at Point Defiance, to which Tacomans went to spend several days or weeks at a time, and they were careful to take arms. An Indian shot a large cougar there in 1884, and bears and bobcats frequently were seen."<sup>23</sup>*

In 1891 and 1894, the Park Board attempted to remove squatters from the park.<sup>24</sup> Two years later in 1896, however, they bowed to reality and decided upon charging \$3.00 "per lot" for the season, apparently in an effort to distinguish seasonal holiday campers from true illegal habitation on public property.<sup>25</sup> Early photos of the park show some of these campsites. Imagine the idyllic world and adventures of a child spending a summer in Point Defiance Park in the 1890's. An entire summer without shoes!

Park Board Minutes of this era also document a scandalous incident that occurred in 1896, when 2 women and 1 man were seen bathing "in a nude condition" on the beach. The Park

Board called a special meeting, and passed a resolution that these nude bathers must be identified and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.<sup>26</sup> However, there are no indications in subsequent Park Board Minutes that the wrongdoers were ever apprehended or prosecuted.

One of the earliest improvements in Point Defiance Park was the construction of a log bridge in 1892, which was designed by the Park Board Secretary, F.I. Mead.<sup>27</sup> This bridge was the gateway from the developed areas located closer to the entrance of the Park to the wild, forested areas out towards the Point. It bridged a gulch, and a stream running underneath was dammed up to create a pond, which in turn had a series of smaller picturesque rustic bridges. This area became known as “Lovers Lane”. The log bridge was made up of some 3,500 logs and was approximately 250 feet in length and 80 feet high.<sup>28</sup> The Rustic Bridge was a major attraction in Point Defiance Park and is frequently pictured in post cards of the era.


Other features of Point Defiance Park in the 1890’s included a waiting area for the streetcar line,<sup>29</sup> and a rustic fruit stand<sup>30</sup> and “boat stands”,<sup>31</sup> which later were enlarged into a restaurant and boathouse. An article published in *The Tacoma Sunday Ledger* in April of 1899 hailed Point Defiance Park as “Tacoma’s Great Show Place” and detailed how the park had grown over the decade. There were various gardens, an artificial lake with fountain, and a concert garden. Bathing huts located near the beach were available for visitors to change into early bathing suits and enjoy swimming and splashing in Puget Sound.<sup>32</sup> Animals were also a feature of the park at this time with enclosures for elk and deer, a monkey, a number of exotic birds, and in 1899 a bear pit for a solitary black bear.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the early buildings and garden furniture located in Point Defiance Park were what was then termed “rustic”, meaning that they were built from trees and limbs that were felled within the park and of simple natural design. Most of these early features in the park were replaced with more substantial counterparts as time went on. Little of the early flavor of the park remains, with one notable exception. In 1898 it was recognized that on-site housing for Superintendent Ebenezer Roberts would enhance security and stop the removal of timber from the park.<sup>34</sup> The Park Board approved \$2,220 to build the residence for Roberts, which we know today as “The Lodge”. This house was designed by noted Tacoma architect, C.A. Darmer.<sup>35</sup> An early newspaper description of the house referred to it as: “... an ideal rural home, built of polished peeled logs, with an immense colonial veranda running around the entire house.”<sup>36</sup> The lodge has been an important feature of Point Defiance Park, almost from the very beginning, as it served as the residence of park superintendents and later executive directors of the Metropolitan Park District until 1980.<sup>37</sup>

It is noteworthy that as early as 1900 there were some in the community that saw fit to preserve the early history of Tacoma. Clinton P. Ferry was an early Tacoma businessman who recognized the importance of the Job Carr Cabin, which was preserved as the first home in what is now Old Town Tacoma. Ferry donated the first park to the City of Tacoma in 1883 and was instrumental in founding the Ferry Museum, which later merged with the Washington State Historical Society. Beginning in 1899, Ferry and the Board of Park Commissioners spearheaded the drive to move the Job Carr Cabin from its original Old Town location to Point Defiance Park.<sup>38</sup> In 1900 the cabin was located near the present tennis courts located on the bluff above the Vashon Ferry Landing.<sup>39</sup> In 1917, the cabin would be moved to the entrance of Five Mile Drive.<sup>40</sup>

In 1901 a major feature was added to Point Defiance Park, its first greenhouse. This structure was 25 by 100 feet and cost over \$2,000 to construct.<sup>41</sup> It appears that the greenhouse was planned with the idea that it would be expanded with additional wings. It was initially both a production greenhouse for plant propagation as well as a display greenhouse for exotic plants and palms.<sup>42</sup> By 1906 these two functions were already at odds with each other. A newspaper article lamented that





*The palms are now kept in a very crowded greenhouse and the height of this retards the growth of the plants...The banana tree has been pruned until it is a dwarf...The royal palms and the blue palms are also suffering from too close quarters...Such a [green]house will cost only a few thousand dollars...but the park board has not the money to build it – there are so many other things that must be done with the little money on hand.<sup>43</sup>*

It is likely that the limitations with Point Defiance's greenhouse led E.R. Roberts to actively encourage a donation of \$10,000 from his good friend W.W. Seymour to build the conservatory at Wright Park, which was intended primarily as a public display conservatory rather than a production greenhouse.<sup>44</sup> The Point Defiance greenhouse was ultimately expanded with additional wings. Sadly, the greenhouse was gone from Point Defiance Park by the 1920's, probably eclipsed by the conservatory at Wright Park. The greenhouse functions were relocated to the southeast corner of the park, where Metro Parks Horticulture is still headquartered today.

Another early amenity in Point Defiance Park was a Concert Garden, further refined with a bandstand in 1901. This area was located on the bluff, on the far side of the Pagoda overlooking the current boathouse. Sunday band concerts became a regular feature at Point Defiance during the summer months. At this time, 6 swings were also added to the park near the Concert Garden area. Clearly, the park was becoming a place to go that offered the visitor a variety of activities and experiences.<sup>45</sup>

A boathouse operator named Edwin D. Ferris was awarded a contract by the Park Board to run a restaurant and boathouse operation in 1901.<sup>46</sup> Ferris may have used existing facilities that were described earlier as a fruit stand and wharf. By the end of 1902, the Park Board and Ferris worked out an agreement where Ferris was to build a "restaurant and pavilion" at his own expense, in exchange for a 10 year contract to operate restaurant and boat rental concessions at the park. The octagonal structure that Ferris had built was 60 feet in diameter with a covered porch extending out an additional 16 feet. The Pavilion contained a restaurant and stands for soft drinks and refreshments such as ice cream and peanuts. The upper floor of the Pavilion was reserved as a residence for Mr. and Mrs. Ferris, with the third story cupola intended as an observatory.<sup>47</sup> This new Pavilion became a major draw to Point Defiance Park; the restaurant was known for the expansive views of Puget Sound and the house specialty of Mrs. Ferris' clam chowder.<sup>48</sup> The crowds in 1903 were so great that the railway company added an additional track on the Point Defiance line to accommodate the increasing number of visitors to the Park.<sup>49</sup>

### *The President and Point Defiance Park*

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President Theodore Roosevelt visited Tacoma in May of 1903. By this time, there was a growing feeling that actual title to the land that comprised Point Defiance Park should be granted to the City of Tacoma. The Park had been substantially improved since the U. S. Government granted use of the land for park purposes in 1888. Bernice Newell was a local newspaper reporter in the early 1900's who was primarily associated with the society pages and arts organizations. But when a cause stirred her, she rose to the occasion with a spirit that would shock her regular society page readers. Mrs. Newell jokingly proposed to kidnap President Roosevelt and take him on the streetcar to Point Defiance. Once there, she described in rich detail the wonders that could be seen in the Park. Her article ended with an impassioned plea:

*Mr. President, don't you think it would be only fair if Uncle Sam would fix it so Tacoma could have Point Defiance Park for her very own and never have to think of the possibility of its being taken away from her?...It is all the resort of the great army of busy people have, and if Uncle Sam could see how they use it, he would never rest until he had provided that it could never be taken away. Don't you think so?<sup>50</sup>*

Bernice Newell was hardly alone. Other more influential people than she also saw the need for

Tacoma to obtain title to Point Defiance from the U.S. Government. Francis W. Cushman was the member of the House of Representatives for the district of Tacoma from 1899 until his death in 1909. Cushman was very much the Norm Dicks of his day, both in terms of the district he represented as well as the power and influence he successfully exerted in the other Washington. House Resolution 17019 was Cushman's pet project to obtain title to Point Defiance Park, which he pushed to a successful vote of the full Congress.<sup>51</sup> On March 3, 1905 President Roosevelt signed the legislation that is the basis for the centennial celebration of 2005.<sup>52</sup>

Representative Cushman died at the relatively young age of 42 in 1909, while he was still serving in Congress. Almost immediately there was talk of commemorating him in some way within Point Defiance Park, arguably his most appreciated local accomplishment.<sup>53</sup> The Cushman family donated money for a suitable memorial within the Park, which was dedicated in October 19<sup>th</sup> 1925.<sup>54</sup> This large statue of Representative Cushman still greets you on the knoll to the right as you enter Point Defiance Park from Pearl Street. The Cushman Memorial is a tribute to the man who secured Tacoma's ownership of this magnificent property, so the next time you enter Point Defiance, make a mental note to wave in the direction of Francis Cushman's statue to say "Thanks!"

Following the acquisition of such an important piece of civic real estate as Point Defiance Park, former Tacoma Mayor Stuart Rice, now serving as president of the Park Board, realized the need for a separate base of tax support exclusively for parks. In 1907, the Metropolitan Park District was created as a municipal entity separate from the City of Tacoma, largely due to the efforts of Rice.<sup>55</sup> This is the agency that still governs Tacoma's parks and recreation spaces.

