

# CULTURAL RESOURCES REPORT COVER SHEET

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# “Along the Row”: The Growth of Seattle’s Automobile Dealerships from 1900-1969

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HISTORICAL  
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# Historical Context

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The “horseless carriage” was still in its infancy when the first automobile arrived in Seattle in 1900. Almost immediately, Seattle entrepreneurs saw an opportunity and began selling automobiles, first from repurposed storefronts, then grandiose buildings with plate-glass fronts to display autos, and eventually from dedicated dealerships with spacious showrooms and large lots full of the latest models. As cars themselves changed styles to meet consumer demand, so too did dealership and showroom design. This historical context tracks the evolution of car dealerships in Seattle from 1900 to the late 1960s, from the first “auto row” on Capitol Hill to suburban dealerships on Aurora Avenue and in Lake City. (Figure 1; see also Appendix A.)

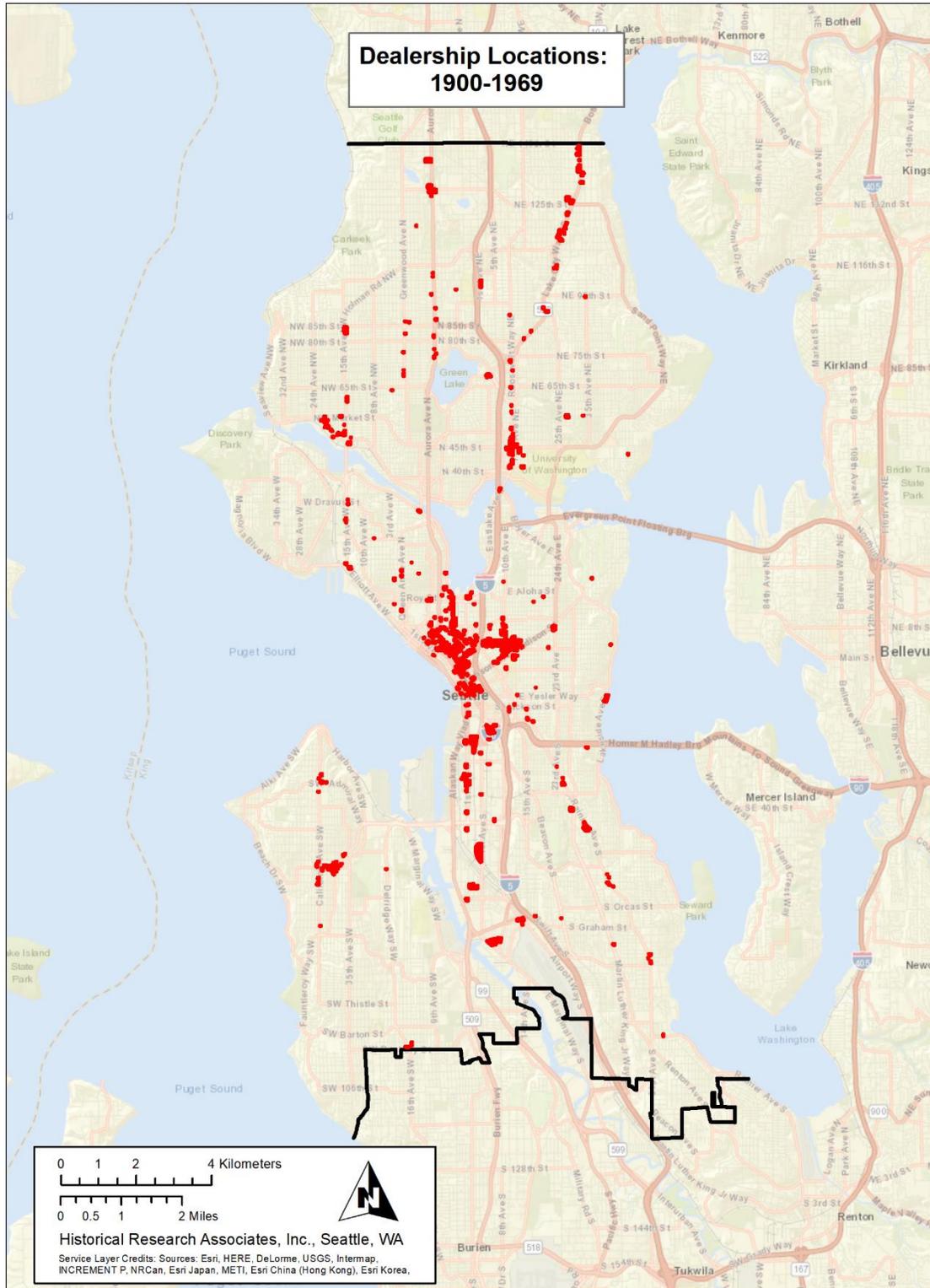
Developed in Europe in the late 1880s, automotive technology soon crossed the Atlantic. In 1893, Charles and J. Frank Duryea, brothers engaged in the bicycle business in Springfield, Massachusetts, were the first in the United States to successfully build a gasoline-powered motorcar. Three years later, they sold their first automobile, joining a growing number of independent automobile manufacturers producing vehicles powered by not only gasoline but also steam and electricity.<sup>1</sup> Like the Duryea brothers, many of these early manufacturers went from producing and selling bicycles to manufacturing motor cars. The mass production and popularity of the bicycle in the latter half of the nineteenth century increased the value placed on individual mobility in the United States. Historian Peter Hugill explained that “The origin of this value lay in rapidly growing wealth from industrialization, an intensified concern with the aesthetics of nature, and an increased focus on the life and mind of the individual rather than the group.”<sup>2</sup> Individualized modes of transport like bicycles allowed elites to more easily travel apart from the masses and avoid the fixed schedules of railroads and public transit. With the advent of the automobile, elites could enjoy the individual freedom initially provided by the bicycle without the physical labor required to power the vehicle. “The automobile,” Hugill wrote, “was ‘sweat free’ and, because it was more expensive [than the bicycle], its ownership was a far better mark of distinction.”<sup>3</sup> Automobiles quickly outpaced the popularity of bicycles, however, with the market for motor cars around the country growing

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<sup>1</sup> James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 13, 23; and John B. Rae, *The American Automobile: A Brief History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 9. For a discussion of early attempts to create steam, electric, and gasoline-powered automobiles, see Flink, *Automobile Age*, 1–14.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hugill, “Good Roads and the Automobile in the United States 1880–1929,” *Geographical Review* 72, no. 3 (July 1987): 327–49, quotation on 327–28. For a summary of the popularity of bicycles in early Seattle, see Knute Berger, “How Bikes Led to Seattle’s First Roads Renaissance,” *Crosscut.org*, September 23, 2013, <https://crosscut.com/2013/09/seattles-first-golden-age-bikes>; and Knute Berger, “The Car That Broke the Back of Seattle’s Bike Craze,” *Crosscut.org*, September 25, 2013, <https://crosscut.com/2013/09/bike-paths-seattle-history>.

<sup>3</sup> Hugill, “Good Roads,” 328.



**Figure 1:** Map of dealership locations in Seattle from 1900 to 1969, based on locations listed in Polk directories.

dramatically in just a few years. By the early 1900s, there were nearly 2,600 makes of automobiles on the market in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

The automobile craze struck Seattle not long after the Duryea Motor Wagon Company sold its first car. Wealth generated by the Klondike gold rush of the late 1890s provided Seattle's elite with ample means to purchase the latest models of automobile.<sup>5</sup> As early as 1900, advertisements in the *Seattle Daily Times* promoted sales of the "horseless carriage." In early June that year, Mitchell, Lewis & Staver Co. advertised the Waverly automobile as "an electric vehicle which is as easily controlled as a trolley car, runs about as fast when on a good road and meets all the requirements demanded of the modern run-about." The advertisement further asked, "Isn't it time some prosperous Seattleite set the pace with the best type of horseless carriage?"<sup>6</sup> Just a month later, in July 1900, Ralph Hopkins, a Northwest native and grandson of U.S. Senator Edward Baker (OR), drove his Woods Motor Vehicle Company electric motorcar through the city, prompting curiosity and attracting a great deal of attention.<sup>7</sup> Twenty years after Hopkins's first drive through the city, the *Seattle Daily Times* noted



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

Figure 2. Ralph Hopkins in his Woods Electric, ca. 1916. Source: Image No. 1983.10.10334, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, Museum of History & Industry, Seattle (MOHAI).

<sup>4</sup> That number dropped to fifteen by 1956. Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Carmack, whose discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek sparked the Klondike rush, was another early purchaser of an automobile in Seattle. In 1902, he and his wife drove their automobile "of French pattern" from Seattle to San Francisco, making headlines in the local press. According to the *Seattle Daily Times*, the auto, named "Carmack," "cost many thousands of dollars" and could make "a speed of anywhere from fifty to sixty miles an hour on good roads." "To 'Frisco in an Auto," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 7, 1902. For more on Carmack's involvement with the Klondike gold rush, see "With Four Millions," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 30, 1898. For more on the early popularity of automobiles in Seattle, see Knute Berger, "Auto Reverie: The Daze of Seattle's First Cars," *Crosscut.org*, October 8, 2013, <https://crosscut.com/2013/10/seattle-cars-autos>.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, Lewis & Staver Co., "A Waverly Automobile," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 2, 1900.

<sup>7</sup> "The presence of an automobile," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 25, 1900.

that the appearance of Hopkins's auto on the streets would "cause runaways, blockade traffic and [was] the magnet to draw mobs of excited people to crowd around and look at it."<sup>8</sup> (Figure 2) Hopkins purchased his Woods Electric directly from the manufacturer for \$500—a substantial sum in 1900—and drove it from Chicago to Seattle over the course of about five months.<sup>9</sup>

The number of automobiles on the streets continued to increase rapidly both across the country and in Seattle despite remaining largely a novelty of the rich and elite. According to one report from 1920, the number of autos in Seattle increased from 400 to 7,500 between 1908 and 1913.<sup>10</sup> The number of businesses selling cars grew with the popularity. In 1901, the Polk City Directory listed only one business, Whitford Rapid Vehicle & Motor Launch Co., under the heading "Automobiles."<sup>11</sup> By 1910, the directory listed thirty-six separate businesses under that heading, as well as many others related to automobile repair, storage, and service. Businesses like livery stables, blacksmith shops, and carriage and bicycle stores were often the first businesses to sell cars. Often located in existing downtown business districts, they simply added the new automobiles to their existing inventory, turning their shops into makeshift automobile showrooms.<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix B.) For example, the Fred T. Merrill Cycle Co., located at 1108–1110 Second Avenue (Ave.) (demolished ca. 1958) in downtown Seattle, mentioned sale of "Steam, Electric, and Gasoline Automobiles and Motorcycles" in small print below a 1902 advertisement for Rambler Bicycles, "The Best Wheels on Earth."<sup>13</sup> By 1903, the Merrill Company advertised Oldsmobile, Rambler, Toledo, and Waverly automobiles. Interested customers could "Call or Write for Catalogues."<sup>14</sup>

As autos grew in popularity, some business owners shifted toward selling them exclusively. These first dealers often simply converted their existing shops into auto dealerships by updating storefronts with large display windows and adding repair and service areas.<sup>15</sup> Showroom spaces in the early era of auto dealerships were relatively small, often with only one or two demonstration

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<sup>8</sup> "First 'Auto Show' Was Really Held on Streets in '01," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 25, 1923.

<sup>9</sup> "Operated First Auto on Streets of Seattle," *Seattle Sunday Times*, September 3, 1916.

<sup>10</sup> "Pioneer Dealer Reviews History," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 14, 1920.

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise cited, all dates, addresses, and dealership names are drawn from the Polk City directories for Seattle, 1900 to 1969, Seattle Public Library, Seattle, Washington.

<sup>12</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 75; and Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership* (St. Paul, MN: Motorbooks International, 2004), 39–40.

<sup>13</sup> Fred T. Merrill Cycle Co., Inc., "Why Look Elsewhere for Your 1902 Mount," advertisement, *Seattle Daily Times*, March 29, 1902, evening edition, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Fred T. Merrill Cycle Co., Inc., "Automobiles," advertisement, *Seattle Daily Times*, May 16, 1903.

<sup>15</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 39–40; and Florence K. Lentz, "An Inventory and Evaluation of Historic Properties Associated with Transportation in Washington State," Eastern Washington University Reports in Archaeology and History 100-90, June 1995, 20, [https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Hist\\_Prop\\_Transportation.pdf](https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Hist_Prop_Transportation.pdf).

models on display.<sup>16</sup> Interested customers could view the displays and review additional available models in the company’s literature. Once a selection was made, the vehicle itself would be shipped by train from manufacturer to dealer or local distributor, sometimes in several pieces. (Figure 3) Trained mechanics then completed assembly before the dealer finally delivered the car directly to the customer.<sup>17</sup> The entire process could take months from order to delivery. In addition to the growing number of individually owned dealerships, many auto manufacturers set up regional distributors that both marketed their cars to dealers in the area and sold cars directly from the factory to customers.<sup>18</sup> Company distributors established offices in large downtown buildings like Seattle’s Smith Tower and others.<sup>19</sup>

In 1903, Henry Grant began selling autos from his bicycle shop at 508 Pike Street (St.) (demolished ca. 1983).<sup>20</sup> According to one news report, H. P. Grant & Co. carried “a fine stock” of both bicycles and automobiles, with a machine shop and large room dedicated to automobile storage.



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

**Figure 3.** Cars being unloaded from train at King Street Station, Seattle, ca. 1915. Source: Image No. 1981.7265.11, MOHAI.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Hewitt explained that, because cars were a relatively unknown product, manufacturers chose to “make the cars conveniently available to the consumer for demonstration and testing in advance of purchase.” Dealers could purchase demonstrator models from the manufacturer at a reduced price. In the early years of selling automobiles, dealers would often advertise when a new demonstrator model would be arriving at their store. In 1907, for example, the Pacific Coast Automobile Co. (1414–1416 Broadway) ran an ad in the *Seattle Sunday Times* letting interested readers know “Our 1907 type XV Pope Toledo Demonstrator is on its way to Seattle.” See Charles M. Hewitt, “The Development of Automobile Franchises,” *Indiana Business Information Bulletin* (Bloomington, IN: Foundation for Economic and Business Studies, 1960), 8; and “Automobiles: A Tip to the Wise,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, February 3, 1907.

<sup>17</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 19–20; and City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board, Report on Designation, Kelly-Springfield Motor Truck Co. Building, January 7, 2015, 9, <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation/landmarks/landmark-list>.

<sup>18</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 18–19.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Dodge Brothers, Inc. had an office in the Smith Tower between 1915 and 1917. Other motorcar companies with offices in the building included Graham-Paige Motor Cars (1928–1930) and the Saunders-Doane Motor Truck Co. (1924–1932). Around the same time that Dodge leased space in the Smith Tower, the Studebaker Corporation had an office in the Maritime Building (906 Alaskan Way).

