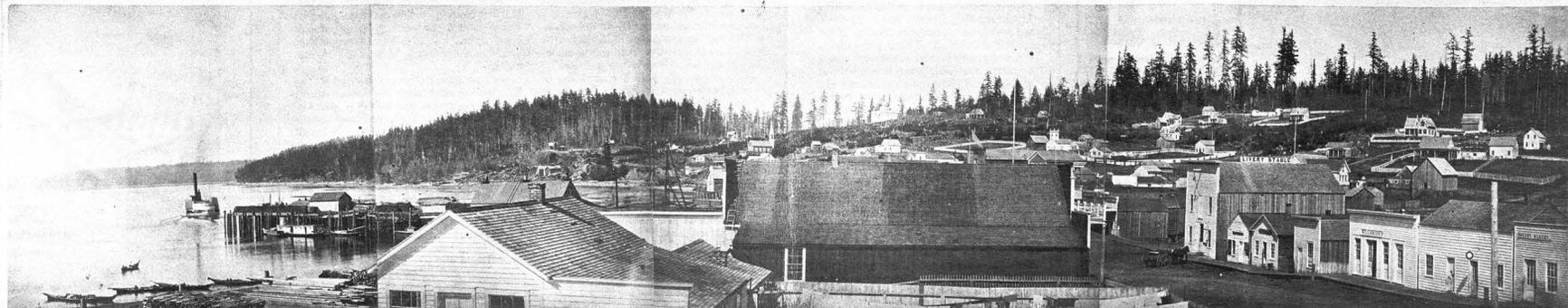


BY PAUL DORPAT

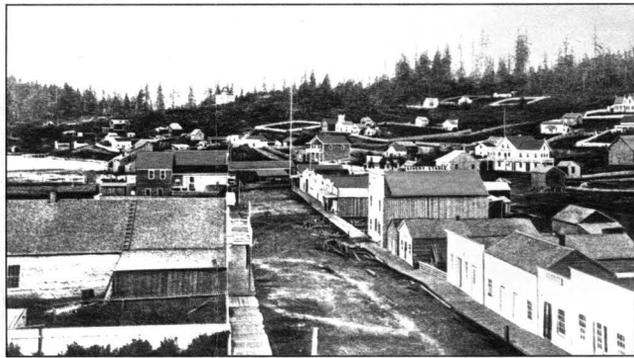
The way Seattle used to be



Seattle

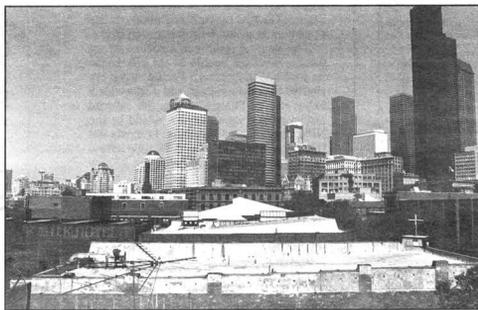
Canadian photographer George Robinson's newly discovered panorama of Seattle is the single most remarkable record of the pioneer community to surface since it was photographed in 1869. At left, in the distance, is Magnolia.

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



E.M. Sammis' 1865 panorama of Seattle was photographed from the same building, Plummer's Hall, as Robinson's view. The two scenes share many of the same features.

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R. SCOTT VANCE

A contemporary photo overlooks the viewpoint of the historical photographers from a roof nearer Jackson Street than Main.

STITCHED together from four negatives and forgotten in Canada for more than a century, this panorama of pioneer Seattle only recently leaped south of the border into the thankful hands of Ed Nolan, the Washington State Historical Society's curator of special collections.

Measuring a bit more than 15 inches from end to end, the state's precious new artifact is, in my opinion, the second most important historical photograph of this city. The first, E.M. Sammis' earlier 1865 pan of the city, is shown here for comparison. Both views were photographed from Plummer's Hall at the southwest corner of Commercial Street (First Avenue South) and Main Street.

The larger and later view was photographed by George Robinson while he visited Seattle in the summer of 1869 from his hometown, Victoria, B.C. Earlier that spring Robinson had sold his portrait gallery there because he preferred shooting outdoor views. Happily, they included this record of a community then only 17 years old on the east shore of Elliott Bay.

Among the number of spectacular "firsts" included in the Canadian's wide-angle view:

■ At left on the waterfront, the first vessel to be photographed on Elliott Bay — probably the Howard H. Hunt departing for its home port, Victoria.

■ Below the side-wheeler, the first record of Indian canoes along the waterfront.

■ The first view of Yesler's wharf, the city's pile-driven link >

with the world.

In the Robinson view you can almost count the trees in the old-growth forest that still covered Denny Hill, above the wharf. A sense of the southern limits of that forest — also the northern line of the city's clear-cut — can be gained by locating Arthur and Mary Denny's home just above and to the right of the brick chimney of the building at front left. Though Lilliputian in this view, the Denny residence was a Victorian showpiece when it was built at the southeast corner of First Avenue and Union Street in 1866. Note below the hill and home the first clear record of Seattle's central waterfront, where even moderate tides still splashed upon the feet of First Avenue.

Sammis' view, aimed from the Plummer's roof crown and directly above the sidewalk, looks over the long roof of S.B. Hind's store. Since Robinson's point of view is lower — from the second floor of Plummer's Hall and about 40 feet back from Commercial Street — the center of his panorama is obscured by the Hinds store. But scrutiny reveals that many of the same structures appear above the Hines roof in both views. These include the classic white box of the Territorial University on the horizon, now the site of the Olympic Four Seasons Hotel.

The most obvious continuity between the two photographs is to the far right, where, except for one addition in Robinson (you'll find it), the same storefronts line the east side of First Avenue between Main and Washington streets. The Canadian's record, however, includes the first depiction of any street life in Seattle: a horse and wagon parked in front of Wyckoff's Livery Stable. On the hillside are many of the same homes, picket fences and even trees.

The year of Robinson's record was a turning point for Seattle as the city began its first boom. Northern Pacific surveyors charted Snoqualmie Pass, and it was widely believed that Seattle, where the railroad headquartered its surveyors, would be the NP's Puget Sound terminus. (Tacoma got the honor.) By year's end 69 new structures were built in town, including 37 new homes.

In 1869 Seattle was at last incorporated — legally — and the community got its first nickname, "Queen City," from two Portland real-estate agents with land to sell just beyond the city limits. Later, pioneer historian Clarence Bagley looked back on 1869 as "the year the village became a town. Its business more than doubled, and its population trebled."

Paul Dorpat's two-hour videotape on Seattle's early history, "Seattle Chronicle," is \$29.95 from Tartu Publications, P.O. Box 85208, Seattle, WA 98145.