### *The Hare & Hare Plan of 1911*

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The creation of the Metropolitan Park District in 1907 had immediate ramifications for the development of Point Defiance Park. For almost twenty years since Tacoma first had permission to develop the property as a park in 1888, Point Defiance progressed in fits and starts with many popular additions and attractions, but the development was not guided by any particular grand plan other than the early vision of Edward Schwagerl and Ebenezer Roberts. Roberts, who lived in the Point Defiance Lodge and worked in the Park until 1908,<sup>56</sup> accomplished a great deal of beautification projects, but he really had been more of a hands-on gardener, builder, planter and occasional animal keeper than a professional park planner. Now that the Metropolitan Park District had its own autonomy, and following the end of Roberts' tenure as Superintendent of the Park, the Board of Park Commissioners decided that it wished to seek professional landscape design in the future planning and development of Point Defiance.<sup>57</sup>

In 1910, the Board engaged the services of the prominent Kansas City, Missouri landscape architectural firm of Hare & Hare to study topographical maps of the Park, to survey and photograph the terrain in person, and to "prepare complete plans and specifications for the full development of the Park...in such manner that they may be intelligently carried out at some future time".<sup>58</sup> The Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 was, in effect, the first formal effort to plan the future of Point Defiance Park.

Hare & Hare was comprised of Sidney J. Hare and his son, S. Herbert Hare. Surviving documentation suggests that the father, Sidney, did most of the work at Point Defiance, spending two weeks in March of 1911 hiking around the Park, taking measurements and photographs. The resulting Hare & Hare Plan, as it came to be known, was delivered to the Board of Park Commissioners in July of 1911<sup>59</sup>, and praised the Park's natural beauty:

*Surrounded on three sides by Puget Sound, and rising some three hundred feet above the tide level, it affords as beautiful views over land and water as can be seen in this or foreign lands. The view to the northwest from the point, toward the great Olympic range with its snow-*





*capped peaks glistening in the sunshine, has been pronounced by those who know, to be equal to view in Italy and the Mediterranean.*<sup>60</sup>

The Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 looked at Point Defiance Park in zones, or, what the designers termed “Function and Natural Divisions”. An athletic field, playground, swimming pool and service area were outlined for the area that is now covered by the road to the ferry landing and the land to the east. Incidentally, although an amusement park was later established here in the 1930s and the service area suggested by Hare & Hare eventually existed in the form of the present greenhouses and park district maintenance shops, this section of Point Defiance Park property remains largely undeveloped and many modern-day visitors do not even think of it as a cohesive part of the remainder of the Park. Metro Parks Tacoma is currently studying the possibilities for reintegrating this area of Point Defiance into public use and appreciation.

Additional recommendations of the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 suggested an entrance, zoo, conservatory, superintendent’s house, gardens, streetcar station and music court, all to be located in the area we think of today as the bowl and the formal gardens area. While some of these features, such as the Lodge and the gardens, already existed in 1911 and others were never implemented, one major result of the Hare & Hare Plan’s suggestions was the eventual removal of the zoo further up the hill to its own area, separate from the bowl area and gardens, where it has expanded to the facility we know today as Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium. The current Rose Garden is in the same approximate location as it was 90 – 100 years ago. The introduction of Japanese architectural themes in the zoo’s animal shelters and the eventual development of the Pagoda and the Japanese Garden as we know them today were specific recommendations from the Hare & Hare report. The Music Court in 1911 was located in the area between where the Pagoda is now and the bluff overlooking the Boathouse. Hare & Hare suggested improvements to this feature, but the Music Court seems not to have lasted beyond the construction of the Pagoda in 1914.<sup>61</sup>

At the time of Sidney Hare’s visit in 1911, the beach area only contained the octagonal Boathouse and a dirt path leading west. We can thank the Hare & Hare report for recommending the construction of a concrete promenade and the enlargement of the Boathouse/Pavilion structure to handle greater public use. The report anticipated by a few decades the future development of what would later be called Owen Beach, advising that shelters, a pergola and a comfort station (rest rooms) be located at a large concourse at the end of the promenade with a connecting road from the drive located near the picnic area on the cliff above the promenade.

The main picnic areas, with surrounding walks and vistas, are still located in the same approximate area they were 90 years ago. In addition, the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 recommended building more picnic areas out along what is now Five Mile Drive. The additional picnic areas that were developed from the ‘teens and through the 1930s do not exactly follow their plan, but certainly owe their existence to Hare & Hare’s foresight in extending recreational use into the forested area.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the future protection of Point Defiance Park as a significant public property, the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 recognized and underlined the dire need for bigger water lines running to and throughout Point Defiance Park, to combat the very real threat of forest fire. While their recommendations were not without controversy, and many of their proposals for improvements were never followed, the spirit of the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 guided the development of Point Defiance Park through the 1930’s, and many features advocated by the plan are still in evidence today, such as the Japanese architectural theme embodied in the Pagoda.<sup>62</sup>

The Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 was the first truly comprehensive planning document generated under the auspices the Metropolitan Park District on behalf of any of its parks. Even though the



plan was written in the early years of the twentieth century, it recognized that Point Defiance Park lends itself to examination and exploration by the various zones or regions that comprise its bountiful acreage, and all serious studies of Point Defiance Park over the decades since 1911 have generally recognized the co-existence and interdependence of these regions, which will also serve as a guide for this centennial exploration of the history of Point Defiance Park. Generally speaking, the areas recognized by a century of appreciative park visitors are:

- The Waterfront Region
- The Formal Park Region
- The Zoo and Aquarium Region
- The Forest Region<sup>63</sup>

Now, let's explore Point Defiance Park by these regions, as you encounter it today, and take a look at all the interesting changes over time for this jewel of Tacoma's park system.

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## *The Waterfront Region*

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### *Introduction*

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Point Defiance Park as encountered by today's visitor is a study in contrasts. While many of the early features of the Park already mentioned have been altered beyond recognition over the past one hundred years, or indeed no longer exist at all, a surprising number have remained and would still be recognized by a Tacoma resident of 1905.


Modern visitors proceeding into Point Defiance Park at the Pearl Street entrance can either enter the park proper on the main road and head towards the formal gardens, or they can elect to bear right to head down toward the Vashon Island ferry landing. Let's begin by that route, and start our exploration with a look at the development of the waterfront areas of Point Defiance Park. Incidentally, for many years, the Pearl Street entrance was the only way to enter Point Defiance Park by vehicle, whether auto or streetcar. What we use today as the alternative entrance by the Mildred Street route was not opened until 1970.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Nereides Baths*

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The first historical feature to note on the way down to the ferry landing is the site of a parking lot, rather unremarkable by today's standards. However, back in its day, this was a busy place on many a Saturday night, for this was the location of a saltwater "natatorium" or swimming pool, called the Nereides Baths – Tacoma's first indoor swimming pool.<sup>65</sup> The unusual name "Nereides" comes from the name of sea-goddesses who rendered assistance to sailors in Greek mythology. Swimming had been a popular activity at Point Defiance from the very first years of the Park's operation in the 1890s, when the City Park Railway Company built bathhouses on the beach, and bathers braved the chilly waters of Puget Sound.<sup>66</sup> Designed by noted Tacoma architect Frederick Heath – who also served as an early Park Board Commissioner and President – the Nereides Baths opened on Memorial Day 1906, with the attraction that the new pool heated those bracing Puget Sound waters for the swimmers' comfort! The pool was built by private individuals with Metropolitan Park District cooperation and operated under a contract. For an admission of twenty-five cents, swimmers enjoyed a 50 X 150 foot pool, water pumped up from Puget Sound and heated to 80 degrees, a diving board, spectators' gallery, dressing rooms...and rented bathing suits! Tacomans who recall patronizing the Nereides Baths remember how the jersey knit bathing suits stretched unflatteringly out of shape when wet! Originally planned as a year-round amenity, the Nereides Baths soon became a summer-time only attraction and provided some twenty-odd seasons' of heated saltwater swimming enjoyment to park patrons. Over





time however, the combination of an aging wooden building exposed to humid saltwater and changing water sanitation regulations numbered the days of the Nereides Baths. By the late 1920s, other options were under consideration for the structure, including refurbishing it as an ice rink or a gymnasium. However, with the onset of the Depression following the Stock Market crash of 1929, there was little money to invest in renovation, and the loss of discretionary income for many Tacomans meant that admission revenue suffered as well. The Nereides Baths closed and a contract eventually was awarded for its demolition in January 1932. Today, the only reminder of the site of Tacoma's first indoor swimming pool is a parking lot overlooking the Vashon ferry landing, and a set of stairs – now closed to public use – which street car riders used to cross under the tracks to get to the Nereides Baths many years ago.

### *Wallace Playfield*

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The expanse of land across the ferry landing road from the Nereides Baths site also was a more prominent feature of Point Defiance Park in earlier times. The Hare and Hare Report in 1911 anticipated locating a playfield in this area, and a baseball diamond was in existence in the area by 1929.<sup>67</sup> In May of that year Hugh C. Wallace donated \$10,000 for playground use. Wallace was one of Tacoma's most distinguished citizens, having substantial business interests in the city, and was one of the original power brokers, acting behind the scenes in Washington D.C. in 1888 to get Point Defiance designated as a park. Just after World War I, Wallace was appointed ambassador to France.<sup>68</sup> Although there were initially great plans for developing this area into a major athletic venue with playfields, children's wading pool, tennis courts, an archery course and locker rooms, the realities of the October 1929 stock market crash soon set in.<sup>69</sup> The existing baseball diamond was thereafter referred to as the Wallace Playfield, but no further developments were made. Park Board minutes suggest that the money was only partially used for developing the area,<sup>70</sup> and was also allocated for other financial needs within the park system.<sup>71</sup> The area currently has a restroom and is used for parking, but park planners may again look at integrating it back into the area that is more actively used by visitors.

