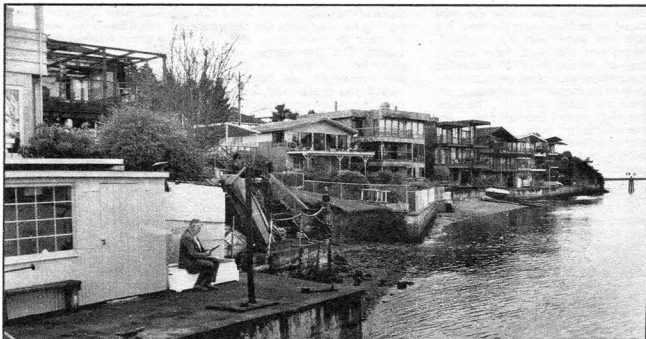




For nearly 50 years, Indian Charlie lived on the shores of Salmon Bay in Magnolia and sold salmon, clams and berries to the settlers.

Courtesy of the Seattle Public Library



Now Magnolia's most northern tip is lined with the view homes of Lawton Wood.

Paul Dorpat

Indian Charlie

He sold salmon and clams
to white settlers
from his Magnolia shack

WRITTEN BY PAUL DORPAT

Indian Charlie and his wife lived in a cedar shack on the south shore of Magnolia's Salmon Bay. For a half century Charlie, also known as Sitwah Charlie and Salmon Bay Charlie, sold salmon, clams and berries to the first settlers and later to the soldiers at Fort Lawton.

Today's historical view shows Charlie's house at the turn of the century, taken by the photography firm, Webster and Stever.

Charlie's native name was Hwelch'teed, and he probably was the last of the Sheel-shol-ashbsh (hence Shilshole) group that centered on this once narrow Shilshole-Salmon Bay inlet to the fresh water interior. ("Sheel-shol-ashbsh" translates to "threading the bead," which was descriptive of the canoe trip to lakes Union and Washington.)

The Shilshole Indians were one of the eight or nine principal tribes who lived in what we now call Greater Seattle. Local historian David Buerge discovered that this Salmon Bay site was once the center of a large community whose area extended from Mukileto to Smith Cove. Here, long before Charlie's shack was built, three long houses dominated the area. The largest house was big enough for potlatches, a ritual dance.

The Shilsholes went into a sudden decline a half century before white settlers grabbed their land. Sometime about 1800 their numbers were ravished by "a great catastrophe," most likely an attack by one of the slave-taking, booty-hunting and beheading North-coast tribes. By the time pioneer Henry Smith settled Smith Cove in 1853, the tribe had dwindled to a dozen families at most, and by the late 1880s there were only two families left.

Steady white settlement started in the 1870s when German immigrant Christian Scheurman moved to the area, cleared the timber and married a native woman who had 10 children before she died in 1884.

In 1895 Seattle boosters organized to attract a military post to the area and gathered the acreage that is now Fort Lawton-Discovery Park. The little area that is now Lawton Wood, shown in our contemporary photo, is not part of the military holding because Scheurman withheld it.

Soon after the military moved in next door, this protected enclave was improved with mansions of a few of Seattle's elite. In 1952 these neighbors — about 30 houses sparingly distributed about a generous 30 acres — organized the Lawton Wood Improvement Club waving the motto: To Beautify and Develop Lawton Wood. When the last of the Scheurmans, Ruby, moved out in the late 1970s the beautifying had more of a developing flavor.

Any attempt to recreate the perspective used in the photo of Charlie's shack would have put us literally in the bay. Today's contemporary photo is close enough. During the early part of this century, deep-water dredging by the Army erased the old Indian's promontory. But the excavation did reveal the many layers of discarded clam shells that piled up over the centuries of native settlement.

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