<sup>20</sup> “Pioneer Dealer Reviews History,” *Seattle Daily Times*, March 14, 1920.

As with many sellers of the early auto era, Grant's company would deliver the purchased car to its new owner, advertising that staff would "demonstrate and instruct in manipulating any kind of automobile."<sup>21</sup> Just a year later, Grant formed the Seattle Automobile Company with partners Henry Schmidt and Dr. Frank Bryant. They sold thirteen vehicles in their first year.<sup>22</sup>

In the early years of auto popularity, purchases of new automobiles were uncommon enough they were often printed in the *Seattle Daily Times*, which for many years had a lengthy section of the Sunday newspaper dedicated to the latest in automobile news. Often a photograph of the purchaser and his (and occasionally her, see Figure 4) new auto would accompany the announcement. In 1919, a weekly column called "Along the Row" provided "Little Stories about Auto Dealers and others" in Seattle. (Figure 5) The column echoed society sections of the time, including news about promotions, business ventures, and even births within the growing number of persons associated with the auto industry in Seattle.<sup>23</sup>

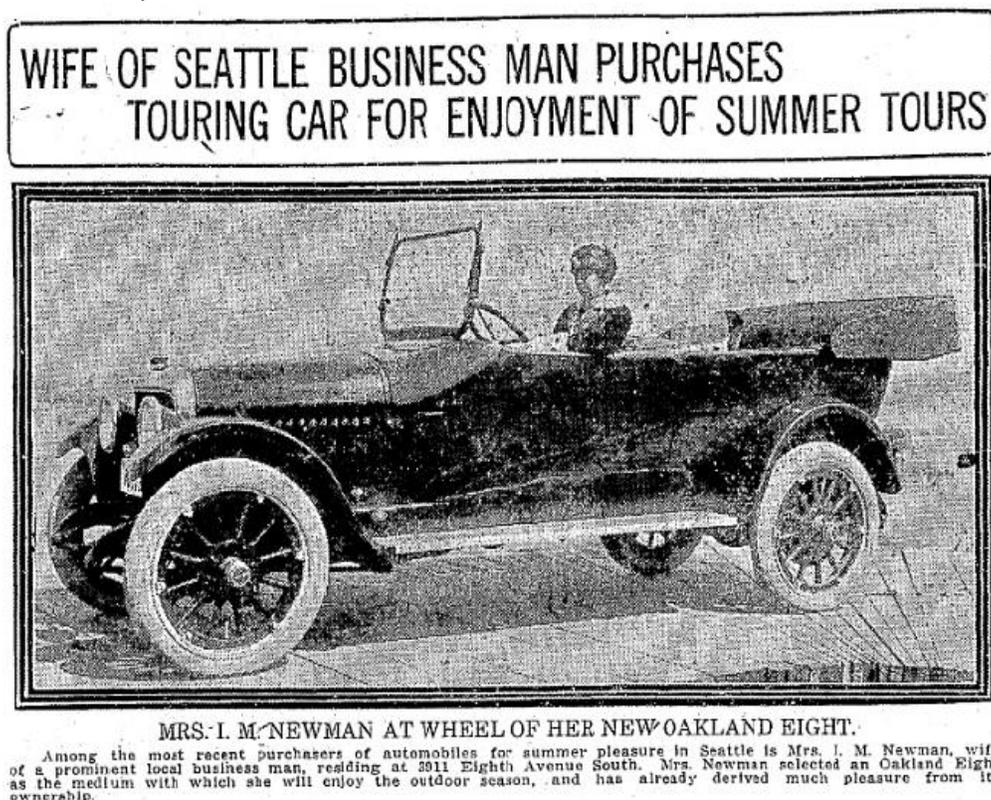


Figure 4: "Wife of Seattle Business Man Purchases Touring Car for Enjoyment of Summer Tours," *Seattle Sunday Times*, June 18, 1916.

<sup>21</sup> "H. P. Grant & Co.—Automobiles," *Seattle Sunday Times*, February 7, 1904.

<sup>22</sup> "Early Days Trying, First Automobile Dealer Recalls Pioneer Times," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 25, 1923. According to the 1905 Polk City Directory, the Seattle Automobile Company was located at 1407–1409 Fourth Ave.

<sup>23</sup> "Along the Row," *Seattle Sunday Times*, January 5, 1919.



Figure 5: Column headline from “Along the Row,” as printed in the *Seattle Sunday Times*, June 8, 1919.

Early dealers received minimal oversight from manufacturers. However, it quickly became clear that the most effective way for producers to market their vehicles was to take advantage of the growing network of dealers being established around the country. Manufacturers reached prospective dealers through word of mouth and advertisements in industry periodicals, newspapers, and magazines, as well as by sending men from the main factory office specifically to recruit businessmen in local markets.<sup>24</sup> Manufacturers offered franchise agreements to dealers they felt would be good representatives of their products and could reliably turn a profit. Selling cars relied heavily on the reputation of the salesperson, especially in the early days of the industry when motorcars were relatively unknown commodities. Thus, manufacturers capitalized on the respect already earned by local businessmen in their communities. Early on, dealers held a great deal of power relative to manufacturers. Because banks and other established investors were wary of backing new auto producers during their infancy, early manufacturers relied on cash deposits from dealers to fund their production. For a dealer, the investment required to enter a franchise agreement was generally minimal, with the largest cost being purchase of a demonstrator car from the manufacturer, often at a discount. In the very early years, dealers could cover wide swaths of territory without much competition, ensuring they could recoup initial investment costs after selling just a few automobiles.<sup>25</sup> The low productivity of manufacturing also meant that it was only financially feasible to become an auto dealer if you held franchises with multiple manufacturers. Exclusive franchised dealerships were uncommon during this era. Brand loyalty would not become a requirement to receive a franchise until the 1940s.<sup>26</sup>

Early automobile dealership franchise agreements contained several common requirements. Manufacturers required dealers to have a physical location from which to sell and service cars. They needed proper branded signage to identify the establishment as an authorized dealer and at least one new model on site for demonstration. Some agreements required dealers to maintain a certain stock of spare parts and provide facilities for vehicle service and repair. For example, in 1917, Ford always

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<sup>24</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 17; and Hewitt, “Development of Automobile Franchises,” 12.

<sup>25</sup> Hewitt, “The Development of Automobile Franchises,” 11.

<sup>26</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 42; and Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 22, photo caption.

required its dealers to maintain \$20,000 worth of spare parts, although dealers could buy the parts from the company at a slight discount. To order a car for a customer, many manufacturers required dealers to provide a 10 percent down payment on the wholesale price of the vehicle. The dealer often received the down payment from the customer, however, with the balance of the entire car's purchase price due on delivery.<sup>27</sup>

Local dealers in Seattle attempted to establish an association in the mid-1900s, as the number of businesses selling cars increased. On January 15, 1907, the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* reported that “a move will be made this week for the formation of an Automobile Dealers’ Association, on the lines of those which now exist in all the larger cities.”<sup>28</sup> One of the first actions of the Seattle Auto Dealers’ Association (SADA) was to host an auto show in 1908. To occur at the Dreamland Rink, a downtown skating and events venue, from April 22 through 25, SADA advertised that the auto show would be, “the most elaborate and costly exhibition ever staged in the Northwest; over half a million dollars’ worth of motor cars on display.” Reflecting the elite nature of automobiles at the time, SADA made sure the event would attract Seattle’s high society by offering the “Best Music Obtainable” and “A Fairyland of decorations as a background for the gowns of beautiful women.”<sup>29</sup> The *Seattle Daily Times* anticipated that “Seattle’s smart set” would “no doubt fall in line and lend their presence to the affair.”<sup>30</sup> To begin the show, SADA organized a parade of automobiles from Pioneer Square to the Dreamland Rink, where attendees could wander the floor to see the latest models from a long list of manufacturers: Columbus Electric, Franklin, Kissel-Kar, Locomobile, Maxwell, Oakland, Packard, Peerless, Pierce-Arrow, Pope-Hartford, Pope-Toledo, Premier, Reo, Stearns, Stevens-Duryea, Stoddard-Dayton, Studebaker and Studebaker Electric, Winton, Welch, White, and Woods Electric.<sup>31</sup> Although the show did not attract as large a crowd as many had hoped, the dealers present nonetheless expressed satisfaction with Seattle’s first auto show. “From an educational standpoint,” said Frederick Wing of Broadway Automobile Company, “the show has been a great success. . . . It has stimulated the automobile spirit and is good for the trade in a hundred ways, among which is the friendly feeling built up among the dealers themselves.”<sup>32</sup> Through SADA’s events and outreach, the automobile reached new levels of acceptance in Seattle.

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<sup>27</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 18–19.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in “No Auto Show,” *Seattle Daily Times*, January 15, 1907.

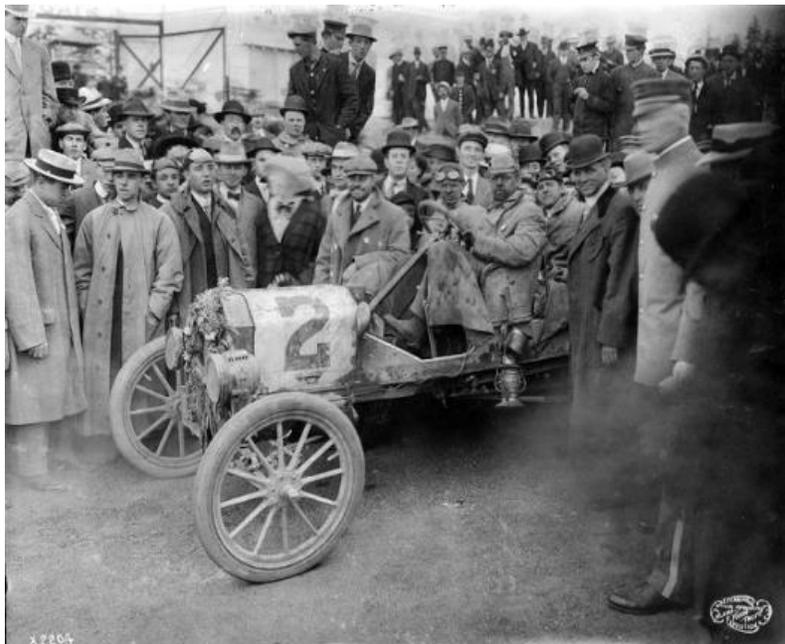
<sup>29</sup> “Automobile Show under Auspices of Seattle Automobile Dealers’ Association,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, April 12, 1908. Dreamland Rink was located at Seventh Ave. and Union St. For more on the history of the Dreamland Rink, see Paul Dorpat, “Long before ACT Theatre, this downtown corner was Dreamland,” *Seattle Times*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/long-before-act-theatre-this-downtown-corner-was-dreamland/>.

<sup>30</sup> “Lining Up for Big Auto Show; Dreamland Rink Is to Be Profusely Decorated and an Attempt Will Be Made to Make It a Social Function,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 12, 1908.

<sup>31</sup> “Auto Parade Marks Show’s Opening; First Show of the Kind Ever Given in Seattle Begins at Dreamland Rink This Evening,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 22, 1908.

<sup>32</sup> “Exhibitors Pleased with Auto Show,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, April 26, 1908.

In 1909, the Alaska–Yukon–Pacific (AYP) Exposition once again highlighted automobiles in the city. As part of the exposition, Seattle auto enthusiast Robert Guggenheim and the Seattle Auto Club helped sponsor a transcontinental auto race, starting in New York City and ending at the exposition grounds. Ten American-made autos left New York on June 1 to make the 4,000-mile journey to Seattle. President William Taft started the race with the press of a button from the White House, thus officially opening the exposition.<sup>33</sup> After twenty-three days on the road, with a total of twelve days running time, the Ford Motor Company Car No. 2 arrived in Seattle on June 23, apparently winning Guggenheim’s \$2,000 price.<sup>34</sup> The race prompted Henry Ford to visit Seattle to see the winning car for himself.<sup>35</sup> (Figure 6)



**Figure 6. Ford Car No. 2, one of two cars entered by the Ford Motor Company in the cross-country race that coincided with the opening of the AYP Exposition. Driven by Bert Scott and C. J. Smith. M. Robert Guggenheim appears behind the steering column to the left; Henry Ford is to the right of the driver. Source: AYP148, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections (UW Special Collections).**

In addition to raising Seattle’s national profile as an auto city, the transcontinental race provided local dealers with additional means to market their wares. The local Ford distributor used the company’s first and third place finishes as a marketing tool, declaring in an advertisement that the race outcome was “the biggest demonstration of car superiority ever offered,” especially given that the winning car was “a standard stock car. . . . Nothing special, nothing better than regular, nothing different from what any buyer gets when we deliver to him a Model T Touring Car, Roadster, Coupe, Town Car, or Taxicab.”<sup>36</sup> (Figure 7) Ford had already established the Model T as

<sup>33</sup> “Taft to Give Auto Race Signal,” *Seattle Daily Times*, May 31, 1909.

<sup>34</sup> “Ford Car Has Lead in Race,” *Seattle Daily Times*, June 21, 1909. Although the newspapers reported that the Model T won the race, the finish was not without controversy. After it became known that the Ford Car No. 2 had changed its axle mid-race, the final prize was awarded to the second-place finisher, the Shawmut. See Greg Lange, “Transcontinental Auto Race Ends in Seattle on June 23, 1909,” HistoryLink.org Essay 2151, January 1, 1999, <http://www.historylink.org/File/2151>.

<sup>35</sup> “Way Back—When Henry Ford Visited Seattle,” *Seattle Daily Times*, March 16, 1934.

<sup>36</sup> “Ford the Winner of the Ocean-to-Ocean Contest,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, June 27, 1909.

one of the lowest-cost models among the multitude of vehicle options available. After the race, when potential buyers looked at a Ford Model T, they saw not just a relatively inexpensive motorcar, but a winning race car, and one they could own themselves.

The first auto dealers in Seattle found homes in existing buildings in what is now considered downtown, with most dealerships contained within the area between First and Third Avenues and Seneca and Bell Streets.<sup>37</sup> However, by 1911, at least sixty-five auto dealers and salesmen were working in Seattle.<sup>38</sup> As the trade grew, it became clear that Seattle's downtown would run out of capacity for new businesses, and dealers began to look east to First Hill and the "Broadway District" (part of Capitol Hill) for additional space.<sup>39</sup> The first auto dealerships appeared on Capitol Hill in 1905, when the Broadway Automobile Company opened at the corner of Broadway and Madison (1112–1114 Broadway, demolished ca. 2003).<sup>40</sup> However, the area would not become the city's main auto hub until the next decade. In August 1910, the *Seattle Daily Times* ran an article under the headline, "Location of Auto Row Causes Talk."<sup>41</sup> Although some dealers argued that Fifth Ave. was the logical choice for an auto row, others were concerned about higher downtown rents. Capitol Hill was seen as desirable not only because there was potentially more unoccupied land on which to build dealership buildings but also because it was on multiple streetcar lines and was becoming one of the more fashionable neighborhoods in which many of Seattle's



Figure 7. Ford advertisement touting the company's win in the Alaska–Yukon–Pacific Exhibition Transcontinental Race. Source: *Seattle Sunday Times*, June 27, 1909, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Locations of downtown businesses taken from Polk City directories available at the Seattle Public Library.