### *Funland Amusement Park*

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The development that *did* get off the ground in the early 1930's in this area was Funland. Generations of Tacomans fondly remember this amusement feature in Point Defiance Park. What people may not realize is that Funland was a private enterprise that met a need for family entertainment during the Great Depression and was a revenue source for the Metropolitan Park District, since the amusement park's contract paid the district a percentage of its profits. Funland opened on May 30, 1933, costing the private developers over \$100,000 to construct, a huge sum generating many jobs at a critical time. Attractions included The Dodgem, Merry Mixup, Buzzer, Tilt-a-Whirl, Water Scooter, Miniature Train, Red Bug, Shooting Gallery, Skee-ball, Penny Arcade, Popcorn booth and refreshment store. The Park Board was naturally concerned that Funland not become a tawdry amusement park with games of chance; "only legitimate and wholesome amusements would be offered" according to a newspaper article at the time it opened.<sup>72</sup> Park Board commissioners personally inspected Funland and tested the rides prior to the public opening.<sup>73</sup>

Funland gave visitors to Point Defiance Park an escape from hard times and worries during the Great Depression and World War II. Residents of the neighborhood can still remember the mechanical sounds of the rides and the shrieks of laughter emanating from the park on warm summer nights. In 1951, Funland re-opened in May for the summer season after undergoing extensive renovations to update the facilities and expand the rides.<sup>74</sup> By the mid 1970's, public opinion began to run against plans to revitalize the old Funland site. Citizen testimony indicated the new attitude of environmental education that was coming to the forefront in park management and an increased appreciation of parks for their natural beauty.<sup>75</sup> Today, the only vestiges of this area as an amusement zone are the Go-Kart track and Batting Cages.

Tacoma residents may also recall that between 1954 and 1973, an old railway steam locomotive sat proudly in an area immediately south of Funland, close to the entrance of Point Defiance Park. Engine 1364 was built for the Northern Pacific Railroad and was in active service between 1902 and 1953. A working life may yet be in the future for this engine, it is currently under restoration in Toppenish by The Yakima Valley Rail and Steam Association.<sup>76</sup>

### *The Tacoma Yacht Club and Ferry Landing*

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After leaving the site of the Nereides Baths, today's park visitor continues down to the ferry landing. Looking to the east is the Tacoma Yacht Club, which has had a home on Point Defiance's waterfront since 1914.<sup>77</sup> The Yacht Club was formally incorporated in 1908 and moved its clubhouse to Point Defiance from an earlier home at the entrance to City Waterway. The present clubhouse was built in 1971.<sup>78</sup>

The ferry landing was established in its current location in 1918.<sup>79</sup> Prior to that time the ferries landed at a dock near the original Pavilion. It is noteworthy that these early ferries were not the car ferries we think of today, but the smaller foot ferries that were part of Puget Sound's "Mosquito Fleet". These ferries connected Point Defiance with downtown Tacoma, Gig Harbor, Brown's Point, and various points on Vashon Island and the Kitsap peninsula.


### *Boathouses and Pavilions*

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Turning to the northwest, the approach to the present Point Defiance Boathouse today is by driving along the waterfront through the large parking lot. However, when Edwin Ferris built the octagonal boathouse/pavilion in 1903, access would have been by boat or by foot from a trail coming down the hill from the original streetcar station. This octagonal boathouse was the first in a series of developments that would come to define the Point Defiance waterfront as we know it today. The needs associated with boat rentals and fishing, food concessions and ferry service demanded more space as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed and larger numbers of cars became an increasing factor. Correspondingly, the waterfront structures of Point Defiance Park have progressed through a series of buildings that have variously been identified as "boathouses and pavilions" over the past one hundred years.

Ferris' 1903 pavilion was the only major structure on the waterfront until 1919. In that year, construction began on a new pavilion designed by noted Tacoma architect, Ambrose J. Russell. The new Pavilion was completed in two stages. This second Pavilion was conceived of as a part of a much larger complex that was planned to eventually replace the 1903 structure with a central tower and two long wings projecting from it.<sup>80</sup> However, only the northwest wing of this structure was ever built. It was a massive concrete building 90 by 170 feet that featured restaurant facilities, a ballroom and esplanade. In 1921 the ground story was completed and photographs of the time suggest that even while unfinished the open terrace was used for banquets and other entertainments.<sup>81</sup> By 1925 the second and third levels had been completed.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, the realities of the Great Depression following 1929 prevented completion of this ambitious project. A trial aquarium consisting of one tank was first installed in the new Pavilion in the summer of 1933.<sup>83</sup> In 1936, the ground floor was converted to use as a new aquarium,<sup>84</sup> and for many years it was the home of "Dub Dub", Point Defiance's famous seal who later in 1963 moved up the hill to more spacious aquarium facilities at the Point Defiance zoo. The second floor of this building was initially used as a restaurant, but became the home of crash boat crews of the U. S. Army Air Corps during World War II. These men were responsible for rescuing downed crewmen in the event of a loss of military aircraft over Puget Sound, at the time a strategic location where military attack was a possibility. Many a Tacoma girl may recall these dashing young men at Point Defiance during the World War II years. The third floor of the second pavilion was used for staff housing in the 1930's and 40's; Boathouse Manager Arthur Akin lived there in the 1930s, and Zookeeper Oscar Olson called it home in the 1940s. Fires





destroyed the upper floors of this structure in 1974, but the lower level is still used for boat storage today.<sup>85</sup>

The original octagonal pavilion appears to have been demolished in 1933, though it is possible that boat storage on the lower level still was retained.<sup>86</sup> The subsequent structures built on the site of the 1903 pavilion have all been termed boathouses. In 1939 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was actively working in many parts of Point Defiance Park, including the restoration of Fort Nisqually and a number of Five Mile Drive construction projects. The last project of the WPA in the park was the construction of a new Point Defiance Boathouse, which opened in 1940. Construction materials were either taken from salvaged wood from the old Pavilion or lumber taken from trees cut at Point Defiance Park. This new boathouse, measuring 105 by 140 feet, was desperately needed to house some of the restaurant and concession functions that the second Pavilion could not easily accommodate after the addition of the 1936 aquarium.<sup>87</sup> The boathouse was added to and remodeled in 1947 and again in 1962. In 1956 it was recognized as the largest municipally-owned boathouse in the United States by a national sportsmen magazine.<sup>88</sup> The Point Defiance Boathouse was the gathering spot for many a fisherman until September 1984, when a three alarm arson fire destroyed it along with an estimated 250 privately owned boats.<sup>89</sup>

Happily, a new boathouse and pavilion eventually rose out of the ashes of this fire. In spring 1988, the present Point Defiance Boathouse was opened, funded primarily by a 1986 Park District-wide bond issue. Although initially Boathouse regulars protested the increased fees, the complex has become a second home for those who fish the Point Defiance waterfront.<sup>90</sup> A new restaurant was added to this complex in 1990, built in an octagonal shape to suggest the original 1903 pavilion.<sup>91</sup> Today, Anthony's Restaurant, offering northwest seafood and exceptional sound and mountain views, represents the tradition of dining at Point Defiance.<sup>92</sup>

The many versions of boathouses and pavilions on the Point Defiance waterfront served a variety of needs for generations of Tacomans. Water carnivals, fishing derbies, bathing beauty contests, dance marathons and many other now-treasured memories were regular features throughout the years. The whole culture and sport of fishing is alive and well today, nourished by the storage facilities, bait and camaraderie that is still a vital part of the current Point Defiance Boathouse.

### *The Promenade*

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Continuing northwest along the shoreline from the Point Defiance Boathouse, the promenade extends towards what is now Owen Beach. The Hare and Hare Plan of 1911 recommended building a promenade extending northwest from the octagonal pavilion to a concourse and made permanent by the construction of a cement seawall.<sup>93</sup> Beginning in 1916, work started on the promenade with a budget of \$6,000, and continued at the rate of 600 feet per year over 5 years until the 3,000 ft. seawall was completed.<sup>94</sup> In 1933, further extensions of the seawall and walk were added, pushing it slightly northwest of Owen Beach and southeast to the original shoreline location of the Tacoma Yacht Club.<sup>95</sup> In 1997, the promenade was enhanced with poetry and sculpture embedded on a cement surface in 28 panels. Approximately halfway along the promenade is a vantage point from which to look up into the ravine that was once topped by the old Rustic Bridge. This area is now called The Sound Garden, an art installation where the changing environmental sounds of water, wind and trees whisper to the listener.<sup>96</sup>

### *Owen Beach*

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Continuing along the Promenade, Park visitors reach the area now called Owen Beach, which was used by early seasonal campers and picnickers in Point Defiance Park long before it was ever formally named.<sup>97</sup> Early references to this area called it the "new beach"<sup>98</sup> or sometimes "Picnic Beach",<sup>99</sup> and access to it was by walking or by boat. The Hare and Hare Plan of 1911 envi-

sioned improvements including a 50 by 500 foot concourse and shelters with cooking facilities, pergola and restrooms.<sup>100</sup> With the arrival of the Depression-era federal work relief programs of the CCC and WPA, public amenities were added to this area, including the Bathhouse and concession building, and one of Point Defiance Park's several community kitchen log shelters. Newspaper articles in the 1930s welcomed the road down to the beach from Five Mile Drive and these new facilities for cooking at the beach.<sup>101</sup> Owen Beach was named in 1959 in honor of Floyd E. Owen, a 47-year Metropolitan Park District employee from 1912 -1959, who served many of those years as the Superintendent of Parks and lived in the Point Defiance Lodge.<sup>102</sup>

