

Smith: The Cove and the Man

WRITTEN BY PAUL DORPAT

This week's historical scene is photograph No. 6577 of some 30,000 negatives in the Asahel Curtis collection.

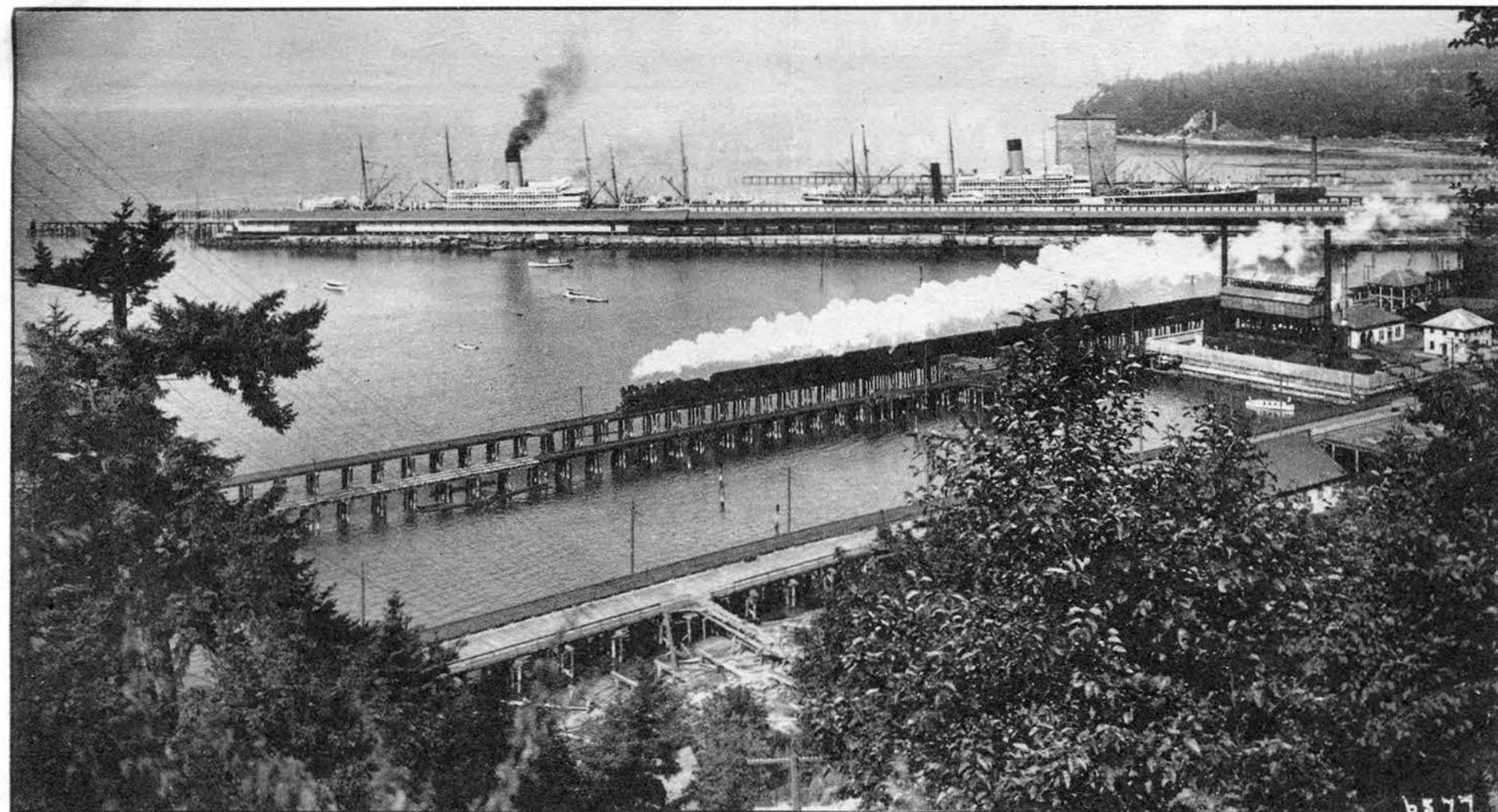
Asahel was the younger brother of the celebrated Edward Curtis whose romantic, posed photographs of American natives are worth hundreds of dollars each. However, No. 6577 cost me only a little more than \$4, paid to the Washington Historical Society, and it is easily one of the most popular images in the history of local photography.

Asahel's photograph, taken from Queen Anne Hill in 1905, resonates with a local industrial drama that centered on Smith Cove.

In the foreground is the Oriental Limited rushing its passengers from St. Paul and all points west over the last few miles of trestle into Seattle. In a few months it will be trailing its white ribbon of steam under Seattle while passing through the Great Northern's new tunnel. And soon it will exhale its last transcontinental gasps alongside the new King Street Station, which in 1905 was still under construction.