<sup>38</sup> "Auto Dealers Meet for One Big Time; Business Affairs Thrown to Winds by Seattle Motor and Accessory Men at Hotel Butler Banquet," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 5, 1911.

<sup>39</sup> In the late 1890s, various classified ads and real estate listings use the terms First Hill and Broadway District in reference to the neighborhoods east of downtown. The first use of the term *Capitol Hill* appeared in 1905. See, "Crisp Snaps, Twelfth Avenue Addition," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 9, 1898; "Fehren-Marvin Co.," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 7, 1899; and "Pettit & Son; Big Income Property Near," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 8, 1905. For more information on the history of Capitol Hill and how it got its name, see Paul Dorpat, "Seattle Neighborhoods: Capitol Hill, Part 1 – Thumbnail History," HistoryLink.org Essay 3188, May 7, 2001, <http://www.historylink.org/File/3188>.

<sup>40</sup> Puget Sound Automobile Co. and Northwest Motor Co. followed Broadway Automobile Co., Inc., to Capitol Hill in 1906. See 1906 Polk City Directory.

<sup>41</sup> "Location of Auto Row Causes Talk," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 7, 1910.

wealthy families had settled. Automobiles were still comparatively expensive. A Ford Model T, one of the lower cost models, cost about \$825 when it was introduced in 1908.<sup>42</sup> The average U.S. wage at the time was around \$10 per week, putting even the Model T out of range for many households.<sup>43</sup> Thus, for auto dealers, proximity to Capitol Hill’s wealthier residents provided access to a larger number of potential customers while the streetcar lines allowed residents of other parts of the city to easily access the growing number of Capitol Hill showrooms, repair shops, garages, and other auto-related services. By 1911, nearly three-quarters of automobile dealers listed in the Polk Directory had addresses on Capitol Hill, mostly along Broadway, Pike, and Pine Streets.<sup>44</sup> (Figure 8; see also Appendix B.)

As it became clear that Capitol Hill was the favorite for the growing auto row, a construction boom began, echoing a similar one happening across the country. Historian Chester Liebs explained that during this early period of sales growth in the 1910s, “automobile buildings were no longer considered merely places where a fad was merchandized; now they were the point of contact between the public and a rapidly expanding industry, consisting of scores of manufacturers.”<sup>45</sup> In this constantly fluctuating market, with small manufacturers frequently entering and then quickly failing out of the market, it was important for both manufacturers and dealers to find ways to convince potential customers not only that the cars they were selling were high quality but also that the company would not go out of business, leaving customers without necessary replacement parts and other



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**Figure 8. Looking south along Broadway toward E Pike St. on Capitol Hill. The three-story building in the center of the frame is the Broadway & East Pike Building, built in 1912 and is still standing as of 2018. Source: 1983.10.10456.2, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, MOHAI.**

<sup>42</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Manufacturers: 1905* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1908), 11.

<sup>44</sup> The 1911 Polk Directory lists forty-two businesses under the “Automobiles” heading, with thirty of those located on Capitol Hill (mostly in the Pike/Pine and Broadway corridors) and the remainder in what is now considered downtown.

<sup>45</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 78.

services. One method dealers used to generate trust in their product was to build and appoint attractive and impressive showrooms, creating connections between the opulence of the surroundings and the presumed excellence of the product itself. Newly constructed dealerships were “crafted to resemble the most impressive office buildings, banks, and railroad depots so they were instantly perceived as civic assets.”<sup>46</sup> Dealers sought to create elaborate “sales palaces” where the city’s most fashionable men and women would feel at home and perhaps more inclined to purchase a new motorcar.<sup>47</sup>

In 1912, the *Seattle Daily Times* reported that “the growth of the automobile industry is responsible for the construction of about \$1,500,000 worth of buildings in Seattle devoted chiefly to motoring interests.”<sup>48</sup> Some dealers opened in renovated buildings; others financed new construction. The M. S. Brigham Motor Car Company, state distributor for Cadillac, began an extensive remodel of its building at 915–917 E Pike St. in 1912, in the heart of the new and growing auto row.<sup>49</sup> (Figure 9) The renovation raised the original building from one story to three, increasing its size to nearly 18,000 square feet (ft).<sup>50</sup> The architect of the remodel was Victor Voorhees, who would become the supervising architect for the Willys-Overland Company, designing auto showrooms and garages for the company’s products throughout Washington state.<sup>51</sup> The first-floor showroom of the re-designed building featured two 14-ft-tall French plate-glass windows which created “an abundance of light that makes possible an attractive display.” Somewhat unusual for the time, the remodeled building had a secondary showroom on the second floor, with Chicago-style pivoting windows, as well as “a reading and rest room for the convenience of women car owners, a feature that accentuates the importance the feminine sex now plays in the automobile business.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Lentz, “Historic Properties Associated with Transportation in Washington State,” 19.

<sup>48</sup> “Big Growth Apparent in Automobile Row,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 14, 1912.

<sup>49</sup> 915–919 E Pike St. is still extant. See WISAARD Historic Property Report, Property ID 343114 for more information on the building.

<sup>50</sup> “Work Under Way on Cadillac Building,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 17, 1912. The original building was home to Brigham & Fenn Motor Car Co. See 1909 Polk Directory.

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, ed., *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014): 483. Voorhees (1876–1970) was born in Wisconsin but moved to Seattle in 1904. With Elmer Fisher he established the firm Fisher & Voorhees. Best known for a plan book he produced (*Western Home Builder*), Voorhees was also a prolific designer credited with designing more than 110 building projects between 1904 and 1929, including residential, commercial, industrial, and educational buildings. See, Sarah J. Martin, “Victor W. Voorhees,” Architect Biographies, Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-victor-w-voorhees>; and Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON), Summary of 915 E Pike St E, <http://web6.seattle.gov/DPD/HistoricalSite/default.aspx>.

<sup>52</sup> “Cadillac Building New Addition to Auto Row,” *Seattle Daily Times*, February 9, 1913; and Seattle DON, Summary of 915 E Pike St E.

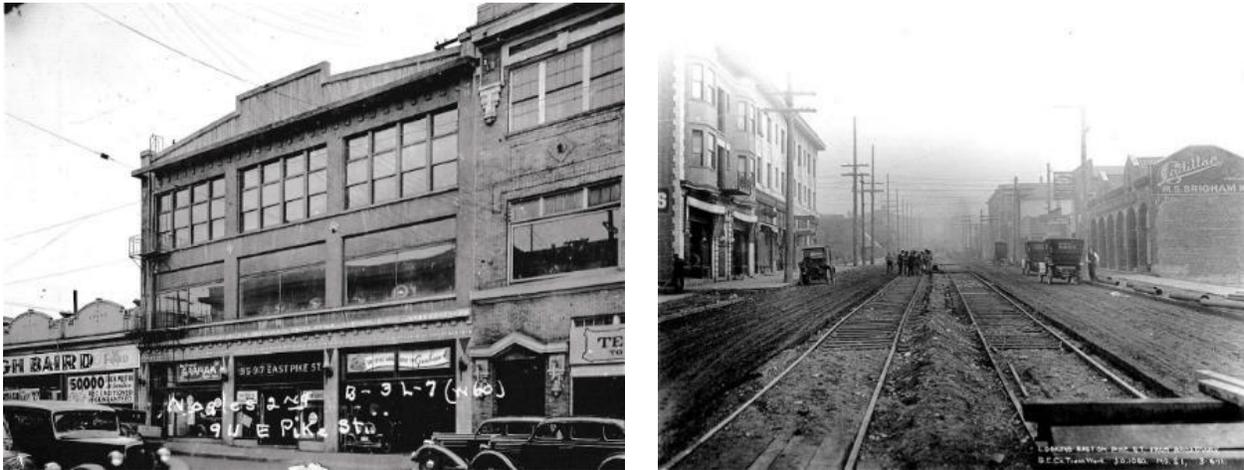


Figure 9. Left: 915–917 E. Pike Street, ca. 1937. Note the large showroom windows on the second floor of the building. Source: King County Tax Assessor, Real Property Record Cards, 1937–1972, Washington State Archives, Bellevue (King County Property Cards). Right: Looking east on Pine St. from Broadway, March 6, 1911. M. S. Brigham’s one-story dealership is on the right-hand side of the photograph. Source: SEA0505, UW Special Collections.

The third floor was dedicated to the service department, where “every inch of space will be utilized, for there will be no posts,” made possible by specialized roof trusses.<sup>53</sup> A three-ton electric elevator was installed to carry cars from the street to the second and third floors. Even in 1912, Cadillacs were among the higher-end car models, and Brigham clearly wanted customers to feel the luxury immediately upon entering the building.

Large windows were a prominent feature of dealership buildings around the country. Seattle’s Capitol Hill auto row buildings were no exception, whether they were remodels or new construction. Most building facades followed a similar style, with a windowed storefront on the lower floor and an upper-story with smaller windows, topped with a decorative cornice. The new or remodeled dealerships often added larger storefront windows to the facade “so that passersby could catch a better glimpse of the cars displayed inside.”<sup>54</sup> For example, in 1919, Dodge distributor William Eaton made plans for a brand-new building on the southeast corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. and E Pike St. (1205 E. Pike St., built 1920). The *Seattle Daily Times* reported, “one big feature will be the windows, which will practically cover the street sides, affording one of the best lighted buildings on Automobile Row.”<sup>55</sup> The two-story building, which was finally completed in 1920, was to be entirely dedicated to showrooms and offices, with the shop and service departments in a separate building. The separation of the dealership from the service department was an innovation for dealership buildings of the time, which typically included both.

<sup>53</sup> “Work Under Way on Cadillac Building.”

<sup>54</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> “Novel Idea in Eaton Building,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 27, 1919.

The inside of dealership buildings was just as important as the outside. Dealers sought to make their showrooms attractive to customers through elaborate decoration and extravagant furnishing and a “sales salon,” an elaborate stage from which cars could be shown off and sold.<sup>56</sup> When the Garford Motor Truck Company opened a new Seattle branch on Broadway in 1917, the *Seattle Daily Times* noted that, “the entire show room, covering the length of the building, is not interrupted by columns or pillars and gives a wide sweep which is at once impressive.”<sup>57</sup> The new building, also designed by architect Voorhees, included an 80 by 40 ft showroom on the first floor, with 13 ft plate-glass windows, an 18 ft ceiling, mahogany finishes, and terrazzo tile floors.<sup>58</sup> When building his new Ford dealership on Westlake Ave. in 1922, William McKay hired architectural firm McClelland & Pinneh to design an interior showroom with high ceilings, sandstone-finished walls, and elaborate woodwork and paneling. The design also included a lounge for female customers on the mezzanine level, looking out over the salesroom. (Figure 10)

In addition to decorative elements, dealers used other innovations to enhance their buildings and adapt them to the needs of selling cars. Cars and the equipment used to service them were mobile, bulky, and increasingly heavy, requiring buildings with large, open spaces whose floors could support



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**Figure 10. Top: Showroom at William O. McKay Company, ca. 1929. Source: SEA2848, UW Special Collections. Bottom: Women in the Ladies' Rest Room at William O. McKay Company, ca. 1929. Source: SEA2849, UW Special Collections.**

<sup>56</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 79.

<sup>57</sup> “New Garford Home Almost Ready for Branch,” *Seattle Daily Times*, February 18, 1917.

<sup>58</sup> “Plans for Garford Branch Home Announced,” *Seattle Daily Times*, October 8, 1916.

heavy weights. Dealers also gave high priority to making new buildings fireproof, since gasoline and other flammable materials kept in service areas were a constant danger.<sup>59</sup> Thus many of Seattle's auto dealership buildings were made of reinforced concrete, a relatively new material that was "capable of supporting large loads, vibration resistant, and relatively fireproof."<sup>60</sup> Other innovations aided dealers in better storing vehicles. The Wright Building, on the northeast corner of E Pike St. and Harvard Ave. (802 E Pike, built 1912), included a ramp leading from the back of the building to the second-floor service and storage area, eliminating the need for a costly elevator. Construction of the building cost an estimated \$125,000.<sup>61</sup>

The growth of the national auto industry continued through the end of the 1910s, with a short interruption during World War I. In 1918, the War Industries Board cut in half the auto industry's steel allocation for civilian production, resulting in a 45 percent decrease in passenger car production. Since supply could not meet demand, new car prices rose by about 42 percent, in addition to a government-imposed luxury tax of 5 percent on new cars.<sup>62</sup> Despite these increases, the auto-manufacturing industry recovered fairly quickly after the war. The recession that hit the United States between 1920 and 1921 affected the auto industry dramatically, however. For eighteen months starting in January 1920, deflation increased and wholesale prices of goods decreased by as much as 36.8 percent. Civilian unemployment also rose, from about 1.8 percent in 1918 to 11.7 percent by 1921.<sup>63</sup> Although car prices were dropping, fewer people could afford them, decreasing the number of new car sales.<sup>64</sup> Some manufacturers, including Buick, Dodge, and Ford, were forced to halt production at some factories by the end of 1920, decreasing the number of cars available for dealers to sell.<sup>65</sup> Many smaller manufacturers closed their factories for good.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> In 1925, for example, a fire on Halloween caused more than \$800,000 in damage to buildings in Capitol Hill's Auto Row. John Caldbick, "Pike/Pine Auto Row (Seattle)," HistoryLink.org Essay 20630, September 10, 2018, <http://www.historylink.org/File/20630>; and Daryl C. McClary, "Seattle's Auto Row on Capitol Hill is hit by fire on October 31, 1925," HistoryLink.org Essay 10678, December 5, 2013, <http://www.historylink.org/File/10678>.

<sup>60</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> "New Auto Building Nears Completion," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 9, 1913.

<sup>62</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*; and Rae, *American Automobile*, 70–71.

<sup>63</sup> J. R. Vernon, "The 1920–21 Deflation: The Role of Aggregate Supply," *Economic Inquiry* 29, no. 3 (July 1991): 572–80, esp. 572–73.