### *Salmon Bakes*

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Native American salmon bakes have been a local tradition for generations. Photographic evidence suggests that salmon bakes on the beach were held at Point Defiance in the 1920's. In 1962, a very popular summer salmon bake tradition was started at Owen Beach that lasted over 20 years. Initially, these salmon bakes were held on a weekly basis as a complementary event to link Tacoma with the larger regional events surrounding Seattle's 1962 Worlds Fair, and were jointly sponsored by the Metropolitan Park District and the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce. The salmon bakes of succeeding years were held several times each summer and frequently featured fireworks displays and appearances by the Seattle Seafair Pirates.<sup>103</sup>

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## *The Formal Park Region*

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*"Mr. Roberts says nothing more purely indicates the culture of a city than its parks."*<sup>104</sup>

### *Pearl Street Entrance Log Arch*

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Now that we have followed the ferry landing road and explored the waterfront of Point Defiance Park, let's return to the main entrance from Pearl Street and visit the Formal Park region. The Pearl Street entrance to Point Defiance Park was once framed by a giant log arch, designed and built in 1906 by Superintendent of Parks Ebenezer R. Roberts. A newspaper article of the day heralded the arch as "likely to become as famed as the rustic bridge".<sup>105</sup> This impressive entrance arch shows up in a number of early views of the park. However, it was short-lived, and was evidently gone by 1911 as there is no mention of it being an existing park feature in the Hare and Hare Plan of that year.

The sloping lawn of the entrance area, sometimes informally referred to as "the bowl", was the first part of the Park to be developed, as the arrival of the streetcar line in 1890 dictated the need for fairly immediate improvements in this area. Photographs from the early 1890's clearly show the clearing of the park's entrance. The area does form a natural drainage bowl, or as one newspaper article of the day termed it, "a great cedar swamp, waist-deep and covering 2 ½ acres during the rainy season".<sup>106</sup> By 1898, excavation for a formal pond with fountains was underway in this area. Once cleared, the adjacent low land was initially used as a bulb farm, producing award-winning hyacinths.<sup>107</sup> It would soon be incorporated into a pen for buffalo as a part of the early "zoological gardens" at Point Defiance Park.<sup>108</sup>

Continuing along the entry drive towards the Point Defiance Lodge, the impressive monument to U. S. Congressional Representative Francis W. Cushman commands the high ground of the knoll. Instrumental in securing Tacoma's formal title to Point Defiance Park from the federal government in 1905, the Cushman statue has presided over several generations' enjoyment of this magnificent acreage since the monument's dedication at this location in 1925.





## *The Point Defiance Lodge*

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The Point Defiance Lodge was a private home during most of its more-than-100-year history. Built in 1898 for Superintendent of Parks Ebenezer R. Roberts, his daughter Trillium would later recall her days growing up in the Lodge with the beauty of Point Defiance for a backyard. She, along with her parents, 2 brothers and 1 sister lived in the Lodge between 1898 and 1908. The importance of horticulture to Superintendent Roberts is clearly evident, as, after naming his first-born son Ebenezer Jr., he gave his following three children botanical names: Trillium, Reseda and Woodland. Writing a detailed account published in the *Tacoma News Tribune* in 1967, Trillium Roberts Insel gave a wealth of detail about the Lodge in the early days:

*...The beautiful maple paneling of the "front parlor" and the library was a distinctive background for the fine furnishings and rare pieces of bric-a-brac so beloved as home decoration in those days... The décor of the dining room was a combination of handsome wallpaper and panels of royal-blue burlap. A grooved, polished plate rail held a collection of hand-painted souvenir plates from every state in the Union.<sup>109</sup>*

Since the Ebenezer Roberts family in the early 1900s, the Point Defiance Lodge served until 1980 as the residence of several Point Defiance Park Superintendents and Metropolitan Park District Executive Directors and their families. Today, this historic home is maintained as a rental facility for meetings, parties and weddings and treasured by the citizens of Tacoma for the gracious beauty it lends to the formal gardens of Point Defiance Park.

## *Tennis Courts*

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Given the extent of its acreage, it is somewhat surprising that Point Defiance Park does not boast more opportunities for sports. While the grand athletic field envisioned by the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 at the entrance of Point Defiance Park never came to pass, one prominent location was set aside for tennis in the early days. The Park Board authorized and built the three tennis courts near the Pagoda and the Lodge in 1910.<sup>110</sup> The original courts were surfaced with coke and tar, and have been re-paved many times in the past ninety-five years!

## *Point Defiance Greenhouse*

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From 1901 to the early 1920's, the view from the verandah of the Point Defiance Lodge, looking back towards the Park entrance, included the impressive greenhouse located in the general vicinity of today's large Rose Garden.<sup>111</sup> This was the main greenhouse for plant propagation and horticultural exhibits in Point Defiance Park, as well as all the other parks in Tacoma, until the construction of the W.W. Seymour Conservatory in Wright Park in 1908. By the early 1920s, the Point Defiance greenhouse functions were removed to newer structures in the south-eastern area of the Park, along North 54<sup>th</sup> St near the present-day maintenance shops, and the commanding edifice in the center of the formal park area was dismantled.<sup>112</sup> The area where the greenhouse had stood was appropriately dedicated to gardens over the next several decades, each with their own unique character. Most of these gardens are now located within the formal park region or in more natural settings elsewhere in Point Defiance Park. Let's take a stroll through these gardens, which have been the delight of so many visitors for more than one hundred years.

## *The Gardens of Point Defiance Park*

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Gardens have been an important part of Point Defiance Park from the very beginning. The first gardens established were located near the Lodge, where they were under the expert care of Superintendent Roberts and his horticultural successors. More recently established gardens have been located a bit further afield in Point Defiance, but are still concentrated in the southern half of the park. These gardens are today maintained by Metro Parks Tacoma in partnership

with various horticultural interest groups.

### *The Rose Garden*

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Point Defiance Park's Rose Garden is located on the left of the entry drive, just before reaching the Lodge. This beloved garden has been situated in this location from the beginning, when as early as 1895, Superintendent Ebenezer Roberts solicited donations of rose cuttings from school children. The appeal evidently proved successful, as a newspaper article just three years later in 1898 detailed 75 varieties of roses flourishing in the Park.<sup>113</sup> Early photographs and postcards show the beauty of the roses and the luxuriant 500 foot arbors that formed a walkway through the gardens.<sup>114</sup> The rose gardens that Roberts laid out continued to flourish and draw the attention of rose enthusiasts from all over the world. In 1937 the All American Rose Society (AARS) was formed, and they selected Point Defiance's Rose Garden as one of the earliest gardens to be accredited as a designated display garden. When the AARS withdrew this accreditation in 1986, the Tacoma Rose Society mobilized their members with the goal of re-accreditation, pledging 250 hours of labor for revitalizing the garden. The Rose Garden was re-dedicated on July 21, 1990 and proudly continues the magnificent tradition started by Roberts more than a century ago.<sup>115</sup> There are now more than 1,500 rose bushes, including a garden of miniature roses, arbors with climbing roses, a picturesque wishing well and gazebos on more than an acre of land.<sup>116</sup> The Tacoma Rose Society continues to be a partner in maintaining the beauty of this garden, a major attraction in Point Defiance Park.

### *The Rhododendron Garden*

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Located deeper in Point Defiance in the Forest Region of the park is the Rhododendron Garden. Nestled in a stand of old growth forest to create a natural display of rhododendrons in the wild, the garden is nearly 5 acres in size and was established in 1968 in cooperation with the Tacoma chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The garden contains more than 160 plants with 115 cultivated varieties and 29 species of rhododendrons.<sup>117</sup> A rustic shelter built in the garden in 1975 is a perfect place for special shows or a picnic lunch in the spring when the rhododendrons are in bloom.<sup>118</sup>

### *The Native Garden*

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On the hill above the bowl area, on the way towards the Pearl Street exit from the Park, is the Northwest Native Garden. Established in 1964 by the Tacoma Garden Club,<sup>119</sup> the 1 ½ acre garden features a waterfall and pool that divide the garden into seven areas reflecting Pacific Northwest vegetation zones. Bog, coastal forest, meadow, San Juan, sub alpine and East Cascade areas all display plants and trees unique to the zones, and give the visitor a feeling for the variety of native flora in Washington State.<sup>120</sup> A totem pole featuring Native American motifs is located in the sub alpine zone, carved by Northwest artist Paul Luvera of Anacortes, Washington in 1975.<sup>121</sup>


### *Herb, Fuchsia, Dahlia and Iris Gardens*

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Returning full circle back to the formal park region, Point Defiance Park also has 4 other gardens, perhaps not quite so well known but still a joy to visit in their season. These gardens are all located in areas adjoining the Rose Garden, just south of the Lodge. The Herb Garden has two beds containing more than 150 perennial plants. In spring and summer this area surges with growth and color. The Tacoma Horticultural Study Club established the Herb Garden in 1981, and continues to maintain it in cooperation with Metro Parks Tacoma.<sup>122</sup>

The Fuchsia Garden was established in 1994 and is supported by the Tahoma Fuchsia Society. It contains 125 different varieties of upright fuchsias, giving a colorful display between June and October.<sup>123</sup>





The Dahlia Trial Garden is an official trial garden sponsored and maintained by the Washington State Dahlia Society. This garden features plants grown from tubers sent by dahlia growers throughout the world. The dahlia garden is in full bloom in August, when plants reach heights higher than 6 feet.<sup>124</sup>

