

In a place to play, danger

IF ONE GIVES little attention to the homes on the hill and none to the junk dumped into this waterway, then these adventurous boys captaining their crafts might remind Pacific readers of their own youthful adventures or of those told by Mark Twain. This, however, is not the Mississippi, but one of the last evidences of the mudflats south of King Street where, for millennia twice every 25 hours or so, the waters of Puget Sound sloshed as far east as Beacon Hill, here on the right.

This summer subject was first printed in *The Seattle Times* on Aug. 24, 1945, the day Gen. Douglas MacArthur announced that an advance party would land in Japan two days later to prepare the way for occupation. A half-century earlier the reclamation of these tideflats began in earnest. Most likely this is a catch basin — a big one — for runoff. In a 1946 aerial photograph it can be measured reaching through most of this 660-foot-long block east of Airport Way between Holgate and Massachusetts streets.

The *Times* headline for this subject does not celebrate youth and its summer recreations, but reads, “Where Death May Be A Playmate.” The paper shared Seattle Police Chief Herbert Kinsey’s claim that his forces were frequently called upon to rescue children who fell into this pond. A survey of tragic accidents since the first of the year named five children who had drowned in backyard lily ponds or in Seattle’s wetlands like this one — although not in this one. William Norton, chairman of the Seattle City Council Public Safety Committee, speculated “between 50 and 60 small children have met death in such ponds in recent years.” If true, this is a shocking statistic.

Throughout most of the Great Depression one of the lesser Hooverville communities of shacks scavenged by homeless men crowded the west shore of the pond (to the left). Roughly 100 of them can be counted in the 1940 aerial. 

Check out Paul Dorpat and Jean Sherrard’s blog at www.pauldorpat.com.



COURTESY OF RON EDGE

THEN: The scene shows part of the pond that in 1946 filled much of the long block between Massachusetts and Holgate streets and Eighth Avenue South and Airport Way.



JEAN SHERRARD

NOW: With freezing, the few captured ponds that dotted the tideflats south of King Street as late as the 1940s were busy with skaters. Now this rolling neighborhood of settling fill — today named Sodo — is home for light industry and lots of parking.