<sup>64</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Other manufacturers that halted production include Maxwell-Chalmers, Nash, Packard, REO, Studebaker, and Willys-Overland. Flink, *Automobile Age*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> According to John Rae, the number of independent motor vehicle manufacturers decreased from 108 to 44 between 1923 and 1927, reflecting a larger trend toward consolidation, especially after the financial trouble of the early 1920s recession. Rae, *American Automobile*, 102–103.

For dealers, the recession meant relying more heavily on used car sales for profit. *Motor World*, one of the many auto-industry periodicals popular at the time, ran an article detailing the used car shows some Seattle dealers were putting on. Clearing their showrooms of new car stock, dealers brought in used cars for a week, with the showroom decorated in equal splendor to their new car displays. Max Olson, SADA president at the time, explained that “the dealer to-day [*sic*] must regard the used car as one of his most effective means of extending his range of prospects for new cars.”<sup>67</sup> A satisfied used car customer might eventually become a new car customer. But for many, meager profits from used car sales were not enough. In Seattle, during what one dealer called “the tragically fatal days of 1920–21,” the number of dealers dropped by nearly a third between 1919 and 1921, from one hundred to seventy.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the downturn of the early 1920s, by mid-decade, it was clear the automobile had shifted from novelty to necessity and overall auto sales were still on an upward trend. “Driving,” wrote Liebs, “had become a potent form of mass entertainment, and the automobile elevated to much-sought-after cultural icon. Next to a home, a car was a family’s most expensive purchase.”<sup>69</sup> As noted above, during the recession, car prices had been steadily dropping. By the end of 1920, the factory price for a basic Model T Runabout was \$395, less than half what it had sold for when introduced in 1908.<sup>70</sup> And even though the American economy was going strong by 1927, the year the last of the Model Ts rolled off the production line, the model was selling for only \$290.<sup>71</sup> More and more people were also buying cars on installment plans or with additional financing, sometimes through the credit corporations set up through auto manufacturers themselves.<sup>72</sup> By 1925, nearly three-fourths of all car sales, including used cars, were made using an installment plan or some sort of financing.<sup>73</sup> According to the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce (NACC), motor vehicle registrations in Washington increased from 60,734 in 1916 to 185,359 in 1921. Gross motor vehicle revenues in the state increased even more dramatically, going from \$350,052 in 1916 to

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<sup>67</sup> “Used Car Shows Are Selling for Seattle Dealers—They Can Sell for You, Too,” *Motor World* 65, no. 11 (December 15, 1920): 14–15.

<sup>68</sup> “Eaton Predicts Current Season One for Profit,” *Seattle Daily Times*, May 4, 1930. W. L. Eaton owned a Dodge franchise in Seattle for many years. Dealership numbers are compiled from 1919 and 1921 Polk City directories.

<sup>69</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 20. For more on this shift in the 1920s, see Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 9.

<sup>70</sup> “Encyclopedia: 1921,” Model T Ford Club of America, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://www.mtfa.com/encyclo/1921.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 87–88.

<sup>72</sup> In 1919, General Motors established the General Motors Acceptance Corporation to provide financing both to dealers and individual auto buyers. Similarly, Ford established the Universal Credit Corporation. Other large manufacturers with the means to do so followed suit. Many subsidiary corporations were sold in the 1930s to avoid anti-trust concerns. See Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 20; Rae, *American Automobile*, 88; and Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 88; and Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 9.

\$3,140,730 in 1921. As of March 1922, there were 649 passenger car and truck dealers in the state of Washington, most of whom operated in or around Seattle.<sup>74</sup>

Capitalizing on this growth, dealers again began to look to other parts of Seattle for new customers and more space, a trend that would appear over and over as the city grew in both population and area.<sup>75</sup> Some dealers had tried and failed in the early 1910s to establish a presence in places like South Lake Union, Lower Queen Anne, Ballard, and Georgetown.<sup>76</sup> However, dealers did not find lasting success in these new areas until the 1920s.

Among the most successful new businesses were Nelson & Kellogg, Inc. (later Nelson Chevrolet, which operated in Ballard until 2002), established at 4918 Leary Ave. NW (built 1928) in Ballard in 1922 (Figure 11), and Columbia Motor Co., which opened in Columbia City in 1925 at 3806–3808 S



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**Figure 11. Nelson Chevrolet, ca. 1944.** Nelson opened in 1922 in Ballard and remained at the same location until the early 2000s. The family business, started by Stan Nelson and passed on to his son Stan Nelson, Jr., became Three Sisters Nelson Chevrolet in 1998 when the sisters took over the dealership. Rising property values and pressure to develop the prime 3 acres led to the closing. The family still owns other businesses outside of Seattle. Source: Image No. 1983.10.14627, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, MOHAI.

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<sup>74</sup> National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, *Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry, 1922* (New York, NY: National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, Inc., 1922), 50–51, 56. On March 14, 1920, the *Seattle Sunday Times* reported that five hundred dealers and salesmen attended a dinner sponsored by the Seattle Automobile Dealers' Association. While not every attendee would have owned a dealership, the size of the crowd indicates the extent of the auto-related industry in Seattle at the time. "Auto Salesmen Talk Over Plans for Show," *Seattle Sunday Times*, March 14, 1920.

<sup>75</sup> A 1932 report on the passenger car industry noted that "The congestion of city traffic and difficulty of finding parking space have made trips to the center of town less pleasant, while a drive to a suburban sales and service station is easy. The best answer to the dealer problem, therefore, it appears to us, is to get out of congested areas to some location convenient to main automobile highways, with plenty of room for new and used car display and for service." The same logic drove dealers to the suburbs once again in the 1950s. See Charles Coolidge Parlin, *The Passenger Car Industry* (Philadelphia: Curtis, 1932), 59.

<sup>76</sup> Several dealerships opened in these neighborhoods between 1910 and 1913, but few lasted more than a year or two. For example, according to the Polk City Directories, Pennsylvania Motor Car Co., Inc., set up shop at the corner of Minor Ave. and Aloha St. in 1910 but was gone by 1911. Similarly, Georgetown Automobile Co., 6109 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. S, started in 1913 and folded in 1915.

Ferdinand St. (built 1921).<sup>77</sup> However, the biggest growth occurred in the area along Westlake Ave. between downtown and Lake Union and in the University District. These two locales emerged as counterparts to Capitol Hill's auto row. (See Appendix B.)

City directories first list an automobile dealer on Westlake Ave. in 1922. The next year, three dealerships opened in the area, including the William O. McKay Company, which became a fixture of the Westlake neighborhood until the 1990s. Several more dealerships opened in 1924, including Westlake Chevrolet Co. (118 Westlake Ave. N, demolished ca. 2007), and eight more in 1925.<sup>78</sup> By the 1930s, Westlake Ave. between Denny Way and Lake Union was firmly established as one of Seattle's new auto rows. One reason dealers chose Westlake over the Pike/Pine area was proximity to Ford's Seattle manufacturing plant at 724 Fairview Ave. N. (built 1914) Ford opened the plant in 1914 and built vehicles there until 1932, when it opened its new plant on East Marginal Way.<sup>79</sup> With a major factory branch nearby, William McKay saw an opportunity and moved his fledgling Ford franchise from Capitol Hill to a brand-new building at Westlake and Roy.<sup>80</sup> When it opened in July 1923, the *Seattle Daily Times* called the building "truly a monument to Seattle's newer automobile row," reflecting the "very highest type of construction adopted by a progressive automobile dealer."<sup>81</sup> The building's lavish interior (Figure 10, above) and terra-cotta exterior marked McKay's dealership as one of the finest in Seattle.

Although dealers had looked to the University District for expansion earlier than Westlake, it never grew to the size of Westlake's auto row. Cline & Carpenter, Inc., opened a dealership at 1100 NE 45<sup>th</sup> St. (demolished, ca. 2001) in 1918 but shuttered it soon thereafter in 1921. In 1924, several

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<sup>77</sup> See 1923 and 1925 Polk City directories; Nelson & Kellogg began advertising in the *Seattle Daily Times* in late 1922. "Drive Your Old Car Out to Nelson & Kellogg," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 10, 1922; and Bill Kossen, "A New Life for Ballard's Auto Row," *Seattle Times*, May 22, 2002. For more information on the building at 3806 S Ferdinand St., see WISAARD Historic Property Report, Property ID 717852.

<sup>78</sup> See 1925 Polk City Directory.

<sup>79</sup> The Seattle Ford plant reportedly built up to six thousand automobiles in its first year of operation. "Ford Company Builds Fine Seattle Plant," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 12, 1913.

<sup>80</sup> A factory branch served the same purpose as an independent dealership but was owned and run by a manufacturer. Factory branches had their own salesrooms and staff and distributed cars to other area dealers. The presence of a factory branch in a city could present a problem for independent dealers, as factory employees were paid a salary directly by the manufacturer rather than based on commission. Seattle was home to several factory branches, including Studebaker, Winton, and Ford, among others. Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 19. For an example of a factory branch in Seattle, see "Winton Plant Here One of Importance," *Seattle Daily Times*, September 22, 1912.

<sup>81</sup> "Seattle-Built Plant," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 8, 1923. For a detailed description of the McKay building, see City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board, Report on Designation, Pacific McKay and Ford McKay Buildings, April 19, 2006, <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/HistoricPreservation/Landmarks/RelatedDocuments/pacific-ford-mckay-designation.pdf>.

new dealers opened along Tenth Ave. NE (now Roosevelt Way), University Way, and E 45<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>82</sup> For example, W. L. Burns, of the University Motor Company, opened a salesroom at 4231 University Way NE (built 1922) to sell Overland and Willys Knight cars and remained in the University District for forty years.<sup>83</sup> Although the University District's auto row did not grow quite as rapidly as Westlake's, by 1927, nine dealerships were operating in the area.

In the 1920s, dealers began establishing branch dealerships along Seattle's new auto rows. By 1926, for instance, in addition to its main store at 907 E Pike St. (built 1912), Central Chevrolet, Inc., advertised branches of its franchise in the Central District (1001 Jackson St., built 1915), Westlake (118 Westlake Ave. N, demolished ca. 2007), and the University District (4041 Tenth Ave. [now Roosevelt Way] NE, demolished ca. 2016).<sup>84</sup> After C. H. Wells took over the Chevrolet franchise, he opened another branch in West Seattle (4022 SW Alaska St., demolished ca. 1988).<sup>85</sup> Others followed suit, including Eldridge Buick, with a branch in Ballard (2038 NW Market St., built 1928), and W. L. Eaton Dodge with a branch in Westlake (111 Westlake Ave. N, demolished ca. 2005).<sup>86</sup>

Consumers in the "Roaring Twenties" began to demand more and more stylish and luxurious cars, increasing production costs for manufacturers and prompting them to place greater pressure on dealers to increase sales. Manufacturers sought greater control over the distribution of their vehicles, feeling "they could not afford to let the distribution side of the industry take care of itself."<sup>87</sup> One method manufacturers used to control dealer sales in this period was to require exclusive franchise contracts. Whereas in the early years many dealers carried multiple automobile brands, in the 1920s manufacturers introduced new provisions to franchise agreements that required exclusive representation of their make of automobile.<sup>88</sup> The practice became so common that by 1930, 80 percent of dealers represented a single manufacturer.<sup>89</sup> When Seattle's McKay started his dealership, for example, he received an exclusive Ford franchise. For some dealers, the exclusive contract was a helpful advertising mechanism, illustrating to potential customers their faith in the product. However, smaller dealers found being forced to sell only one line of cars could mean a reduction in sales and potential ruin. When faced with this predicament, some dealers nonetheless

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<sup>82</sup> See 1924 Polk City Directory.

<sup>83</sup> "Gets Local Agency," *Seattle Daily Times*, September 2, 1923.

<sup>84</sup> See 1925 and 1926 Polk City directories.

<sup>85</sup> "New Organization Begins Promoting Chevrolet Sales," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 4, 1926.

<sup>86</sup> See 1926 and 1927 Polk City directories.

<sup>87</sup> Hewitt, "Development of Automobile Franchises," 15.

<sup>88</sup> Hewitt, "Development of Automobile Franchises," 17.

<sup>89</sup> Ralph F. Breyer, *Commodity Marketing* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 371.

chose to take on a competing line, losing their original franchise.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, the auto industry itself was consolidating. Where once hundreds of firms produced as many makes of cars, by 1923, ten firms were responsible for over 90 percent of vehicle production.<sup>91</sup> Larger companies had greater resources to advertise and to attract and support dealers, thereby reaching a greater number of potential buyers. By the end of the decade, the number of independent auto manufacturers had been reduced by half.<sup>92</sup>

By the time the stock market crashed in October 1929, the auto industry had largely recovered from the recession at the beginning of the decade. Dealers and manufacturers who had weathered the earlier downturn used their experience to relieve some of its worst effects, but the Great Depression nonetheless had an impact. While the crash drastically decreased the demand for new cars, car culture in the United States had become so strong that people continued to drive—and even buy—older, used car models. As historian John Rae has explained, “economic crisis or no, the family car was not a luxury to be jettisoned during the storm; it was a household necessity which, if it could not be replaced, had somehow to be kept running until better times arrived.”<sup>93</sup> Motor vehicle production in the country dropped 75 percent between 1929 and 1933, but auto registrations only dropped 10 percent, indicating that while Americans may not have been buying new cars, they were still driving.<sup>94</sup>

The number of dealers in Seattle fell only slightly between 1929 and 1940, from sixty-nine to fifty, according to listings in Polk City directories. Veteran Seattle dealers such as William Eaton even reentered the auto business in the middle of the Great Depression. Eaton reopened his dealership at 1110 E Pine St. (built 1928), as distributor for Hudson-Essex cars, just four months after “retiring” from the business in April 1930. “I have every confidence,” Eaton reported to the

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<sup>90</sup> Hewitt notes, “According to the cancellation files of leading manufacturers, the principal cause for dealer cancellations during this period was listed as, ‘Took on a competing line.’” (“Development of Automobile Franchises,” 19).

<sup>91</sup> Hewitt, “Development of Automobile Franchises,” 14. According to a report published in 1928, the ten leading manufacturers in 1923, in order of production, were Ford, General Motors, Willys-Overland, Dodge, Studebaker, Hudson, Maxwell-Chrysler, Nash, Reo, and Packard. Lawrence H. Seltzer, *A Financial History of the American Automobile Industry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 57.

<sup>92</sup> Rae explains that between 1923 and 1927, the number of independent motor-vehicle manufacturers decreased from 108 to 44 in part because of the need for mass production to meet increasing consumer demand (*American Automobile*, 102–3).

<sup>93</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 109.

<sup>94</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 9. Rae provides numbers to illustrate the decrease. In 1929, 5,337,087 cars were produced, compared to a low of 1,331,860 in 1932, after which conditions gradually improved. In contrast, the number of motor-vehicle registrations dropped from 26,500,000 to 23,877,000 between 1929 and 1932, just a 10 percent decline (*American Automobile*, 105, 109).