The Iris Garden was established in 1992 in cooperation with the Pierce County Iris Society. Cobblestones from old Tacoma streets were used for the raised beds. The garden contains 101 tall bearded iris, 80 Pacific Coast iris hybrids and 26 iris tectorum in assorted colors. Come to the garden from May to July to see the Irises in their full glory.<sup>125</sup>

### *The Pagoda and The Japanese Gardens*

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Continuing along the drive, the Pagoda comes into view. This magnificent structure now functions as a rental facility for weddings and other private parties as well as a venue for garden shows, lectures and concerts. Built in 1914 in an eclectic oriental temple style undoubtedly influenced by the recommended Japanese architecture of the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911, and initially referred to as simply “the Car Station”, the Pagoda served as a waiting room for the streetcars, with restrooms and first aid facilities on the lower level. Architect Luther Twichell designed the new streetcar station in the Japanese “Pagoda” style, which was considered complementary to the adjoining gardens.<sup>126</sup> Newspaper articles prior to the Pagoda’s completion indicated the modern and luxurious amenities it would have. The women’s restroom would have easy chairs, couches, and in the summer season, an attendant to hand out towels and keep the facility clean.<sup>127</sup> Men visiting the Pagoda would find a separate smoking room and marble lavatories.<sup>128</sup> The waiting room itself was to be roomy with tile floors and walls, comfortable chairs and a fireplace to keep warm in the cooler weather.<sup>129</sup> Early photographs of the Pagoda suggest it was in fact built as planned. Later used as a bus station, and then as a locale for garden clubs and floral displays, the Pagoda was meticulously restored in 1988. It now looks much the same as it did originally, although the original waiting room furniture is long gone and the restroom facilities have been modernized.<sup>130</sup>

There may have been Japanese-inspired gardens in the area of the Pagoda even before it was built in 1914. Certainly after its construction, Point Defiance gardeners made more of an effort to design plantings in harmony with its Japanese style architecture.<sup>131</sup> In 1963, a two-year project under the sponsorship of the Capitol District of Garden Clubs began to give the gardens a more characteristic Japanese ambience.<sup>132</sup> In the 1980s, the local Japanese community helped add a number of additional features that continued to refine the authenticity of the garden.<sup>133</sup> A Shinto shrine and Torii Gate were re-located to the east side of the Pagoda in 1982. These features were originally a gift to the City of Tacoma from its “sister city”, Kitakyushu, Japan in 1961.<sup>134</sup> The Japanese Gardens are a work in progress that continue to reflect the rich cultural heritage of Tacoma.

### *The U.S.S. Maine Shell*

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Also located in the Japanese Garden is an artillery shell from the battleship the *U.S.S. Maine*. In November of 1898, the Park Board petitioned the U.S. Secretary of War for a relic from the *Maine*,<sup>135</sup> whose sinking in Havana Harbor had just occurred on February 15, 1898. It was an event that shocked the United States, resulting in the loss of 260 American lives and marking the beginning of the Spanish-American War.<sup>136</sup> Many American communities sought to memorialize this tragic loss of life with a memento from the sunken battleship; it resonated with the American public then in a way that we might today equate with our time’s September 11, 2001 tragedy. In 1912, the Park District obtained a shell donated by veterans of the Spanish-American War and installed it on a base with a commemorative bronze tablet at a grand unveiling on Memorial Day 1913.<sup>137</sup> Although the *U.S.S. Maine* shell is still in its original 1913 location, which is now a quiet area of the Japanese Garden, this same spot in 1913 was alongside the well-



traveled path that linked the street car terminal with the Boathouse Pavilion on the beach, and many a Tacoman of an earlier day would have paused alongside it to reflect and to “Remember the *Maine!*”.

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## The Zoo & Aquarium Region

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*“Point Defiance Park is becoming the home of a rare zoological exhibit...”*<sup>138</sup>

### Introduction

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In the early years of Point Defiance Park, the Formal Park region of open land, greenhouse and gardens near the Park’s main Pearl Street entrance was closely linked in its history and development with what visitors now know as the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium. Far from today’s animal sanctuary and conservation center that covers some thirty acres on the hill above the formal gardens, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium had humble beginnings. The animal collection started in 1891 with two deer and a possum,<sup>139</sup> had added herds of elk, deer and bison by the late 1890s, and by 1910 it also included bears, monkeys, lions, kangaroos and pheasants.<sup>140</sup>

In these early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the zoo was actually located down lower in the park than its present up-hill location, with the buffalo pen standing in what is now the entry bowl area of Point Defiance Park.<sup>141</sup> The original bear pits, built in 1899 and 1905, as well as the animal house of 1905 and the deer and elk pen, occupied the start of the uphill slope across from today’s Rose Garden, making the early animal collection very much a part of the entry bowl, greenhouse and formal gardens area.<sup>142</sup> Accordingly, Ebenezer R. Roberts, the Superintendent of Point Defiance Park from the 1890s to 1908, was in charge not only of the Park’s greenhouse and gardens, but also served as the head animal keeper until 1905,<sup>143</sup> raising two black bears, Jack and Mollie, from cubs.<sup>144</sup> Roberts was a strong proponent of zoological exhibits and insisted that the animals receive proper housing, turning to prominent businessmen to help with expenses. In the early years, many of the animals found their way to the Point Defiance zoo by boat, brought by sailors who collected specimens from the distant and exotic ports they visited.<sup>145</sup>


### Early Changes

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The Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 included the zoo area in its comprehensive plan for improvements to Point Defiance Park. Although the firm’s grand design for a zoological museum, a large animal house and a Conservatory that would combine an aviary and aquarium with exotic plants was never realized, the Park Board eventually implemented the Hare & Hare Plan suggestion to remove the “buffalo” and elk pens from the bowl area to make way for lawns and a drive, resulting in the more open and now-familiar prospect as visitors enter Point Defiance Park.<sup>146</sup> The area claimed by the zoo would now and in the future include more of the slope behind and above the Formal Park area. Additional eventual improvements to the zoo dating from the vision of the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 included a new barn for the elk in 1913, and a new Pheasantry in 1914, both of which exhibited the rustic Japanese style of architecture advocated by Hare & Hare.<sup>147</sup>

Interesting additions to the Point Defiance Park animal collection in the World War I era were some of the first celebrity residents of the zoo. In 1913, “Dave” and “Dandy”, the faithful oxen who pulled Ezra Meeker’s wagon in 1906 over sections of the Oregon Trail, to present petitions in Washington DC to preserve the old pioneer route, came to live out their days with the elk and the buffalo herds of Point Defiance Park.<sup>148</sup> In 1915, following their deaths, the oxen were preserved by taxidermists, and then placed in the Washington State Historical Society Museum, where generations of Tacoma schoolchildren have visited them on field trips.<sup>149</sup> Other famous





animals of the era included “Romeo” and “Juliet”, native grizzlies of the Canadian Rockies, who were a gift to the zoo from the Canadian government in 1913. Romeo was known as the saluting bear because he had learned to perform a military salute. Soldiers of the 91<sup>st</sup> Division of Fort Lewis taught Romeo the trick by rewarding him with peanuts.<sup>150</sup>

The decade of the 1920s saw increasing visitation to Point Defiance Park, as more and more people enjoyed private ownership of automobiles, and the zoo’s popularity increased. Animals, such as the zoo’s beloved pair of lions, lived out their lives, and new ones arrived by birth or acquisition, such as two polar bears purchased in 1921, and a sacred baboon of India born in at the zoo in 1926. The entire animal house was remodeled during the 1920s, with improvements in light, heat and ventilation.<sup>151</sup>

### *The Aquarium and “Dub Dub”*

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The 1930s were notable for the establishment of the Point Defiance aquarium, which was located in the waterfront Pavilion building and remained separate from the zoo for its first thirty years of operation, until 1963. The Park Board authorized a trial aquarium of one tank in 1933, and then approved the larger installation in the Point Defiance Pavilion in 1936, which grew to consist of 20 tanks housing more than 100 specimens.<sup>152</sup> Whereas the zoo was free to park visitors, the Pavilion aquarium charged most visitors a nominal admission.<sup>153</sup> Oscar the octopus, the first of many, was the main attraction. In 1938, arguably the most popular aquarium attraction ever at Point Defiance arrived in the form of a hair seal pup. Donated by a local oyster farmer and placed in a wooden tub, the seal supposedly received his moniker when a small child viewed him and exclaimed, “Dub Dub!” The name Dub Dub stuck. He entertained visitors for years, and astounded the zoo staff by living to the ripe old age of 33. When Dub Dub died in 1972, he had enjoyed more than twice the average life span of hair seals in the wild.<sup>154</sup> A bronze statue of this beloved zoo resident stands near the tide pool outside the North Pacific Aquarium building on the present zoo grounds, a reminder of a cherished Point Defiance friend for a generation of now-grown Tacoma children.

