



... Aerial Photo By Clyde-Harold Pix

The City With an Interesting Past . . . and a Bright Future

No one who has talked to the real old-timers or who has taken the trouble to read up on the early days of Kirkland can rightfully say that Kirkland hasn't had an unusual and interesting past. No one who is well-acquainted with the city today can very well say that Kirkland doesn't have a bright future. Every indication is that Kirkland, the "hub of the East Side," will continue to grow and expand at a faster rate than ever before.

But the Kirkland that is developing — a business center for a large suburban and rural area dotted with nice homes, progressive dairy, poultry, and truck farms, as well as small industries — is a lot different than the founders of the city envisaged 57 years ago. Their dream that Kirkland would be a strong industrial city, "The Pittsburg of the West," did not come true. It's an interesting and almost unbelievable story.

The east shore of Lake Washington boasted only a few scattered settlers in 1887 when L. S. J. Hunt, then owner of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, conceived the idea of making this community a great industrial city. Always a promoter and a

businessman who was not afraid to take a chance, Hunt knew that large quantities of iron ore had been discovered in the Denny iron mines in the Cascade Mountains near Snoqualmie.

This Lake Washington community was picked as a site for a huge iron and steel works, with a smelting plant and shops for the fabrication of rails and other steel products, because it was ideally located, they thought, near all important factors — iron ore, coal, rail and water transportation.

Peter Kirk, a wealthy English steel man, was interested in the project and traveled here to take over actual management after he had disposed of his vast interests in England. He and other members of the Great Western Iron and Steel Company and the Kirkland Land and Development Company bought all the land around the present site of Kirkland, leased the mines for 45 years, erected several brick business buildings on Market Street which are still in use, and purchased tons of heavy machinery.

For a time it looked as though their plan was going to succeed. Kirkland became a beehive of

activity with hundreds of workmen busy clearing land, planking streets, constructing buildings, laying rails, etc. But the project was destined to fail. The expected high-grade iron ore was too expensive to mine and haul. The Panic of 1893 occurred at a critical time and some of the members of the company couldn't pay their assessment. Consequently, the project was abandoned and Kirkland lay idle for several years. Most of the people who had come to work here in the steel mills went away. A few remained and took up farming since there was an abundance of good land here after it had been cleared of heavy forest growth.

Kirkland was not actually incorporated until 1905 and the population was still very small when Dr. H. E. Bradley was sworn in as the first mayor with Ollis Patty, still a Kirkland resident, as treasurer. There were probably not even 500 residents here at that time. But Kirkland has steadily grown ever since and in 1940 the official government census listed it as having 2,084 residents. That was, of course, before the war boom when hundreds of people moved here to work at the Lake Washington Shipyards and other war industries. Government officials now estimate that the population within the confining city limits is about 3,750. The population in the immediate adjoining areas — Juanita, Rose Hill, housing projects, and Houghton — would give the Greater Kirkland area a population of 15,000 people.

Although Kirkland at the present time does not have any large industrial payroll as it did during war times, few people are out of work. Several smaller industries have come into Kirkland to absorb some of the labor and other workers have found jobs in Seattle. The nearby housing projects are practically full and houses to rent are as scarce as the traditional "hen's teeth." There are, however, a few homes and tracts to buy.

Kirkland's newest industry is the Preco Corporation which recently purchased the former Lake Washington Shipyards warehouse from the government. This company has begun the manufacture of pre-fabricated houses.

With Kirkland enjoying the natural advantage of being very close to Seattle by fast ferry and motor bus, it has every reason to count on a greatly increased population and a sound future. Hundreds of people have already purchased land and are awaiting only lower prices on building materials and a more plentiful supply of labor before they build their new homes.

Kirkland business has steadily expanded, even during the past few years when construction was practically impossible.

Kirkland, as a part of the Lake Washington School District, can boast one of the finest school systems in the state. Keeping pace with a phenomenal rise in enrollment, the school directors have managed to construct one new grade school, make a substantial addition to another, and will be ready to start work on a huge new high school and athletic stadium in the very near future. There are now more than 3,000 pupils in the local school system.

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