

Woodland Park

Not always so zooy, it once wore the formality of a country estate.

WRITTEN BY PAUL DORPAT

Woodland Park has undergone some remarkable landscaping changes in the past 90 years — from the formality of a country estate to the ruggedness of an African savanna.

Two Englishmen were responsible for the two very different views.

Guy Phinney, an Englishman, arrived here from Nova Scotia in 1881, broke and alone. Ten years later, he had become a successful real estate man, moved his family into his park and began developing it.

The older scene shows many of the manicured trappings of an English country estate. It was photographed from the Woodland Hotel, now gone.

Described by a contemporary as the "best example of push and enterprise," Phinney stands to the right of the raised rock flower bed at the left.

The actress Sarah Bernhardt visited the park in 1891, and it is likely this photograph was taken the same year.

The white conical roof in the background, to the left of the four tall firs, tops the estate's garden conservatory. It is the present site of the park's rose garden.



Courtesy of Seattle Municipal Library

Guy Phinney hired photographers Boyd and Braas to capture views of his Woodland Park in the early 1890s, including this one from the top of the Woodland Hotel.

Also in the park at the time were a dance pavilion, a racetrack for bicycles, a hunting lodge, a boathouse along the shores of Green Lake, a church and the hotel.

The Phinneys opened the park to the public, but rules included no firearms, no liquor, no dogs, no picking the flowers and no molesting the animals, which included deer, beavers, skunks and a bear named Bosco.

Phinney died in 1893 while getting ready to build a mansion on the property. The economy worsened, and his widow was left with the difficult task of keeping the park open and in order. Overriding loud citizen objections and the mayor's veto, the Seattle City Council voted in 1899 to purchase the park.

David Hancocks, another Englishman, adopted Seattle as his home in 1975, after a bus tour of America, and within a year was named director of the Woodland Park Zoo.

Hancocks' goal was to transform it from a prison for animals to a natural habitat where they can act like themselves, and the savanna, with its strolling zebras, giraffes, Egyptian geese and monkeys, is a realization of that dream.



Paul Dorpat

The roof of the bear grotto was used for this contemporary view of the park, which has changed in landscape from formal country garden to African savanna.