The decades of the 1930s and 1940s saw little physical expansion of the Zoo, as the Park Board coped with the budgetary challenges first of the Great Depression and then the financial realities of the home front during World War II. The Park Board had to defer maintenance and improvement out of wartime necessity. By 1949, the zoo’s buildings were beginning to show their age. A local newspaper article chronicled the particularly dilapidated and hazardous conditions of the animal house.<sup>155</sup> Within hours of the article’s publication, the Park Board voted to tear down the structure, which dated from 1913.<sup>156</sup> Without the means to rebuild the animal house, it was decided that the three lions it housed would have to be temporarily moved to Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle until a new shelter could be built. An emergency city-wide fund drive raised \$12,000, which was supplemented by passage of a special capital improvement levy to keep the zoo from closing and to replace the aging facilities.<sup>157</sup> This crisis of adequate funding to support modern zoological operations, had a silver lining, however. The Tacoma Zoological Society was formally organized in July of 1949 to respond to the challenge, and it opened memberships to the public later that same year, with the express purpose of raising money and other community support for the Point Defiance zoo.<sup>158</sup> In July 1954, the new \$123,000 animal building opened, housing the three lions, a cougar, a jaguar, and two white-faced gibbons. The modernistic sandstone animal house also featured red-tiled floors, radiant heat, ¾-inch glass windows, two recreation rooms, and cold storage lockers for meat.<sup>159</sup>

In the summer of 1959, Point Defiance Park zoo expansion and improvements continued with the construction and dedication of the Children’s Farm Zoo, funded by a special public election, which exhibited cows, chickens, rabbits, ducks and goats and encouraged their interaction with city children. Care of the farm animals was a cooperative venture between zoo staff and chapters of the Future Farmers of America.<sup>160</sup>

## *Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium*

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The decade of the 1960s saw further development on the zoo grounds. In 1963, the aquarium moved from its location in the waterfront Pavilion-Boathouse complex, where it had existed since the 1930s, up the hill and into then-state-of-the-art quarters in its new round building, which still stands on the grounds today and houses the North Pacific Aquarium.<sup>161</sup> For the first time in its history, the land and marine animal collections in the Park were united in one location, and the operation could now truly be called the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Other developments of the decade included the opening of the new Aviary in 1968,<sup>162</sup> and frank Park Board discussion of the possible implementation of an admission fee to the Zoo, which had been a free attraction for some seventy years.<sup>163</sup>

In 1965, an animal that would become one of the most famous ever to take up residence at the Point Defiance zoo arrived. Donated by Otis P. Jordan, a Portland contractor, Cindy the Asian elephant was just under three years old and at 3,000 pounds, was getting too big for Jordan to handle.<sup>164</sup> At the time, there was no money available to build a permanent home for Cindy, so the Tacoma Rotary Club began a fund drive to which schoolchildren, interested citizens, and business and service organizations donated. The money was soon raised, and the new \$10,000 elephant house was built adjacent to the animal house in March 1966.<sup>165</sup> Cindy's story at Point Defiance would last almost forty years.

Another noteworthy addition in 1969 were two red wolves that were transported thousands of miles from their natural habitat in the southeastern U.S. to Point Defiance Zoo. When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sought a partner to help with efforts to save the critically endangered wolves, the Tacoma zoo was the only one that stepped up. In 1973, a captive breeding project was established with the support of the Tacoma Zoological Society.<sup>166</sup> Eventually, the successful reintroduction of the red wolves into the wild in the 1980s would earn the zoo the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's highest conservation honor, the Edward H. Bean Award.<sup>167</sup>


In 1976, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium was fenced for the first time in its long history, following professional practice at zoos across the country, in the interest of ensuring animal safety during non-public hours.<sup>168</sup> However, at the same time, the zoo found itself falling behind ever-more-rigorous standards for zoo exhibits and an aesthetic that favored naturalistic habitats. For example, the zoo's only polar bear was housed in the same crumbling vintage bear pit built in 1899. The Kodiak and grizzly bears had been moved to other zoos after their cages literally fell apart. The elephant barn built to hold the adolescent elephant Cindy had long become too small for her ever-growing size.<sup>169</sup> Something had to be done or the zoo would have to close. With estimates for improving the zoo reaching into the millions of dollars, it was no longer an option to obtain the money through private funds.

## *The Modern Zoo Emerges*

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In November 1977, voters overwhelmingly approved a \$7 million bond issue that doubled the size of the zoo and rebuilt all but four exhibits.<sup>170</sup> The traditional zoo theme was replaced in 1979 by a Pacific Rim theme, focusing on land and marine animals from countries adjacent to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>171</sup> Out went the iron bars and cages of old and in came the free-roaming, spacious exhibits of today. The new exhibits included a new polar bear complex, a musk ox exhibit, a remodeled farm zoo and aquarium, the Rocky Shores complex featuring the walruses E.T. and Rosie, the World of Adaptations, and a new mammal house. In accordance with emerging zoological practice, animals from the same natural environment were now grouped together, instead of being isolated by species. In 1982, the new polar bear exhibit earned the Exhibit Achievement Award from the American Zoo and Aquarium Association for the "Best New Exhibit" of the year.<sup>172</sup> Today, it is still regarded as among the world's best.





The new exhibits and subsequent costs of maintaining them forced the zoo to begin charging an admission fee on March 15, 1981.<sup>173</sup> After the initial shock of paying for something that had been free for 76 years wore off, the fee proved to be a positive step. Visitors began utilizing the facility more and taking renewed pride in their beloved zoo.

The 1980s saw ever more evolution and growth at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.<sup>174</sup> Cindy the elephant, a zoo resident since 1965, had begun showing a progressively worsening behavioral problem, which zoo officials felt endangered the animal care staff. Eventually, she was accepted into the Asian elephant breeding program at the San Diego Wild Animal Park in Escondido, Calif., in hopes that living with other elephants and perhaps breeding would improve her temperament.<sup>175</sup> In 1986, the citizens of Tacoma approved a park district-wide bond issue that included \$10 million slated for zoo improvements, including the Discovery Reef Aquarium.<sup>176</sup> With its construction, the Zoo established the biggest shark collection north of San Francisco as well as an impressive collection of tropical fish.

Meanwhile, the convoluted saga of Cindy the elephant continued. By 1988, she finally wore out her welcome at the San Diego Wild Animal Park with her refusal to mate and her chronically aggressive behavior. Point Defiance Zoo wanted her back but didn't have adequate housing for her. So, interest from the 1986 bond issue was used to pay for a new elephant barn to house and manage her care.<sup>177</sup> Cindy made her triumphant return to Tacoma in 1992.<sup>178</sup> As part of her return, the zoo adopted a new approach to elephant management called "protected contact", in which there is always a barrier between animal care staff and the elephants.<sup>179</sup>

### *A New Century Approaches*

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While good things were happening for elephants, the zoo was again encountering challenging financial times. In 1996, the park district joined a public-private partnership in which the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma would continue to own the zoo while The Zoo Society would manage it.<sup>180</sup> Faced with losing American Zoo & Aquarium Association (AZAA) accreditation, the Zoo Society campaigned for a \$35 million bond issue that would give the zoo a much-needed makeover.<sup>181</sup> After one failed attempt, the bond issue passed in March 1999. To ensure adequate operating revenue, Pierce County voters rallied in 2000 to pass a sales tax to support the zoo, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and parks in Pierce County, which forestalled loss of accreditation.<sup>182</sup> Meanwhile, the zoo laid plans to begin improvement projects that would affect more than half its exhibits.

In June of 2002, the zoo staff celebrated Cindy the elephant's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, but just five months later in November, Cindy required euthanization after worsening degenerative arthritis left her unable to stand. Out of respect for her long-lasting legacy at Point Defiance Zoo, the elephant barn was rededicated to Cindy's memory in 2003.<sup>183</sup>

On Oct. 15, 2003, the zoo dedicated the new Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater and environmentally friendly animal hospital. The hospital features a "living roof" to catch and filter rainwater before directing it into a cistern, recycled building materials, and solar panels to heat water. The Wild Wonders Theater, conceived as the zoo's major conservation education outreach facility, features covered seating for 300 and hillside seating for an additional 800 visitors.<sup>184</sup> Exciting new animal education programs began in the new theater in May 2004.

The largest of the bond issue projects, the lush new Asian Forest Sanctuary, opened in July 2004 with exhibits featuring Sumatran tigers, Malayan tapir, white-cheeked gibbons and other vanishing Asian species. The animals will be rotated among exhibit enclosures to experience a more natural forest environment.<sup>185</sup> Opening in 2005 is the Kids' Zone, an interactive educational play area to engage the imagination of the youngest zoo visitors.

## Conclusion

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From its humble beginnings in the 1890s to the sophisticated animal care and exhibits of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the zoo in Point Defiance Park is an institution beloved by the citizens of Tacoma and by its regional visitors. In quiet testament to a century of change, two of the earliest structures of the Point Defiance zoo to be built, the bear pits of 1899 and 1905, lasted into the present day, although they were abandoned as appropriate exhibits a number of years ago as standards of animal care progressed. The 1899 bear pit was finally demolished in 2003 to make room for the new Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater,<sup>186</sup> while remnants of the 1905 bear pit still stand on the slope below the zoo's new Asian Forest Sanctuary area, a reminder of the long tradition of ever-evolving zoological exhibits in Point Defiance Park.

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## The Forest Region

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*"...the most attractive spot to be imagined...from the rugged splendor of the great cliffs at the shore and the deep silence and restfulness of the forest..."*<sup>187</sup>

Leaving the more formal, developed areas of the Park such as the waterfront and Boathouse, the gardens, and the Zoo & Aquarium behind, and entering the forest, the regal green glory of Point Defiance is fully apparent, greeting the visitor and inviting further exploration under its shaded canopy. For many Park visitors over the past century, this section of Point Defiance Park has always given the magnificent peninsula its meaning. Indeed, more than one hundred years ago, the Park Board recognized that preserving a section of the peninsula's old growth forest was a paramount mission of park administration. Writing in 1902, Park Board Secretary M. L Clifford stated:

*...many thousands of people from all parts of the United States visit this park and are there enabled to see the native timber of Puget Sound in its natural state. The timber in this great timber country is rapidly being cut down along the lines of travel and in a very few years it will be necessary to go long distances away from the established lines of travel to see this timber in its natural growth. It becomes a matter of interest to all the people of the United States to preserve in some place easy access to some tract of land covered with this natural growth.*<sup>188</sup>


This forested region of Point Defiance, which still commands the majority acreage of the peninsula today as it did one hundred years ago, has by design experienced less development than the rest of the Park over the past century. When development came, even in limited form, it was not always without controversy.<sup>189</sup> While Five Mile Drive, the Park's main concourse, and some remote picnic areas have existed since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 advocated a grand extension of the system of roads, trails and picnic grounds out to the Point. Some of these features *were* implemented on a smaller scale, but the forested region of Point Defiance essentially remained far less traveled in the early days, when most visitors arrived by streetcar for their day in the Park.