*Seattle Daily Times*, “that the automobile business as a whole, if such is not already the case, will very shortly show a marked upturn in sales volume and I am of the opinion that 1931 will be one of the healthiest years in the motor car business.”<sup>95</sup> As a SADA member, Eaton also helped put on the annual auto show, a tradition that continued throughout the Depression years. (Figure 12) President Herbert Hoover opened the 1931 show with a “telegraphic signal,” and famed Notre Dame coach Knute Rockne entertained guests on opening night.<sup>96</sup> In a nod to the continued economic struggle, by the mid-1930s, Seattle dealers chose to celebrate auto show week by hosting events at their individual dealerships rather than through an expensive showcase event.<sup>97</sup>

Dealers sought ways to cut costs and increase profits. Manufacturers urged dealers to focus on their service and parts departments and, if building new, to construct single-story facilities with smaller showrooms.<sup>98</sup> During the Depression, most car owners opted to repair old cars rather than buy new ones, making the parts and service facilities an even more important source of profit for businessmen. Dealers in Seattle followed this advice. In 1930, the Yates Motor Company completed a new building at



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**Figure 12.** Just months prior to the stock market crash in 1929, SADA joined with groups in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York to host a travelling auto show. The group brought more than a million dollars-worth of cars to the Hec Edmondson Pavilion at the University of Washington. Some new models were shown in the northwest for the first time. In this photo, probably taken in 1929, two-seated roadsters and four-door sedans crowd the floor of the athletic pavilion. The show included Whippets, Hudsons, and Durants, as well as Chevrolets, Fords, and Oldsmobiles. Source: Image No. 1983.10.3620.4, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, MOHAI.

<sup>95</sup> “Eaton Appointed New Hudson-Essex Distributor,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 3, 1930; and “W. L. Eaton to Retire from Auto Field,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 30, 1930. In 1941, Eaton moved to Detroit where he took a position as executive vice president of the Graham Paige Motor Corporation. He retired again in 1945 and moved to California, returning to Seattle in 1952 to take a position as executive vice president and member of the board of directors for Rototiller, Inc. He died in 1955. “W. L. Eaton, Ex-Auto Dealer, Dies,” *Seattle Daily Times*, September 6, 1955.

<sup>96</sup> “Hoover, Mayor Opens Seattle’s ‘31 Auto Show,” *Seattle Daily Times*, February 24, 1931.

<sup>97</sup> “Auto Show Set for Next Week,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, November 8, 1936.

<sup>98</sup> Lentz, “Historic Properties Associated with Transportation in Washington State,” 19; and Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 86–87.

2701 California Ave. SW in West Seattle. (Figure 13) The new Ford dealership opened with a public reception on November 22, showing off the “new tile and concrete building.” Although smaller and less intricate compared to the grandiose buildings of the earlier auto boom, the building nonetheless featured “large plate glass windows, coming almost down to floor level” and “a light and modern shop with all the latest labor saving devices for servicing Ford cars.”<sup>99</sup> In the University District, another Ford dealer, R. W. Hinea Motors, Inc., invested \$45,000 in 1931 in a new building at 7301 Tenth Ave. (now Roosevelt Way) NE.<sup>100</sup>



Figure 13. 2701 California Ave. SW, ca. 1937. Source: King County Property Cards.

By the beginning of World War II, the auto industry had mostly recovered from the Great Depression. During the war, however, production of civilian passenger cars ceased, as major manufacturers transformed their factories for production of tanks, airplanes, and other war-related vehicles.<sup>101</sup> From a high of 3,250,000 in 1941, passenger car production dropped to only 700 in 1945.<sup>102</sup> With auto production halted, many dealers also converted their dealerships to small-scale war work. In Seattle, at least seven dealers engaged in some kind of work in support of the war effort. Among them, Dick DuBois, a Hudson dealer, began making sleeping bags at his facility; the American Auto Company, run by Stan Sayres, made equipment for the Army; and Samuel Savidge’s

<sup>99</sup> “Yates Motors is West Side Ford Agency,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 30, 1930.

<sup>100</sup> “Big Automotive Building Slated for R. W. Hinea,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 19, 1931.

<sup>101</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 10; and Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 28.

<sup>102</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 161.

Dodge dealership remodeled trucks for military use. Some dealers and staff members also enlisted for direct military service.<sup>103</sup> Although the largest dealerships found ways to persevere through the lean years of passenger car sales, by 1944, the number of dealerships in Seattle had dropped to fifty, from sixty-one in 1941.<sup>104</sup>

After the war, it took auto manufacturers several years to reconfigure their factories for passenger car production; no truly new passenger car models appeared on the market until 1949.<sup>105</sup> Following more than a decade of depression and war, “the nation’s automobile fleet was aging and decrepit, pent-up demand was unleashed, and people wanted to buy.”<sup>106</sup> At the same time, widespread building and postwar suburbanization was changing the shape of the cities across the nation as more and more people moved beyond the urban core. In Seattle, dealers looking to build new or expand existing outfits took advantage of these trends by establishing dealerships in areas once considered the “outskirts” of the city, such as what was once the separate municipality of Lake City and along North Aurora Ave., also once outside Seattle city limits.

Lake City grew alongside the development of the automobile. In the early years of the automobile’s popularity, the Bothell Highway (later Lake City Way) was a popular route for a drive in the countryside. (Figure 14) Restaurants, service stations, and other businesses grew along the highway to serve Seattleites out for a drive. The area incorporated as a township in 1949 and was annexed by Seattle in 1954.<sup>107</sup> Bill Pierre Motors, Inc. (12531 30<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE), was the first dealership



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Figure 14. Automobile excursion on the Bothell Highway, ca. 1911. Source: Image No. 1983.10.7724.1, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, MOHAI.

<sup>103</sup> Dudley Brown, “Doing Auto Row with Dudley Brown, Automobile Editor,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 15, 1942.

<sup>104</sup> Dealership numbers based on listings in the Polk City directories from 1941 and 1944.

<sup>105</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 27.

<sup>106</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 87.

<sup>107</sup> David Wilma, “Seattle Neighborhoods: Lake City—Thumbnail History,” HistoryLink.org Essay 3449, July 18, 2001, <http://www.historylink.org/File/3449>.

to open there in 1947. The next year, four more dealerships opened in the same vicinity.<sup>108</sup> (See Appendix B.) Similarly, North End Motors opened at 10201 Aurora Ave. N (built 1929) in 1941. The growth along Aurora Ave. was slower, with only four new dealerships opening in the area between 1942 and 1967, when the area would see a dealership boom.<sup>109</sup>

With most Americans using cars for everyday transit, dealers looked for ways to attract the attention of people speeding by on city streets in their cars. Where previously potential customers might stroll by on foot or view the latest models from a slow-moving streetcar, bigger and bolder buildings were necessary when people were zooming by at high speeds.<sup>110</sup> Manufacturers distributed manuals on showroom design and planning to their franchise holders to aid dealers in adapting to the changing times. General Motors, for example, held a competition for the best in dealership design and in 1948, published a comprehensive manual entitled *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties*. The manual covered everything from best practices in window display to the angles best suited to capturing the most natural light. GM's manual provided guidelines on how to “plan the showroom to fit the traffic,” including ensuring displays would fall within the 30-degree angle of a driver's field of vision.<sup>111</sup>

As did their colleagues across the country, Seattle auto dealers increasingly used color, light, and movement to attract the eyes of passersby, often installing bright and often mobile neon lights, as well as rotating turntables in showroom windows to show off the latest model car.<sup>112</sup> Savidge's Dodge dealership was one of the first new buildings in Seattle to incorporate a turntable as a prominent feature of its new showroom.<sup>113</sup> Situated on the corner of Ninth Ave. and Lenora St. in Westlake (2021 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.) with windows facing both streets, the turntable gave people passing by on foot or in a car a rotating view of the latest Dodge or Plymouth model for sale. A long-time Seattle dealer, Savidge invested \$1 million in the 187,000-square-ft building. A three-day open house celebration in August 1948 invited the public to visit the dealership to explore the new mirrored showrooms, see the indoor pool containing turtles and a small alligator, and watch Dodge sales films

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<sup>108</sup> See the 1948 Polk City Directory.

<sup>109</sup> The Auston Co., at 622 N 117<sup>th</sup> St., was the next dealership to open in the area near North Aurora Ave. The company is first listed in the 1948 Polk Directory, followed by Teutch Motors in 1951 (8624 Aurora Ave. N), Day's Auto Brokers in 1955 (10101 Aurora Ave. N), and Reinhart Motors in 1963 (938 N 95<sup>th</sup> St.). See 1941–1963 Polk City directories.

<sup>110</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 48.

<sup>111</sup> General Motors Corporation, *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties* (Detroit, MI: Service Section, General Motors Corporation, 1948), 5–6.

<sup>112</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 50.

<sup>113</sup> “History of the WTBBL Building,” informational panel, Washington Talking Book and Braille Library.

in “what is probably the smallest movie theatre in the country.”<sup>114</sup> In addition to a luxurious interior, the building’s exterior reflected the style of the time and exemplified the Streamline Moderne design, with its flat roof (used for parking cars), curved corner window, and extensive use of glass blocks set into the stucco exterior.<sup>115</sup> (Figure 15)

### *Our New Building*

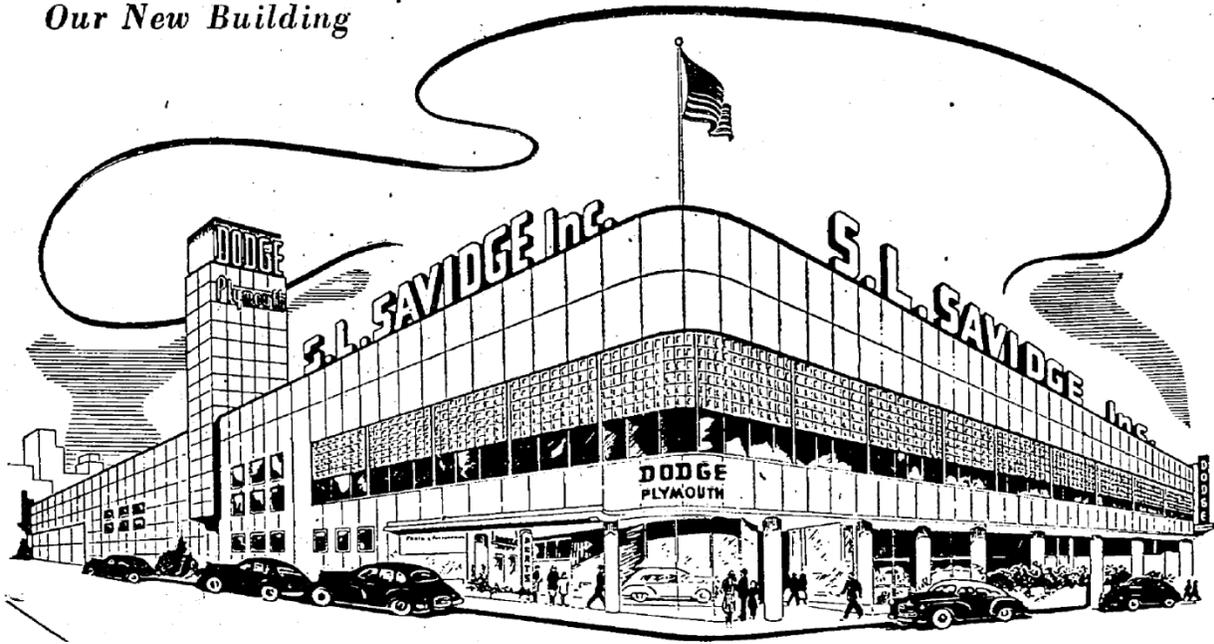


Figure 15. Artist’s rendering of the new S. L. Savidge, Inc. Dodge and Plymouth Dealership at Ninth Ave. and Lenora St. Source: *Seattle Daily Times*, August 18, 1949.

Even in the postwar boom, not all dealers could afford the kind of investment Savidge was able to make. Another example of a postwar Streamline Moderne dealerships is 9439 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW (built 1946), which was home to Pilla & Swanberg Motors from 1946 through 1955. Paul Pilla and Raymond Swanberg’s dealership was one of seven Kaiser-Frazer dealerships in Seattle, and the only one in White Center.<sup>116</sup> Though on a smaller scale, the Pilla & Swanberg building has many similarities to Savidge’s more elaborate design, emphasizing the horizontal plane and employing curved wall surfaces and ribbons of windows to produce a smooth, streamlined facade typical of the

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<sup>114</sup> “S. L. Savidge to Be Host to City in New Quarters,” and “Tiny Movie Theatre in Savidge Building,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 18, 1948.

<sup>115</sup> The building was designed by William James Bain, one of the founders of preeminent Seattle architecture firm Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johnson Architects (now NBBJ Design). Founded in 1943, the firm, known as NBBJ since merging with Ohio-based Godwin, Nitschke, Bohm in 1976, was born out of joint ventures designed to complete major federal projects during World War II, including an expansion of the Bremerton Naval Ship Yard. The firm remained together after the war and are now credited with nearly 6,000 units of housing, schools, and facilities including community centers (Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, 244).

<sup>116</sup> “Hawthorne-Wilkins Motors, Inc.,” *Seattle Daily Times*, January 25, 1946.

style and period.<sup>117</sup> The building at 9439 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW was constructed of modest materials including concrete block and wood-framed windows, but used these elements to create horizontal bands and curved display windows that allowed for heightened visibility.(Figure 16)

With fewer pedestrians and more fast-moving cars on the streets, the most important thing a dealer could do was ensure their storefront attracted enough attention to make traffic stop and look. Dealers sought to create a “visual front,” with large windows framed by small division bars, thereby creating the illusion of no barrier between inside and outside.<sup>118</sup> (Figure 17) As Liebs explained, while earlier dealers had relied on elaborate buildings to provide a sense of prestige and credibility, starting in the late 1940s, “the street façade of the modern dealership was viewed as a sequence of visual events for rapidly communicating to passing



Figure 16: Pilla & Swanberg Motors at 9439 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW, April 30, 1947. Source: King County Property Cards.



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Figure 17. Display at Westlake Chevrolet, ca. 1948. Note the large windows with minimal interruption and use of lights both inside and out to attract the eye to the new car display. Source: Image No. 1983.10.16883.2, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, MOHAI.

<sup>117</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture since 1780* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999): 241.

In 1945, as the nation transitioned away from a World War II economy to a domestic economy, Joseph W. Frazer, president and chairman of the Graham-Paige Corporation, and Henry J. Kaiser Jr., son of West Coast industrialist Henry J. Kaiser Sr., organized the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation to design and produce new cars. The pair leased a former bomber construction plant outside Detroit and began preparing to produce Kaiser and Frazer model automobiles. “Kaiser-Frazer Bid Prepared for Auto Plant,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 29, 1945.