Beyond are the Great Northern docks and between them the largest steamers in the world, the railroad's Minnesota and Dakota. They are being prepared for their trans-Pacific routine of delivering raw cotton to the Orient and returning with raw silk.

The director for this industrial drama was James Jerome Hill, the Great Northern's empire builder. Years before, Hill discovered that "one acre of Washington timber will furnish as many carloads of freight as 120 acres of wheat from a Dakota farm." So when the first Great Northern freight train rolled into Seattle in 1893, Hill was anxious to turn it right around and head east with carloads of lumber. This was



Asahel Curtis' 1905 view of Smith Cove and the Great Northern docks looks west from Queen Anne Hill toward a still-forest-covered Magnolia Bluff.

Washington State Historical Society

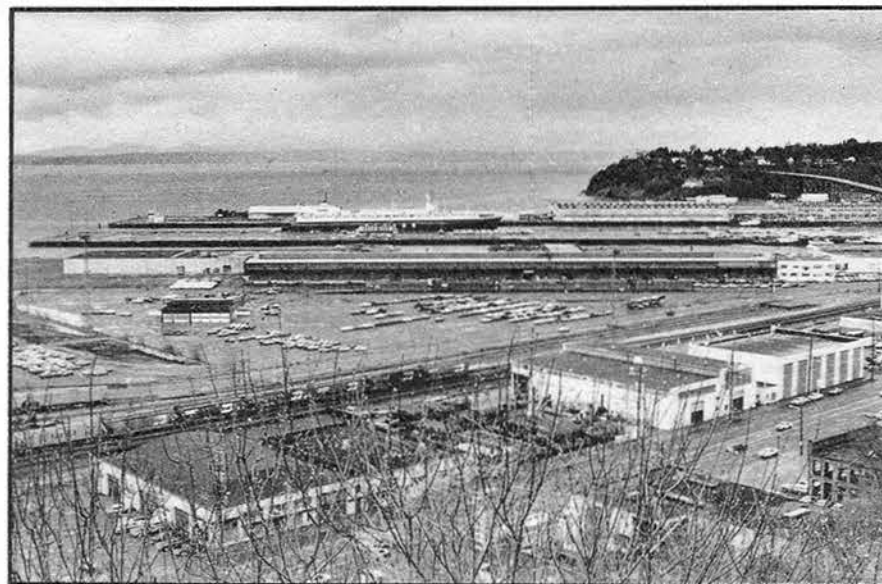
actually a radical departure from the old notion that railroads to the West were built to carry people and cargo in that direction and then return East empty.

In 1905, J.J. Hill was moving his show onto the biggest stage. Having moved the country around, Hill here was attempting to revolutionize international trade.

Dr. Henry A. Smith arrived at the cove, which would get his name, in 1853. For 63 years, he was easily one of the most remarkable characters on Puget Sound, and most of those years were spent at Smith Cove. Today, he is best remembered as an ethnologist and linguist who translated Chief Seattle's prophetic treaty speech.

But Smith was also a surgeon who successfully used hypnosis as anesthesia, a psychotherapist who encouraged dream analysis for uncovering repressed traumas, a poet published in *Sunset Magazine* under the pen name Paul Garland, a botanist who grafted the area's first fruit trees and a universally loved gentleman farmer of whom one of his seven daughters, lone, wrote:

"Papa had a passionate love for



Paul Dorpat

Today the Great Northern docks have been filled and surrounded in the foreground by 35 acres of dirt from construction of the freeway and the World's Fair in 1962. Beyond are the Port of Seattle Piers 90 and 91.

the beauties of nature, was kind to all the farm animals and they, in turn, seemed to understand and love him."

Smith was King County's first

school superintendent, and a very rare statesman who seemed to inspire absolutely no resentment. As a territorial legislator for several terms, he still "never sought office,

never asked for a vote and was never defeated in an election."

When the 22-year-old doctor first arrived at Smith Cove, the highest tides would fill potholes for sun-warmed swimming farther north than today's Galer Street. When he died at his Interbay home in 1915 at the age of 85, it was from a chill caught while setting out tomato plants in his garden. At that time the tideflats of Smith Cove were being filled by the cove's new owner, the Port of Seattle. The consequences were the half-mile-long Piers 90 and 91, still said to be the longest earth-filled piers in the world.

The lucrative silk trade which J.J. Hill originally had channeled through Smith Cove was ended in 1940 by a synthetic made from coal called nylon. Two years later Smith Cove was separated from the Port of Seattle by the Navy for a condemnation fee of \$3 million. The port bought it back in the mid-'70s for about \$15 million, and added another \$4 million in improvements, including Smith Cove Park. There, in the spring of 1978, a plaque was placed honoring the remarkable Dr. Henry A. Smith.