## Private Automobiles

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Early automobile traffic in Point Defiance Park was limited of course by the condition of the dirt roads out to its far reaches, but even more by the fact that not nearly as many people owned cars in the early 1900s as they do today. Recognizing that this limited car ownership precluded many Tacomans from visiting and appreciating the outer edges of the Point Defiance Park forest, the Board of Park Commissioners in the summer of 1915 implemented an early form of shuttle bus service through the Park, where visitors could pay ten cents for car passenger service that ran at regular intervals from the water tower, which stood near the Lodge, around Five Mile Drive





and back.<sup>190</sup> Some 5,000 visitors patronized this service in its first season, more than covering the Park Board's cost of providing it. Interestingly enough, while the Park Board made this public transit available in 1915, in that same year they also anticipated the private car ownership trend of the future, in their construction of the Park's first "auto parking ground" with a capacity of 250 cars, near the main picnic ground.<sup>191</sup>

### *Picnic Grounds of the Forest Region*

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This main picnic ground was located on the plateau above the beach, west of the original octagonal pavilion, and was a feature at Point Defiance Park from the early 1900s. A smaller version of it still exists today, located on the bluff across the road from the back side of the Zoo's present Rocky Shores exhibits. The picnic ground was clearly designated on the Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 and was referenced in the accompanying report.<sup>192</sup> A rustic footbridge linked the main picnic area with the 1914 street car station, which we know today as the Pagoda.<sup>193</sup> Though replaced first in the 1930s, and most recently in the late 1950s, a steel and concrete version of this bridge still links the Pagoda and Japanese Garden with the picnic ground. Other picnic shelters in the forest region in 1915 were described as having concrete fireplaces with 3' x 6' stoves for cooking and stone chimneys.<sup>194</sup> These structures may have looked similar to the slightly later WPA era shelters that are still in use at Point Defiance Park today. A picnic area was also created at the lookout point located at the very tip of the Point Defiance peninsula in 1916.<sup>195</sup> This lookout gave visitors to the Park expansive views of the Narrows; of course, at that time the view would not have included the now familiar Narrows Bridge!

### *The Job Carr Cabin*

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Just inside the formal entrance to Five Mile Drive and the Forest Region, many park visitors may remember the site of the Job Carr Cabin. Relocated to this locale in 1917 from its first Point Defiance Park location near the streetcar track, where it had been moved in 1900 from Old Town, the Job Carr Cabin stood as a monument to Tacoma's pioneer past.<sup>196</sup> This cabin, long considered the first home in Old Tacoma, was re-dedicated in this area near the old Rustic Bridge with much fanfare in May of 1917, with 3 generations of Carr family descendants on hand for the ceremonies.<sup>197</sup> The Job Carr Cabin was a familiar feature in this location until the late 1980s, when the Metropolitan Park District disassembled and stored it.<sup>198</sup> This removal was necessitated by conservation concerns and the hope for eventual relocation near its original locale in Old Town Tacoma. Today, although no longer located in Point Defiance Park, the Job Carr Cabin story ends, appropriately enough, near its Old Town origins – as a reconstructed interpretive museum on North 30<sup>th</sup> Street telling the story of Job Carr and his contribution to the early development of Tacoma. These early developments of picnic areas and the Job Carr Cabin near the old Rustic Bridge were precursors to more dramatic developments that would occur along Five Mile Drive and in the Forest Region in the 1930's.

### *Along Five Mile Drive*

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After the installation of limited amenities in the early 20th century, the story of the next period of development of the forest region of Point Defiance Park is closely bound to the national crisis of the Great Depression following the Stock Market crash of 1929. Initially, work was accomplished by crews who were paid by county and state emergency relief funds on projects such as the sea wall. On Five Mile Drive, once past the site of the old Rustic Bridge, which was dismantled and replaced with 23,000 cubic yards of earth fill in 1933-34,<sup>199</sup> these crews built a road down to the popular beach, known today as Owen Beach, which previously was accessible only by foot or by boat.<sup>200</sup> By the mid-1930s, crews funded by federal relief agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were at work in Point Defiance Park. The WPA and CCC crews spent thousands of man-hours clearing and improving Five Mile Drive and the various viewpoints along the way out to the tip of Point

Defiance. Alongside the Drive, they built a water culvert system, which today still bears testament to their work. Stop to take a closer look, and consider how much these citizen workers accomplished in Point Defiance. Perhaps most notable of these improvements made for the comfort of Park visitors are the community kitchen picnic shelters, such as the one next to Fort Nisqually, where countless picnics over the last seventy years have been held, protected from too much sun or rain, and with the convenience of running water and a wood-fueled stove.<sup>201</sup>

### *The Mountaineers Tree*

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Along Five Mile Drive, between the Vashon Island and Dalco Passage Viewpoints, is the Mountaineers Tree. With the growing appreciation in the 1940s of the heritage of the old growth forest in this region of Point Defiance Park, the Park Board in cooperation with The Mountaineers Club, marked this 450-year-old Douglas Fir with a plaque and an interpretive sign in 1949. Rededicated in 1989, the Mountaineers Tree renews appreciation for the existence and preservation of Point Defiance Park's old growth native forest in the middle of an urban metropolis.<sup>202</sup>

### *CCC Camp Point Defiance*

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*"By reason of the hard times prevalent today throughout our nation..."*<sup>203</sup>

With limited amenities and visitation, and the Board of Park Commissioners' mandate to maintain the majority of Point Defiance Park as a preserve of native Northwest forest, the Forest Region saw little additional development until the decade of the 1930s. Following the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the ensuing national financial crisis of the Great Depression, the federal government of the United States, under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, instituted massive federal work relief programs across the country to help put unemployed Americans back to work. Two of these programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps, known as the CCC, and the Works Progress Administration, or the WPA, figured prominently in the work that was done in the Forest Region of Point Defiance Park in the 1930s.


The Civilian Conservation Corps was composed of young men between the ages of 18 and 25, who most often lived communally in camps, working on public works projects such as clearing brush and dead timber, grading banks and building trails; they were guided in this work by a coalition of Army, National Park Service and Forest Service supervisors.<sup>204</sup> The young men were paid \$30 per month, \$25 of which went to their families, and they could enlist for a maximum of fifteen months.<sup>205</sup> The CCC presence in Point Defiance Park became a reality in the autumn of 1934, with the construction of "Camp Point Defiance" on the southwest edge of the forest region, on a bluff below Fort Nisqually, which was in the process of restoration and reconstruction at the time. Although Camp Point Defiance operated for only a couple of years and nothing now remains of the installation other than remnants of concrete foundations, it originally boasted 15 wooden buildings including a schoolhouse, hospital, officers' quarters, barracks and latrines.<sup>206</sup> From this base, some 200 CCC workers assisted with the removal of the fire hazard of tangled and overgrown brush throughout the Park, participated in the restoration of Fort Nisqually that was underway on the hill just above the CCC camp, improved roads and paths, and helped construct the covered community kitchen at the picnic beach which would later be known as Owen Beach.<sup>207</sup> By late 1935 Camp Point Defiance faced significant reduction in its workforce due to a curtailment of the CCC program.<sup>208</sup> In the late 1930s, the site of the CCC Camp Point Defiance was used for summer recreation purposes, and although the buildings were eventually removed, the area was used for many years as Madrona Day Camp, introducing generations of children to the pleasures of new experiences in a forested locale.<sup>209</sup>

### *The Restoration of Fort Nisqually*

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Closely linked to the presence of the CCC's Camp Point Defiance in the forest region of Point





Defiance Park is Fort Nisqually Living History Museum, which also has its origin in Point Defiance Park in the 1930s. However, Fort Nisqually has a long history pre-dating Point Defiance Park, the City of Tacoma, and even the State of Washington. Originally built in 1833 near the present-day town of DuPont, Washington, as part of the London-based Hudson's Bay Company, Fort Nisqually was the Puget Sound post of this North American fur trading and mercantile enterprise.<sup>210</sup> After the Hudson's Bay Company ceased operations at Fort Nisqually in 1869, the buildings remaining on the original site were privately owned until the early 1930s, when the then-current owner, the DuPont Company, gave permission for the structures to be restored in a suitable location elsewhere.<sup>211</sup> The Tacoma Young Men's Business Club in cooperation with the Metropolitan Park Board, led the way beginning in 1933 to move and restore the last two surviving buildings of Fort Nisqually - the Granary and the Factor's House - to a site in Point Defiance Park where they could be appreciated by park visitors.<sup>212</sup> The site selected in the forested southeast section of Point Defiance Park had already been somewhat cleared of trees by various service organizations, who had permission from the Park Board to harvest firewood from this location for distribution to the unemployed during the hard times of the Depression.<sup>213</sup>