<sup>118</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 52.

motorists what was sold inside . . . almost as if appearing on a huge television directed at the traffic stream.”<sup>119</sup> Showrooms no longer resembled venerable office buildings or hotels, but could be immediately identified as dealerships just from the architecture.

By the late 1950s, U.S. automobile manufacturers were producing nearly 8,000,000 cars for the American market alone. Dealers turned to the “principles of volume selling” in an attempt to capitalize on the large supply of cars on the market.<sup>120</sup> To accommodate the need to have more cars readily available for customers to drive off the lot, dealers looked to growing suburban areas where land was plentiful and inexpensive. By moving to a larger lot and constructing a simple, one-story building, often containing only a small showroom and service desk, dealers could maximize the space available to display new cars. The showroom itself sometimes took up only 4 to 11 percent of the dealer’s physical space.<sup>121</sup> The marketing focus rested on a large lot full of row upon row of automobiles for sale, with showrooms functioning, “more as reception halls decorated with cars than the fundamental sales tool they had been previously.”<sup>122</sup> Although they took up less real estate as a whole, dealers continued to design showrooms with large windows, following a Modern style with soaring roofs and canted fronts.<sup>123</sup> (Figures 18 and 19)



Figure 18: Lake City Dodge at 13515 Lake City Way NE (built 1962), January 1963. Source: King County Property Cards.

<sup>119</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 89.

<sup>120</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 91.

<sup>121</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 93.

<sup>123</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 90.

Like domestic sales, foreign car sales increased in the postwar years. In 1955, Germany's Volkswagenwerk established Volkswagen of America in order to build their marketing and dealer network in the United States.<sup>124</sup> By 1957, Volkswagen had established 350 dealerships around the country and for the first time, sales exceeded some domestic models.<sup>125</sup> By 1968, VW was selling more than a half million cars in the United States alone.<sup>126</sup> For many Americans, VW cars were appealing because they were smaller than most American-made cars of the era.<sup>127</sup> In Seattle, the first listings for foreign car dealerships appeared in city directories in the late 1950s and early 1960s, covering car makers from Volkswagen to Peugeot to Renault. Seattle Sports Cars, Inc., was one of the first dealers to sell Volkswagens in Seattle. In June 1953, the company advertised the new Volkswagen as "A New High in Quality for a Family Economy Car!"<sup>128</sup> From their showroom at 423 E Pike St. (built 1920), Seattle Sports Cars also sold Porsche, Siata, and Triumph cars.<sup>129</sup> As Volkswagens became more mainstream, some dealerships began to exclusively sell VW products, including places like FreewayMotors (4546 Roosevelt Way NE, built 1946), which began advertising as Freeway Volkswagen late in 1965.<sup>130</sup>

The first Japanese cars came on the American scene in the late 1950s. The first import from Japan was the Toyopet, although it was reportedly underpowered and had boxy styling unappealing

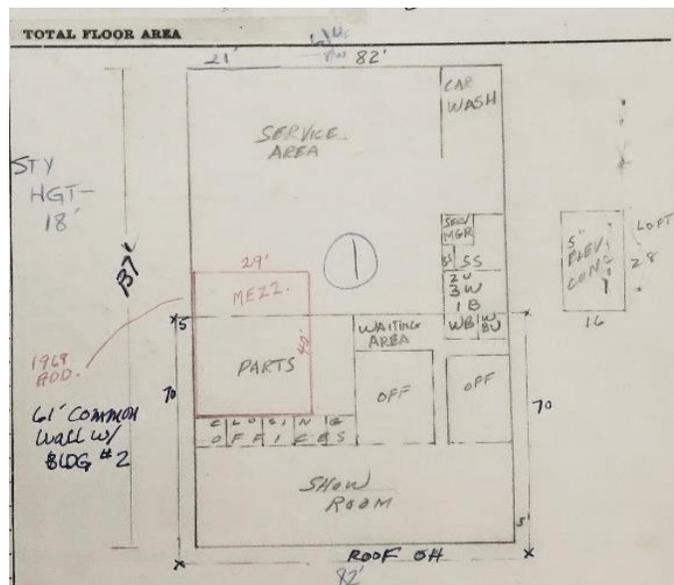


Figure 19. Floor plan of Lake City Dodge, ca. 1968. Note the small size of the show room compared to the service area. Source: King County Property Cards.

<sup>124</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 324.

<sup>125</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 323; and Rudi Volti, "A Century of Automobility," *Technology and Culture* 37, no. 4 (1996): 663–85, esp. 681.

<sup>126</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 324.

<sup>127</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> "Now It's Here!" advertisement, *Seattle Daily Times*, June 29, 1953.

<sup>129</sup> "Now It's Here!" advertisement, *Seattle Daily Times*, June 29, 1953.

<sup>130</sup> "If Service Is Important," advertisement, *Seattle Daily Times*, December 3, 1965. The company also appears listed as Freeway Volkswagen, Inc., in the 1966 Polk City Directory.

to American consumers.<sup>131</sup> The Toyopet was first displayed in Seattle at the International Trade Fair in April 1958; by December that year, Frank Hawkins Buick received the first Toyopet franchise in the city.<sup>132</sup>

The first dedicated Toyota dealerships opened in Seattle in 1967, Tenney's Toyota Motors in the Lake City neighborhood (10430 Lake City Way NE, demolished) and Scott's

Toyota Center along Westlake's auto row (753 Ninth Ave. N, built 1949;

later 731 Westlake Ave. N, built 1921).<sup>133</sup> (Figure 20) Although slower to reach popularity than Volkswagen, by the end of the 1970s, largely due to the fuel crisis of that decade and their gas efficiency when compared to most American models, Toyota and other Japanese carmakers were firmly entrenched in the U.S. auto market.<sup>134</sup>



**Figure 20:** Scott's Toyota at 731 Westlake Ave. N, August 18, 1969. Source: King County Property Cards.

By the mid-1960s, glass-and-metal curtain walls in the International style had become the standard for auto dealerships, even as the showroom footprint continued to shrink.<sup>135</sup> Dealerships increasingly became complexes with multiple auto-related services housed on one large lot: sales, service, and showroom all in one. Because of the space required, new dealership complexes were established farther and farther from the central core of the city and its old auto rows. In Seattle, the southern and northern ends of the city increasingly become home to more dealerships. For example, Courtesy Chevrolet moved its facilities from 800 E Pike St. to 3711 Rainier Ave. S in 1963. The new dealership, built on 5.5 acres, consisted of five separate buildings, including a central 60-square-foot (sf) sales department and showroom facing the street to catch the eye of passersby. Behind the showroom was a 13,500 sf service facility with “40 separate service stalls [to] provide instant service

<sup>131</sup> Genat, *American Car Dealership*, 12–13.

<sup>132</sup> “Japanese Auto,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 13, 1958; and “Hawkins Buick Named Dealer for Toyopet Line,” *Seattle Daily Times*, December 7, 1958.

<sup>133</sup> See the 1967 Polk City Directory.

<sup>134</sup> Volti, “Century of Automobility,” 680–82.

<sup>135</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 92–93; and Joe Ashley, “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation: Roadside Architecture Along US 2 in Montana,” National Park Service, October 1993, E-15, [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64500344\\_text](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64500344_text).

for as many as 60 cars at a time.”<sup>136</sup> Separate body and paint shops stood behind the service area. Designed by architect Chester L. Lindsey, the facility incorporated midcentury marketing tactics, with the showroom and office building both using glass curtain walls and simple geometric plans to highlight the dealership’s stock and optimize visibility to the driving public.<sup>137</sup> As Modernism flourished and the ideas of architects like Mies van der Rohe impacted commercial design, buildings grew increasingly open, were simple in plan, and constructed of new materials like steel, concrete, and plate glass. The complex at 3711 Rainier Ave. is distinctive in that it represents a new building type that emerged with the growing popularity of car culture: the Modern automobile dealership.

Taking advantage of the space still available in north Seattle, Merrit Mervyn “Bud” Meadows moved his Pontiac dealership from the University District to Aurora Ave. N. In 1964, Meadows, who owned a Pontiac dealership in Portland, purchased a long-time University District auto dealership known as Wockner Pontiac-Tempest (4724 Roosevelt Way NE, built 1959), renaming it Bud Meadows Pontiac.<sup>138</sup> Within a month, Meadows was publishing ads in the *Seattle Daily Times* claiming that his dealership was already the second-largest volume Pontiac dealer in the Northwest, and that he was after the number-one spot, selling the 1964 Pontiac Catalina V-8 for \$2,495.<sup>139</sup> Seeking more space for his expanding new and used car sales, In 1966, Meadows hired Oregon firm Wernes S. Storch and Associates to design a new dealership at 12800 Aurora Ave. N.<sup>140</sup> Opened in early 1967, the bulk of the new building was taken up by a large service area with parking on the roof for sixty new cars. A small, semicircular showroom extending out from the building toward Aurora and N 130<sup>th</sup> St. could house seven to ten new display models.<sup>141</sup> (Figures 21 and 22) The building’s round showroom is its character-defining feature. Designed to provide visual access to the company’s stock, the showroom was constructed with walls of glass so that the cars inside were visible from all directions. The novelty of the round showroom was also designed to attract

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<sup>136</sup> “Chevrolet Agency Opens Huge Operation on Rainier,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, September 29, 1963.

<sup>137</sup> Lindsey (1927–2003), was born in Yakima, graduated from Washington State University in 1949, and worked in California briefly before moving to Seattle in 1951 and joining Daniel Lamont and Lester Fey (1951-1952), Hadley & Hadley (1952-1957), and then launching his own private practice. He designed Arden Lanes Bowling Alley in Shoreline (1960; altered), Chevrolet Motors Division building, Seattle (1961), Southgate Realty Shopping Center in Burien (1962), the Sixth and Lenora Building in Seattle (1963, with Hadley & Hadley), and, between 1982 and 1985, Columbia Center, Seattle. See, Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, 454; and Michael Houser, “Chester L. Lindsey,” Architect Biographies, DAHP, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-chester-l-lindsey>.

<sup>138</sup> “Portlander Buys Wockner Pontiac,” *Seattle Sunday Times*, May 17, 1964.

<sup>139</sup> “After Just One Month We’re Only No. 2,” *Seattle Daily Times*, July 17, 1964.

<sup>140</sup> In addition to other projects, Werner and Associates provided conceptual drawings for Portland’s Fremont Bridge. See, George Kramer, Multiple Property Document for Willamette River Highway Bridge of Portland, Oregon (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2011).

<sup>141</sup> “Meadows Sets Grand Opening of New Facility Thursday,” *Seattle Daily Times*, January 15, 1967.

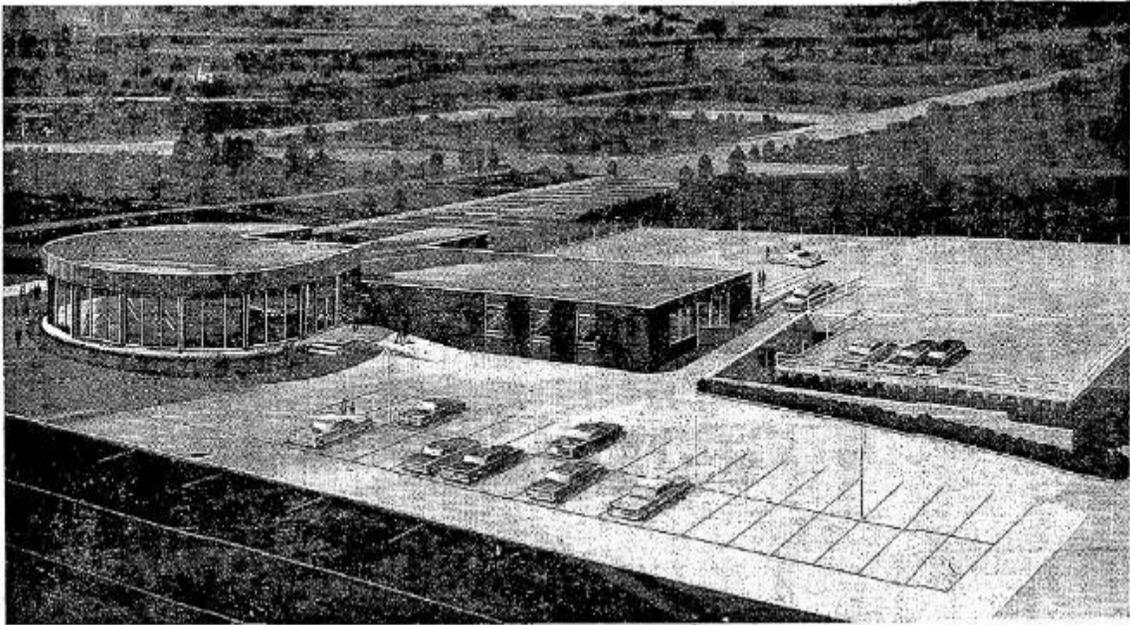


Figure 22: Artist's rendering of Bud Meadows Pontiac at 12800 Aurora Avenue N. Note the small showroom footprint. Source: *Seattle Daily Times*, January 19, 1967.

