

WRITTEN BY PAUL DORPAT

**B**ack in December of 1981, historian Murray Morgan and I journeyed to Port Townsend to collect some oral history from Laura Kiehl. At the time, Laura was 89 years old and I was carrying a stack of photos printed from negatives taken by her father, Ambrose Kiehl. This week's historical scene is one of them, and Laura remembered it well.

Laura was born in Port Townsend in 1892. At the age of 4, she moved with her younger sister and parents to Seattle. Her father, a civil engineer, had been hired by the Army to survey the forest wilderness that is now Magnolia Bluff's Discovery Park. He also helped build the fort that local politicians hoped would pad the city's purse with military money and also help defend Seattle against the rowdy radicals then milling about the city's economically distressed streets.

Ambrose, who paid his way through college by playing a pipe organ, did his work well in helping design and build Fort Lawton. It breaks the rules of dull rectilinear military-post design and imaginatively nestles the buildings in their striking setting.

He used this artistic eye in his photography as well. In this week's historical photo, Laura is pictured, second from the left, between her mother, Louisa, and her sister, Lorena. Laura explained that the other three women in the costume of the day were guests, not relatives. The six are wading in the tide flats off the southern shore of West Point. That is the then-still-forested Magnolia Bluff on the left. On the right, West Seattle is barely visible through the haze across Elliott Bay.

In this scene, Laura is a teen-ager. She was always tall for her age, she said. The picture was taken around 1908, the last year of major construction at Fort Lawton — until World War II, when it flourished briefly as the second-largest point of departure on the West Coast. Later it became clear that this fort would never be a big one, and the locals soon started musing over what a wonderful park it would make.

The Kiehl family had been treating it as a park right along, Laura said. For years they used this beach below the fort to entertain family and friends with clam and salmon bakes and, of course, wading.

Getting to the beach then required a long hike on a path bordered by salmon berries, devil's club and nettles, and patrolled by giant mosquitoes. Today the nettles are gone, but the beach is still protected from the summer swarms that fill Golden Gardens and Alki Beach. To enjoy the sun-warmed tide pools, you must hike to get there.

Once an adult, Laura pursued more serious outings than beach walking. She graduated from the University of Washington in 1916. And later she became the first woman in the state to be issued a brokerage license. Since no brokerage house would hire her because of her sex, she successfully operated her own office for years in the Smith Tower. Laura died in January 1982, less than two months after my visit.

■ PACIFIC



Courtesy of Frederick Mann

About 1908, Louisa Kiehl, left, and her two daughters introduced the three friends on the right to the pleasures of wading along the West Point shore below Magnolia Bluff.

# WADING AT WEST POINT

They discovered the beach below the bluff



Paul Dorpat

Six Seattle high-school graduates, from the class of 1985, wear contemporary beach wear to test the sun-warmed West Point tidepools with a pose similar to the historical tableau. Pictured from left are Liesel Murray, Erin McCaffery, Terri Sullivan, Sabrina Steffens, Leslie Stewart and Carson Furry.