Once the Granary and the Factor's House had been relocated and restored in Point Defiance Park by the Young Men's Business Club in 1934,<sup>214</sup> the Fort Nisqually restoration project became a larger and more ambitious reconstruction effort, as funds and work crews were made available by the Works Progress Administration among their many other public works throughout Point Defiance Park. Over the course of the next few years, the WPA, assisted by the CCC, reconstructed a number of additional Fort Nisqually structures, such as the Trade Store, the Blacksmith Shop, the Bastions and the Palisade walls, to recreate Fort Nisqually as it appeared in the 1850s.<sup>215</sup> By 1939, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington statehood, various pioneer memorial organizations had joined forces to mount a small display of artifacts in the Factor's House, which was the beginning of the museum collection and exhibits at Fort Nisqually.<sup>216</sup>

Since 1980, Fort Nisqually has excelled in the quality of its growing artifact collection and educational programs for both children and adults that depict the history of the Hudson's Bay Company on Puget Sound in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the initial restoration of Fort Nisqually in the 1930s, Metro Parks Tacoma has joined with local, state and federal agencies, along with private foundations, to ensure the preservation of this unique historic site. The U.S. Congress declared the Granary a National Historic Landmark in 1970,<sup>217</sup> and the U.S. Department of the Interior named the Granary and Factor's House to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.<sup>218</sup> Over the last two decades, additional restorations of the Granary (1984), the Bastions (1991), and most recently, the Factor's House (2003), have received recognition and accolades from museum and historic site professional organizations.<sup>219</sup> The history of the Hudson's Bay Company on Puget Sound in the 1850s is now brought to life for Point Defiance Park visitors through interaction with staff in period clothing and the experience of historical re-enactments. Particularly popular with visitors are these annual living history events such as Queen Victoria's Birthday, the Brigade Encampment, and the Candlelight Tours. Fort Nisqually Living History Museum celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an important component of the forest region of Point Defiance Park in September 2004.<sup>220</sup> It is a valued bridge between the more distant past of the fur trade era, before Washington was even a state, and the more recent past of the work relief programs of the 1930s, still in living memory for many Tacomans.

### *Point Defiance Riding Academy*

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Another development in this forested southwest section of the Park was the Point Defiance Riding Academy, established in the early 1930s along with the CCC Camp and Funland amusement park, in direct response to the challenges of the Depression. The preamble to the Park Board resolution granting use of the Point Defiance trails to the Riding Academy in 1933 is interesting in what it says about the economic realities the Park Board was facing:



*WHEREAS: By reason of the hard times prevalent today throughout our nation and the consequent loss of tax revenue it is absolutely imperative that the Commissioners of said Park District give a sympathetic ear to all proposals for safe and sane amusement and recreational concessions in the parks in order to obtain such revenues as would flow therefrom...*<sup>221</sup>

Creation of the Point Defiance Riding Academy was therefore an excellent opportunity for the park district at this time, as it opened in 1933 under private operation, with 10% of the gross profits going directly to the park district.<sup>222</sup> So, similar to Funland, the Metropolitan Park District was able to offer recreation and earn revenue without any direct costs.

From its beginnings in 1933 until its loss to a fire in 1964, the Point Defiance Riding Academy provided years of enjoyment to local residents. Privately owned horses could be stabled on site, or Academy horses could be rented to enjoy the more than twelve miles of bridle trails that criss-crossed Point Defiance Park.<sup>223</sup> Today we see these paths used mainly by walkers and runners, but for a few decades they were also very popular with equestrians. The Point Defiance Riding Academy was headquartered in the old buffalo barn, after the last of the Park's buffalo herd was dispersed in 1930, on land that is now occupied by the grounds of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.<sup>224</sup> After fire destroyed the stables in August ??, 1964,<sup>225</sup> horseback-riding in Point Defiance Park ended. In 1981, the Park Board voted against attempts to re-introduce the stabling of horses in Point Defiance Park, as it was considered to be a liability, and incompatible with the presence of general park visitors. Walkers, runners and cyclists were now the primary users of trails in the park, reflecting changing forms of exercise and recreation.<sup>226</sup>

### *Additions of the 1960s*

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Thirty years after the flurry of activity and investment that added the CCC Camp, Fort Nisqually and the Riding Academy to this part of the Forest Region of Point Defiance Park, the last two major developments arrived. They would be contract operations, like the Riding Academy, authorized by the Park Board to locate within Point Defiance Park, but operated privately.

#### *Never Never Land*

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Never Never Land, located on the road just before Fort Nisqually Living History Museum, opened in 1964 presenting young and old alike with an enchanted world where fairy tales came to life. Humpty-Dumpty, Little Boy Blue, Jack and Jill, and Old Mother Hubbard were just a few among many characters that depicted in cast fiberglass.<sup>227</sup> Story book scenes, characters and nature co-existed in a magical way that transported park visitors from the every day world. Never Never Land was an early form of interactive playground, where children could make the mouse run up the Hickory-Dickery Dock Clock and wind their way through a maze at the Crooked House coming out of it on a slide. A generation of Tacomans grew up with summer outings to Never Never Land, and memories of the wooded fairy tale world have a fond place in the hearts of many.<sup>228</sup> The Metropolitan Park District purchased Never Never Land from the private owner in 1986, and with Humpty-Dumpty still waving to visitors from his perch atop the stacked books at the entrance, it now welcomes young children and families to a picnic and play area that spurs the imagination.

#### *Camp Six Logging Museum*

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Just down the hill from Fort Nisqually is the Camp 6 Logging Museum. This is another attraction in this forested region of Point Defiance Park offering park visitors a glimpse into Washington's heritage. Timber was the first major industry in Washington and created not just a living but also a way of life for many people. In 1964, Camp Six was conceived of as a museum





to portray a working logging camp circa 1900.<sup>229</sup> Its mission has expanded over the years, and now covers the entire era of steam logging, from 1880 to the mid 1940's when "Loggers were Boss and Steam was King!"<sup>230</sup> In 1973, Camp Six was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Camp Six was designed after an actual logging camp and reconstructed from various logging operations in Washington. The exhibits all bear scars of earlier logging days and represent the basic equipment that evolved during the era of steam power.<sup>231</sup> This window into Washington's heritage is privately operated at Point Defiance Park by the Western Forest Industries Museum.

A special seasonal attraction at Camp Six is the "Santa Train" that operates during the first three weekends every December. Children and adults board festively decorated trains for a twenty-minute train ride around 1 ¼ miles of track; Santa Claus is, of course, one of the passengers to delight and amuse young riders.

### *Return to the Formal Park Region*

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After Camp Six Logging Museum, the one-way road system through Point Defiance Park returns visitors to the edge of the Formal Park region, skirting the back side of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and emerging on the uphill side of the bowl area near the Pearl Street entrance. The tour through more than one hundred years of Point Defiance Park history has come full circle and is nearly complete.

## *The Future of the Point*

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### *The Current Master Plan*

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The Hare and Hare master plan for Point Defiance Park was completed in 1911. Utilities installed over 75 years ago no longer can meet the demands placed on them today. The roadways, once designed for horse-drawn carriages and Model-Ts, are now called upon to carry larger amounts of traffic including tour buses and RVs, along with crowds of joggers, bicyclists, and skaters. Increased demand for access to the water continues to put a strain on the boat launch and marina facilities. In addition to these physical challenges, as a regional park, visitors look to Point Defiance to meet a broad range of their recreational needs. Consequently, daily operations and future enhancements continue to be significant issues.

Metro Parks Tacoma has started a planning process to define the future of Point Defiance Park. The beginning step of what will be a comprehensive process is a Revitalization Study, completed in early 2004, that focused on gathering community and professional input to enumerate the strengths and weaknesses of the Park. With this information as a starting point, a more comprehensive planning process is planned for 2005. This planning process will be based on strong community input to address potential new park improvements, recreational programming opportunities and long-term park maintenance and operations. Development of this new vision for Point Defiance Park is anticipated to take a year to complete. When finished, the plan will preserve and restore those features of the Park that have been part of the Tacoma community for the past century, while creating new facilities and recreational opportunities that will serve the community for the next one hundred years.<sup>232</sup>

## *Conclusion*

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Generations of Tacoma residents and visitors from far and wide hold a deep and abiding affection for Point Defiance Park, this unique civic property that we have inherited from the stewards of the past. Metro Parks Tacoma looks to the future of Point Defiance Park with optimism, guided

by a new Master Plan in which citizen participation is paramount. Those who care for Point Defiance Park in the present - whether the public servants of Metro Parks Tacoma and its many volunteers, or the public visitors who respect its heritage and enjoy its beauty and many amenities – truly are “united in the duty and privilege of being its guardians.”

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Hare & Hare Plan of 1911 (including report, photographs, map, and planting guides), Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma miscellaneous papers, Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room.

<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Michael Valentine, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Geology, University of Puget Sound, July 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Where the Land Meets the Water; Point Defiance Park Comprehensive Improvement Plan*, Jones & Jones, 1980, 5-2, Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> With thanks to Kenneth Greg Watson, M.A., correspondence and interview, January 9, 2004.

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*Citizen Contributions (photographs, memories, ephemera)*

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Bruce Akin  
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Marilyn Moisio  
Robin Paterson  
Billie Salapka  
Lisa Schuman  
Sheree Trefry  
Shirley Tronson  
Rilla Yancy





*Washington State Historical Society*

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Papers of Francis W. Cushman

Papers of Ezra Meeker

Photographic Collections

*Newspapers*

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Daily Tribune, See *TNT*

Northend Tab

Pierce County Magazine

*PG* Peninsula Gazette

*PI* Seattle Post Intelligencer

Seattle Sunday Times

*TDL* Tacoma Daily Ledger

*TDN* Tacoma Daily News

*TNT* Tacoma News Tribune or The News Tribune

Tacoma Progress

*TT* Tacoma Times

*TW* Tacoma Weekly

Toppenish Review