

BY PAUL DORPAT



COURTESY OF JOHN COOPER

With the 1916 completion of the City-County Building, far right, a ring of distinguished structures made City Hall Park also a city center.

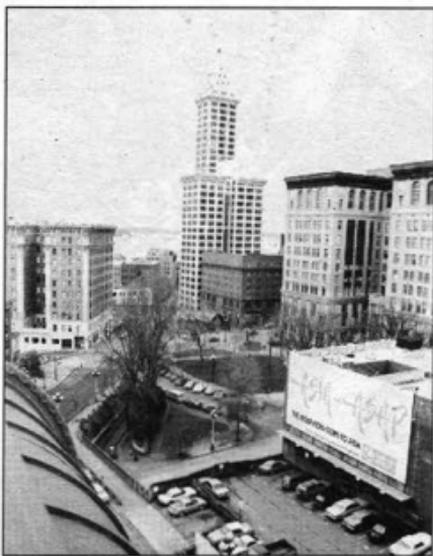
City Hall Park

THE ODD-SHAPED BLOCK OF grass shown here was called City Hall Park. The Seattle City Council's first recommended name, Oratory Park, was rejected by progressives who claimed it was a political ploy to limit free speech to this open plot between Yesler Way (on the left), Jefferson Street, Fourth Avenue (bottom) and Third Avenue. The year was 1913, when radicals - "Wobblies" among them - used much of the business district, especially the Skid Road section south of Yesler Way, for soap-box oratory.

This view was probably photographed in 1916, the year the first six stories of the City-County Building, far right, were completed across Jefferson Street from the park.

In this scene Jefferson is a gray swath taken from a photo retoucher's palette. The real street is probably a mess of tunnel construction and old streetcar tracks. The tunnel, from its entrance off Fourth Avenue just north of Yesler Way, curved beneath the street and park en route to parking in the new building's basement. The entrance to the tunnel can be seen in the contemporary view photographed from the roof of the 400 Yesler Building, itself once a Seattle City Hall.

City Hall Park was used during the Depression for mass meetings of the unemployed and during World War II as drill grounds for the Seattle Air Defense Wing (housed across Yesler Way in the Frye Hotel, far left). In the mid-1950s it was redesigned with new walkways, trees and plastic game tables. In the late '60s the building was remodeled and its entrance



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After a brief closure, City Hall Park was reopened in 1993 with the latest of its many historic designs.

moved to Third Avenue. Now the county is studying plans to return a restored grand entrance to Jefferson Street.

City Hall Park itself was closed, landscaped and rededicated in 1993, in part an attempt to retard its common use by as a "Muscatel Meadows" by the down-and-out. 

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.