



This view looks across the reconstruction of the northernmost portion of waterfront piles and stringers scorched by Seattle's 1889 fire.

A contemporary prospect was adjusted some to reveal the Harbor Steps block partly shown in the historical scene.



PAUL DORPAT

The Northern Limit

IN THIS COMPARISON THE HISTORICAL photographer's back is to University Street, a little more than one week after Seattle's Great Fire of June 6, 1889. A contemporary repeat would have put my back to the Alaskan Way Viaduct for an unrevealing view against the northwest corner of the Immunex headquarters. Instead I moved to the northwest corner of University and Western Avenue for a fuller view of the Harbor Steps block partly revealed in the ruins.

The larger ruin here is the dark brick skeleton of the Northwestern Cracker factory, center-right, one lot south of the southwest corner of Front (First Avenue) and Seneca streets. To its left and across First Avenue is the pointed facade of Annie and Amos Brown's Carpenter Gothic home. It was one of the fire's "heroic structures," for the bucket brigade that saved it from all but blistered paint and burst windows also saved the neighborhood behind it, including the big-roofed skating rink, top center, and Plymouth Congregational Church, facing Second

Avenue above the temporary white tents at far right.

On this west side of First Avenue the fire destroyed the 1876 retaining wall that held this bluff. Below the church and the tents, First Avenue is suspended above a ravine that once cut through the bluff at Seneca Street.

The wall below the bluff at far left is another savior. The brickwork on the foundation of the Arlington Hotel (Bay Building), begun before the fire, stopped the fire's advance north. Behind the historical photographer was another impediment: a section of open water not covered with the timber trestle work we see in the foreground. Only the tracks of the Lake Shore and Eastern Railroad crossed this waterfront gap. There, at about 8:30 in the evening, another bucket line stopped the advance of a fire that had begun three blocks south around 3 p.m. that day. P

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.