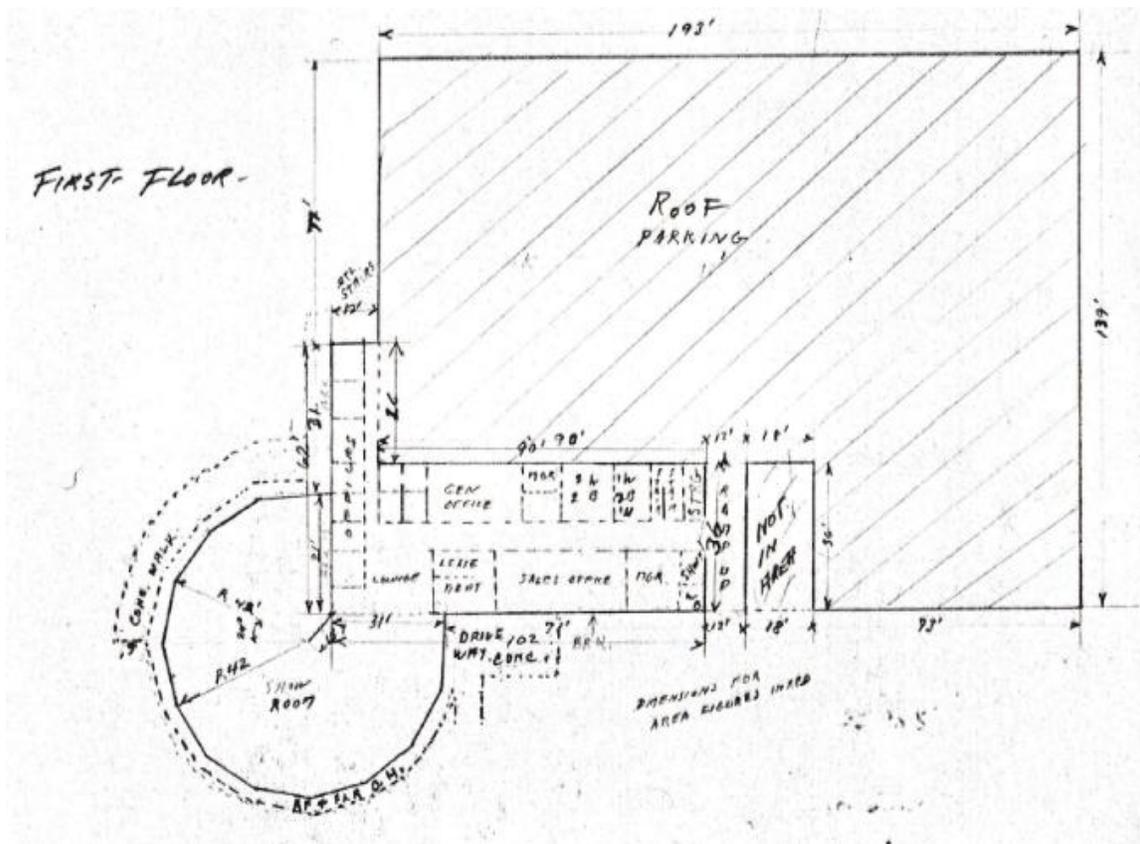


Figure 21: Floor plan of Bud Meadows Pontiac, ca. 1967. Source: King County Property Cards.

attention. Geometric and dramatic, it is another example of how the ideas of Modern architects who prized open spaces, plate glass, and dramatic geometric shapes, were transforming the auto industry in the middle of the twentieth century. Other dealers followed Meadows to the northern stretches of Aurora Ave., including Olympic Mercury, Inc. (13001 Aurora Ave. N) in 1967; Bill Johnson Motors, Inc. (12715 Aurora Ave. N) in 1968; and Pacific Dodge Co. (12821 Aurora Ave. N) and John Dresslar Buick (12801 Aurora Ave. N) in 1969.<sup>142</sup> A few auto dealerships remained in Seattle's core, but by the 1980s, most had moved to auto rows on the northern and southern ends of the city.

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<sup>142</sup> See 1967–1969 Polk City directories, 1967–1969. For more information about Olympic Mercury's dealership at 13001 Aurora Ave. N, see WISAARD Historic Property Report, Property ID 337470.

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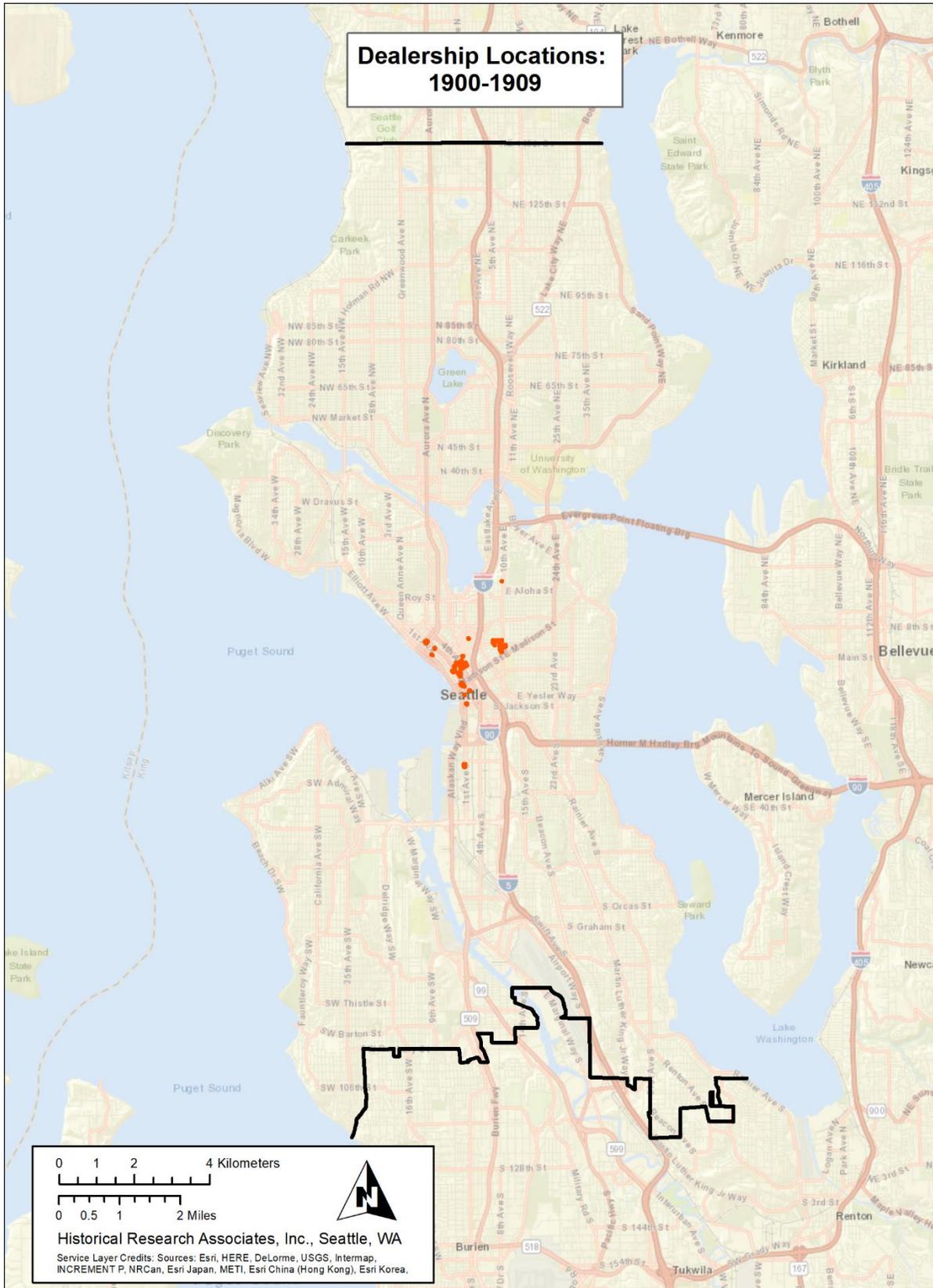
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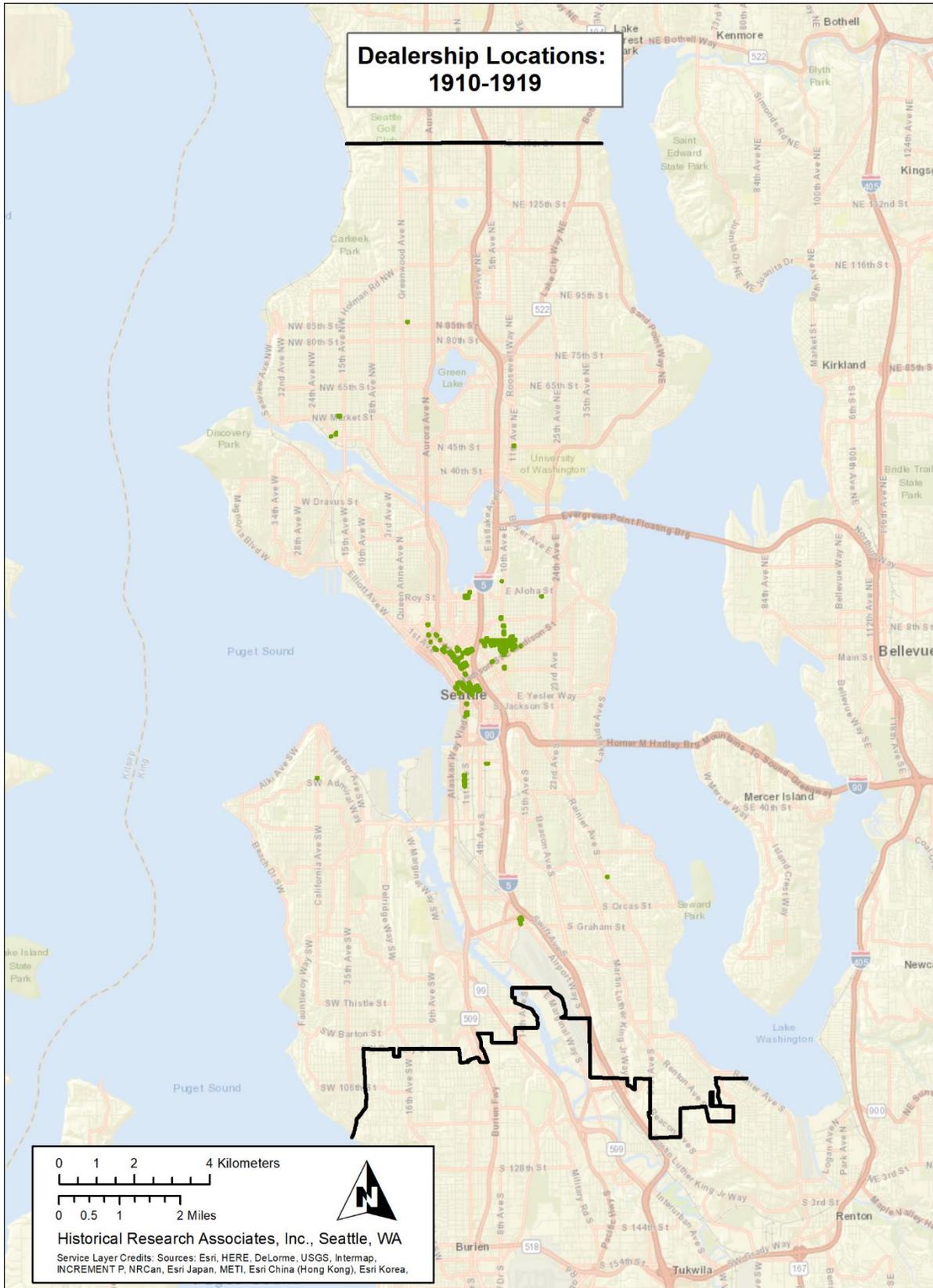


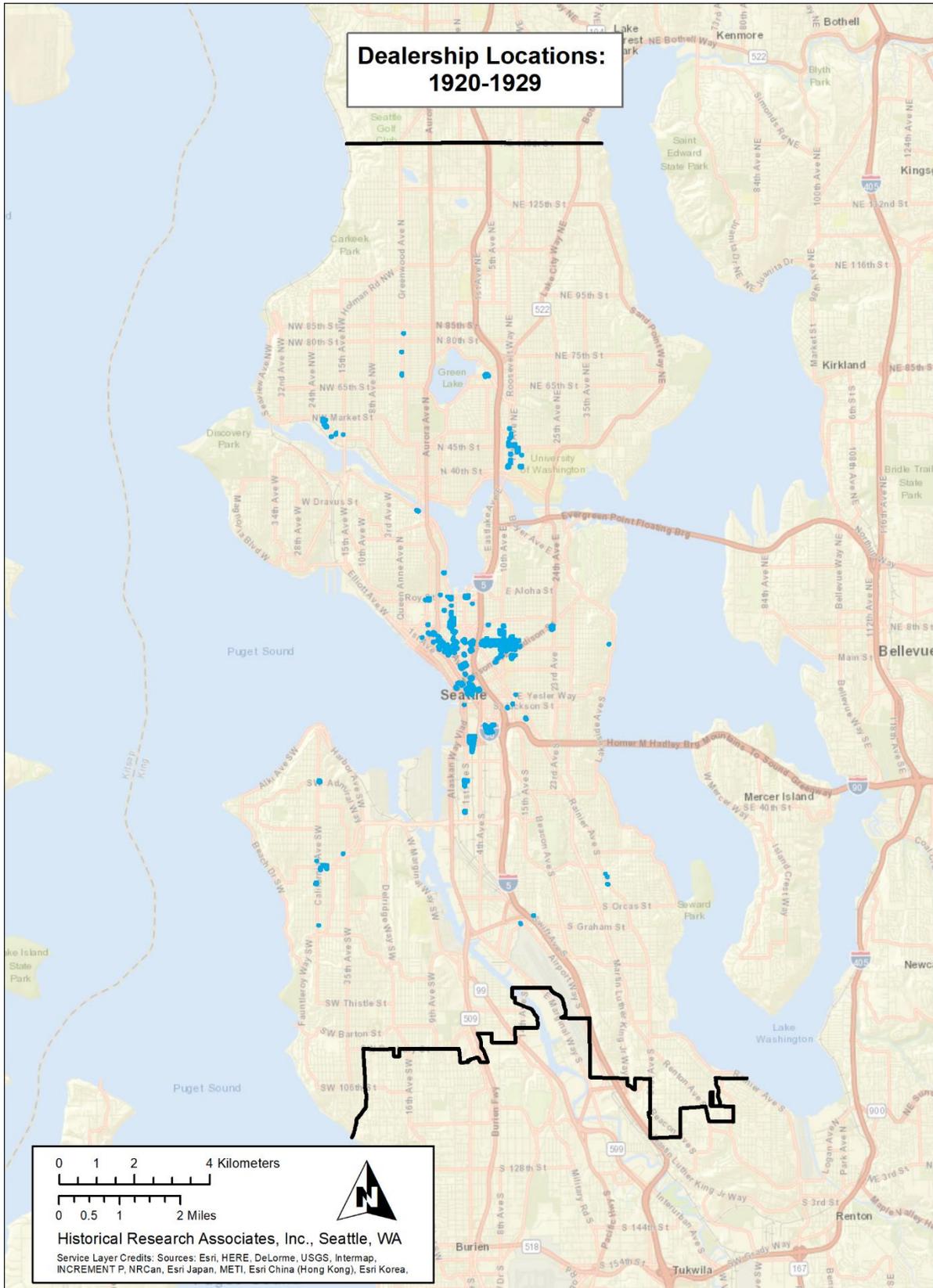
# Appendix A: Maps of Dealership Locations by Decade, 1900-1969

