

A good place for doctors and nurses to gather



COURTESY OF HISTORIC SEATTLE

THEN: Asahel Curtis' photograph of the Smith/Rininger home at the northwest corner of Columbia Street and Summit Avenue dates from the early 20th century when motorcars, rolling or parked, were still very rare on the streets of Seattle, including these on First Hill.

IN THIS "NOW" photo, five nurses from Swedish Medical Center/First Hill's oncology ward stand at or close to what was once the southeast corner of Columbia Street and Summit Avenue. This was also the prospect for Asahel Curtis' "then," recorded early in the 20th century when this First Hill neighborhood was still known for its stately homes, big incomes and good manners.

Both photographs are only the center thirds of wide panoramas. Jean Sherrard's "now" shows Swedish Medical Center's lobby during a renovation. Curtis' pan at its full width reaches from the northeast corner of Columbia Street and Summit Avenue, on the right, to far west down Columbia, on the left. (The full pans of both now hang in the lobby of Town Hall, the former Fourth Church of Christian Science, another First Hill institution on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Seneca Street.)

The big home, centered here at the northwest corner of the intersection, was built for Seattle banker-industrialist Charles J. Smith. He in

turn sold it to the doctor-surgeon Edmund Rininger in 1905, about the time Curtis visited the corner. With his wife, Nellie, and daughter, Olive, Rininger moved into the house next door on Columbia, in order to set about building his Summit Avenue Hospital.

The surgeon's plans ended abruptly on July 25, 1912, when, while driving home alone from a house call in Kent, the 42-year-old Rininger collided with a Puget Sound Electric Railway train and was killed. Nellie Rininger sold the nearly completed hospital to the Swedish Hospital Association in the spring of 1913. As part of this fateful transfer, Nellie also gifted her late husband's large medical library and his then-new X-ray machine to Swedish.

Both the china and linen monogrammed SAH for Rininger's Summit Avenue Hospital came with the sale. No doubt for reasons of economy the Swedish Hospital Association (SHA) decided to use both despite the reordering of the letters. 

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



JEAN SHERRARD

NOW: Swedish Medical Center nurses, from the 12th-floor oncology ward, gathered here in the hospital's lobby for Jean Sherrard's repeat.