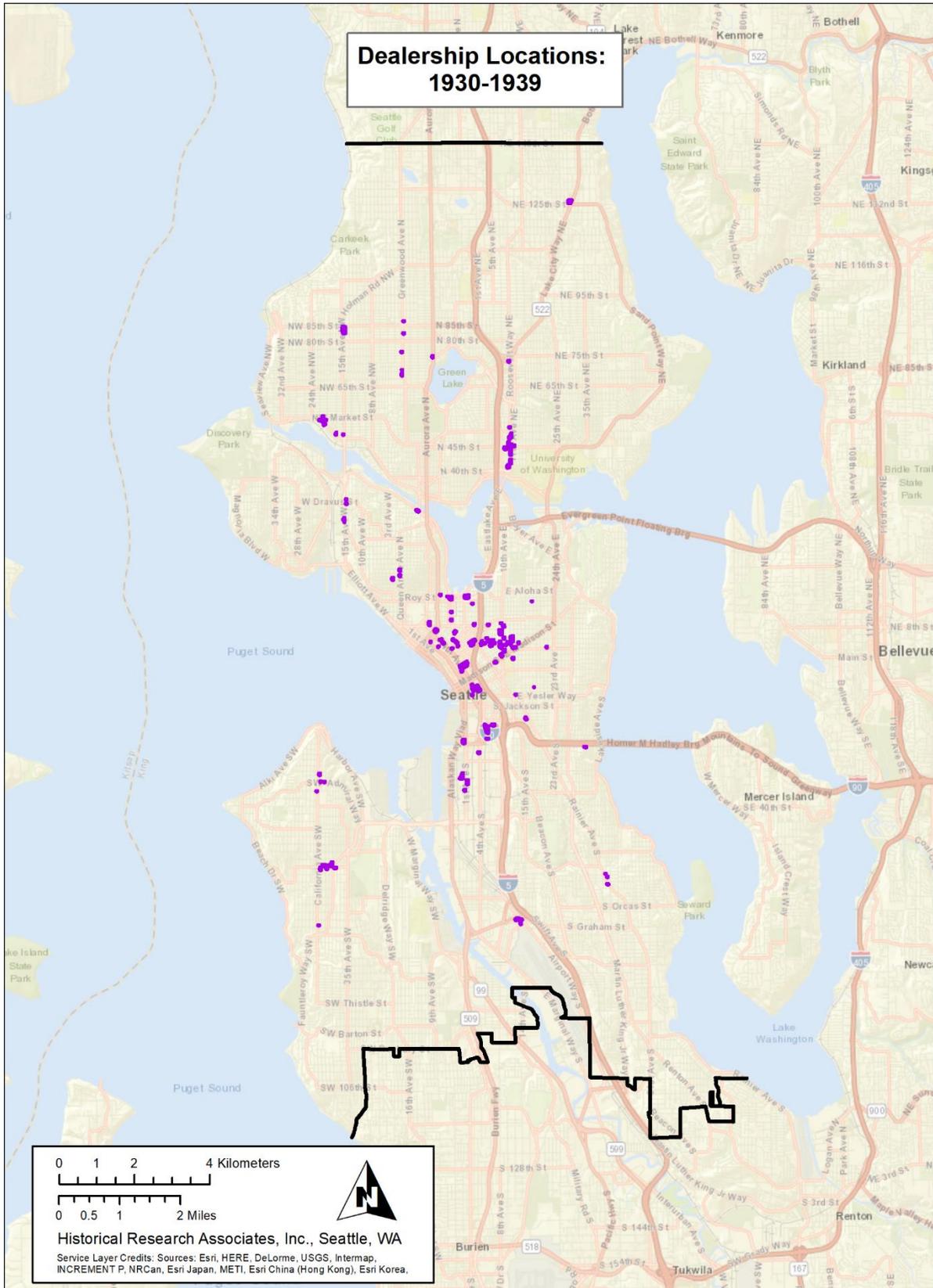
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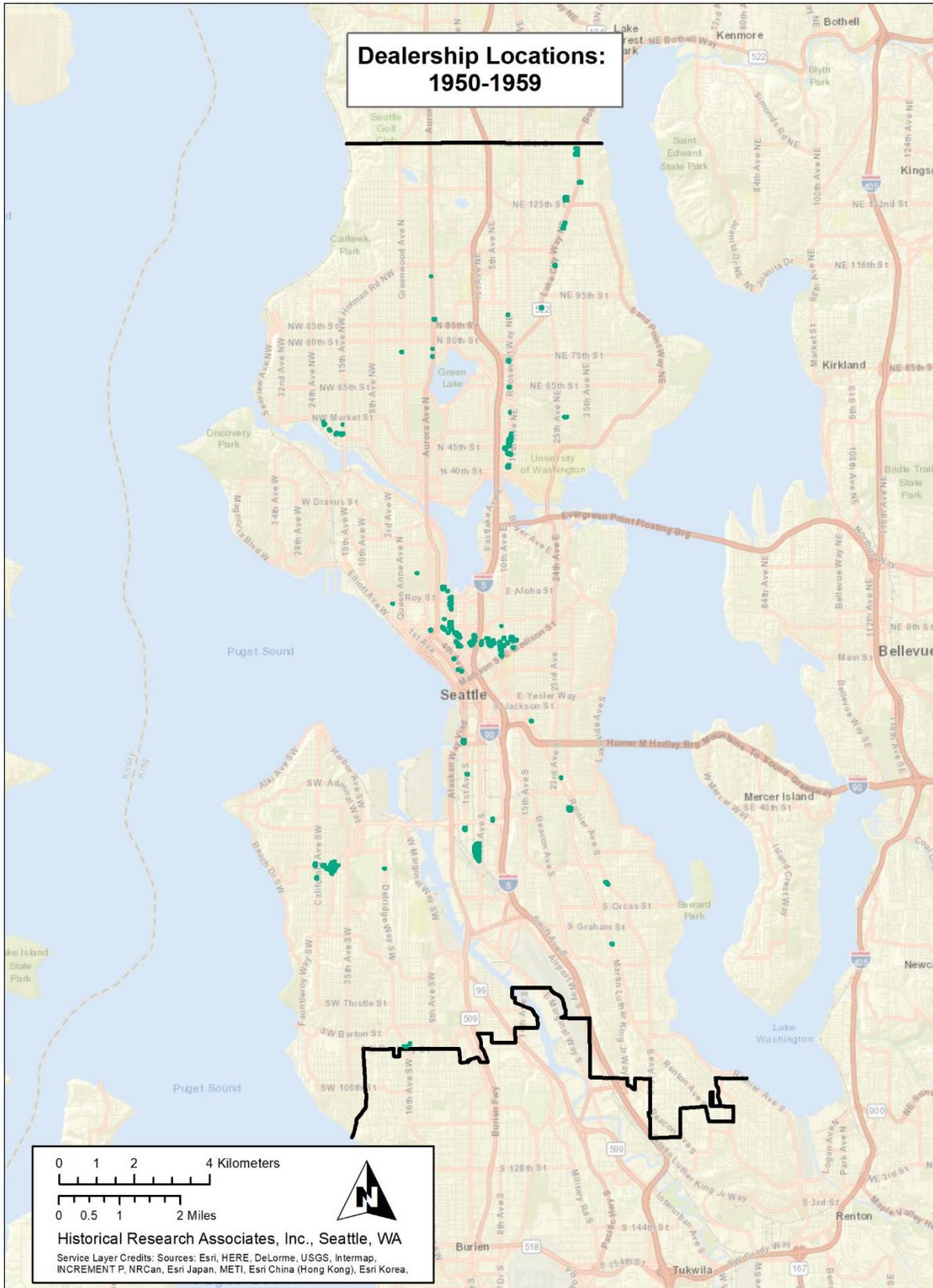


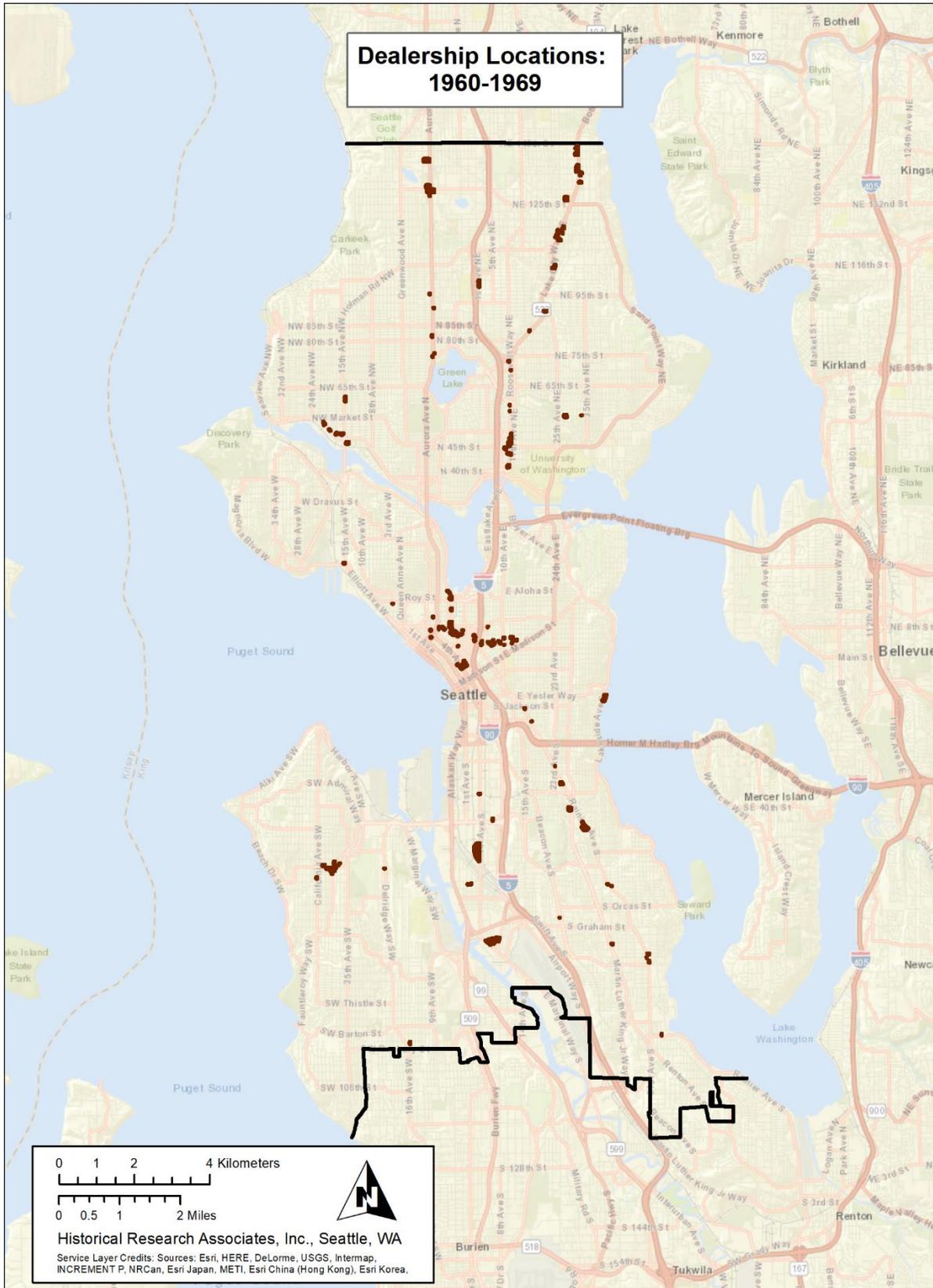










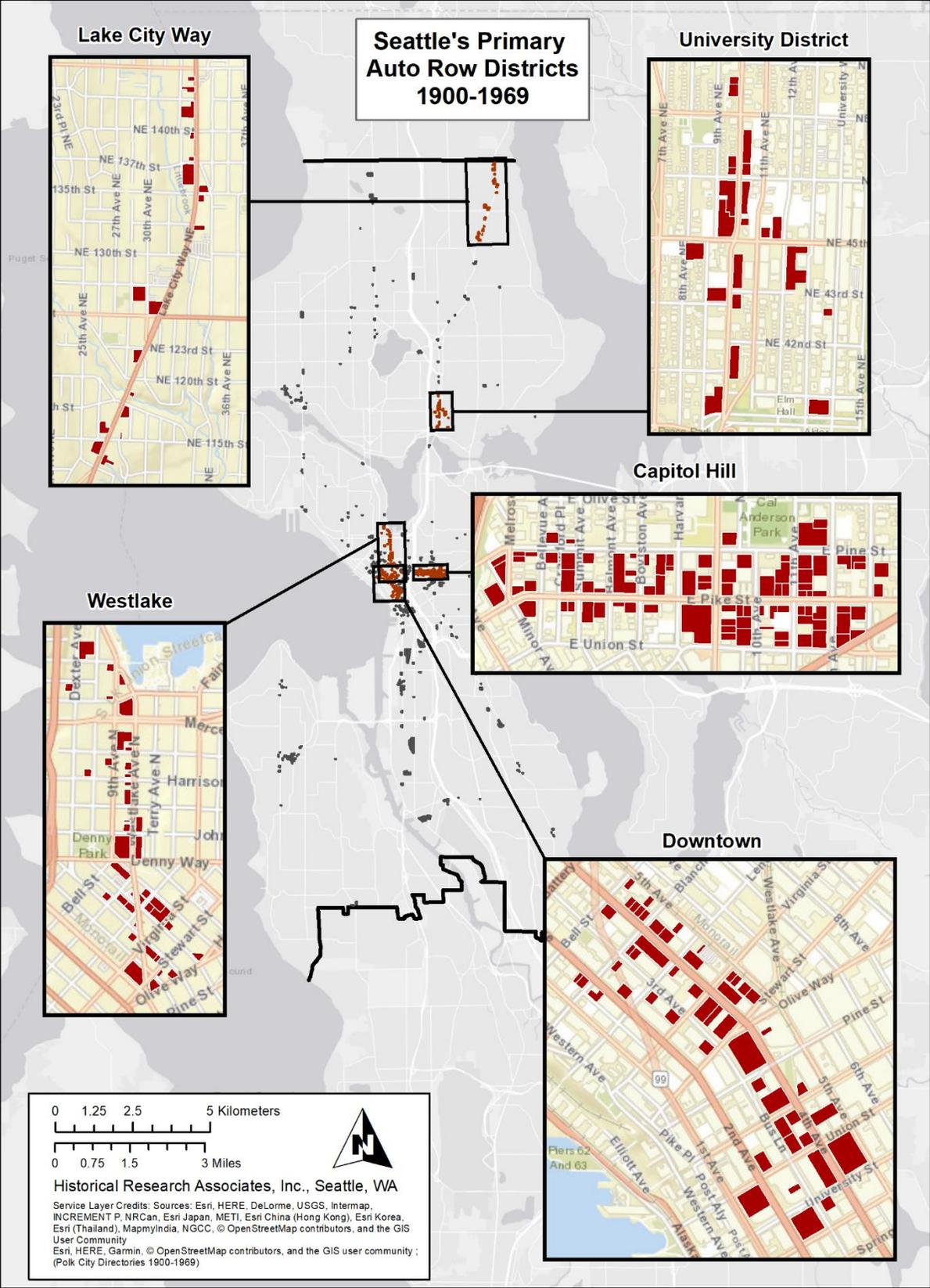




# Appendix B: Maps of Seattle's Primary Auto Row Districts

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“Along the Row”: The Growth of Seattle’s Automobile Dealerships from 1900-1969



